TRASH IS TRUTH:
PERFORMANCES OF TRANSGRESSIVE GLAMOUR

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Abstract

I will examine several transgressive and transformative performances of glamour in American queer cinema. Primarily, I will look at Mario Montez in the films of Andy Warhol and of Jack Smith (1960s), Divine in the films of John Waters (1970s), and George Kuchar in his own video diaries (1980s). These performances are contradictory, messy, abject, and defiant; they are also profoundly moving to identifying spectators. The power of these performances lies in their harnessing of the experience of shame from queer childhood as a force to articulate deviant queer subjectivities. By forging a radical form of glamour based on a revaluation of trash and low culture, these performances refuse to value authenticity over artifice, beauty over ugliness, truth over trash. This trash glamour is intimately connected to the intense star identification of Hollywood cinematic spectacle that was a survival strategy for queer male children in post-World War Two America.

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Introduction

"As Walter Benjamin argued, it is from the 'flame' of fictional representations that we warm our 'shivering lives'" – Peter Brooks

I would like to begin with an anecdote that will serve as a point of origin for the connections and resonances among queer childhood, shame, Hollywood fandom, abjection, trash, glamour, and performance that I will develop in this thesis. In his book A Small Boy and Others, Michael Moon recounts a story that his friend Mark had shared with him:

> When he was twelve, he said, his mother went out shopping one Saturday afternoon and left him and his two older brothers, who were thirteen and fourteen, at home by themselves. The oldest boy proposed they have what he called a Scheherazade party in their mother's absence, and the other two readily fell in with the plan. He had recently been talking about what sounded to each of them like a funny and possibly exciting game of 'playing harem,' and the boys decided to seize the opportunity to try it out. Giggling, they put on a phonograph record of Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade and launched into simultaneous and uproarious stripteases to the music. Once they were undressed, one of the boys ran into their parents' room and returned with three of their mother's scarves, which they tied around their by now erect penises as they resumed their hilarious 'harem girl' dances. At this point their mother, having realized she had forgotten her wallet, unexpectedly returned home. The three 'dancing girls' found themselves surprised by a parental whirling dervish who shouted and cursed at

> them, threw the phonograph record off the turntable, and then, her fury still unvented, hurled a chair through one of the living-room windows. Mark said years later that he was so embarrassed and frightened by the episode that he didn't again indulge in any form of sexual experimentation – even solo masturbation – for nine years afterward. (67)

In this traumatic scene, we see a parent's violent reaction both to the homoerotic play of her three sons, and to the sight of boys dressed as girls engaged in an elaborate and exoticized fantasy world only possible in the absence of the watchful eye of parental authority. Both of these qualities of their performance caused her to shame them. This scene testifies to what José Esteban Muñoz calls the "queer world-making" power of performance, which often involves the production of queered glamourous fantasies from the trash and leftovers of mass culture. In this case, the mother's scarves and the record player were employed to bring to life a harem fantasy of epic proportions that seems gleaned from the movies. Muñoz recounts his own particularly apt childhood memory of shame in Disidentifications, his study of performances by queer artists of colour. Bringing home a pair of bright red sunglasses to his Cuban-American family in Miami in his late teens, his father declared them *picuo*, a word that Muñoz did not understand, but which he assumed meant queer. Learning that it does not signify queer, but instead means tacky, Muñoz is struck by the intensity of the feelings of shame that his father's simple speech act had elicited: "The fact that *picuo* meant tacky, yet I feared that it might mean queer, reveals what is for me a point of convergence between these two different forms of alterity. Both the queer and the 'tacky' poor have failed to properly be hailed by

heterosexuality and capitalism. Both share this sense of 'failure' when hailed by the call of normativity" (195). Similarly, Moon has pointed out that the etymology of the word in Yiddish theatre for trash – *shund* – may have its origin in the word *shande* – scandal, or shame (172).

My project explores these interconnecting discourses of trash and shame specifically in their relation to queer childhood and cinematic performance. I will examine the work of queer underground film performers Mario Montez, Divine, and George Kuchar as examples of transgressive glamour. This glamour is rooted in a pervasive sense of shame originating in queer childhood, harnessed as a transformative force. This is the shame of the gender deviant identification of a queer or proto-queer boy with the "effeminate" glamour and pleasures of Hollywood and its actresses. This desperate adoration of Hollywood is trashed through its embodiment in a resolutely abject and obscene queer performer. By believing enough in their dreams of glamour that they become reality, the performances also challenge the distinctions between artifice and authenticity, trash and truth. I will ultimately show how these performances are profoundly moving to certain spectators due to their solicitation of empathy based on a shared sense of shame. Richard Dyer sees the powerful appeal of stars as lying in their apparent ability to embody contradictions smoothly ("Four" 80), but in the performances I am studying, contradictions on the level of gender identity, banality and spectacle, abjection and defiance, documentary and fiction, and beauty and ugliness, are virtually the defining features of their star glamour, though not their popularity (none of the performers in my study could be said to have achieved mainstream success).

I will begin with a chapter outlining the theories of queer spectatorship, shame, identification and disidentification, camp, glamour, and abjection that are fundamental for my thesis. I will then move on to a chapter discussing these themes in the films of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith, as well as in the figures of Mario Montez and his idol Maria Montez. I see Mario's channeling of Maria as the lynchpin of my project. In chapter three I will show how these discourses of shame, glamour, abjection, and identification operate in three spectacular performances by Divine in the John Waters films Multiple Maniacs (1970), Pink Flamingos (1972), and above all, Female Trouble (1974), as well as in Divine's interviews and publicity. Finally, I will end with a chapter on George Kuchar's video diaries of the late 1980s, showing how he has transformed Hollywood glamour into a deeply queer and empathic way of seeing the world through his video camera. While Kuchar began filmmaking as a teen in the 1950s, he participated in the 1960s New York underground film scene along with Warhol, Smith, and their star Mario Montez. The younger Waters, who cites these three figures – especially Kuchar – as enormous influences, took part in the underground scene as an enthusiastic audience member while making films starring Divine in Baltimore from the mid-1960s onward.

I would like to outline briefly how this thesis is related to the political work of "queer." I use the term "queer" with the definition it has accrued from the theoretical work that became so prominent in the 1990s. "Queer" is that which attempts to undermine any essentialist or binary view of sexuality, sex, and gender constructed by discourses of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. When I apply the term "queer" to figures or practices that existed before the term's relatively recent reclamation by

academia, even before a public liberation movement, I am suggesting that they shared the deconstructive and non-normative project of "queer" in a manner that makes any present use of the term "gay" seem inappropriate. "Queer" is transitory, embracing diversity, fluidity, and difference in a way that the stable identity politics of "lesbian and gay" does not. As "gay" becomes more and more a term devoid of radicalism and threat, it becomes synonymous with privilege and the marginalization of both the gender variance within the spectrum of "male," and of other sexually or gender deviant communities – from SM enthusiasts to sex workers to trans people – by the now-established "gay" community. I use "queer" to describe non-normative desires, genders, and bodies that have been constructed as shameful. Queer does not only mean sexual orientation; I do not use the term "gay man," a man who is sexually attracted to men, because this thesis is not so much about love or lust between men as about the shame and stigma attached to effeminacy and failed masculinity – beginning in childhood – which "queers" one's experience of the world. Queer childhood is represented and visualized more through gender deviance than through same-sex attraction, and these potential feminine identifications and gender variances are opened up more with the designation "queer" instead of "gay."

Perhaps the most important distinction between "queer" and "gay" is their opposing connotations of shame and pride respectively. According to Douglas Crimp, "Gay Pride" attempts to chart a post-Stonewall narrative of progress for gays and lesbians out of oppression and shame and into full citizenship, visibility, and self-actualization (qtd. in Barber and Clark 25). In order to accomplish this, more deviant, "queer" aspects

of the community must be marginalized along with their potentially more productive understandings of the affect of shame. Consequently, shameful queers fail at the assimilation and commodification necessary for the positive "Gay Pride" narrative where difference must be normalized. "Queer" represents a counter-memory to this narrative thanks to its history as a term used to attack and shame sexual and gender minorities. It represents a potential non-hierarchical *salon des refusés* based on an accepted "common experience of being despised and rejected" whose rule is "get over yourself," as opposed to a gay community that seeks to advance itself by shaming other minorities, sexual or otherwise (Michael Warner qtd. in Crimp 66). The performers in my study are these obscene and deviant queers who cannot easily be recuperated into an assimilationist, normalizing agenda. Clearly there are problems that arise when ascribing value to emotions such as pride and shame, which are not mutually exclusive. While I do not advocate simply shaming pride or being proud of shame, I would hope that this work contributes to a more critical understanding of how these affects function in queer performance and politics.

It is important to state that the directors and performers I am looking at almost always resist political interpretations of their work. In "Beginning to See the Light," Ellen Willis discusses her lack of enthusiasm for women musicians who have the appropriate feminist politics but lack a defiant spirit and a sense of revolt. She instead finds inspiration in the mixed outrage and fascination she experiences from the blistering loathing of the Sex Pistols song "Bodies": "The extremity of its disgust forced me to admit that I was no stranger to such feelings … music that boldly and aggressively laid

out what the singer wanted, loved, hated … challenged me to do the same … the form encouraged my struggle for liberation. Similarly, timid music made me feel timid, whatever its ostensible politics" (99). These performances are about passion over reason, intensity of affect over tempered articulation. As Matias Viegener states, we must account for "expressions of negation and affirmation *which don't necessarily make sense*, which defy rules of grammar" (253, emphasis his). These performances prioritize desire, pleasure, indulgence, and personal expression over discipline, identity categories, community responsibility, or programmatic politics. Speaking about Joseph Cornell, Wayne Koestenbaum suggests "[he] valued the sweet and the immediately satisfying over the healthy and the nourishing. Cornell reminds us: pursue desire for its own sake. Need we label desire progressive or hygienic to condone it? … No certainties of progress undergird his consumption – only appetite, unbridled and unrationalized" ("Smell" 261-2). Due to their "unbridled and unrationalized" desires and bodies, these performers and filmmakers have been excluded from the ranks of what constitutes a positive image of homosexuality. Warhol, for example, was "too tortured and 'nelly,' too *embarrassing*" (Watney 29, emphasis his). Simon Watney suggests "his work frankly and painfully enacts scenarios of homosexual shame which were largely incompatible with the aesthetic of normative 'positive images'" (29). The positive image gay man is proud, strong, clean, articulate, and politically aware, not the shy, sickly, dirty, obscene, and flaming creatures that we see in these films. Positive image discourse depends on a heroic image of gay agency, but Roy Grundmann points out "because phobia, abjection, desire and identification are so central to notions of gender and sexual identity, they

complicate questions of agency with regard to gay politics" (102). Chris Straayer importantly reminds us that positive images are designed for the approval of an imagined heterosexual audience (279), a fact no doubt responsible for much self-censorship. These performances speak a queer language that is arguably illegible to those who value assimilation into a straight world, or rather, those who are unable to empathize with the experience of shame shared by many who fail at normativity, queer or otherwise. Muñoz states that performances such as these "[help] us imagine an expansive queer *life*-world [not just a community], one in which the 'pain and hardship' of queer existence within a homophobic public sphere are not elided, one in which the 'mysteries' of our sexuality are not reigned in by sanitized understandings of lesbian and gay identity, and finally, one in which we are all allowed to be drama queens" (34, emphasis his).

I will end this introduction with two manifestoes by queer theorists with which I would hope this project engages. Koestenbaum focuses his attention on trash, those who fail at being artists, stars, *visible*:

> I am interested in the ordinary fan who cuts out Liz pictures but never makes a silk screen to justify, retroactively, the industrious clipping and collecting. I am interested in the Warhol who never graduated from fan to artist. I am interested in the drag queen who doesn't have the looks, ambition, genius, and good timing to become Candy Darling. I am interested in the lazy nobody who dreams of stardom but never finds a cooperative patron to film a screen test … If we want to follow Warhol's example, we must not only pay attention to beauty; we must

> attend to plainness and anti-glamour, to ignored bodies and slapdash outfits. ("Toiletries" 244-5)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has devoted a life to making visible such ignored and ordinary bodies, and through such work of illumination, save lives. She has repeatedly stated that her extensive and deeply influential theoretical work is based on a desire to end the genocidal oppression and erasure of queer youth. She sees the work of queer adults as an extension of promises made as children. These are "promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled, and with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queer-eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged" ("Now" 3). Koestenbaum and Kosofsky Sedgwick both suggest a politics that values ways of creating meaning that are often eclipsed in the public sphere. In failing to achieve beauty, one's ugliness can be flaunted in a new light. In failing to live up to the dreams of Hollywood, one achieves the possibility of queer world-making. With this thesis I would like to contribute to this politics of shame and trash and ideally articulate new strategies for queer survival.

1. Theoretical Context

"The glamour rooted in despair" – Andy Warhol

The performances in my study are unimaginable without considering the disorienting experience of queer childhood in post-World War Two America. In James Morrison's stories of his 1970s gay boyhood, he returns repeatedly to the feeling of shame that arises from recognizing that one's difference – often a taboo effeminacy – is visible to others as well as to oneself: "The [voice on the tape recorder] did not sound like mine. It squeaked and trembled. I did not expect my vivid happiness to be so known. I blushed, and that too shamed me, the blush of my face like the tremor of my voice – a giveaway. Still, I was happy – shame and joy not opposites" (3). Morrison derives a distinct pleasure from this awareness that his difference is publicly evident. In addition to the tremulous voice (or the lisp) and the blush, some of Morrison's other characteristics of queer childhood are an "unusual concentration of attention" and a "heightened need for solitude," that are also coded as sickliness (233). He comes to the conclusion that "if I were going to love [these qualities], and not fear them, I would have to love sickness, and not fear it" (233). After seeing the 1932 film I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, he is haunted by the protagonist's criminal degradation – a victim of circumstance – in a scene where he cowers in the shadows of an alley. Morrison identifies with his abjection, embracing rather than fearing indecency. He states that "[i]f shame was my métier, then let me come into the closest possible union with it: the alleyway of destiny awaited me, only there would be no girlfriend to pity me; and it was that very lack, of course, already well gleaned, that predetermined my profligacy" (133).

In this passage, Morrison is recalling his boyhood feelings of both fear and pleasure at the thought of the abject queer life that lay ahead of him.

I will argue that this sense of shame that develops in queer childhood is the key to understanding these diverse performances of trash glamour. Kosofsky Sedgwick's groundbreaking essay, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel," makes powerful connections between queer identity and childhood, shame, performance, and transformation. For Kosofsky Sedgwick, shame is the mightiest emotional force produced by "the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood" (4). She speaks of queer childhood in terms of forced erasure – "exile" is her exact word – and she defines shame as a turning inward, a desire for self-effacement (4). She suggests that the word "queer" is so "politically potent" because it "cleaves to that [childhood scene of shame] as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy" (4). Shame has both a "deconstituting and foundational" relationship to identity, and she refers to developmental psychology to suggest that shame is "the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop" (5). Our personalities and even our bodies are the sum total of shame's effects on how we relate to and interpret the world, the very "structuring fact of identity" (13-14). Kosofsky Sedgwick states that "[shame] is available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, *trans*figuration, affective and symbolic loading and deformation; but unavailable for effecting the work of purgation and deontological closure" (13, emphasis hers). To Kosofsky Sedgwick, shame *is* performance and queer performativity (5, 11). She is also interested in exploring the possibilities of shame-creativity as an antidote to positive images. I see the

specific source of the childhood scene of shame in these performances as the "improper" identification of a male boy with the excesses and pleasures of "feminine" glamour and stars. I will argue that this is what fuels the pride, dignity, self-display, and exhibitionism (Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame" 38) in these very different queer performances of shame.

In studies of queer spectatorship, the importance of the screen image, and especially of the screen performance, to queer children is often emphasized. I argue that the identifications that occur are as much based on identifying with taboo expressions of glamour as on identifying with women as emotional subjects. Larger than life star images of Lana Turner or Elizabeth Taylor allow spectators to identify with their glamourous and powerful bodies on display, which can be a temporarily liberating survival strategy when glamour is forbidden in the everyday, often-traumatic lives of queer and proto-queer boys. In his collection of film writings, "The Devil Finds Work," James Baldwin discusses his virtually transcendent cross-gender and cross-racial identification with Joan Crawford while watching her 1931 film Dance, Fools, Dance when he was seven. It is not the story, or even Crawford's actions or character that Baldwin was "fascinated" by, but the movement of her body, and "the movement on, and of, the screen" (479). When he sees a Black woman at the store who looks exactly like Crawford, he describes her in almost divine terms: "She was so incredibly beautiful – she seemed to be wearing the sunlight, rearranging it around her from time to time, with a movement of one hand, with a movement of her head, and with her smile" (479). Above all, this smile, a gesture of approval and acceptance, is what is able to transform Baldwin, offering a moment of liberation from his "terrifying" life (480). His description speaks to

the power of cinematic identification for marginalized, shame-laced youth: "[Miss Crawford] looked down at me with so beautiful a smile that I was not even embarrassed. Which was rare for me" (479). The star's glamourous screen image is powerful enough to – temporarily – transcend Baldwin's feelings of shyness and humiliation. This screen image of Crawford also offered an opportunity for cross-racial identification in a world where white people were "unutterably menacing, terrifying, mysterious – wicked" (481). Muñoz similarly testifies of being mesmerized as a child watching "talk-show deviants" late at night on TV. He experiences a profound mix of terror and deep pleasure at "getting" Truman Capote's bitchy, "swishy spectacle," loving the writer's ability to make queer language (4).[1]

A star's emotional traumas both on and off screen, their suffering and pain, indelibly mark their star image and inflect their glamour. In his analysis of gay men's love for Judy Garland, Dyer suggests that it is a combination of suffering and ordinariness that is the basis for her appeal (Heavenly 143). He quotes fans like Roger Woodcock: "Every time she sang, she poured out her troubles. Life had beaten her up and it showed. That is what attracted homosexuals to her. She created hysteria for them" (146), and Drew Griffiths: "I loved her because no matter how they put her down, she survived … People are falling on their faces every day. She got up" (147). These quotations very succinctly demonstrate the complex dynamic of suffering and survival, which "showed" on Garland's performing body, inspiring adoration and identification in

[1] The TV talk show as site of transgressive queer performance has been investigated in Joshua Gamson, Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

her queer male spectators of an emotional intensity that is outright "hysteria," wild effeminacy unleashed in the relative safety of the movie palace. Indeed there is a long history of queer fandom focused on actresses who are somehow marked by difference or trauma, whether real or performed, who transformed this marginalization into glamour. Actresses who suffered, rebelled, or were just plain bad, those who exceeded norms of gender and sexual propriety, or those whose performances were mannered and hyperbolic were particularly conducive to queer adoration (Farmer 125-6). Moon suggests that the shamefulness of a queer boy's identification with female stars is rooted in their excess (86), which I would argue is based in this collusion of over-the-top emotions and over-the-top glamour: "For how many gay men of my own and the previous generation were our earliest intimations that there might be a gap between our received gender identity and our subjective or 'felt' one the consequence … of enthusiastically enjoying and identifying with the performative excesses of Maria Montez rather than Jon Hall, or Lana Turner rather than Burt Lancaster" (86). Queer male spectators find in Hollywood actresses the emotional and physical excesses that they themselves are denied.

It is widely accepted now that meaning is not passively consumed by spectators but that spectatorship and identification are composed of a series of negotiations, dependent on the individual identities and experiences that each viewer brings with them inside the theatre, and their shifting allegiances. Straayer acknowledges diverse and "multiple 'deviant' subjectivities outside the patriarchal and heterosexist confines of binary [gender] opposition" (3). We identify with stars by altering them in meaningful ways to suit our personal lives, beyond categories of identity. Brett Farmer describes

how individual "privatized contexts of reception" are most appropriate for understanding gay spectatorship because of the discourse of "interiority, privacy, and secrecy" that shapes the construction of homosexuality (30). In other words, because we are encouraged or forced to be invisible and discrete, we are more likely to have fantasy lives that would actively desire "[cinema's] central promises of visibility, escapism, and emotional discharge" (Farmer 31). He interprets cross-gender identifications as radically destabilizing to heterosexual gender systems (132). Andrew Ross sees a survival strategy of fantasized control in the imaginary and displaced relations to mass culture evident in queer appropriations of Hollywood stars: "glamourous images culled from straight Hollywoodiana were appropriated and *used* to make sense of the everyday experience of alienation and exclusion in a world socially polarized by sexual labels" (70, emphasis his). In addition to making sense of and navigating a hostile world, I would argue that such appropriations are capable of going further, becoming the source material for queer imaginings of the world that stand against heterosexism and queerphobia.

How can glamour be this powerful? When I use the term "glamour" I am referring to the exciting and alluring qualities of one's appearance and performance. When I speak of "transgressive glamour" I am referring to glamour that refuses conventional notions of what is considered exciting and alluring and, whether intentionally or not, inflects glamour with traces of queer shame, suffering, struggle, and survival. Glamour can be transformed into something damaging and degrading to majoritarian culture, especially with regard to gender, sexual politics, and class. In many ways these performances are examples of underclass glamour, appropriating the trash or

leftovers of majoritarian culture and following Quentin Crisp's dictum: "Never mind keeping up with the Joneses; drag them down to your level – it's cheaper." Wendy Chapkis warns that social, political and economic inequality problematizes pleasures of style (174), but I would argue that "low culture" performances in underground films such as these are statements of queer class war on the battleground of style. Patricia Pisters has theorized stardom and glamour "as the surplus values of audiovisually mediated capitalist culture" (133). She argues that glamour can now be endowed on anyone simply through consumer products and being represented (in appropriate poses) and visible in images (133). I would suggest that these performances undermine this consumer capitalist idea of glamour by constituting themselves from spoiled and trash artifacts and identities, and by fostering a glamour originating in attitude or life experience and not primarily in consumer products. They do, however, depend on the preeminence of the visual and of image culture, and visibility is their goal.

Glamour is a source of pleasure and desire that many political radicals attempt to write off as merely an alluring ruse of consumer capitalism that can only lead to false consciousness. In John Berger's analysis of publicity images, he defines glamour as a commodity, "the happiness of being envied" (132), and he suggests that glamour is a form of mystification that distracts people from bettering their social conditions with political struggle. We feel powerless when the inequities of capitalism prevent us from achieving our desires, so we compensate for our impoverished material reality with daydreams of glamour instead of revolution (148). To Berger, revolution is decidedly un-glamourous, and questions of aesthetics and style should be marginalized as trivial

and frivolous when it comes to the man's work of political struggle. Berger's hard-line Marxist stance and focus on publicity obliterate the fact that the pleasures of glamour are decidedly ambiguous. I would suggest that glamour can be reclaimed as the product of a defiant expression of marginalized identity and trauma, and that empathic identification can be invited instead of envy. Meanwhile, Dyer sees glamour as the anti-thesis of the ordinary, a glorying in artifice that depends on a self-enclosed "glazed, plastic, perfectly 'finished' world" ("Four" 93). Again, I would argue that artifice and the ordinary are not mutually exclusive but that glamour can fuel an enjoyment of the mundane and ugly rather than clouding it in "glazed" mystification. The refusal of closure that shame requires opens up these glamourous performances to the outside world, forcing us to see the connections between a glamourous image and the trauma, shame, and abjection that are the creative forces behind it.

In these performances we see the desperate desire to escape our traumatic daily lives into Hollywood's glamourous fantasy. In the case of Divine or Mario Montez, it is an obsession with Hollywood actresses, and with Kuchar it is a fascination with Hollywood's power to embellish and enhance life. For example, the obsession that Mario has for his namesake Maria is a source of passionate, even maniacal energy, as he escapes into fantasy and ultimately refuses to accept the rules and codes of the real world. I would argue that these performers act as filters between an imagined public of fans and their own Hollywood dreams. The performers are dramatizing their relationships to stardom and glamour with varying degrees of distanciation and critique, but all of them are mediating this utopian love of Hollywood through a queer subjectivity and body (and

the shame that this entails). They perform as living proof that "something better" (Farmer 75) can be actively produced from the Hollywood material they consumed and transformed in their queer countercultures, specifically the 1960s New York underground film scene. These self-representations fuelled by shame are living proof of the production of queer difference through performance, and not just spectres from our fantasies. Elin Diamond states that every performance necessarily refers to – and consequently reembodies, reinscribes, reconfigures and resignifies – previous ones (1-2). She goes on to suggest that performance tends to "gesture towards an epistemology grounded not on the distinction between truthful models and fictional representations but on different ways of knowing and doing that are constitutively heterogeneous, contingent, and risky" (1). She sees performance as necessarily political for it negotiates and transforms "the ideas, symbols, and gestures that shape social life" and is centered on the physical, polymorphous body of the performer (2-3). Brian Massumi similarly emphasizes the importance of affects like shame to performance when he proclaims "the actor's talent: *self-affectation*. That term should be understood in the double sense of the artificial construction of a self and of the suffusing of that self with affect" (63, emphasis his). The affect of shame in these performances nuances existing models for understanding queer representation such as camp.

A camp gesture is when a marginalized (queer) subject appropriates a degraded cultural object and invests it with love and value. This process of revaluation is infused with the marginalized subjects' own desire to transcend their similarly low status. Camp is the most frequently employed discourse for approaching queer appropriations of

Hollywood. It is certainly useful for its anti-essentialism, its ambivalence, and its bridging of the apparent gaps between adoration and mockery, authenticity and artifice, though for a theoretical tool it is notoriously fluid. Like shame, camp can be considered an affective response to cultural objects particular to queer subjects (Cynthia Morrill qtd. in Farmer 116). However, I have noticed a tendency in the field to position camp readings, no matter how passionately engaged they may be, as necessarily positive and playful stances towards the objects they engage with. This tendency risks effacing the negative feelings such as shame that go along with the very experience of marginalization that enables a camp reading. Stefan Brecht suggests that camp offers "reassurance that being queer is gay and is not merely the same old painful and sad human condition of bondage" (98). I believe that shame and the obsessive identifications it entails can function as an agonistic critique of camp, reminding us to pay attention to the trauma behind the laughter.[2] I would also argue that when you consider such performers as Mario Montez, where the identification with the star is so strong – not consciously critical or distanced – that it approaches being itself, they seem to go beyond camp.[3] These intense identifications problematize the idea that the movies are merely artifice and fiction that can easily be looked at objectively, and they dramatize the extreme and at times overwhelming vitality that film plays in queer lives.

The 1967 film Portrait of Jason by Shirley Clarke is an interesting example of this phenomenon. Clarke filmed a middle-aged Black gay man named Jason Holliday as he

[2] See J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum's discussion of punk as a more negative, sleazy, "pseudo-lumpen," and antiutopian descendant of camp (274-5).

[3] I will address Mario and Maria Montez in depth in the next chapter.

gradually became inebriated, giving an autobiographical monologue and enthusiastically, even ecstatically acting out for the camera. As Parker Tyler states: "the true cachet of Portrait of Jason is that it portrays a real-life individual who is willing to admit publicly everything which (especially in the case of a homosexual) it has been considered socially desirable to keep secret or a fact known only to one's close circle of friends" (39). Clarke claims that everything about the film is "bona fide" though Holliday himself might be lying (qtd. in Tyler 39). Tyler cites Holliday as an example of a performer whose imitations of Hollywood stars are "too honest, too accurate" (46). When Holliday imitates Mae West and Scarlet O'Hara, Tyler suggests that he lacks a sense of cool detachment from the female figures. What makes this "child's delusion of grandeur" so disturbing to Tyler (46), and more moving, I would argue, to identifying spectators, is that it is infused with feelings of shame and taboo identification that many of us are familiar with from queer childhood. Here the star identification is so strong, verging on obscenity or pathology, that we cannot erase the shameful and traumatic realities of queerness – that fuel such excessive spectatorships – from our awareness.

Muñoz's theory of disidentification – essentially a theory of recycling – is a useful concept through which to understand the performances in my study, and the histories of appropriating and reimagining Hollywood glamour in the performers' lives. Muñoz uses disidentification to understand minoritarian performance in a way that acknowledges shame and trauma. For Muñoz, disidentification refers to the negotiations, restructurings, and transformations of stereotypes and other objects produced by normative culture that queers (especially queer people of colour) must go through in

order to survive systemic oppression, violence, and subjugation, ideally contributing to queer self-creation and world-making. He argues strongly for the transformative and queer world-making powers of performance. The term "disidentification" might be misleading for it actually demands simultaneous identification and disidentification. Muñoz states: "[D]isidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (31). Muñoz defines queer world-making as alternative vistas that are potentially opened up by the labour of disidentificatory performances: "[O]ppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of 'truth' that subjugate minoritarian people … Such performances transport the performer and the spectator to a vantage point where transformation and politics are imaginable … Disidentification uses the majoritarian culture as raw material to make a new world" (195-6). For example, in his discussion of Carmelita Tropicana's performance Chicas 2000, he finds a subject "resist[ing] escalating state repression by performing the very shame-laden excessive affect that the state indexes as justification for discrimination" (198). This is certainly the phenomenon that we can see in the films in my study, defiant reenactments of shameful and taboo cross-gender star identification and glamour worship. The stigma of being a glamour-loving boy is transformed into what I will later call *divinity* through performance.

I would like to turn my attention to how glamour is trashed by strategies of low, obscene, and abject self-representation in these performances. They embrace filth and the profane to express the power of shame to transform conventional notions of glamour.

Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque and the classical body is an important dialectic to keep in mind: "The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world" (Russo 219). Influenced by Bakhtin, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have discussed the "interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low" (2), the classical and the grotesque. Their concept of a "hierarchy inversion" can be applied to the performances in my study. Rather than attempting to re-appraise trashy and deviant queer subjectivities according to the values of dominant culture, these performances revel in the abject and shameful status they have been assigned in order to mine the depths of marginalization for transformative energy and power. In a hierarchy inversion, the low becomes valorized on its own terms, and not by emulating the high. In the Victorian cities upon which their study focuses, the "low-Other" was constructed as above all "a spectacle of filth" (128-9), against which the bourgeoisie could define themselves. There was an enormous fear of contamination – as there is to this day, albeit in different forms – with the bourgeoisie strictly policing any interaction between their class and the low-Others. We now see this phenomenon in the guise of censorship and obscenity laws.

In his study on dirt, Christian Enzensberger begins with the passage: "Clean is well and good. Clean is cheerful proper nice. Clean is above and here. Dirty is ugly and elsewhere. Clean is obviously the answer, dirty is underneath and evil, dirty is pointless. Clean is right" (7). Dirt threatens the separateness of the individual (22), violating

boundaries and order, and is thus anathema to the properly discrete and impenetrable bourgeois body. To talk about dirt is dirty, and risks exposing one's shame. It reminds us of something "improper and offensive: the fact that one is vulnerable and has borne wounds from the very beginning" (60). Enzensberger states that "[m]inorities" are always considered unclean, in their very natures, and will never be accepted as clean no matter how often they wash: "He can only cleanse himself [sic] by going away or doing away with himself altogether" (78). Similarly, most "queer" characters in 1960s Hollywood films such as Advise and Consent and The Children's Hour had to cleanse themselves through suicide in order for Hollywood's morals to appear unsoiled.[4] Enzensberger states: "By means of hygiene, people cut themselves off not only from the ubiquitous dirt but also from the equally ubiquitous other people" (88). These transgressive performances actively contribute to a creation of solidarity and empathy amongst the unclean and shamed, defying hygienic distanciation.

The performers that I am looking at are all obscene in different ways: they court shame by exposing themselves and showing all, regardless of law or morality. Shocking images are a means of demystification, refusing the myth of social consensus with unassimilable negativity. They are also a way of coping with trauma. Susan Sontag, speaking about Georges Bataille, states: "Obscenity … simultaneously revives his most painful experiences and scores a victory over that pain" (61). Mary Caputi has perhaps the most utopian and even divine view of obscenity, which she defines as an aspect of

[4] It would be quite fruitful – though beyond the scope of this project – to examine 1960s underground queer film performance in the context of post-Code Hollywood's overt representations of ashamed and pathetic sexual deviants.

culture that "incorporates transgression and taboo … allows us to cross boundaries, exceed limits, apprehend the irrational, and experience the dialectic between life and death" (5-6). For Caputi, the obscene opens up a more primal and de-differentiated state of continuity and abandon that resembles religious communion (5-6). Obscenity transgressively reveals the "ultimate tenuousness" of the cultural limits (6) that govern representation. Challenging the delineation of normal and perverse, obscenity dramatizes the extent to which we are not free from cultural prohibitions (Caputi 8). Finally, filth and obscenity are both contagious, an important characteristic of shame, as we will see.

Challenging the notion of a stable self, these performances can be considered abject. Performing the abject is a way of dramatizing pain, shame and marginalization: "[E]nactments of bodily pain … actively produce abjection, thrusting suffering and leakage (blood, piss, mucus) into social visibility … [they] violently recorporealize the subjects of culture who spew, shit, piss and vomit their woundedness (as female, gay, sick)" (Jones 33). Craig Houser suggests that the strategy of abject self-representation for queer performers is fraught with danger. He asks what can be gained when the image of abjection has been used to oppress queer people by heterosexual society (85-86). He does not really consider the deployment of abjection for pleasure or as a marker of defiant marginalization or authenticity. He seems only to consider it in terms of a critique of heterosexuality. Dick Hebdige's analysis of punk culture fits more appropriately with the kinds of pleasures in abjection and obscenity that these performances portray. Hebdige sees punk culture's abjection as introducing illiterate, nihilistic "noise" or blockages into the system of representation (90). Emerging in the

mid to late 1970s, punk employed a set of broken codes, distorted appropriations of other subcultures, in order to transform the fate of dead end poverty into a youth culture: they "'dress up' their Destiny in its true colours" (66). Similarly, the performances in my study originate in marginalization and they dramatize that fact. These tactics of provocation and passionate rage serve to denaturalize heterosexuality and dominant culture, and to create a space of social alterity that resists the "Disneyfication" of queers (Viegener 250).

The power of these performances is that we can see in them the traces of their transcendent and desperate identifications with Hollywood glamour. But the kinds of spectatorship that they demand from identifying viewers is of a different form than Hollywood's. The performances are so queer that they seem to embody the difference that is constantly averted and erased in Hollywood fiction films. Consequently, they court deviant queer spectators who seek out performances of boldly proclaimed otherness in an otherwise hostile world. I would like to come to terms with the intense and transformative forms of individual spectatorship and identification that the performances in my thesis demand from viewers who are willing to meet this challenge. David Wojnarowicz states:

> I have always loved my anonymity and therein lies a contradiction because I also find comfort in seeing representations of my private experiences in the public environment. They need not be representations of my experiences – they can be the experiences of and by others that merely come close to my own or else disrupt the generic representations that have come to be the norm in the various medias

> outside my door. I find that when I witness diverse representations of 'Reality' on a gallery wall or in a book or a movie or in the spoken word or performance, that the larger the range of representations, the more I feel there is room in the environment for my existence, that not the entire environment is hostile. (121)

These performances contribute to this project of making a space in the otherwise hostile public sphere for those who experience marginalization. Wojnarowicz importantly points out that viewer empathy does not require that the representations be of one's own experiences, but that they "come close to my own or else disrupt [the norm]." Their model of empathy is not based in identity but in a shared sense of shame.

The profoundly moving quality of the performances that I will be studying originates both in the performances themselves and in the kinds of deviant queer spectatorships and identifications that they demand. On the level of content, the performances are notable for refusing to present a masterful subjectivity: Mario Montez, Divine, and George Kuchar all perform shame with a desperate and disorganized intensity that I would argue is a potentially transgressive force. They also demand that spectators connect to their shame as a "structuring fact" of their queer identities. Shame is particularly conducive to identification. As Kosofsky Sedgwick states:

> [O]ne of the strangest features of shame (but also, I would argue, the most theoretically significant) is the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment *by* someone else, someone else's embarrassment, stigma, debility, blame or pain, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me – assuming that I'm a shame-prone person – with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems

> to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable. And the contagiousness of shame is only facilitated by its anamorphic, protean susceptibility to new expressive grammars. ("James" 14, emphasis hers)

In this passage, Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the characteristic of shame that will prove so important to the construction of empathy in the performances I will be examining. She characterizes this feeling of being suffused with another's shame as "isolating," but I would like to show how the medium of film performance can "flood" spectators with shame in a way that does not obscure individual differences but is still able to overcome this damaging sense of isolation by identifying a community of "shame-prone" viewers. Crimp suggests that the sharing of shame opens up the potential for an empathy that is not based on identity but instead respects difference: "I simply adopt the other's vulnerability to being shamed … In taking on or taking up his or her shame, I am not attempting to vanquish his or her otherness. I put myself in the place of the other only insofar as I recognize that I too am prone to shame" (65). This politics of (queer) shame is also clearly a response by Crimp to the politics of (gay) pride, as I discussed earlier. The trash glamour that is produced in these performances is one of these "new expressive grammars" – a queer language of shame – to which Kosofsky Sedgwick refers. Shame represents a transformative nexus of contradictory and complex ways of being in the world. Perhaps shame is the word for the distinctly queer sensibility that Dyer calls "the knife edge between camp and hurt" (Heavenly 180) that holds together ostensibly antithetical categories: "theatricality and authenticity … intensity and irony, a fierce assertion of extreme feeling with a deprecating sense of its absurdity" (qtd. in Kleinhans

185). Shame is the most powerful concept for understanding how these performances are able to mantle abjection with defiance, vulnerability with power, artifice with authenticity, trash with truth, pain with pleasure. As Morrison stated earlier, shame and joy are not antithetical.

Nancy K. Miller states that shame "is both what's most private and most revealed" (204), and "that it excludes you in your own eyes from decency" (198). I would argue that it is when one brings this deviant, indecent selfhood to a potentially decent public that one becomes capable of achieving profound and transformative forms of empathy in spectators, identification beyond identity. Miller asks whether revealing shameful secrets compounds the effects of stigma (198), and I would suggest that taking the risk to reveal one's shame is the gesture that can galvanize some spectators while simultaneously repulsing others, or provoke both these feelings at different times. Straayer suggests that the ability for empathic identification in otherwise hostile viewers lies in their being aware that there is no dividing line between normal and perverse (78). A specific spectator's capacity for empathic identification would thus be based on their awareness of their own perversions, their own shame. These performances specifically originate in queer childhood shame but it is in the performance, going public with one's own shame, that they invite empathy – as opposed to sympathy – from all who are shame-prone, sensitive to their own shame, queer identified or otherwise. These moving performances ultimately position queer pain within what Stefan Brecht calls the broader "human condition of bondage" (98) through the language of shame.

2. Super-Fans: Warhol, Smith, Montez

"No one was gay in the fifties; they were just shy" – Lily Tomlin

The films of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith, and the performances of Mario Montez, were vital in developing the forms of transgressive and trash glamour examined in this project. Warhol's films, and his own absent body within them, have a central position in the discourses of shame, performance, and glamour. There is already an extensive body of scholarly work available on Warhol, so I will only refer to those aspects of his work that shed light on the performances in my study. Warhol's career has often been theorized as that of a producer,[5] and Kosofsky Sedgwick, refashioning her James essay in "Queer Performativity: Warhol's Shyness/Warhol's Whiteness," posits Warhol's shyness and shame as a "nexus of production: production, that is, of meaning, of personal presence, of politics, of performative and critical efficacy" (135). Warhol provides a key example of shame-creativity and queer world-making. As stated earlier, the affect of shame is able to mantle many apparent contradictions, with resolutely queer effects (Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame" 38). For example, Warhol, like the performers I will be analyzing, is both shy and an exhibitionist at once. This represents a desire for communion with others as well as the stifling of this desire, a signature mark of shame. This is "the double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality" (Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame" 37). Watney similarly notes Warhol's shyness, though he substitutes "dandyism" for "exhibitionism" (thereby raising the spectre of Oscar Wilde), and he concludes that both identities "equally inform

[5] See, for example, James and Suárez.

[Warhol's] dazzling fantasy of stardom" (23). Callie Angell, echoing both Kosofsky Sedgwick and Watney, describes the tensions visible in Warhol and the performances in his films as a process of self-concealment and revelation (14). These terms "exhibitionism" and "revelation," with their allusions to desperate, perhaps even pathological self-exposure, are qualities typically applied to the performances in Warhol's films. I would like to direct my attention to the role of shame, shyness, and self-concealment that fuel such acting out.

Warhol's practice is representative of the world-making potential of a traumatic queer childhood. To Watney, Warhol was a working class queer aesthete, teased and humiliated in his childhood, who invented himself and "his own America" from the detritus of mass culture: "the radio, comics, Saturday morning children's cinema, and so on" (22-23). His work in general is dependent on appropriations and transformations of both high and low culture. This includes the star images, the consumer products, and the found newspaper photos that are the source material of much of his work. This incorporation occurs on the levels of form and genre as well as content, as Warhol's films are evidence of the absorbed influences of Hollywood, documentary, porn, avant-garde performance and theatre, portraiture, gossip, and minimalism (Angell 8-9).

In the context of queer childhood, mass culture cannot be damned as simply ideologically suspect. Images of stardom and celebrity are "constitutive parts of the social world" (Watney 24). I would argue that there is a direct correlation between shame's foundational role in queer identity and the central role of mass culture, particularly female star images, for queer world-making. Koestenbaum argues that the

star system is the "structure of identity on which [Warhol] depended" (Andy 196), his way of making sense of himself and others. Ideas of stardom (Koestenbaum) parallel those of shame (Kosofsky Sedgwick) as structures of identity, suggesting a dialectical relationship. Watney characterizes the experience of queer childhood, and flaming adult queerness, as similar to being an alien. He asks "[h]ow do you explain about yourself to yourself, let alone to others, when you have absolutely no legitimate or legitimating model for your own most intensely personal feelings about other people and the world? You turn to those elements within what is culturally on offer and make them speak your queer feelings, as best you can" (24). In this statement, Watney is suggesting that the creation of one's self-image is a product of one's cultural consumption. Kosofsky Sedgwick states:

> I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love. ("Now" 3)

This is a recurring conceptualization of queer childhood, as if the experience of shame wipes any "essential" sense of self away and leaves one's identity opened up like a wound to a world of cultural objects to be recycled and transformed. If shame seeks to efface the self, perhaps that inner void becomes filled up with similarly "queer" objects gleaned from the outside. The cultural sphere also offers a physically safer space than the

playground, as any effeminate boy who escaped persecution in the library or movie theatre can attest. Stereotypes and queerphobic images can hurt your feelings, but if you are desperate enough, the queer meanings you can uncover or create anew are virtually inexhaustible. Consuming star images is a way of "managing one's embodiment" (Flatley 117), and this process of making objects "speak your queer feelings" is defined as subcultural style by Hebdige, a concept central to many studies of queer spectatorship. These transformed signs warn the straight world of the presence of difference, and become valuable representations of the survival and even triumph of forbidden identities (Hebdige 2-3). These transformations are deviant deployments of artifice that mark an alienation from the deceptive natural innocence of appearances (Hebdige 19). Importantly, artifice in Hebdige's model is a necessary expression of, rather than an inhibition to, authenticity.

While the influence of Hollywood and its star system is visible throughout Warhol's oeuvre, from 1963's first silent Kiss (which Catherine Russell sees as the queering of that most conventional of Hollywood climaxes (172) – and of early cinema I would add) to the 1967 Freudian Western Lonesome Cowboys, he made several films that overtly queer specific Hollywood stars and their travails. Warhol created an impromptu trilogy of Hollywood scandal in his most prolific year as a filmmaker, 1965: Hedy, about Hedy Lamarr's arrest and trial for shoplifting, More Milk Yvette, about Lana Turner's doomed relationship to mobster Johnny Stompanato, murdered by her daughter, and Lupe, about actress Lupe Velez, who had planned a dignified pill suicide but ended up dying while vomiting in the toilet. These films offered Warhol a chance to both revel

in the seemingly innate sleaziness and debauchery of off-screen Hollywood while also refashioning the star images he held dear into queer icons within irreverent queered narratives. Juan A. Suárez suggests that Warhol's fascination with the star system of Hollywood cinema was made possible by the close availability, especially in New York, of increasingly more iconic and nostalgic images of the recently faded Classical Hollywood stars at revival houses and on TV (123). Ross points out that this gave rise to "the first wave of revivalist nostalgia, and to the cult of Hollywoodiana – with all of those necrophilic trappings that embellish its decadent fascination with the links between glamour and death" (56-57). Dyer similarly remarks, "the idea of tragedy and suffering being endemic to Hollywood was commonplace" (Stars 50). By removing the stars from their Hollywood vehicles and dramatizing their extra-cinematic moments of weakness and degradation with his own superstars (Hedy and Lana were both played by Mario Montez, Lupe by Edie Sedgwick), Warhol is transforming the world-making of queer childhood spectatorship from an imaginary, subjective survival strategy into a lucrative pop art enterprise. Instead of representing the scandals, Warhol uses them to structure his experiments in human presence. For example, most of the lush Lupe is simply Sedgwick in a luxury apartment silently going about the same banal activities she does in many other films, with the death staged as a three-minute coda to each of the film's two reels. In More Milk Yvette, we see a virtually empty set with three figures engaged in repetitive activities: Turner sings about herself, a nurse feeds and changes her, and Stompanato wails on a harmonica. The sound is often garbled, as is the image because Warhol's camera is constantly moving, though not in conjunction with the action. These films

explore the confluence of glamour and abjection through the performers' versions of Hollywood poses and gestures, queered and trashed in a slapdash recycling.

The performance style in Warhol's films can be traced back to his 1963 Portrait of Ethel Scull, the wife of one of Warhol's investors. The multi-image portrait bestows glamour and fame on Scull, who poses for the camera in her best movie star impersonations (essentially the role enacted by all his future performers), sunglasses in tow. Her self-presentation is "a repertoire of glances and gestures derived from [fashion] model images, a lexicon of possible selves presented to her own gaze for approval and endorsement. They are all stills from the movie of Ethel Scull" (James 62). To play the star is to become the star, and once audiences materialized for Warhol's films, the stardom that had only been make-believe became real (James 82). Suárez sees Warhol's superstars as a self-conscious simulacrum of the now defunct star system, except at the Factory it was being on camera that was the prerequisite for stardom and not skill or determination (228-9), which were the ideologies if not necessarily the reality of the Hollywood star system. Gloria Berlin and Bryan Bruce see Warhol's films as "an extreme instance of the star vehicle … a compilation of 'real' moments constructed from the performer's personality, and packaged, finally, as star" (55). Warhol reduced stardom to its essence, presence, and he populated his world with flamboyant bodies that would impress and histrionic personalities that could improvise (Suárez 229). Stefan Brecht states:

> Superstar is star of extraordinary purity: there is nothing in it but glamor, a compound of vanity and arrogance, made from masochist self-contempt by a

> simple process of illusio-inversion … the raw materials: any self-despising person, were cheap, and the industrial process simple: to make the trash just *know* he or she is a fabulous person envied to adoration … [Warhol] invented a camera-technique that was nothing but exposure. (qtd. in Crimp 59, emphasis his)

In Warhol's world, if you believe strongly enough in your dreams – of stardom, beauty, glamour, and visibility – they will come true. Jonathan Flatley states: "When we acquire a public persona or identify with public bodies, we participate in 'utopias of self-abstraction' that enable us to feel as if we have transcended our particularity" (104). He suggests that for Warhol, being able to imagine oneself as a public representation is to exist. Warhol succeeded in creating images that included marginalized and damaged figures like (white) drug addicts, hustlers, transsexuals, queers, and street trash in the realm of representation, a space that Flatley refers to as a "queer counterspace" (105). Warhol effectively prophesied the battleground on which Gay Pride would almost exclusively fight: the arena of media representation, where the struggle for visibility and "exposure" is job one, for better or for worse. Warhol may have found "queer sexiness in a queer-hating world" (Doyle, Flatley and Muñoz 16) but Stefan Brecht's quotation argues that this was accomplished through exploitation.

The ethics of representing people desperate for visibility and fame was brought to light by the controversy surrounding Jennie Livingston's 1990 film Paris is Burning about the Black and Latino/a gay, drag, and trans community in New York. Laurence Senelick states: "The lives of black and Puerto Rican poor and homosexual [sic] youths may be severely circumscribed, but their fantasy lives are not … In a society that denies

reality to anyone who has not become famous … the construction of a celebrity identity through voguing legitimizes the existence of the economically disadvantaged" (401). The film offers rare representations of queer and trans people of colour presented with dignity and flare as they construct their own arena for glamour and community while trying to survive a hostile world at large. Dreams are particularly important to queer, poor, racialized, and other marginalized communities where the desire for a public face is most extreme. Livingston, an acknowledged outsider of the scene, made the people in her film famous to a certain degree, but she reaped the profits. The context of the early 1990s and the issue of Livingston's white privilege resulted in her encountering much greater criticism than Warhol ever did. Stefan Brecht points out that the human "raw materials" for exposure and stardom came "cheap" to Warhol. Peter Wollen suggests that Warhol transformed human "leftovers" – people who have been damaged through their extensive use by others – into stars (24). Through recycling, whether it be an image or a person, "[Warhol] appropriates this mass media debris and, in transforming it, transforms the drabness of everyday life" (James 75). The damaged queer bodies around him were simply more trash to be appropriated and transformed into a beautiful spectacle.

Whether the camera records one person or many, Warhol's films are all the end result of experiments staging human presence. On the subject of the tempo of many of the Warhol performances, Koestenbaum states: "a stern skeptic might call [it] narcissistic self-absorption but … I, more charitably, if portentously, would call [it] an investigation of the schisms that make up presence" (Andy 104). In Warhol's films, the human face becomes a prime focus of our attention, a space of emotional expression opened up for us

to read and develop a deeper sensitivity to (Tavel 78). Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that "inner" emotions do not exist but are exterior, on the face. He states that "[a]nger, shame, hate, and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviour or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside. They exist *on* this face or *in* those gestures, not hidden behind them" (qtd. in Naremore 80, emphasis his). By refusing interiority, Warhol's performers demand that we sensitize ourselves to the minute changes of emotional expression that occur on the exterior. Ronald Tavel has said "you feel that [these] films are very much history … the most authentic history books we have. They record infallibly how people think, because when you watch them in those silly stories performing, what you really watch is the flesh at work" (qtd. in Koch 69). All of the film's formal elements except those that serve to illuminate the performers (such as stylized lighting by Billy Name and makeup) tend to be sacrificed. The mechanical or fleeting camera movements, the sparse settings and junk props, the convoluted, non-existent, or ignored scripts, and the minimalist long take, all seem to bring out something hauntingly authentic and vulnerably human in the beautifully presented performer. Grundmann argues that minimalism allows a greater scrutiny of the image (7), especially when the image is of a star. In Warhol's films, the constructedness of manufactured settings, banal narratives, and the camera machine itself are consistently juxtaposed with fragile, damaged, corporal bodies. The scripts of Tavel – Warhol's eccentric screenwriter for several films – are marked by repetition, intentional mistakes, absurd humour, and extreme Brechtian distanciation. They test the limits and conventions of human performance, and are therefore perfect structures for Warhol's

vision. Essentially, Tavel and Warhol put people in banal, clichéd, absurd, and exploitative situations in order to force their performances to transcend the base material of their surroundings. Many of them do not just feel empty of drama or narrative, but of content itself. Warhol, and Smith as well, are champions of boredom as a source of transformative possibility. Vivienne Dick suggests that Warhol is interested in the incidental, "the throwaway part" outside of the events (158). It is in an apparent vacuum of content that performance can communicate most urgently.

What makes Warhol's films so complex is that the performers are in constant flux between artifice and authenticity. The performances are remarkable for their refusal to acknowledge where the real world ends and the performance begins. As Grundmann puts it, Warhol exploits cinema's ability to document and fictionalize simultaneously (19). A feeling of authenticity is the end product of layers of lived theatricality, artifice, and style. Warhol thought that bad and amateur performances are incapable of being false because they are unsuccessful at convincing us of a fiction (qtd. in Doyle, Flatley and Muñoz 15). Their realism is a function of how dramatically they fail at being fictional: artifice is their "real." Warhol and Hackett state: "Everybody went right on doing what they'd always done – being themselves (or doing one of their routines, which was usually the same thing) in front of the camera … Their lives became part of my movies, and of course the movies became part of their lives; they'd get so into them that pretty soon you couldn't really separate the two, you couldn't tell the difference – and sometimes neither could they" (180). Warhol's interest in banality, showing all despite its supposed unworthiness, not missing a thing (Wollen 25), is paralleled by the performances that try to show all,

people exposing their bodies and souls in film after film. Indexical media are especially suited to this task of potentially transgressive total exposition: Roland Barthes states that photographic representation – and I would argue film as well – comprises "an image where *all is seen*; a collection of details without hierarchy, without 'order' (that great classic principle)" (qtd. in Bergman 104, emphasis his). Where "*all is seen,*" the contradictions, ambiguities, and messiness of queer subjectivity can be fully displayed.

Importantly, as David James points out, Warhol refused to censor or censure (67), thereby transgressing many of the obscenity laws at the time. By framing his obscene images as the complicated everyday rather than as the libertine utopia of pornography, his gesture made it impossible to ignore that it was these "leftover" bodies whose very existences were being threatened by the political sphere. Warhol dramatized a tendency that we still see today: some queer people's very lives are declared obscene by the "community standards" of decent people. Warhol and Hackett state that to critics, "The Chelsea Girls looked like a horror show, but it was a comfort to the makers: after all, we were a group of people who understood each other's problems" (185). These problems become "horror" to some when centered on the performing human body, which Warhol explores in great depth. Warhol's films are all about what it means to have a body – and in the most potent examples for me, the marginalized body of the queer Other – in an increasingly more mediated and artificial world. Koestenbaum places Warhol's own sickly body at the center of his art: "Warhol's entire oeuvre may be interpreted as an externalization, crisply distanced and disembodied, of his abject internal circuitry" (Andy 201). Stephen Koch points out that secrets were regularly unearthed about the superstars

so that they could be thrown into scripts to elicit the reactions of "shock or anger or shame or confusion for the camera's placidly witnessing eye" (68). This deliberate interpersonal conflict engineered by Warhol for dramatic ends is a metaphor for the way our corporal bodies are disciplined by and resist institutions and industry. Koestenbaum sees trauma, especially the trauma of language, as "the motor of [Warhol's] life" (Andy 18). Human vulnerability to trauma, imperfection and flaws always threaten to rupture the mechanical structures and forms with which Warhol represents people. To Hal Foster, these ruptures are "the real."[6] Warhol saw value and worth in the traumatized bodies of the denizens of the Factory, many of whom appeared on camera: "a girl always looked more beautiful and fragile when she was about to have a nervous breakdown" (233). The nervous breakdown is the locus of interest, that which breaks the mold of a normal girlhood that would otherwise pass unnoticed.

I would like to emphasize how Warhol can help us to understand the *divinity* that I will explore further. Koestenbaum aptly articulates why Warhol's films have this foundational role in my study:

> Many of the people I've interviewed, who knew or worked with Warhol, seemed damaged or traumatized by the experience. Or so I surmise: they might have been damaged before Warhol got to them. But he had a special way of *casting light on the ruin* – a way of making it spectacular, visible, audible. He didn't consciously harm people, but his presence became the proscenium for traumatic theater. Pain, in his vicinity, rarely proceeded linearly from aggressor to victim; trauma, without

[6] See Foster's "The Return of the Real" in The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) 127-68.

> instigator, was simply the air everyone around him breathed. To borrow a religious vocabulary, often useful in Warhol's case: he understood that people were fallen. Standing beside him, they appeared more deeply fallen, even if his proximity, the legitimacy he lent, the spark he borrowed and returned, promised them the temporary paradise of renown. (Andy 4, emphasis mine)

I would like to appropriate this phrase "casting light on the ruin" to describe how the illumination and visibility that the cinema can bring to a queer body and subjectivity in crisis can be conceived of in terms of a *divine* and powerful force. Illumination has consistently been interpreted as a divine phenomenon in the Judeo-Christian tradition. "Photograph" literally translates to "writing in light" and the cinema is perhaps the apotheosis of the practice of illumination in the arts, extending the photograph into time. The light makes these performers visible, preserving them in history, their defiant stances against queer erasure marked forever. We in the audience are transformed by their image: their bodies and their speech. To transform a life through cinema, to build a "paradise of renown," even if it is temporary, for "deeply fallen" people, is a process that can be profoundly moving to identifying spectators. Is this not what draws queer people (all people?) to the movies, the drama of a body in crisis, bathed in glorious light? James Baldwin remembers his real life Joan Crawford "wearing the sunlight" itself.

This metaphor of illumination, this "spark" also appears repeatedly in discussions about shame. In Stephen M. Barber's and David L. Clark's essay about Kosofsky Sedgwick's theoretical work, they describe shame as "the stubborn and performatively vivid way of being a subject at the instant that the circuit of recognition, of seeing that

one is being seen and acknowledged by another, is broken or bent; it is where and how the subject turns when the light of that returned gaze flickers or goes out" (26). Kosofsky Sedgwick herself cleaves to the term "shining" to describe Warhol's productive exhibitionism (qtd. in Crimp 57). I would like to suggest that through its divine effects of illumination, the cinema offers a means of reconnecting these circuits of the gaze with the passionate engagement and empathy of a spectator.

Grundmann suggests that the divine "light" in Warhol's 1963 film Blow Job lies where "spiritual authenticity and profane exhibitionism meet on the level of the pose" (74). The pose, as developed by Mario Montez, is one of the most important performative forms in Warhol's world. Portraying Jean Harlow in Harlot, Hedy Lamarr in Hedy, and himself in Screen Test #2, Montez gives some of the most beautiful performances in Warhol's oeuvre. In these three very different films, all scripted by Tavel, Montez is the queen of the glamour pose. Suárez compares the film Harlot (1964) to an old movie still. In his first talkie (three off-screen narrators wax philosophic), Warhol defies the norm that a moving picture frame must have actual movement within it. The pose can be seen as a stylized gesture of pure presence as if it were in a vacuum, the result of formalizing the "throwaway part" of life, the triumph of affect over language, style over content, mimicry over originality. Montez is clearly the star, dressed in luminous white garb complete with furry wig, flanked by three figures in black, framing him. Ostensibly playing the role of Harlow, the enormously popular blonde and beautiful MGM bad girl, Montez vamps it up for the camera while constantly eating and playing with bananas with erotic abandon. Tavel has stated that the film is not about

Harlow, but that it is about the idea of her, inseparable from her publicity materials (76). Silent and barely moving – Tavel calls it "still immanence" (68), they "pose on forever" (77) – Montez seems to be performing the archetypal female star image, which makes her more like a luminous blank slate for our fantasies than an actual personality. The star is there for her glamour and fame and not necessarily for her personality or achievements. She is reminiscent of Mae West, symbol to some "of all that was deemed to be wrong with modern America," performing in Belle of the Nineties, who is "supposed to be a vaudeville star, yet she does virtually nothing when she's onstage. She just stands there, striking poses and giving off vibrations … It's like she's getting paid to breathe" (Paul Roen qtd. in Farmer 140, 143). Montez/Harlow's continual consumption parallels our "eating up" of our favorite stars, Warhol's oral metaphor for fandom. Because Hollywood was such an enormous part of American culture, part of the fabric of American life, showing the overwhelming fascination of these images was a way of coming to terms with what it meant to be an American in one way, but always also the Other: "Harlot has succeeded in repeating the madness that is America … The nightmare is merely sharper in Mario Montez, and if there is any hope for our expiation, it lies in our being unable to avoid the tragedy of this boy" (Tavel 81). Tavel has also claimed "Hollywood is the mythology that Americans have in common" (74). Hollywood might be American, but a male's overly emphatic obsession and "sharper" identification with female star glamour is decidedly shameful, queer, and forbidden, or in Tavel's words, a "tragedy." There is no better way of proclaiming one's dangerous effeminacy, one's

abjection and shame than through a strong and visible identification with both the subjectivity and the glamour of a female star.

Employing dramatic movie music on the soundtrack, Warhol's Hedy tells the story of Hedy Lamarr from plastic surgery to death by intoxication as minimalist absurdist melodrama, with Montez as Lamarr occasionally bursting into songs such as "I Feel Pretty" and "Kleptomaniac" (sung to the tune of "Young at Heart"). The film opens with artful shots of Lamarr receiving plastic surgery (performed half an inch above her face, no attempts at verisimilitude here) to make her into the most beautiful woman in the world. Then in a different space, illuminated by film noir lighting, we see Lamarr arrested for shoplifting. Throughout the film, Montez plays up the "strong woman" role: Lamarr is always vamping proudly, covering up her emotions with a brave face, and courageously changing outfits in front of us to go to jail. In a satire on melodrama, Warhol presents Lamarr donning white gloves with overly emphatic musical cues and excessively dramatic zooming in and out. In the courtroom scene for her trial, dressed defiantly in formal wear, Lamarr is the center of the camera's attention as well as the focus of judicial inquiry. The camera moves closer and closer to her muscular, dark-featured face as the music increases in volume. Found guilty – she confesses that "stealing is like life" – she undresses as the wild zooming begins anew and the music reaches a fever pitch. Forced to drink herself to death (?!), she histrionically flails about. Finally, Jack Smith, playing the bailiff, testifies that Lamarr was "tragic and noble" as the film ends mid-sentence, as usual. While the star may command the world's attention, the

cinematic machine waits for no one. Warhol's reels always run out, leaving the drama unceremoniously unfinished.

In Screen Test #2 (1965), Montez claims, "the most wonderful mistakes that I've done for the screen have turned out the most raging, fabulous performances." The film consists of a medium close shot of Montez, auditioning for the part of Esmerelda in The Hunchback of Notre Dame to a director behind the camera voiced by Tavel. The tension in the film comes from Montez's varying looks of confusion, self-consciousness, defiance, and ecstasy. He never allows you to be certain whether he is in on the joke or not: the audition is not "real," but he plays it like it is. To put it bluntly, the director psychologically tortures Montez, who never capitulates. He continues to perform no matter what, winning us over with a mix of slapdash glamour and perseverance. Mario primps and preens for the director who forces him through such acting tests as reciting the word "diarrhea" twenty times ("Mouth it as if it tasted like nectar," Tavel insists), playing a chicken-eating geek at a circus sideshow, dancing like a gypsy, portraying an evil child poisoner, giving "a look that would make a priest give up church," salivating, and screaming. Finally, the director turns nasty and demands that Montez take out his penis for "that's what the movie business is all about." These overt spectacles are satirically presented as the qualifications that make one a serious dramatic actress: the boundary between carnival grotesqueries and dignified acting is decimated. Throughout the film, Montez skillfully enacts a catalogue of poses, for this is what acting is essentially about in Warhol's view. We cheer for him when he is defiantly playing along, and when he acts shy he communicates beautifully the emotional traumas that must be

repressed by all stars – real or imagined – behind all manner of Hollywood glitter and gold. The objectification of the actress as "cock-teaser" (Montez's own word for himself) is scathingly travestied by the "man-queen-star" (Tavel 66). The drama consists of the extremes that Montez will go to in order to be a star, with the film he is auditioning for being the one he is already performing in and creating himself.

Warhol and Hackett characterize Montez's star power as a core of strength shrouded in a vulnerable persona: "Mario had that classic combination of seeming dumb but being able to say the right things with perfect timing; just when you thought you were laughing at him, he'd turn it all around" (181). Sensitive to teasing from the other superstars, Montez lived in fear that his Puerto Rican family and coworkers at his civil service job would find out that he did drag. Crimp analyses Mario Montez as an embodiment of shame's political power, though he does not consider where queer shame might intersect with class or racial shame. Crimp sees shame as "the affective substrate necessary to the transformation of one's distinctiveness into a queer kind of dignity" (66-67). He quotes Warhol: "[Mario] adored dressing up like a female glamour queen, yet at the same time he was painfully embarrassed about being in drag (he got offended if you used that word – he called it 'going into costume')" (59). This is just one of the many examples Crimp cites of references to Montez's shyness and embarrassment. Crimp finds Montez's shame through a detailed reading of Screen Test #2, and concludes: "We see [Mario's] soul enlarged before us most conspicuously at those moments when Mario is overcome with shame, when we become aware – painfully – of his shame as what Kosofsky Sedgwick calls a blazon. That blazon, which we share, might well proclaim a

new slogan of queer politics: For Shame!" (68). However, Barber and Clark express concern about the "collateral damage" of Warhol's sacrifice of Montez on the altar of shame-creativity: "how did Montez experience Warhol's camera; as a scene of humiliation or as the queerly resistant citation of a scene of humiliation?" (30). This is an important question, though the more I think about the film, the more I believe that Montez must have understood the fiction in which he was performing. Tavel and Warhol were no strangers to him, and to presume that he is ignorant of the cinematic practices of his own underground scene seems questionable.

Drag and gender play are obviously very important elements of these performances, and their role in queer performance history is equally prominent. Senelick interprets cross-dressing as a means of demystifying through mimicry such phenomena as class, glamour, beauty, stardom, and spectacle, in addition to gender (10). He argues for the power of drag to "reveal the absurdity of social values; it also plunders the rich legacy of past artistic and emotional types to engender new forms" (409). He sees glamour as a necessity in the lives of common folk in the postmodern age (435), and drag as a form of authentic self-creation based in recycling and appropriation and not "false" artifice (505). Drag represents a form of glamourous liberation from the strict regulations of expected male behaviour: "After a lifetime of being repressed, it's easy to understand the appeal of drag," as one anonymous queen put it (qtd. in Senelick 377). If female star identification and worship is the theory, drag can be seen as the practice.

Similar to the other performers I will be studying, Montez was a huge fan of Hollywood stars: he would say prayers each night "for all the dead celebrities he loved"

(Warhol and Hackett 181). Montez saw himself as carrying on the legacy of Maria Montez, also the diva of Jack Smith and others, and his performances earned him star status within the underground. Tavel, in his excellent analysis of Harlot, suggests that there is one thing that can make a film seem as "real" and immediate as the theatre. This is when the performer seems to genuinely believe they are the character, transforming the illusion into reality:

> Mario Montez believes he is the Queen of the Silver Screen. The entirety of Harlot rests on his belief and its success is supported almost solely by his extraordinary belief. There is deliciousness in his gestures that passeth understanding. His coy rising to and sinking against the back of the couch when Swan Lake suddenly swells up at the end of the film is a piece of intangible truth that bridges our deepest ganglia. (Tavel 84)

Tyler notes Montez's intense identification as well, pointing out that the ineptness of the drag parody is the whole point, that Mario is not impersonating Maria but is actually her: "It is camp existentialism" (47).

This intense adoration that Mario had for Maria can perhaps best be illuminated through the films of Jack Smith. Tavel states that it was at the Orpheum Theater in Chicago in 1951 at a retrospective honouring Maria Montez's death that the then nineteen year-old usher Smith "became familiar with the star whom he has since referred to as The Wonderful One or The Marvelous One. He felt that all the secrets of the cinema lay in careful study of the woman" (qtd. in Hoberman, "Jack" 16). In his groundbreaking article "The Perfect Film Appositeness of Maria Montez" from 1962, Smith argued that

the visual pleasures of cinema had been sacrificed to the narrative to the detriment of the art form. His appreciation for the sensual and excessive in cinema centered on an eclectic list of shame-laced "secret-flix," pleasures ranging from the Marx Brothers, Ron Rice, and Von Sternberg to trashy genre exercises, films that Smith had mostly seen in childhood and adolescence. The essay centered on Montez, around whom Smith developed not just an obsession but also an entire worldview (Hoberman, "Jack" 16).

In Montez, Smith perceived the same "extraordinary belief" that we see in her descendant Mario Montez: She believed she was Cobra Woman or Scheherazade, and "thereby made the people who went to her movies believe" (Smith, "Perfect" 25). Muñoz suggests that Maria Montez's bad acting, by commercial film standards, allowed Smith to "imagine another mode of performing the world that was for him transformative" (xi). What is appealing to Smith is not Montez's skill, but her delirious joy at her own flamboyant beauty which transcended everything surrounding her: "one of her atrocious acting sighs suffused a thousand tons of dead plaster with imaginative truth and life" ("Perfect" 25). He sees in her something genuine, a magnificent failure, and thus the perfect screen presence: "exposing herself – having fun, believing in moldiness" and a model for a new way of appreciating cinema: "To admit of Maria Montez validities would be to turn on to moldiness, Glamorous Rapture, schizophrenic delight, hopeless naiveté, and glittering technicolored trash!" ("Perfect" 26). Interestingly, critic Pete Martin in 1948 had already suggested that Montez's image facilitated diverse interpretations, echoing the opinion that Warhol's performers (and the stars they emulate) are blank slates: "writing about Montez is the next best thing to being allowed to jot

down anything that jumps into your head" (qtd. in Hoberman, "Jack" 23). Smith similarly suggests that her films have a wide range of effects and interpretations: "lots of work for extras, hilarious to serious persons, beloved to Puerto-Ricans, magic for me, beauty for many, a camp to homos, Fauve American unconsciousness to Europeans etc." ("Perfect" 28). I would like to position Maria Montez's performances, like those of her followers in this study, as examples of a form of trash glamour that opens up possibilities for imaginative queer world-making. Rather than representing a closed, seamless world, Montez's bad acting and delirious beauty provide an opportunity for viewer participation and pleasure. She offers an infectious strain of "don't dream it, be it."

Maria sparked in Mario Montez, whom history will never remember by any other name,[7] a deep desire to live out his fantasies of glamour regardless of the consequences. Smith ends his essay with a prophetic anecdote told by a friend "'tonight I saw a young man in the street with a plastic rose in his mouth declaiming – I am Maria Montez, I am M.M.' A nutty manifestation, true – but in some way a true statement. Some way we must come to understand that person" ("Perfect" 35). Whether this was Mario Montez or not is unknown, but it is clear that Maria's delirious vision of herself as a beautiful star is contagious, the way shame and filth are. Hoberman concludes: "The truth was that Montez was always herself – her films were unintended documentaries of a romantic, narcissistic young woman dressing up in pasty jewels, striking fantastic poses, queening it over an obvious make-believe world" ("Jack" 19). Hoberman is referring to what we also see in Warhol, the authenticity that breaks through in the desperate acting out of

[7] He was born Rene Rivera.

one's fantasy, the real that is always a part of the "obvious" artifice. She and her followers spread the idea that glamour and beauty are simply ways of seeing yourself and the world, and not reserved for a privileged elite: I shine therefore I am.

Smith and the Montezs offer a theory of performance and of glamour that is deeply humanist in its acknowledgement of childish drives and passions, and the active fantasy life that comes from the childhood experience of shame. Moon discusses Maria Montez's most famous quote (to an interviewer in the late 1940s), which was the basis for an audition Smith used to cast the soundtrack to his film Normal Love. She exclaimed: "When I see myself on the screen, I look so beautiful I want to scream with joy" (86). In this one utterance, we see both childlike awe at the larger-than-life silver screen and a hysterical intensity that bears a striking resemblance to Divine's "glamour fits" that I will explore in the next chapter. The cinema casts "light on the ruin" of our lives, transforming us into something so powerful we scream with uncontrollable emotion at both the pleasure and the divinity of our glowing, flickering representations. Importantly, Smith specifically states that the phenomenon of Maria Montez is only possible "in America" ("Perfect" 25), where the mythology of Hollywood and stardom arguably reached its zenith. Smith poignantly argues: "M.M. dreamed she was effective, imagined she acted, cared for nothing but her fantasy … Those who credit dreams became her fans. Only actresses can have fans and by a dream coming true she became and actually was and is an actress" ("Perfect" 35). For Smith, everyone is already a capable actor, for we use drama constantly in our everyday lives, and theatre is to blame for turning human beings into vessels for fiction. In a press release he says "[a]cting

shouldn't deny glamour … but instead treats [sic] it as an eternal human and humanizing thing" ("Actavistic" 166). This is the model of glamour that these performances express.

Morrison suggests that the shame of a bad performance comes from not being aware that you are bad (63), a sense of self-consciousness that would entirely ruin Maria Montez's effect. Smith sees truth in what is commonly seen as bad or corny: "[P]honiness could be valued as rich in interest & revealing. Why do we object to not being convinced – why can't we enjoy phoniness? Why resent the patent 'phoniness' of these films – because it holds a mirror to our own, possibly" ("Perfect" 33). This is similar to Warhol's desire for bad acting as a more pleasurable alternative to a realism that purports to be truthful and self-justifying. This enthusiasm for phoniness is nothing less than a manifesto for the power of the spectator to transform the meanings of films according to their own passions and desires. The truth of Smith's secret-flix resides purely in the aesthetic pleasure that those who open themselves up to them will receive: to Smith pleasure = knowledge, or in his words "enjoying is simply thinking" ("Perfect" 30). He celebrates the trashy glamour of Montez and her films for their delirious passion and their flaming spectacles. If we desire fantasy, artifice, and spectacle so deeply at the cinema, why do we have so much trouble accepting such "phoniness" in our daily lives?

Along with phoniness, a refusal of realism, Smith agitates for trash, a refusal of originality. Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon suggest that

> If an ecological system includes no 'out there' to which the waste product can, in fantasy, be destined, then it makes sense that the meaning-infused, diachronically rich, perhaps inevitably nostalgic chemical, cultural, and material garbage – our

> own waste – in whose company we are destined to live and die is accruing new forms of interpretive magnetism and new forms, as well, of affective and erotic value. (235)

As we become surrounded by more and more garbage, the waste products of our obsessive consumption, we will increasingly look to trash as a source for films and performance, whether recycled literally (as in found footage films or dumpster drag) or metaphorically (parody and pastiche). The aesthetics of trash has been an important pre-occupation of underground cultural production. Trash is central to Smith's appreciation of Montez, as well as to his own artistic output. Responding to a critic who labels Montez's Cobra Woman "juvenile...trash," Smith states emphatically, "Juvenile does not equal shameful and trash is the material of creators. It exists whether one approves or not" ("Perfect" 26). This concise quotation nicely retaliates against the critic's attempt to shame Montez, as well as asserting the essentially derivative nature of contemporary culture – and especially performance – as valuable. Smith did not believe that originality was possible: "We have only to scratch the icing to find beneath – centuries of icing" ("Statements" 151), so recycling was the order of the day. Smith found trash likable because it was imperfect and ugly, and Suárez posits that these objects "were the quickly churned out, quickly dated products of a culture of consumption and planned obsolescence, and in them Smith saw a potential reservoir of transformative and utopian affects, which seemed exiled from up-to-date products" (201). Smith's performances and films were often focused on junk heaps and cultural detritus; in 1978 he imagined a city whose intellectual activity centered on a junkyard of unused and unwanted objects

(Hoberman, "Jack" 17). Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the basis of queer politics as "the management of spoiled identity" (qtd. in Doyle, Flatley and Muñoz 9).[8] This word "spoiled" is particularly apt for Smith's project, where the process of decay or rot increases an object's potential pleasures rather than diminishing them. Junk is the raw material of queer world-making: "[Smith] recycled schlock culture and remade it as a queer world … Glitter transformed hackneyed orientalisms and tropical fantasies, making them rich antinormative treasure troves of queer possibility" (Muñoz ix-x). Kleinhans suggests that "trash – or deliberate low Camp" (189) is made possible by the recirculatory nature, or "kitsch aspect" of contemporary mass culture (188). The trash sensibility is about finding aesthetic pleasure in the marginalized and excluded, about pushing the bad, low or shocking to its limits so that it becomes the essence of a work (189).

Smith's performance in Ken Jacobs's and Bob Fleischner's Blonde Cobra (1963) perfectly embodies the ideas and themes of his own artistic production. Costumed in slapdash drag outfits that intentionally fail at femininity, Smith enacts a series of increasingly violent glamour fits for the mirror and for the camera, culminating in suicide. The soundtrack is composed of found material and Smith's perverse story telling which employs obsessive repetition to the point of delirious disintegration. The prevalent themes are glamour, dreams and memories, sexualized violence, narcissism, blasphemy, and decrepitude. Smith's shrieking voice, maniacal laughter, and his despairing "boo poo be doos" contribute to the sense of anarchic frenzy. His collapsing body and its glamourous exploits, while obviously pleasurable, are also a means of dramatizing his

[8] Appropriated from the title of Erving Goffman's 1963 book Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.

increasing evil and madness. Koestenbaum suggests that "[f]ear of the marketplace can engender the backwards, smashed glamour of the shut-in" ("Notes" 281). Smith embodies this decadent and depraved shut-in afraid to leave his tenement (it was almost entirely filmed in his apartment), trapped by the deafening logorrhea and blinding mass cultural detritus that push him over the edge, ultimately bringing forth his own destruction. On the subject of his "aesthetic of impoverishment," Jacobs stated: "You see the actual, the banal, you see what you're stuck with and you also see the ideal. The humiliation of what you are and what you aspire to be makes the aspiration all the more glorious because there you are earthbound" (qtd. in Hoberman, "Big" 143). Jacobs introduced Smith to Cornell's 1936 masterpiece Rose Hobart, and the two watched it repeatedly, in every possible way it could be projected, for inspiration. P. Adams Sitney sees Smith's masterpiece Flaming Creatures (1962) as an elaboration of Rose Hobart, with the "secret-flix fantasies restaged rather than re-edited" (qtd. in Hoberman, "Big" 158).

At heart, Flaming Creatures is a series of performative tableaux populated by a queerly costumed assembly of bohemians and libertines with recycled pop and movie music on the soundtrack. Hoberman considers Flaming Creatures visionary, an "amazing artifice" that blends contradictions of every sort into a "rich stew" of "cinematic self-consciousness" ("Big" 155-6).[9] None other than the brilliant Mario Montez appears as

[9] "At once primitive and sophisticated, hilarious and poignant, spontaneous and studied, frenzied and languid, crude and delicate, avant and nostalgic, gritty and fanciful, fresh and faded, innocent and jaded, high and low, raw and cooked, underground and camp, black and white and white on white, composed and decomposed, richly perverse and gloriously impoverished, Flaming Creatures was something new under the sun" (Hoberman, "Big" 155). Hoberman also famously stated "Flaming Creatures proposed an entirely new form of cine-glamour - one that owed everything and nothing to Hollywood's" ("Big" 155).

the regal and enchanting Spanish Girl dancing up a storm in the film's lengthy finale. Suárez sees in Flaming Creatures a plurality of allusions to Hollywood where "identities are assemblages of found images" (193). He goes on to say that "in out-dated kitsch, appearances, styles, and gender roles seemed thoroughly artificial, deprived of any overtones of naturalness and normality, and therefore susceptible of being reinvested and revaluated" (203). In this film, Smith's friends play dress-up just like Maria Montez, ecstatically writhing for the camera as if trapped in the fantasy worlds of their own secret-flix. Smith viewed the brutal censorship of the film as a refusal of anything that was not masterful, organized, and plastic:

> Shocked by the seaminess of images of sexpartners not attired in brand new garments moments fresh from the dry cleaners, shocked by images of partners without textureless faces, shocked by the uselessness of anything but cut-out, rigidly self-conscious beings smiling pleasantly, displaying a product and fainting with rapture all at the same moment. And they are shocked by Flaming Creatures and have called it obscene. (qtd. in Leffingwell 74)

Smith clearly saw his version of the movies as the more authentic one, starring blemished, awkward performers, and intentionally failing to use its glamour to commodify and mystify.

3. Divine Shame

"Glamorize your messes" – Jack Smith

Divine is a monumental performer, and one thesis could never do justice to his enormous impact on drag and transgressive queer representation in general. Much has been written on Divine, *né* Glenn Milstead, so I will concern myself with how his performances in three films by John Waters – Multiple Maniacs, Pink Flamingos, and Female Trouble – are profoundly moving to identifying spectators due to their powerful articulations of a trash glamour based in shame and abjection. The discourse of shame in Divine's work is also palpable on an extra-cinematic level, in his own and others' vocal denials of the transformative power of his feminine persona in interviews. Divine is often portrayed as a creation, and even as a victim, of Waters, whose career as a character actor was sacrificed because of Waters's obscene vision. The truth is much more complex: Waters created Divine's look and carefully scripted his films, allowing no improvisation, but we must not deny Divine's agency and the intensity that he brought to his roles in Waters's films. In interviews, Divine and Waters consistently emphasize the purely fictional nature of Divine's characters. Their comments disavow profoundly compelling performances that seem to run much deeper than their alibi of "just entertainment" would suggest. In Divine's performances we see shame harnessed as a transformative force, yet in interviews he disavows his effeminacy and his transgressions, denying his own power in order to sanitize his star image, further his career, and be accepted by the mainstream. The apparent contradiction between the Divine we see in performances and the Divine in publicity material is a site of shame and pathos.

My investigation is greatly inspired by Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon's "Divinity: A Dossier, a Performance Piece, a Little Understood Emotion." Their motive for this performative dialogue is worth quoting at length:

> We have for some time been collaboratively compiling a dossier on a feeling or attitude we call 'divinity.' The presiding figure for these meditations has been, naturally, Divine, the late star of many John Waters films. As a huge man who repeatedly created the role of 'the most beautiful woman in the world,' Divine seems to offer a powerful condensation of some emotional and identity linkages – historically dense ones – between fat women and gay men. Specifically, a certain interface between abjection and defiance, what Divine referred to as 'glamor fits' and which may more broadly be hypothesized to constitute a subjectivity of glamor itself, especially in the age of the celebrity, seems to be related to interlocking histories of stigma, self-constitution, and epistemological complication proper to fat women and gay men in this century. This combination of abjection and defiance often produces a divinity-effect in the subject, a compelling belief that one is a god or a vehicle of divinity. (218)

They conceptualize Divine's performance drag as "a three-hundred-pound man not trapped in but scandalously and luxuriously corporeally cohabiting with the voluptuous body of a fantasy Mae West or Jayne Mansfield" (218-9). They admire his refusal to erase or eclipse his own large body behind the fantasy images he performed. By refusing to be "trapped" in a feminine persona, instead choosing to "cohabit," Divine is also resisting the pathologization of transgender performance. Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon

trace Divine's transgressive power to this refusal to naturalize and tame his drag with both the alibis of essentialism and those of artifice. Instead he loudly staged his stigmatized "fat-ass pansy" body (216), performing a "drag-monster version of an autonomous and obnoxious underclass woman" (240). Unlike the respectable drag queens with their emphatically pronounced distance between their "real" male bodies and the performed female ones, or the trapped-in-the-wrong-body construction of the trans person, there was no easy explanation for Divine. His performed women were messy manifestations of his vulgar and aggressively effeminate male body. Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon call Divine "magnetically irresistible" (244). "Magnetism" or "queer magnetism" is a metaphor coined by Kosofsky Sedgwick to designate what is "productive of deviance" ("Interlude" 33). Following her theories of shame's creative potential, they also state that "[a]t a certain level of human creativity, it may be true that the management of spoiled identity simply is where experimental identities, which is to say any consequential ones, come from" (225). They clearly see Divine's as one of these "spoiled" identities that, through his mantling of abjection and defiance, produce profound effects on the viewer, and incites us to similar transgressions.

Dan M. Harries suggests that the surplus generated by Divine's excessive persona is too great to be recuperated by the film, leaving us with a parody of gender, celebrity, and beauty that has lasting effects. He points out how Divine's glamour produces a trash alternative to Hollywood glamour: "Actresses quite often become 'plasticized' through Hollywood's effort to manufacture glamour and to create an aura of desirability. With Divine's persona, quite the opposite is achieved" (16). Harries suggests that Divine's

grotesque, obese, heavily made-up body parodies his attempts at glamour on the level of poise and pose. He also argues that Divine's persona is an amalgamation of Jean Harlow's toughness and intelligence, Mae West's androgyny, and Jayne Mansfield's costumes, makeup and mannerisms (18-19). His inescapably abject body haunts and ultimately transcends his attempts at mimicking "real" Hollywood actresses, producing failure (Harries 16).

Typical of the other performers in my study, young Divine was obsessed with such "real" Hollywood actresses as Marilyn Monroe. His idol was the beautiful and glamourous Elizabeth Taylor, whom young Divine resembled, and Vincent Canby, writing about his performance in Waters's 1981 film Polyester suggested, "[h]e looks like Elizabeth Taylor if she'd been locked up in a candy store for three months" (qtd. in Jay 98). Divine's mother, Frances Milstead, states:

> [Glenn] would go see anything she was in, and he thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world. When Glenn was a teenager, some of her most famous movies were first released, and he went to see every one … Glenn's high school sweetheart, Diana Evans, tells me that they went to see Cleopatra almost a dozen times, and that Glenn always cried during the death scene at the end of the movie. Many of Glenn's fans [read: queer men] have commented on how much these same movies meant to them while growing up. (Milstead 25)

Canby was accurate in his bitchy appraisal of Divine as "a grotesque extension of the fantasies of all little boys who grew up in the forties and fifties wanting to be Marlene Dietrich or Mae West" (qtd. in Harries 14) though he perhaps did not appreciate how

transformative this distinctly queer fantasy could be. Divine's teenage drag was disturbing to the authority figures in his life. His mother interpreted it as angry rebellion: "saying to all of those people who had harassed him for so long, 'OK, if this is what you think I am, then here it is'" (36). His Pastor reminisces, "It was not long before Glenn began to show up in all sorts of amazing hairdos and dress. It became a great concern to his parents and me. We had no idea what was going on. As their Pastor, I felt totally inadequate" (qtd. in Milstead 36). The Pastor's sense of inadequacy reveals the extent to which an effeminate boy's glamourous aspirations can disrupt, confuse, and even shame those around him, especially the moral authorities. Divine tried to sublimate his desires for glamour onto his high school sweetheart, obsessing over her makeup, hair (he was a trained hairdresser), and outfits. His performances can be seen as homages to and mutations of the female stars he idolized growing up.

The young Divine was fat and shunned – yet proud (Jay 23). Waters describes him:

> He was anything but flamboyant … He tried to be normal and fit in, but he got hassled and beaten up every day by other kids...He would just be waiting for the bus, this creature with dyed red hair, and I would see my father shudder … I became intrigued by the hostile reactions he got just because he acted like a girl … I was looking for a leading lady for my next film and when I saw Divine dancing the Dirty Boogie at a local swim club, I knew I had met my goddess. (qtd. in Pela 19-20)

Many try to claim Jean Genet's hero(ine) of Our Lady of the Flowers as the source of Divine's name, but Waters attests that it is a combination of underground film convention and the influence of his Catholic upbringing (Ives 80). Divine's first live act involved a combination of glamour fits and freak show absurdist stunts such as tearing phone books in half and pelting the audience with fish, all while dressed in Capri pants, towering heels, and his recently created look (visible in Pink Flamingos) of eye makeup extended all the way to the middle of his shaved scalp (Pela 61). Waters joked, "the human head did not have enough room for the eyebrows that we had in mind" (Divine). The glamour that Waters desired was in excess of what the human body could withstand, so he transformed Divine into a supervillain of obscene decadence.

Divine's persona is above all, that of a monster: "Waters's … thing, his it, his creature" (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 141). Waters wanted to create a new form of glamour based in revolt, a psychotic drag queen whose goal was terror rather than beauty (Ives 32). Divine is characteristic of Waters's other characters who turn their damage and disadvantages into a style through exaggeration (Ives 68). Milstead notes an autobiographical quality in Divine's character Flash, abused throughout youth, in the Tom Eyen play The Neon Woman. Flash states: "I lost my faith in mankind. That made me hate. That's why I became this overblown cartoon for protection. No one is ever going to see the real me ever again – the thin, vulnerable little angel, instead of this big, flashy fabulous exterior!" (qtd. in Milstead 94-95). Divine's glorious signature glamour fits, the site where Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon find his divinity, can be defined as "a combination of exhibitionist poses and temper tantrums" (Hoberman and Rosenbaum

147). These fits connote a narcissistic and delirious sense of one's own beauty (*à la* Maria Montez) inflected with a sense of violent rage and revolt. Divine claimed: "It *was* glamour, but glamour gone berserk" (qtd. in Jay 30, emphasis his). In the classic films with Waters, Divine's persona is constructed as a libertine, fueled by fierce desires. Her excessive and filthy acts are flamboyant, playful, sensual, and spontaneous.

Divine's image became increasingly excessive and extreme from his early roles in Waters's shorts such as Roman Candles (1966) and Eat Your Makeup (1967) to his now-familiar likeness in the early 1970s Waters films I am analyzing. Divine characterized his casting in these films as "bitchy Bette Davis/Joan Crawford-type roles" (qtd. in Jay 98). Like many of the other characters in Waters's films, Divine screeches continuously, which Waters explains as the way that desperate people talk (qtd. in MacDonald, "Waters" 239). Waters considers the essence of Divine's look to be "trashy with tight clothes" (qtd. in MacDonald, "Comedy" 56) and states that he was intended as an excessive Jayne Mansfield: "The character of Divine was an inflated, insane Jayne Mansfield, that was the point … the fifties kind of glamour girl look gone low-key – lowbrow basically" (Divine). Van Smith, the makeup and costume designer for these films, took Divine's extreme makeup equally from the high fashion of the 1960s and from Bozo the Clown. He stated: "John wanted this really trashy, slutty look … John and I both considered Divy beautiful. The costuming was to be as revealing as possible. We always talked about fat as sexy. It was all to be as voluptuous as possible, as racy as possible" (qtd. in Milstead 78). Divine suggests that his persona was a combination of the children's movie villains that Waters had been obsessed with: "the wicked stepmother

in Cinderella, the evil queen of Snow White and that bad witch in The Wizard of Oz" (qtd. in Jay 27). In his childhood, Waters created his own world of "queer feelings" from fairy tales, Technicolor movies, car accidents, puppet shows, Sunday school, and the local junkyard. Robrt L. Pela interprets Waters's films as a realization of his childhood dreams of a world of trash and glamour united. Like Warhol, Waters created an Artaudian theatre of cruelty from the detritus of mass culture, specifically the "low" culture contexts of exploitation and sleaze films, comic books and crime tabloids, and underground as well as art films.[10] Divine's persona, in turn, was also an assemblage of appropriated and transformed star images and pop cultural detritus, gleaned by Waters but powered by Divine's remarkable performative shame-creativity.

I will examine the films Multiple Maniacs, Pink Flamingos and Female Trouble in chronological order so that we can see the evolution of Divine's look and persona, and because our empathic identification is increasingly solicited as the films progress. By the time of Multiple Maniacs, Divine had already appeared in many of Waters's shorts and the non-synched sound feature Mondo Trasho (1969). Though his body shape and persona remain quite similar throughout the three films in my study, because Multiple Maniacs was shot in low-grade black and white, his costumes and makeup are not quite as outrageous as in the later films. Multiple Maniacs is the story of Lady Divine, proprietress of the Cavalcade of Perversions – "we got it all and we show it all" – a traveling freak show that enables Divine to rob the disgusted yet titillated patrons at

[10] Much more could be said about Waters here, though because he is a director and visual artist as opposed to a performer, he does not have a central role in my thesis. For insight into the connections between Waters, Hollywood fandom, and trash, see the catalogue for Waters's recent New Museum of Contemporary Art show John Waters: Change of Life (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004).

gunpoint.[11] She jumps out from behind the scenes after being introduced as a "live, in-person monstrosity," a sight that will be "branded in your mind forever and ever." Like an haute couture Charles Manson, she instills fear in her cultish followers due to her power mongering, her unquenchable greed and her insatiable blood lust. Sneering and snarling, Divine is headed on a downward spiral: "Every minute she's alive she's getting worse and worse." A rape on the street provokes a lengthy religious hallucination wherein Divine constructs herself as a saint, and claims that her homicidal plans are being assisted by divine providence. Paranoid, vindictive, and easily irritated, when she discovers that her lover Mr. David is cheating on her, she plots the murders of him and his girlfriend. The killings push Divine over the edge, transforming her literally into a monster. She moans and groans orgasmically as she stabs them, eventually mauling and consuming the bodies of her victims in grotesque close-up. Growling into a mirror, and then collapsing onto a couch, Divine gives a villainous speech of enormous power:

> O Divine, you're still beautiful. Nothing that has happened can change that. I love you. I love your sickness! I love your crimes! I love your murders! O Divine. I love your twisted mind. I love you so much! O and you're still the most beautiful woman in the world. Nothing can change that! O Divine, and now you're a maniac! O but what a state of mind that can be. How exciting, how stimulating! And now you're alone, the way it should be, the way it will be. You're finally there, you're finally there, Divine. You don't ever want to go back...You have to go out in the world in your own way now. You know it's all

[11] I will continue using the pronoun "he" for Divine the actor (as he requested) while using "she" for Divine's performed persona and the characters Divine played in Waters's films, all women.

> right. You know no one can hurt you. You know no one can even get near you. You have x-ray eyes now, and you can breathe *fire*. You can stamp out shopping centres with one stub of your foot. You can wipe out entire cities with a single *blast* of your fiery breath! You're a *monster* now, and only a monster can realize the fulfillment I'm capable of feeling. *O* Divine, it's so wonderful to feel this far gone! This far into one's own depravity! I'm a *maniac*! A maniac that cannot be cured! O Divine, I am Di-*vine*! (emphasis hers)

In this speech – perversely interrupted by Divine to change outfits off-camera – we can see vividly the intricate web of shame, defiance, abjection, trauma, glamour, and divinity that is responsible for the profoundly moving quality of Divine as a persona. What is suggested is that Divine, the most beautiful woman in the world, even more beautiful because of and not despite the atrocities she has committed, is now something even greater because she has achieved madness in addition to beauty: she is in a state of transcendence – divinity – that cannot be attained by anyone else. The narcissism and selfishness that have historically been used to explain and pathologize queer identity are here elevated to fanatical – murderous – proportions. What is palpable despite this near invincible power that she gains from the carnage is the distinct sense of childlike, damaged vulnerability – "you have to go out in the world in your own way now. You know it's all right" – that will reappear in Female Trouble. Her divinity is what will enable her to survive going out into a hostile world, yet she is still haunted by the traumas of the past. Living inside her own mania, becoming a monster, is Divine's survival strategy, the means to create her own way in the world. Divine's final declaration – like

a summoning of supernatural powers ("I am Di-*vine*!") – is punctuated by the entrance of a giant lobster that ravages her in a scene reminiscent of Flaming Creatures.

The cataclysm that befalls her at the moment of her greatest strength only increases her ferocity, as she runs wild-eyed and foaming at the mouth from the house, laughing maniacally, stomping and stumbling through the streets of Baltimore to the strains of Holst's composition Mars: The Bringer of War. She attacks several cars, smashing windows, and then goes after innocent bystanders. We see her chasing and clawing at an increasingly larger crowd of pedestrians, growling and barking like an animal. Cornered by the National Guard, called in to subdue the terror, Divine continues swatting feebly at the now-cheering civilians while being cruelly prodded by the National Guard's machine guns. Waters states: "I wanted [Divine] to be the Godzilla of drag queens. I mean, at the end of Multiple Maniacs, the National Guard shoots him. How much closer to Godzilla can you be?" (qtd. in Milstead 79). The flailing Divine is vanquished with numerous gunshots. With her dying face in close-up, "God Bless America" blasts dramatically onto the soundtrack, accompanying the celebratory gun and fist waving of the body politic, and then the film ends with the dead Divine's face. This finale is both a pointed critique of how queerness and otherness is regulated and erased by the state and society, and a comment on the immense transgressive and revolutionary power of Divine's untamable body. By mirroring the first scene of the Cavalcade of Perversions – where the "queers kissing each other like lovers on the lips" received the most vitriolic audience response of all the atrocities – Waters shows that the way monstrosity and difference are viewed in society is a continuum between titillation

accompanied by exploitation and total annihilation due to fear. What stays constant is how the Other is constructed as a spectacle, marginalized from the general public.

In his analysis of gay monsters in film, Michael William Saunders suggests "[t]he monster is, by its very nature, most fundamentally an image whose purpose is to reveal the power and, more importantly, the terror, of divinity" (2). Saunders draws parallels between provocative gay visibility and monstrosity.[12] He sees Divine as America's "queer nightmare": "an amalgamation of fearful images, images of some of the most potent transgressions against normalcy our culture can imagine" (93). He hopes that empathic spectators will be able to see the transformative force behind the monstrous exterior of such queer representations: "[W]hat lies within the image of the monster is often an image of power and humanity that asks us to engage in the world as creative beings" (5). His vision of monstrousness as creativity parallels Kosofsky Sedgwick's conceptualization of shame as a creative and transformative force. The monstrosity of Divine's performance in Multiple Maniacs frightened Mark Spratt badly enough to lead him to believe that "actual death may be about to occur on screen" (20). Hoberman and Rosenbaum similarly remark on Divine's ability to "inspire terror and sympathy simultaneously" (167), which I would argue is perhaps the most favourable position for a drag queen in a queen-hating and queerphobic world to occupy, now and even more so in 1970. Divine's mental instability, violence and monstrosity contributed to her profoundly empowering and disturbing queer presence.

[12] For example, in post-Code Hollywood films, gay male characters were usually represented as deformed, diseased, and doomed due to their failure at masculinity (Saunders 8).

These climactic scenes can be interpreted as exploiting the disruptive potential of the grotesque body as spectacle. The spectacle has been examined by Mary Russo as a "specifically feminine danger": "a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries: the possessors of large, aging, dimpled thighs displayed at the public beach, of overly rouged cheeks, of a voice shrill in laughter, or of a sliding bra strap – a loose, dingy bra strap especially – were at once caught out by fate and blameworthy" (213). Divine makes a spectacle out of herself. She possesses a grotesque body literally out of control. Russo suggests the female spectacle, the grotesque, and the carnivalesque as sources for a feminist cultural politics.

Divine playing insane as a survival strategy can also be linked with the discourse of hysteria. Elaine Showalter has theorized hysteria as a disease of the powerless and silenced, and as a bodily and nonverbal form of feminist language consisting of unattractive, noisy and emotional displays (286-7). A diagnosis applied mostly to women, it was also applied to stereotypically effeminate men who were weak, studious, nervous, pale, sensitive, and emotional (289-93). Hysteria was considered by the medical establishment to be a matter of "trials, tears, tricks, and tantrums" (302). These nouns provide an apt summary of the melodrama genre that was also stigmatized for its appeal to feminine emotion and messy spectacle.[13] Describing the hysterical patients at Salpêtrière, Dr. Jules Falret "denounced the women as 'veritable actresses … the life of the hysteric is nothing but one perpetual falsehood; they affect the airs of piety and devotion, and let themselves be taken for saints while at the same time abandoning

[13] I will look more at melodrama in the next chapter.

themselves to the most shameful actions" (qtd. in Showalter 302). Instead of hiding her shame with saintly airs, Divine achieves divinity through making her shame as visible, audible and memorable as possible. Michel Foucault has documented how exhibiting the insane as entertainment, illuminating the shame from the dungeons for all to see, was common from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century: "Here is madness elevated to spectacle above the silence of the asylums, and becoming a public scandal for the general delight" (69). Madness in general was constructed not necessarily as sickness but as scandal (70). When the process of shaming becomes a public endeavour, when the queer comes out of the closet and becomes visible, it is a scandal.

The narrative of Pink Flamingos is summed up by Waters's original tagline reading "The filthiest people alive: their loves, their hates, and their unquenchable thirst for notoriety." Stefan Brecht suggests that the film "incites us to filthiness" (142), a statement that reminds one of Kosofsky Sedgwick's use of the term "magnetism" and her understanding of the infectious nature of shame. Divine plays Divine, living underground as Babs Johnson due to the notoriety brought on by tabloid publicity. Shot in Day-Glo colours resembling those of the Kuchar brothers' homemade melodramas (Pela 77), Divine's appearance in this film is the most lurid and excessive yet. With an enormous amount of clownlike makeup and elaborate wigs, very tight and tacky clothes like a blue body stocking, a puffy red dress, and a bra and hot pants ensemble, Divine is even more grotesque than before. Her behaviour in the film is initially tamer than in Multiple Maniacs: she carries a steak home between her legs, defecates in a park, and teases hitchhikers. But when Connie and Raymond Marble attack her divinity, seeking

her title of Filthiest Person Alive, she unleashes a torrent of depravity. First she and her friends and family kill and cannibalize the police sent by the Marbles to her birthday party, then she and her son/lover (her incestuous blow job is a "gift of divinity") break into the Marbles's home and curse all their possessions by licking them, destroying their domestic bliss with the dangerous drool of queer monsters. An excised line reads: "Let our divinity and fame be felt on everything in this middle-class dump!" (qtd. in Pela 172). This licking scene is even more salient after the dawn of AIDS, when any queers' bodily fluids became constructed as a toxic danger, with risk of deadly infection as opposed to mere physical rejection by one's furniture. Finally, in revenge for burning down her trailer, Divine captures the Marbles and holds a mock trial for them in the woods with only a select group of tabloid journalists present.

These frenzied scenes offer the opportunity for Divine to really shine, and are reminiscent of her fury at the end of Multiple Maniacs, as well as anticipating her *tour de force* performance in her and Waters's crowning achievement Female Trouble. During the mock trial, Divine makes several glorious statements to the journalists, delivered in sound byte form rather than as rantings and ravings: "Kill everyone now! Condone first-degree murder! Advocate cannibalism! Eat shit! Filth are my politics, filth is my life! ... I will be queen one day and my coronation will be celebrated all over the world, do not forget: I am Di-*vine*!" During these scenes, Divine regularly strikes glamour poses, which disgust the ingratiating yet unsympathetic tabloid journalists. In Pink Flamingos, Divine is a media darling and a star. She knows how to manipulate the press in order to get what she wants: one reporter states that he can "always count on her for a story." In

an outtake from the film, Divine laments: "Oh my god, what a horrible photograph! My first WANTED poster and I had to look just awful!" In scenes where she is gawked at openly while walking down the street – a documentary piece of "real" public drag intervention accompanied by Little Richard's "The Girl Can't Help It" – we know that it is due to her appearance, but in the diegesis it could just as easily be due to her great fame and notoriety. Waters films Divine head-on as she executes the Marbles, placing her within a long tradition of screen shooters from The Great Train Robbery (1903) to the Elvis of Flaming Star (1960) frozen by Warhol in his silk screens. By putting audiences in the place of the victim, there is also the suggestion that Divine is a threat who will come for you next. Are you going to join her cult of shame-creativity or be guilty of "assholism" and end up the same way the Marbles did? That is Divine's challenge to us: recognize your shame and its filthy pleasures...or else.

The film is almost a textbook lesson in constructing a monstrous and trashy queer public persona. Waters has described Divine's behaviour in the film as infantile and immature (Divine), and this is taken to an extreme in the non-narrative coda sequence where Divine consumes real dog poo: Waters's narration bluntly boasts "what you are about to see is a real thing." Stefan Brecht describes the scene as such: "When she eats the shit, this idealism in the practice of everyday life shines out in the easy mischievous, big glamorous glorious smile on Divine's face, huge, bland, obscenely pretty" (144). Waters's narration also frames Divine as the "filthiest actress alive" in addition to her character, the "filthiest person alive." This emphasizes the scene's documentary status, and constructs a real Divine that is even more debased than the fictional Divine. In this

scene she is dressed in a distinctly more stylish, genuinely glamourous flapper-style outfit, complete with gold lamé vest and blonde hair that distinguishes the real Divine further from the character Divine. All this serves to confuse the reality or fiction of Divine to the point that some audiences thought she was really wanted for murder.[14] James melodramatically – and correctly – labels this scene a quest for "pure affect" (144) where the desire for fame and shock transcends reason. Divine dramatizes how the obsessive intensity of affect makes one a star and not what one does or how well one does it.

In all the writing on this scene, Waters and Divine construct it as the ultimate publicity stunt, something unforgettable that would win them infamy: "John Waters said … 'If it works, you'll be a new star; if it doesn't, you'll be back doing hair or working in another junk store and never heard of again' … God, I wanted to be famous so bad, I'd wanted to be a movie star since childhood" (Divine qtd. in Jay 32). If Divine failed at stardom, there would be nothing but the junk heap for him: there is no space for Divine's existence in between. I would argue that this scene, still scandalous thirty years later, is a perfect embodiment of the sense of desperation and obsession that comes out in these performances. Divine proved that he was willing to commit an act of extreme shame and abjection in order to be a great big shining star like his idols. For a body like his – from the "junk store" – the way to achieve this was not through the respectable means mythologized by Hollywood, but through an act of debasement in an underground film.

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[14] In Multiple Maniacs, Lady Divine repeatedly suggests that she and Mr. David were involved in the Tate-LaBianca murders as many scenes were filmed before the arrest of Charles Manson and his gang. Also, the real Divine as a teen was questioned when he turned out to have been the last person to see one of his friends alive before she was murdered. He was never accused of the crime.

Two completely different trajectories and two sides of the American dream, but the same outcome: fame. One path leads to glamour as a precious commodity, the other to glamour as a symbol of extreme otherness, refusal, and trash.

The message that David Chute finds in Female Trouble is: "[I]f one is willing to do whatever it takes, however extreme, then even the most revolting among us can achieve glamour. It's a wish-fulfillment fantasy for hopeless cases" (30). I would argue that all of Divine's performances act out this "hopeless" fantasy and give us hope in the process through his example. Waters, like the other filmmakers in my study, "makes films *about* trash, and about people who embrace it because society makes them feel like trash" (Chute 32, emphasis his). Divine's glamour lies in his desperate drive for visibility and value despite a body marked by shame and abjection. The performers and filmmakers in my study dramatize the failures, traumas and ruptures of this dream of celebrity, the mythology of a then-decaying Classical Hollywood. As I suggested earlier, in the 1960s Hollywood had a reputation for depravity that rivaled that of the underground. Dyer points out that "[t]he themes of decadence, sexual license and wanton extravagance emerged more strongly in the fifties and sixties, not only in fan magazines and the press but also in novels and even films set in Hollywood" (Stars 50). This is precisely the era when these filmmakers and performers were able to access Classical Hollywood through TV and revival houses.[15] Because the films themselves had not changed, it was the mythology of Classical Hollywood that had rotted over the years.

[15] As Manny Farber points out, TV and the revival houses themselves degraded and trashed Hollywood images through their "presentation problems" (18). On TV, Classical-era films were "blurred, chopped, worn, darkened, [and] commercial-ridden" while the revival houses suffered from poor projection and print quality, broken seats, and house lights "half left on" (18).

Waters emphasizes this soured mythology by stating: “Hollywood is supposed to be trashy, for Lord’s sake” (5).

The narrative of Female Trouble is Waters’s most strongly developed commentary on this world of criminality, degeneracy, glamour, and fame, structured as a bio-pic of Dawn Davenport (played by Divine). While Multiple Maniacs and Pink Flamingos are both structured as a series of attractions or shocks, carnivalesque episodes loosely connected by a narrative, Female Trouble contains stronger narrative causality, wittier writing, and more interesting supporting characters. The film also invites empathic spectator identification in a more accessible way thanks to the pronounced pathos that inflects Divine’s spectacle. In this riveting performance, Divine goes from juvenile delinquent to mass murderer executed on the electric chair in under ninety minutes. The constant changing of roles: teen, worker, mother, wife, model, criminal, and prisoner allow Divine to test his range, and he succeeds brilliantly. A perfect example of this variety is the series of vignettes introduced with the title “Career Girl 1961-7,” where we see Divine perform Dawn as a hard-bitten waitress, a seedy go-go dancer, a prostitute, and a thief. Divine is also able to drastically shift affect on a moment’s notice in order to convey Dawn’s psyche in a state of performative crisis. She effortlessly goes from anguished to ecstatic, supplicant to tyrannical in the blink of an eye. One of the most memorable of these sudden turns is a jarring post-divorce monologue straight out of a Hollywood melodrama, delivered in a highly theatrical fashion with excessive swooning and gestures of pathos.

The film begins in Dawn's youth. She is a cheap, habitually lying schoolgirl delinquent who has equal contempt for school and her parents. Adjusting her clothes and hair obsessively, she gives scathing looks and rolls her eyes, full of attitude. In a short skirt and beehive hairdo, she illicitly devours an enormous meatball sandwich in class, provoking her teacher to humiliate her for her size in front of her laughing classmates: "from your appearance Ms. Davenport it looks like you never stop eating." The seed of revolt is thus firmly planted. When her parents try to quash her yearnings for glamour by giving her sensible shoes for Christmas instead of her coveted cha-cha heels, Dawn rebels, screeching and cussing, stomping on the other gifts and knocking the tree onto her mother like a charging elephant in pom-pomed slippers and nightie. This event beautifully echoes the desires for glamour of many queer boys who are made to feel ashamed by parents and other authorities for their desires for tawdry, feminine glitter and glitz instead of the sensible, plain, and masculine. Divine's characterization of Dawn can easily be read as a wish fulfillment fantasy for a trashy girlhood that he never had.

Dawn begins frequenting the Lipstick Beauty Salon, escaping her life of drudgery with glamourous styling and beauty treatments at a veritable clubhouse for the elite of the neighbourhood's gutter trash. She shacks up with the crude and abusive hairdresser Gator (whose Aunt Ida desperately wants to be queer), but the marriage falls apart. Spurned, Dawn rushes to the Salon for a pick-me-up, where the snobbish proprietors – Donald and Donna Dasher – offer her the opportunity to be a fashion model as part of a beauty experiment: "Our experiment involves beauty and crime. We feel them to be one. We have a theory that crime enhances one's beauty. The worse the crime gets the more

ravishing one becomes." Encouraging Dawn's lawbreaking tendencies with promises of celebrity, they construct a more and more "beautiful" – i.e., abject and outlandish – appearance for her. Her clothes seem to get more revealing and more spectacular as the film progresses. Their goal is to create someone whose ego and sense of beauty and fame is inflated and pushed to the breaking point by crime and debasement. The Dashers are a rich couple, slumming, and using Dawn as a plaything in order to inject some excitement into their dreary lives. Stefan Brecht states that "[f]rom this point on, [Dawn's] figure is transcendent: crucified victim, she transcends her mere humanity; and Divine, the actor, does it … Only after they start her on her modeling career, – her rapid-motion speedfreak's posing for them, a splendid shimmy, *is* her artform … does she get going as a vicious criminal: her rage is no longer outrage, it has become joyous" (151, emphasis his). We see Divine transport Montez's glamour poses to new levels of divinity.

Her first photo session with the Dashers takes place at Dawn's home after Gator has given her a black eye and her daughter Taffy has ruined their dinner party. As Dawn becomes more enraged at Taffy, Donald eggs her on by snapping photos. An ecstatic Dawn soon breaks a chair over young Taffy, knocking her unconscious. As the Dashers continue to snap photos, Dawn enthusiastically poses with her daughter's unconscious body. They are all manically high from the experience, with Dawn quickly becoming addicted to modeling and to the camera, as the Dashers shout commands: "Look rough! Look happy! Look horrified at what you've done to your daughter! Look like you've just won a prize!" This is perhaps the scene where the glamour poses clash most jarringly with the violence and trauma that fuel them. When Dawn is deformed by acid

thrown on her by Aunt Ida (the attack eagerly photographed by Donald), she becomes a vulnerable, childlike creature, obviously uncertain about whether this mutilation will help or hinder her new modeling career: "Pretty? Pretty?" she chirps as she looks at her new face in a mirror after being unveiled to an appreciative audience. Stefan Brecht comments "she is shocked, hesitant, and is only after a beautifully acted moment of repulsion, dismay, – of weakness, – converted to her evil genius' view of her hideousness as beauty, gazes about shyly" (152). Arriving home from the hospital, the Dashers present Dawn – in sequined hot pants and taffeta – with a miniature stage to practice her modeling on, and she begs and growls for an immediate "red hot cover session!" The Dashers soon get Dawn hooked on liquid eyeliner: "Eyeliner taken internally heightens one's beauty awareness" (which suggests the likely narcotic explanation for how Waters and his friends became aware of the beauty of trash).[16]

From this point on, Dawn literally cannot stop striking poses, as Donald cannot stop taking photos: "Murder! ... Scars! ... Flashes!" she screams. After a scene similar to that in Pink Flamingos of Dawn strutting down the street as real passersby look on in shock and awe (including a man whose eyes pop out of his head at the very sight of her), Dawn announces proudly "everyone was staring and gawking at me like I was a princess" to which Donald replies "we all know you're beautiful; it just takes the stupid little world a little longer to catch on, always has." This line emphasizes how Waters constructs Dawn/Divine as the avant-garde of a revolutionary new form of glamour that requires sensitivity to appreciate. When confronted by Taffy, who wants to join the Hare

[16] The enormous influence of marijuana on Waters's cinema is as fundamental as that of amphetamines on Warhol's.

Krishnas, Dawn is humiliated and disgusted by her. The kind, loving, spiritual Krishnas represent for Dawn the "exact opposite of beauty," like hippies do for Waters. When Taffy points out her ugliness and insanity, Dawn literally cannot understand her for they share different languages: Taffy's of the spirit and Dawn's of the flesh. Dawn yells, "haven't you ever heard of style, Taffy? Can't you see how pretty your mother is? Don't you envy me? You are in the presence of a star!" These stunning scenes resonate beautifully with the desperate need that the real Divine himself felt for fame and celebrity despite his grotesque body: "I came out onto the stage there and people just went bananas at the sight of me. It's such a thrilling experience because when I was a child I wanted to be a movie star, so now I had been given the chance to be a movie star, an actor, whatever you want to call it, and the sight of me, not Elizabeth Taylor or somebody else, but me, it's really weird" (Divine). The film is so moving because Dawn becomes increasingly lost in the fantasy of her stardom. In her mind, her body has a value that it could never have in the "real" world.

Later, at her big debut performance, Dawn is as much of a monster as Divine was in Multiple Maniacs, performing ridiculously mundane trampoline stunts poorly while grunting, groping, and posing ecstatically onstage dressed in a particularly grotesque outfit – complete with mohawk and foot-long eye makeup – as "crime personified." Declaring "I'm so fucking beautiful I can't stand it myself," she asks the ecstatic audience "who wants to die for art?" before opening fire, eager to share her fame and notoriety with select victims. Hoberman and Rosenbaum characterize this as a manifesto composed of equal parts Breton's ultimate surrealist act (firing a revolver at random on a

crowded street) and Warhol's theory of celebrity (everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes) (163). Put on trial, Dawn is the only one to tell the truth, but she is too far gone, her mind only thinking of publicity and her career, and she does not comprehend why the "audience" at the trial are not clamouring for her attention: "Can't you stupid people see I'm a huge star!" Consistently in Divine's films, the importance of queer world-making, of dream spaces where you can be your own star, is dramatized as nothing less than a desperate survival strategy.

For Dawn, fame, being remembered after you are gone, achieving visibility and value, is worth dying for, and consequently she receives the death penalty. In prison, Divine's performance once again is fraught with a pathos and vulnerability. Her lover Ernestine cries "you still think you're in a show, baby, you gotta realize it's your life," to which Dawn replies "my life is a show, why is it so hard for people to understand?" Dawn is pleased to be executed – "the biggest award I can get in my field" – and laments not being allowed to wear a gown and makeup to the electric chair. In perhaps the saddest moment in Divine's career, poor Dawn, with no makeup, head shaven, and in prison blues, pathetically and spastically does one final glamour posing session for an audience of one – her cell mate Cheryl. Dawn gets her to promise to "remember me and talk about me for the rest of your life." This is the fantasy that the experiences of queer shame and invisibility cultivate. Dawn is led to the electric chair, where she gives an acceptance speech as if it were the Academy Awards, and Waters constructs this as spectacle through a reaction shot of the vicious and unglamourous guards positioned as her audience. Confessing to her imagined fans "I love every fucking one of you," she is

executed in close-up. Hoberman and Rosenbaum point out that her dying grimace is preserved in a freeze frame and provides the backdrop for the final credits and the film's pop theme song sung by Divine (163). This juxtaposition darkly criticizes the absurd value put on celebrity while at the same time acknowledging the vitality of such fantasies of visibility for marginalized people like queers and the underclass in America. Divine's voice persists even after his character has been murdered by the state.

As mentioned earlier, Waters's films are the products of an extreme sensitivity to and enthusiasm for both low and high culture.[17] Genet is a clear influence on Waters, especially in Female Trouble. Genet's practice of appropriation and negation is an important early and extreme case of queer world-making. He stated: "the most sordid signs became for me the signs of grandeur" (qtd. in Hebdige 34). Genet determines the sacredness of an act or of an object based on his perception of its beauty. All forms of abjection and destruction are ethical if they have aesthetic worth.[18] Genet made a practice of transforming the objects and people around him, regardless of their apparent meanings or values, into elements of his own private dream world. Genet revels in dehumanization, degradation, and despair: "Humiliation, shame, and suffering are unpleasant attributes of being. To avoid them may be to escape from the human condition. Yet to affirm them as Jean does is also an escape from reality" (Hauptman 48). In Genet's extreme narcissism, his striving for beauty and passion beyond accepted

[17] The dejected young mother in Diane Arbus's photo "A young Brooklyn family going for a Sunday outing, N.Y.C. 1966" inspired Female Trouble.

[18] Waters and Genet are working in the time-honoured aesthetic tradition of defilement. Bataille has suggested that "[b]eauty is desired in order that it may be be-fouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it … to despoil is the essence of eroticism" (144-5). In an interview with Scott MacDonald, Waters suggests that to him, beauty is about shock, about presenting what is typically seen as ugly or abject as glamourous and beautiful ("Waters" 236).

ethical systems, and his profane obsessions, we can clearly see a precedent of Waters and Divine. Hoberman and Rosenbaum offer a provocative reading of Waters's refashioning of both Warhol and Genet. They suggest that Waters represents Genet's practice filtered through Warhol's "media materialism." Rather than carrying enormous moral weight, or being judged for their beauty, as in Genet, criminal acts in Waters are valuable based on their degree of sensationalism: "Inspired by Warhol, Waters adds Hollywood notions of 'celebrity' and 'glamour' to Genet's perverse esthetic … For Waters (as for Warhol), publicity – not beatitude – is the bottom line" (152-3). Waters's spectacles, and his anger uncompromised by any political programme also bear many similarities to punk's nihilism.[19] His intention was to channel his hatred of society into film, and Divine was perhaps the supreme manifestation of this vengeance.

I would like to use the following two quotations to suggest the quite different ways that Divine's transgressive performances can incite spectators. The first is a calculated and reasoned appraisal of Divine's work, while the second is more passionate and euphoric. Scott MacDonald suggests

> [A]t first, one may only laugh at the idea of Divine (in Female Trouble) as 'the Most Beautiful Woman in the World,' but by the end of the film the courage, commitment, and skill of the actor have rendered him beautiful and allow us to be comfortable with a definition of physical beauty that centers on imagination and distinctiveness, rather than on adherence to a simpy [sic], industry-promoted

[19] Waters employed the imagery, themes, and styles of punk several years before the "official" birth of punk music, fashion, and culture in the mid to late 1970s.

> standard. No contemporary actress is more stunning than Divine at the end of Pink Flamingos and in many scenes in Female Trouble. ("Comedy" 53)

On the other hand, Stefan Brecht states:

> Divine … now in Female Trouble not only embodies outrageousness and projects the joy of life as well as innocence (though not, except briefly toward the end in a beautifully tender and humane Lesbian cuddle on death row, goodheartedness), but gives a *sublime* performance of passion, of daemonic, – one might almost say, <divine>, – Dionysiac – frenzy … the passionate hunger to be extraordinary … has become the substance of the figure. (150, emphasis his)

For MacDonald, Divine's power originates in his critique of beauty norms and his skill and determination as a performer. On the other hand, Stefan Brecht's ecstatic logorrhea seems more sensitive to shame-creativity, responding instead on the level of affect. He suggests that Divine's power resides in his ability to upset, in his unbridled delirium, and in the Maria Montez-like "hunger to be extraordinary."

Divine has consistently been interpreted as a figure of chaotic power. George Morris remarks that the energy of Divine's performances often seem to throw a film off balance (23), while Canby similarly sees him as a performer out of control (qtd. in Milstead 105). Divine's characters construct themselves according to a perverted system of beauty and value, and the more striking they believe themselves to be, the more aggressive they become in their exhibitionism. They are in their own dream worlds, accountable to no one, where the "fat-ass pansy" can be queen. They are closed systems of desire. While the on-screen Divine seeks fame and notoriety, she will always be her

own biggest fan, and anyone who is not her disciple is peripheral to her inflated ego: "With her onanistic gestures aimed at no one and everyone, she makes culturally approved feminine exhibitionism perverse because she is so narcissistic that she no longer needs a fetishizing male subject to confirm her objectification. It is of no surprise, however, that Divine's spectacle of female carnality elicits incredulity rather than desire from those who observe her on the street" (Studlar 7-8). Kleinhans is disturbed by what he perceives as Divine's lack of "Camp critique." He feels that Divine's "excess is simply bizarre, representing nothing but itself" and assaulting viewers from an inexplicable position (191). He claims that Multiple Maniacs has little to do with Divine's persona or his acting, and he finds the film's lack of narrative development, rhythmic pacing, character interest, variation, or surprise inhibiting to audience appreciation (191). Kleinhans is judging the film based on conventionally accepted measures of quality and competence, and he is concerned that Divine's "position" will be unintelligible to audiences. Divine was meant to represent virtually unassimilable difference; it is thus a formidable challenge for viewers to empathize with his persona. As a work of deep rage and negation, many would be turned off, but that is the crux: Divine's extreme performances demand an insider's knowledge or at least a sensitivity and openness to perceiving the shame and trauma that fuel such queer monsters (which I would argue Kleinhans here lacks). A "Life Force of Maniac Transgression" (Brecht 155), Divine eclipses everything else in the film because it cannot contain the excess and extremity he personifies.

Celebrity has a high status in the world created by Divine and Waters. It is a phenomenon that eclipses the specific roles of person, artist, fictional character, and commodity, thereby enabling the creation of new, "impossible" bodies like Divine's (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon 227). Divine wanted to be a "real" star, not just a star of the underground, but you can't be a "real" star if you are a fat, shit-eating drag queen. When reading interviews or statements by Waters or Divine there is a consistent denial of the transformative power of the films and Divine's performances within them. Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon praise the persistent literal-mindedness of Waters's films for throwing a wrench in the works of our "cultural economy of knowingness," which can be defined as the way queer knowledge is produced, consumed, and disavowed at the same time, or the shared presumptions about the queer Other that "everyone already knows" (249). However, Divine and others engage in precisely this practice of "knowingness" as a survival strategy. Bernard Jay, Divine's biographer and manager, tries to de-emphasize gender deviant spectator identification and position Divine as Other to his fans:

> As the sexual revolution of the seventies spread to mid-America, gays were finally coming out of their closets and, in a curious way, looking on Divine as one of their leaders. And not because he was in drag – it is, *of course*, a tiny minority of gays who actually identify with female impersonators or transvestites – but because 'she' had no shame, no compromise. When Divine was on stage, in character, they could cheer and respond to something larger than life, someone their own day-to-day convention, with which they were often still forced to live,

couldn't touch. He was their idol; their hope for a more extrovert, freer world for themselves. (91, emphasis mine)

While Jay celebrates Divine's shamelessness, shame resurfaces in his own refusal and marginalization of the very feminine identification that was such a source of immense transformative power for Divine, and for many other Hollywood actress-obsessed queer boys. He uses the discourse of "knowingness" to shame Divine's effeminate fans, as well as the "impossible" bodies of the drag queens and trans people among them. He is correct to position Divine as idealized extrovert, but that aspect of his performance is impossible without the shame-creativity originating in feminine identification and an effeminate boyhood that lies behind it. Divine himself defuses the power of his films when he says: "I think they're extremely funny. But I have other people that disagree, that think [Waters's] movies are just really sick – sick movies, sick people. But they're not – *they're just to entertain*" (qtd. in Milstead 87, emphasis mine). This construction of entertainment as innocuous downplays the dramatic emotional and psychic power that the performances have on identifying spectators such as myself.

Divine is obviously a figure marked by contradictions, and I often find myself trying too hard to fit Divine into my idealized image of him. Divine was trying to navigate a queerphobic and hostile public sphere, leading him and his entourage to make apologetic statements that appear to contradict the defiant performances. His transgressive performances required immense courage, but they are so compelling that I want to find that same Divine in his interviews and publicity material, not a flawed and vulnerable male character actor distancing himself from his alter ego. These tactics were

deployed in order to facilitate Divine's access to a mainstream show business that did not approve of such shameful acting out. Divine was marked by difference in a way that made him much more difficult to assimilate than Waters, for example, who has steadily developed a complicated though undeniable position within mass culture. Jay testifies:

> [Divine] did not want to become a joke, known only as a narcissist who would truly do *anything* to get publicity. He knew only too well that others of his male contemporaries who were earning limited fame by playing female roles – Candy Darling, Jackie Curtis and Holly Woodlawn among them – were not receiving this attention from the media … He hated the labels 'drag queen' or 'transvestite' that seemed to accompany him everywhere. In his own mind, Divine was never anything but a man. Contrary to press speculation and gossip, he never had the slightest reason to consider for either psychological or career purposes, any changes to his natural looks, needs, feelings, behaviour. Male.... 'But I *am* a man,' Divine would insist time and time again. 'It's a simple, inescapable fact. I mean, all the plumbing's intact. (52, emphasis his)

This quote illustrates how Divine tried to distance himself from the desperate exhibitionism and the narcissism that are clearly his persona's raison d'être, as well as from the more dangerous – because they were trans – "male contemporaries" whose feminine identifications were even harder to discard than his. In addition to making it clear how he was a real man – "Male," Jay proclaims authoritatively – Divine also clearly distinguished the trash body onscreen from his natural and decent body: "I've *always* been respectable. What I do onstage is not what I do in my private life … It's an

act…It's how I make my living. People laugh, and it's not hurting anyone" (qtd. in Jay 139, emphasis his). I want Divine to hurt someone, to threaten someone's understanding of the world. I do not want him to claim it was all for laughs when he has been so moving to me. It hurts me to see a wounded Divine take refuge in the natural, in "knowingness": the plumbing may be intact but it's attached to a shame-laced, trashy, queeny body that is screaming for attention, refusing to be erased. Each overly emphatic defense of his manhood speaks to feelings of shame about his drag lurking beneath the apparent shamelessness of the performances. However, his performances would be unimaginable without the conflict, embarrassment, and desperation – the sense of shame – that surface so strongly in interviews. Divine is forced to buy into the same value system that oppresses bodies and subjectivities like his by downplaying what makes his performances transformative and powerful.

In 1974, Divine made the following two pronouncements, which together illustrate the gap between trash and respectability, artifice and authenticity, feminine and masculine identifications with which the discourse of shame is always flirting. In the first, uttered while queening over a film set, he is Di-*vine*! In the second, facing the hostility of the outside world, he is not.

> Divine. That's my name. It's the name John gave me. I like it. That's what everybody calls me now, even my close friends. Not many of them call me Glenn at all anymore, which I don't mind. They can call me whatever they want. They call me fatso, and they call me asshole, and I don't care. You always change your name when you're in show business. Divine has stuck as my name. Did you ever

look it up in a dictionary? I won't even go into it. It's unbelievable. (qtd. in Milstead 1)

One thing I was very glad about was that I didn't play 'Lady Divine' in Female Trouble. People start believing that actually is me! That's why I've had people ask me in interviews and things if I really go around scarfing up piles of dog shit off the street and murdering people … The good thing about playing the part of Dawn Davenport was that it wasn't me at all. There is no way I can defend her. She was a hideous person. (qtd. in Milstead 77)

In the first quotation, Divine is a star soaked in self-love and pleasure from her persona, and the "real" boy Glenn is left behind forever. Divine here is clearly an "unbelievable" and divine force that is both the product and transcendence of his queer childhood victimization. In the second quotation, Divine makes it clear that performer and fictional character are distinct. He downplays the uncertainty of whether Divine was real or fictional that made his films with Waters so compelling.[20] James Naremore points out that comic acting has often relied on projecting a distance between an actor and their role for humourous effect (77). In Divine's comic performances, the boundary between actor and character is blurred as much as possible. The power of the performances lies in what seems to be the real, extra-cinematic intensity of Divine's identification with an abject glamour and celebrity.

In her essay "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," Kosofsky Sedgwick theorizes the effeminate queer or proto-queer boy as "haunting abject" (157). She discusses the

[20] Despite being named Dawn in Female Trouble, this uncertainty was still there, as Dawn's first live show is a reconstruction of Divine's first live show, thereby linking performer and character.

erasure of queer youth, as well as how effeminacy continues to be pathologized by a mental health industry that has normalized masculine gay men. Pointing out that most queer men, regardless of how butch or femme they are in adulthood, would likely have had a childhood history of effeminacy, she suggests that "the eclipse of the effeminate boy from adult gay discourse would represent more than a damaging theoretical gap; it would represent a node of annihilating homophobic, gynephobic, and pedophobic hatred internalized and made central to gay-affirmative analysis" (158). She shows how the DSM-III replaced homosexuality with "gender identity disorder of childhood" for those who display a "preoccupation with female stereotypical activities as manifested by a preference for either cross-dressing or simulating female attire, or by a compelling desire to participate in the games and pastimes of girls" (156-7). These pastimes would obviously include dreaming about being and dressing-up as glamourous Hollywood actresses. This trend in psychology represents a renaturalizing of gender (159), precisely the tactic that Divine is resorting to in interviews, yet dismantling in his performances. Friedrich Nietzsche stated: "Must not anyone who wants to move the crowd be an actor who impersonates himself? Must he not first translate himself into grotesque obviousness and then present his whole person and cause in the coarsened and simplified version?" (qtd. in Naremore 34). The reason why Divine is so powerful a performer in these films with Waters is because his persona was a monstrous return of the repressed "haunting abject" of his effeminate boyhood. Divine's performances are memorable because these visible and audible nuances of authentic trauma are palpable in a body defiantly marked as effeminate and trash. By effacing this body and its powers, Divine

was put in the unenviable yet familiar position of identifying with his own erasure in order to survive in the world.

4. Kuchar's Queer "Kino-Eye"

"This is the other face of cinema … the side that sells tabloids and makes legends, a trillion dollar heritage of human refuse devoured by a cyclopean eye designed to entertain, to titillate with tit, to teach. The art form of the 20th century" – George Kuchar

George Kuchar, one of the most influential figures in queer cinema, has been making movies for almost fifty years. I would like to focus on his video diaries from the late 1980s in order to examine both his acting and his direction as transgressive performance. Whereas Divine performed a spectacle of trash glamour, Kuchar has assimilated Hollywood's methods of constructing glamour into his practice. He documents himself and his friends' everyday lives using Hollywood's formal conventions inflected by his own queer subjectivity. In an age when Hollywood *is* America, Kuchar finds meaning in the gap between our painful, banal, shame-laced lives and the promises of beauty, success, and fame offered by our cinematic mythmakers. I would ultimately like to suggest that Kuchar's practice offers a model of a transformative way of seeing others with an empathy based on a shared sense of failure and shame. Through his cinematic gaze, Kuchar democratizes glamour and imagemaking, while creating an authentic persona from artifice and trash.

Kuchar characterizes his childhood in the Bronx as one of constant humiliation by teachers and classmates, and of a perverse interest in the more carnal aspects of Catholicism (Stevenson 215-6). He and his twin brother Mike escaped to the movie theatre, spending hours watching an "adult" world of violence and debauchery, monstrosities and sex (Stevenson 215). Kuchar consumed a steady diet of silver screen

spectacles, with his favorites the seamy and lurid exploitation and B-grade Hollywood movies. Beginning in the 1950s, the precocious Kuchar brothers began making zero budget 8mm films with trashy titles such as I Was a Teenage Rumpot (1960) and A Town Called Tempest (1962). Using friends in homemade costumes and props, they employed the codes and conventions of his beloved trash spectacles on the roof of their Bronx tenement apartment: "At the age of 12 I made a transvestite movie on the roof and was brutally beaten by my mother for having disgraced her and also for soiling her nightgown" (G. Kuchar qtd. in Stevenson 164). These cinematic endeavours – which James considers successful failures at reconstructing Hollywood (149) – were a survival strategy to escape from the mundane and often hostile life of the brothers' urban queer childhoods. To stem the tide of the Kuchars' glamourous urges, their parents attempted to mold them into men. According to George, "[w]hen manliness seemed in short supply, we were draped in denim and given butch haircuts. Once I was taken to a school counselor who gazed myopically through prescription glasses at my queer mannerisms" (Kuchar and Kuchar 5). As Jack Stevenson puts it, if escaping the Bronx of the 1950s failed, the Kuchars could "make it over, colourize it, give it plastic surgery and drape it in cheap tinsel and leopard skins" (162). Paralleling Smith's appreciation of Maria Montez, and showing an early awareness of Hollywood conventions, George states that Lana Turner was his favorite actress as a child because "she always looked like she was acting in a Hollywood movie" (Kuchar and Kuchar 10). The early films were also a nascent form of George's diaristic video world-making that would eventually show his daily life both haunted and animated by cinematic dreams of glamour and adventure. George and

Mike Kuchar continued to make films into the 1980s, branching out into 16mm, with some of George's most celebrated titles being Hold Me While I'm Naked (1966), The Devil's Cleavage (1973), and Ascension of the Demonoids (1985). George left New York to teach at the San Francisco Art Institute in the 1970s, where he continues to champion the rejected, junky, and bad films that are suppressed from the film history canon. Each semester, he and his students produce a "classroom film," which resembles his earlier no-budget smut epics. He also continues to churn out video diaries.

George Kuchar picked up a video camera in the mid-1980s and began working in the medium precisely because it was considered trashy, ugly, and cheap: "a despised medium, a despised format" (qtd. in Cantrill and Cantrill 63). Video remains stigmatized to this day for these same reasons. The VHS tapes that Kuchar shot look even more degraded from our current vantage point of digital technology that can virtually mimic celluloid.[21] Video's worth as a medium (outside of the video art and home movie milieux) continues largely to be based on how successfully it looks like film. In some ways video can be seen as the perfect technological embodiment of the performances in my study: shoddy, messy, fragmentary, and desperately attempting to imitate – though always failing – something more classy and venerated.[22] Kuchar compares the arrival of consumer video with a floodgate of delicious abjection being opened up: "The camcorder revolution was just what the doctor ordered … a laxative of cheap non-stop imagery

[21] For Kuchar, the arrival of digital technology represented yet another medium begging to be degraded. In his "videoscapes" he unleashes a torrent of supremely tacky special effects, abusing colour keys to filters, and everything in-between.

[22] Also, the greater accessibility of video has made a wave of transgressive queer representations possible.

endowed with high flatulating fidelity. I finally lowered my briefs and let drop the digested dollops of diaristic diarrhea. My video career had begun" (Kuchar and Kuchar 123)! Kuchar's diaries do not try to represent the same stories of scintillating sex, dastardly deeds, and cataclysmic terrors of his earlier films, but on a formal level they are haunted by the absence of these spectacles. Kuchar uses Hollywood codes and conventions as a way of "casting light on the ruin" of his real life, but we are far more likely to see tabloid newspapers, radios, or TV – arguably even more degraded media than video – than we are to see the movies. Steve Seid characterizes this switch to video as Kuchar's realization that his everyday life was as "maudlin" and "fecund" as anything that Hollywood could turn out (18).

Kuchar carries his camera with him at all times, creating his dramatized video diaries using his surroundings as source material. Personable and deeply humanist, yet easily embarrassed and shy, Kuchar needs the camcorder as a prosthetic communication device. Kuchar believes that artists are sensitive: they are either overly endowed or deficient people who require their chosen forms of expression in order to "make their way through life" (Kuchar and Kuchar 53). The camera mediates all interaction he has with others, but he also confides in the camera as if it were his conscience or a trusted friend, in the style typical of the genre. Kuchar tries to recreate the intensity of the B-movie in the diaries by applying its structure of feeling to his life: his own body, his friends, children, animals, *tchatchkes*, junk food, consumer products, and of course, the ever present media landscape. Whether an advertisement for the Gut Buster, a decorative

ashtray, a Reese's peanut butter cup, a stray dog, his own soiled underwear, or Bruce Conner, all are treated as equally fascinating characters in a postmodern landscape.

Kuchar's mind is unabashedly colonized by the movies, and his desperate reliance on these Hollywood dreams is the structuring fact of his identity and his work. Unlike Divine or Mario Montez, Kuchar's shameful childhood identification was not with the bigger than life Hollywood actresses but with the mythmaking power of the medium itself. Rather than seeing Hollywood glamour in a queer body, in Kuchar's diaries we see glamour productively exploited and transformed into a queer way of seeing the world. Kuchar takes the formal techniques that Hollywood employs in its construction of a closed, seamless world of perfection and applies them to subjects and objects that fail to achieve this perfection. Through these gestures, Kuchar is acknowledging, even celebrating, our dogged determination to achieve the glamour and beauty that Hollywood constructs as exciting and liberating. He is also suggesting that the glittering dream world created by Hollywood is a means of dressing up and transcending its own bad reputation as trashy low culture. Kuchar dramatizes Hollywood's occupation of the consciousnesses of America's queers, underclass, and oppressed. His video diaries investigate how people who experience marginalization use their active fantasy lives – shaped by Hollywood dreams – to navigate a reality that is far more difficult and dull than the ones we imagine and desire for ourselves. Kuchar answers Muñoz's call for a queer world where we can all be drama queens: "We all want a scandalous past – it's what Hollywood pictures were always made about. I think it's the dream of our nation, to be a person like that" (qtd. in Finch, "Half" 83). Kuchar uses the techniques of

Hollywood to demystify them and to exploit them as a way to "spice up life." This reliance on the movies to make life worth living is dramatized by a section of Rainy Season (1987) where Kuchar shows us a series of student paintings depicting a terrifying vision of hell. He narrates pathetically "that sums it [i.e., life] up," then cuts to students preparing a film screening with his more enthusiastic narration: "but the show must go on!" The painful, awkward, and sad moments of being human can be transformed into a "show" and Hollywood can reveal how. This "spicing things up" with glamour has been a long time survival strategy for queers. Kuchar essentially dramatizes the work that deviant spectators do to make the movies applicable to their own lives through appropriation and transformation. Kuchar suggests that through sensitive observation we can understand how Hollywood formally constructs glamour to hide its shame, and using this knowledge we can reflexively reenact its tricks with our camcorders, achieving more accessible, trashy, and queer forms of glamour that do not erase shame's traces. This practice brings us back to Warhol (although Kuchar was democratizing stardom on his Bronx tenement roof a decade before the more celebrated artist picked up a camera and turned his Factory into a casting couch). Whereas for Warhol, performance was about presence and pose, and star glamour could be harnessed from the desperate exhibitionism of damaged "leftovers," for Kuchar anyone could be a movie star if your friends supplied the right lighting, music, dialogue, composition, and camera work. Donna Kerness was one of these eager stars: "My passion to be an actress was dripping all over me. It was so strong, it reeked all over my face and body! George and Mike could smell the burning of

my desire to act and they could taste the lust I had to be on the screen. Before I knew it I was becoming a Kuchar star" (qtd. in Kuchar and Kuchar 156)!

Kuchar's video diaries refuse the masterful and closed glamour of Hollywood with low production values, imperfect bodies, awkward conversation, mundane landscapes, and an emasculated auteur. The gauche settings of dingy fast food restaurants, messy apartments, office cubicles, university classrooms, and run-down motel suites further contribute to the distance between his prosaic reality and Hollywood gloss. Kuchar is not trying to emulate Hollywood but instead to mimic it with a pronounced difference, to show the effects of the degradation that occurs once it has become part of the media landscape and the public consciousness. His videos are copies of copies in a way, for they refer more to the B-movies and lowbrow genres than to the A-list classics these genres often tried cheaply to reproduce. The multiple generations of mimicry transform the techniques into clichés: "He isn't just playing with clichés, he's living them" (Finch, "Reason" 251). Kuchar's cinema of poverty, with its rough edges and straight cuts, is simply "good enough." It refuses superficial perfection. Pam Cook argues that "Kuchar's films are like blemishes on the face of the American dream: persistent, unsightly and fascinating" (283). He represents big dreams with modest means, reflecting the real disenfranchisement of many average Joes from the mythologies of the American dream and "bigger is better."

The events presented in Kuchar's video diaries run the gamut from the trivial to the momentous. They range from his playing with animals, tossing out garbage, and excreting waste, to the death of his lover and collaborator Curt McDowell (Video Album

5 (1987)), his mother's stay in the hospital (Creeping Crimson (1987)), and endless road trips to either weather-watch or tour with his films to universities and film festivals. Partly because they are shot on video and partly because they are narrated by the oft-miserable Kuchar, even the life-altering moments do not seem to live up to the intensity with which such events would be presented on the silver screen. This represents the necessary but tragic failure of the real to meet the dramatic standards that many have come to expect from watching movies. There is a palpable and extremely moving sense of inadequacy that pervades the characters' funny and sad attempts to live up to the Hollywood standards with which they identify so strongly (MacDonald, "Kuchar" 300). Kuchar is not exactly a pessimist; he is just sober enough to undercut any optimism with a harsh reality check. In Kuchar's world, romantically blowing dandelion fluff will always result in a coughing fit (Weather Diary 3 (1988)), the "bright new day" is always rainy (Weather Diary 2 (1987)), the flowers outside are still "touching" even though they are plastic (Weather Diary 2), and even the most heartfelt declaration of unrequited love has to be interrupted by passed gas (500 Millibars to Ecstasy (1987)). Close-ups with Kuchar's camcorder do not reveal spotless perfection bathed in divine light but instead simply a more magnified view of a flawed and weathered creature. Kuchar is interested in how Hollywood is able to cover up human frailty with a shimmering exterior because he loves the shimmer but is unwilling to perform the erasures necessary to create it. He shows that behind the gleaming surface of Hollywood fantasy are the messy and damaged people creating it, who are probably much like him (Anbian 7, 15).

Formally, Kuchar is most interested in the tropes of lowbrow and B-movies: melodrama, science fiction, and horror. He uses such expressive formal devices as musical cues, overly dramatic dialogue, lighting, and props to bring something cinematic, and thus meaningful, to his degraded medium, life, and surroundings. Kuchar has stated: "Most of us see life in the form of a Hollywood movie anyway … And so in diaristic videos you can add music at just the right time … and orchestrate the shots of mom making potato blintzes so that it looks like she's in a Brian DePalma movie" (qtd. in Seid 20). For example, the dark shadows and minor-keyed music from horror films combined with close-ups can transform Kuchar's elderly mother into a fearsome beast (Cult of the Cubicles (1987)), or high-key lighting and melodramatic writing can lend pathos to a self-deprecating soliloquy. This practice of parodic mimicry is Kuchar's signature style, and has developed in different forms since his earliest 8mm film work. In both film and video, Kuchar adds dramatic musical cues to intense close-ups of tacky souvenirs and consumer products regularly enough that they have become signature shots. He also integrates fiction film shooting and editing styles into his diaries, placing the camera in a room before he arrives there, or filming one action using several shots linked with continuity editing. For example, in Weather Diary 2 we see Kuchar in the shower, then a shot of the soap dropping to the floor, then Kuchar bending over to retrieve it, and finally a message reading "Hot Ass" written in the steam on the bathroom mirror. The last shot subverts the sequence linked by continuity editing before it with a surprising and funny commentary on the action. Kuchar tries to create moments of queer aesthetic beauty that would win over even the most vitriolic anti-videaste. He uses such techniques as deep

focus, filters (like IV bags and beer mugs), and reflection (in door knobs and rainwater for example) to show how the trash medium of video and the trashy detritus of life can easily be made aesthetically beautiful. The most visually striking scene, to my mind, occurs in Weather Diary 2 when Kuchar catches The Donna Reed Show reflected as he records out of his motel window, the TV image hovering in a dust bowl American landscape.

Kuchar's films and videos have been consistently interpreted as melodramas. The melodrama genre is founded on stylistic, emotional, and performative excess. These excesses range from emotional musical cues to a metaphoric use of mise-en-scène to extreme displays of emotion. Linda Williams has theorized melodrama along with porn and horror as "body genres," films dripping with obscene fluids that provoke "unseemly" physical reactions in the spectator. The genre of melodrama has long been stigmatized for presenting naked, messy, raw, even infantile emotion, showing spectacular bodies in "ecstatic excess" which often refuse "coded articulations of language" (Williams 4). Melodramas demand intense identification, and consequently constitute a beloved genre of many of the star-obsessed performers in my study, and queers in general. Melodramas provoke the kind of visceral over-involvement that we see in figures like Mario Montez and Jason Holliday, for whom distance is sacrificed in favour of deep rapport with the suffering star: "Pathos is … a surrender to reality but it is a surrender that pays homage to the ideal that tried to wage war on it" (Franco Moretti qtd. in Williams 11). Peter Brooks has suggested that melodramas, in their distillation of experience into clearly polarized forces, offer us a form of transcendence and empowerment, and "infuse an intenser

meaning into the life we lead in everyday reality" (205). They are a form of sense-making that represents the theatrical impulse itself: "the impulse toward dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out" (Brooks xi). Rainer Werner Fassbinder sees in Douglas Sirk's Classical Hollywood melodramas a world where hypocrisy and traditional valuations are destroyed, and the social mechanisms that keep everybody (as well as their thoughts and dreams) in their place are brutally uncovered:

> In Written on the Wind, the good, the 'normal,' the 'beautiful' are always utterly revolting; the evil, the weak, the dissolute arouse one's compassion … Sirk looks at these corpses with such tenderness and radiance that we start to think that something must be at fault if these people are so screwed up and, nevertheless, so nice. The fault lies with fear and loneliness … What these movies are about is the way people kid themselves. And why you have to kid yourself … Loneliness is easier to bear if you keep your illusions. (23-24)

Kleinhans interprets Kuchar's films as burlesques of the style of Classical Hollywood melodrama, inserting the body and the unseemly even more emphatically into the genre. Parodying Fassbinder's appraisal of Sirk,[23] Kleinhans states: "Kuchar reminds us that cinema, like life, is also bed pans, ear wax, sleazy fantasy, ineptitude, compromise, and laughter" (193). Kuchar's dialogue is particularly influenced by his idol Tennessee Williams, arguably one of the most melodramatic queer playwrights.

Melodrama has also been considered a distortion of the Classical Hollywood narrative, instead focusing on spectacle, episodic structure, and playful rather than strict

[23] "Cinema is blood, is tears, violence, hate, death, and love" (qtd. in Kleinhans 193).

causality (Williams 3), all predominant characteristics of Kuchar's videos. Moving at lightning quick speed, his videos are fragmented juxtapositions of narration, sync sound, stills, found and original footage, all linked by specific themes. Footage recorded at one time interacts through editing with footage recorded at another, allowing Kuchar to comment on his own and others' actions through narration and juxtaposition. The videos tend to appear like condensations of a lifetime of movie watching remembered in glimpses. Because of his verbal editorializing in the form of narration, and his stream-of-consciousness, often in-camera editing style, every aspect of the tapes are performative, and not simply his recorded physical presence. The videos are always explorations, both of Kuchar's obsessive and fragile ego, and of the world around him. By consistently foregrounding how he can shape the meaning and resonance of the content through his formal interventions, the diaries reach the point where representation itself is demystified.

To Kuchar, everything looks like something else through the camera. Every object is both itself and representative of something either far more important or far more ridiculous. Each object becomes meaningful in some unexpected way, unexpected because the meaning usually dramatically exceeds or falls short of the apparent or commonly accepted value of the object. Kuchar constantly – desperately – gives his humble reality an aura of idealization and shows how all that is high and revered can very easily be lowered into trash with a simple change of vantage point. Kuchar alters perspective through juxtaposition: between shots as well as through sound and image correlation and frame composition. It is deeply empowering to see the meaning of cultural detritus transformed through a simple change of perspective, to see beauty and

value relativized. For example, while waiting for a Polaroid photo to develop in front of our eyes in Rainy Season, Kuchar declares philosophically: "things will come into focus." This is a bluntly literal statement but also an ironically philosophical one. In Weather Diary 2, Kuchar places a McDonalds cartoon cutout in front of an equally kitsch, yet holier, poster of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper suggesting that the two gastronomic situations are more closely aligned than we might like to think. Kuchar regularly uses authoritative-sounding language forms such as excessively dramatic dialogue, religious verse or antiquated Old English to inappropriately narrate far baser scenes of contemporary American vulgarity. For example it is not uncommon to hear lines like "my droppings have been more solid and odorless O praise the Lord" (Weather Diary 2), or a mournfully delivered: "there's always room at the inn" accompanying the sight of a bedraggled stray dog (Weather Diary 5 (1989)). This tactic lends an aura of ironic seriousness to his distinctly Bronx vernacular and invests seemingly mundane occurrences with a mock-sacred quality. Kids picking fruit with police sirens in the background make the scene a yearning for "the forbidden fruit" (Cult of the Cubicles), and existential crises can be provoked from a heady mix of Dinty Moore stew, powdered milk, and marshmallow pie (Weather Diary 1 (1986)). Kuchar also skews our sense of scale when he compares relationship problems to covering up acne (Chili Line Stops Here (1984)), or describes replacing the old TV Guide with the new as "the changing of the guard," lending another inappropriately authoritative description to a pop culture cliché (Weather Diary 5). In America, royalty is reserved for the stars of prime time TV, and in this case Roseanne is the queen of the Guide's front cover.

Rather than creating a clear single narrative with unified image and sound, Kuchar uses juxtaposition to uncover multiple narratives and overlapping interpretations and resonances that seem to lurk just below the surface if you are willing to look for them. Kuchar's work is so layered both thematically and emotionally thanks to analytical editing. After being paid for a videotape in Rainy Season, Kuchar declares "I wonder how I'm going to piss [the money] away" over a shot of himself urinating, he then cuts to a shot of tacky pottery which he considers purchasing, but then decides "I've already got a pot to piss in." In Creeping Crimson, Kuchar cuts from the shower scene of Hitchcock's Psycho to a scene of him washing his underwear at his mother's house and lamenting how he feels as if he is staying at a motel with his mother absent, to "mother" in Psycho killing the private investigator. The resonances between mothers, motels, and washing are clever; moreover they go to show how intertwined our lives are with mediated entertainment. The motifs in Psycho are so much a part of our lives that they are indistinguishable from "real" individual memory and thought. The events and characters of Kuchar's actual life are not prioritized above the events and characters in the movies he has watched. Both a mother and daughter camera pose and beef on a stick are "nice scenes" to Kuchar's eye (Rainy Season). No offense is intended; Kuchar is innocently observing that he enjoys the sight of food as much as the sight of loved ones. In Weather Diary 5, a watering hole becomes Kuchar's nipples becomes a cow's udder becomes a meditation on "nourishing the young" and raising children. The videos cumulatively build up these resonances to the point that the distinctions between high and low, private and public, fiction and reality, nature and culture, laughter and tears are

confused. There are constant slippages between food, sex, art, media; anything consumable can have its meaning transformed through the cinema. Kuchar "eats up" the world around him, greedily assimilating everything in sight into his playfully existential narratives. If trauma has become banal thanks to media over-saturation, if all hierarchies of significance are diminished in the landscape of an image culture where every shot is a commodity, then meaning and value are up for grabs, available to both the dominant culture and those on the margins. In the scene from Weather Diary 2 that gives this thesis its name, Kuchar addresses both his beloved tabloid newspapers and his future dinner of ham wrapped in a Hefty garbage bag as "truth wrapped in trash and vice versa."

Media culture is perhaps most available for dissection and transformation in Kuchar's Weather Diary series, the backbone of his extensive oeuvre. Most of the six installments created from 1986 to 1990 – his best video work in my opinion – have a similar situation: Kuchar is in El Reno, Oklahoma, storm-watching the "Superstars of the meteorological stage" in the early summer (Kuchar and Kuchar 81). He spends most of his time by himself – especially when the weather gets intense – in his dingy motel room with the TV, radio, and newspapers for company, filming the world outside ("Shitsville") through the window. His motel room, the stage for his comedy of life, is the interzone between his media consumables and the harsh outside world. These are the diaries that use the most found footage, where his sense of isolation drives him to interact more with the TV, the bad art on the walls, and the bottles of antacid than with the scary "real" world beyond. The "media overload" combined with isolation make these tapes the densest in image and sound juxtapositions and layering. For example, one of Kuchar's

faux crying jags is graphically matched with the face of a preacher attempting an authentic one on a religious TV show (Weather Diary 2). The difference between the two is that Kuchar does not see authenticity as a self-evident and transparent commodity with which to manipulate the public. He understands that authenticity for someone whose subjectivity was formed by the movies is the product of multiple levels of mediation, artifice, sincerity, and irony. The severe weather outdoors essentially acts as the representative of drama and danger straight out of a Hollywood disaster film, against which Kuchar's mundane hygiene matters, TV viewing, underwear washing, and junk food consuming are measured. Of course, both outside and inside, public and private, are equally significant and dramatic through Kuchar's lens. Instead of the galaxy in a coffee cup in Godard's Two or Three Things I Know About Her, Kuchar gives us an American version of an equally simple pleasure: a "real" tornado contained in a two-dollar Walmart toy.

Kuchar's subjectivity is constantly present as narrator and as performer. He is always the center of attention whether he is visible or not. His distinctive nasal voice narrates with a passion for adjectives, alliteration, yiddishisms, and melodrama.[24] Large, balding, bespectacled and mustachioed, Kuchar makes his body's presence felt in his video diaries, a body that is abject and grotesque. He regularly farts, films his bowel movements, and discusses his digestive problems, foot fungus, bruises, mucus excretion, rashes, and poor health in general. He presents his own middle age body – chubby and

[24] In some ways Kuchar is working in the Jewish humour tradition of neurotic nebbishes like Woody Allen. Despite the fact that he was not raised Jewish, he clearly performs a Jewish persona, a phenomenon that deserves greater attention.

hairy, a "flabby mass of pain" – in sultry glamour poses befitting Rock Hudson or Lana Turner. Kuchar is polymorphously perverse; his gender and sexuality are fluid to allow greater dexterity in identifying with and mimicking mass culture. He literally strips himself bare for the camera, revealing his naked body and his deepest fears, anxieties, hopes and dreams. In addition to making visible the abject bodies and their refuse that tend to be eclipsed from Hollywood, Kuchar's defiant over-exposure is seen by Steve Reinke as an excessive burlesque of the diary form itself: "the turds are a parody of the confessional mode … His dirty laundry … the raison d'être of the tapes" (7-8).

Kuchar's persona is vulnerable, self-deprecating, and emotional. Shame is his modus operandi as opposed to being the structuring absence of Divine's performances. Like Divine's, Kuchar's body is an excess that cannot be recuperated. Its insistent presence in tape after tape allows us to chronicle a subjectivity in physical and emotional crisis. He derives his sense of humour – which Seid describes as "a wit impressed by the intrinsic sadness of life" (19) – from his sense of shame. In Kuchar's performance, the shame does not come from a stigmatized identification with a female star, but with the realization that one's body is not "real" because it fails at being desirable and glamourous by Hollywood's standards. Kuchar is ensuring that the messy bodies of regular folk such as he and his friends are not erased from the history of cinematic representation, even if it is just no-budget video. Margaret Morse suggests that Kuchar's aggressively grotesque self-presentation is a test of how willing we are to open ourselves to the text, to empathize with him and the meanings he produces in the tapes (28). Kuchar exploits the inappropriateness of his body for humour; his failure at a masterful, proud, and strong

masculinity provides a funny and tragic productive site of viewer identification and empathy. He demands that viewers identify with a body that is messy and abject as opposed to perfect and clean. Delivered with his impeccable comic timing, Kuchar's laments such as, "my face is so oily and the night is so lonely" (Chili Line Stops Here), and "the light shames me" (Cult of the Cubicles) are deeply moving. His videos are unimaginable without his self-deprecating humour, which contributes greatly to the construction of empathy based on a shared sense of shame.

Culled from a lifetime at the movies, Kuchar has absorbed the conventions of film acting. He is capable of performing a virtual catalogue of affects: seductive, abusive, despondent, ecstatic, frightened, nostalgic, etc. Each emotional state is simply another cinematic technique. Instead of transforming Kuchar's persona into pure fiction, this emotional dress-up illuminates rather than eclipses Kuchar's "real" emotions. Kuchar's persona is able to be trash and truth at once, thanks to his persistent demystification. As I've mentioned, Kuchar problematizes authenticity in an age of media overload. He understands the importance of artifice, play, and imagination as queer world-making tools, working in the service of "authentic" subjectivities with real desires, dreams, and tangible lives. I am reminded of Tavel's comment that it is impossible to tell apart the language of an American – emotional as well as verbal, I might add – from the language of cinema (76). In perhaps the most overt example of this, Kuchar occasionally finishes his sentences with words printed on cultural detritus such as a Dead End sign, literally absorbing his surroundings into his own speech. Kuchar interprets everything as trash that can be recycled with alternative meanings: "Anything will influence me" (qtd. in

Stevenson 189). Kuchar seems to see the world with the awe of a child, recycling Hollywood's garbage heap into a nascent queer language. Richard Combs states, "Kuchar's naive lack of self-consciousness about the disparity between his 'toys' and those of the big studio effectively obliterates the distance between them … as if Kuchar had seen with child-like simplicity what was essential to a movie experience, and found the means to amplify it on a less-means-more basis" (249). Kuchar's sensitivity to his surroundings, how he uses dominant culture to speak his queer feelings and blurs the distinctions between high and low in the process, puts him firmly within the tradition of Warhol, Smith, Montez, Divine, and Waters.

Kuchar is quite adept at playing around like a child, joyfully imitating those around him. During a typical session of voyeurism in Weather Diary 2, Kuchar spies a construction worker outside his motel window unknowingly exhibiting an exposed ass crack. The next shot shows Kuchar fixing his bathtub with his own crack revealed, taking on the faux pas himself as a joke but also as a means of empathically positioning himself as a fellow inappropriate body and grotesque spectacle. In a similar scene, when his friend Gloria rants against a boy wearing sunglasses and a backwards baseball cap to her son's elementary school graduation in Weather Diary 5, Kuchar cuts to an image of himself in those exact accessories bathed in high-key lighting and nostalgically declaring "if only I could be that kid again..." In addition to playing around like a child, Kuchar also takes on the persona of a child occasionally, always as a foil to more "mature" forms of behaviour. For example after a particularly melodramatic mock-religious tirade in Cult of the Cubicles, he squeaks "I'll drink my apple juice now" like a child realizing the

impropriety of his actions and reining in his enthusiastic exhibitionism. Later in this tape, Kuchar visits the apartment of a dour former high school friend who now works at an office job. Our feelings towards this cynical character immediately change when Kuchar persuades him to model his theatrical costume collection for the camera. He goes through a large repertoire of specific and generic personae in a session of whimsical, childlike make-believe, making it difficult for us to reconcile this figure with the gloomy, beaten-down office worker we saw earlier. We see him through a new light and immediately recognize in his delirious dress-up fantasies, dreams, and self-effacement (characteristic of shame) with which we can empathize. The only people who are not invited to share in Kuchar's world are the paranoid, bloated, and jaded people (as described in Creeping Crimson) usually found in suburbia, unwilling to allow their dreams to affect their lives or to see the world around them with new eyes. Childhood offers a world of imaginative possibility with identity still in the process of construction and available for transformation and play. In adulthood, people are more likely to be stuck, unwilling to take risks or see from different perspectives.

Kuchar's ironic gaze is always heartfelt. Kuchar is emphatically a part of the kitsch mass American culture that he teases but never disdains. You do not get the sense that Kuchar looks down on the rural Oklahomans that he films, nor that his passions for junk food, garage sale treasures, tabloid TV, UFOs, and the occult are not genuine. Kuchar's gaze is not authoritative and totalizing, it is vulnerable and embodied, which comes out through his reflexivity. James suggests that Kuchar's work combines consistent reflexivity with sincere "affection" (144). Kuchar's reflexivity – which I

would argue is not necessarily distancing – is where his intelligence and sensitivity come to the foreground. Perhaps my favorite moment in his video work occurs in a startling gesture of reflexivity when he stares out at a streetlight, a beacon in the night sky in Weather Diary 2, and solemnly declares: "A ray of hope in this sea of misery." Unsatisfied with his delivery, he announces "let me say that with a little more feeling." He then repeats the statement with greater affect. Kuchar means what he is saying, but he knows the codes that construct a feeling of authenticity in the movies and is willing to explain them to us. He distances us from the cliché but not from the emotion behind it that is left with no other way of expressing itself but through cliché. Another self-reflexive moment occurs when he is reunited with a crush in 500 Millibars to Ecstasy: "you can tell by the music there's some emotional involvement." In this tape we see Kuchar watching the footage he has recorded on a visit to Madison, Wisconsin, and commenting on it, overtly reenacting the process of mediated voyeurism behind most of his diaries, except here we see his spectatorship of the world (on tape) instead of being embodied within his gaze.

Kuchar is intensely self-conscious. At one point in 500 Millibars to Ecstasy, he analyses his own representations: "Jerome had interesting and childish bedspreads, I was wearing an overly colourful sweatshirt and tennis shoes of virgin whiteness that gave me a look of forced gaiety." I would argue that such self-consciousness does not necessarily suggest a critical awareness of the self as much as a way of being in the world conditioned by the experiences of embarrassment and shame. Self-consciousness slips very easily into humiliation, especially in Kuchar's world, and the experience of shame

builds an ever present and painful awareness of one's own body and its physical position in the world, to the point that one assumes they are being looked at and judged almost constantly. Kuchar actually is being seen all the time, putting his body up for analysis by his own appraising and self-deprecating gaze and that of the camera that records it. He takes the mechanism of the gaze that inflicts shame and directs it upon himself as a means of taking the power away from those who would shame him from the outside. Others can still shame him – Kuchar definitely does not resist this positioning – but he is deflecting the blows and exerting some desperate agency by shaming himself first.

Shame is virtually the human condition for Kuchar. It lies in the gap between what is expected of us and what we actually show others we are or desire to be. Kuchar's camera does not shame others but instead casts "light on the ruin" and uncovers the sense of shame and failure palpable in those around him. For Kuchar, the movies are an authority that sets expectations of beauty, glamour, adventure, and success in a way that parallels those expectations that a parent sets for a child. When cinema becomes as vital as life itself to a queer child, our inability to live up to the standards of the movies becomes as shameful as the disapproval of a parent. Kuchar essentially uses melodramatic cinema – a shared form of communication based more on affect than language – to stage this shameful failure, and to develop a profound sense of empathy towards others. This empathy is not based on categories such as queer, poor, or marginal but on a shared sense of shame that speaks loudly and strongly from and across these and other identities. As Kosofsky Sedgwick pointed out, shame is particularly contagious, and thus conducive to empathy in a way that identity politics does not always permit.

Kuchar is not so much universalizing shame as pointing out its origin in sources we may not have considered, making us more sensitive to its transformative possibilities through his formal techniques and persona. This sense of empathy based on shame is constructed partly through how he creates meaning in his videos (his gaze), and partly through the subjectivity that he constructs in his diaries through corporeal performance (his body).

Kuchar sees his own suffering as the productive force behind his filmmaking, and even though he does not create his diaries as comedies (MacDonald, "Kuchar" 305-6), I would argue that the laughter of the audience comes from a shared sense of tragedy rather than mockery. Kuchar emphasizes the importance of suffering to a movie's success in the first paragraph of his "Tips on Directing": "As a film director I am usually a fun-loving human being … as a man I am a wretched and obscene creature … a creature of perverted instincts and revolting hungers. Save all these drawbacks for the characters you create for the screen as once they are projected these flaws become 'big box office potential'" (13). However, Kuchar ends up being the only figure that suffers for the camera because he feels that a film is not important enough to hurt someone's feelings.[25] In his suffering alone lies the beauty and truth that can move audiences, or in cruder terms, be "big box office potential." These performances demonstrate that provoking viewers to empathize based on a shared sense of failure and shame requires great risk-taking by the performers. Only when the performer suffers – puts themselves into a position of abjection and vulnerability towards their viewers – can the performance

[25] Kuchar never rejects bad actors for this reason and will always find a part for them: "As for acting, well if they stink, just have the person stand around in a stylized pose... It is better to have a rotten picture than a trail of tears shed by a rejected human being" (Kuchar and Kuchar 50).

achieve an intensity that moves spectators to empathy. Charles Ludlam of the 1960s New York theatre company The Playhouse of the Ridiculous claimed: "When the audience laughed at my pain, the play seemed more tragic to me than when they took it seriously. A solemn audience trivialized the event" (qtd. in Senelick 428). Whether audiences laugh with, marvel at, or feel moved by Kuchar's sense of inadequacy, Divine's defiantly damaged body, or Mario Montez's fanatical idolatry, the empathy that is produced clearly originates from bodies in a state of crisis. There is so much at stake in queer world-making that extreme measures are required.

Cinema is a survival strategy for Kuchar, and presents a world where dreams can overcome, or at least cover up, any obstacle: "It is all fantasy. A world of illusion conjured by concubines with cold sores that masquerade as beauty marks … Technology has amplified the aural components of every vibrating orifice into a Jehovah-like commandment of withering import. We are a truly blessed congregation of cinephiles in rapture" (Kuchar, "Lips" 206). For Kuchar it is the cinema that is able to bridge the apparent chasm between trash and truth, inhibition and exhibitionism, and fiction and reality. By blurring so many dichotomies, Kuchar creates a cinematic form based on process, transformation, and sensitivity to the contradictions and complexity of human experience. To make a movie is to illuminate our shivering, shameful lives: "Our framing and rendering with light was the key in transforming it from an abomination into adoration of the unadorned unleashed … it was now my turn to focus that [beam of projected light] into a laser-sharp image of perfection that would transcend us both and make the gutter a brighter place to wallow in" (Kuchar, "Lips" 213). Cinema offers a

desperately needed blueprint for an empathy based on shame, humiliation and failure. I would like to christen Kuchar's practice as queer "Kino-Eye": a way of seeing the world that acknowledges the devastating and the creative effects of shame; that advocates vulnerability and refuses mastery; that creates new forms of transgressive glamour based on abjection, desperation, and resiliency; that is deeply attached to trash as a meaningful cultural form; and that shows an openness and sensitivity to the transformative power of imagination and cultural appropriation that comes from queer childhood. Kuchar shows how any of us can transform the key to a sardine can into the key to happiness, and through his lessons in the world-making potential of the movies he is able to cast "light on the ruin" of our lives. I will finish with a statement from Kuchar that resonates as much with Montez and Divine: "If you're desperate enough, you can make the dream come true. How can you find something true and genuine if you're not dirty first? Sometimes, atrocious deeds pay off – a genuine thing comes out of it" (qtd. in Finch, "Half" 85).

Conclusion

"We didn't need Hollywood, we were Hollywood. She was the most glamourous woman I had ever seen. And that made us both famous" – Sadie Benning, It Wasn't Love

Mario Montez, Divine, and George Kuchar are all models of queer world-making through performance. They each harness the shame of their emphatic and obsessive identifications with Hollywood glamour and transform it into a creative force. This force not only fuels their transgressive and trash self-representations but opens up the possibility for empathy based on a sensitivity to shame, abjection, and trauma as opposed to a stable identity. This empathy acknowledges difference and mutability rather than requiring a shared and fixed identity position. The contagiousness of shame can transform sympathy into empathy through the shared experience of an affect that many, if not all, people have experienced, albeit in different ways. These performances demand our attention and our participation in radical ways that are largely shunned by a contemporary gay and lesbian cultural production which values tidy sameness over defiant otherness, pride over shame. These performers' bodies are marked by shame in a way that would make them virtually impossible to incorporate in contemporary normalizing narratives of the American Dream – of which the assimilationist Gay Pride movement is an example – at a time when debates over same-sex marriage have forcefully illuminated the extreme queerphobia and heterosexism of a liberal America that had shrouded itself in a discourse of tolerance since the late 1990s. I believe that in order to maintain queerness as a force that is deconstructive and unsettling, we must acknowledge the importance of shame and failure as vital themes, structures, and

emotions to queer cultural production, and look to the historical past for inspiration for today's survival strategies.

In their creation of worlds of queer possibility through performance, these figures are also constructing their personae from the detritus and trash of the cultures surrounding them, acknowledging the impossibility of a purely original or essential identity. Delving into the junkyard requires an enthusiasm for historical excavation, and an awareness of and sensitivity to the past, as well as to the present. These performances refuse to erase the foundational experiences of childhood (the past) from their present bodies and identities, thereby refusing to marginalize or erase the effeminate queer or proto-queer child from the queer public sphere. They advocate the gleaning of recycled representational forms, and exhibit a childlike openness to the world in general that undermines traditional modernist goals of creating something completely original through one's individual mastery. These performances violate the tenets of consumerism by assembling their glamour from the trash and the banal with very modest means, countering the mythos of the advertising world that pleasure can only be found in the new and exciting. They elaborate a dynamic relationship between past and present, cobbling together "authentic" queer identities from the refuse and leftovers of cultures both mainstream and marginal.

These performers also celebrate fantasy as a realm of radical possibility and potential liberation from lived oppression in the real world. In their own way, they criticize the erasure of pleasure, desire, and aesthetics from radical political activism. These performers live "in the gap between exotic fantasy and ordinary reality"

(Hoberman, "Jack" 18), and consequently have a deep understanding of how the former can illuminate or simply enable one to survive the latter. They champion glamourous dreams not as an escape from life, but as a defiant stance against the authority of a brutal reality that seeks to destroy queer people. When Hollywood *is* America, this dream space is perhaps the only place left for queer boys whose identification with and passionate feelings for glamour violate the strict rules of a mythology that asks boys to gaze at but not to recognize themselves in such feminine spectacles. When the traces of such a queer childhood are visible in a performance, they mark that person as a survivor. Queer world-making necessarily comes from *failing* to achieve the American Dream, constructed by a heterosexist majoritarian culture and all that it stands for. Even though these figures are creating "something better" through performance, actively contributing to and making themselves visible within underground subcultures, there is also a great sadness that haunts these acts of production. It must be stated that this strategy of failure is fraught with danger as many queer bodies are still the targets of extreme violence. Transgressive performances take a toll on the "real" lives of queer performers, as Divine's experience especially attests. The shame that is palpable in these examples of desperate exhibitionism are deeply embodied blazons signaling the lengths we must go to in order to become visible and valued on our own terms.

These performers transform their pain into a profoundly moving – even healing – experience of communion for certain spectators. The cinema must be seen as a central sphere for radical action, for it can sensitize people to their own experiences of shame, reconnect the circuits of the approving gaze (whose disconnection produces shame), and

connect us with other people, queer or otherwise. An awareness of each other's shame is what communities could potentially be built upon. Shame is absolutely necessary for these performances, offering an alternative model to Gay Pride and the mainstreaming of queer identity. Barber and Clark ask, "[w]hat unpredictable futures await those for whom being shamed is a condition of personal and political efflorescence rather than emaciation and incarceration? What new optics will need to be created through which even to glimpse the fecund boundary zones, at once fierce and playful, of 'shame-creativity'" (27)? In the contagiousness of shame, the infectiousness of trash and abjection, and the corrupting power of glamourous fantasy made flesh through cinematic performance, new forms of understanding and imagining open up viewers to queer life-world possibilities once only dreamed of.

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