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Odjel za anglistiku
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Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 29. kolovoza 2023.

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1. Introduction

New Queer Cinema placed within the context of the 1990s, in a world that had lost so many queer people to a ravaging epidemic of HIV/AIDS, served as a rejection of assimilation and a reaction to a slew of stereotypes, labelling, and attacks on the queer community. The majority of the films were also placed in urban settings and frequently depicted harsh realities of queer existence (Rich 185). Henry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin speak of New Queer Cinema as challenging the demands of mainstream audiences, namely demands for positive representation and happy endings, instead opting to present works which were provocative, edgy, and complementary to academic queer theory, as well as characters who were unabashedly engaging in immoral or illegal actions (220-223).

Throughout this thesis, a socially constructed definition of deviance is applied. Deviance is not viewed as a phenomenon with a specific psychological profile of those labelled as deviant, but rather as a label that specific groups of individuals share and that classifies them as social outsiders. The acts and behavior that has rendered them deviant may not be legally punishable, individuals may be falsely labelled as deviants but also may be participating in acts deemed deviant in secret (Becker Ch. 1). What is perceived as deviant societally is also dependent on particular codes of morality that are "geographically, culturally, historically and temporally, situationally and subculturally" relative (Goode and Ben Yehuda 111). As we have seen historically in the western world, certain acts that were viewed as particularly deviant and were criminally prosecuted, may in contemporary times be legalized and socially viewed in a much more positive light as is the case of marijuana usage (Becker Ch. 12) or homosexuality. However, queer characters featured in the films that will be mentioned and analyzed here are not only deviant in their queerness, they also engage in criminal acts such as murder and theft. These films, directed by queer directors, are challenging to the viewers and firmly placed

outside of spheres of heteronormativity and gay assimilation. They also frequently reflect on the anguish and the pain of the time period that they were filmed in.

Besides targeting homophobia within the mainstream culture and not shying away from "negative" representation, New Queer Cinema also sought to criticize class discrepancies within the queer community, specifically the privileges held by the bourgeois portion of the community, while also going deeper with the examination of what constitutes queer identity itself. Films that belonged to this movement included films such as *Paris is Burning* (1990), *Swoon* (1991), *Poison* (1991), *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), *The Living End* (1992), *Go Fish* (1993), and *Watermelon Woman* (1995) (220). Prior to these films, B. Ruby Rich speaks of four films released in the mid 1980s as the "precursors to the early New Queer Cinema": *Born in Flames* (1983), *Mala Noche* (1985), *Parting Glances* (1986), *and She Must Be Seeing Things* (1987). These were low-budget films that were inspiring in their innovative approach to cinematic art and the exploration of queer sexuality (7). Anti-assimilationist politics of the nineties which also included a more critical stance on mainstream LGBTQ+ culture and particularly gay pride might have contributed to New Queer Cinema:

> One of the achievements of the antiassimilationist queer culture of the early 1990s was to bring about the rehabilitation of pre-Stonewall queer outlaws—from Leopold and Loeb to Gertrude Stein to Liberace—whose criminality, pathology, sinfulness, flamboyance, brutality, homophobia, or sexual and gender deviance had made them inimical to the ethos of gay pride, repulsive to liberated, self-respecting lesbians and gay men of the post-Stonewall era, and resistant to inclusion within affirmative histories of homosexuality. (Halperin and Traub 7)

Throughout this work, historical elements that inspired the movement will be analyzed and the intricacies of cinematic works and directors which were a part of will be further explored. The thesis will particularly focus on several films belonging to the cinematic

movement of New Queer Cinema that specifically portray queer individuals engaging in acts of deviance, as well as defiance to cultural and societal norms. This will be done through the examples of three films: *Swoon* (1992), *The Living End* (1992) and *Bound* (1996). All three films feature romantically entangled pairs of queer individuals who engage in acts that go beyond law or morality. Nowhere throughout the thesis is violence condoned, rather the thesis speaks on the power of cinema that makes us consider why exactly violence from those who are not expected to show defiance, violence from those individuals who are societally marginalized is so poignant to imagine. Similarly, Jack Halberstam contemplates on the depictions of violence perpetrated by lesbians or women:

> We have to be able to imagine violence, and our violence needs to be imaginable because the power of fantasy is not to represent but to destabilize the real. Imagined violence does not necessarily stop men from raping women, but it might make a man think twice about whether a woman is going to blow him away. Imagined violence does not advocate lesbian or female aggression, but it might complicate an assumed relationship between women and passivity or feminism and pacifism. (263)

Imagining those overpowered fighting back gives us space to also possibly imagine societal change in which marginalized communities do not feel threatened or left behind by their families. It would be far more constructive to imagine societal change but in the face of everyday violence against the most vulnerable societal groups cinema may offer an escape into forms of revengeful fantasies.

As opposed to disavowing all the conservative remarks on the queer lifestyle, New Queer Cinema depicts queer characters as embracing the death drive, the culture of death, the rejection of futurity in the sense of not participating in the physical act of reproduction (Edelman Ch. 1). New Queer Cinema openly confronts all the deviance attributed to queers and ultimately their fate during the HIV/AIDS crisis, which was posited as only righteous for

their daring effort to build a culture ostensibly based on carefree exploration of sexuality with the absence of procreation. Such culture which fails to ensure the future of humanity and disrupts systemic order (ibid. Ch. 1) is openly depicted throughout the films discussed here. They embrace the ugly and the violent, and refuse to compromise or assimilate, on the contrary – they engage with sexual promiscuity in an unapologetic way. Some of the films even focus on queer criminals and by doing so "challenge restrictive definitions of sexuality and force audiences to confront the diversity and fluidity of desire" (Benshoff and Griffin 221). Confronting the portrayal of cinematic queer criminals, outlaws, and rebels is exactly the goal of this thesis, demonstrating that queer deviance serves its purpose in provoking the audience to consider the very nature of labelling acts as deviant while pointing out the existence of cinematic tropes which were long utilized to characterize queer individuals.

2. Before New Queer Cinema: a Brief Overview

Queer characters, characters who did not comply to sexual or gender norms of the time, were depicted all throughout American cinema, even if their queerness was never named as such and was only implied through usage of signifiers left for the spectators to recognize. It could even be argued that the construction of gender and sexuality is essential to the history of cinema. Queerness in both sexual and gender performance has been present in cinema since its inception, even before the development of feature-length films (Mennel 1-2). However, queer-coded characters were often condemned, humiliated, and punished reinforcing the cultural hegemony of the time (Rich 4), and consolidating heterosexuality and gender-normativity as the status quo. In addition to their portrayal on the silver screen, it is needless to say that in the early days of Hollywood actual queer people were struggling to live their lives openly and were even encouraged to think of themselves as deviants due to their own marginalized sexual orientation or gender presentation (Benshoff and Griffin 42).

Portrayal of queer coded individuals even dates back to the silent era and female and male impersonators could be seen in films such as *The Spy* (1907), *When Women Win* (1909) and *Getting Even* (1909). The trope of the sissy, an effeminate humorous male character started appearing in the 1910s and continued well into the next decade. Some forms of lesbian representation began appearing in the 1920s and 1930s in European cinema. In Hollywood, one of the most prominent early examples of female queer depiction would be Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco* (1930) kissing a woman on the lips while in *Queen Christina* (1933), traces of lesbianism of the protagonist linger for the queer audience to latch onto (Davies 17-18). While queerness in mainstream cinema was heavily censored, queer filmmakers in Hollywood such as George Cukor, Dorothy Arzner, and James Whale made their mark while concealing their sexuality. Audiences dealt with the censorship and absence of openly queer individuals in cinema by seeking "subtext and coded language" and also by engaging in the long-standing tradition of gossip in the queer community as a way to identify individuals in Hollywood who might have been a part of the queer community themselves. (Rich 4).

Turning attention to spectatorship itself, within the gay male community, cinephilia became particularly important in identifying and bolstering of that same community. Even post-Stonewall and with the increasing mainstream visibility of queer individuals, cinema continued to facilitate in "the production and circulation of gay subcultural capital" now competing with popular music and television (Farmer 28). Even while films were only allowed to signify homosexuality through subtle imagery made to be important only to the keen queer observer, gay men started developing fascination with Hollywood divas and films which are even now considered as queer classics such as *The Wizard of the Oz* (Davies, 22). Traditions of gay spectatorship have survived for decades due to references and discussions within queer media and repertory screenings (Farmer 28).

By 1933, Production Code, also known as the Hays Code named after William Hays who was instrumental in its development and implementation, was introduced. The Code contained moral guidelines which all films had to abide by in order to be approved by the Production Code Administration and screened in major theaters. Among other things, this also constituted an effective prohibition of all depictions of queerness in Hollywood films, which as it has been mentioned earlier there weren't many positive examples of in the first place (Benshoff and Griffin 29-30; Davis 19). However, certain queer moments and characters still lingered on, frequently due to the fact that code officials managed to miss "more subtle instances" of queerness due to not being acquainted with the nuances of queer subcultures of this era, certain homosexual tropes such as the character of the pansy did not disappear, they were just made less obviously homosexual, married to a woman or completely asexual. In the same way, lesbian-coded mannish women were also stripped of their sexuality, becoming asexual or maiden aunts (Benshoff and Griffin 30-31).

This also entailed the introduction of queer-coded characters as villains. Although queerness is never shown explicitly in *Rope* (1948), the film itself is reminiscent of the real-life case of Leopold and Loeb, gay lovers turned murderers. Hitchcock also cast gay actors to play them. His cinematic choices in *Rope* were certainly different for the time period and could be described possibly as subversive, as perpetuating homophobia, or perhaps both at once. He chose to defy the cinematic tropes of queer-coded characters as solely tragic characters or characters that serve as a comic relief and he depicted queer individuals as murderers in one of the rare films of that era that even depicted queer individuals, albeit with a wink ensuring us all nothing truly queer is happening (Davies 19). The World War II years enabled more same-gender pairings which also allowed for homoerotic buddy couples to be depicted (Benshoff and Griffin 30-33). The emphasis here was on their masculinity- as long as cinema depicted the

men as masculine, as they would have to be in the army for instance, they were allowed to have meaningful, even loving relationships with one another (Russo, Ch. 2).

The forties and the sixties marked a transitional period in Hollywood. The rise of social movements striving for racial and gender equality and fall in profits both had an impact on the cinema that was being produced in this era. Homosexuality was in this period linked to other forms of revolutionary, albeit "un-American," activities such as communism and the civil rights movement (Benshoff and Griffin 86-88). During this time, there were more queer-coded characters in cinema, but it also marked a trend in presenting queer-coded characters as deviant and depraved as in the aforementioned *Rope* (1948) and *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959). The depiction of queer-coded characters began to be treated as acceptable as long as those characters met a tragic demise. Plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* were ultimately adapted to the silver screen in 1951 and 1958 respectively while simultaneously stripping the plot of the more sexual and queer references (ibid. 86-87).

After the Production Code had been revised in 1961, filmmakers could openly refer to homosexuality as long as it was handled with "care, discretion and restraint" (ibid. 93). Vito Russo states that what that essentially entailed was treating homosexuality as a "dirty secret" (Ch. 3). In mainstream cinema, queer characters were commonly either tragic suicidal figures, such as in *Children's Hour* (1961) and *Advise and Consent* (1963), source of comedy, such as in *Lover Come Back* (1961) and *That Touch of Mink* (1962), or villainous predators, such as in *Homicidal* (1961), *From Russia with Love* (1963, and *Goldfinger* (1964) (Benshoff and Griffin 96-97). In the majority of films which dealt with queerness, notable gay characters met a tragic demise either by "suicide or violent death" (Russo Ch. 1). Some of these films could be analyzed as criticizing heterosexism and marginalization itself but, particularly due to the lack of systematic analysis or articulation of homophobia in the mainstream, they also could be understood as blaming homosexuality itself for the situations that queer characters find

themselves in. Moreover, the Production Code Administration aimed to make these films cautionary tales rather than empathetic portrayals of queer individuals (Benshoff and Griffin 96).

The post-war era was also marked by the boom of independent cinema which was the alternative to Hollywood cinema which had to adhere to the censorship of the Production Code. Even though independent cinema became more visible during this time, it had existed for decades prior to the loosening and the dismantling of the Production Code (ibid. 108). Films with gay and lesbian themes as well as queer filmmakers could be located within the avant-garde cinema of the early Hollywood era. B. Ruby Rich speaks of James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber and their films *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) and *Lost in Sodom* (1933), as well as the film *Borderline* (1930) made by the poet H.D. and her lover Bryher. The avant-garde American cinema made after World War II was critically celebrated for its innovativeness and experimentation, albeit far less attention had been given to the queer sensibilities found within those films. Some of the noted directors of that era were George Kuchar, Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, James Broughton, Gregory Markopolous, and of course Andy Warhol (Rich 4).

After the Production Code was finally abandoned, the new ratings system was introduced in 1968 which entailed limiting audience attendance by age. A year later, on June 27 1969, Stonewall riots occurred marking a new era in queer activism and as an extension of it, the representation of queer individuals within media. While the Stonewall Inn, a predominantly gay bar in New York City was commonly raided by the police, that night the queer community fought back against the police. The rise in queer activism also coincided with the "sexual revolution" in the United States, which was characterized by its resistance to traditional values and which encouraged a more liberated approach to sexuality, birth control, and divorce, (Davies 66). Stonewall served as a "watershed moment" in queer history, including

queer cinema. The period before Stonewall was marked by coded language, role play, and double life, while the post-Stonewall period was notable for the politization of queer identities, celebration of gay pride and efforts in achieving legal and societal equality (Mennel 49).

After Stonewall, cinema began to take a new approach to queerness on a regular basis. The late sixties were characterized by the depictions of repression of homosexuality being associated with tragedy or violence as in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967) and *The Sergeant* (1968). The highlight of the late sixties was *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), giving a more positive and complex account of the queer experience (Benshoff and Griffin 136). However, the seventies signaled a change in viewing habits and cinematic trends, notably transgressive camp-oriented queer classics such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and John Waters' *Multiple Maniacs* (1970), *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Female Trouble* (1974) found their enthusiastic queer audiences (Davies 69). There were also more experimental works like Jim Bidgood's *Pink Narcissus* (1971) and Barbara Hammer's *Dyketactics* (1974) (Rich 5). Overall, for LGBTQ+ individuals, there was much progress being made both on the political and on the cinematic front. However, it could be noted that openly queer directors were still underground working outside the Hollywood of the time, the so-called New Hollywood marked by the turn to auterism, "the single vision of the director". Those celebrated auteurs were mostly heterosexual men while queer men and women were more often found in costume, design and make-up, demonstrating the division of labour between important masculine work and largely overlooked feminine work (Mennel 50-51).

In the eighties, the cinema belonging to the mainstream began to take a more inclusive approach to queerness and portrayal of LGBTQ+ individuals, depicting them as just ordinary people worth sympathizing with. This also came with the loss of exploitation and camp cinema which managed to provide more diversity to queer representation (ibid. 51). However, these portrayals were still being subjected to criticism from members of the LGBTQ+ community,

often quite understandably. Queer individuals were of course never a monolith and this is quite clearly demonstrated studying the political splits among the various subsections of the queer community. While a part of the community was active in criticizing the allegedly negative portrayal of queer individuals, what constituted or constitutes negative representation was not necessarily agreed upon (Benshoff and Griffin 179) and consensus on this perhaps cannot even be reached. Good example of this phenomenon was the polarized reception of the film *Cruising*, which was believed to have constituted a "homophobic distortion" of the queer scene among certain parts of the queer community. However, as Benshoff and Griffin note: "gay life isn't always pretty rainbows, Pride marches and Will & Grace re-runs" (93). The grittier, more tragic approach to queer themes is not necessarily an offensive one and can be given more profound meaning and interpretation.

Lesbian and bisexual women in the eighties were often depicted through love stories of "incidental lesbianism" such as in *Personal Best* (1982), *Lianna* (1983) and *Desert Hearts* (1985). However, unlike the former two *Desert Hearts* was applauded for its hopeful ending which presented lesbianism as more than just a phase for the protagonist and has provided the queer viewers with a hope for a better future for themselves (Mennel 51-52). These films could be placed in contrast with a less assimilative, subversive, even controversial perspective on feminism and lesbian identity in films such as *Born in Flames* (1983) and *She Must Be Seeing Things* (1987) (ibid. 61). Just as the world of mainstream cinema was getting more comfortable and sympathetic about queer characters as in the aforementioned *Personal Best* (1982), as well as *The World According to Garp* (1982), *Victor/Victoria* and *Making Love* (1982) (Benshoff and Griffin 184), the AIDS crisis began while global politics simultaneously leaned more conservative with the election of Ronald Reagan as the president of the United States. Mainstream cinema at the time either erased or fully desexualized queerness, making portrayal of queer intimacy once again stigmatized (ibid. 184). As with the depiction of lesbian

characters, more nuanced gay male characters were found within independent cinema with the examples being *Parting Glances* (1986), *Torch Song Trilogy* (1988), and of course *Mala Noche* (1985) directed by one of the most notable New Queer Cinema directors Gus Van Sant (Davies 96-100).

The breadth of the history of queer cinema undeniably cannot even begin to be fully covered within several pages. However, studying cinema imbued with queer sensibilities that came before New Queer and more broadly LGBTQ+-related cinema of the past two decades helps us recognize the influence it had on modern directors. This chapter also sheds light on the relationship LGBTQ+ individuals had with cinema and the complex history of representation that cinema still grapples with.

3. New Queer Cinema

Going through history of queer cinema, one may have noticed an abundance of tragedy, stereotypes, and erasure. However, queer spectatorship has historically provided us with a reparative reading of some of those films. One may argue even that New Queer Cinema itself lies on the shoulders of reparative reading, finding joy and different meaning in films that have been made in Hollywood with not necessarily affirmative intentions. Marc Francis, borrowing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, speaks about the importance of programming in fueling reparative reading of cinema. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick spoke about paranoid reading which dwells over negative portrayal; such reading could be found all throughout Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* focused on the tragic negative portrayal of queer individuals all throughout the history of cinema. Another approach to older, more controversial cinema would be reparative and this has historically been the approach taken in cinematic programming in arthouse cinemas. Reparative reading does not constitute fully positive feelings towards cinematic words but leaves space for "simultaneous spectatorial psychological and emotional states in which empowerment, ambivalence and shame, among others, may cohabitate" (Francis 409-411).

The so-called "camp reading" itself is one of the most notable examples of reparative strategies and involves temporal distance from the works produced but also "dialectical nearness" which then provide ways in which to engage with and find pleasure in tropes and clichés that Old Hollywood cinema would provide us with (ibid. 411). The culture of queer spectatorship is here crucial in both the creation of new works and the evaluation and appreciation of older cinema. Sedgwick herself notes that such evaluation of cinema in comparison to a paranoid reading is not more or less realistic or delusional but merely prioritizes a different set of affects, ambitions, and risks. The biggest takeaway from such an analysis would be the enrichment to our own approach to artistic works (Touching Feeling 150-151), finding joy and pleasure in the same cinema that might have brought pain and tragedy to certain queer cinephiles in the past. When encouraging the queer audiences to embrace pleasure in favor of trauma as a manner of spectatorship while recognizing pleasure can also come from "bad objects", Francis even mentions the seminal New Queer Cinema works *Swoon* (1992) and *Poison* (1991) both exemplifying the unabashed incorporation of queer "bad objects" or in other words, deviance, filth and shame into their very aesthetics (429).

Returning to the societal origins of the New Queer Cinema movement, Halperin and Taub describe the early 1990s as the time of disavowal of heteronormativity and of social norms which were characterized as "irreparably heterosexual and heterosexist" (7-8). In this moment in time, queer negativity and the reclamation of the controversial figures belonging to queer history came to be embraced. Exactly this is associated with the New Queer Cinema movement. In response to gay / queer pride, activists and academics decided to explore queer shame dissecting it within queer communities and attempting to deconstruct it in contrast to merely obscuring it. Allowing queer individuals to feel pride, also opened up space to openly address shame that they were still confronted with, as well as issues of class, race, and disability within the queer movement and the lack of acceptance of those who were marginalized in more ways

than one. Furthermore, opposition to the politics of Pride entails repudiation of assimilation (ibid 3-39), as well as "the increasingly sanitized, staid, politically vacuous and generally boring official gay culture of self-affirmation" (ibid. 8).

When B. Ruby Rich first described New Queer Cinema, she characterized their style as "homo pomo", homosexual post-modernism, describing some qualities these films shared, the tendency to use pastiche and appropriation, as well as their reworking of history and social constructionism. She also added qualities such as moving away from identity politics of older humanist approaches to cinema and perhaps most importantly their energetic, irreverent, simultaneously minimalist approach to cinema. She concluded that these films are "here, they're queer, get hip to them" (Rich 18). This movement within cinema had its share of critics as well. Right wingers used the films as their reasoning to defund public art projects and decried them as pornographic while some of its queer audience saw them as tedious, overly intellectual, or perhaps overly negative. More subtle and interesting criticism was levelled at sexist and racist dynamics still at play in some of the films which were a part of New Queer Cinema (Benshoff and Griffin 220-221). B. Ruby Rich on the other hand criticizes the gender balance in New Queer Cinema, referring to prevalence of gay male directors in the movement who were also the ones who were given the most critical acclaim and media attention. This also reflected on the trajectory of their careers. While the men of New Queer Cinema were given the chance to build a filmography, an opus of sorts, B. Ruby Rich mentions female queer directors such as Cheryl Dunye, Alex Sichel, and Rose Troche who directed seminal works belonging to the movement and then proceeded to vanish "into *The L Word* credits and an otherwise unknown universe" (202). In other words, female directors were not given the funding nor the opportunities to make more films and instead went on to work on television series where their vision and ideas were potentially compromised or at the very least could not be given the same amount of space and attention.

Specifically discussing the differences between Hollywood and New Queer Cinema depicting queer individuals through what some may identify as negative stereotypes, Henry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin point to the introspective intellectual dimension of choosing to tell these stories. As an alternative to the view of cinema as merely a form of entertainment, the aim of these films was to challenge the audience's experience as a form of metacinema, cinema that examines the construction of narratives through which stories of queer individuals are told while also combining various modes of storytelling:

> New Queer Cinema is a metacinema that simultaneously represents queer characters and concerns but also comments upon the form of those representations. This project is quite clearly tied to queer activism and queer theory. Both activists and theorists had seen the importance of breaking beyond stable identity categories and using confrontational tactics. Thus New Queer Cinema actively breaks down filmic categories such as genre, fiction, realism, and documentary—as well as deconstructs essentialist concepts of history, race, nation, gender, and sexuality. (222)

Beyond that, New Queer Cinema was created by queer filmmakers who on the very basis of being queer were themselves subjected to the very same stereotypes. Even if their work is characterized as negative or tragic, such sentiments throughout it could be understandable if we consider the historical context of the time when these films were made - after almost a decade of the American government's failure to appropriately react to the HIV/AIDS epidemic leading to the deaths of thousands of queer individuals, which includes many artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, Jack Smith, David Wojnarowicz and Marlon Riggs. All of them helped inspire others in both their activism and artistic production. The loss of so many individuals is immeasurable to the queer community, it is the loss of much of a generation that helped pave the way for today's political progress in LGBTQ+ rights.

4. Studying Queer Deviance Through Cinema

4.1. *Swoon* (1992)

Swoon is a film directed by Tom Kalin and released in 1992. The film premiered at Sundance, the same year that the aforementioned film scholar B. Ruby Rich who coined the term New Queer Cinema, moderated a panel entitled Barbed Wire Kisses bringing together enthusiastic queer filmmakers and the audience of the films belonging to this movement (Kalin 616). Shot in black and white, it focuses on the relationship between Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, who take turns narrating the film.

Prior to the two of them engaging in murder, Leopold and Loeb perform a series of misdemeanors: vandalism, burning buildings, breaking windows and they convey pleasure from doing so. The film is also interspersed with archival depictions of violence. The two steal a typewriter and Nathan buys a chisel and thirty feel of rope. Richard expresses his fear that Nathan will ruin their plans. They write a ransom letter demanding money in exchange for the safe return of the boy they plan to kidnap. It is shown to us that in between planning of the crime the two maintain their social life - they organize a gathering of their queer gender-non-conforming friends. One day they finally enact their plan and kidnap a boy named Bobby. Richard is the one who commits the murder. After doing so, the two ride with the body in the backseat of their car and abandon it in a vacant area. While Richard is almost gleeful after the murder, Nathan appears to be much more anxious and distraught. He calls the boy's father to inform him his son had been kidnapped whilst lying that the boy is safe. When the boy's body is found so are Nathan's glasses near the body. Richard meanwhile destroys the typewriter that they used to write the ransom letter so the typewriter could not be traced back to the two. However, the glasses are ultimately traced back to Nathan due to the frame and the hinges being patented and only three pairs in Chicago being sold. When questioned separately both tell their versions of the events. During the trial, the men are pathologized for their homosexual

inclinations. Phrenology is even being applied in the analysis of their faces and skulls. After they are convicted and both sentenced to prison, Richard is murdered inside the prison and the prisoner claims self-defense. Nathan Leopold is released thirty-three years after. From the narration, we are told he moved to Puerto Rico and married a woman named Gertrud Feldman Garcia.

Tom Kalin got his start making experimental AIDS-inspired short films, working for a non-profit education AIDSFilms which was focused on producing AIDS-prevention education. At the time he was also an activist, contributing to ACT UP meetings and protests (Kalin 609). While *Swoon* given the time setting it is placed in would initially not seem influenced by the AIDS crisis, Monica B. Pearl points out the centering of death and "control over death" in the film as well as Tom Kalin's previous work (31). Tom Kalin himself talked about his previous work in AIDS-education as influencing his future work in cinema (609-610). He also commented on the intersection of queerness and murder that is relevant to the film, pointing out the hypocrisy of nobody assuming heterosexuality has driven individuals to murder in other films that portray such content. *Swoon* is a film influenced by the rage and the anguish that were brought on by the AIDS crisis (ibid. 616). Kalin comments on another film, analyzed within this thesis, *The Living End*, pointing out its provocative energy and punk stance, not only expressing rage but also fun and power (613-617). *Swoon*, perhaps a much more direct narrative of queer violence than *The Living End*, portrays the protagonists engaging with other queer individuals, queer people engaging with other queers, maintaining a sense of comradery despite all the tragedy.

The plot of the film itself was based on the real case of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb who together murdered the fourteen-year-old Bobby Franks. The basic story presented in the film is fairly straightforward and truthful to real events. Nathan and Richard were two students attending University of Chicago, coming from affluent families, who were in a sexual

relationship with one another. During the trial, the two were presented as privileged, perverted "degenerates" and their motives for the murder were associated with their sexual inclinations. After Richard was murdered in prison, his murderer James Day was acquitted on the basis of the "gay panic" defense. Day claimed Richard Loeb was making sexual advances towards him and that he killed him in self-defense (Mogul Ch. 1). The film was also made in the aftermath of the Jeffrey Dahmer case, another case involving an infamous gay murderer. However, this film takes on more than just the shock factor of queer people also being capable of incredible violence and "evil" (Rich 28).

Also, as with the rest of films analyzed or mentioned here as examples of portrayal of queer deviance, *Swoon* rejects politics of positive representation "and turns the system on its head" (ibid. 28). It might not be entirely coincidental that the film revolves around the murderers' kidnapping and murdering a child. Corruption of the Child is of utmost concern to the conservatives and the family preservers. This child not being just a child, but rather an image of innocence and promise of futurity that Lee Edelman speaks about. Conservative politics or rather heteronormativity constantly appeals to the children, not so much literal children, but Child as a figure (Ch. 1). "What will the children think, what will the children say?" – is a constant political linguistic construction being expressed among the conservatives adamant on removing queerness from public life. The ultimate provocation here is that *Swoon* decides to portray Loeb and Leopold, real-life child-murderers who represent the ultimate threat of queerness, threat to futurity, to reproduction now taking place on a literal level. It just exemplifies how New Queer Cinema differs from mainstream contemporary films about gay individuals. It is not afraid to tackle the biggest conservative fears and confirm them, evoking a resistant attitude to any kind of respectability politics and to trying to appeal to the masses in portraying queer people as all "perfectly normal" with the same dreams and aspirations

heterosexual people have. As Tom Kalin himself commented on the tagline on the UK poster claiming the film puts the "homo back in homicide":

> I often quipped then that I believed in equal- opportunity homicide. Heterosexuality remains a durable institution. When people view Billy Wilder's fictional narrative Double Indemnity no one ever exclaims, "Those nutty heterosexuals, they're fucking so much it caused them to murder". (613)

Indeed, there are many films portraying heterosexual people as capable of violence, abuse, murder yet negative representation is assumed to reflect poorly only on all marginalized people. One bad queer person is representative of an entire community, one bad cisgender heterosexual person is an outlier, an anomaly, a rotten apple.

Swoon essentially embodies Lee Edelman's response to invocation of the Child in response to the threat of queerness:

> Queers must respond to the violent force of such constant provocations not only by insisting on our equal right to the social order's prerogatives, not only by avowing our capacity to promote that order's coherence and integrity, but also by saying explicitly what Law and the Pope and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation of queer sexuality: Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop. (Ch. 1)

Ultimately such a response offers an opportunity to create something outside of heteronormativity and the conservative order of affairs. It is the lack of adherence to social expectations and norms that can ultimately truly liberate queer individuals as the Child will always be invoked. *Swoon*, as well as much of the rest of the New Queer Cinema canon,

embraces the negativity of queerness and ultimately refuses to make queerness palatable for straight people.

Swoon is challenging to the spectator, its characters are not meant to be identified with but ultimately asks the question why couldn't queer people be "bad people"? It calls upon another interesting tendency, the failure to engage with the more "questionable" historical figures that happened to have engaged in same-sex relationships (Lemmey and Miller 1-18) As we remember artists and activists who happened to be queer, we at the same time place aside the "criminals, despots and bigots" (ibid. 17). This narrative, the whitewashing of queer history, primarily the history of white male homosexuality is also accompanied with the desire to integrate oneself into heteronormativity and capitalism, and comes with the erasure of gender non-conformity, "appropriation of the bodies and sexualities of racialized people and denial of those people's full humanity, political participation and equality" and of course, the very project of establishing of the clear-cut construct of sexuality (ibid. 5).

In *Swoon*, history is played with through reminders of others minorities, not just two men who were in a romantic relationship that would retroactively label them as not just child murderers but gay child murderers, but also gender non-conforming individuals, we see individuals of undetermined gender, perhaps transgender, perhaps in drag. There is also an element of intentional "historical anachronism" as with the black female stenographer who appeared in the courtroom scene. Tom Kalin states that his goal with the film was to challenge audience to do self-enquiry on the subject of those who own historical narratives and have the claim to writing history (613). B. Ruby Rich also speaks about how the film portrays the historical unity of various groups of outsiders, Jewish people, black people, queers, even murderers, all labelled under the "commonality of perversion" (27-28) or deviance, it might be said. In that way, the film returns to the previously mentioned constructions of deviance as ever-shifting and fundamentally marginalizing.

4.2.*The Living End* (1992)

In comparison to *Swoon*, *The Living End*, directed by Gregg Araki deals with the AIDS crisis in a more overt, obvious manner. However, even though both main characters are HIV positive, the film itself is not about their struggle with the illness. Luke does struggle a bit to accept his diagnosis but other than that, the anger at the society and the government that allowed the AIDS crisis to happen so carelessly is at the center of the narrative. The HIV virus itself however is treated as almost liberating in the minds of the protagonists. Now that they are infected with what is deemed as the worst possible sentence in one's queer existence, they can do "whatever the fuck (they) want" (Pearl 28). *The Living End* explores being newly diagnosed with HIV, but also delves into the sense of doom associated with the full realization regarding the lack of care that the US Government has shown to the queer community. The sense of mortality that the protagonists experience ultimately makes them more apathetic and carefree.

The film begins with Jon being newly diagnosed with HIV and experiencing a tremendous crisis and despair. He meets Luke, the antithesis to his anxious, intellectual self, who is also an HIV-positive gay man, and despite initial reluctance, Jon begins a sexual and romantic relationship with him. The two then set on a journey to nowhere, each for a different reason. Luke runs from the police as he shot a homophobic police officer and Jon is seemingly infatuated with Luke and lost in life, trying to come to terms with being HIV-positive. After a series of discussions and arguments, Jon realizes that his relationship with Luke is doomed due to Luke's maniacal nature and informs him that he is leaving him and ending the road trip. The film culminates in a physical altercation and an intense sexual encounter during which Luke holds a gun to his own mouth. After all of this, Jon seemingly walks away from Luke forever but at the very last moments of the films comes back to embrace him while Luke is still sitting on the ground.

Gregg Araki's whole career is composed of films which explore queer defiance/deviance and a certain nihilist, negative, dark stance on the world around them. The credits brazenly introduce *The Living End*, his breakthrough film, as "an irresponsible film by Gregg Araki". *The Living End* could be described as a queer road-trip film in the vein of *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Badlands* or even early Godard, "an existential film for a postporn age" (Rich 27). Araki's films, strongly belonging to the New Queer Cinema movement, are blatantly anti-normative and portray characters as unapologetically sexual, immoral and not interested in playing into respectability politics that the mainstream cinema of that era gladly embraced (Roig-Mora 148). Araki labelling his own film as irresponsible directly plays against both representation and respectability politics and also against the narrative that the task of the directors is to provide morality tales and positive role-models for the viewers. It challenges the notion that personal media consumption is reflective of our own morals and even influences our decisions. This notion is fundamentally the basis of traditionalist views on the function of cinema and the basis of the production code itself.

It is reminiscent of the famous arthouse director Claire Denis being asked during a Q&A portion of the screening of her film *High Life* why her films did not provide strong female role models. Denis allegedly provocatively replied: "What the fuck, I am not a social worker" (Huseby). Indeed, cinema offers us an escape into fantasy, dream, nightmare or perhaps just voyeurism. It is up to the spectators to find the meaning of watching films and for them this can obviously range from entertainment to wish fulfilment to education to intellectual stimulation. Not every film is meant to be easily enjoyable or even "fun." There is plenty of tragedy in reality and there is plenty of tragedy in cinema. Possibly, the depiction of violence and tragedy can offer catharsis to those watching or perhaps, it can establish an artificial sense of intimacy and connection between the spectator and the cinematic characters. As it is evident in the chapter on the history of queer representation in cinema, queer history is riddled with the issues

of tragic demise, “littered with the corpses of gender and sexual deviants” (Love, Feeling Backwards 1). While there are tendencies to merely refute negative representation, queer theory itself has reclaimed the word queer from a slur to an identifier (ibid. 1-2). Queer theory is based on taking back tragedy and owning it.

At the beginning of the film, Jon states how it’s April 14th, marking the first day of the rest of his life as this is the day that he discovered he was HIV positive. In the following flashback scene, the doctor ensures him how it is possible to live “perfectly happy normal life” even with the diagnosis. Jon meets Luke right after the latter shot three homophobic men who threatened to hurt him while calling him a faggot. When the two have sex and Jon implies that he recently found out he was HIV positive, Luke assures him that there is nothing to worry about and tells him: “Welcome to the club, partner”. The next morning Luke talks about how both of them are going to die young, but it soothes him as he never wanted to live long. He refers to the HIV/AIDS crisis as a genocide and as there is nothing that they themselves can do about it, they also have nothing to lose and ultimately should go through life with the frame of mind of “fuck work, fuck the system”. While Jon is passive, contemplative and depressed, Luke outwardly expresses his anger at the world while simultaneously coming to terms with his deviant status.

Later on, while they are on the run together, driving aimlessly through California, their personalities and life philosophies once again clash. Luke plays with his gun and fantasizes about shooting George H. W. Bush or injecting him with their blood, commenting on how if they were to do that, a cure for HIV/AIDS would be found “by tomorrow.” Luke’s fantasies parallel those of the artist David Wojnarowicz who himself in his memoir fantasizes about revenge:

> I wake up from daydreams of tipping amazonian blowdarts in “infected blood” and spitting them at the exposed necklines of certain politicians or nazi-preachers or

> government health-care officials or the rabid strangers parading against AIDS clinics in the nightly news suburbs. I carry this rage in moments like some kind of panic and yes I am horrified that I feel this desire for murder but it all starts with a revolving screen of memories that mixes past and present. It contains the faces and bodies of people I loved struggling for life, people I loved and people who I thought made a real difference in the world, or at least who lent some kind of balance to those whose images and intents we get served daily through the media.(103-104)

It is unclear whether Gregg Araki was influenced by Wojnarowicz's writing or if the *The Living End* simply captured that era's zeitgeist. These fantasies of revenge captured through any kind of art seem to be deeply rooted in the grief that queer people had felt at the time. Tom Kalin has spoken about it in relation to making *Swoon* and Gregg Araki seemed to have felt it too. In a time of loss, queer people struggled with complicated feelings. While HIV/AIDS crisis at this time in history might seem almost abstract, spoken about in terms of factoids and famous people who have died of it, many queer people at the time lost their friends and their (chosen) family.

In *The Living End*, Jon becomes far more frustrated with Luke and their road-trip which culminates in an altercation during which Luke tells him that there is no going back to normal for him after receiving the diagnosis:

> You really want to go back to your "I'm HIV-positive and everything's normal, hunky-dory" life? Well, go fucking right ahead. Just don't forget to have sex in a plastic bag and don't plan anything too far in the future. Don't you get it? We're not like them. We don't have as much time. So we got to grab life by the balls and go for it. You can piss it all away in that stupid job of yours until you wither away and they feed you to the worms. I say "fuck that shit, man".

In the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis and particularly the diagnosis, assimilation does not even exist as an option for them anymore. Not only does this represent Luke's refusal to conform, it

also represents a defense of uniquely queer modes of existence. The conservative gay narrative on the AIDS crisis was that it finally made gay men "grow up". With the threat of HIV/AIDS, gay men would no longer be promiscuous non-monogamous pleasure seekers, but could instead assimilate (Crimp 3-4). Heather Love frames it in her defense of queer "unhappiness." She speaks about the new era of gay assimilation where gay Americans are given the opportunity to live out the quintessential American dream along with the marriage, the children, and the house (53-54) and due to the traditional association of queerness with disappointment and depression "being happy signifies participation in the coming era of gay possibility" (ibid. 54).

However, happiness becomes a pressure placed upon queer individuals and so does the erasure of any traces of negative emotions. Partly due to marginalization, queer people have not only invented their own modes of being and alternative forms of happiness but also a remarkable ability of living life without eternal hope for a quintessential happy ending. This has given way to a queer culture with its expressions of bitchiness and cynicism imbedded in the very fabric of queerness (Love, Compulsory Happiness 54-63). It is evident that there is plenty of those types of expressions in *The Living End*. It is not so much that queer people should refuse to be happy, or that queer existence is doomed to unhappiness. Besides defending tragic portrayals in art, Love's argument seems more rooted in rejecting the dominant constructions of what it means to be happy.

Going back to the topic of HIV/AIDS, very important in the context of the film and the New Queer Cinema movement, years prior to the epidemic were marked by the greatest growth of the activist queer movement in history, which makes it even more offensive to paint queer culture, particularly gay male culture in this case, as frivolous and merely hedonistic. The epidemic then marked a huge loss, not just in the sense of loss of human lives (Crimp 4-14), but also cultural and sexual institutions that then began to wane or were under attack for being "too associated with illness and death" (ibid 14). *The Living End* begins with Jon, one of the

protagonists seen in a car with a bumper sticker that says “Choose death” while narrating his own journal entry. Later on, Luke, the other protagonist, spray-paints “I blame society” in an underground parking lot. The film is filled with anti-societal, nihilist messaging by the characters. However, the film cannot be characterized by nihilism only. While the relationship between Jon and Luke is co-dependent and ultimately destructive, it does provide Jon with the acceptance of his HIV status. Despite the moral panic concerning gay sex, Jon and Luke are two HIV-positive men portrayed in an erotic, sexual light. Their relationship is sexually charged and sex between them is portrayed as lacking the guilt and the shame that the popular media depiction of the HIV/AIDS crisis tried to inflict on the queer community.

In the 1990s particularly, with the success of new drugs, it was not only conservative right wingers who were fixated on the supposedly promiscuous gays, it was the popular, widely-celebrated gay journalists too expressing their fears that there might be a return to promiscuity since the illness was not necessary a death sentence anymore (Crimp 265). The issue here is that despite queerness becoming a matter of identity regardless of sexual habits, particular queer sexual habits were still under the umbrella of immoral, deviant behavior that is supposed to be widely regarded as unwanted and irresponsible. Meanwhile, the portrayal of queer people who suffered from HIV/AIDS was always cloaked in the lack of sexuality, disease, death. There was a particular reasoning for that as Douglas Crimp explains when talking about portrayal of PWAs (Persons with AIDS):

> After seeing Danny, it occurred to me that there is a deeper explanation for portrayals of PWAs, and especially of gay men with AIDS, as desperately ill, as either grotesquely disfigured or as having wasted to fleshless, ethereal bodies. These are not images that are intended to overcome our fear of disease and death, as is sometimes claimed. Nor are they meant only to reinforce the status of the PWA as. victim or pariah, as we often

> charge. Rather, they are, precisely, phobic images, images of the terror at imagining the person with AIDS as still sexual.

This is exactly why the portrayal of two very attractive HIV-positive men having sex is so important and provocative. It shows us that people with HIV/AIDS continue living their lives as sexual beings. While we in contemporary times know that HIV-positive people can have normal, long, fulfilling lives with access to drugs, that perception was not so common back then.

The film ultimately ends in uncertain but vaguely hopeful terms. After Jon decides to end their relationship, Luke refuses to let him leave. He pulls out his gun again with his finger on the trigger while simultaneously telling Jon that he would never find anyone who cares as much about him. His infatuation coupled with his lack of restraint or boundaries essentially culminates in intense despair. The two wrestle to the ground and Luke knocks Jon unconscious with his gun. When Jon wakes up, he has his hands tied behind his back and Luke wrestles him to the ground again and tells him that he loves him more than life, he has sex with Jon there while holding a gun in his own mouth, he throws away the gun afterwards and Jon slaps him and then seems to leave. However, he comes back, sits down on the ground next to Luke, and rests his head on Luke's shoulder.

Luke's violent acts can also be understood as retaliation for the systemic violence inflicted upon him by homophobia and governmental neglect. Death seems to haunt the film intertwined with the violence and sex. Death is all around, unseen but creeping throughout, the death sentence of being diagnosed with HIV, the article Jon is said to be writing on the death of cinema, the off-screen death of homophobes that Luke has shot, the last scene in which Luke holds a gun to his mouth while having sex with Jon. However, the film ends on a hopeful note, after the two protagonists get into a physical altercation, at the end of the film Luke throws away his gun and Jon comes back to embrace him. Despite it all, the violence, the carelessness,

the nihilism, care for one another seems to win. Romance between Luke and Jon seems futile given Luke's extremist tendencies, yet simultaneously Luke's rage at the world seems understandable. Luke also manages to help Jon in a way his best friend Darcy cannot. He helps him make peace with his diagnosis and not blame himself but rather "blame society".

The film also talks about those individuals that society views as valuable and those it disregards. Luke tells an anecdote of a homeless lady who climbed to the top of a skyscraper and a big crowd witnessed her.

> I saw this bag lady jump off a skyscraper. It was at the corner of Hollywood and Vine during rush hour. Man, it was just like in the movies. This big crowd gathered around. The cops came. The fire department came and stuff. Everyone was all trying to talk her down. I mean, people who wouldn't even give her a nickel if she were begging in the street. Now all of a sudden her life became this fucking precious thing to them. Well, she took the plunge. She landed feet first. She bounced back up like ten feet in the air after she hit. And the sound of it, man. Oh, man, I'll never forget it. It was so loud, like this thunder crack. Every bone in her body shattered at once. Fucking gnarly.

He points out the hypocrisy of people who probably never would have helped her otherwise caring about her life now. Marginalized lives are seen as disposable. Marginalized people aren't provided the mental and medical care that they need yet there is performative outrage over self-destructive behavior and the suicides of those most vulnerable and oppressed. The same thing could be said about the societal response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Those who happened to contract the virus through "innocent" means like blood transfer or heterosexual sex were given far more public sympathy than the people who engaged in gay sex or drug use. While if asked, most people would probably deny believing that gay men, transgender people, or IV drug users deserved to die, the public reaction was nevertheless more ambivalent to those deaths. Unprotected gay sex or drug use were still seen through a moralistic lens of deviance with the

refusal to see them as everyday occurrences (Crimp 198). *The Living End* comments on this barrier between those rejected by society and those who manage to adapt or conform.

Even though there is anger abound depicted in *The Living End*, there is tenderness as well. There is tenderness in the way Jon's best friend is worried about him and how he keeps contacting her all throughout the film, there is tenderness in the way Jon caresses Luke at the end of the film. *The Living End* portrays revenge but it does not relish in it. It does not portray the graphic violence of said revenge. Most violence is either a fantasy, like Luke fantasizing about killing the president, or taking place off-screen, like Luke murdering a homophobic police officer.

The violence also provokes the question of how to live in a society that does not necessarily find your existence socially acceptable and shows indifference to your suffering. What even constitutes violence and what causes greater harm - individual acts of violence or the US government neglecting a large part of their population due to the fact they engage in the "wrong" kind of sex? Once again, David Wojnarowicz talks about his own disgust at himself for reacting to governmental and social violence with feelings of murder but yet again in the US at the time "public and social murder" of queer individuals was a barely acknowledged occurrence (107-108). Rage seems to again be a legitimate reaction to societal problems but rage can also be turned into calls for action, into activism, into art seen by other people who might be on the other side of the world grappling with those same feelings. Queer people should always be allowed to be troubled, troublesome, confused, complicated, tragic, depressed, angry. Understandably, frequent demands for solely positive representation, no dead gay people, no heartbreaks, no violence, no queer love-relationships broken by the end of a film or a tv series stand as an over-correction of the history of queer representation. However, those demands are damaging to creativity and stand in contrast with much radical work done by queer directors

who themselves have not refrained from supposedly controversial issues and morally ambiguous characterizations.

4.3. *Bound* (1996)

Bound is a film released in 1996 directed by the Wachowskis. Lana and Lilly Wachowski made *Bound*, their first feature film, prior to their respective gender transitions. Since then much attention has been given to rereading their filmography through the lens of transness. *Bound* is surprisingly progressive for its time in its treatment of queerness, deviance, and sex work. *Bound* focuses on a butch/femme pairing of Corky and Violet. The two set their eyes on one another in an elevator. Corky is a former convict who comes back from jail only to be pulled into another adventure by Violet who, despite being a lesbian, is a former stripper and a sex worker. Violet is stuck in an abusive relationship with Caesar, a member of the mafia. After another mob member is discovered to have been stealing money, the two protagonists come up with a plan to steal a large amount of mob money themselves with the "perfect" alibi. However, their plan backfires as they did not take into account exactly how unpredictable and unhinged Caesar was. After their relationship is discovered and therefore their plan is ruined, Caesar threatens to murder both of them. However, the two ultimately outsmart him. Corky, who he knocked unconscious and left tied up inside a closet, frees herself and Violet pretends that Caesar forced her to lie to the mafia and tells the mobsters that she needs their help. After Violet shoots Caesar, the film flashforwards to the future. Violet talks to another mafia member Mickey and it is implied he thinks Caesar ran off with the money. Meanwhile, Corky is waiting for her elsewhere with a red truck parked on the sideway. The two hold hands and kiss inside the truck and then drive off.

Bound is frequently not included in the New Queer Cinema canon. B. Ruby Rich the originator of the term, mentions it once when speaking about the lethal lesbians "genre" in cinema, noting how it is one of the few films within it afforded a rather happy ending (113).

Lana and Lilly Wachowski have come out after the release of the film, but their previous films are also now being re-evaluated through the lens of their queerness or rather their gender identity. The argument that the directors' transness informs not only the films released after their transition but also the ones made prior to it is mostly commonly evoked with *The Matrix* (1999), but the same could be said for *Bound*. By coming out as transgender and also telling their audience that their transgender "self-actualization" was integral to their cinematic production, that the two have coincided, Lana and Lilly Wachowski have retroactively rendered the transgender experience as an already substantial part of cultural consumption (Keegan 4-8).

Even prior to the two coming out, it was notable that Susie Bright was hired as a "technical" intimacy consultant for the film. Susie Bright was known as a lesbian "sex expert" who was recognized in the community for her columns in the magazine On Our Backs and whose lectures, columns, essays, interviews were later published as books (Noble 14). This was the initial detail which provided *Bound* with some legitimacy and praise for the treatment of its lesbian characters, the authenticity of their sexual encounters and elements of their presentation like Corky's labrys tattoo and the leather clothing that both protagonists are seen wearing (Keegan 8-17). This thesis takes a stance towards recognizing *Bound* as a queer film belonging to the canon of New Queer Cinema. Moreover, if B. Ruby Rich's previously mentioned initial description of homo pomo (18) was to be taken into consideration, *Bound* would perfectly illustrate it, it uses pastiche and appropriates the classic noir genre which it turns on its head both with its ending and its reconstruction of cinematic gender tropes. It is unabashedly deviant, the main characters are two lesbians, one a former felon, another a sex worker, who escape the film both getting the girl, one another, and getting the stolen money from the mafia. Finally, *Bound* is undoubtedly energetic and irreverent and refuses to take itself too seriously with the scenes of masculine rage being depicted as pathetic and the two women outsmarting the mob members who have underestimated Violet due to her being coquettish and soft-spoken.

Crime and sex are interconnected in the film. Corky, who is a former convict who served five years for theft, even at one point compares sex to stealing: “For me, stealing is a lot like sex. Two people that want the same thing sit in a room and they talk, they start to plan and it's like flirting, a kind of foreplay, because the more they talk about it, the wetter they get”. While again, some would repudiate this portrayal as it would constitute negative representation, throughout this whole thesis negative representation has been defended over and over again (as have the portrayals of rage, anger, and revenge) as being potentially cathartic to the queer viewer. This film could be interpreted as revengeful but also as an escape from the closet, from heteronormativity, from violent men and from abuse. The closet in queer terminology is a widespread metaphor for self-disclosure of queerness. It is a complicated, omnipresent term with its imperfections, particularly problematic for the fact that queer people are forced to come in and out of the closet with new people and in new environments. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the closet is so central to queer narratives making it inescapable (Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet 68-69). It is heavily featured in this film as well. The film begins with Corky tied up in a then unidentified person’s closet unable to leave. From there, it offers a flashback into how Corky ended up in someone’s closet. The closet as a metaphor for queerness is very clear here. Corky literally frees herself of the closet and the violence of a closeted concealed shameful existence. Simultaneously a sentence that keeps being repeated and heard in flashbacks is Violet saying “I want out”. She also says: “I want a new life”. They both constantly express the desire to come out as a liberating notion.

The film takes a progressive stance towards sex work. Even though Violet is a lesbian, she is also a former stripper and when Corky sees men coming in and out of Violet’s apartment, she questions Violet about it. Through their turbulent discussion later on she finds out Violet is a sex worker or rather explicitly that she does not consider the encounters she has with these

men as sex but rather as work. She also compares the two of them and places their lives in direct parallel:

> You made certain choices in your life that you paid for. You said you made them because you were good at something and it was easy. Do you think you're the only one that's good at something? We make our own choices and we pay our own prices. I think we're more alike than you want to admit.

Corky, who insists that they are very different, does not offer a lot of empathy and understanding for her position and Violet tells her to leave her apartment.

Historically, lesbianism and prostitution existed at an intersection, when studying lesbians and prostitutes in the US from the mid-19th century to mid-20th century, the conclusion is that lesbianism proliferated among sex workers. However, this is also complicated by the shared perception of deviance of lesbians and prostitutes and the equation of prostitution and same-sex sexual behavior between women in studies which focused on both without differentiation. Lesbians and prostitutes were both "sex deviants" of the female gender, both were socially undesirable groups of women, a threat to social order, and both lesbianism and prostitution were considered "sex perversions" (Miller 67-85). In contemporary times there are also lesbian sex workers who do not count the sex they have as a part of their work as truly sex (Shrage and Stewart Ch. 1) so that line from the film is close to reality. The film does not ultimately place moral judgment on Violet. It also never places sex work in the domain of regret or even fault. After all, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two transgender women of color who were notable and prominent figures in Stonewall itself, the watershed moment in queer history, were also sex workers (Lemmey and Miller 306). Queer people have historically engaged in (survival) sex work and still do even if that would bring shame to those sections of the community, insistent on separating all stigmatized forms of labor from the LGBTQ+ community. *Bound* concludes with the two women establishing a partnership both in their heist

and in romance. The two conclude that they are one and the same at the very end of the film prior to driving off into the unknown. Both of these women are at the societal margins and have lived long surviving to the best of their abilities.

Another interesting aspect of *Bound* are its neo-noir elements, notably the treatment of gender within the genre. In classical neo-noir, the femme fatale had three options: die, reform or turn out "not to be a femme fatale after all" (Straayer 222). The true unrepentant femme fatale was denied a romantic relationship at the end of the film. In *Bound*, Corky, the more masculine or butch lesbian, encounters Violet, coded in many ways as the noir femme fatale. She is seductive, involved in crime, and needs a favor from Corky, whom she expresses sexual attraction towards. The film ultimately shows that Violet is both the femme fatale and a femme lesbian (ibid 222-229). She is the femme fatale with men who she only seduces for her gain and she is the femme fatale when she ultimately shoots her mafia boyfriend Caesar. Caesar is here at times a comic relief; he parodies classic cinematic gangster masculinity. He is constantly incapable of performing "tough" masculinity, he is anxious, he lacks control, yet he is also delusional. Ultimately it is Violet, whom he continuously underestimated, who shoots him and runs off with the money. As a femme lesbian, she proves to Corky that she can in fact be trusted and the film ends up with the realization that in fact the two complement one another, that they are more similar than Corky ever thought (ibid. 222-229). Violet escapes the constraints of her trope and she escapes the constraints of heteronormativity.

While we have these two lesbians framed as deviants both on the basis of being lesbians, including in the film itself by the misogynist clueless Caesar, they are of course deviants by also engaging in criminal activities. Despite all of this, they are still afforded complexity, care and empathy. They are afforded a happy ending that is also affirming to those spectators expecting punishment for their rebellion.

Happy endings may be just ideologically heteronormative endings and queer theory certainly does not shy away from embracing sadness and tragedy as parts of queer life. Happy endings can also take on a form of "queer happiness," of being "happily queer" as opposed to merely a "happy queer," (Ahmed 115), constituting happiness that often reveals the sacrifice of personal desire in order to be considered normal. The kinds of endings embodying genuine "queer happiness" can explore acts of deviating from normality, of causing trouble. The greatest strength of those kinds of stories is that they also refuse to punish their deviants, to "put (them) back to place" (ibid. 107-117). *Bound* offers us the two protagonists making their own destiny and doing so on their own terms. Continuously throughout the film, both of them defy attempts to be placed back to their place and they both make troubling choices to liberate themselves. By the end of the film, however, they are happily queer, completely out of bounds of conventional life.

5. Conclusion

All three films analyzed within this thesis illustrate the importance of complicated portrayals. They also represent elements of New Queer Cinema that have made it such an important movement within the tradition of queer cinema. The irreverence and passion towards authenticity of queerness and its rejection of assimilation differentiate it from popular contemporary mainstream depictions of queer individuals. It was necessary to examine the history of queer cinema as history informs current artistic production. It also explains why the response to tragedy within queer art has been greeted with such ambivalence.

Nevertheless, works constituting negative queer representation were recontextualized in the post-Stonewall era. The power of spectatorship and film programming has provided new ways of making peace with the past. New Queer Cinema was made by queer directors for the queer gaze. It has given way to expression of "negativity" and has tackled historically challenging issues such as queer murderers, queer sex workers, queer tragedies, queer revenge. All of those are assumed to reflect badly on the queer community, the community that can now enjoy even Christmas romantic comedies and teenage uplifting shows dedicated to showing that queers are just like heterosexuals. However in most of those narratives, it is up to the queer individuals to seek acceptance from a heteronormative society. While some members of the LGBTQ+ community probably relate to those portrayals, New Queer Cinema and other traditions and forms of queer art outside the mainstream dare to imagine life free of seeking acceptance. This vision of existence includes the formation of chosen families, being active in alternative communities, and liberating themselves of expectations to societally conform, which includes the expectations to be monogamous, marry or have children. In two out of three of the films analyzed, queer people do achieve some form of liberation or even happiness by the end of the film, but they do so without opting for the construction of happiness that involves social conformity and the erasure of queer culture itself.

All of the films analyzed are interconnected, the theme that runs through them are chosen alliances between queer people. They are challenging in a way that they contemplate the social construction of deviance and what it means to be a “bad gay”. Can queer people feel a connection with those who resort to violence? Judging by the popularity of New Queer Cinema among queer people and the academics that the movement resonated with, they obviously can and are able to even derive pleasure from such portrayals. These depictions are reminiscent of the radicalism of early queer activism and remind us that queer history as well as queer cinema are permeated with outwardly sexual, gender non-conforming, deviant, criminal, morally gray individuals.

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7. Queer Deviance in New Queer Cinema: Summary and Key Words

This thesis revolves around the phenomenon of deviance in relation to films within the cinematic movement dubbed New Queer Cinema. This cinematic movement originated in the nineties and featured unapologetically queer directors making irreverently vibrant films that challenged conventions of positive representation and heteronormativity. The thesis engages with academic queer theory as well as the history of portrayal of queer individuals in order to explore and analyze the themes present throughout the films within the movement. It features analysis of three films: *Swoon* (1992), *The Living End* (1992), and *Bound* (1996). These films were chosen for their challenging view on deviant subjects, and critical perspective towards assimilation and societal norms. They challenge the viewers' conception of morality and what even constitutes deviance.

Key words: New Queer Cinema, queer theory, deviance, violence, representation

8. *Queer* devijantnost u novom *queer* filmu: sažetak i ključne riječi

Ovaj diplomski rad bavi se fenomenom devijantnosti povezanim s filmovima koji pripadaju kinematografskom pokretu nazvanom novi *queer* film. Ovaj kinematografski pokret nastao je u devedesetim godinama prošlog stoljeća i uključivao je filmove *queer* redatelja koji su problematizirali konvencije heteronormativnosti te koji nisu nužno bili zabrinuti za to da *queer* pojedinci budu pozitivno prikazani. Također *queer* teorija kao i povijest prikaza *queer* pojedinaca u filmu korišteni su za ilustraciju i objašnjenje tema u analiziranim filmovima. Fokus je stavljen na tri filma: *Vrtoglavica* (1992.), *Do Samog Kraja* (1992.) i *Vezane* (1996.). Ovi filmovi su izabrani zbog svog prikaza devijantnih pojedinaca, kao i zbog svog kritičnog stava prema društvenim normama i asimilaciji LGBTQ+ zajednice. Oni također potiču gledatelje na razmišljanje o društvenoj konstrukciji moralnosti i devijantnosti.

Ključne riječi: Novi *queer* film, *queer* teorija, devijantnost, nasilje, prikaz *queer* pojedinaca