



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Don't judge a book by its cover

The Camp and Queerness of Rocky Horror Picture Show

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í ensku

Bjarni Snæbjörnsson

September 2012

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Abstract

This essay examines the quixotic notions of camp and queer in terms of the 1975 film adaptation of Richard O'Brien stage musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Its starting point is the unparalleled international success of the film version and its unique cult status across the entire gamut of sexual and gender identities. In short, its appeal is not restricted to any particular ethnic, age or gender groups. At the same time, and perhaps as a result of its broad-based popularity, the show and the film have proved to be instrumental in the call for equal rights and acceptance of the queer culture. Questions are raised about the problem of assessing or defining identity by means of gender in the wider context of the film musical and the development of queer culture and queer theory. Some of Judith Butler's writings on gender underpin part of the discussion, but this essay is by no means intended as a critique of her writings or systematic application of her ideas to this particular work of art. Examples and references to the film's structure, songs, lyrics, characters as well as to Richard O'Brien, Jim Sharman and Richard Hartley are included to shed light on why the musical has become a cult classic. With some help from Judith Butler, as well as from other feminist theorists and queer theorists, it also tried to shed some light on this musical's social significance.

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1. Introduction

“How do you do?”

Gathered around a chair are three people. To the right kneels a skinny, bald hunchback in a suit. Behind the chair stands a woman in a maid’s costume with a revealing neckline and lots of curly hair. To the left kneels a woman in a sequin costume, a silver corset, a gold jacket and a golden top hat. The chair is covered with silver fabric that gleams in the light. A person wearing heavy makeup is sitting in the chair: The face is white; there is dark eye shadow and lipstick in abundance. The shadows on the cheeks give extra emphasis to the cheekbones. The person wears very high heels, black stockings, a garter belt, a corset, silver shiny gloves and a large pearl necklace. The person is poised on one armrest of the big chair with their feet on the other armrest, revealing a good deal of skin at the top of the thighs, between the stockings and the garter belt. The person smiles benevolently and mockingly at the camera.

This image is one of the most famous promotional photographs from the motion picture *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the person in the extravagant chair is Dr. Frank-N-Furter. The people gathered around him are his servants: Riff Raff, the hunchback servant, Magenta the maid, and Columbine (a groupie, according to the cast list) wearing the sequins. Frank-N-Furter’s body type suggests that he is a male. He is tall, has a deep voice and clearly has no breasts. However, what he is wearing is generally considered as female attire.

At this point in the movie, Frank-N-Furter is welcoming two guests to his mansion whose car has a puncture: the soon-to-be-wed Brad and Janet who are a very conventional couple who have stumbled into a party that Frank-N-Furter is hosting. Brad and Janet, who are simply looking for a phone or a mechanic, are shocked by many things that they see at their arrival, especially this man wearing revealing female clothing. In the song “Sweet Transvestite,” which Frank-N-Furter sings when he meets the newcomers, he addresses this precise tension within the couple and says: “Don’t get strung out by the way I look / don’t judge a book by its cover.” In short, Frank is asking his two guests to ignore his appearance. At the same time, he is also saying that he does not follow the general social unwritten rule about how men should dress and that there is more to him than meets the eye.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show has had tremendous influence since it was first premiered in 1975. Although it might seem obvious why the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) societies relate to the movie’s message, plot and characters, it is interesting to realize that it also appeals to the non-LGBTQ public as well. In

the introduction to *Reading Rocky Horror* (1975), the editor Jeffrey Weinstock claims that there is a consensus of opinion among scholars and critics in a variety of fields concerning the *Rocky Horror Picture Show's* “unrivalled status as pre-eminent cult film”(2). But what is it that the audience and critics relate to so well? This essay employs the lexicon and tools of queer and feminist theory in an attempt to unveil the movie's success. In other words, it intends to show why the work continues to enjoy continuing international popularity among audiences, irrespective of their linguistic, cultural or gender grouping. Or, to paraphrase Frank-N-Furter, we are going to look beyond outward appearances.

2. The Notion of Camp

“I’m just a sweet transvestite
From Transsexual Transylvania”

One might imagine that it is important at the outset to classify the different groups of people who are traditionally identified as a part of the queer communities of the world. However, that would be contrary to both to Judith Butler's basic ideas and those of the theoretical fields she pioneered. As she points out: “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts” (Butler, 5). In short, defining identity is not an easy task.

Everyone has their own ideas about identity. On the other hand, it is essential to discuss where certain words come from because they are so closely linked to the history of the human rights' battles of queer communities of the world. According to Annamarie Jagose in the *Australian Humanities Review*, the word “queer” is used “sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications.” This would include gay men, lesbians, transgendered people, bisexuals, transvestites, non-monogamous relationships, fetishists etc. The whole group of people is sometimes referred to as LGBTQ.

Hence, according to Chris Jones in his article on “Lesbian and Gay Cinema,” the term “gay” was adopted by the members of the queer community in New York following the Stonewall riots in 1969, who wanted to choose a word that had not been assigned to them by outsiders. Jones continues by saying that today it signifies a “strong, positive sexual love and attraction between members of the same sex, used by extension to describe cultural products, such as film and video” (309). Before the Stonewall riot, the word “homosexual” had been used and is still used in the common language. The word “homosexual” was invented in 1869

by a Swiss doctor and the people that were identified as such were considered partly as a psychologically diseased group of people (310). Understandably, the queer communities did not want to use word that implied that their lifestyle was diseased. Here the word “homosexuality” will be used for the group of people who lived in the time where the word was used for them, for example in the early days of the MGM musical. At the time, the words “gay” and “queer” were not used for the sexual minorities.

In a similar manner, one term that has always been heavily associated with queer culture is the word *camp*. However, scholars and critics alike seem to have different understandings of the notion of “camp.” For example, Anneke Smelik says that “rather than running the risk of being dead serious about something as quixotic as camp, I propose to discuss camp as a reading strategy for gay people” (141). While this is a very simplified idea of what camp is, it surely is one way of viewing culture as a whole. Smelik continues by saying that “as an oppositional reading, camp can be subversive for bringing out the cultural ambiguities and contradictions that usually remain sealed over by dominant ideology” (142). She argues that camp is merely a way of looking at culture; goggles with which to view and experience performances, culture and life. This idea which Smelik introduces is a simple explanation of the term. In some circles she might be considered being derogatory towards queer people. The notion of camp deserves more.

On the contrary, Steven Cohan’s *Incongruous Entertainment* (2005) discusses the notion of camp in great detail in relation to MGM musicals since the 1940s. Cohan argues that in the beginning of the musical era “camp allowed for the ironic, self-reflective style of gay men passing as straight” and thus being a “response to that era’s oppression and censorship of homosexuality.” He continues by saying that the mainstream audience didn’t understand the innuendos and suggestive signals in the musicals. The men appeared straight, “while simultaneously winking at the initiated in shared acknowledgement of it” (1). Hence, camp is not merely a way of looking at culture, but also a way of expressing oneself through art. At the beginning of the MGM musical era, camp was a concealed signal which homosexuals at the time understood.

Certainly, this fact is crucial when discussing *camp*. The place where it comes from explains a lot and gives a clear view on the subject. Cohan suggests that the old MGM musicals are considered “an outdated – niche commodity,” while at the time, they were “mainstream fare” (1). One wonders if that era’s musicals are considered outdated because the concealed signals of camp in them can be easily recognized by the general audience of today.

The times have certainly changed: in today's musicals, both on stage and on film, homosexuality, queer, gay, lesbian and transgender people are not hidden, but are often celebrated as an important factor of the plot. For example, the animated film musical *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999), Satan and Saddam Hussein, who are lovers in Hell, go through some relationship problems, like any other couple would do. So, if this is where the film musical is nowadays, it is understandable that today's audience would consider a 1940s musical an outdated work of art. People in contemporary society live according to different values and social norms than the people of that MGM studio-era; as Cohan describes the golden age of the MGM musicals (2).

Admittedly, it is important to address in short what has changed since the studio-era musical was a popular family commodity which included the camp value that was important for the homosexual viewers at the time. At MGM for example, a considerable percentage of the staff were homosexuals or at least queer in some way (Cohan 47). The fact of the matter is that along with creating marvellous and larger-than life extravagant visual shows, they also contributed to giving the gay communities worldwide a sense of belonging; a sense of self-identity which is an important trait for an oppressed minority group. The extravaganza, showmanship, lavish costumes and cheeky humour connected people in a sense.

However, it was not until 1969 that for the first time in modern history that this self-identity fought its way out of the closet when a major riot broke out in a New York in a bar called *Stonewall*. The police were carrying out one of their regular raids of the queer bars and finally, the people rebelled. "The *New York Gay Liberation Front* was immediately formed and members of the movement adopted the word "gay." Soon, similar organizations followed across the globe. It was an act of coming out of the closet as a community and creating the self-identity of the group that the world knows today" (Jones 310). So, the times changed and the gay communities needed something more than the camp of the musicals to feel they belonged. They fought against being subject to police raids and society's bigotry by coming out of the closet as a whole and consequently, they need an identity which would unite them.

For this reason, one might say that *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* was the next natural step of "coming out of the closet" for the movie musical. According to the book *Reading Rocky Horror*, which is dedicated entirely to *Rocky Horror*, Jeffrey Weinstock, the editor states that even though the movie was initially a flop, it ran for a record-setting ninety-five weeks as a Midnight Movie at New York's Waverly Theatre in Greenwich Village in 1976 and by the end of the 70s it was playing at midnight on Fridays and Saturdays at over

fifty locations around the United States (5). Weinstock continues by saying that what also made these screenings unique was the unparalleled audience participation that characterised them, where people would throw rice, dance the “Time Warp,” light candles, wear newspaper hats and scream and shout at the screen during the run of the whole movie. As a result the audience experienced a “sense of community” while doing this (6).

While the *camp* of the golden age of the MGM musical expressed the culture of a queer and oppressed minority with a hidden wink at the camera, *Rocky Horror* brought something entirely new to the table. The flamboyance of *Rocky Horror* was entirely different even though the initial foundation of *camp* is entirely the same. This time around, the leading man winked unashamedly at the camera, without hiding it. The queer minority groups across the United States and the whole world related to the flamboyant expression and showed up in abundance. Hence, *camp* has always been heavily associated with the queer audience. Even though the way of expressing *camp* has obviously changed through the recent history, the base is always the same. Cohan’s detailed description of camp is applicable to the MGM studio era, *Rocky Horror* and also today’s movie musicals:

Camp can be defined as the ensemble of strategies used to enact a queer recognition of the incongruities arising from the cultural regulation of gender and sexuality. The flamboyance of camp when inflected as style, taste, wit, parody, or drag may seem the antithesis of passing, but to be flamboyant was a fundamental component of the joke. Camp strategies for achieving ironic distance from the normative have always exploited the slippery space between a “posture” and an “imposture,” between “resembling” and “dissembling” – in one way or another, camp signalled the queer eye for a straight guise. Now out of the closet and made more visible, camp continues to bear this significance today as a queer practice and, in academic circles, as queer theory (1).

Indeed, *camp*, has always been a part of the musical as a phenomenon and even today, though the social variables have changed in regards to LGBTQ rights in the western world, it still holds on as an important factor of queer culture. It still bears the significance of belonging for the LGBTQ community and helps the people identify with each other, provoke the norms and express themselves. Most recent camp phenomena are undoubtedly the multiple gay pride festivals held annually in different cities across the globe. There, the key words seems to be *camp*, so the “flamboyance of camp” whether it is “inflected as style, taste,

wit, parody, or drag” is very much a part of today’s culture as it was in the golden age of the MGM musical. It is, in essence, an inseparable part of queer culture and always has been.

3. Queer Theory

“I’m not much of a man by the light of day, but by night I’m one hell of a lover.”

According to Cohan, today’s academic term for camp that has come “out-of-the-closet” is queer theory. The core of queer theory, according to theory.org.uk, is the idea of identity as “free-floating,” meaning that “the confines of any identity can potentially be reinvented by its owner.” This fluid notion of identity comes from Judith Butler originally. She is one of the key contributors to queer theory and feminist theory, which are different methods but are undeniably related and draw ideas from one another. Furthermore, Butler’s ideas called into question “the distinction between the naturally-given normative ‘self’ of heterosexuality and the rejected ‘Other’ of homosexuality” (Barry 140). Butler criticised the feminist movement because she believed its concepts of gender to be reductive and restrictive:

Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those it purports to describe and represent, women, even in the plural becomes a troublesome term, a site of context, a cause for anxiety. (6)

Similarly, the idea of clearly definable gender groups was the main focus of post-structuralist deconstruction of binary opposites. Barry states that “the distinction between paired opposites is not absolute, since each term in the pairing can only be understood and defined in terms of the other, and secondly, that it is possible to reverse the hierarchy within such pairs, and so “privilege” the second term rather than the first” (138).

In other words, queer theory fights against any shape of constructing, especially in terms of sexuality, gender or any other distinction between the two binary opposites of woman and man. In his online article called *Things are Queer*, Jonathan Weinberg states that “it is as if the dominant culture needs the Other to be certain of itself,” referring to the fact that the word ‘heterosexual’ was only invented after the word ‘homosexual’. Consequently, Weinberg suggests, just like Butler, that the distinction between two paired opposites can only be understood and defined in terms of the other; one always has to have the other edge of the sword. In brief, Butler’s rejection of binary opposition and Cohan’s detailed definition go hand in hand since the former rejects this double edge sword and argues that an individual

should be able to create his or her own identity without defining it in terms of someone else's. So, queer theory resists the notion that there is a naturally-given normative "self" of heterosexuality and rejects therefore the binary opposition in any way. Queer theory and camp are about dissembling the resembled and to posture as one's own identity. Also, in queer theory, the impostures seem to be everywhere. This is precisely what the film musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is all about.

4. Camp Characters

"Don't get strung out, by the way I look."

In a 1985 edition of his book *The Celluloid Closet*, Vito Russo describes *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as "probably the 'gayest'" film yet made by a major studio (52). Russo is almost certainly referring to the extreme *camp* of the film and also to the fact that it is so "out of the closet," meaning that it is openly camp and queer. For example, the antagonist Frank-N-Furter, who is played by Tim Curry, is a flamboyant transvestite who is sexually active with men and women, the protagonist couple who seem to be heterosexual, explore their sexual identities and so does Rocky himself, a manmade marvel of perfect physique. Also, there are quite a few instances where Frank-N-Furter is moving on the story while simultaneously winking ironically, sometimes even directly into the camera. As in Cohan's words: The camp in the movie is inflected as style, taste, wit, parody, or drag and the flamboyance of it is a fundamental component of the joke. Furthermore, Larkin says that "Curry's outrageous camp performance provided the film's memorable qualities" (518). Evidently, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is considered one of the most *camp* musical ever made. But what is it that makes it so camp?

After all, no matter how queer and abnormal all the different characters are and how bizarre the storyline is, the fact is that Frank-N-Furter is easily a queer character. Not only does he seem to be the very prototype for Butler's definition of queer theory, but also does he fit nicely into the definition of Cohan's camp. Zachary Lamm says in the essay *The Queer Pedagogy of Frank-N-Furter* that the concept of a "transvestite transsexual" is indeed mindboggling. Although Lamm claims that Frank is referring the planet of Transsexual in the galaxy of Transylvania, Frank's transsexuality is a part of the queerness of the song. He continues by saying that "Logically, if we assume that Frank is biologically male, then his

transvestism would cause him to dress as a woman, but his transsexuality would actually make him a woman, thus producing a “female woman” (198). For those eager to define and find terms and words for all sexual identities that exist, Frank would be an impossible task. Lamm continues by saying that “Frank’s body, regardless of its anatomical properties, becomes a canvas for play with genders while simultaneously refusing to be naturalized by them.” Indeed, Frank-N-Furter might well have been in Butler’s mind. The character’s being disassembles all pre-conceived ideas of genders and sex and rejects fully any binary opposition.

Also, the allegory of Frank-N-Furter is crucial. Firstly, Frank will be referred to as ‘he’ since the character bears a man’s name and is also played by a male actor. According to the musical’s creator, writer and composer, Richard O’Brien on the show *An Evening with Richard O’Brien*, Frank is the wicked witch in the children’s story of Hansel and Gretel. At the same time, he is also the serpent that tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the movie he is the master of the house and everyone must comply with his will; guests and staff alike, or the consequences might be death. In this sense he is also the Red Queen in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, the pun is intended.

At the same time as Frank signifies various evil characters from literature, his personality seems to be the very incarnation of *camp* and queer theory. He is a person who bears all the physical features of a man; he does not have breasts, he is tall, has a deep voice and his body type suggests that he is male. However, he is a man wearing revealing women’s clothing. In the physical sense, Frank is defying and denying the binary opposition of man vs. woman. Accordingly, his actions throughout the movie suggest that he is, in Butler’s words, creating his own identity, and while doing that, Brad, Janet and Rocky tag along and explore the unknown territory of their identity and sexuality. As previously shown, Frank’s attire and physical features do not fit in a normative box. His actions are like that of a child in many ways. Right from the first song he is the centre of attention. When he is there, he has the highest status and he is in control. Therefore, when he suggests that Brad and Janet stay for the night, they are torn out of their wet clothes and given robes to wear and they are not even given the chance to object since Frank leaves the ballroom on the final notes of the song singing that they should follow him to his laboratory where he has been making a man with gorgeous physique, “blond hair and a tan.” This is Rocky coming to life and of course Frank acts like a child at Christmas around his new “toy.”

At the same time just as Frank is the manifestation of an indefinable type, Rocky is an extreme parody on the reverse side of the axis. In his essay, Ben Hixon argues that Rocky

“ironically highlights the normate¹ body. His character could be said to masquerade as a masculine, white, able-bodied normate, to exaggerate the normative or socially dominant characteristics” (Hixon 182). As a result, not even the newly created innocent man is normal. He is so normal that he is abnormal. The parodies of the camp lay seemingly everywhere.

For the protagonists Brad and Janet, however, the journey is quite different. Firstly, they are planning to get married. The opening of a movie reveals a wedding which they had been attending, where a man and woman are getting married. So, right from the start, the heterosexual world which the couple belongs to, is obvious. The couple sings the song “Damnit Janet” about how much they love each other and during it, they get engaged. Brad gives Janet a ring while singing “to prove that I’m no joker,” which is a very clear-cut sign of heterosexual lifestyles. Their conventionality is strengthened with Janet even saying “that you met mom and you know dad,” hinting at the normal way of the boyfriend already being introduced to her parents. However, as a foreshadowing of coming events during their journey which ends at Frank’s mansion, it seems that the caretakers of the church are indeed Frank-N-Furter, Magenta and Riff Raff in different costumes. The characters are at least played by the same actors and they can easily be seen from the start of the scene and even act close to the camera inside the church during the song “Damnit Janet.”

As a result, the significance of this does not go unnoticed; no matter how heterosexual and conservative in sexual lifestyles people are, their views on life and their identities are always subject to change. A real and true queer theory foreshadowing, as it were, since Brad and Janet’s lives would be changed dramatically in the following night through provocation of their values and social norms, or as Hixon puts it: “Frank challenges the epistemological foundation of the conventional and constrained sexualities of his newest pupils: Brad and Janet” (194).

While the happy couple are at the mansion, Frank wastes no time seducing his latest visitors. When night arrives, Brad and Janet are shown to their individual rooms to sleep in; an act which wouldn’t raise any questions in their minds since they are merely engaged and thus wouldn’t dare to sleep in the same room anyway because that would not be the proper thing to do. However, as if to challenge Brad and Janet’s epistemological foundation to the

¹ According to Hixon’s essay, the term “normate” was introduced by Rosemarie Garland Thomson and refers specifically to an ableist “normal” body, a fictional “standard” or “average” body whose representation as that average is disseminated throughout popular culture (Hixon, 190).

full extent, Frank lures them both into having sex with him by posing to be the other. Lamm even suggests that Frank's transcendence of gender makes him an appealing partner (199).

After all, neither Brad nor Janet might not consider him male or female but merely a sexual being which they have a hard time defining and therefore don't object much to the notion of a sexual encounter with him; like that, they are not breaking any rules or taking part in sexual pleasure which they know society would frown upon. Hence, Frank bolsters his own sexual identity which is hard to define, not only to the audience of the movie, but also to the other characters in it. Furthermore, when the other characters finally start to defy him, partly because he had them take part in cannibalism, eating Eddie, a man Frank killed in front of everyone's eyes; he reacts calmly by forcing them to do a floor show with him. There, Columbine, Rocky, Brad and Janet sing about how they are giving themselves over to sexual pleasure and how they like it. So, near the end, all boundaries and inhibitions are wiped away; everything is dissembled.

However, there is one character of the movie which cannot be defined as camp, namely the Narrator who tells the story of Brad and Janet. He foreshadows and comments on events and even participates in musical numbers. His role is the voice of reason; he is an older man who is situated in a huge academic office with books and heavy wooden furniture. Not only does this suggest that the story we are witnessing is indeed a fairytale, but also it adds a distance to the story, making the morale and message more important than the actual emotional investment of the characters. Surely, this is intentional. Having a narrator telling a story is a Brechtian way of alienating the audience from the performance they are witnessing and "preventing the spectators from becoming emotionally involved in the action." The writer, director and theatre producer Berthold Brecht believed that by alienating themselves from the emotion of the performance, the audience could judge it and the themes "objectively" and "with intelligence" (Hartnoll 255). Moreover, there are further signs of Brechtian alienation. For example the fact that people burst into song to move the story along is one factor and also the acting style of the characters, which often seems very melodramatic and overboard. It seems like the only real character is the Narrator, who is indeed telling the story. Also, it seems as if the Brechtian alienation is closely associated with the *camp* of musicals; both affect the style and taste. The difference lies merely in the execution, whereas the camp uses ironic wit, flamboyance and drag to create a parody. Conclusively, the *camp* of *Rocky Horror Picture Show* is to help the viewer to learn from the musical, rather than engage

in it emotionally. The *camp* of it should be fun to watch, but the reason for the *camp* is to get a message through. But what is the message?

5. Lyrics and Songs

“Let me show you around, maybe play you a sound”

Obviously, the music and lyrics in *Rocky Horror* plays a vital part in experiencing the movie. The songs are many and all of them have tunes that are catchy and have an impact on the overall atmosphere at any given time. Sometimes there is urgency or sincerity and often there is sexuality and provocation. In general, the songs are crucial in moving the story along and the emotional voyage of the characters often reaches its peak during songs.

When Brad and Janet reach the mansion to ask for help about their flat tire, they are immediately swept into whatever is going on inside the house. They are greeted by Magenta and Riff Raff who are just about to start the Transylvanian party. Riff Raff sings that “time is fleeting/ madness takes control” which acts like a warning to the newcomers since they will never get out of the house again now that they have arrived and that the night to come will be considered madness for them. While singing, Magenta seems like she’s almost having an orgasm:

It's so dreamy, oh fantasy free me.
So you can't see me, no, not at all.
In another dimension, with
voyeuristic intention,
Well secluded, I see all.

It is as if she is referring to some sort of a happening just about to occur. There is a (sexual) fantasy just about to take place and it will free her and Brad and Janet as well. Also, no one will ever see that it is going on, as if it is in another dimension, so everyone will be able to act without inhibition and not think about the world outside and consequently; what other people would think of their actions. However, Magenta has voyeuristic intentions, because we learn later in the movie that she has access to hidden cameras that are placed all around the building. So, no matter how well secluded you think you are in your sexual fantasies, she, and the audience, will always see what is going on.

Instead of fleeing immediately, Brad and Janet let the odd servants of Frank lead them in and find a big ballroom full of alien people from Transsexual Transylvania. The aliens have weird costumes on and dance the “Time warp” again and again. Janet is the first to realize that something strange is going on and even says to Brad “there’s something unhealthy about this place,” pinpointing what the queer community has been viewed and is still is in many parts of the world; as something *unhealthy*; a striking reminder of the origin of the word “homosexual” and it meaning a psychological disease. In this sense, it is as if she is stressing how her “self” is heterosexual and stuck on the fact that everything else, every “Other,” is strange, different and unhealthy; i.e. something she does not recognize or understand.

On the other hand, Brad is interested in seeing what is going on. He tells Janet to relax and just to look at the people as if they were a part of another culture; she should keep an open mind and later he says: “They are probably foreigners; their way is different than our own.” In this way, Brad is a little closer to the rejected ‘Other’ than Janet and is perhaps curious about exploring this unknown territory. Also, he represents the normative group that is willing to keep an open mind, even though he is uneasy. Like this he realizes that he shouldn’t judge without knowing what is going on and he is struggling to keep an open mind. Little does he know how open their minds will be in the end.

Indeed, Janet sees their hosts as unhealthy and unwholesome. The people are strange looking to her, they dance bizarrely and communicating with them is odd. At the end of the song “Time-warp,” Brad is keen on leaving also. However, coming down the lift, is the transvestite Frank-N-Furter and he starts immediately singing “Sweet Transvestite.” This is where Janet faints, but Frank still struts uninterrupted into the ballroom while singing and Brad and Janet follow him. Frank recognizes the look on Brad and Janet; that they think this place is unhealthy, so he sings

Don’t get strung out
By the way I look
Don’t judge a book by its cover
I’m not much of a man by the light of day
But by night I’m one hell of a lover

Perhaps this verse hold the most important line of the whole musical: “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” At the beginning of the song, Janet faints at the sight of Frank’s extreme look: his heavy make-up. Frank is at this point wearing a huge cape and after saying a brief “how do you do,” he struts from the elevator to the main room where the other Transylvanians are

while singing the verse above. Since he still wearing his huge cape, the lines might mean that Brad and Janet shouldn't judge him by what they see then and there. Obviously he is also meaning his heavy make-up and high heels, since he knows that for them, it is not the normative style of clothing.

At that time, Frank breaks into the chorus of the song while simultaneously throwing of the huge cape, revealing his corset, ripped stockings, garters and gloves. He sings: "I'm just a sweet transvestite, from Transsexual Transylvania" and at the last word does a little pelvic thrust. His attire, moves, manners and singing style all apply to Cohan's description of what camp is. He is a very flamboyant character whose style is women's lingerie. It is a parody like no other and had never before been seen in a major studio's film. His drag attire is, and has always been, the flamboyance that Cohan speaks about as the fundamental component of the joke. The character even stresses the ironic humour by looking right at the camera at least three times during this song alone. At the end of the first chorus, while doing the pelvic thrust, he is looking straight at the audience. The tongue-in-cheek look at the camera looks like a witty comment from the actor, Tim Curry, who knows that he is going all out in this costume; that he is being an over-the-top parody.

Furthermore, in the second verse, after Frank sings "why don't I show you around/ maybe play you a sound/ you look like you're both pretty groovy" he makes a frown and looks again directly at the camera, which suggests that he doesn't think that Brad and Janet look groovy at all. He has noticed that they are wearing very normative clothing; their hair is nothing out of the ordinary and they have said nothing that suggests the same wit or humour that Frank bolsters. It is as if Frank is commenting, without words, on how heterosexual and conventional they are and that he can help them by "showing them around," in every sense of those words.

Yet again Frank looks directly at the camera after Brad tells them that their car has a flat tire and that they only want to use the phone. Interestingly, Brad does not sing his verse, he merely says it, as if to stress the fact that he and Janet are not taking any part in the circus in any way. In Frank's verse following, he sings: "Well you got caught with a flat/ well how about that" and immediately looks at the camera and lifts one eyebrow. Yet another camp witty comment on the fact that Brad and Janet are not getting out of there easily and also foreshadowing the fact that something as simple as a flat tire on your car can dramatically change your life forever. Frank already has planned what he is going to do to the couple; now it is Frank's way and it is Frank's night.

At the end of the song, Brad and Janet are invited to join Frank and the rest of the people to see the birth of Rocky, the man Frank is making and they are offered to stay for the night. Finally Frank sings: “Maybe the rain/ Isn’t really to blame/ so I’ll remove the cause/ but not the symptom” and then laughs maniacally. He will make sure that it is not because of the rain that they are staying, but because of him. Then, Brad and Janet are torn out of their wet clothes by the servants; a strong signal to suggest that their covers have been removed. Now they can perhaps add different covers, or at least decide new clothing or even identities; because at the end, their identities will be completely changed.

Certainly, the way Frank acts might soon become annoying and too much throughout the whole film. However, this is not the case due to the character’s witty comments, acts and depth. As the movie progresses, it becomes evident that Frank is acting like a child; he follows all his impulses without thinking about consequences and when his guests do not comply, he makes them. All the scenes are filled with parodies, jokes and wit, which all help the audience view Frank as a character who is indeed a human being, even though he is a childish one. He constantly comments on what is going on, without doing it directly, such as the instances where he looks at the camera. He often says one thing and means the other. In the end, however, his servants take his control away from him because he has been too excessive in his lifestyle on earth and Rocky, Columbine and Frank are killed by Riff Raff. Finally, the whole mansion takes off into space like a spaceship; the Transylvanians are going home.

Hence, the camp in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is a crucial element with which to tell the story. But instead of it being “closeted” or sealed over by dominant ideology, it is an obvious, apparent and critical part of the story and the movie’s message. Frank isn’t the only camp character; the heterosexual couple is, in a sense, also very camp. There are a few instances where the acting style of the actors is excessive and melodramatic, for example when Frank glues them to the spot. The style with which the actors portray the characters there makes them almost seem childish, or at the very least melodramatic, but in a very different way from Frank. Brad and Janet seem as though they haven’t grown up yet. In the beginning of the movie they haven’t seen much of the world and they are just going to get married, presumably because that is what everyone else does. They don’t think about it too much, they just act on the impulse within the confines of the social acceptable norm that they are born into and brought up in.

Consequently, this leads us to the evident signs of binary opposition which belong to the world of Brad and Janet. They are a man and a woman and they want to get married; they unknowingly accept that they are walking into this binary opposition of “man” and “woman.” However, we don’t know what is going on inside their minds and hearts. They make the audience believe that they are truly happy about their place in life and that they really want to be together as husband and wife. It is therefore interesting to look closely at their reactions towards Frank-N-Furter and the other guests of the mansion. As previously stated, Brad is interested in this weird group of people he sees while they perform “Time-warp” and at the end of Frank’s song: “Sweet Transvestite,” Janet is seen laughing, as if she now approves of staying the night and getting to know Frank, who oozes sexual innuendos in every direction. Brad and Janet are secretly willing to look past the boundaries society has taught them.

For this reason it is easy for Frank to persuade both Brad and Janet into sexual acts with him that evening. Even though both of them try to resist, they cannot say no and both ask Frank not to tell the other. Furthermore, Janet also has sex with Rocky after singing the song “Touch-a touch-a touch me” which is about Janet basically “needing action” because she has tasted blood and she wants more, which refers to her sexual encounter with Frank just moments earlier. So, Frank’s mission to “show them around” has been a success, but he’s not happy about Janet sleeping with Rocky, since Rocky is his toy. Another guest enters the mansion; Dr. Scott, who is a friend of Brad and Janet. He is surprised at seeing the couple there and his mission is to stop Frank, because he knows about his evil plan. From there, things escalate fast towards the dramatic floor show which Frank puts on because no one wants to obey what he wants and people seem to be acting continually according to their own free will. So, Frank forces the crowd to take part in Rocky’s birthday party and tricks them into consuming human flesh and finally, the “Floor Show.”

Since everyone keeps doing what they want, Frank gives up and says directly into the camera: “It’s not easy to have good time,” which is a truly camp moment. Frank puts on a floor show where Brad, Janet, Columbine, Rocky and Dr. Scott are all dressed in garters, corsets, stockings and high heels. Brad and Janet sing about the bliss they are feeling in the song “Rose Tint my World” and Columbine and Rocky comment on their place in life. In his essay, Lamm argues that “the whole lot not only indulges in pleasures formerly taboo but expresses the debt they owe to Frank for liberating them from cultural constraints” (201). Frank has them dance on stage in an empty auditorium and Brad doesn’t know what has come over him, he feels so sexy but it is Janet’s verse which gets the liberating point through:

Oh I feel released
 Bad times deceased
 My confidence has increased
 Reality is here
 The game has been disbanded, my mind has been expanded
 It's a gas that Frank has landed
 His lust is so sincere.

As a consequence for the night's events, Frank has changed the young couples view on life and "expanded their minds," in many ways. This conventional couple not only has experienced sex for the first time, but they have also lost all inhibitions regarding their pre-given rules of binary opposition of sex and gender; they are being engulfed by sexual pleasure. Janet has had sex with two men already and Brad with Frank. Soon after this song finishes, they all partake in a swimming pool orgy where gender obviously doesn't matter. Janet even goes so far as saying that "bad times (are) deceased" and that she has disbanded the game, meaning that this is a way of life she would rather live. Moreover, at the end of the song Frank encourages the partakers in the floor show to give themselves over to absolute pleasure, and then says "swim the warm waters of sins of the flesh / erotic nightmares beyond any measure / and sensual daydreams you'll treasure forever / can't you just see it" and then ends the song by repeating the lines "Don't dream it, be it" over and over again and the cast joins in. Frank sings these lines as a representative of full sexual freedom which the four floor show participants have now taken a full part of. Consequently, Frank is pleading to the audience of the movie because saying this to the already libido engulfed crew of the floor show would be like "preaching to the choir" (Lamm 196). Frank encourages the audience to not only dream to be their sexual self, but be their sexual self, whatever it might be. He encourages people to explore, go outside the box and find themselves because they will treasure it forever.

However, this kind of life does not seem easily obtainable. After the pool party and a fabulous can-can floor show in the empty theatre, Magenta and Riff Raff burst in wearing space suits and armed with a laser gun. Their mission has changed because Frank's "lifestyle is too extreme" and Riff Raff has become his new commander. Frank's excessive lifestyle has caused his fellow Transylvanians to not only demote him, but to kill him and leave him behind. Frank's behaviour changes immediately; he becomes soft and humble. Before he

realizes that he is supposed to be killed and left behind he sings the song “Going home,” which is probably the most allegorical song of the movie:

On the day I went away
 Was all I had to say
 I want to come again and stay
 Smile, and that will mean I may

Cause I've seen blue skies, through the tears In my eyes
 And I realise I'm going home.

Everywhere it's been the same
 Like I'm outside in the rain
 Free, to try and find a game
 Cards for sorrow, cards for pain
 Cause I've seen blue skies through the tears In my eyes
 And I realise I'm going home.
 I'm going home, I'm going home.

Firstly, an obvious connection is apparent between the character of Frank-N-Furter singing this song and Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy's main objective is to get back home. Also, in her first song “Over the Rainbow” she sings about that on the other side of the rainbow “skies are blue / and the dreams that you dare to dream / really do come true.” Dorothy sings about dreams of a better life coming true, as does Frank, and furthermore they both sing these two songs at a point in their lives which is full of tension and emotion, so both have tears in their eyes looking at the blue skies. One could say that Frank was already on the other side of the rainbow, being completely free in being his sexual self, but when he is told that he is going home, he is happy. So, for both Dorothy and Frank, the skies are always bluer on the other side of the rainbow.

Secondly, in the second verse, Frank sings that it is always like he's outside in the rain, everywhere he goes, even though he is free to try and find his own (life) game, and he is always given pain and sorrow. So, in the end, it seems as if Frank's determined search for his own life has never given him anything but bad experience. In addition, he has always felt like an outsider everywhere he goes. This loaded verse connects directly with life experiences of the queer community. From the time “homosexuality” was recognized as a condition and up

to the release of the movie, queers had always felt like outsiders. It was not until 6 years before the release of the movie that the Stonewall riots occurred and The New York Gay Liberation Front started forming. Up until the movie's release it had been a rocky road to obtain social acceptance and the queers surely might have felt that their life experience was full of sorrow and pain.

Admittedly, The chorus states that there are blue skies to be seen through the tears. In this, the song might suggest two things; that better times are coming for the 'sexually free' or that people that want to explore their own sexual identity should leave to a place where they can, and not try to change their current social and political norms. In fact, Dr. Scott stands for this ideology. When Riff Raff and Magenta tell Frank that he is supposed to be killed, Janet is shocked at that fact, but Dr. Scott says "Society must be protected." One can imagine this being a common view on queer culture at the time the movie was made. After all, during the floor show Dr. Scott tries to shut down the power in the theatre so that Frank cannot continue with his abominable queer floor show. Soon it seems that Frank's gas has reached Dr. Scott's nose because he reveals one high-heeled leg in net stockings by pushing it into air and caressing it and thus becoming a part of the show. Lamm asks: "Did Frank and his minions adorn him, or was he wearing them when he arrived (and before he arrived as well)?" (196). Lamm continues by saying that this might suggest either that queerness is desirable for the non-queer person when he or she is put in a position where it isn't a stigma, or that queerness is indeed in all places where conventionality is, it is simply veiled by socially prescribed normalcy. Evidently, these suggestions would explain why Brad and Janet were so easily persuaded into sexual acts along with everyone else in the mansion. Frank's unapologetic behaviour which normalizes all queer and non-conforming acts is so dominant that everyone falls under the spell. No one can escape the snake.

After society has been securely protected and Frank killed, the three earthlings; Brad, Janet and Dr. Scott run out of the mansion, which immediately takes off into space like a rocket, leaving the trio crawling on the ground in their now ripped lingerie looking like burn victim hobos barely visible because of the smoke. What follows is the last song on the musical "Superheroes":

Brad: I've done a lot, God knows I've tried
 To find the truth, I've even lied
 But all I know is down inside I'm bleeding.

Janet: And Super Heroes come to feast

To taste the flesh not yet deceased
 And all I know is still the beast is feeding.

Nar.: And crawling on the planet's face
 Some insects called the human race
 Lost in time, lost in space
 And meaning.

Obviously, Brad and Janet have gone through a major shift. Brad's journey through the movie has been a search for the truth where he "even lied," which the day before would have been unthinkable. Janet sings about super heroes that are beasts still feeding, referring to the force of nature that sexual energy is that she has come in touch with. Finally, the Narrator utters the final words of the movie which are highly philosophical and existential thoughts about the human race being lost in every way possible by being nothing more than crawling insects, just like the three characters are in the end. So, the final moral is that whatever goes on in one's life is futile and whatever meaning, truth or path one finds, it all doesn't matter, for we will always be lost and searching for skies that are more blue.

6. The Writer's Agony

"Everywhere, it's been the same / Like I'm outside in the rain."

According to Cracked.com, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is being shown daily somewhere in America and most likely as an audience participation screening where the audience dresses up and brings props to sing along and interact with the movie. The official fan page of the movie, www.rockypedia.org, states that even though it was premiered in 1975, it didn't reach its peak until the early 1980s, and since then the new generations have found different ways to alienate society as the movie has now become more mainstream. This fan page argues that *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* has always given the "outcasts" of society a place to go, and still does. By viewing the movie and seeing the show they interact and "collectively realize how fucked-up mainstream society really is."

Apparently, feeling like an 'outcast' was a major factor in the life of Richard O'Brien who wrote the original play, music and lyrics and also co-wrote the screenplay for the movie. Furthermore, he plays the hunchback servant of Frank-N-Furter, Riff Raff. O'Brien appeared in an interview with Mark Sainsbury in the show *An Evening with Richard O'Brien* (2008)

where he discusses in depth his musical and where it came from. The theme of feeling like an outcast in society and not belonging was obviously a major factor in O'Brien's life, hence the camp and queer plot, lyrics, characters and ideology of the show and the movie.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of O'Brien's alienation from the norm of society is the fact that he is transgendered. In the interview, he states that he just recently had come to terms with it and says that he finally started living his life fully now that he is nearing 70. He even states that he was cursed or blessed by nature in this way and that he does not wish it on anyone. The reason he talks about this is that the interviewer had asked him a question why the master of the mansion, Frank-N-Furter, the serpent in the Garden of Eden, was a transvestite.

This fact is crucial in understanding the major theme regarding queer theory and *camp* in the movie. It can be argued that the psychological agony of the creator and writer of the musical manifests itself in the work as a whole. O'Brien used the musical to channel his thoughts and ideas on binary opposition, gender norms, sexual exploration and search for meaning and truth. By doing this, he struck a human chord within the audience. First, the timing seems to have been crucial since the film musical was premiered only 6 years after the Stonewall riots and The New York Gay Liberation Front had already been established to create a queer culture. Second, Feminism was on the rise and people were starting to realize that general social rules, which people had not really thought about before, were suddenly under scrutiny, such as people's acceptance of binary opposites of "male" and "female." Third, the movie was "released in the wake of rock's androgynous period, headed by David Bowie" (Larkin 518).

Moreover, when O'Brien was a child, he expressed to his older brother that he wanted to be a fairy princess when he grew up. He continues by saying that he immediately knew that he had said the wrong thing, the shutters came down and he said he started "living inside his head." Furthermore, he adds:

That's a secret that you'll never show anybody and there are never going to be any chink in the armour and that way madness ensues. You're never allowed to actually grow up, you grow up as a kind of an idea for everybody and you're not really yourself, and there has to be a payoff sooner or later. I went over the edge of the abyss a few years ago. Then I suddenly said, oh stuff it I am what I am by default. (*An Evening with Richard O'Brien*)

Certainly, it is no accident that he expresses a feeling of “madness ensuing” when you are living inside your head and in the closet with something. Also, in the song “Time Warp” Riff Raff, played by O’Brien, says that “madness will take control” in the mansion and that “blackness would hit me (Riff Raff) and the void would be calling.” Then all of the Transylvanians burst into the Time Warp dance, as if to release extreme tension that is built up in Magenta and Riff Raff.

Furthermore, O’Brien expresses that he grew up “as a kind of an idea for everybody” and that he was not really himself, thus becoming a person which a predominant heterosexual society wanted him to be. Everything else was odd and unacceptable. In Butler’s terms, O’Brien was not allowed to create his own sexual identity when he was young, creating tension within him, since he was always trying to be someone he was not. This is a double edged sword though. On one hand this closeted young transgendered man had to find an outlet for his tension and does so by creating a masterpiece of a musical that inspires millions to be themselves, which a true blessing. On the other hand, this has obviously caused him psychological agony throughout the years, one which he even refers to as a curse.

Admittedly, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is a blessing because O’Brien has been given the chance to view the world in a very different way from the majority of people and he was able to channel his ideas through the movie. Like that, he has inspired people, both the queer communities and also those who accept without thinking any kind of binary opposition of “male” and “female.” In the latter part of the interview, O’Brien dresses up in a frock and continues the interview wearing it and he says he sometimes wears frocks on a daily basis and that people are shocked at that fact. It is more acceptable for women to dress towards ‘male’ attire, than for a man to dress toward ‘female’ attire; it is considered weak and stupid, while being masculine is forceful. Furthermore, he states that society in general is misogynistic like that, and also that “it demeans our mothers, it demeans our sisters and wives and our daughters.” His view expands even further when he says that he has “lost the plot” because 50% of the sentient species of this earth, and even the whole universe, demeans the other 50% by seeing them as less viable. Understandably, he really doesn’t understand it.

7. Conclusion

“Lost in time, lost in space . . . and meaning.”

The Rocky Horror Picture Show obviously strikes a nerve within people and has done so since the movie premiered in 1975. People still flock to the movie theatres, both in costumes and not, to partake in an event that moves you, makes you laugh and yet poses some serious philosophical question about sexuality, gender, meaning and the way we live and view life. Whether or not people realize why they like the movie, it obviously has had a profound effect on alienated groups in society since its release. Gay, lesbian, transgendered, transvestites, bisexual, bi-curious, straight and all queer alike seem to relate in one way or another with the theme of sexual exploration, the outstanding lyrics and music and the moral of the story. In the interview with Mark Sainsbury, O’Brien might have pinpointed the essence of the experience of going to the theatre and seeing it by saying that both men and women connected instantly to Tim Curry’s shamelessness in his portrayal of Frank-N-Furter; he came out with no embarrassment and swept off his cloak exposing his corset, high heels and lingerie, in the first chorus of the song “Sweet Transvestite” and men and women, gay and straight, all went “Well hello.” O’Brien continues by saying that the show is so unapologetic that it is liberating.

Perhaps without knowing it, Richard O’Brien has made one of the most important cultural phenomena in queer society up to date. The fact that it was so influential in giving a voice to countless alienated people who struggle in finding their place in the world makes it a work of art that will be remembered throughout history. The people, who today would be named the queer community or LGBTQ society, have always related strongly to the movie and the show and through it they have created an identity together. In fact, according to Wikipedia: “in 2005, the film was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being ‘culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant,’” proving that it is indeed an important work of art which deserves the attentions of generations to come. Also, aside from all the theories, philosophy and arguments, it is simply a good campy entertainment. Or as in O’Brien’s own words: “It works on so many levels, doesn’t it. It works as a trashy, fun, campy piece of theatre.” And the reason why people like it does not have to be any more complicated than that.

In the end, the movie being an entertaining parody on so many levels, the message of the movie might be quite simple like the final song “Superheroes” suggests. In the end, we are

merely insects crawling on a face of a rock in a vast universe and it is up to each and every one of us to use the time here or not. Will I be confined by society? Will I be what other people want me to be? Will I live my life like everyone else because that is just the way it is supposed to be?

I guess it is up to you.

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