

**“It’s a freak!”: The Construction of the Monstrous-Feminine in
contemporary feminist horror cinema**

An Analysis of *Jennifer’s Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the construction of the monstrous feminine in contemporary feminist horror cinema through a visual critical discourse analysis (VCDA) of *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024). By analyzing how visual elements like costume, color, lighting, mise-en-scène, reveal discourses of gender, identity, and monstrosity, the study examines how these films subvert horror tropes and dominant representations of femininity. Drawing on feminist film theory, fourth-wave feminist discourse, and theories of abjection, posthumanism, and camp, the analysis is structured around four discursive sites: (1) the monstrous body and abjection, (2) archetypes of the monstrous feminine, (3) the feminine ideal, and (4) rage, destruction, and revenge. The findings suggest that these films reimagine monstrosity not as a threat to be vanquished, but as a feminist and queer mode of resistance which weaponizes grotesque bodies, exaggerated femininity, and violent rupture to expose and challenge patriarchal norms. By centering female authorship, visual excess, and affective intensity, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates in horror scholarship and confirms the genre's radical potential to critique and reconfigure societal structures.

KEYWORDS: *Monstrous Feminine, Feminist Horror, Visual Critical Discourse Analysis, Abjection, Camp*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Horror has always occupied a unique and enduring space within cinema, captivating audiences with its ability to evoke intense emotions and delve into the darkest corners of human psychology. From the early days of silent cinema and gothic monster films like *Frankenstein* (Whale, 1931) and *Dracula* (Browning, 1931), to the psychological torment of *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), the genre has undergone a remarkable evolution in response to shifting historical moments and collective anxieties (Baako, 2023, p. 7). As Alfred Hitchcock once remarked, “A glimpse into the world proves that horror is nothing other than reality” (Stewart, 2018, p. 279). This statement highlights how horror acts as a cultural mirror that reflects the tensions and taboos of the societies that produce it. This long tradition culminates in socially charged works like *Get Out* (Peele, 2017), where horror becomes a vehicle for confronting structural violence and racial trauma (Lu, 2023, p. 442).

As Andrew Tudor (1989, pp. 5, 19) notes, horror films often deploy varied narrative and visual strategies to shape “landscapes of fear” and dramatize contemporary anxieties, with the monster serving as a central, enduring figure in this cultural work. Thus, whether represented through supernatural entities, grotesque bodies, or human deviants, monsters in horror function as allegories for what society represses, fears, or seeks to control, often race, class, gender, sexuality, and the body (Kambli, 2024, p. 3). According to Barbara Creed (1993, p. 386), horror cinema has historically reflected patriarchal anxieties surrounding femininity, especially through the figure of the female monster, which she calls the “monstrous feminine.” Creed (1993, p. 315) argues that all human societies carry conceptions of female monstrosity, and horror cinema repeatedly draws upon these to construct the female body as a site of terror, excess, and danger.

Thus, horror’s capacity to expose cultural fears has made it a crucial mode of feminist cultural intervention, giving rise to the subgenre of feminist horror: a mode of filmmaking in which the genre is used to explore, disrupt, and rewrite dominant narratives about gender (Peirse, 2020, p. 5). In particular, in recent years, the rise of fourth-wave feminism has significantly reshaped cultural production across media, including horror cinema. Emerging in the early 2010s and propelled by digital activism, fourth-wave feminism is defined by its emphasis on intersectionality, bodily autonomy, queer and trans rights, anti-racist and anti-capitalist critique, and a renewed focus on dismantling systemic misogyny (Shiva & Nosrat Kharazmi, 2019, p. 130). This wave has amplified conversations around sexual violence,

mental health, reproductive rights, and gender-based trauma, issues that are often silenced in mainstream discourse (Shiva & Nosrat Kharazmi, 2019, p. 133).

This feminist reclamation of horror is especially significant given the genre's longstanding and complicated relationship with female representation. According to Lauzen's (2022, p. 7) report *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World*, female protagonists appeared more frequently in horror than in any other major film genre, accounting for 43% of horror leads, compared to 37% in drama and only 10% in action. However, as feminist scholars have long argued, visibility alone does not always equate to a disruption of gendered stereotypes (Peirse, 2020, p. 2). Despite its focus on women, the genre frequently produces reductive, bidimensional representations. This can be explained, as Peirse (2020, p. 2) notes, by the fact that women's creative labor in horror has frequently been erased or sidelined in canonical histories of the genre. This absence reflects not merely a lack of visibility or credit, but a deeper issue of perspective: who gets to tell horror stories fundamentally shapes how gender, power, and embodiment are imagined on screen (Grant, 1996, p. 2).

Thus, although feminist horror can be made by male directors, the genre becomes particularly effective when women occupy roles behind the camera as directors, writers, editors, and producers, bringing their own cultural, political, and aesthetic concerns to the genre (Peirse, 2020, p. 3). In this light, the recent rise of women-directed horror films represents a crucial intervention into both cinematic form and feminist cultural discourse. This phenomenon, referred to as feminist new wave cinema, signals a shift toward narratives that foreground intersectional politics, female rage, bodily autonomy, and visual excess, often through genre hybridity and aesthetic experimentation (Creed, 2022, p. 5).

Horror is already a particularly rich visual field because it often relies on ambiguity, surrealism, and symbolic density to convey cultural anxieties (Pratama, 2023, p. 10). Feminist horror extends and reconfigures this tradition, using aesthetic strategies that are at once excessive, parodic, and hyper-stylized, often embracing subgenres such as body horror and horror comedy (Peirse, 2020, p. 19). Body horror exposes the female body as a site of sociopolitical control, where anxieties around reproduction, desire, and autonomy are rendered grotesquely visible (Aldana Reyes, 2024, p. 82), while horror comedy deploys irony and exaggeration to satirize patriarchal norms and destabilize gendered expectations (Kelly, 2016, p. 10).

Although conventional horror relies heavily on low-key lighting and desaturated color palettes to create fear and suspense (Chen et al., 2012, pp. 14-19), many feminist horror texts intentionally break from these norms by embracing vibrant color schemes, theatrical

aesthetics, and grotesque visual compositions (Ammer, 2020, pp. 135, 142). A paradigmatic example is *Suspiria* (Argento, 1977), where saturated colors, choreographed violence, and artifice construct a sensory space that shapes atmosphere and embodies the film's thematic concerns. These choices are not simply decorative but deeply political: they express alternative ways of seeing, experiencing, and representing femininity (Giusti, 2012, pp. 154-158).

By foregrounding excess and artifice, feminist horror reclaims cinematic space for alternative expressions of gendered subjectivity. It is precisely this visual excess and its formal, symbolic, and affective dimensions that make horror a uniquely rich site for feminist visual critique. In this context, the trope of the monstrous-feminine is no longer just a projection of patriarchal fear, as originally theorized by Creed (1993), but a site of feminist agency, critique, and subversion.

1.2 Research aim and relevance

Taken together, these strategies demonstrate how feminist horror reclaims female monstrosity as a site of critical meaning-making. They underscore the genre's capacity to transform historically stigmatized experiences into narratives of power, resistance, and political affect. These insights provide the foundation for the present study, which investigates how female monstrosity is visually and narratively constructed in contemporary women-directed horror films. Through a close analysis of *Jennifer's Body*, directed by Karyn Kusama (2009), *The Love Witch*, directed by Anna Biller (2016), and *The Substance*, directed by Coralie Fargeat (2024), the study explores how these films challenge dominant representations of femininity by reclaiming the figure of the monstrous-feminine.

This research is both culturally and academically significant. Culturally, it is relevant to ongoing conversations around feminism, including gender representation, sexuality, bodily autonomy, ageism, and objectification, issues that feminist horror, and specifically the selected case studies, explore through affective and symbolic intensity. Academically, this study contributes to feminist film theory and horror scholarship by updating the monstrous-feminine framework through a fourth-wave, intersectional lens and by centering women's authorship in a historically male-dominated genre.

Barbara Creed's (1993) book *The Monstrous-Feminine* operates as the theoretical foundation for this study, alongside other feminist and visual culture theories. Despite extensive research on horror and feminism, few studies combine feminist theories with detailed visual analysis of modern horror films. This study addresses that gap by drawing on

Visual Critical Discourse Analysis (VCDA) to closely examine how color, mise-en-scène, costume, and framing function as meaning-making tools in the cinematic production of female monstrosity. In doing so, it aims to illuminate how feminist horror not only reflects but reshapes cultural attitudes, offering a model for analyzing how visual form participates in gendered cultural discourse.

Against this backdrop, the study brings forth the following research question:
How do women-directed horror films, specifically *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024), use visual and narrative elements to construct the monstrous feminine as a site of feminist critique?

1.3 Thesis structure

The research is structured into five chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundation of the study, outlining key concepts such as the monstrous-feminine, abjection, camp, and performativity. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach, detailing the use of Visual Critical Discourse Analysis (VCDA) and the rationale behind the selection of case studies. Chapter 4 presents the core findings of the analysis, organized into four discourse sections that explore the construction of female monstrosity in *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024). Finally, Chapter 5 offers concluding reflections on the findings, addressing the study's implications, limitations, and potential directions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

Barbara Creed's (1993) book *The Monstrous-Feminine* serves as the backbone of this research, exploring how horror cinema functions as a platform for feminist critique. Creed's (1993) model will be updated and expanded through additional theories drawn from psychoanalysis, feminism, and visual culture. Kristeva (1982) and Creed (1993) provide a foundational psychoanalytic and abjection-based reading of monstrosity; Butler (1990) and Mulvey (1975) destabilize essentialist notions of gender through performativity and the gaze; posthuman feminists like Braidotti (2002) and Haraway (2016) offer ontologies of transformation that blur traditional boundaries; finally, camp theory (1999) supplies a queer mode of aesthetic and affective critique. Together, these theories create a multifaceted, integrated framework that provides a critical foundation for a reading of the monstrous-feminine in contemporary horror films.

2.1 What Unsettles the Symbolic Order: Abjection and The Birth of the Monstrous-Feminine

To unpack the dynamics of the monstrous-feminine, it is essential to begin with the psychic (internal, emotional, and unconscious) and symbolic (cultural and linguistic) processes through which femininity has been constructed as threatening, unstable, and transgressive (Creed, 1993, pp. 28-30). Julia Kristeva's (1982, p. 54) theory of abjection, developed in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, offers a foundational lens for understanding how the female body is positioned as both fascinating and repulsive, a site of crisis for identity and meaning. Abjection is the process through which the subject defines itself by rejecting what threatens its sense of identity or order, what feels dangerous and impure, such as bodily substances like blood and corpses, or transgressive behaviors (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Horror movies are perhaps the most visible representation of abjection in contemporary popular culture. Here abjection is visualized through monstrous figures and hybrid bodies, often characterised by bodily decay or fragmentation, that challenge stable identities and blur the line between life and death (Arya, 2014, p. 74).

According to Kristeva (1982, p. 4), abjection is not only about dirt or health but rather what radically escapes clear categories or breaks social norms. This includes anything ambiguous or in-between. These elements disturb the viewer because they dissolve the boundaries that culture depends heavily on to create a sense of order. Kristeva (1982, p. 11) further positions abjection as "edged with the sublime," a space where horror mixes with what she calls "jouissance", a kind of overwhelming, transgressive pleasure. In horror

cinema, these contradictions are often seen in the figure of the bleeding, leaking or morphing female body, disrupting viewers' expectations of what a body should be (Arya, 2014, p. 76). In particular, Kristeva (1982, p. 13) refers to menstrual blood and the process of birth as key examples of abjection, thereby connecting the feminine and the maternal body to what culture must expel to preserve symbolic and social boundaries. This logic of symbolic expulsion sets the basis of Barbara Creed's (1993) theory of the monstrous-feminine in horror cinema.

2.2 Reclaiming Her: Reconfiguring The Monstrous-Feminine

Creed (1993) draws directly from Kristeva (1982) to argue that horror films do not merely reflect societal anxieties about women, such as fears around female sexuality, reproduction, bodily autonomy, and power, but instead dramatize these cultural fears by monsterizing the feminine, portraying it as disgusting and dangerous to symbolically expel it and reaffirm patriarchal order (Creed, 1993, p. 10). In Freudian theory, the female body is often conceptualized as lacking a phallus, which positions femininity as absence or deficiency within patriarchal symbolic structures. Thus, Freudian psychoanalysis situates the female body as a site of lack, while Creed (1993), by contrast, emphasizes its powerful excess: its capacity to bleed, reproduce, and transgress (p. 42). The author questions the stereotypical representation of the passive female victim in horror, instead describing female monsters (witches, vampires, possessed demons, etc.) as figures who threaten patriarchal logic and destabilize conventional gender roles with rage, desire, and corporeal power. Although these monstrous women are constructed through patriarchal fears, Creed (1993) argues they carry subversive potential by disrupting traditional gender roles and narrative control. While she doesn't depict these figures as "feminist" or "liberated", since they reflect male fears more than female subjectivity, she nonetheless sees the disruptive potential within the broader cinematic system (Creed, 1993, p. 47-48).

In her analysis, Creed (1993) identifies several recurring archetypes that shape the representation of female monstrosity in horror cinema. For example, the "archaic mother" embodies both nurturing and terrifying qualities, representing primal fertility and existential threat (Creed, 1993, p. 269). Closely related, the "monstrous womb" reflects anxieties about female reproductive organs, often connected to unnatural pregnancies or invasive gestation, as seen in *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986), where the Alien Queen acts as both archaic mother and monstrous womb, a reproductive machine whose grotesque maternity mirrors Ripley's fear of pregnancy (Creed, 1993, p. 312). The "possessed monster" represents patriarchal fear of female autonomy, as seen in *The Exorcist* (Fredkin, 1973), where Regan's possession is is

expressed through bodily excess and loss of control. Vomiting, bleeding, urinating, and obscene speech function as metaphors for puberty and awakening sexuality (Creed, 1993, pp. 293-294). The “femme castratrice” channels rage through sexual power, often linked to symbolic castration and revenge against male violence, particularly in rape-revenge narratives like in the film *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi, 1978) (Creed, 1993, pp.445-446). The “witch” is described as a hybrid of sexuality and supernatural force, representing unruly knowledge and erotic danger (Creed, 1993, p. 282-283); a figure often charged with disrupting rational order, as the main character in *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976) (Creed, 1993, p. 303). Similarly, the “vampire” uses her erotic allure to seduce female victims, such as Sarah in *The Hunger* (Scott, 1983), who embodies a transgressive form of same-sex desire that challenges heteronormative tropes in horror films (Creed, 1993, p. 226, 260). Through these archetypes Creed (1993) demonstrates that horror cinema constructs femininity as a site of collapse, making the female body fertile ground for symbolic transgression. In other words, horror uses the female body to challenge cultural boundaries and norms around gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Yet by exposing the structures that abject women, these films also unsettle the symbolic order itself. That is to say, by showing how women are cast out or made monstrous, horror films don’t just reflect oppression, they also challenge the system that enables it.

While Barbara Creed’s (1993) *The Monstrous-Feminine* remains a foundational text in feminist horror theory, its analytic lens reflects certain structural limitations. Creed’s original study draws almost exclusively on male-directed horror films from the Anglo-American canon, such as *Alien* (Scott, 1979), *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973), and *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976) (Chare et al., 2020, p. 2), thus framing the monstrous-feminine largely through the lens of male authorship and patriarchal projection rather than as an expression of feminine or feminist agency (Heller-Nicholas, 2020, p. 35).

More recently, Creed (2022) responded to these critiques in *The Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, a follow-up to her 1993 book, where she reframes abjection not simply as a condition of horror but as a tool of “intimate revolt”. Creed (2022, pp. 13-15) takes this term from Kristeva (1982) to describe a feminist journey of self-questioning and ethical resistance, where female protagonists confront the horrors of the patriarchal symbolic order as part of a transformative process. In this context, abjection becomes a means through which trauma, monstrosity, and taboo are not just endured, but reworked as sources of feminist agency and voice. Thus, Creed (2022, pp. 1-2) shifts her focus toward what she calls Feminist New Wave Cinema: a global movement of largely female-directed films that reconceptualize monstrosity

as a site of transformation and feminist subjectivity. In this revised model, monstrosity becomes a dynamic aesthetic and political strategy, embracing genre hybridity and alternative gazes to disrupt dominant modes of spectatorship (Creed, 2022, pp. 4-5, 13-15).

Creed (2022, pp. 6-9) also introduces a significant conceptual shift by turning attention toward the figure of the abject male: a reversal of her earlier exclusive focus on the female body as the main site of monstrosity. She identifies a new strand of feminist horror in which male characters, particularly rapists, abusers, misogynists, and racists, become the focus of abjection (Creed, 2022, pp. 6, 9). These figures are no longer agents of symbolic order, but destabilizers of it. This means they no longer uphold patriarchal structures, but instead symbolize their decay, becoming targets of horror and disgust: monstrous in their embodiment of structural violence, which can be defined as the normalized, often invisible forms of harm embedded in institutions, relationships, and cultural norms, and the visible breakdown of patriarchal power. In these narratives, male monstrosity exposes the rotting core of a system once seen as stable or authoritative. Horror, in this formulation, no longer punishes female transgression alone, but turns its gaze toward male power itself as something grotesque, excessive, and in need of expulsion. This inversion reflects broader fourth-wave and intersectional politics, including #MeToo and queer/trans liberation, which aim to expose and dismantle systems of male dominance. Within this ethical turn, monstrosity becomes a site not only of revolt and reimagining, but of accountability, as horror casts male perpetrators of violence as its most grotesque and abject expressions (Creed, 2022, pp. 6, 9).

Although Creed's updated model (2022) responds to critiques of essentialism and expands the scope of monstrosity to include sociopolitical critique, it still operates within a framework that often presumes the visibility and coherence of gendered and sexed bodies. This means that Creed (2022) often assumes that bodies can be clearly read as male or female, and that monstrosity emerges from deviations from those binary norms. Such assumptions risk excluding experiences that do not conform to this visual logic, including trans, non-binary, or intersex embodiments, whose relationship to gender may not be immediately visible or culturally recognized. These critiques frequently center authorship because the creator's perspective shapes how gender and monstrosity are represented, both narratively and visually (Lowenstein, 1996, p. 471). In horror, where female characters are often objectified or punished, critiques of male authorship reveal how patriarchal storytelling frames monstrosity as a projection of fear (especially fear of female power) rather than as an expression of female subjectivity (Peirse, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, such critiques point toward broader omissions, particularly in relation to how monstrosity intersects with race, queerness, and

trans identity. While Creed (1993, p. 265) does include some representations of lesbian desire in her original text, her framework largely centers normative, Western constructions of womanhood.

2.3 Performing Womanhood: Gender, Abjection, and the Horror of Ideal Femininity

To interrogate these assumptions more deeply and to theorize how femininity and monstrosity are not merely represented but constituted, Judith Butler's (1993, p. 2) theory of performativity and materialization becomes essential. Her work allows for an analysis of gender not as a stable identity or essence, but as a reiterated, contingent process embedded within cultural and visual regimes. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990, p. 179) argues that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts". This notion radically unsettles essentialist and binary conceptions of femininity that have historically informed both psychoanalytic theory and cinematic representation. Rather than treating gender as an expression of some pre-discursive sex, Butler (1990, pp. 33, 45) reframes it as performative: an ongoing production that is both constrained and potentially subversive within hegemonic regulatory frameworks. Thus, Butler (1988, p. 527) observes that gender is not an innate trait, but rather a series of continuous performances designed by societal expectations: "Gender is real only to the extent that it is performed". This perspective aligns with and extends Creed's (1993) understanding of the monstrous-feminine, allowing us to reconceptualize monstrous embodiment not as a reflection of an inherent female excess but as a performative collection of signs like costume, gesture, makeup, and *mise-en-scène* that temporarily merge into "femininity" as a horror trope. In her book *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993, pp. 2-3) develops this further, asserting that what we call "sex" (as being male or female) isn't just a biological fact. Instead, it is a concept shaped and produced over time by social rules and expectations. These norms decide which bodies are seen as "normal" in society (Butler, 1993, pp. 2-3).

Abjection, in this context, becomes not only a psychic or symbolic rejection (Kristeva, 1982; Creed, 1993) but a political process that delineates the limits of the human and the livable. For Butler (1993, pp. 3-9), it is not only about rejecting what feels impure or threatening, but also about how society decides which bodies "count" as fully human. Some bodies are excluded from recognition altogether, seen as unintelligible or unworthy of life. In this way, abjection becomes a powerful force that shapes who is allowed to exist visibly and who is pushed to the margins of culture (Butler, 1993, pp. 3-9). In feminist horror these

insights provide a crucial pathway to analyze how visual and material aesthetics, particularly those that amplify ambiguity, excess, or transformation, both enact and expose the unstable discursive boundaries that constitute gender and monstrosity.

Thus, Butler's (1993) theory equips this framework to read the monstrous-feminine not only as a site of symbolic disturbance but as a performative and political strategy, especially through costume, gesture, and the aesthetic coding of gendered bodies on screen. For example, femininity is constructed through visual cues such as makeup, dress, body, a language that horror can exaggerate or subvert, turning performance itself into a site of critique. Yet this performance of femininity is not easily abandoned, even when it proves harmful. As Lauren Berlant (2011, p. 1) argues, "a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing." In this context, idealized femininity functions as an aesthetic and affective aspiration that promises coherence or cultural value, yet often demands conformity, self-surveillance, or bodily sacrifice. Horror frequently visualizes the emotional toll of this attachment, transforming femininity into a site of abjection and collapse.

2.4 Becoming Other: Monstrosity, Hybridity, and the Feminist Posthuman

Yet while Butler's (1993) account of gender performativity emphasizes the instability of identity within symbolic systems, it still operates within a human-centered framework. To move further beyond the constraints of humanism, and to account for monstrosity as a materially hybrid and more-than-human condition, the posthumanist turn in feminist theory, particularly through the work of Rosi Braidotti (2002) and Donna Haraway (2016), offers valuable tools. These thinkers reconceptualize embodiment not just as constraint, but as potential transformation across human, animal, and technological thresholds.

While Butler (1993) interrogates the discursive production of gender, Rosi Braidotti (2002, p. 2) in *Metamorphoses* calls for a "materialist theory of becoming" that privileges transformation, hybridity, and sexual difference as sites of generative subjectivity. Her figure of the nomadic subject resists stable identity and embraces subjectivity as affective, embedded, and constantly in flux: a model especially relevant to horror cinema's depictions of unstable, transforming female bodies. In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti (2013, p. 3), furthers this argument by proposing a "nature–culture continuum," advocating a monistic ontology that collapses the distinction between organic and technological life in favor of vitalist, relational subjectivities. This reconceptualization finds direct resonance in the introduction of

Creed's 2023 edition of the monstrous-feminine, where she embraces posthumanist theory and redefines abjection as a feminist and nonhuman strategy. Figures like the mermaid, chimera, machine, and zombie are no longer threats to symbolic order but tools of revolt, aligning her with Braidotti's (2002, p. 2-3) ethics of becoming. Braidotti's (2002, p. 2-3) ethics of becoming is a way of thinking about identity as something flexible and always changing, rather than fixed or stable. It values transformation, connection, and embodied experience, suggesting that resistance can emerge from embracing difference rather than trying to conform. These figures represent what Braidotti (2002, p. 4-6) calls transversal subjectivities: ways of being that move across categories like gender, species, and the human/nonhuman divide. These transversal subjectivities allow for a reading of female monstrosity not as a deviation from normative femininity but as a form of ethical becoming that subverts the supremacy of the "Human" as a stable category and reclaims embodied difference as a political force. In other words, these half-human, half-other figures challenge the idea of a pure or stable self. They suggest that identity is always shifting, that the monstrous-feminine is not a threat to order, but a force that remakes it.

Donna Haraway's (2016, p. 6-7) *A Cyborg Manifesto* complements this perspective by introducing the cyborg as a feminist figuration of ironic boundary-blurring: "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction". Rejecting the fantasy of organic unity, Haraway (2016, p. 7) celebrates "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries", a stance that resonates strongly with horror cinema's visual aesthetics of corporeal fragmentation, hybridization, and grotesque recomposition. Unlike traditional feminist frameworks that seek to reclaim or reassert "womanhood" as a stable category, Haraway's (2016) cyborg resists oppositional logic altogether, favoring ambiguity, irony, and hybridity over binary confrontation. In this light, female monstrosity in horror films becomes more than a reaction to patriarchal oppression, it can be interpreted as a radical escape from identity itself, in which hybrid bodies confront not only structures of control but the very foundations of identity. Cyborg monstrosity thus becomes a means of destabilizing patriarchal and anthropocentric ontologies while embracing fractured identities and post-gender embodiments. For example, in *Titane* (Ducurnau, 2021), the protagonist's transformation challenges gendered expectations and blurs the boundary between human and machine, aligning with Haraway's (2016) idea of cyborg. Rather than resolving monstrosity through narrative closure or symbolic containment, both Braidotti (2002) and Haraway (2016) redefine it as a productive and transformative condition, one that challenges fixed notions of identity and opens space for new feminist and

posthuman subjectivities. For them, monstrosity is not something to be feared or destroyed, but a generative force grounded in context and open to continual reinvention.

2.5 From Object to Witness: Reframing the Gaze in Feminist Horror

Therefore, posthuman feminist theories offer a renewed lens through which to analyze the monstrous-feminine as a site of embodied transformation. However, horror cinema does not construct monstrosity through bodies alone, it is also mediated through images. Visual culture, especially cinema, plays a vital role in making the monstrous-feminine visible, constructed, and contested. The visual field becomes a key site where gender, power, and monstrosity are produced and regulated. Feminist film theory, particularly the psychoanalytic tradition, provides the vocabulary to understand how these mechanisms operate. Laura Mulvey's (1975) foundational theory of the male gaze identifies how classical cinema positions women as objects of visual pleasure, while men retain agency as active spectators and narrative drivers. For Mulvey (1975), classical cinema encodes women through fetishism or voyeurism, rendering their bodies sites of symbolic containment and narrative control. Mulvey's (1975) work was pivotal in shifting feminist inquiry toward the gendered unconscious of cinematic form, showing how women were not only represented, but positioned within visual regimes of power and desire (Chare, Hoorn, & Yue, 2019, pp. 47-49). Taking this further, Rosalind Gill (2007, p. 151) argues that in today's media culture women are expected to internalize the male gaze, becoming both subjects and objects of self-surveillance. This means they not only anticipate being seen, but also constantly monitor and compare themselves to normative standards of femininity. In this way, the gaze is no longer only external and male, it becomes embedded in how women see and regulate themselves. However, horror cinema often complicates these dynamics, being a genre that both enacts and unsettles these paradigms. The female monster, as Creed (1993) and others have argued, does not simply absorb the male gaze but often turns it back on the viewer, disrupting it through abjection, rage, and corporeal excess. In *The Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, Creed (2022) explores how feminist horror filmmakers challenge this gaze through aesthetic and ethical strategies that resist voyeurism and fetishism. Directors such as Coralie Fargeat (*Revenge*, 2017), Julia Ducournau (*Titane*, 2021), and Jennifer Kent (*The Nightingale*, 2018) explicitly engage with and subvert the male gaze. Coralie Fargeat, for instance, notes that she deliberately subverts the visual language of sexual objectification by refusing to allow the camera to participate in her protagonist's victimization. She explains that the film's second

half depicts a protagonist who “has to recreate a new self within the same body,” detaching her image from patriarchal desire (Creed, 2022, pp. 16-17).

These films do not just reverse the male gaze; they construct what Creed (2022) calls a “feminist gaze”: affective, embodied, and relational. (2022, pp. 16-17). Rather than fragmenting women into fetishistic parts, this gaze centers their pain, agency, and presence in ways that reposition the viewer as witness rather than voyeur. Furthermore, as Peirse (2020, pp. 6-8) highlights, horror has historically marginalized women as passive victims or objects of male-directed fantasies. However, the rise of women filmmakers marks a significant shift. These filmmakers are not only telling new stories, but also reclaiming horror as a site of political resistance and personal expression (Peirse, 2020, pp. 6-8). Horror becomes a space where women can confront trauma, rewrite gendered power dynamics, and fight the norms that have traditionally defined the genre. Together, these developments signal a radical shift in how visual pleasure functions in horror cinema: monstrosity no longer conforms to the gaze, it confronts it, reframes it, and ultimately turns it into a space of resistance and power.

2.6 A Monster in a Sparkling Gown: Camp Aesthetics and the Language of Excess

If the feminist gaze offers a new lens through which to view gendered representation, then camp operates as the filter that inflects this gaze with irony, excess, and stylized distortion (Kelly, 2016, p. 10). Camp does not simply invert patriarchal codes; it exaggerates them to the point of collapse, reframing monstrosity and femininity not as deviations from the norm but as performances that expose its incoherence. Camp stages a critique not through absence or negation but through excess, through stylized exaggeration, and through a self-conscious embrace of performance and artifice. Where feminist filmmakers may center the embodied experience of female protagonists, camp exposes femininity itself as an unstable performance, one that can be parodied, appropriated, or grotesquely overacted.

In her essay *Notes on Camp*, Susan Sontag (1999, p. 59) defines the aesthetic as “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration”, and writes that “Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers”. But while her essay initiated the cultural theorization of camp, it also depoliticized it, abstracting camp from its roots in queer subcultural expression. Sontag (1999) treated camp as a sensibility, not a strategy; as aesthetic taste, not political resistance. In response, Jack Babuscio (1999, p. 118) identifies camp as a product of “the gay sensibility,” marked by irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor, strategies used to cope with and resist cultural marginalization. Camp operates

through semiotic excess and a refusal of dominant cultural values. Films like *Pink Flamingos* (Waters, 1972), exemplify this mode of radical queer camp, where aesthetic excess, bodily transgression, and performative revolt converge in a grotesque celebration of abjection (Tyler, 1999, p. 375). As Cleto (1999, p. 7) notes, camp's resistance lies not in coherent definition but in its "refusal to be reduced to a unitary meaning or to fulfill a single function," a structural instability that allows it to remain politically and aesthetically mobile. It is not merely about taste or frivolity, but about performing difference (especially sexual, gendered, and affective difference), through parody, stylization, and the grotesque.

This is particularly evident in camp's long-standing affinity with horror cinema, a genre similarly fascinated with bodily transformation, visual spectacle, and the collapse of normative boundaries. Babuscio (1999, p. 122) argues that musical comedy and horror are the genres "most saturated with camp," precisely because they dramatize emotion, visual excess, and theatricality over narrative realism. Classic horror films like *Cat People* (Tourneur, 1942), *The Black Cat* (Ulmer, 1934), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Mamoulian, 1931) are, in this view, not only Gothic or uncanny, but performative and saturated with stylized codes that can be read queerly. Their use of symbolic *mise-en-scène*, dramatic facial expressions, and excessive emotion foregrounds theatricality over realism, while their narratives often center doubled identities, repressed desires, and transformations that resonate with queer experiences of secrecy, performance, and fluidity.

Two films are particularly illustrative examples of this camp-horror interplay: *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Aldrich, 1962) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975). In the former, decaying Hollywood glamour, grotesque performance, and gendered hysteria are exaggerated to the point of parody. Bette Davis's performance as Jane Hudson, plastered in thick makeup, locked in an infantilized identity, turns failed femininity into a horror of visual excess (Ross, 1999, p. 310). The latter film, by contrast, celebrates that excess: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) delights in gender transgression, narrative incoherence, and visual flamboyance, reimagining monstrosity not as threat but as theatrical liberation. Both films highlight how camp horror refuses to resolve the monstrous into moral or symbolic order, and instead it lets it live, sing, bleed, and mock.

This theatrical refusal resonates with Judith Butler's (1990, p. 179) theory of gender as a "stylized repetition of acts", whereby the subject is constituted not through internal essence, but through performance, reiteration, and social citation. Camp amplifies this process to grotesque proportions. It does not aim to pass as normative, but to expose the artifice of

normativity itself. In so doing, it aligns with Butler's critique of identity as naturalized performance and with the monstrous-feminine's own status as a figure of symbolic disorder.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) critique of the male gaze, too, can be extended through camp. While Mulvey (1975) exposes how classical cinema positions women as fetishized spectacles for male consumption, camp exaggerates that spectacle until it collapses. Camp subjects do not avoid being seen; they demand to be seen in ways that rupture the coherence of the gaze. Pamela Robertson (1999, p. 274-276) identifies this process as a form of feminist camp, where in excessive femininity, represented by elaborate costumes, exaggerated gesture, and dramatic mannerisms, is not a sign of submission but of parody. This mode, she argues, "mocks and undermines the authority of patriarchal images by over-performing them", turning cinematic femininity into a spectacle of critique (Robertson, 1999, p. 274-276).

Within this visual and political register, the monstrous-feminine is not a deviation from gendered norms, it is their theatrical deconstruction. Camp horror embraces bodily excess, incoherence, and artifice as both aesthetic and critical tools. Monstrosity, under the lens of camp, becomes performative revolt, that is a staging of the unnatural that refuses symbolic closure and defies representational discipline. It does not seek to recover an authentic feminine subjectivity, but to explode the very categories through which such a subject might be defined.

This study integrates these perspectives to develop a multidimensional framework for analyzing the monstrous-feminine in contemporary horror cinema. Beginning with Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection and Barbara Creed's (1993) foundational text, the discussion has expanded to engage critiques of essentialism, male authorship, and the limitations of binary gender models. The new, updated monstrous-feminine emerges as a dynamic and unstable site of transgression, transformation, and feminist resistance. Through Butler's (1993) performativity and Braidotti (2002) and Haraway's (2016) posthumanism, monstrosity is recast as a performative and political disruption of normativity. The chapter further explored how feminist film theory, especially through Laura Mulvey's (1975) gaze theory and its extensions, illuminates the visual regimes that regulate feminine bodies, while camp aesthetics reveal the power of irony, stylization, and exaggeration to fracture those regimes from within.

Taken together, these intersecting theories allow for a reconceptualization of monstrosity as a visual, affective, and political weapon within feminist horror cinema. This framework also resonates with the core values of fourth-wave feminism, particularly its emphasis on intersectionality, bodily autonomy, and queer and trans liberation. By centering abjection,

performativity, hybridity, and visual excess, it aligns with fourth-wave feminist efforts to disrupt normative representations and reclaim the abject, the excessive, and the monstrous as sites of political agency and resistance. It is not confined to bodies alone, but unfolds through aesthetic excess, narrative instability, and visual rupture, particularly in relation to femininity and identity. Rather than seeking to stabilize or redeem the monstrous-feminine, this framework embraces its incoherence: its grotesque beauty, its rage, its hunger, and its relentless refusal to be fixed. Applying this framework to the analysis will further explore how horror cinema not only stages the monstrous-feminine, but aesthetically reimagines it as a mode of feminist and queer revolt.

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study, which investigates how feminist horror films construct the monstrous feminine and convey feminist critique through color, visual excess, narrative, and dialogue across three contemporary women-directed horror films: *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama, 2009), *The Love Witch* (Biller, 2016), and *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024). The chapter is organized into five key sections: Research Design, Sampling, Operationalization, Data Analysis, and Credibility.

The first section presents the qualitative research framework and explains its suitability for addressing the study's research question. The second section outlines the sampling strategy, justifies the selection of the three case studies, and clarifies what data is collected and how. The third section explains how the key concepts of the theoretical framework, such as the monstrous-feminine or abjection, are operationalized and translated into specific analytical categories. The fourth section describes step by step the way the analysis is conducted to interpret the data. Finally, the last section addresses issues of credibility by discussing validity, transparency, and reflexivity, and details the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Through this structure, the chapter aims to provide a clear and coherent account of the research process to illustrate how the methodological approach aligns with the theoretical framework and support the purpose of the study.

3.1 Research Design

This study is situated within a constructivist and feminist epistemology, which assumes that knowledge is socially and culturally produced through discourse, power, and representation. A feminist approach to knowledge also recognizes that who we are affects what we see and how we interpret it. This is what Donna Haraway (1988) calls "situated knowledges", the idea that all knowledge comes from a particular standpoint, and that acknowledging this is more ethical and honest than pretending to be neutral or detached. Feminist scholars also underscore embodied and affective ways of knowing: understanding that our bodies, feelings, and lived experiences are valid sources of insight, especially when analyzing topics like gender, sexuality, and monstrosity in visual culture (Rose, 2022, p. 102; Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

These assumptions shape the study's research question: How do women-directed horror films, specifically *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024), use visual and narrative elements to construct the monstrous feminine as a site of feminist critique? This research builds on feminist and queer theoretical traditions to critically analyze

how visual culture not only reflects but also produces gendered and ideological meanings. This direction supports an interpretive, critical, and multimodal methodological framework in order to align with the project's aim, which is to uncover how female monstrosity is constructed and made meaningful through multimodal representation within contemporary women-directed horror cinema.

3.1.1 Methodological Framework: Visual Critical Discourse Analysis (VCDA)

This study employs Visual Critical Discourse Analysis (VCDA) as its core methodological framework to analyze how meaning is constructed through visual and textual elements in feminist horror cinema. VCDA combines principles from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and social semiotics to offer a systematic method to examine how multimodal texts convey ideology (Kilby & Lennon, 2021, p. 7). In other words, VCDA analyzes how visual and linguistic elements cooperate to produce ideological meaning. Thus, images and language are not treated as neutral representations but as sites where power, discourse, and ideology are actively constructed and negotiated (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 30-32). In fact, according to Aiello and Parry (2020, p. 14), visual media do not simply mirror reality but participate in the discursive production of meanings around identity, power, and representation. From this perspective, images in film, through composition, color, gesture, framing, and stylization, become fields through which ideologies are communicated and challenged. What distinguishes VCDA from other forms of visual analysis is its focus on how meaning is produced through the interaction of semiotic resources within specific social contexts (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 31-32). Rather than simply describing what is visible, VCDA interrogates on what meanings are being made, how are they made, and why do they matter ideologically. This means attending not only to visual elements themselves, but also to how they are culturally coded and framed within dominant discourses. This approach aligns with feminist media theory, which likewise sees visual culture as a site of ideological struggle, particularly around gender, the body, and spectatorship (Rose, 2022, pp. 106-107). Therefore, in the context of feminist horror, VCDA represents a particularly rich site because the genre frequently deploys exaggerated, grotesque, or hyper-stylized images that both reflect and critique cultural anxieties about femininity (McGillvray, 2020, p. 124). Applying VCDA to these films reveals how visual strategies are not just aesthetic, but political choices, used to question patriarchal norms, reframe the gaze, and shape resistant or ambivalent forms of

femininity. VCDA thus enables a critical, multimodal, and theoretically grounded reading of how the monstrous feminine is not just shown, but ideologically made.

3.1.2 Multimodality and Qualitative Case Study Design

According to the VCDA principles, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach to investigate how meaning is constructed through multimodal representation. Case studies are particularly well-suited for in-depth, symbolic analysis of rich visual texts and cultural phenomena (Yin, 2014, p. 16). A multimodal orientation guides the research design, which analyzes both key scenes through screenshots and selected excerpts of film dialogue and narration to understand how specific horror films co-construct meaning across image and language. According to Kilby and Lennon (2021, p. 19), visual and verbal modes should not be treated as separate streams of meaning, but as interdependent resources that cooperatively construct subjectivity, affect, and ideology. By analyzing costume, color, lighting, and composition and the interplay with spoken dialogue and narrative context, the study aims to trace how the monstrous feminine is made both visible and legible to the viewer, allowing for a feminist multimodal analysis of the selected horror films.

3.2 Sampling

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method that enables the researcher to choose the data that is most relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this context, data refers to three horror films, *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024), along with 8-9 selected screenshots per film and 13 script excerpts of key scenes that exemplify themes of female monstrosity. This approach allows for the intentional selection of scenes and images that best capture the thematic and aesthetic concerns of the research.

The selection of these films is justified by their critical and audience reception, their thematic and aesthetic relevance to the study, and their alignment with the project's feminist focus. The study focuses on women-directed, English-language horror films produced in Western cultural contexts: U.S. studio productions (*Jennifer's Body*), independent American cinema (*The Love Witch*), and European co-productions with international distribution (*The Substance*). Rather than offering a comprehensive genre overview, it examines theoretically and symbolically rich examples to explore how the monstrous feminine is constructed in recent feminist horror.

The choice of focusing on women-directed horror films responds to the historical underrepresentation of women behind the camera and the growing scholarly recognition of

their contributions to the genre (Peirse, 2020, pp. 2-3). Prioritizing women filmmakers also aligns with this project's feminist and constructivist epistemology, which emphasizes that knowledge is shaped by standpoint and positionality. Attending to female authorship allows for a more situated analysis of how monstrosity is constructed on screen, while also foregrounding the potential for these films to offer social critique, particularly of gender norms, power structures, and representation. These films span from the late 2000s to the mid-2020s, a period marked by growing cultural engagement with gender politics, sexual agency, and feminist critique in popular media (Cefai, 2020, pp. 6-8). Their release during this timeframe reflects a broader shift toward more self-aware, politically sensitive approaches to horror, often driven by women filmmakers (Peirse, 2020, p. 2).

The selected films, *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024), share a distinct visual language that sets them apart from conventional horror cinema. Unlike the darker, colder aesthetic typical of many mainstream horror films (Chen et al., 2012, pp. 14-19), these works embrace vibrant color palettes, stylized mise-en-scène, and visual excess. Their aesthetic choices are deliberately theatrical, often drawing from camp, melodrama, and satire to subvert traditional gendered spectatorship and genre norms. This use of artifice and exaggeration, especially in costume, makeup, and set design, supports the interrogation of femininity and monstrosity not through realism, but through heightened, often ironic representation. Not only these visual styles break away from typical horror conventions, but also support a feminist and reflexive critique of patriarchal spectatorship, which makes them ideal for analysis through VCDA. Additionally, *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *The Love Witch* (2016) share the same cinematographer, M. David Mullen, whose visual style contributes to the way female monstrosity is framed in both films. This stylistic similarity provides an interesting opportunity to examine how recurring visual elements contribute to the communication of specific themes in different narrative contexts.

These films strategically blend horror, drama, satire, and dark comedy to explore different feminist themes. Each film offers a distinct portrayal of the monstrous feminine, depicting it not only as physical transformation but also as a complex response to patriarchal control, manifesting through transgression, resistance, or victimization within social and gender norms. *Jennifer's Body* (2009) uses satire to reimagine possession and sexual agency, turning a high school cheerleader into both a literal and symbolic predator seeking revenge (Chusna and Mahmudah 2018, p. 12). *The Love Witch* (2016) revisits classic femme fatale and witch archetypes, embedding feminist critique within a highly stylized, retro-inspired fantasy (Stümer 2022, p. 1212). Meanwhile, *The Substance* (2024) plays with body horror to address

concerns such as aging, power, and objectification. Their narratives and recurring themes present monstrosity as a space of ambivalence, empowerment, and critical reflection, an approach that aligns closely with this project's focus on feminist horror.

Furthermore, the three films under analysis experienced unique distribution strategies and receptions that influenced their positions within popular culture and the film industry. *Jennifer's Body* (2009), directed by Karyn Kusama, was distributed by 20th Century Fox. Despite a lackluster box office performance and mixed critical reviews at the time of release, the film has since undergone a critical re-evaluation, becoming a cult classic appreciated for its feminist themes and subversion of horror tropes (Ibor, 2022, p. 166). *The Love Witch* (2016), directed by Anna Biller, was critically acclaimed and after its premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam was acquired for distribution by Oscilloscope Laboratories. Lastly, *The Substance* (2024), directed by Coralie Fargeat, premiered at the 77th Cannes Film Festival where it received a standing ovation. The movie received positive reviews and numerous accolades like 5 Academy Award Nominations, including Best Original Screenplay, Best Director, Best Actress to Demi Moore, and Best Picture, ultimately winning Best Makeup and Hairstyling. The Best Director nomination made Coralie Fargeat only the ninth woman in history to receive this milestone. At the time of writing, *The Substance* (2024) has not yet received academic attention due to its recent release. This lack of prior scholarship is not a limitation but an opportunity: the film's critical acclaim, feminist themes, and aesthetic boldness make it an ideal and timely case for analysis. Including it allows this study to contribute original insights to emerging discussions in feminist horror cinema. Its critical reception highlights its cultural relevance and justifies its inclusion within a contemporary feminist research.

3.2.1 Sample size

The unit of analysis in this study consists of 8-9 screenshots per film and 13 short script excerpts. These units are purposively selected based on their visual density, narrative centrality, and thematic relevance to feminist concerns and the monstrous feminine. This sampling strategy reflects Aiello and Parry's (2020, p. 14) view that visual analysis should consider not only what is shown in an image, but also how it is shown, through formal and aesthetic features that shape meaning and reflect ideological values. The selected sample provides sufficient visual evidence for a comprehensive examination to support the arguments. Each screenshot will be carefully selected to capture the visual and thematic essence of the scene and will be accompanied by detailed analytical commentary. This method ensures a focused selection of key visual moments that encapsulate significant

aesthetic and thematic representations. Scenes involving transformation, violence, seduction, rage, abjection, or visual excess are prioritized for their symbolic intensity and representational complexity. The selection process is guided by three primary criteria: (1) the presence of visual excess, especially in costume, color, makeup, and *mise-en-scène* as a means of constructing, amplifying, or parodying normative femininity within patriarchal visual culture; (2) the scene's engagement with or disruption of dominant horror aesthetics and gendered spectatorship, particularly those aligned with the male gaze or heteronormative visual pleasure; and (3) the scene's significance in visualizing key political themes from the theoretical framework, such as the regulation of female bodies, queer resistance, monstrous agency, and the subversion of binary gender logics. All selected screenshots and script excerpts are included in Appendices B through E.

3.3 Operationalization

The key theoretical concepts used in this analysis are operationalized through specific visual and discursive indicators. Abjection is identified by the presence of bodily fluids, wounds, decay, and visual motifs that disrupt bodily integrity (Kristeva, 1982; Creed, 1993). Performativity is analyzed through stylized acts of gendered behavior, such as exaggerated makeup, costuming, body language, and spoken affirmations of femininity (Butler, 1990). The gaze is examined via camera angles, framing, and narrative positioning that either objectify or resist the viewer's control (Mulvey, 1975). Camp is recognized through excessive artifice, irony, theatricality, and visual exaggeration (Sontag, 1999; Babuscio, 1999). Posthumanist and transformational elements are operationalized through hybrid figures, bodily metamorphoses, and visual disruptions of the human-animal-machine divide, often represented through special effects or prosthetics (Braidotti, 2002; Haraway, 2016). Monstrous archetypes, such as the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, *femme castratrice*, witch, or vampire, are identified through costume, narrative role, corporeal emphasis, and symbolic alignment with patriarchal anxieties (Creed, 1993). Male abjection is traced via the grotesque or excessive representation of violent male figures (Creed, 2022). These indicators are applied to selected scenes via close multimodal analysis of visual and textual elements. Together, they provide a strong critical toolkit for examining how contemporary, women-directed horror cinema constructs, contests, and reimagines the monstrous-feminine as a site of feminist and queer resistance.

3.4 Data Analysis

Visual materials are analyzed across three interrelated sites: the compositional (what the image shows and how it is visually arranged), the technological (how the image is produced

and framed), and the social (the wider cultural discourses and institutions that shape its meaning) (Rose, 2016, pp. 16–17). This framework provides a structured yet flexible model for interpreting the visual and ideological construction of meaning within each film.

The analytical process unfolds in three stages. First, purposive sampling was used to select key scenes from each film that aligned with the study's theoretical concerns. Each film was viewed multiple times to identify moments of intense ideological significance or maximal visual density. Selected scenes were annotated for relevant compositional and technological features, including lighting, gesture, color palette, shot scale, and sound design. These images were then examined semiotically at two levels, following Barthes (1977): denotation, referring to the literal, observable content of the frame; and connotation, referring to the symbolic and ideological meanings these features carry (Rose, 2016, pp. 105-109; Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 49-51). Furthermore, the analysis incorporated other core tools of Visual Critical Discourse Analysis to unpack how visual meaning is structured and ideologically charged. These included the assessment of modality (how 'real' or credible the image appears), salience (which elements draw the viewer's attention), and framing (how visual elements are linked or separated to guide interpretation) (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 51-55). Within salience, attention was paid to foregrounding and backgrounding, which refers to how certain figures, objects, or symbols are visually prioritized or marginalized in the composition to reinforce or obscure particular meanings (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 52-56). Composition was further analyzed in terms of information value, visual hierarchy, and layout, drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to explore how spatial organization contributes to ideological messaging. Then, interactional elements such as gaze, angle, and distance were analyzed to understand how the image positions the viewer in relation to the characters and actions it presents. These choices can serve to either reinforce or challenge gendered power dynamics (Rose, 2016, pp. 77-79). Lastly, the analysis examined color in terms of both its symbolic meaning and its cultural associations, in order to reveal how mood, affect, and ideological positioning are constructed visually (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 68-70). In this case, the analysis built selectively on Patti Bellantoni's (2005) color psychology framework, which identifies specific emotional and psychological associations with color hues in visual storytelling. Despite not being applied systematically, this model is particularly useful in relation to scenes where chromatic choices are central to the construction of the monstrous feminine.

In parallel, dialogue and narrative structure were analyzed as a complement to the visual, using critical discourse analysis to identify ideological framings, rhetorical strategies, and

intertextual references. Particular attention was paid to how visual and verbal elements operate cooperatively to construct meaning. This multimodal approach enabled a nuanced reading of how stylistic and linguistic choices performatively reproduce, subvert, or parody dominant cultural discourses surrounding female monstrosity, femininity, and resistance.

The analysis was guided by core theoretical concepts developed in the operationalization section, which informed the identification of recurring patterns across the data. These patterns were subsequently developed into themes and articulated further through sub-themes. This integrated VCDA approach enabled a systematic yet critically engaged interpretation of how women-directed horror films construct the monstrous feminine not merely as a visual trope, but as an ideological and political formation.

3.5 Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this study, which analyzes the construction of female monstrosity in *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024) through Visual Critical Discourse Analysis (VCDA), particular attention was paid to trustworthiness, transparency, and reflexivity. In line with qualitative standards, trustworthiness was not framed in terms of replicability but rather as depth, contextual coherence, and interpretive integrity. This was achieved through an iterative, theory-informed process of thematic development, guided by key concepts such as abjection, monstrosity, camp. These themes emerged from sustained engagement with the visual data and were grounded in foundational feminist and queer theoretical literature. Rather than striving for objectivity, reliability was addressed through rigorous documentation of interpretive decisions, including coding practices and the development of analytical categories, in order to ensure traceability and coherence (Stewart et al., 2023, pp. 3151-3154). Transparency was secured by clearly outlining the criteria for scene selection, the justification of the case studies, and the description of the analysis. Reflexivity, central in this context of feminist qualitative research, was also an active methodological principle throughout. As Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) argue, reflexivity is not merely a disclosure of bias, but a situated mode of knowledge production (p. 114). In this context, the researcher's queer and feminist positionality was embraced as a critical lens. This aligns with Tracy's (2010) concept of "sincerity," where self-reflexivity and methodological transparency together underpin ethical and interpretive rigor (pp. 842-843).

4 Results

The visual critical discourse analysis (VCDA) of the three selected films revealed four recurring discourses: the monstrous body and abjection, monstrous archetypes, the feminine ideal, and rage, destruction, and revenge (see Appendix A, Table A1). This analysis not only traces how monstrous femininity is represented, but also examines how it is produced through aesthetic choices and discursive strategies, ultimately contributing to the answer to the research question.

4.1 “Women bleed, and that’s a beautiful thing”: The Monstrous Body and Abjection

Horror cinema visualizes abjection through elements like blood, vomit, wounds, and unnatural textures (Arya, 2010, p. 85). Julia Kristeva (1982, p. 4) defines abjection as what “disturbs identity, system, and order”. Barbara Creed (1993, pp. 9, 37) builds on this theory to argue that the monstrous-feminine represents a threat to patriarchal structures because she embodies abjection through her uncontrollable body. This discourse explores how the abject feminine is constructed in the selected case studies, where the female body becomes a site of horror through its collapse of boundaries between beauty and decay, sexuality and death, purity and pollution.

4.1.1 Bestial Femininity in the Domestic Frame

In *Jennifer’s Body* (2009), Jennifer is a visual expression of the abject feminine: leaky, undisciplined, and symbolically polluted. Early in the film, Jennifer becomes the victim of a satanic sacrifice performed by a local boy band who mistakenly believe she is a virgin. Because she is not, the ritual fails, and Jennifer returns as the male nightmare of the seductive but abject, man-eating female monster (Creed, 2022, p. 115).

This screenshot (00:23:49; see Table B1 and Figure B1 in Appendix B) captures Jennifer at Needy’s (her best friend) house shortly after being brutally murdered and transformed into a demon, which explains why her clothes are soaked in blood. Hungry and feral, she crouches in front of an open fridge, with her blood-covered hands grasping a chicken. Opposite her sits Needy, who is partially visible and has a fearful posture which contrasts sharply with Jennifer’s clarity and dominance. Jennifer is positioned in the foreground, lit by the open refrigerator’s sterile white glow. The fridge is transformed into a grotesque backdrop for Jennifer’s visceral hunger. The girl dominates the right side of the frame with her low, animalistic crouch, breaking traditional norms of feminine composure. She instead conveys a bestial energy: legs splayed, shoulders hunched. Her blood-smearred mouth gapes open in a

sound that blurs a scream and a growl. These abject elements mark the collapse of the boundaries between human and animal, life and death. Jennifer controls the gaze, since her monstrous appearance deliberately confronts and disturbs the viewer. She is wearing a white puffer jacket, a jeans mini-skirt, black ankle boots and red fishnet tights. She is feminine and youthful, although this stylized girlhood is defiled by gore, so that cuteness turns into horror. Her outfit becomes a visual contradiction where femininity and monstrosity collide.

4.1.2 Glamour and Gore: The Eroticized Object

The next screenshot from *Jennifer's Body* (2009, 1:11:08; see Table B2 and Figure B2), perfectly encapsulates this same contradiction of abjection, where beauty and horror merge in a single frame. In this scene, Jennifer is envisioned by Needy in the high school corridor. She is placed in the foreground, right of center, turned toward the camera in a semi-profile. She looks directly at Needy, and possibly the viewer. Her relaxed, semi-profiled pose and lifted eyes suggest ironic defiance. Her dark pink hoodie is layered over a gold necklace in a feminine and non-threatening look. The green-lit, blurry school hallway behind her highlights her isolation and undead status. Her face is clean and youthful, except for the blood dripping from her mouth and staining her neck in a symmetrical pattern, like lipstick gone extreme. The blood becomes accessory; the violence is unseen but its effects are proudly worn. Her smile is key: she is weaponizing her charm and clearly showing that she is not horrified by her condition, she enjoys it. She feels no shame or remorse for her hunger. Her body is in full control of its monstrosity and her gaze invites the viewer to witness and admire her transgression. This aestheticized gore eroticizes the abject and aligns with Creed's (1993, p. 42) assertion that the monstrous feminine is both spectacle and threat. The significance of this scene lies in its crystallization of the monstrous-feminine as a visual paradox: clean beauty and dripping gore, softness and savagery, teenage femininity and vampiric, demonic horror. The film makes the abject desirable to critique structures that eroticize violence against women, while making that eroticism a site of female agency. (Ibor, 2022, p. 157).

This interplay of eroticism and monstrosity is similarly explored in *The Love Witch* (2016), especially through the main character, Elaine. Elaine is a witch, and as noted by Creed (1993, p. 76), abjection is deeply connected to witches, because these figures blur distinctions between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary. Elaine uses her magic to make men fall in love with her, however, these spells have a destructive effect: the men are not physically able to handle the intensity of these emotions, so they become ill and ultimately die. Like Jennifer, Elaine is an abject contradiction: beautiful and deadly, hyperfeminine and manipulative, human and supernatural.

This image (01:12:17; see Table B3 and Figure B3) comes from a vision experienced by Richard, one of Elaine's victims, while he is sick after being seduced. The image presents the witch's body in an overtly sexualized pose, on a blood-red bed, wearing black lingerie and holding a chalice. The composition is symmetrical and tightly framed, and directs the viewer's gaze to her exposed back and buttocks, while she looks directly at the camera with a stoic expression. The saturated red lighting paints the frame with heavy symbolism on blood, death, and erotic danger. This moment highlights the erotic tension central to Kristeva's (1982) abjection: her hyper-feminized body is seductive, yet unsettling. Her gaze breaks the submissive positioning. The camera's perspective, along with the dreamy lighting and the artificial saturation of red, constructs a highly stylized visual discourse in which the female body becomes a medium of both fantasy and death. Elaine is not shown in gore or decay, but rather in a state of erotic excess, a monstrous body through sexual agency and female autonomy, which threatens symbolic order (Creed, 2022, p. 4). The chalice she holds is also presumably the deathly love potion given to Richard; in fact, we can hear Richard crying in the background while this and other images of Elaine's fatal seduction are shown. Here the red bed suggests the contamination of a sacred space coded for purity (the bedroom, intimacy).

In a similar subversion (00:36:40; see Table B4 and Figure B4), another space historically associated with the feminine is contaminated. The kitchen is a traditionally gendered space associated with care, cleanliness, and domestic femininity. Elaine's naked body is partially covered by her long black hair, but is positioned as the visual center of the frame. She stands at the counter surrounded by herbs, jars, and oils. The *mise-en-scène* is nostalgic and the colors are soft. However, her nudity and ritual action subvert this frame. Elaine is not cooking, but performing witchcraft. She transforms the kitchen into a site of occult production and abjection. In particular, she is making a witch bottle with her urine and menstrual blood to bury with Wayne, one of her victims. "Tampons aren't gross. Women bleed and that's a beautiful thing (...) Part of me can be with Wayne now.", she asserts (Biller, 2016, 00:36:40; see Table B5 and Excerpt B1). This dialogue reframes menstrual blood and urine, traditionally considered disgusting or shameful, as intimate, powerful, and even sacred. By saying so, she reclaims the abject as a medium of personal agency. Visually, this scene aestheticizes the collapse of distinctions between purity and pollution, domesticity and the occult, care and destruction.

4.1.3 “Have you ever dreamt of a better version of yourself?”: Posthuman Abjection and Monstrous Becoming

Another example of the monstrous body and abjection on screen is *The Substance* (2024), a body horror film about Elisabeth, a middle-aged actress once celebrated as an icon, now forgotten and relegated to hosting a fitness program on tv. When she is abruptly fired because the production needs a younger face for the show, Elisabeth turns to a black-market drug, “The Substance”, which externalizes a “younger, more beautiful” version of herself: Sue (Fargeat, 2024, 00:14:36; see Table B6 and Excerpt B2). However, the two women are not separate subjects; as the clinic warns her: “Remember there is no ‘she’ and ‘you’. You are one.” (Fargeat, 2024, 1:04:00; see Table B7 and Excerpt B3). Sue and Elisabeth must alternate weeks to give time for the other body to recharge. But Elisabeth, desperate to remain in her younger form, begins abusing the system. Each additional moment as Sue causes her original body to decay further.

Abjection manifests early in the film through Elisabeth’s deteriorating body: her hair falls out, her posture collapses, her skin shrivels, and she moves painfully. When she finally decides to terminate the process, and consequently Sue, she hesitates, weeping: “I can’t. I need you. I hate myself. You’re the only interesting part of me.” (Fargeat, 2024, 1:44:20; see Table B8 and Excerpt B4) Her self-repulsion and emotional dependency culminate in a physical confrontation with Sue. Elisabeth finally faces her younger self and is violently rejected.

This scene (1:48:00; see Table B9 and Figure B5) is significant as it visually depicts Kristeva’s (1982, p. 4) abjection: the urge to expel what is perceived as threatening or destabilizing. Sue’s violent assault on Elisabeth is not driven by cruelty and ambition, but by a deeper, internalized revulsion and self-hatred: Elisabeth’s aging body embodies the obsolescence and decay that Sue fears within herself. In attacking Elisabeth, Sue symbolically attempts to destroy her own undesirable self, the part of her that is considered invisible and worthless by a youth-obsessed, patriarchal culture. This act can be read as a desperate erasure of the abject feminine she has been taught to reject. Sue’s blood-smearred mouth and Elisabeth’s mutilated, pain-contorted face show abjection as the violent rejection of that which endangers the coherent, socially acceptable self. Elisabeth’s old body, soaked in blood and stripped of dignity, becomes a symbol of the cultural abject, which represents what dominant culture seeks to cast out: old age, decay, and the loss of conventional beauty.

Notably, Sue is in physical contact with this abjection. This suggests how women, under patriarchal regimes, are both enforcers and victims of these structures and norms, having internalized the logics that oppress them. The collapse of boundaries is evident here: self and other, youth and old age, care and violence. Through this, the film exposes the visceral horror of female aging, not as a biological inevitability, but as a culturally constructed monstrosity. It critiques how older women are rendered disposable, invisible, grotesque, unfit for the aesthetic economy of hyper-feminine perfection that characters like Sue desperately try to inhabit and preserve.

Once Sue ends Elisabeth, she inevitably starts falling apart, since the only reason she lived is because of her matrix. Her teeth fall, her ears fall. She decides to inject the drug again, hoping to get a newer, better version of herself. But things don't go as predicted. She gives birth to a monstrous, hybrid figure that transcends every boundary.

In this image (1:59:44; see Table B10 and Figure B6), the birth of Monstro-Elisasue confronts the viewer with a strong visual of abjection. The creature's body is rendered in hyperreal detail: sagging flesh, tumors, scarring, and asymmetrical anatomy disrupt any coherent sense not only of femininity but of humanness. As the previous scene, the character stands fully exposed in a sterile, clinical bathroom, a *mise-en-scène* that intensifies the horror of a body that cannot be categorized or restored, evoking the abject in its most extreme form.

Braidotti (2013, p. 103) argues that such images challenge anthropocentric ideals and disrupt the humanist subject. Monstro-Elisasue is a posthuman, material figuration of becoming, a "metamorphosis" that resists fixed identity and instead foregrounds ambiguity and transformation (Braidotti, 2002, p. 3). In this context, monstrosity is a productive force that reveals the instability of bodily borders and normative subjectivity. Similarly, Haraway (2016, p. 7) reframes abjection as the breakdown of fixed boundaries through her concept of the cyborg, which emphasizes the political power of hybrid bodies that defy binary categories such as machine/organism, male/female (p.7). Monstro-Elisasue resists gender, beauty, and species norms. In Haraway's (2016, p. 67) terms, this body does not seek restoration but reclaims its liminality as a site of political resistance. Across these three films, abjection is not merely a marker of horror, but a visual and narrative strategy through which femininity is destabilized, aestheticized, and made monstrous.

4.2 Archetypes of the Monstrous Feminine: Grotesque Wombs, Hungry Girls, and Haunting Bodies

This section explores how the selected films construct discourses around female monstrosity through recognizable archetypes. Distinct figures are examined along with their symbolic function, narrative logic, and feminist reinterpretations.

4.2.1 “You wouldn’t exist without ME!”: Maternal Power and the Horror of Self-Erasure

Creed’s (1993, pp. 270, 386) archaic mother and monstrous womb are unified under this category, which refers to the horror of the female reproductive body. In *The Substance* (2024) this archetype emerges through the ambiguous, parasitic mother-daughter dynamic between Elisabeth and Sue. This image (31:48; see Table C1 and Figure C1 in Appendix C) depicts Elisabeth’s body lying torn open along the spine, while Sue prepares to sew it back. This moment follows Sue’s emergence from Elisabeth’s body. The sterile, white-tiled bathroom evokes a surgical space which contributes to strip Elisabeth of subjectivity and reduce her to biological function. The framing positions Elisabeth as passive, objectified, and horizontal, while Sue is upright and dominant. The grotesque laceration appears wet and ragged. There’s blood and yellow bodily fluids on the ground, yet the horror of this image is not only corporeal but deeply symbolic. Sue assumes the role of caretaker and undertaker, and by doing so, she visually inverts the maternal act. Elisabeth embodies what Creed (1993, p. 270) calls the archaic mother, a maternal figure who reproduces without a male counterpart and represents a kind of female power that exists outside of patriarchal control.

Throughout the film, Sue and Elisabeth’s relationship develops into a parasitic exchange, where Sue’s existence accelerates Elisabeth’s physical decay. Elisabeth ages uncontrollably as her younger double oversteps the temporal limits dictated by the drug. This is exemplified by a scene that stages the juxtaposition between Sue’s glamour and Elisabeth’s isolation. The image (1:28:10; see Table C2 and Figure C2) captures Elisabeth as she watches Sue on a TV talk show. The frame situates Sue as confident, youthful, and adored, while Elisabeth, in a grease-stained robe, stands in her cold, glass-walled apartment, surrounded by dirty dishes and food. Sue’s face, glowing on the screen, is paired with a billboard that reads “*Pump It Up with Sue*”. The positioning of this billboard, outside Elisabeth’s apartment is critical: it forces her into constant confrontation with the image of the woman who is taking away her beauty, youth, and identity. The emotional turning point occurs when the TV host asks Sue to share her beauty secret: “One little trick of yours that helps you look so incredibly stunning! I mean just look at you!”, prompting Elisabeth’s furious command: “*Say it!*” As Sue demurely

replies, “I guess it’s that I just try... to be myself...”, Elisabeth starts throwing eggs at her face on the screen in a violent explosion of rage (Fargeat, 2024, 1:32:20; see Table C3 and Excerpt C1). This scene reveals Elisabeth’s distress at watching Sue succeed while she herself fades away. Her resentment, her sense of loss of youth and beauty as Sue thrives, reflect what Creed (1993, p. 504) calls the “monstrous womb”, which represents how the maternal body becomes a site of anxiety and terror of being consumed or replaced by the offspring. The archaic mother is erased as her body is rendered abject and obsolete.

4.2.2 “Hell is a Teenage Girl”: Queer Desire and Female Autonomy in the Possessed Monster and Vampire Archetypes

In *Jennifer’s body* (2009), Jennifer embodies the archetype of the possessed monster. In this scene (1:25:10; see Table C4 and Figure C3), she has just been interrupted by Needy while eating Chip (Needy’s boyfriend). She is levitating above the water with her long white dress soaked and dripping. Below, Needy and Chip cling to the pool’s edge, physically lower, smaller, and overwhelmed by Jennifer’s elevated presence. The composition positions Jennifer as the scene’s spectral and symbolic axis. Blue-green lighting and decaying vines draped over the pool’s walls evoke a contaminated environment. Jennifer’s levitation and trance-like state are classic horror visuals for possession which suspend her between human and supernatural. Drawing on Creed’s (1993, p. 25) theory, Jennifer’s possessed state can be read as both a manifestation of cultural anxieties surrounding female sexuality and social disorder, and a consequence of male violence that imposes monstrosity upon her. Jennifer’s posture is erect and dominating. The wet, spectral dress reminds the viewer that even as the main antagonist of the film, she is still a victim of the circumstances.

Jennifer’s character can also be aligned to the vampire archetype, especially because of her queer nature. Right after the levitation scene, Jennifer and Needy have this significant exchange: “I’m gonna eat your soul and shit it out.” “I thought you only murdered boys.” “I go both ways.” (Kusama, 2009, 1:26:21; see Table C5 and Excerpt C2). This dialogue marks an essential moment where Jennifer’s queerness is not only verbalized but theatrically performed and entwined with her monstrosity. Her declaration, at once ironic, seductive, and violent, embodies what Creed (1993, pp. 59-63) identifies as the female vampire’s excessive sexual agency, a force that threatens male dominance not just through violence but through same-sex desire.

Moreover, Jennifer’s sexuality is not just implied through this dialogue. Earlier in the film, Jennifer and Needy share an intimate kiss on the bed (00:59:39; see Table C6 and Figure C4), and this scene shows how queer desire is constructed through a feminist gaze. The camera

does not objectify either character; instead, the shot maintains symmetry and emotional parity. The medium close-up positions both characters as emotionally legible subjects rather than eroticized objects. Neither character is fragmented by the camera's gaze. Compared to other moments in the film where Jennifer seduces boys, this moment is not framed as aberrant or transgressive, but as emotionally sincere, even tender. Jennifer, like Creed's (1993, p. 270) lesbian vampire, blurs the boundaries between predator and seductress and disrupts the patriarchal framework of heteronormativity. Rather than performing queerness for male pleasure, Jennifer's actions are coded as affectively complex, infused with emotional ambivalence and sexual appetite. The kiss is not treated as a titillating spectacle for a male gaze, but as a moment of layered affect between two girls navigating a complex relationship of friendship, intimacy, and rivalry.

4.2.3 Rituals, Sex, and Magic: The Witch and the Deceptive Promise of Empowerment

Elaine, in *The Love Witch* (2016), exemplifies the archetype of the witch. In this image (00:13:10; see Table C7 and Figure C5), Elaine is surrounded by ritual objects: candles, herbs, pentagrams, and spell ingredients. She stands on the left side of the composition. Her expression is serene and her long dark hair falls over a soft blue shirt. The domestic setting contrasts with the occult symbolism of the altar-like table, and reinforces her status as a woman who subverts normative femininity with esoteric power.

According to Bellantoni's (2005, p. 29) framework, there's a strong symbolic opposition between red and blue; red is associated with passion, power, and disruption, while blue signifies composure, control, and emotional detachment. The walls behind Elaine are blue, and the chromatic tone can be approximately considered a lighter shade of what Bellantoni (2005, p. 58) calls Cerebral Blue, a hue associated with intellectual control. While Elaine moves gracefully, concentrated on her magic, the mise-en-scène incorporates red elements like candles, nail polish, and tablecloth to symbolize the violent nature of her actions. Red "advances" while blue "recedes", allowing red to erupt from the frame both visually and symbolically (Bellantoni, 2005, p. 29). This stark visual contrast between the two colors mirrors Elaine's character duality. Calm, gentle, and feminine on the outside, yet internally driven by desire, obsession, and murderous instinct. Therefore, this color opposition does more than create visual drama, it stages the monstrous feminine as a site of contradiction. As noted by Creed (1993, p. 275), the witch is feared because of the excess she embodies: of knowledge, sexuality, and ritual power. *The Love Witch* (2016) engages with this legacy explicitly. During a coven meeting, Barbara, another witch, declares: "The whole history of

witchcraft is interwoven with the fear of female sexuality. They burned us at the stake because they feared the erotic feelings we elicited in them. Later, they used marriage to hold us in bondage and made us into servants, whores, and fantasy dolls.” (Biller, 2016, 00:48:00; see Table C8 and Excerpt C3). This statement functions as a feminist metanarrative that reframes witchcraft as a political counter-history: one that interprets women’s sexuality as something made dangerous through patriarchal repression. Elaine’s power is fundamentally uncontainable by patriarchal systems. She is not hysterical or chaotic, she is deliberately magical, and that is what makes her monstrous.

However, *The Love Witch* (2016) subtly introduces a more complex and layered satirical critique within witchcraft. Ironically, Elaine’s coven is guided by a man, Gahan. His presence in the ritual space (00:52:25; see Table C9 and Figure C6) re-centers male dominance within a supposedly feminist spiritual tradition. As the leader, he presides over Elaine’s initiation, which resembles a sexual spectacle more than a genuine act of empowerment. Elaine is kneeling naked on a pentagram-inscribed floor. Her face is blindfolded with a red cloth, a symbol of vulnerability and eroticized submission. Two members of the coven wear only long black coats over otherwise nude bodies. The other figures in symmetrical formation are dressed in black robes, while Barbara is wearing a red one, as she is being initiated with Elaine. In the background there is a candlelit altar backed by glass windows. In particular, the central one presents a pentacle, a symbol often associated with magic, the occult, and spirituality. On the right side, Gahan stands dressed in a purple robe as he extends a sword toward Elaine’s chest, a gesture of symbolic assertion of ritual authority. The body positioning of Elaine and Gahan visually implies a hierarchical power relation under the guise of spiritual initiation. While the scene is framed as mystical and ceremonial, the visual grammar constructs Elaine as an object of collective gaze and control. Earlier in the film, this underlying logic is made explicit in Gahan’s speech during the previously mentioned coven gathering. He tells the witches: “we feel that a woman's greatest power lies in her sexuality...”; This rhetoric, disguised as empowerment, instead naturalizes a vision of womanhood rooted in essentialism. Gahan continues: “Wear high heels and makeup... display flesh artfully... be a mother and a lover. Stand your ground, but always let the man feel like a man.” (Biller, 2016, 00:48:56; see Table C8 and Excerpt C3). These instructions codify femininity through a patriarchal lens that reduces women to erotic objects and nurturing figures. Elaine is thus offered “empowerment” through a system that still centers male authority and emotional manipulation. This reflects one of the film’s broader critiques: even within esoteric or countercultural frameworks like witchcraft, patriarchal structures persist.

4.3 The Feminine Ideal: Camp, Performativity, Gaze and Collapse

This section explores how the selected films employ camp aesthetics and stylized performance to construct and subvert the monstrous feminine. With its roots in queer sensibility and performative excess, Camp functions as both a visual and tonal strategy and a mode of critique. Through exaggerated femininity, theatricality, saturated color palettes, and choreographed gesture, these films reveal femininity not as an essence but as an artificial and often grotesque performance. Crucially, camp is not purely playful in these texts; it is a vehicle for exposing the absurdity, violence, and labor embedded in the production of idealized womanhood.

4.3.1 The Construction of the Ideal: The Feminine Masquerade

Drawing from 1960s and 70s genre cinema, Anna Biller (2016) saturates *The Love Witch* with bold Technicolor palettes, vintage costuming, and elaborate mise-en-scène. Camp permeates the film to expose how femininity is performed to such an extent that it reveals its own artifice. However, this aesthetic, characterised by heavy makeup, wigs, silky lingerie, and baroque interiors, shows not only artifice but armor. For the main character, Elaine, it represents a weapon, other than a mask.

This scene (00:50:27; see Table D1 and Figure D1 in Appendix D) is a vivid example of this visual language. The shot references 1960s glamour shots. The red background evokes danger and contrasts with the soft white of her clothing. On one hand, white amplifies Elaine's ethereal, soft-looking persona; on the other, it highlights how stylized and constructed that persona is. It reveals how cultural ideals of womanhood rely on surface and illusion.

Her makeup is meticulous, her necklace precisely centered. The red candle in the background is indicative of her magical nature. Even the choice of purple eye makeup stands for her alignment with witchcraft, other than erotic control and emotional intensity. According to Bellantoni (2005, p. 9-10), purple indicates someone who is mysterious, emotionally intense, or in a state of transformation. This is exactly Elaine's condition in this scene: She is transforming herself, taking off her wig and constructing a new persona; and she is marked by emotional contradictions: sadness, vanity, rage, and desire all coexisting under her composed surface.

The act of removing the wig is crucial because it exposes the artifice behind idealized femininity and reveals gender not as a fixed identity but as a stylized performance, as

theorized by Butler (1990). This moment illustrates how gender is not something one is but something one does: a continuous and socially regulated ritual of actions, gestures, and aesthetics that fabricate the illusion of a stable identity. The elaborate eye makeup, flowing white lace robe, and carefully styled hair are all elements that serve to stage femininity as a theatrical act.

While looking at her reflection, a voiceover of her ex-husband plays in the background: “Dinner was late three times this week (...) And why don't you ever brush your hair? You need to take better care of yourself and of the house.” (Biller, 2016, 00:50:27; see Table D2 and Excerpt D1) His voice attempts to reduce Elaine to a failed woman: unattractive and unfit for domestic life, layering the scene with a tone of judgment that reinforces the gendered expectation that women must maintain both the home and their physical appearance for male approval.

The voice functions like a ghostly echo that haunts Elaine just like many women who are often made to carry internalized pressures to “fit” into narrow ideals of femininity. It speaks to the exhausting and often painful emotional labor of being “enough” under patriarchal scrutiny. The scene thus captures the psychic weight of gendered expectations, where beauty is not just an aspiration, but also a mechanism of control. And yet, this is precisely the femininity Elaine weaponizes. The ideal men demand of a beautiful, submissive woman is what she uses to seduce and destroy them. Ironically, the fantasy they crave is also the fantasy that leads to their death.

Just as Elaine constructs her hyper-feminine image to enchant and control, Jennifer channels similar aesthetic tools toward destruction. Where Elaine seduces under the illusion of love, Jennifer seduces to consume; both wield femininity as performance, but the affective register shifts from allure to annihilation. In this iconic scene from *Jennifer's Body* (2009) (00:38:33; see Table D3 and Figure D2), Jennifer stands in front of the mirror admiring herself after consuming her first victim, the school's football captain. Her phone is cradled against her cheek as she extends her tongue over the flame of a lighter. On the surface, this moment marks the emergence of her post-consumption power: a femininity no longer performed for approval, but weaponized against the world that once objectified and constrained her.

The scene is saturated with camp: Jennifer's flawless face, her baby-pink flip phone, and the warm lighting all recall a hyper-feminine, teen-girl visual style of the early 2000s. Here, Jennifer performs eroticized pain not to seduce, but to assert power. The act of burning her tongue is a visual contradiction: a beautiful girl hurting herself without suffering any visible

pain. Therefore, the boundaries between innocent girl and undead-cannibal monster are disrupted. The mirror, though off-screen, is symbolically central. Jennifer isn't just speaking to Needy; she is worshipping herself. She is no longer conforming to societal expectations, she is performing pain as proof of her transformation from girlhood to monstrous-feminine divinity.

Yet, even at her most powerful, Jennifer is not free from vulnerability. Her divine persona is also a mask for trauma and alienation. As with Elaine, the surface performance conceals internal damage, and camp turns suffering into spectacle. In both cases, however, femininity is not only exaggerated but weaponized, transforming pain into vengeance: a spectacle of beauty that conceals emotional devastation and psychic collapse.

4.3.2 Cracks in the mirror of the Feminine Ideal: Deconstruction and Collapse

While Elaine and Jennifer use hyper-femininity as a tool for seduction or domination, these performances are never entirely stable. Beneath the surface lie fractures: moments when the mask slips and the emotional toll becomes visible. Camp, with its embrace of theatricality and excess, is not only a strategy of empowerment but also a fragile façade behind which pain and psychic strain accumulate. Even scenes that appear triumphant are haunted by vulnerability. In the following scenes from *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *The Love Witch* (2016), the mirror reemerges as a key visual motif, no longer a space of self-admiration or control, but one of psychic disintegration. Here, the feminine ideal begins to collapse under its own weight and expose the instability and internalized pressures that such performances demand. In this scene from *Jennifer's Body* (2009) (1:16:20; Table D4 and Figure D3), Jennifer stands before the mirror, applying foundation. Her complexion is pallid, her eyes rimmed with redness and fatigue, and the gesture of pressing makeup on her skin feels more like an effort to hold herself together than an act of beautification. She is visibly deteriorating, weakened by hunger, as a reminder that her monstrous beauty is sustained through violence. The scene marks a shift in the function of the mirror: from a site of self-care or vanity to one of emotional crisis, where femininity must still be performed even when the self unravels. To the side, a framed photograph of Jennifer in a state of glowing, effortless perfection serves as a visual specter of an ideal that is no longer sustainable.

The image employs a carefully constructed color palette to intensify this contradiction. The warm, saturated tones of the photograph and soft pink background evoke Jennifer's previous identity, while the lifeless hues of her actual reflection, washed-out, grey-toned skin

and heavy foundation, suggest emotional and physical depletion. The makeup, rather than enhancing beauty, resembles post-mortem cosmetology. Symbolically, even the background visible through the mirror behind her figure is a muted grey that signals emptiness and death.

Through the mirror, the scene visualizes the emotional and physical toll of gendered expectations. It reframes femininity as a site of regulation and exhaustion, where the ideal woman becomes both unreachable and inescapable. The performance is not seductive, but survivalist.

A similar collapse of idealized femininity occurs in *The Love Witch* (2016), though through imitation rather than decay. Just as Jennifer's appearance crumbles under the pressure of sustaining her posthuman power, Trish's dress up as Elaine (1:40:00; Table D5 and Figure D4) marks a moment of emotional rupture disguised as performance. If Jennifer's mirror scene stages the aftermath of power, Trish's reveals the cost of aspiring to it. Here, camp does not celebrate transgression but exposes fragility; the performance is not empowering, but unraveling.

Trish is in Elaine's bedroom. She is wearing Elaine's hot pink lingerie, bright turquoise eyeshadow, and flowing black wig. The image is unmistakably camp: florid, extravagant, and decorated in a saturated palette of reds and purples. But beyond surface exaggeration lies a deeper interrogation of gender, identity, and aesthetic performance.

Trish's imitation of Elaine is not simply mimicry; while Elaine is performatively hyper-feminine throughout the film, Trish's sudden drag reveals a disjunction between her usual normal style and her new, exuberant identity. The performance fails as a seduction but succeeds as camp: it turns gender into spectacle, revealing it to be a mask rather than an essence. Her expression and posture reveal self-conscious parody: she is aware of her transformation, yet cannot fully master it, caught in the artifice. This echoes Jack Babuscio's (1999, p. 120) formulation of camp as rooted in theatricality, incongruity, and irony.

Yet Trish's mannerisms express more than irony. They reveal what Lauren Berlant (2011, p. 24) calls "cruel optimism": an attachment to ideal womanhood not because it empowers, but because it promises emotional coherence and cultural value. Furthermore, Rosalind Gill (2007, p. 151) argues that women today are expected to internalize the male gaze, becoming both subjects and objects of self-monitoring, caught in constant comparison with one another. Trish's act of dressing like Elaine is shaped by this cultural logic: it is not simply envy, but an emotional response to the pressures of femininity where comparison, aspiration, and judgment become normalized forms of self-relation. Trish's parody of Elaine exposes not only the unsustainability of feminine ideals, but the emotional violence they impose. Her

attempt to inhabit hyper-femininity becomes a site of affective instability, where camp exposes physical and psychic strain.

4.3.3 “Pretty Girls Should Always Smile!”: Spectacle, Fragmentation, and the Grotesque Feminine

While earlier sections deal with personal or intimate acts of gender performance, the next scene from *The Substance* (2024) (1:17:00; Table D6 and Figure D5) is not about an individual trying to meet a gender ideal, but about how femininity is produced, engineered by others, choreographed for an audience, and optimized for consumption. Sue’s new fitness show “Pump it up” is one of the most visually charged and thematically dense moments. Sue, Elisabeth’s surgically produced younger double, performs a sexually suggestive choreographed routine alongside dancers in a studio setting. The scene is stylized to excess: blinding lights, metallic bodysuits, explicit movements, and, most notably, framing choices that isolate body parts like thighs, breasts, buttocks. The camera does not merely record Sue’s body; it fragments, disciplines, and hyper-exposes it. This visual fragmentation echoes Laura Mulvey’s (1975) theory of the male gaze, which explains how women’s bodies in cinema are often reduced to eroticized parts for male visual pleasure. Crucially, the film foregrounds this gaze, making clear that it is explicitly male and sexual. This moment contrasts sharply with Elisabeth’s earlier program, which was staffed entirely by women and featured a more neutral, balanced visual style. In contrast, Sue’s version is produced by a male team and clearly tailored for a heterosexual male audience.

Sue is not merely performing femininity; she is its most extreme and horrifying realization: a subject tailor-made for patriarchal consumption. Her monstrosity lies not in her failure to meet gender ideals, but in her violent, seamless embodiment of them. The entire performance space is built on artifice, and camp is the aesthetic strategy through which this horror is made visible. Sue’s hyper-femininity is not the expression of any internal truth, but a surface effect produced by discipline and aesthetic labor. As Pamela Robertson (1999, p. 267) notes, camp operates as a feminist tool for denaturalizing femininity through exaggeration and artifice. In this scene, camp serves as a critical exaggeration of femininity that reveals its artificial construction. Through theatrical choreography, coordinated costumes, and glossy visual excess, the film exposes the normative feminine image as hollow, plastic, and grotesquely idealized. What initially appears joyful or performative becomes a sharp commentary on the visual labor and aesthetic violence required to uphold these gender norms. The pink-saturated mise-en-scène enhances this dynamic. As Patti Bellantoni (2005,

p. 39) argues, while pink often appears gentle, sweet, or feminine, it can mask more complex dynamics. She writes that pink can be associated with manipulation, passive control, and concealed power, particularly when it's used to cover up or soften harsher truths (Bellantoni, 2005, p. 39). In *The Substance* (2024), pink is Sue's main color, which envelops the character in a softness that masks the violence of gender ideals. The beautiful becomes monstrous not through distortion, but through perfection. And it is deeply ironic that Sue is not even a real woman, but a product of a pharmaceutical experiment. One of the male producers even remarks upon seeing her for the first time: "Looks like everything sure is in the right place this time." (Fargeat, 2024, 00:38:02; Table D7 and Excerpt D2) The comment makes explicit that she is only viewed as a checklist of bodily features, and her value is fully determined by her ability to attract male desire.

Notably, the scene also incorporates racialized dynamics within the spectacle. One of the dancers is a Black woman with straightened, red-dyed hair, styled to conform to white beauty standards. Meanwhile, a Black woman in the background, likely an assistant, stands with a pink towel. Their presence reveals how racial difference is not excluded but absorbed into a system that privileges uniformity and erases specificity. The assistant's near invisibility points to the unseen labor required to uphold Sue's idealized image, while the dancer's aesthetic alignment underscores how participation in the spectacle demands assimilation. Rather than disrupting the performance, these women of color are absorbed into its logic, one crafted to appeal white, cisgender, heterosexual male desire.

This scene is therefore not simply an example of stylistic excess, it is an illustration of how gender and race are aestheticized within systems of control. The horror in this moment arises not from grotesque abjection, but from seamless beauty: femininity made plastic, perfected, and disturbingly palatable for consumption.

The mirror reappears as a central visual motif in *The Substance* (2024), this time in an image that is both grotesque and camp (2:01:54; Table D8 and Figure D6). The recently "born" Monstro-Elisavie sits before the mirror getting ready to host the upcoming New Year's show (a performance originally intended for Sue). Her flesh is distorted, asymmetrical, and visibly decaying, yet she appears adorned in rhinestone earrings and draped in a sheer turquoise robe, as if still tethered to the fantasy of femininity. The monstrous body is presented as a staged performance, resulting in a horrifying and absurd scene that echoes camp's embrace of contradiction and theatrical subversion. This aligns with Cleto's (1999, p. 14) framing of camp as a queer mode of cultural critique, where the performative excess destabilizes normative understandings of embodiment, gender, and identity. The monstrous

body, rendered as visual spectacle, thus participates in a larger discourse of parody and the aesthetic undoing of seriousness that defines the camp mode.

Here, the mirror becomes a space of posthuman performance, where the ideal of womanhood is no longer only unsustainable but wholly exploded. Yet the performance continues, not despite the monstrosity, but through it. In this sense, the scene veers into tragic camp: Elisasue participates in the ritual of getting ready, even as the body she inhabits has become an unrecognizable version of its former self. This moment reflects what Braidotti (2002, pp. 2-3) calls an ethics of becoming: a mode of subjectivity grounded in embracing transformation, embodiment, and difference. Elisabeth's gaze no longer seeks to restore the ideal, but to recognize and affirm the self as it is. For the first time, she sees herself not with horror, but with compassion and even love.

Visually, the scene is saturated with contradictions. The warm lighting suggests intimacy or glamour, but instead exposes every wrinkle, fold, and raw seam of Elisasue's flesh. The beauty tools visible on the vanity (lipstick, brushes, perfume) mock the futility of her preparation. The turquoise dress, a delicate, elegant garment clashes with the grotesque texture of her skin and creates a visual dissonance that exemplifies camp's power to destabilize normativity.

This image captures the failure of the feminine ideal in an extreme form to underscore its violent absurdity. Elisasue is the grotesque consequence of a woman who has pushed herself beyond human limits in an attempt to embody an ideal. In doing so, the film reframes monstrosity not simply as abjection, but as a theatrical, affective, and exaggerated critique of gendered performance and the fantasy it demands. The mirror does not reflect the ideal; it reflects its cost.

The following scene from *The Substance* (2024) (2:06:00; Table D9 and Figure D7) shows Monstro-Elisasue on stage. Her body is visibly grotesque and deformed; she is wearing a glittering blue ballgown and is surrounded by a chorus of ultra-feminine showgirls dressed in pastel pink lingerie and feathered caps and fans. However, the most striking element is the mask: a printed photo of Elisabeth's original face with an exaggerated red smile scrawled over the mouth in red lipstick. This violent overperformance of happiness becomes a grotesque satire of femininity's most insidious demands: to smile, to be pleasant, to perform emotional availability even in pain. Coulter (2018, p. 437) connects this mandate to Ahmed's (2010) concept of the "happy housewife", where women's visible contentment becomes a measure of their success under patriarchal scrutiny. When Monstro-Elisasue paints a second, hyperbolic smile on top of an already smiling image, it enacts a camp-inflected parody of this

affective demand. Her mask mocks the impossibility of maintaining an authentic self within these strictures. It exposes the cracks in a cultural system that insists “pretty girls should always smile” (Fargeat, 2024, 1:55:19; Table D10 and Excerpt D3), as the producer told Sue when her body started breaking down following Elisabeth’s death (the original body). In this way, the act becomes both a critique and a performance of gender.

The paper mask, the silence of the audience, and the contrast between the glamour and the decaying posthuman body converge in a moment of horror masquerading as glamour. Here, camp aesthetic is weaponized to highlight the absurdity of unattainable standards imposed upon women. The stage becomes a cruel space of posthuman drag: not a parody of femininity, but the final, failing performance of a woman haunted by the demand to maintain an ideal she can no longer embody.

Elisabeth’s persistence in this performance is a ritual of femininity extended to the point of grotesquery. Her monstrous presence, masked by a photo of her former self, confronts the audience with the psychic and physical cost of beauty as cultural fantasy. Here, camp transforms the pain and marginalization of queer and gender-nonconforming subjects into exaggerated, stylized performance. As Cleto (1999, p. 28) suggests, theatricalization through irony, parody, and visual excess not only aestheticizes suffering, but also exposes and critiques the cultural systems that produce it. *The Substance* (2024) does not simply parody femininity; it unmasks it, revealing the violence, distortion, and emotional ruin that lie beneath its glittering surface.

4.4 The Monstrous Feminine Unleashed: Rage, Destruction, Revenge

This final discourse examines how the monstrous feminine operates as a site of anger, resistance, and agency within *Jennifer’s Body* (2009), *The Love Witch* (2016), and *The Substance* (2024). Having previously traced the construction and aestheticization of the monstrous feminine through abjection, archetypal coding, and camp performance, this section turns toward actual action to focus on how monstrosity acts as a dynamic response to systemic violence, gendered oppression, and patriarchal control, as theorized by Creed (2022, pp. 4-5, 13-15). Female rage, often object of taboo in mainstream media, is here refigured as a powerful political force. Through acts of rebellion, seduction, murder, or even self-destruction, the monstrous feminine actively resists and critiques binary, patriarchal structures. Where the earlier sections traced the construction and aestheticization of the monstrous feminine, this section marks its rupture.

But before delving into this rupture in detail, it is necessary to understand the structure that provokes it. Across all three films, male characters embody a form of ethical and symbolic corruption that Creed (2022, pp. 6, 9) identifies as the male abject.

4.4.1 The System to Be Destroyed: Representations of the Male Abject

Across the three films, patriarchal violence reveals itself as the systematized structure that precipitates monstrous resistance. In *The Substance* (2024), the restaurant scene in which Harvey fires Elisabeth (00:08:32, Table E1 and Figure E1 in Appendix E) is shot with aggressive visual proximity: the camera obsessively fixates on his open mouth, greasy fingers, and the slurping consumption of shrimp. As he speaks, Harvey rationalizes the replacement of women over fifty as a biological inevitability (Fargeat, 2024; 00:08:32, Table E2 and Excerpt E1). This scene is especially striking for how it fuses grotesque visual excess with the film's ideological critique of misogyny. In *Jennifer's Body* (2009, 1:04:20; Table E3 and Figure E2), patriarchal violence emerges through ritualized sacrifice. A wide shot captures Jennifer bound and supine beneath torchlight, surrounded by the members of the band in a gloomy forest. The mise-en-scène fuses pagan iconography with stylized rock aesthetics, while Nikolai (the frontman), mocks her desirability, forgets her name, and jokes mid-murder, rendering violence both theatrical and banal. *The Love Witch* (2016) offers an equally brutal sequence (1:51:50; Table E4 and Figure E3): a group of men attempts assaulting Elaine on a nightclub floor while screaming "burn the witch!" (Biller, 2016, 1:51:50; Table E5 and Excerpt E2). Shot from an overhead angle, the image centers her splayed, helpless body while male hands reach in from all sides, their faces obscured. Sexual violence is visualized as a faceless, collective force.

Across all three scenes, gendered violence appears systemically normalized, enacted through excess, ideology, and repetition. It is within this visual and narrative contexts that the male abject, as theorized by Creed (2022, pp. 6-9), emerges, not as an isolated character, but as a recurring structure that encodes patriarchal excess, ethical vacancy, and bodily grotesquery. These abject masculinities operate as both aesthetic and ideological catalysts for the monstrous feminine's revolt.

4.4.2 The Monstrous Feminine's Revolt

Having established how patriarchal violence manifests through the male abject, the following scenes illustrate how the monstrous feminine's response through murder, symbolic inversion, ideological critique, and visual excess. One of the final scenes in *Jennifer's Body*

(2009) stages the monstrous feminine in its full destructive potential (1:24:17; Table E6 and Figure E4). Within the setting of an abandoned poolhouse, Jennifer holds Chip's weak body in a pose that visually echoes romantic intimacy. Her face is demonic: emptied of humanity and overtaken by a force beyond reason. She is not angry in a human sense, but possessed by something far more ancient and disruptive. Her mouth is grotesquely extended, sharp teeth stained with blood while she is in the active, visceral process of eating. Her white satin gloves, now stained with blood, indicate a corrupted femininity, while the cool blue-green tones of the tiled wall behind them accentuate the pallor of death and detachment. Jennifer's posture remains composed while Chip's slack, shocked expression makes him passive and vulnerable. This visual dissonance not only emphasizes the scene's subversion of gendered power, but also inverts conventional horror dynamics of male predator and female victim.

This is the moment that, shortly after, leads to Jennifer's death (1:32:51; Table E7 and Figure E5). The two girls are captured in a striking overhead shot. The image is quiet but loaded with affect: Jennifer lies motionless, blood blooming across her chest, while Needy rests beside her, their bodies nearly touching. The *mise-en-scène* is deceptively soft: pillows, plaid sheets, and warm lighting suggest slumber-party nostalgia. Yet this feminized domestic space has become a deathbed. The visual contrast between the warmth of the bedding and the vivid red of the blood symbolizes the intrusion of violence into the realm of girlhood. Their hair spills across the frame, entangled and touching, signifying the enduring intimacy that lingers even in death. Jennifer's expression is peaceful, as if she momentarily reclaims her humanity, which denies the audience a clear moral resolution. The shot resists the logic of traditional horror cinema, where the final girl's survival is a reward for virtue. Instead, Needy survives through violent transformation. Jennifer's rage, born from male violence and never given the chance to be directed at its true source (the band who sacrificed her) is silenced here, not by patriarchy, but by another woman. Yet in this act, power is transferred: Needy becomes the inheritor of Jennifer's monstrous energy and will eventually seek revenge. The scene becomes an example of feminized rage: interrupted, redirected, but still alive.

Another scene that theatrically stages female rage is Elaine's final murder in *The Love Witch* (2016, 1:56:00; Table E8 and Figure E6). Elaine sits beside Griff's dying body, holding a bloodied ceremonial dagger; her face is serene, almost relieved. Griff is a police officer, the last man she seduces and the only one who refuses to drink her love potion. As she tells him moments earlier, "All my life I've been tossed in the garbage except when men wanted to use my body," a statement that links her personal trauma to broader patterns of erotic disposability and patriarchal exploitation. Her violence, then, is not mindless but the

culmination of a long, failed negotiation with heteronormative romance. “Only men make us work so hard for your love” Elaine declares, “If you would just love us for ourselves, but you won't.” (Biller, 2016, 1:49:52; Table E9 and Excerpt E3) The red silk sheets and matching curtains visually echo her burning desire and foreshadow the act of violence to come. Behind her, a painting of an orgiastic scene saturates the frame in patriarchal fantasy, now literalized in Griff’s sacrificial pose: arms crossed over his chest like a gothic lover, consumed by the very ideals he once dismissed.

Notably, Griff is dressed in white, a color historically associated with purity, femininity, and passive victimhood, while Elaine wears black, the color of mystery and death (Bellantoni, 2005, p. 16). This chromatic reversal visually disrupts traditional gendered codes, positioning Griff as the feminized object of sacrifice, and Elaine as the violent executioner. Unlike the men who died under the influence of her magic, Griff must be killed manually. This shift is significant: where enchantment fails, direct force intervenes. Elaine had previously declared, “I decided to find my own power. And I found that power through witchcraft... I take what I need from men and not the other way around.” (Biller, 2016, 1:50:22; Excerpt E3). Now, she enacts that logic with the blade. The witch holds the dagger like a scepter, not only assuming phallic power but narrative authorship. Her rage, though visually masked by beauty and serenity, is the force that propels the film’s radical reversal of cinematic norms. By stabbing Griff in the heart after he denies her fantasy, Elaine transforms the failure of romance into a declaration of sovereignty.

Her smile in this moment can be interpreted as both a moment of female empowerment and a sign of psychological fracture. Throughout the film, Elaine has tried to find love by conforming to male fantasy, only to be met with emotional collapse and rejection. In killing Griff, the embodiment of patriarchal rationality and emotional detachment, she rejects the male gaze and the systems that define her through male desire. She is no longer seeking validation but asserting autonomy through destruction. Denotatively, her smile expresses triumph or release; connotatively, it reveals deeper ambiguity: a delusional fantasy, a collapse between love and violence, or a satirical exaggeration of romantic fulfillment. Dreamlike images of a fairytale ending with Griff play over the murder, which reinforce a reading of disconnection from reality and the failure of romantic idealism. The scene functions as a satirical inversion of the fairytale ending: Elaine, having embraced her identity as witch and femme castratrice, stabs her “prince” instead of kissing him. In line with Barbara Creed’s (1993) theory, this moment marks her full transformation into the monstrous-feminine. The witch archetype here, as with the possessed monster in *Jennifer’s Body* (2009), intersects with

the femme castratrice: rage connected to symbolic castration and revenge against male violence (Creed, 1993, pp. 445-446).

But where Jennifer's killings are cynical and displaced, and Elaine's are ritualized and delusional, Elisasue's collapse in *The Substance* (2024) is public, expansive, and uncontrollable. Her eruption marks a culmination of the monstrous-feminine: not masked, not aestheticized, just violently uncontainable.

The explosive climax of *The Substance* (2024) stages not only the destruction of the monstrous-feminine but the collapse of ethical, visual, and ontological boundaries (2:10:48; Table E10 and Figure E7). The scene unfolds in a delirious spiral of gore: Monstro-Elisasue, brutally beaten and decapitated by men rushing the stage, spins on the stage in her glittering blue dress, spraying torrents of blood in every direction. The excess is deliberately grotesque: the arterial spray reaches the audience, covers them in red and transforms the stage into a theatre of pure bodily horror. Her movement is balletic yet uncontrolled, mechanical yet human, a grotesque parody of feminine performance pushed to collapse. The composition is visually disorienting: Elisasue's dismembered body spins across the stage, overlaid with the image of the producer's screaming, blood-covered face.

Earlier, Elisasue's fragmented voice called out, "It's still me," while the audience shouted back, "It's a freak!" and demanded her death (Fargeat, 2024, 2:08:40; Table E11 and Excerpt E4). This moment literalizes what Judith Butler (1993, pp. 3-4) describes as abjection: a process by which society defines which bodies count as fully human by casting certain bodies out as dangerous, impure, or unrecognizable. Elisasue's body, queer, hybrid, and posthuman, no longer fits within the accepted norms of gender, beauty, or humanity. Even as she tries to speak to reclaim her personhood, she is visually and symbolically overwritten as a monster. What this means is that the audience (both within the film and watching the film) no longer sees her as a person. Her pain, her words, her identity are denied meaning because her body no longer conforms to what society recognizes as legible or worthy, having fundamentally destroyed every possible boundary.

This moment also resonates with posthumanist ethics. As Rosi Braidotti (2013, p. 190) argues, posthumanism asks us to rethink ethics not through individualism or sameness, but through relationality, vulnerability, and shared responsibility. The crowd's violent, panicked, dehumanizing reaction represents a collective ethical failure: they respond to her new form with fear and annihilation rather than recognition or care. Her final eruption of blood is more than shocking imagery, it is a symbolic act of expulsion. Rather than disappearing under patriarchal violence, the monstrous feminine retaliates through excess. Blood floods the very

stage that once objectified her. Abjection becomes a weapon; collapse becomes revolt. But the eruption of blood is not just grotesque, it is also deeply satirical, a hyperbolic parody of patriarchal violence turned back on itself. The spectacle mocks the very gaze that sought to control her, it transforms destruction into performance and collapse into critique. The scene ultimately functions not just as feminist horror, but as a posthuman political critique: a grotesque indictment of a culture that creates feminine bodies only to destroy them when they cease to serve its fantasies.

5. Conclusion

This research examined how the horror trope of the monstrous feminine, as theorized by Barbara Creed (1993), is constructed, aestheticized, and politicized in women-directed horror cinema. Drawing on a layered theoretical framework built on authors such as Julia Kristeva (1982), Judith Butler (1990), Laura Mulvey (1975), Donna Haraway (2016), and Rosi Braidotti (2002), the study meticulously applied a Visual Critical Discourse Analysis (VCDA) approach to contemporary examples of feminist horror, *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama, 2009), *The Love Witch* (Biller, 2016), and *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024). The study traced the discursive and aesthetic strategies through which the monstrous feminine emerges not only as a site of horror, but as a vehicle for feminist critique. This study contributes to contemporary feminist media discourse by foregrounding the monstrous feminine as a mode of affective, political expression rather than mere genre convention. Through the discourses, a constellation of visual and narrative strategies emerges that articulates monstrosity not just as a horror device, but as a site of feminist resistance. The findings reveal that, in the selected case studies, the monstrous feminine is constructed in different yet comparable ways. The three main characters navigate a patriarchal system in order to survive. Whether it is about preparing love potions, murdering teenage boys, or destroying their own body, their choices reflect the broader, systemic logics that cause their oppression.

In all three films, abjection becomes a visual and thematic strategy that blurs the line between beauty and decay, attraction and repulsion. Jennifer's bloodlust, Elaine's seductive toxicity, and Elisabeth's grotesque transformation reflect how femininity is regulated, consumed, and punished. Ultimately, these films challenge viewer expectations through discomfort and confrontation. This strategic unease is what renders their political satire effective.

Societal pressure on beauty plays a crucial role in every film: the characters, particularly Sue and Elaine, are vivid examples that reveal how impossible beauty standards are, and how artificial the construction of the feminine ideal can be. Elaine wants to be this picture-perfect patriarchal fantasy and to do so, she creates a hyper-feminized alter ego. Sue also represents a living projection of the patriarchal fantasy, with the exception that she is literally the result of a pharmaceutical experiment.

This aligns with Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender as performance: a set of repeated acts that produce the illusion of a stable, fixed identity. In the case studies, the characters demonstrate how femininity is always an artificial construct shaped by social norms, performed through stylized routines of makeup, clothing, and posture. These performances

mimic patriarchal ideals so intensely that they become exhausting, violent, and ultimately destabilizing. As Butler (1990, p. 187) suggests, gender's repetition becomes most visible and most exposed through parody. The films utilize camp as the main aesthetic to bring this idea to the screen. Camp is a powerful tool because it exaggerates femininity to such an extent that it exposes its own artificiality; elements like parody, saturated color palettes, and theatricality effectively mock the artifice of gender and convey the affective costs of trying to conform to these impossible ideals.

These films also make clear that gender as we understand and experience it is shaped by the male gaze. The monstrous feminine emerges also as a weapon capable of reconfiguring this gaze, to dismantle these logics and generate new ones. *The Substance* (2024) disrupts the male gaze not by avoiding it, but by inhabiting it so excessively that it becomes grotesque. Fargeat (2024) replicates the conventions of male-directed spectacle, especially in Sue's scenes, to expose how absurd and violent these visual norms truly are. One of the risks is that women internalize this gaze, believing there is a single way to be beautiful: appearing as desirable objects of pleasure.

The films disrupt horror conventions by refusing clear categories of victim or villain. The monstrous feminine does not manifest as an essentialist category, but rather as a complex and dynamic visual and narrative strategy shaped by contradictions, trauma, societal constraints, violence, and ideological inversion. The monstrous feminine is not merely a symbol of deviance or threat; she is a site of cultural contestation. Even as the films employ conventional narrative archetypes of horror like the witch or the possessed monster, as outlined by Creed (1993), these figures are reinterpreted: rather than operating as passive symbols of patriarchal fears, they become active agents of destruction.

The monstrous feminine's birth can be seen as a result of what Creed (2022, pp. 6-9) calls the "male abject", an intensified expression of patriarchal violence. The patriarchy is thus the primary trigger for the monstrous feminine's revolt. This revolt assumes different but complementary faces in the selected case studies. In *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama, 2009), Jennifer's sexual assault causes her to transform into this hungry demon who seeks revenge against men. In *The Love Witch* (Biller, 2016), Elaine internalizes the patriarchal fantasy that romantic love will complete her, and this fantasy leads to the death of every man she interacts with. *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024) visualizes this revolt in a posthuman register, showing how monstrous femininity collapses under the pressure of commodified beauty, only to return as a grotesque spectacle and send back the violence in an explosion of blood and gore.

Jennifer's revolt is consumptive and seductive. Elaine's is delusional and tragic.

Elisabeth/Sue's is grotesque and posthuman.

These findings highlight how monstrosity in these texts is not purely aesthetic or narrative; it is deeply political. The monstrous-feminine challenges hegemonic norms around gender, age, beauty, sexuality, identity, and exposes the structural, symbolic, and physical violences that underwrite normative femininity. Furthermore, it strengthens the horror genre's position as a cultural mirror and a rich site for political critique. Across all three films, monstrosity becomes a method of speaking what is unspeakable, of showing what has been rendered invisible, and of disrupting the boundaries that contain women's bodies, desires, and agency. Monstrosity in these films is not merely horrific, it is revolutionary. It reclaims the female body as a site of power, defiance, and reimagination, both visually and ideologically.

5.1 Limitations

The study presents some limitations that must be addressed. Firstly, the scope is necessarily narrow, focused on three Anglophone, feature-length, women-directed horror films made between 2009 and 2024. While this allowed for in-depth analysis, it limits the generalizability of the findings across global horror or other intersecting genres. Secondly, although the analysis is intersectionally informed, the films themselves are centered on white, cisgender, upper-middle class protagonists, with limited representation of racialized, trans forms of monstrosity. As such, the thesis primarily reflects dominant constructions of womanhood within Euro-American media contexts.

In addition, as with all qualitative and interpretive research, the analysis is shaped by the researcher's own positionality and interpretive lens. While care has been taken to ground interpretations in feminist theory and visual critical discourse analysis, the selection and reading of scenes may reflect subjective biases. These limitations highlight the need for future research to expand the representational scope and to critically engage with alternative cultural, racial, and gendered imaginaries of monstrosity beyond the dominant Western canon.

5.2 Implications and Future Research

Despite these limitations, this research contributes meaningfully to the fields of feminist cinema and horror studies. It expands the monstrous-feminine framework beyond its original psychoanalytic formulation by integrating posthumanism, performativity, and camp aesthetics. It also demonstrates the utility of Visual Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological tool for feminist cultural critique. Crucially, the study foregrounds women-

directed horror as a generative space for experimental feminist critique, illustrating how monstrosity functions not merely as a genre trope, but as a visual and narrative strategy that exposes, contests, and disrupts patriarchal logics.

These findings invite further research into how race, class, disability, and trans identity intersect with the monstrous feminine across other horror subgenres and global film traditions. Future studies might expand this framework by analyzing horror texts from non-Western contexts, or by focusing explicitly on trans embodiments of monstrosity and their unique visual and affective languages. Such research would continue to challenge and expand the boundaries of feminist horror discourse, offering more inclusive and multifaceted readings of the monstrous feminine.

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Appendix A

Table A1

Discursive Coding table

| Discourse | Visual Strategies | Discursive Tropes | Theoretical Concepts | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Monstrous Body and Abjection | Blood, gore, bodily fluids, fragmented or decaying bodies, close-up framing | Erotic abjection, bestial femininity, bodily excess, the aging body | Kristeva's abjection, Creed's monstrous-feminine, Braidotti's and Haraway's posthuman embodiment | Female monstrosity is visualized through the disruption of bodily boundaries, conflating beauty and horror, and positioning the feminine body as unstable, leaky, and transgressive |
| Archetypes of the Monstrous Feminine | Gothic and occult symbolism, ritual mise-en-scène, archetypal costumes (witch, seductress), levitation, queer desire | The witch, the possessed girl, the grotesque womb | Creed's archetypes, Mulvey's theory of the gaze | Traditional archetypes are reactivated and distorted to explore patriarchal anxieties around female power, sexuality, and maternal excess |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| The Feminine Ideal | Highly stylized mise-en-scène, saturated color palettes, exaggerated makeup/costume, artificial lighting, symmetrical or staged compositions | Hyperfemininity, as performance, parody, seduction emotional excess | Butler's gender performativity, Berlant's cruel optimism, Cleto on camp, Mulvey's male gaze | Camp aesthetics foreground femininity as an artificial, labor-intensive performance that is both seductive and destructive; it becomes monstrous through its own exaggeration |
| Rage Destruction, and Revenge | Dark/red color grading, violent male figures, weaponized female bodies, destructive or violent acts, grotesque spectacle | Feminist rage, symbolic castration, posthuman revolt, final girl reversal, the femme castratrice | Creed's the monstrous feminine reconfigured as a political strategy, Creed's male abject, Braidotti's posthumanism | Female monstrosity is triggered through confrontation with the male abject, becoming a vehicle for feminist revenge and revolt; violence is both symbolic and material, challenging patriarchal control through rage and destruction |

Appendix B**“Women bleed, and that’s a beautiful thing”:
The Monstrous Body and Abjection
Bestial Femininity in the Domestic Frame****Table B1**Figure B1 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 00:23:49): Jennifer at Needy's house**Glamour and Gore: The Eroticized Object****Table B2**

Figure B2 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:11:08): Jennifer's blood smeared smile

Table B3



Figure B3 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 01:12:17): Richard's vision of Elaine

Table B4



Figure B4 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:36:40): Elaine in the kitchen

Table B5

Excerpt B1 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:36:40):

ELAINE

Tampons aren't gross. Women bleed and that's a beautiful thing. Do you know that most men have ever even seen a used tampon? Part of me can be with Wayne now. Always.

“Have you ever dreamt of a better version of yourself?”: Posthuman Abjection and Monstrous Becoming

Table B6

Excerpt B2 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 00:14:36):

AN ENTIRELY BLACK SCREEN.

After a moment, a MALE VOICE : it is deep and slow. Underneath a very slight, almost inaudible crackling sound.

Have you ever dreamt of a better version of yourself?

The screen remains completely black as the voice continues:

We are merely the expression of a genetic code that freezes at a precise moment. But your DNA conceals billions of other possibilities. Inside of you, there is another you. Or should I say, billions of other “yous.” One single injection unlocks your DNA, starting a new cellular division, that will release another version of yourself. Younger. More beautiful. More perfect.

This is...

The title appears full screen at the same time as the voice pronounces: THE SUBSTANCE

Table B7

Excerpt B3 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:04:00):

Remember there is no “she” and “you”, you are one.

Table B8

Excerpt B4 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:44:20):

ELISABETH (CONT'D)

I can't...I can't... I HATE myself...I need you.. (shaking her)

I need you!!!

She starts to panic, leans in very close to her face to try and make out any sign of breathing. Nothing. She starts CPR on Sue.

ELISABETH (CONT'D)

(one two three four...) Forgive me I was out of my mind... (one two three four...)

YOU're the only interesting part of me. You're the perfect one.

Table B9



Figure B5 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:48:00): Sue attacks Elisabeth

Table B10

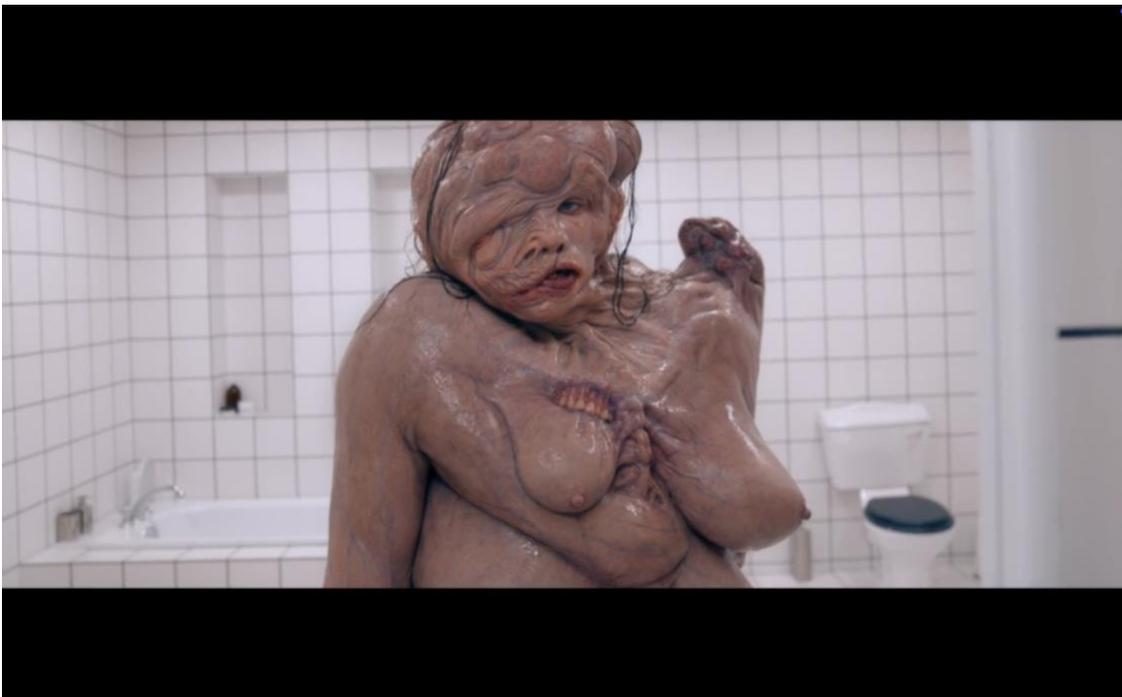


Figure B6 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:59:44): The birth of Monstro-Elisabeth

Appendix C

Archetypes of the Monstrous Feminine: Grotesque Wombs, Hungry Girls, and Haunting Bodies

“You wouldn’t exist without ME!”: Maternal Power and the Horror of Self-Erasure

Table C1



Figure C1 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 00:31:48): Sue prepares to stitch Elisabeth’s back

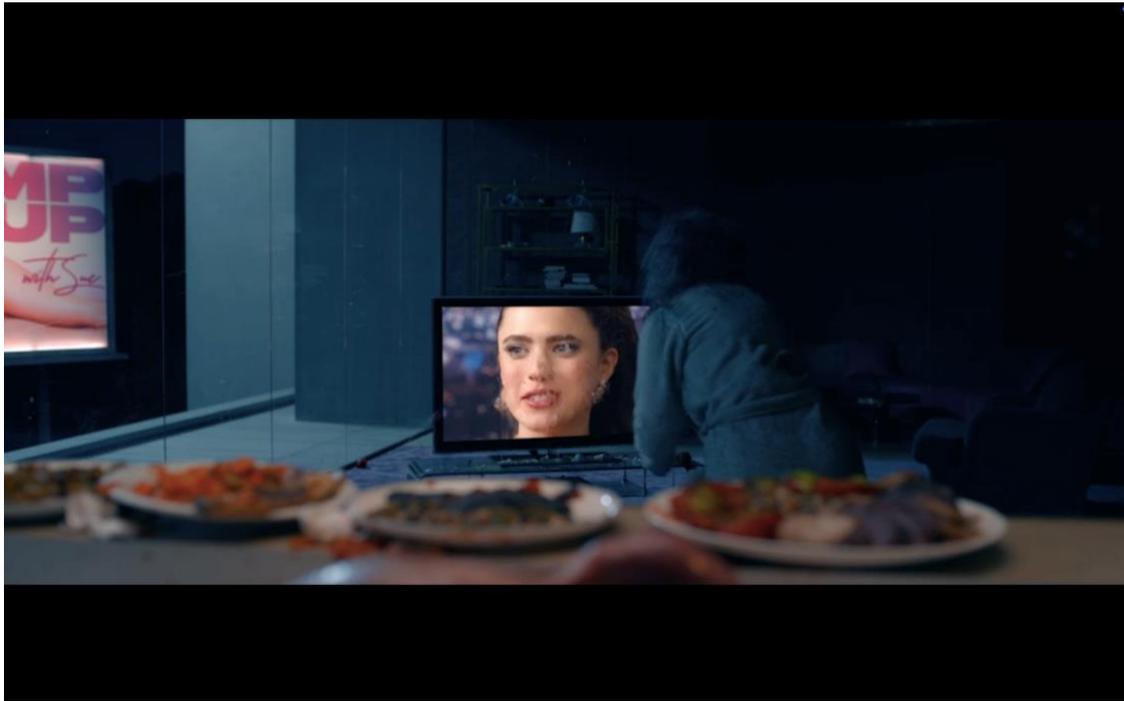
Table C2

Figure C2 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:28:10): Elisabeth throws eggs at Sue on TV

Table C3

Excerpt C1 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:32:20):

TV HOST (CONT'D)

...And now for our final question, the one we ask each and every one of our guests...Would you share one of your little beauty secrets with us?

All of a sudden, Elisabeth darts in a hurried limp over to the TV, placing herself right in front of it.

TV HOST (CONT'D)

One little trick of yours that helps you look so incredibly stunning! I mean just look at you!

ELISABETH FACES THE SCREEN as if the TV Host was speaking

directly to her, in her dirty grease and egg yolk-stained

bathrobe. On the talk show, Sue pauses before answering him:

SUE

Oh... let me think...

Elisabeth points an accusatory finger towards Sue like a preacher in a trance.

ELISABETH

SAY IT!

TV HOST

(as an aside)

We won't tell anyone... (laughter from the audience)

ELISABETH

SAY IT!!

(facing the tv, opening her arms in a wide exaggerated gesture, waddling back and forth)

Go ahead, show them your little secret!

We see Elisabeth's face grow increasingly somber as she listens...

SUE

I guess it's that I just try... to be myself... to be sincere and grateful for all that I have and to
always-

SPLAT! AN EGG HAS JUST BEEN THROWN AT THE SCREEN. SPLAT! AND NOW A
TOMATO! THE VISCOUS YELLOW YOKE AND BLOOD RED PULP DRIP DOWN
OVER SUE'S PEARLY WHITES.

**“Hell is a Teenage Girl”: Queer Desire and Female Autonomy in the Possessed
Monster and Vampire Archetypes**

Table C4

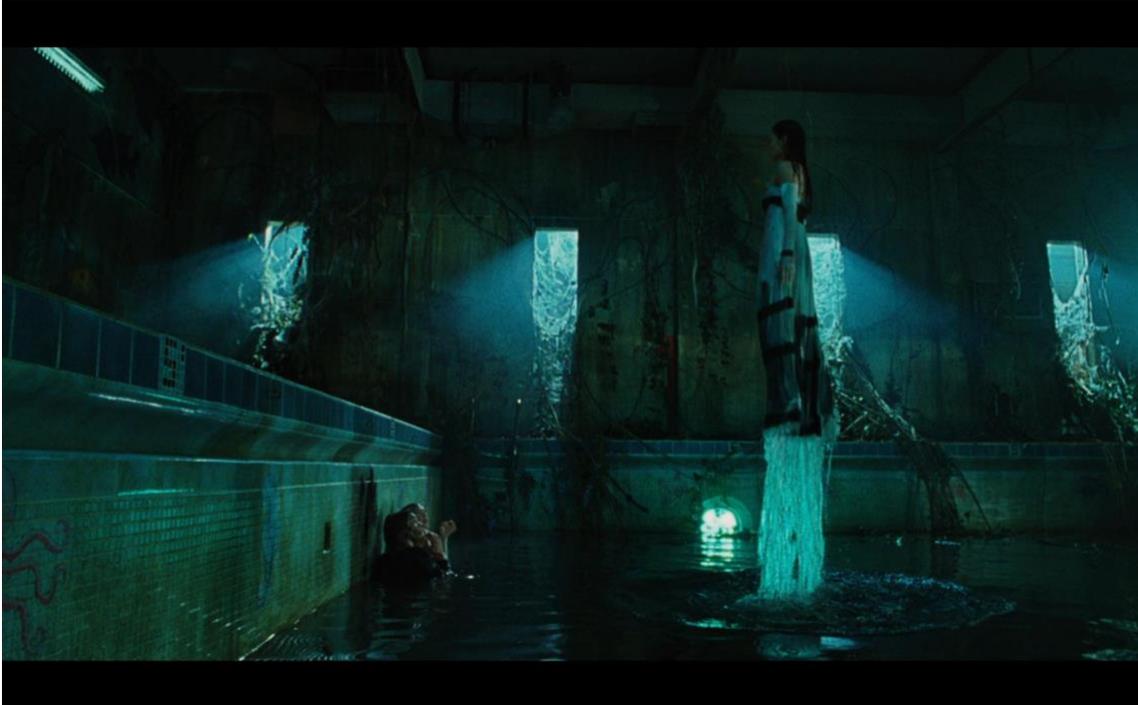


Figure C3 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:25:10): Jennifer levitates in the abandoned pool

Table C5

Excerpt C2 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:26:21):

JENNIFER

I'm gonna eat your soul and shit it out, Lesnicki.

Her voice is now an unearthly growl.

In the background, Chip is slowly, painfully pulling a POOL SKIMMER with an eight-foot handle off the pool deck.

NEEDY (trembling)

I thought you only murdered boys.

JENNIFER

I go both ways.

Table C6

Figure C4 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 00:59:39): Jennifer and Needy kiss**Rituals, Sex, and Magic: The Witch and the Deceptive Promise of Empowerment**

Table C7

Figure C5 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:13:10): Elaine making love potions

Table C8

Excerpt C3 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:47:36):

GAHAN

All witches need to figure out where their power lies. And we feel that a woman's greatest power lies in her sexuality. We don't view this power as satanic or anti-feminist, but as a celebration of woman as a natural creature. An earthly body, a spiritual essence, and a womb.

BARBARA

The whole history of witchcraft is interwoven with the fear of female sexuality. They burned us at the stake because they feared the erotic feelings we elicited in them. Later, they used marriage to hold us in bondage and made us into servants, whores, and fantasy dolls never asking us what we wanted.

GAHAN

They teach us that a normative human being is a hyper-rationalist, stoic male and that women's emotions and intuitions are illnesses that need to be cured. We believe that men and women are different and that true equality lies in that difference.

BARBARA

We strive for male/female polarity and to regain our primal power as goddesses. We need to teach men how to love us using ways they can understand.

GAHAN

So goddesses, use perfume, wear high heels and makeup, learn to dress your hair in attractive ways, display flesh artfully, and know what to conceal. Be a mother and a lover. Stand your ground, but always let the man feel like a man.

Table C9

Figure C6 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:52:25): Elaine's initiation ritual

Appendix D

Feminist Camp: Performativity, Gaze, and Collapse

The Construction of the Ideal: The Feminine Masquerade

Table D1

Figure D1 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:50:27): Elaine in the mirror

Table D2

Excerpt D1 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 00:50:27):

JERRY

I love you, Elaine. You know that, don't you? I love you very much. But you need to be more careful. Dinner was late three times this week. And that house is a total pigsty. Do you know that I found an old hot dog under the bed this morning? And why don't you ever brush your hair? You need to take better care of yourself and of the house. I'm embarrassed to have people over. I've been really patient up until now, but you need to step up your game.

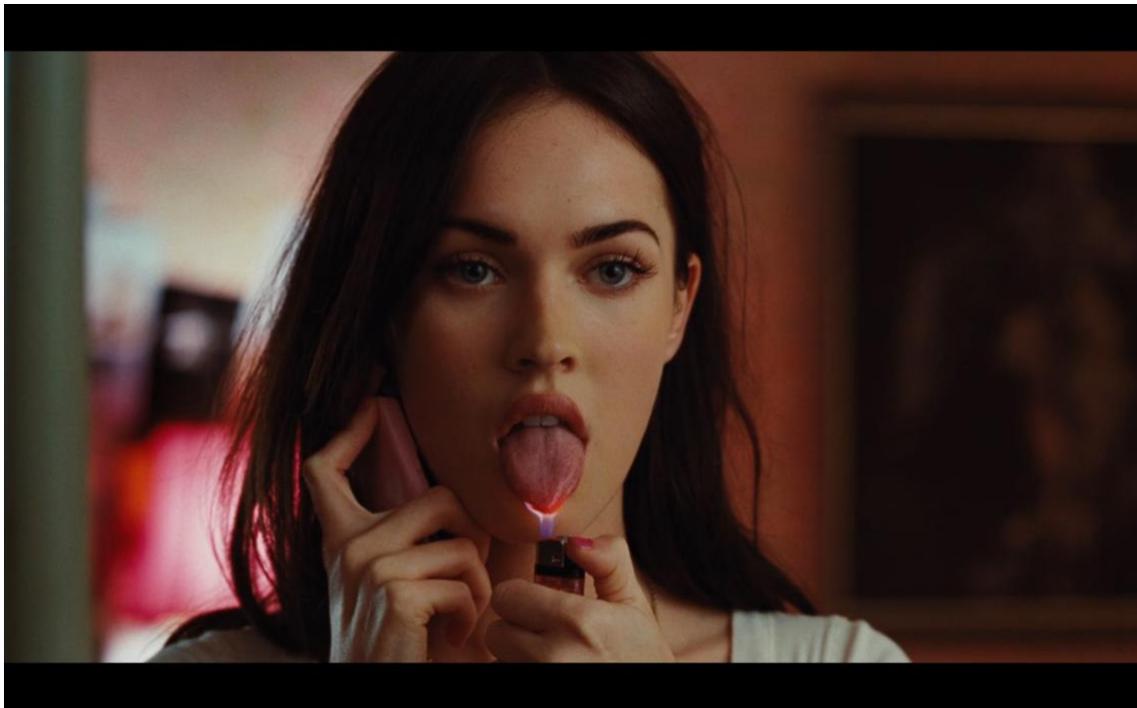
Table D3

Figure D2 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 00:38:33): Jennifer burns her tongue

Cracks in the mirror of the Feminine Ideal: Deconstruction and Collapse

Table D4



Figure D3 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:16:20): Jennifer in the mirror

Table D5



Figure D4 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 1:40:00): Trish's dress up as Elaine

“Pretty Girls Should Always Smile!”: Spectacle, Fragmentation, and the Grotesque Feminine

Table D6



Figure D5 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:17:00): “Pump it up” with Sue

Table D7

Excerpt D2 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 00:38:02):

CASTING DIRECTOR

Too bad her boobs aren’t in the middle of her face instead of that nose. A beat. Then the other guy gives a grunt of approval.

ASSISTANT CASTING DIRECTOR

NEXT!

Still focused on them, we hear the door that opens and closes, footsteps...

The two men look up: A beat where their faces are frozen, as if something took their breath away... and the camera slowly pulls back to reveal... AN ASS, frozen in the same sexy sway, hand on her hip and wearing the same FLASHY PINK LEOTARD as the mannequin in the store window... except this time it’s a human ass. NewElisabeth’s perfectly formed ass.

CASTING DIRECTOR

Looks like everything sure is in the right place this time...

Table D8Figure D6 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 2:01:54): Monstro-Elisasue getting ready**Table D9**Figure D7 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 2:06:00): Monstro-Elisasue on stage**Table D10**Excerpt D3 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 1:55:19):

HARVEY (CONT'D)

Everything ok?

Sue remains silent for a moment... Has he noticed anything? She nods as if to say yes... her neck is drenched in sweat... Harvey continues to stare at her for a long moment... until his face finally lights up as he erupts:

HARVEY (CONT'D)

SO SMILE! THAT'S WHAT WE WANT TONIGHT!

After a short moment as if frozen... Sue smiles, keeping her mouth tightly shut.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

PRETTY GIRLS SHOULD ALWAYS SMILE!

Appendix E

The Monstrous Feminine Unleashed: Rage, Destruction, Revenge

The System to Be Destroyed: Representations of the Male Subject

Table E1



Figure E1 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 00:08:32): Closeup on Harvey's mouth

Table E2

Excerpt E1(*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 00:08:32):

HARVEY

...but it's like when you've got someone farting on screen... slurp... People LOVE that! I'd rather talk about RENOIR or GAUGUIN but slurp... that's how it is. C'est la vie... People are just...people. And I have to give people what they want. slurp... That's what keeps the shareholders happy. slurp... And let me tell you something: people always ask for something NEW. slurp... RENEWAL is inevitable. It's nature's way. You either RENEW or you disappear.

"RENEW" seems to explode out of his mouth in a splutter of shrimp.

He stares at a young waitress' ass, which seems to RENEW his appetite.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

At 50, it stops. And that's not me saying so. That's biology.

Table E3



Figure E2 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:04:20): Sacrifice of Jennifer

The Monstrous Feminine's Revolt

Table E6



Figure E4 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:24:17): Jennifer eats Chip

Table E7



Figure E5 (*Jennifer's Body*, Kusama, 2009, 1:32:51): Jennifer's death

Table E8Figure E6 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 1:56:00): Elaine murders Griff**Table E9**

Excerpt E3 (*The Love Witch*, Biller, 2016, 1:50:13):

ELAINE

How can you stand there and boast about being immune to love? Why does the genuine love of a woman scare you so much? You think that your way is a superior way to live? I know a lot of women who feel the way that I do. Only men make us work so hard for your love. If you would just love us for ourselves, but you won't. My ex-husband was just like you. He used to punish me by withholding his love from me. All my life I've been tossed in the garbage except when men wanted to use my body. So, I decided to find my own power. And I found that power through witchcraft. That means that I take what I need from men and not the other way around.

Table E10

Figure E7 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 2:10:48): Monstro-Elisasue collapses on stage

Table E11

Excerpt E4 (*The Substance*, Fargeat, 2024, 2:08:10):

MONSTROELISASUE

IT'F ME...IT'F FTILL ME... I'M FE FSAME....

COMPLETE PANIC INSIDE THE ROOM

MAN 1

THE MONSTER!!!

MAN 2

SHOOT THE MONSTER!!!

MAN 3

IT'S A FREAK!!!