

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 14, 2022

Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan



Published by



Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Founded in 2009 by Fabian Dorsch

Internet: <http://proceedings.eurosa.org>

Email: proceedings@eurosa.org

ISSN: 1664 – 5278

Editors

Connell Vaughan (Technological University Dublin)

Vitor Moura (University of Minho, Guimarães)

Editorial Board

Adam Andrzejewski (University of Warsaw)

Claire Anscomb (De Montfort University)

María José Alcaraz León (University of Murcia)

Pauline von Bonsdorff (University of Jyväskylä)

Tereza Hadravová (Charles University, Prague)

Regina-Nino Mion (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

Jochen Schuff (Free University of Berlin)

Elena Tavani (University of Naples)

Iris Vidmar Jovanović (University of Rijeka)

Publisher

The European Society for Aesthetics



Department of Philosophy

University of Fribourg

Avenue de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

Internet: <http://www.eurosa.org>

Email: secretary@eurosa.org

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 14, 2022

Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan

Table of Contents

Hassan Ali <i>Rosebud: Exploring Deleuzian Temporality through the Wellesian Shot</i>	1
Sacha Behrend <i>On the Apparent Incompatibility of Perceptual and Conventional Accounts of Pictures</i>	14
Anu Besson <i>On Aesthetic Practices and Cultural Identity of Finnish Emigrants</i>	28
Pol Capdevila <i>Mood in Cinema. Towards a Unified Form of Time</i>	38
Jokob Deibl <i>From Infinite Rapprochement to the Open: From Kant to Hölderlin</i>	56
Viviana Galletta <i>The Laocoön and the Devil: A Path through the Franciscus Hemsterhuis' Letter on Sculpture</i>	68
Lorenzo Gineprini <i>The Uncanniness of the Ordinary: Rethinking the Uncanny within Aesthetics</i>	86
Jason Holt <i>Self-Referential Aesthetics in the Art of Leonard Cohen</i>	100
Mariliis Elizabeth Holzmann <i>An Alien Phenomenology of Object Oriented Aesthetics and Genderqueer Representations in Julia Ducournau's Titane (2021)</i>	112

Daniel Kuran <i>From Ethics to Aesthetics: On an Aesthetic Sense in Kant's Philosophy of Religion</i>	128
Salvador Rubio Marco <i>Can Poems do Philosophy?: the Philosopher as a Sportsman of the Mind</i>	141
Philip Mills <i>Wanting Austin Inside Out: Viral Poetics and Queer Theory</i>	151
Eva Schürmann <i>"A Real Fact is a Fact of Aesthetic Experience." On the Actuality of Whitehead's Aesthetics</i>	166
Thomas Symeonidis <i>Designing Worlds: Explorations of the Possible Structures of the Aesthetic in Jacques Rancière</i>	183
Asmus Trautsch <i>Transformation and Transcendence of the Tragic: Milo Rau's "Theatre of the Real"</i>	194
Elettra Villani <i>The Category of the Aesthetic: Considerations on Theodor W. Adorno's Reading of Kierkegaard</i>	218

*An Alien Phenomenology of Object Oriented Aesthetics
and Genderqueer Representations in Julia Ducournau's Titane
(2021)*

Mariliis Elizabeth Holzmänn⁶⁶

Estonian Academy of Arts

ABSTRACT. Julia Ducournau's film, *Titane* (2021), has received considerable critical acclaim while rousing and repulsing audiences with its provocative appropriation of the body horror genre. A critical discursive examination of *Titane* and related paratexts serves to present an "alien phenomenology" that enables a wider consideration of the relations between subject and objects. The analysis is organized in three movements. In the first move, a brief overview of the film is woven together with a consideration of recent philosophical innovations associated with object-oriented ontology (OOO). In addition to the summative analysis of the film, this first section draws on a number of interviews with Ducournau to ground thematic findings associated with OOO using the director's own words. The second move shifts toward a consideration of the audience reception and examines responses to the film with attention to how Ducournau's object-oriented approach appropriates characterizations of gender fluidity. In the closing motion, the analysis turns to examine the way that object characterizations of gender fluidity and identity may remain complacent with hegemonic discourses of post-feminism.

1. Introduction

Julia Ducournau's film, *Titane* (2021), has received considerable critical acclaim while rousing and repulsing audiences with its provocative appropriation of the body-horror genre and object-oriented aesthetic. *The Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw (2021) referred to the film as a "gonzo

⁶⁶ Email: mariliisholzmänn@gmail.com

genderqueer body-horror shocker” (para. 3). An article in *Variety* (2021) drew connections to Ducournau’s 2016 film *Raw* and praised the director for “changing the vocabulary of cinema with her heart-stopping imagery and boundary-blurring approach to genre” (para. 1). The widespread reception of the French language film has been propelled by its critical success. *Titane* earned Durcournau the Palme d’Or award at the Cannes Film Festival, making her only the second woman to have won the prestigious award after Jane Campion’s, 1993 film *The Piano*. Reporting on the film’s critical reception at the Cannes Film Festival, Justin Chang’s (2021) *Los Angeles Times* review noted that showings, “generated walkouts, hoots of laughter, and waves of social media shock and awe, plus scattered reports of fainting and vomiting” (para. 6). With less praise, Ann Hornaday (2021) lampooned the film in a *Washington Post* review that found the film, “so self-consciously transgressive and weird, that it’s difficult to discern who it’s for, besides fetishists, freak-flag fliers, and fans of auteurism at its most hermetic and solipsistic” (para. 4). I argue that the affectively charged responses elicited by the film are a result of Ducournau’s divisive object-oriented approach to the genderqueer representations in the film. In this chapter, I offer a critical analysis of relevant texts to problematize the film’s use of corporeality and examine its representation of gender fluidity. The analysis is organized in three movements. In the first move, a brief overview of the film is woven together with a consideration of recent philosophical innovations associated with object-oriented ontology (OOO). In addition to the summative analysis of the film, this first section draws on a number of interviews with Durcournau to ground thematic findings associated with OOO using the director’s own words. The second move shifts toward a consideration of the audience reception and examines responses to the film with attention to how Ducournau’s object-oriented approach appropriates characterizations of gender fluidity. In the closing motion, the analysis turns to examine the way that object characterizations of gender fluidity and identity may remain complacent with hegemonic discourses of post-feminism.

2. An Object-Oriented Overview of the Film

OOO evolves from work in new materialism introduced by Levi Bryant, Graham Harman, Jane Bennet and others. These innovative philosophical frameworks aspire to open space for

an understanding of relations between non-human others. Following Bryant, this analysis emphasizes an “*alien phenomenology*” that withholds the tendency to examine machine objects based on their human use value and instead, in Bryant’s (2014) words, “opens the possibility of more compassionate ways of relating” and facilitates the “possibility of better ways of living together” (p. 70). With attention to the changing influences that machines, algorithms, and material objects have exhibited on human subject relations, scholars have characterized OOO as a counter-method that avoids collapsing all readings into an examination of cultural elements or subject centered ideological critiques. An “alien phenomenology” of *Titane* serves to more clearly discern the features of an object-oriented critique of gender and sexuality using the film text, director interviews, and examples of audience reception.

As a reaction to modes of textual analysis centered around the dissolution of a film’s story into subjective and cultural elements of meaning making, Harman (2012) emphasizes the critical need to show “how the literary object cannot be fully identified with its surroundings or even its manifest properties” and explains that such criticism enables scholars to examine the “tension between objects and their sensual traits” (p. 202). In the context of Ducournau’s *Titane*, this object tension is explicitly materialized by the affective compulsions of physical identification and sexual pleasure associated with the protagonist’s attraction to automobiles. Following a serious car accident, a young Alexia receives a titanium plate in her head and the doctors encourage her father to look for changes in motor skills and cognitive behavior. Despite the initial warning, her neglectful father ignores any concerns and the film jumps forward in time to Alexia performing as an erotic dancer at car shows. Navigating the hypermasculine space she is pursued by creepy men and has become adept at defending herself. Within the first few scenes of the film, she uses a metal hairpin to brutally murder a fan who confessed his love for her before forcibly attempting to kiss her. Following the murder, she hears something backstage and approaches the stage area to find a Cadillac with its headlights lit toward the stage. Inside the car, the hydraulics trigger and bounce Alexia up and down as she climaxes in response to the car’s undulations. Later, when Alexia begins to leak motor oil from her breasts, she realizes she is pregnant and attempts to use the hairpin to terminate the pregnancy. She murders her girlfriend after she becomes aware of the pregnancy, and goes on a killing spree that necessitates attempting to conceal her gender identity as she transitions from Alexia to Aiden. Posing as Aiden, the missing son of a fire chief, her gender transformation is

confounded by efforts to conceal the pregnancy and adopt to the normative masculine conventions of life in the firehouse with her “adoptive” father Vincent.

Explicating the object ontology of the film, and addressing the aesthetic influence of metal in the film, Ducournau explains, “Metal is cold, heavy, dead, it doesn't react to our eyes. I wanted to try to make it something alive” and adds, “The metal in her head makes her dead inside, so I wanted to intertwine all these thoughts between humans and dead metal and reverse the way they react” (2021, para. 19). In doing so, Ducournau’s configurations of the monstrous confronts gender binaries and destabilizes configurations of heterosexual normativity and gender-fluidity. In the film, Ducournau’s representations of pregnancy further manifest the affective tensions between subjects and objects that are integral to audiences’ inferences of meaning. Addressing the expectant nature of the subject-object gestation, Ducournau notes, “The idea was to create a new humanity that is strong because it's monstrous — and not the other way around” (in Kohn, 2021, para. 9). A critical discursive examination of *Titane* (2021) and related paratexts serves to present an “alien phenomenology” that enables a wider consideration of the relations between humans and non-human others with attention to how these subject-object tensions limit social possibilities and enable new genderqueer imaginaries.

Examining the gendered representations of the film, it is helpful to take up Katherine Behar’s (2016) work on Object Oriented Feminism (OOF) which acknowledges that while feminism’s object has been principally subjective and political, it also arises from an outward orientation that recognizes the tendency for women to be exploited as objects and calls for a solidarity that, as she notes “should rally around objects, not subjects” (Behar, 2016, p. 7). Importantly, the film’s gender relations are not only imbricated in Alexia/Aiden’s transition – but also in the film’s characterization of Vincent, the fire captain whose chemical addiction to steroids is depicted throughout the film in ways that further links the subject and object relations together. Justin Chang (2021) writes:

If Alexia's plight reveals the toll of trying to escape that prison, Vincent shows us the dangers of succumbing to it. Injecting steroids daily into his ridiculously bulked-up frame, he's like a hulking parody of hyper-masculinity, even as he subverts that parody by showering Alexia/Adrien with an unfashionable and unconditional tenderness. (para. 12).

In one scene that confirms Vincent’s acceptance of Alexia/Aiden, he enters while she is

changing and affirms her identity, “I don’t care who you are. You’re my son. You’ll always be my son. Whoever you are. Is that clear?” She nods. And they hug. Her towel falls down and he is unable to ignore her breasts but continues on without acknowledgement. In the final scene, Vincent helps Alexia/Aiden deliver her child – and she confesses, “my names Alexia” and he responds, “push hard Alexia” as she grimaces and her abdomen breaks open and the plate in her head begins to protrude. A crying sound is heard, and she asks – “how is it?” before collapsing. Vincent attempts to resuscitate her but her body appears lifeless, when he pulls the baby up and wraps it in a sheet viewers can see that the baby has a titanium spinal cord and metal plate. In effort to sooth the child, Vincent assures the newborn, “I’m here” and the film closes.

It is unclear if Alexia survives and viewers are left to wonder about the health of the baby and Vincent’s future role in raising the child. Acknowledging the divergent audience reception, Durcournau exclaims, “I hope people are in for the ride and watch it to the end and debate; that is what art is for, to create new debate and new questions” (2021, para. 15). The interplay between Alexia, Aiden, Vincent, and the rest of the firehouse crew each serve to problematize the stability of gender conventions and examine the objective relations that constitute the boundaries of sexuality and the binaries associated with masculinity and femininity. Following this brief overview of the film and introduction to the postulates of OOO, it is analytically productive to consider the audience reception and examine some of the responses to the film with attention to how Ducournau’s object-oriented approach challenges existing configurations of gender fluidity. Toward that end, a critical analysis of paratexts that circulated to evaluate the film’s genre crossing aesthetic categorization serves to problematize the films representations of gender fluidity.

3. Appropriating Gender Fluidity

An article in *Variety* (2021) exclaims, “don’t call her a horror director: She works in the European tradition of visceral cineastes like Pier Paolo Pasolini and Carlos Saura” noting her body horror stylings similarity to David Cronenberg, the reviewer writes, “her work defies categorization” (para. 3). Writing in *Indie Wire*, Eric Kohn (2021) calls the film, “a complex exploration of gender fluidity unlike any seen before” (para. 2). However, notably in his

interview with Durcournau, she herself asserts: “Gender fluidity is *and is not* a topic for me. It’s one of the main themes of the film, but it’s not a theme that I had a plan for. It’s pretty natural for me to think like that” She continues, “I see the world as it should be – fluid, and more fluid every day, in so many ways” (para. 7). However, I argue that these characterizations of fluidity recreate patterns of hegemonic exclusion and illustrate a social process that Lisa Duggan (2004) labels – homonormativity. Duggan (2004) defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest the dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179). In other words, even when aspiring toward a critical project of emancipation, the very effort to position alternative sexual identities along a binary matrix remains flawed. By projecting the x, y, z axes of hetero/homo and masculine/feminine over the genderqueer and mechanophilic subject, the film diminishes its rich explanatory potential through an appropriation of fluidity that inadvertently blurs the necessary object focus within a seemingly endless matrix of subject positionalities.

The epistemological provocation at the heart of post-structuralism gives momentum to a critical theory of genderqueer film studies. Post-structuralist theorists have sought to critique, collapse, and transcend existing binaries. A critical theory of object-oriented gender and sexuality provokes tensions between universality and particularity. Rejecting the assertion of universality, Judith Butler argues that efforts to claim particular identity positions are contingent on the exclusion of others. Butler (1994) argues, “to establish a set of norms that are beyond power or force is itself a powerful and forceful conceptual practice that sublimates, disguises and extends its own power play through recourse to tropes of normative universality” (p. 7). In later work, she writes “universality belongs to an open-ended hegemonic struggle” and argues that the constitutive exclusion of particular identities forms the fundamental antagonism of all identity politics and is the genesis representative demands, (as cited in Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000, p. 38). By analyzing the performative contradiction inherent within a disenfranchised groups claims to universality she suggests we can identify those antagonisms which move us closer to radical political alliance than to a universally emergent identity. Her argument, in other words, is that the constitution of normality is a resource that is often disguised and ignored in ways that contributes to subjects’ complicity and complacency. The

concealments of hegemonic tendencies and the ready acceptance of ruling convention function as a form of discursive power. In this sense, Butler argues that normative universality is a manifest expression of power that is disguised in plain sight as “the way it is”, in such a way that attention to alterity is preempted and prevented. For this reason, an alien phenomenology informed by the postulates of OOO may be uniquely able to introduce an alternative framework of criticism that circumvents the limitations of the subject-centric ideological critiques of gender and sexuality.

Notably, critical considerations of bisexuality have refused gender binaries and pushed queer theory to reconsider the object of sexual relations. As Maria Guervich, Helen Bailey, and Jo Bower (2009) write “Bisexuality unsettles... It disturbs existing sexed and gendered categories, refusing obstinately to settle as a fixed gendered or sexed subject or upon a singular gendered or sexed *object*” (p. 236). The increasing scholarly attention to “fluidity” as it relates to subjective gender identity and genderqueer attraction aspires to problematize binary representations that locate themselves vis-à-vis the universal formation of what is accepted as normal. Characterizations of fluidity attempt to transcend the identity matrix approaches of intersectionality by enabling and valuing the constancy of change. Although, intersectionality originated as a theoretical response to rigid standpoint identity positions, applications of intersectionality have continued to articulate coalitions from amongst distinct identity axes and differential subject positions. In her foundational piece, Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) wrote, “Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics” (p. 1299). However, too often intersectional positions are expressed along binaries that dichotomize identity markers (i.e., male–female, white–non-white, able-bodied–disabled, and hetero–homo). Perhaps the only exception to these binaries is socio-economic class, where subjects are positioned on a continuum that ranges from poor–working–middle-class–and wealthy.

Given these longstanding hegemonic binaries, the consideration of genderqueer fluidity is an important place to begin an effort to inspire resistant readings. Fluidity subtly includes a challenge to definitions that essentialize, temporalize, or pathologize genderqueer and transsexual identities and promotes a recognition of “transgender, intersect, and nonbinary people as desiring subjects” (Engelberg, 2018, p. 111). Notably, genderqueer readings are not

“alternative” readings that present what could be in a utopian world, instead they function to articulate what already exists in the world as it is reflected or problematized by a film text and the relevant paratexts that circulate around it. Alexander Doty (1993) suggests that it is possible to offer queer readings of classic horror films like *Dracula*, arguing that it is “important to consider how the central conventions of horror and melodrama actually encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of the heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry” (p. 15). Post-structuralist, feminist, and queer readings have taken up a range of popular cultural media artifacts to provide dynamic contributions that serve to explain how media contribute to (or alternatively resist) hegemonic ideologies.

The post-structuralist assumptions of identity corroborate the hydro-analogy of fluidity that Durcournau emphasizes in her interviews. Like liquid, identity can be co-located and diffused with changing depths that remain unrecognizable at the surface. However, as I argue here, while post-structuralism and feminist approaches to understanding intersectionality have proven their theoretical use value in naming the systems and structures of hegemonic dominance, their characterizations of fluidity have demonstrated considerably less imaginative and transformative potential. Consequently, Durcournau’s representations of fluidity prove to be too shallow for the deep complexities of object entanglements that condition hegemonic relations. Rather than understand gender identity as if it were fluid – capable of swashing back and forth -, it is more analytically productive to understand gender and sexuality as dynamic and integral forces, object energies that permeate expressions of subject identity. The coming together of diverse subject identities into a coalition requires acknowledging diverse object orientations and valuing the differences of nonhuman perspectives. This necessitates both an orientation toward subjective empowerment and an epistemological challenge to identify the *objectives* of systems and structures we are already embedded into.

4. Problematizing Post-Feminist Fluidity

The representations of genderqueer fluidity in *Titane* seem all too willing to tokenize alterity in ways that reinforce homonormativity. While the promotion of queer representations remains a righteous crusade, in the context of *Titane*, binary representations remain predicated on modes of passing that concretize existing sex and gender polemics. The film’s depiction of

fluidity capitulates to a post-feminist framework that attempts to articulate a universal subject position than has surpassed categorizations of sex and gender. In such a limited framework, queer theory continues to police the boundaries that govern normality with an effort to adjudicate identity according to subject centric binaries. *Titane*'s "fluid" approach to gender and sexuality presents unclear channel markers that erase the objects of criticism and emphasize subject boundaries that remain complacent with existing hegemonic logics that represent alterity as the site of the monstrous. Angela McRobbie (2008) has described how post-feminism undermines the analytical work of feminism and falsely gives the impression that equality has been achieved in ways that misdirects the focus of critical efforts to problematize hegemonic patriarchal structures. In interviews, Ducournau echoes post-feminist sentiments. Speaking with Eric Kohn (2021), she explains her post-feminist directorial position in relation to the character development choices made in *Titane*:

When people say I'm a woman director — I mean, that's always a bit annoying, because I'm a person. I'm a director. I make movies because I'm me, not because I'm a woman. I'm me. So in this respect, Alexia's character comes from my will to show that femininity is so much more flexible and blurry than what people think it is. That's why we start with a sequence shot in a car show. I made it seem as though the cars and the girls are essentially the same at the start. They're equally objectified. (para. 7)

Although this shifts the subject focus toward an important object-orientation, it circumvents any critical object of analytical attention and ignores the considerable burdens that women continue to face in the film industry. Further, this explanation ignores Alexia's sexual attraction to cars.

As Ian Bogost explains, "the familiar refrain of 'becoming-whatever' (it doesn't matter what!) suggests comfort and compatibility in relations between units" however, an "alien phenomenology assumes the opposite: incompatibility.... no matter how fluidly a system may operate, its members nevertheless remain utterly isolated, mutual aliens" (p. 40). Rather than just assume *Titane* is transformative because it problematizes gender passing and presents an object-oriented sexuality it is necessary to critically analyze the objects that mark Alexia/Aiden as a subject of horror.

An object-oriented approach to genderqueer film criticism is needed to problematize

analogical associations with intersectionality and fluidity by conceptualizing the object of sexuality as a dynamic prerequisite energy and not merely a provocative or ambiguous subject positionality. Instead of representing sexuality through single acts of erotic expression (whether with a same-sex partner or automobile), an object-oriented critical approach to genderqueer sexual expression should recognize the potential for objects to exceed acts of intimacy and emphasize the objective commitments that make their togetherness possible. Instead of asking “what does a fluid gender or sexuality look like,” film makers and scholars of horror films might meditate on the question, “what is the *object* of horror?” This shifts the focus toward an alien phenomenology predicted not on the subject identity but on the object relations that enable collectivity, mutuality, and trust in the face of that which is represented as monstrous.

Mateja Meded’s (2021) review in *Die Welt*, acknowledges the vehicular connection to Cronenberg’s *Crash*, observing that, in both films, the “car accident is not destructive, but a fertilizing experience of liberation” (para. 9). The titanium plate implanted in Alexia’s head distinguishes her distinct object relationship, marking her as a unique hybrid-subject. However, her efforts to conceal her femininity and pass as Aiden showcase her monstrous corporeal form. The analogy of “passing” is apt for genderqueer identities moving through an intersectional positionality; passing falsely subjects nonbinary identities into a liminal event that erases their sexuality based on their present partnership or attraction. Instead, a genderfluid sexuality should be considered as temporally located in the past, present, and future of subjective meaning making. In the context of bisexuality, Lingel (2009) argues, “the act of passing, which here means to be able to assume (either actively or passively) membership within multiple communities, contradicts figuring of bisexuality as centerless and fluid and underscores theoretical intersections between bodies, sexualities and community” (p. 382). Anna Camaiti Hostert (2007) suggested that at an intersection passing signifies a “site of constant transition... a desire to withhold information, reminiscent of a poker game, when a player passes his/her hand without stating his/her position and the next move is left to other players” (p. 79). Similarly, Randall Kennedy’s (2001) problematizes passing in its racial context as “a deception that enables a person to adopt certain roles or identities from which he would be barred by prevailing social standards in the absence of his misleading conduct” (p. 1). Understood in the context of passing, the lived experiences of genderqueer and transexual people are obfuscated by intersectional frameworks that maintain the dominant tendency to pathologize

representations and polemically position identities. Moreover, these associations suggest that genderqueer and transexual people are deceitful or otherwise incapable of commitment or fidelity to marked social positions. In these iterations, genderqueer and transexual individuals remain masked; represented as a deviant manipulator whose persuasion is unrestrained by normative laws of attraction, too often characterized as a nymphomaniac whose on-screen contributions are limited to sexual tension and erotic expression.

The frameworks of intersectionality encourage genderqueer individuals to name their identity position, following its analogy, as if identity were an address. However, identity is organic and nomadic. The effort to pinpoint sex or gender identity at a single intersection dismisses the way temporality informs sex and gender and ignores the dualistic conventions that govern interpersonal conduct and social expression. Farrimond (2012) describes how the temporal focus on a person's current sexual partner functions as a hegemonic tendency that erases sexual histories and future potentialities. As a counter-hegemonic tactic to this erasure, Jennifer Baumgardner (2007) detailed efforts to “constantly crowd every conversation with sign-posts (‘ex-girlfriend,’ ‘ex-boyfriend,’ ‘baby’s father’) to indicate the whole person I am” as one, “commonly used technique of avoiding the erasure of bisexuality” (p. 193). The discursive erasure of non-monosexualities is thus not only indicative of bi-phobia, but more importantly it signals the dominance of ideologies associated with monosexism, in both heteronormative and LGBTQ+ communities. Kenji Yoshino (1999) has argued that monosexuals (hetero and homo) “have an ‘epistemic contract’, tacitly agreed upon due to their shared interest in maintaining an immutable identity, leading them to strategically erase bisexual identities” (p. 353). The effort to contain binary representations of gender and sexuality originates from a hegemonic effort to present heteronormativity and homonormativity as the dominant frameworks of attraction. As a cultural apparatus, media and film representations police the boundaries of normality and identify the archetypes of appropriate aspiration. The strategic absence or explicit derogation of on-screen representations of genderqueerness and transsexuality has prompted audiences to pathologize nonbinary characterizations. As if acting for an audience of armchair psychologists, the genderqueer character is presented as “monstrous” and marked as “abnormal” or “unstable” in ways that exacerbates falsehoods and perpetuates stigmatizing tropes that have real life consequences for transexual and nonbinary audiences.

5. Conclusion

As a universal energy, the concern for non-human others, over and above those that resemble the self, is the most radical counter-hegemonic reading strategy imaginable. As an affective postulate, an object orientation to sex and gender problematizes the hetero-homo and masculine-feminine binaries while enabling the loving recognition of plural expression as itself a universal norm. Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2011) exclaims that, “the origin of sex is in the symbiosis of bacteria” and concludes that “allowing the energy of love to circulate is what infuses matter with life” (p. 189). For scholars of critical media studies attuned to OOO, the objective of love is a call to conscience in the construction of coalitional identities with nonhuman agencies of alterity. Alain Badiou (2009) has argued that love creates a framework in which we experience, develop, and live from “the point of view of difference and not identity” (p. 22). The resulting coalitional solidarity is not a mere feature of a particular identity politics in the broader LGBTQ+ movement. Its solidarity does not endorse identarian appeals of essentialism or exceptionalism. Instead, an object-oriented solidarity frames an internally reflective, communicative, and inclusive “we” that is presented as already within the normal operating system of life’s universal conditions. Such an approach serves to expand the “we” at the heart of feminist, post-structuralist, and queer projects of liberation and would emphasize a version of identity based, “not only relations of subjection and subjugation but also relations of recognition and identification, of flourishing, of meaning, of love, of empowerment, of solidarity” (Weir, 2013, p. 18). The coming together of diverse identities into a coalition requires acknowledging genderqueerness and necessitates valuing sex and gendered differences that exceed hegemonic binaries. A transformative representation of genderqueer solidarity would prioritize “the possibility of an inclusive understanding of ‘we’ whereby the strength of the bond connecting us stems from our mutual recognition of each other instead of from our exclusion of someone else” (Dean, 1996, p. 31). To begin imaging genderqueer film representations, resistive readings might postulate a relation of love in which the manifestations of gender and sexuality are so diverse as to preclude the formulation of conventions based on the presentation of gender or representations of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and compulsory monogamy. Critical and genderqueer representations might attend to how love

becomes particularized following its universal genesis rather than beginning from the origin point of its alterity or particularity.

Instead of capitulating to the overly determined “pinned location” of feminist intersectionality or the wishy-washy proclivities of post-structuralist and queer conceptualizations of fluidity, we might seek to develop an object-oriented approach to gender and sexuality as always emerging from the universalizing genesis of difference, an inherent symbiosis between radically distinct others, and a natural proclivity to explore the objects that provoke an abject sense of horror. Such a position enables us to extend film and culture studies considerations of the auteur and audiences’ power to discern hermeneutic meaning through negotiated and resistant counter-hegemonic interpretations, even in the face of post-feminist reading positions. Taking up Stuart Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model, we might see cultural texts through a variety of negotiated identities and ideologies, “a patchwork quilt,” that informs culture studies (Radway, 1986). A truly fluid project would require scholars to emphasize those “ideological seams” and interrogate the places where contrasting or disparate ideologies are sutured together by dominant, negotiated, or resistant readings. John Fiske (1989) describes excorporation as a process whereby subordinated audiences are able to “make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system” (p. 15). For contemporary critical studies scholars, an alien phenomenology that poaches along the perimeter of existing binaries and utilizes the tactic of excorporation to facilitate object oriented resistive readings may serve to problematize and subvert the appropriation of post-feminist representations of fluidity marked by an intersectional address that locates a static and singular identity.

In the context of evolving theories of identity, a genderqueer reading operates as a counter-hegemonic framework, providing a way to represent a distinct agency without fetishizing or erasing difference. By developing and extending a novel authentically genderqueer critique other existing ideological apparatuses are illuminated and new configurations of solidarity and collectivity are imagined. A genderqueer approach to film studies asks us to engage a differential consciousness, “a political revision that denie[s] any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and recenter, given the forms of power to be moved” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 59). A better representation of genderqueerness as a dynamic identity would reveal the potential for

collective subjectivities and agential ethics and norms. A critical approach to genderqueer film representations should recognize the potential for bi-normativity and queer identifications illustrated not only through acts of intimacy but also through shared passion and interpersonal commitments. Film studies scholarship needs to attend to genderqueer subjectivities in ways that exceed the hegemonic tropes that necessitate passing in their pursuit of love. A critique of mediated representations of genderqueer love aspires to displace biphobic dualities (of hetero, homo, and monogamous) to instantiate a vision of love that exceeds duality and ferments an activated mix of queer bisexualities that critically redefines the presentation of normality. The hope is that an organic formulation of genderqueerness can begin to erode the foundations of bi-erasure and transphobia that have precluded the ethical and effective representation of genderqueer subjects lived experiences in media and film.

References

- Anderlini-D'Onofrio, Serena (2011), 'Bisexuality, Gaia, Eros: Portals to the Arts of Loving', *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 11 (2-3), pp. 176-94.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer (2007), *Look Both Ways: Bisexual Politics*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Behar, Katherine (2016), 'An Introduction to OOF', in: K. Behar (ed.) *Object-Oriented Feminism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bogost, Ian (2012), *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bradshaw, Peter (2021, July 17), 'Cannes 2021: Titane Didn't Deserve the Palme, But it Had Guts, Drive – and an Anthro-automotive Hybrid Devil Child', *The Guardian*. Accessed online: <https://www.theguardian.com/>
- Bryant, Levi (2014), *Onto-cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media*, Edinburgh University Press.
- Butler Judith (1992), 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"', in: J. Butler & J. Scott (eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith., Laclau, Ernesto., & Zizek, Slavlov (2000), *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality*, New York: Verso.

- Chang, Justin (2021, October 6), 'It Shocks, then Seduces; 'Titane,' the Cannes 2021 Top Prizewinner, is a Gory Yet Surprisingly Sweet Tale, *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed online: <https://www.latimes.com/>
- Crenshaw, Kimberle (1991), 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43 (6), pp. 1241-99.
- de Certeau, Michel (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Los Angeles: University of South California Press.
- Dean, Jodi (1996), *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Doty, Alexander (1993), *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Duggan, Lisa (2004), *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Engelberg, Jacob (2018), "'How Could Any One Relationship Ever Possibly be Fulfilling?": Bisexuality, Nonmonogamy, and the Visualization of Desire in the Cinema of Gregg Araki', *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 18 (1), pp. 102-17.
- Farrimond, Katherine (2012), "'Stay Still So We Can See Who You Are': Anxiety and Bisexual Activity in the Contemporary Femme Fatale Film', *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 12 (1), pp. 138-54.
- Fiske, John (1989), 'Understanding Popular Culture', in W. Booker & D. Jermyn (eds.), *The Audience Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge.
- Gurevich, Maria., Bailey, Helen., & Bower, Jo (2009), 'Querying Theory and Politics: The Epistemic (Dis)Location of Bisexuality Within Queer Theory, *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 9 (3-4), pp. 235-57.
- Hall, Stuart (1980), 'Encoding/Decoding', in M.G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (eds.) *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Boulder (CO): Westview Press.
- Harman, Graham (2012), 'The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism. *New Literary History*, vol. 43 (2), pp. 183-203.
- Hornaday, Ann (2021, September 29), 'The Palme d'Or-winning 'Titane' Wants to Make You Squirm', *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>

- Hostert, Anna Camaiti (2007), *Passing: A Strategy to Dissolve Identities and Remap Differences*, Madison (NJ): Fairleigh Dickinson.
- Kennedy, Randall (2001), 'Racial Passing', *Ohio State Law Journal*, vol. 62, pp. 1-28.
- Kohn, Eric (2021, July 17), 'Palme d'Or Winner Julia Ducournau on Groundbreaking 'Titane': 'I Don't Want My Gender to Define Me', *IndieWIRE*, Accessed online: <https://www.indiewire.com/>
- Lingel, Jessa (2009), 'Adjusting the Borders: Bisexual Passing and Queer Theory', *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 9 (3-4), pp. 381-405.
- McRobbie, Angela (2008), *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Meded, Mateja (2021, October 6), 'Me and the Cadillac; Julia Ducournau's Award-Winning Film "Titane" Changes the Viewers and the Cinema', *Die Welt*, no. 229, p. 15.
- Olsen, Mark (2021, October 6), 'A Hot-Wired Horror; 'Titane' Director Discusses Crafting the Year's Wildest Film', *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed online: <https://www.latimes.com/>
- Radway, Janice (1986), 'Identifying Ideological Seams: Mass Culture, Analytical Method, and Political Practice', *Communication*, vol. 9, pp. 93-124.
- Sandoval, Chela (2000), *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Variety* (2021, September 29), Julia Ducournau on Her Boundary-Blurring Film 'Titane': 'My Film is its Own Wild Animal', *Variety*. Accessed online: <https://www.variety.com/>
- Weir, Allison (2013). *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory Between Power and Connection*. Oxford University Press.
- Yoshino, Kenji (1999), 'The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure', *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 52 (2), pp. 353-461.