2016

Transliteracy and the Trans New Wave: independent trans cinema representation, classification, exhibition

Akkadia Ford
Southern Cross University

Publication details
Copyright A Ford 2016
Transliteracy and the Trans New Wave

*Independent Trans Cinema Representation, Classification, Exhibition*


Akkadia Ford B.A. (UNE), M.Art (UNSW), M.A. (Macq.)

School of Arts & Social Sciences

Southern Cross University

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Date of Submission: 28th August 2016
Thesis Declaration,

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Candidate’s Name: Akkadía Ford

Signature: Akkadía Ford            date: 28th August 2016
Abstract

The Trans New Wave is an emergent genre of independent gender–diverse films. This research embarks upon the first critical study of the Trans New Wave as a new genre in cinema emerging in the twenty first century. The use of transliteracy is presented as an innovative theoretical approach to reading film representations of the Trans New Wave. The methodology for this research is ethnographic and autoethnographic, centered on gender–diverse communities, centralising independent trans filmmakers in international screen and film festival culture. The term trans is used throughout the thesis as an inclusive, non–essentialist term, acknowledging the specificity of the term within western settings, embracing concepts beyond the western binary. The research necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, utilising a combined methodology, situated within the social sciences and cultural studies, theoretically engaging with contemporary transgender studies, screen and media studies, film festival studies and geographies of sexualities within specific areas. The research project is qualitative.

Through exegesis of purposively selected key case study texts The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) and Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), trans representations currently being produced will be contextualised within the broader cinema of the Trans New Wave. The thesis embraces all that is ‘post’ in the study of film (from poststructuralism to postmodernism), incorporating industrial (screen industry) contexts and materials into the researches. Central theories from gender, queer and trans studies are incorporated throughout.

Through fieldwork with Trans New Wave filmmakers and independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and trans film festivals and drawing upon my autoethnographic experience as the Festival Director of a regional queer film festival in Australia (Queer Fruits Film Festival, 2009–2012), the research investigates the role of independent queer and trans film festivals in presenting alternative cultural, social and political representations of gender and sexuality, which disrupt dominant (gender–normative) paradigms. The role of official classifications (ratings) systems in maintaining hegemonic standards is critically evaluated in relation to independent film production and exhibition, with examples of gay, queer and trans films that have been Refused Exemption to screen (a ‘ban’) from exhibition in Australia. The transactivist significance of Buck Angel’s film Sexing the Transman and his public advocacy work is situated within the growing international trans community. The Trans New Wave is contextualised amidst the growing necessity for sexually and gender diverse cinematic representations by and for trans communities.

Keywords: Trans New Wave, Transliteracy, Cinematic Representation, Classification (Ratings) Systems, Transgender Films
Acknowledgements

Immense respect and thanks are offered to my Supervisors, Associate Professor Elizabeth Stephens (Principal Supervisor) and Dr. Erika Kerruish (Co–Supervisor) of the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University. I am thankful for the attentive, generous, intellectually and theoretically inspiring feedback given throughout the research processes and for the opportunity to engage in this research in such an immensely supportive School.

Thank you to the School of Arts & Social Sciences and to Southern Cross University for funding support to attend and present at two international conferences during my candidature, in Lisbon, Portugal (2013) and in Vancouver, Canada (2015) and for funding support and opportunities to engage in fieldwork at film festivals and with filmmakers in San Francisco (2014) and Los Angeles (2015). Thank you to Associate Professor Grayson Cooke, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, the Director of Higher Degree Research Training during three years of my candidature for ongoing support and encouragement and to Dr. Angela Coco, Director of Higher Degree Research Training, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University during my final year of candidature. Thank you to Dr. Zan Hammerton for generous philanthropic support to attend these two international conferences and engage in fieldwork in the USA. Thank you to Professor Baden Offord, Director and Chair, Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University, Western Australia, for supporting the initial thesis proposal and for Principal Supervision during the first year of candidature.

From the original researches of this project, a number of first publications have been presented. I wish to thank the editors and publishers who have published book chapters and articles during my candidature. This has included first publications on transliteracy as an innovative theoretical concept in reading trans films and on the Trans New Wave as a new cinematic genre of gender–diverse films. Thank you to the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia, Fusion Journal, Charles Sturt University and Associate Professor Jane Mills, School of the Arts and Media, Centre for Modernism Studies in Australia, University of New South Wales, for the opportunity to present and subsequently to internationally publish the first paper on transliteracy (Ford 2014a, 2015a) from this thesis, the original theoretical approach and foundation concept within this research project, subsequently developed and presented as Chapter 4 of this thesis. Thank you to Common Ground Publishing, Illinois, USA for a Graduate Scholar Award to attend and present a paper in Vancouver, Canada on recognising and developing a new canon of representations of gender–diversity within Trans New Wave texts, which is an earlier version of Chapter 4 of this thesis and for the subsequent first publication on this subject (Ford 2015a, 2016b). Thank you to the Space, Sexualities & Queer Research Group (SSQRG), UK, of the Royal Geographic Society–Institute of British Geographers, for a scholarship to attend and present a paper in Lisbon, Portugal, which resulted in two book chapters referred to within the thesis on the regional, queer experiences of Queer Fruits Film Festival (Ford 2015b; 2016a forthcoming). Thank you to Professor Katherine Browne, University of Brighton, UK
and to Eduarda Ferreira, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal, for supportive and detailed feedback throughout the preparation of the chapter for Ashgate Publishing, UK and to Ashgate for presenting the text (Ford 2015b). Thank you to the French editorial team of Karine Duplan, Marianne Blidon, Amandine Chapuis, Cha Prieur, for a wonderful publication process in the ENS Éditions, Paris (Ford 2016a forthcoming). Thank you to Associate Professor Brian Keith Bergen–Aurand, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore and to Andrew Grossman, editors of the The Encyclopedia of Queer Cinema (forthcoming), for the opportunity to present articles on a number of queer and trans films that I am passionate about (Ford forthcoming). A further thank you to Associate Professor Brian Keith Bergen–Aurand for the nuanced editorial support in preparation of the article on Dallas Buyers Club for Screen Bodies (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). Thank you to Dr. Eliza Steinbock, Assistant Professor of Film and Literary Studies, Department of Film & Literary Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands, for supportive and detailed editing feedback and for the opportunity to review Dallas Buyers Club (Ford 2016c forthcoming), for the Transgender Studies Quarterly.

Thank you to these editors and publishers for visionary support and editorial care; in total nine publications (four refereed book chapters/sections and five refereed journal articles) were developed and published from the research processes during candidature.

An especial thank you, appreciation and admiration is given to the Trans New Wave filmmakers who have been enthusiastic in their support of this research project from the outset and have graciously provided insights into their lives and experiences as independent filmmakers. An especial acknowledgement and thank you for participation and for permission to use film publicity stills to Buck Angel (Sexing the Transman), who is a gentleman and inspiration, Monique Schafter and Ali Russell (Trans Boys), generous and gifted filmmakers, Ewan Duarte (Spiral Transition and Change Over Time), who is one of the new generation of filmmakers chronicled within this thesis. An especial thank you to these filmmakers for taking so much time in patiently answering questions about the filmmaking processes and their lives. Thank you to the many Festival Directors of independent queer and transgender film festivals internationally who took time from busy schedules to participate in interviews, providing feedback on their experiences of screening trans and queer screen content and who have been supportive of this research. In this regard, an especial thank you to Shawna Virago, Artistic Director of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival, for post–festival discussions which clarified and confirmed fieldwork observations made on programming of trans texts in the USA, presented in Chapter 5.

Acknowledgement and thank you for permission to reproduce images featured within this thesis to Tobin Saunders (Vanessa Wagner); and to Corrie McDougal and Louise Lenihan at Aurora TV (Australia) for permission to reproduce the poster of Vanessa Wagner from the Aurora TV broadcast series of Queer Fruits Film Festival that I was invited to select and programme in 2013 in Chapter 3;
and to the Museum of Applied Arts Sciences (Sydney, Australia) for permission to reproduce the iconic Australian ‘Chesty Bond’ image in Chapter 4.

Thank you to the independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, queer filmmakers across thirty six countries around the world who supported Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012) and provided exhibition copies of their films either waiving exhibition fees, or at no charge to the festival. In this regard, I wish to especially acknowledge Buck Angel for his generous provision of screening copies of Sexing the Transman, Monique Schafter and Ali Russell for the provision of exhibition copies of Trans Boys and for subsequently making online Vimeo links of the film publically available in 2015 to assist this research project and to Simon Hunt for his support and generosity in providing a rare archival copy of the the New Queer Cinema masterpiece Resonance (Stephen Cummins and Simon Hunt, Australia, 1991) for screening at the 2010 Queer Fruits Film Festival. Thanks and appreciation to the gender–diverse, queer and trans communities of the Northern Rivers, South–East Queensland and Sydney who have supported the festival as audiences, especially the ground–breaking 2012 screening of Sexing the Transman and subsequent film panel following the screening, which inspired this ongoing work.

Continued thanks and appreciation are expressed to the Queer Fruits Film Festival creative team, Virginia Barrett, Elka Kerkhofs, Zan Hammerton, who were supportive throughout the festival years (2009–2012), sharing their talents, imagination and passion for queer arts and culture throughout the festival journey.

To my mother, for cheering pride in my doctoral achievement, profoundly meaningful.

To my partner, for being here and transcending this time; for championing the roads of my life; for your creative generosity and enthusiasm through thousands of screenings of queer and trans film that we have watched, debated, applauded and celebrated; for understanding that this research journey is another part of my becoming. In forms known and unknown, transforming we are roaming.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.........................................................................................................1
1.1 Rise Like A Phoenix..................................................................................................................1
1.2 Rationale for an Independent Trans Cinema and Strategies of Self-Identification in Independent Transgender Films.............................................................................14
1.3 Trans as Non Essentialist...........................................................................................................21
1.4 The Problematic of Mainstream Films/Filmmakers Representing Trans Narratives......................................................................................................................................................24
1.5 Importance of this Research.................................................................................................27
1.5.1 To the Australian and International Screen Industry....................................................29
1.6 Structure of the Thesis..............................................................................................................30

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....................................................................................35
2.1 Introduction—Trans Representation in Mainstream Cinema................................................35
2.1.1 Dallas Buyers Club..............................................................................................................38
2.1.2 Predestination....................................................................................................................39
2.2 Devices, Motifs, Metaphors, Cliches—Stereotypes as Obstructions and Constructions of Transgender Representation On Screen........................................................................................................41
2.3 Use of Metaphors as Representations by Independent Trans Filmmakers.......................42
2.4 Theoretical Perspectives.........................................................................................................43
2.5 An Ethical Approach to Analysing Trans Texts—Film Ethics..............................................49
2.5.1 Further Ethical Considerations—Is Curating a Film Festival About the Audience, or the Film ?.................................................................................................................................54
2.6 On Representation..................................................................................................................55
2.6.1 On The Role of Independent Films and Filmmakers.........................................................61
2.6.2 On Creating Queer Space—Independent and Queer Film Festivals..........................62
2.7 Applying Theoretical Frameworks to Independent Trans Cinema.....................................64
2.7.1 Limitations of Theories.......................................................................................................68
2.8 Emerging Paradigms—Theories of Trans Representation and Gender Diversity..................77
2.8.1 Contemporary Trans Cinema Scholarship.......................................................................78
2.8.2 Transqueer........................................................................................................................80
2.8.3 Transliteracy.......................................................................................................................82
2.9 Summary...................................................................................................................................84

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY....................................................................................................85
3.1 Introduction...............................................................................................................................85
CHAPTER 4: TRANSLITERACY

4.1 Introduction

4.2 The Importance of Transliteracy—Thinking Across Boundaries

4.3 Developing a New Canon of Cinematic Representations of Gender Diversity and Sexuality

4.3.1 Gender Transformation

4.3.2 Queering Trans

4.3.3 Iconic Clothing

4.4 Awareness of the Social and Cultural Settings in Which Transgender Screen Texts are Produced

4.5 Use of Familiar Thematic Narratives and Genres in Reading Trans Films

CHAPTER 5: SIMULATION AND ‘THE REAL THING’

5.1 Introduction

5.2 How a Gendered (Heteronormative) System of Classifications Regulates a Gender–Neutral Space: The Role of Classifications and Ratings Systems in Film Production, Distribution and Exhibition

5.3 The Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department/Office of Film & Literature Classification (OFLC)(Australia)

5.4 Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)/The Classification & Rating Administration (CARA)(USA)

5.5 Differences Between the Australian and American Systems

5.5.1 Implications of a Guideline–Based System (Australia)

5.5.2 Recent Examples of Refusals by the the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth
Attorney–General’s Department (Australia) to Grant the Exemption to Screen at Independent and Queer Film Festivals..........................................................................................................................202

5.5.3 Implications of a Parental Advisory Board Rating System for the Production, Distribution and Exhibition of Non–Hegemonic Films (USA).................................................................214

5.6 Fieldwork Summary: Establishing the Rationale for Programming Decisions, the Role Classifications (Ratings) Systems Have On Film Festival Programming Decisions and the Ratio of Trans Films Within Independent and Queer Film Festival Programs.........................................................................................................................214

5.7 Fieldwork Summary: Establishing the Rationale for Trans Filmmakers Writing, Directing and Producing Independent Trans Films and the Role Classifications (Ratings) Systems Have On the Production of Independent Film.................................................................216

5.7.1 Case Study Filmmakers....................................................................................................................216

5.7.2 Non–Case Study Filmmakers...........................................................................................................218

CHAPTER 6: TRANS NEW WAVE OF CINEMA ........................................................................221

6.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................221

6.2 Characteristics of the Trans New Wave...............................................................................................221

6.3 Case Studies: Fiction to Factual Criteria for Selection and Overview Comparison of Films Analyzed...............................................................................................................................225

6.4 The Short Film Compared to the Short Documentary Treatment of Transgender Narratives.................................................................................................................................227

6.5 The Thing (Rhys Ernst 2011)—Transgender is a Journey But to Where ?.................................230

6.5.1 Use of the Road Movie Genre as a Representational Metaphor for Transitioning.........................242


6.6.1 Xavier’s story—Becoming a Man........................................................................................................258

6.6.2 Dex’s story—Transhomoeroticism – Coming out as a Gay Male .....................................................261

6.6.3 Danny’s story—the Father/Lover.....................................................................................................263

6.7 The Transliteracy That Emerges From Each Film..................................................................................266

6.8 Summary ............................................................................................................................................267

CHAPTER 7: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOYS—TRANSACTIVIST CINEMA........270

7.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................270

7.2 Buck Angel........................................................................................................................................279

7.3 Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel 2011)............................................................................................282

7.3.1 Gender Disruption............................................................................................................................293

7.3.2 Transsex ..........................................................................................................................................295
7.4 The Documentary As A Transactivist Tool & Educator..............................................300
7.5 The Transliteracy That Emerges From This Film.......................................................306
7.6 Summary...................................................................................................................308

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS—TOWARDS A TRANSLITERATE FUTURE.........................310

8.1 The Necessity for Demolishing Trans Gender & Sexual Stereotypes in Cinema.................................................................310
8.2 Representations that Represent All of Us.................................................................313
8.3 The Unique Role of Film..........................................................................................316
8.4 Policy Provocations—Advocating Change in Classification (Ratings) Systems........321
8.5 The Transliteracy That Has Emerged From This Analysis........................................323
8.6 Cinematic Ethnogenesis..........................................................................................324

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 3
Figure 3.1: Queer Fruits Film Festival 2013 Aurora TV Promotional Advertisement Featuring Vanessa Wagner. ©Aurora TV 2013. Reproduced courtesy of Vanessa Wagner, Reproduced courtesy of Aurora TV. Source: Queer Fruits Film Festival archives 2013.................................................................94

Chapter 4
Figure 4.1: Queer Fruits Film Festival 2012 Trans–focused Program. Source: ©Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012. Reproduced courtesy of Akkadia Ford.........................................................127
Figure 4.2: Change Over Time publicity still. Source: ©Ewan Duarte Productions 2013. Reproduced courtesy of Ewan Duarte.................................................................133
Figure 4.3: Xavier—Trans Boys publicity still. Source: ©Ali Russell and Monique Schafter 2012. Reproduced courtesy of Monique Schafter.................................................................138
Figure 4.4: Mannequin torso, ‘Chesty Bond’, plastic / paint, Bonds Industries Limited, Sydney, Australia, c. 1950, A9600-1. Source(s): Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Photo: Andrew Frolovs.................................................................141
Figure 4.5: Buck Angel Sexing the Transman (extras), Interview on Greek television. Source: Sexing the Transman (extras)©Buck Angel Entertainment 2011.................................................................144

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Figure 6.1: Queer Fruits Film Festival—2012 Festival Exemption Notice (Permission to Screen Films), Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General's Department 2012. Source: ©Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012.........................................................................................226

Figure 6.2: Arizona roadside attraction—Dinosaur Footprint Tracks. Source: Akkadia Ford. Photo ©Akkadia Ford 2014............................................................................................................................235

Figure 6.3: Dinosaur Tracks Parking Sign (Arizona). Source: Akkadia Ford. Photo ©Akkadia Ford 2014......................................................................................................................................................235

Figure 6.4: Xavier—Source: Trans Boys (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012). ©Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012. Reproduced courtesy of Monique Schafter.................................................................................................................................................258


Figure 6.6: Dex—Source: Trans Boys (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012). ©Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012. Reproduced courtesy of Monique Schafter.................................................................................................................................................261

Figure 6.7: Dex—Swimming. Source: Trans Boys (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012). ©Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012. Reproduced courtesy of Monique Schafter.................................................................................................................................................262

Figure 6.8: Danny—Source: Trans Boys (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012). ©Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012. Reproduced courtesy of Monique Schafter .................................................................................................................................................264


Chapter 7

Figure 7.1: Sexing the Transman publicity poster. Source: ©Buck Angel Entertainment 2011. Reproduced courtesy of Buck Angel.................................................................................................................................................273

Figure 7.2: Mr. Angel (Dan Hunt, USA, 2013) publicity poster. Source: Buck Angel Entertainment. ©Pearl Wolf Productions 2013. Reproduced Courtesy of Buck Angel.................................................................................................................................................280

Figure 7.3: Sexing the Transman Volume 4. Box cover. Source: ©Buck Angel Entertainment 2012–2014. Reproduced courtesy of Buck Angel.................................................................................................................................................291

Figure 7.4: Buck Angel. Bonus promotional material. Source: ©Buck Angel Entertainment 2011–2016. Reproduced courtesy of Buck Angel.................................................................................................................................................304
Figure 7.5: Buck Angel, transactivism. Poster for gender neutral bathrooms. Source: ©Buck Angel Entertainment 2015. Reproduced courtesy of Buck Angel.

FILMOGRAPHY

REFERENCES

APPENDICES
Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Research
Appendix B: Information Sheet for Participants
Appendix C: Interview Schedule for Informal and Semi–Structured Interviews
Appendix D: Consent Form for Participants
Appendix E: Talent Release/Permission Release Form for Participants (for filming)
Appendix F: Permissions Release Form for Use of Film Media
Appendix G: Sexing the Transman Festival Screenings 2011–2013
Appendix H: Selected Publication


LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS THESIS
CARA The Classification and Rating Administration
MPAA Motion Picture Association of America
MPPDA Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America Inc. (forerunner of the MPAA)
NATO National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc
NQC New Queer Cinema
NV Nouvelle Vague (French New Wave Cinema)
QFFF Queer Fruits Film Festival
STT Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel 2011)
TNW Trans New Wave Cinema
If there are to be grounds for new authoritative cultural judgments, about film or anything else, they will lie beyond the oppositions of culture and commerce, high and low, popular and elite. The only problem is how we get there

(Philip Dodd 1992).
Dedication

In memory of the forty-nine gay, lesbian, queer and trans people who were murdered and for the dozens more that were seriously injured in a vicious hate crime, at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, USA on 12 June 2016, with an especial remembrance for the Latino and Latina trans community locally who were regulars at the club and who were present that night. This tragedy has not happened somewhere ‘over there’, or to some unknown, unloved, or irrelevant ‘others’. This has happened to all of us. We are your sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers, sisters, cousins, boyfriends, girlfriends, partners, workmates, teachers, students, lovers and friends. We are in every place, sitting beside you on every bus, in every theatre, in every shop and restaurant. We live down the street, around the corner, you see us every day. There are not enough tears to express lives lived whilst society spends so much time hating you for simply being—and how to understand and express the grief for people being killed—for simply being out with family and friends.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rise Like A Phoenix

This research embarks upon the first critical study of the Trans New Wave as a new genre in cinema emerging in the twenty first century. The methodology for this research is ethnographic and autoethnographic, centered on gender–diverse communities, centralising independent trans filmmakers in international screen and film festival culture. The research necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, utilising a combined methodology, situated within the social sciences and cultural studies, with theoretical engagement with contemporary transgender studies, screen and media studies, film festival studies and geographies of sexualities within specific areas of the research. Through exegesis of key case study texts The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) and Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), trans representations currently being produced will be contextualised within the broader cinema of the Trans New Wave. As a qualitative research project these texts have been selected deliberately as exemplars in the genre, strategically (Saldana 2011, p. 9) as illustrating typical tropes in transgender representation and purposively (Creswell 2013) to highlight theoretically significant trends in trans cinema in the twenty first century.

One rationale for the selection of these texts as case studies is that these three films present a transmasculine cinematic microcosm of the development of transgender studies, from an initial focus upon identity and representation (Stryker and Aizura 2013b) through to broader themes and areas of critical scholarship, bringing sexuality, sex and porn into the foreground as fields of enquiry. This will introduce new researches from a transmale perspective into areas that

---

1 How the term trans is used within this thesis is outlined in this chapter at 1.3 Trans as Non–Essentialist.

2 As examples, research and empirical evidence related to queer and trans film festivals within this thesis is of particular relevance within geographies of sexualities (Ford 2013, 2015b, 2016a). Developing new theoretical approaches to the research is of particular relevance within cultural studies (Ford 2014a), screen and media studies (Ford 2016b).

3 Full discussion of the rationale for selection will to be presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

4 A subject that will also form part of the conclusions within Chapter 8.
Stryker and Aizura identify as “lacunae” (2013b, p. 10) in the existing literature. Within this thesis the films identified as the Trans New Wave are defined as *independently produced* (non–studio) films, written, directed, produced and exhibited since 2008, the year that Tristan Taormino published a seminal article on a group of emerging group of transporn filmmakers under the heading “The New Wave of Trans Cinema” (Taormino 2008). These are independent films that challenge the hegemonies of dominant cultural production and mainstream screen texts. This research project has developed these initial concepts by Taormino from the context of transporn, in proposing the Trans New Wave (Ford 2014a, 2015a, 2016b) as a new genre in cinema, which cuts across styles, narratives and themes, but which pays homage to and is aware of, these transporn roots, especially in the work of director, performer, activist and educator Buck Angel, the focus of Chapter 7.

This thesis proposes the Trans New Wave as an entirely new cinema, born from a ‘defiant’ (Rich 1992, 2013; Aaron 2006), resilient creative spirit encountered in earlier New Waves such as the *Nouvelle Vague* (French New Wave), the American New Wave and more recently in New Queer Cinema. The socio–cultural circumstances in which this cinema has developed, the situations of cultural production that have led to specific types of representational strategies within Trans New Wave films and the issues surrounding the exhibition of these cinematic narratives are central to the thematic of this thesis. In tandem with proposing the Trans New Wave as a new cinema, this research project has developed a new way of engaging with texts. This thesis introduces *transliteracy* as an innovative theoretical approach to reading gender–diverse films of the Trans New Wave, embedded within queer and transgender social structures and across media to provide greater meaning and insight into the films (Ford 2014a).

As a new cinematic movement, the Trans New Wave filmmakers are continually creating, adapting and improvising cinematic strategies to tell trans narratives. From within this cinema, a new canon of representations of gender–diversity and sexuality is developing (Ford 2015a, 2016b).

---

5 Prior to the journal *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (Stryker and Currah (eds.) 2014) and noting recent scholarship that is contemporaneously engaging these fields such as Steinbock (2013a, 2013b, 2014) that will be discussed within Chapter 2.
Recognition that there are cultural moments when the new arises, new approaches to art, literature, film and to theorising these texts, devolves upon participants in these movements and cultural theorists working during these times. Precipitated through disjunction with hegemonic society leading to activism, changes in attitudes, socio–cultural roles and changes in consciousness occur through movement in time. New possibilities for cultural engagement are opened through new uses of existing socio–cultural spaces and the creation of new spaces. The quote which opened this thesis highlights the tensions inherent in the ‘new’ and derives from the issue of screen industry journal *Sight & Sound* that recognised the culturally significant emergence of New Queer Cinema (Rich 1992b). Presciently, in 1992, the editor–in–chief of *Sight & Sound* Philip Dodd noted that “If there are to be grounds for new authoritative cultural judgements, about film”, there would be a necessity for these to exist “beyond the oppositions of culture and commerce, high and low, popular and elite” (Dodd 1992, p. 3).

The case study films within this thesis provide the basis for such new ‘cultural judgements’ and exemplify a new form of filmmaking, which collapses the previous ‘oppositions’ in screen culture in unique ways. As an example, this is a time in twenty first century screen culture when a film such as *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) may world premiere at a prestigious international film festival such as the 2012 Sundance Film Festival—a place of ‘high’ culture art films, with the director subsequently moving into the ‘popular’ format of subscription video on demand (SVOD) television series for his next projects. Chapter 7 will focus upon award–winning adult film star Buck Angel who has also shifted between cultural forms, moving his filmmaking from the ‘low’ cultural popularist genre of porn, to transactivist cinema focused upon transmale sexuality, with regular invited guest presentations within the ‘high’ culture setting of the University academy. This cinematic movement between ‘high and low’ culture within the Trans New Wave unexpectedly parallels movement within the contemporary academy, where porn studies is now a new academic discipline with an international scholarly journal (Attwood & Smith 2014).

6 *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014), *This Is Me* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015). Ernst’ roles in these two Amazon prime SVOD series will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 8.
There are precedents for the work of this thesis in recognising a new genre in cinema via theoretical, scholarly and screen industry publications. This includes the recognition of the Nouvelle Vague directors and films, initially published in the cinema journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*\(^7\) through the writing of film critics Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jacques Doniol–Valcroze and Pierre Kast. Significantly, film critics, such as Rohmer and Rivette, were also key directors of the French New Wave (Neupert 2002, 2007, xvi), their involvement in the production and subsequent cultural discussion and theorisation of the films highlights the autoethnographic aspect to the recognition of new waves in cinema. Ruby Rich, also known as a film critic, journalist and scholar\(^8\) published an initial article in *The Village Voice* “A Queer Sensation” (Rich 1992a), which recognised the cinematic traits of a diverse group of gay and lesbian filmmakers that emerged in the same time and out of particular historical and social circumstances (Bordwell 1997, p. 4). Rich attributes the phrase ‘New Queer Cinema’ (Rich 2013, p. 31) to a subsequent discussion with Philip Dodd. This discussion enabled Rich to expand upon the developments that had taken place in the months following publication of the seminal *The Village Voice* article. The subsequent publication in *Sight & Sound* collectively designated these filmmakers as “The New Queer Cinema” (Rich 1992b).

Although not officially designated as a ‘Wave’ by Ruby Rich at the time, New Queer Cinema has the characteristics of earlier cinematic Waves. In the seminal *Village Voice* article in March 1992 (Rich 1992a), Rich referred to these films as “the New Wave” (1992a, p. 44, Rich 2013, p. 27) and subsequently, in the defining article published in *Sight & Sound* (Rich 1992b), the term the “queer new wave” was used (1992b, p. 31, Rich 2013, p. 30).\(^9\) From these publications it becomes clearer that Rich embraced the group of gay and lesbian filmmakers featured in the 1992 Sundance Film Festival programme as a Wave, specifically saying that “The Queer New Wave had come full circle” (Rich 2013, p. 30). Specific reference to these queer films as “the New Wave” is made in discussion of Greg Araki’s film *The Living End* (Rich 1992a, p. 44, Rich 2013, p. 27), where it is noted that “Camera, style and palette update the New Wave” (Rich 1992a, p. 44, Rich 1992b, p. 34, Rich 2013 p. 27).\(^10\)

---

\(^7\) Founded by Andre Bazin and Jacques Doniol–Valcroze in 1951.


\(^9\) Written as “The Queer New Wave” by Rich in the 2013 reprint.

\(^10\) The 2013 version (p. 27) of this reprinted article uses the word ‘updated’.
This clearly positioned New Queer Cinema as a cinematic ‘Queer New Wave’ from the outset. The cinematic parallels were also noted at the time by “mainstream critics” who “were busily impressed by the so-called ‘queer new wave’” (Rich 1992b, p. 31, Rich 2013, p. 16). New Queer Cinema has subsequently been called a wave by film scholars (Aaron 2006, p. 398). It is a moot point whether use of the terms ‘New’ and ‘Cinema’ in the designation of New Queer Cinema by Rich were always intended to imply a wave by default.

As the designation of New Queer Cinema became popularised, the identity of this cinema as a wave, linked to earlier cinematic Waves such as the Nouvelle Vague became oblique for non-cinephiles. As a grouping of films, the coherence of the category as a cinematic genre was contested by some filmmakers (Parmer 1992, p. 35, Parmer 1993; Giannaris 1992, p. 35). Michele Aaron notes that New Queer Cinema was:

> contested for its exclusivity (and tokenistic inclusivity). It is contested for its unwarranted optimism: in heralding a minor revolution when a few films do not a movement make...in suggesting a queer–friendliness of mass culture when the majority...remains unaltered. The category is contested for the US–centricity of its films and theory. Perhaps the most irreparable of charges...is that the promise indicated by the films of the early 1990s was never fully realised (Aaron 2006, p.405).

These are salient points to reconsider in the twenty first century as the Trans New Wave films and filmmakers are recognised within screen culture. Chapter 8 will examine whether the “promise” of New Queer Cinema was subsequently realised in the cinematic legacy of the films and filmmakers and in the later cinematic production of key New Queer Cinema filmmakers. Issues of ‘exclusivity’, ‘inclusivity’ and defining a small grouping of films as a ‘movement’ or Wave, will also be examined in Chapters 4, 6 and 7 against the background of the socio-cultural necessity for such a cinema to emerge and assert its cultural positionality.

Entwined with this is critical engagement with programming decisions of independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, queer film festivals internationally, spaces where diversity is

---

11 The identity of these critics is not revealed in the article.
expected and demanded by audiences. The researches of this thesis are interconnected with independent film festival culture, with the autoethnographic basis of the thesis to be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 emerging from my work as Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival (Australia) between 2009–2012. Ethnographic fieldwork with filmmakers and film festivals conducted subsequently during this research will be discussed with especial relevance to Chapters 3 and 5 and issues of classifications (ratings) systems upon film production and film festival programming. The research has identified that screen texts with trans themes, narratives and characters are now purposively included in independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, queer film festival programmes, yet may be under-represented within a program, or presented as a grouping of texts that perpetuates minority positioning of the trans community. Sara Ahmed (2012) has identified a widespread institutional failure of ‘diversity’ policies to effectively prevent discriminatory practises—and in many cases, for ‘diversity’ to conceal active discrimination within universities, whilst promoting practises that actually perpetuate non–diversity. Ahmed’s work is also of theoretical relevance across ‘institutional’ settings including established film festivals, bringing into critical focus issues with onscreen diversity and programming failures within the settings of gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex queer, film festivals. Whilst these are cultural spaces established to promote equality and diversity, both onscreen in texts exhibited and offscreen in the composition of the audiences (Ford 2015b), in practise, films that explore diverse themes and narratives from a range of intersectional perspectives and specifically, the work of trans films and filmmakers, still frequently remain liminal within screen culture. Important exceptions to this observation will also be identified within the research, including exemplar film festivals such as the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival—the oldest transgender film festival in the

12 As an example the 2015 Outfest film festival in Los Angeles presented one dedicated session of short films called “Trans Identities” on 15 July 2015 along with a filmmaker panel of visiting directors and producers. Such opportunities are vitally important for independent filmmakers to receive publicity and distribution for their films. The festival presented a program that demonstrated diversity across all sectors of the GLBTIQ community, spanning ten days and nights, with a forty page festival guide and major event sponsorship including high-profile mainstream screen industry support. A critical question from fieldwork attendance at the event (and one of the fieldwork questions addressed to film festival respondents within this research) is the current ratio of programming of trans films/sessions within a festival, in comparison to the full program of texts. The 2015 Outfest program publicised three sessions with trans films (one shorts program, one feature–length fiction film and one feature–length documentary), two sessions with trans short films included in mixed sessions (the sessions were ‘Queerer Than Fiction’, ‘Platinum Showcase’) and one additional special panel hosted by the Screen Actors Guild addressing the surge of trans in Hollywood. Whether there were additional films with trans themes, narratives, actors/actresses, writers, directors, producers was not ascertainable from published festival materials.

13 Recent focus upon trans screen texts has included a panel presented on 18 July 2015 by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the AFTRAs National LGBT Committee during the 2015 Outfest film festival.
world (founded in 1997)\textsuperscript{14} which provides a dedicated site for screening gender–diverse texts from a wide range of perspectives.

The research for this thesis draw upon autoethnographic and ethnographic fieldwork within the independent queer film festival circuit that will be discussed in Chapter 3. The queer film festival may productively be conceptualised as a temporal queer space, with aspirations to provide equal screen representations across all sections of the community, promoting social justice and equality in programming decisions (Ford 2015b). This approach will be encountered within the autoethnographic accounts of Queer Fruits Film Festival (Australia) and with specific film festivals respondents within this research. In contrast to this, programming decisions that seems to convey a tokenistic approach and attitudes to trans filmmakers will also be discussed, when considered within the context of film festival programmes that may span weeks, encompassing hundreds of films, with only a handful of trans films exhibited.

The interconnections between film festivals, independent filmmakers and cinematic New Waves is well–established. While Ruby Rich cites the independent gay and lesbian film and video scene in the USA from the 1970s and early 1980s as a direct antecedent of New Queer Cinema (Rich 2013), there is recognition of New Queer Cinema as closely linked to the 1992 Sundance Film Festival, with the term being coined by Rich in that year. This was in recognition of the rise of talents such as Derek Jarman, Sadie Benning, Gus Van Sant (\textit{My Private Idaho}, USA, 1991), Gregg Araki (\textit{The Living End}, USA, 1992), and Australian filmmaker Stephen Cummins (\textit{Resonance}, Australia, 1991) who had participated in the first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) filmmaking panel that was held during that years Sundance Film Festival called “Barbed–Wire Kisses: Contemporary Lesbian and Gay Cinema”.\textsuperscript{15} Rich had served as a ‘Competition Selection Advisory Committee Member’ for


\textsuperscript{15} Aaron (2006, pp. 398–399) notes the following list of filmmakers \textit{Paris is Burning} (Jenni Livingston, USA, 1990); \textit{Poison} (Todd Haynes, USA, 1991); \textit{Swoon} (Tom Kalin, USA, 1992); \textit{Tongues Untied} (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1989). This film is incorrectly listed by Aaron as 1990; \textit{My Own Private Idaho} (Gus Van Sant, USA, 1991); \textit{Young Soul Rebels} (Isaac Julien, UK, 1991); \textit{RSVP} (Laurie Lynd, USA, 1991); \textit{Edward II} (Derek Jarman, UK, 1991); \textit{Khush} (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1991); \textit{The Hours and Times} (Christopher Munch, USA, 1991. This film is listed by Aaron as the hour and times, 1992. 1992 which was the USA release date, not the film production date); \textit{The Living End} (Gregg Araki, USA, 1992), along with filmmakers Sadie Benning, Cecilia Dougherty, Su Friedrich, John Greyson, Monika Treut. Country of production is added to each film in this list, not included in Aaron (2006).
the Sundance Film Festival in 1992 and was Moderator and also one of the panelists (Sundance Institute, 2014). Rich has described these times: “I’m clearly there, in the red–hot centre of it all, an on–the–ground participant–observer of what felt very much like my own history” (Rich 2013, p. xxii). The autoethnographic and ethnographic scholarly basis to the emergence of New Queer Cinema is significant to this thesis, as it demonstrates and validates the autoethnographic and ethnographic aspects in recognition of a new cinema.\textsuperscript{16} The Trans New Wave filmmakers that will discussed as case study texts, were all screened internationally at independent film festivals, with this research project emerging directly from the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival in Australia. The autoethnographic account of the relationship of this festival to the thesis is detailed in Chapter 3.

Articles in popular newspapers (Rich 1992a) and screen industry publications including \textit{Cahiers du Cinéma} and \textit{Sight & Sound} (Rich 1992b) highlight that the emergence and recognition of these influential earlier New Waves, the French New Wave and New Queer Cinema, were also firmly based upon cinematic critique and scholarly theorisation. A further parallel may be drawn between Waves, as it was articles in the same popular newspaper \textit{The Village Voice}, that gave initial recognition to the queer filmmakers subsequently designated as “The New Queer Cinema” in 1992 and to the transporn filmmakers identified as “The New Wave of Trans Cinema” in 2008. It was the article by Tristan Taormino in \textit{The Village Voice} that first brought “The New Wave of Trans Cinema” to public attention in 2008. From this similarity, it can be suggested that the editor of the newspaper, or Taormino (or both), were aware of, drawing upon, and/or referencing, the earlier \textit{Village Voice} article by Rich for the title.

While similar in energy, the emergence of “The New Queer Cinema” (Rich 1992b) and “The New Wave of Trans Cinema” (Taormino 2008) are separated in three distinct ways. New Queer Cinema emerged as an energetic, anger–fuelled creative response to AIDS and is set against the background of official denial and hostilities to homosexuals (particularly men) of the 1980s AIDS–era of activism (Çakırlar 2011; Rich 2013). The trans cinematic genre emerged from within independent film and grassroots genderqueer transporn and it could be argued, disaffection with the exclusion of trans lives from mainstream culture, anger at the

\textsuperscript{16} Further discussed in Chapters 4 and 6.
vilification, marginalisation and brutalisation of trans people within society and the heteronormative exoticisation and consumption of trans sexuality (particularly transfemale) within mainstream adult film. With a separation in time of nearly three decades (twenty–six years) between these cinemas, there is new theoretical positioning of screen texts. This acknowledges that: “Transgender theory...did not have time, realistically, to take hold before New Queer Cinema had run its course” (Juett 2010, p. 62). This provides a theoretical basis to clearly identify that the gay and lesbian filmmakers of New Queer Cinema and the trans and gender–diverse filmmakers of the Trans New Wave have distinct theoretical positions and cinematic identities and are distinct cinematic genres. This does not exclude recognition that specific texts of the Trans New Wave pay homage to New Queer Cinema, or that in specific examples, filmmakers may move between these two cinemas.

The emergence of “The New Wave of Trans Cinema” in transporn was a grassroots response and antidote to the mainstream adult film industry. Whilst focussed upon transmale sexuality, these early texts shared the “irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist, and excessive” (Rich 2013, p. 18) characteristics of New Queer Cinema films, including a pivotal role as films which “give voice to the marginalised” (Aaron 2006, p. 399). The New Wave of Trans Cinema could also be paralleled to the postmodern, sexually–fuelled “homo pomo” (Rich 1992) films of New Queer Cinema filmmakers such as Todd Haynes—which were a response to the exclusion of gay male narratives and queer lives with mainstream film. The arthouse sensibility of experimental films such as Resonance (Stephen Cummins and Simon Hunt, Australia, 1991), or Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1989) extend ‘homo pomo’

---

17 Juett (2010, p. 62) notes 1994 and the writings of Kate Bornstein Gender Outlaw as an early point for transgender theory, whilst simultaneously noting this was after New Queer Cinema had run its course. Years after Rich had designated the cinema, she was to describe the short time span of New Queer Cinema as a “moment” rather than a movement in 2000 (Aaron 2004, p. 18). Rich’s statement has perhaps been counter–intuitively interpreted, given her publication of the stand–alone volume on New Queer Cinema subsequently in 2013. When the short time span of all cinematic Waves is taken into account and also the deaths in 1994 of key New Queer Cinema filmmakers Derek Jarman and Stephen Cummins, who both died of AIDS–related complications (Rich 2013, pp. 31–32), the length of New Queer Cinema may still rightly be seen as an influential ‘movement’.

18 This includes the screen text that started it all Buckback Mountain (Buck Angel, USA, 2007) and Couch Surfers: Trans Men In Action (Trannywood Pictures, USA, 2008).

19 Paris Is Burning is noted by Aaron (2006, p.399) as a film which “attends to the gay and transsexual Hispanic and Latino youth of the New York drag ball scene”. This highlights trans as a theme within New Queer Cinema.

20 “Homo Pomo” (Rich 1992a)—shorthand for ‘homosexual post–modernism’ (Johnston 1992). The term ‘homo pomo’ was used by Rich in discussion of the gay and lesbian films and was not as widely used as the later term New Queer Cinema.
stylistically, with films that are poetically homoerotic. Characteristic of New Queer Cinema, *Resonance* and *Tongues Untied* are deeply political films. While *Resonance* deals with the gay bashings taking place in Sydney, Australia in the AIDS–hate era of the late 1980s, *Tongues Untied* confronts issues of racism within not only mainstream society, but also within the homosexual community of the same period. Significantly, both these texts utilise dance as a metaphor and representation of the masculine homoeroticised body freed from conformity to societal expectations of male sexuality.

The similarities and differences between these cinematic Waves is highlighted at the outset in order to differentiate the work of the Trans New Wave in the twenty first century. In defining the distinguishing characteristics of each cinema, the self–conscious referencing between Waves is also highlighted and will also be discussed in Chapter 4. As an example, in New Queer Cinema text *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, USA, 1992), in one scene the character Jean stands in front of a poster on which the words ‘Nouvelle Vague’ and ‘Jean–Luc Godard’ come clearly into view. The self–conscious referencing to the French New Wave by Araki illustrates the cross–fertilisation in cinema. Trans New Wave filmmaker Rhys Ernst in turn makes reference to *The Living End* in case study film *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011). In an early scene in *The Living End*, the red convertible car drives away to reveal a bumper sticker on which text is clearly written. This intratextual device, of using text within the text on the vehicle which enables the road trip, will be discussed in Chapter 6 in light of how Rhys Ernst also uses dashboard stickers featuring specific words in several scenes in Trans New Wave film *The Thing*, foregrounding directorial voice and textual concerns.

This thesis acknowledges and builds upon the seminal article by feminist author, educator, activist and pornographer Tristan Taormino in recognising “The New Wave of Trans Cinema” in 2008 (Taormino 2008) and in acknowledging Buck Angel at the forefront of this form of filmmaking. In this short article, Taormino discussed three transporn films *Couch Surfers: Trans Men In Action* (Trannywood Pictures, USA,

---

21 Acknowledging that that the porn genre also produces political films, but with different styles, aims and intentions than the films designated within New Queer Cinema. The political work of Trans New Wave films focussed upon sex is discussed in Chapter 7.

2008) 23, Cubbyholes: Trans Me In Action (Trannywood Pictures, USA, 2007) 24 and Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil (Morty Diamond, USA, 2007), grouping these together under the heading of ‘The New Wave of Trans Cinema’. Whilst Taormino does not mention the text that positioned Angel at the forefront of this New Wave Buckback Mountain (Buck Angel Entertainment, USA, 2007), the readers Taormino was addressing in the The Village Voice would have been aware of this film—as it was the first film to portray transmasculine sexuality within a homoerotic context, parodying the Academy Award–winning film by Ang Lee that had caused much discussion within the gay community only two years prior.25

This thesis is situated within the broader disciplines of screen, media and cultural studies and the critical field of contemporary trans cinema scholarship that includes key figures such as Jack Halberstam, Joelle Ruby Ryan, Eliza Steinbock, Anthony Clair Wagner, Jonathan Williams, Wibke Straube, Cáel Keegan who have all written significant contributions to developing a trans–informed, transactivist scholarship on cinematic representation in film and television series.26 This thesis builds upon the significant work of these scholars, including the work of leading scholar Susan Stryker (1998, 2000, 2004, 2006a, 2008). Joelle Ruby Ryan (2009), Steinbock (2011, 2013) and Cáel Keegan will be further discussed within Chapter 2. While Ryan’s doctoral thesis (2009) examined trans representation in film, television and media from the 1950s through to the present through four stereotypes, Keegan has focused upon reading the cinematic style of directors The Wachowskis in terms of trans aesthetics. Steinbock (2011) has written on earlier work by Buck Angel prior to Sexing the Transman, which is one of the case study texts of this thesis. Steinbock (2013a) utilised the perspective of affect theory in discussion of the text Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil

23 Simply called Couch Surfers in the article.

24 Simply called Called Cubbyholes in the article.

25 Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, USA, 2005). There is also a lesbian parody of this film Brokeback Mountain Bikes (Nell O’Neill, Australia, 2011), this narrative (non–porn) short film screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2011 and won the Audience Choice Award, most likely because the film provided the ending audiences had longed for in Lee’s film (Ford 2015b). It took until 2016 for a major film Carol (Todd Haynes, USA, 2015) to finally give audiences a complex story arc that eschews the usual dismal tropic endings for gay and lesbian characters. This will be discussed further in context to Chapter 8 and New Queer Cinema.

26 This paragraph is from Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H.

27 Chronologically Ryan’s thesis concluded with a 2006 documentary.
(Morty Diamond, USA, 2007). This text is significant, as it is one of the three transporn films featured in Taormino’s original article to illustrate the emergence of The New Wave of Trans Cinema. In this article, Steinbock’s focus is upon the text *Trans Entities* as an exemplar of the affective dimensions of cinematic trans sex (Steinbock 2013a).

Prior to this current research project on the Trans New Wave, previous scholarship had not identified, nor focused upon the potential position of theorising trans texts across genres, narratives, themes and styles together as an emerging, identifiable new cinematic genre—that can collectively be called the Trans New Wave. This provides theoretical space for this thesis on the Trans New Wave to contribute new researches and empirical evidence to the field. This research will recognise that trans filmmaking has overflowed from the early subcultural transporn origins, into all styles of trans and genderqueer films and that the Trans New Wave has truly arrived, with specific films and filmmakers now being recognised within the screen industry. This became apparent in 2012 at the Sundance film festival with the premiere of *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), one of the case study films within this research, twenty years after New Queer Cinema had come to wider public attention at the 1992 Sundance film festival.

This thesis recognises that the emergence of new waves is episodic, significantly connected to changes in culture and film representations (Sellier 2008). The films written, directed and produced are related to times of consequence in the life of the filmmaker, particularly the director, and independence in telling these stories is vital as will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Each film represents a particular insight into “the specificity of transsexual experience” (Prosser 2006, p. 279) and as such, no metanarratives can be derived from a comparison of the texts selected as case studies. This acknowledges that though temporal moving images, films also become static representations ‘frozen in time’, recording a particular sequence of moments in the fictional screen text, or the factual individual life narrative. This movement of time, both in the onscreen world of the text and in the life of the screen characters and documentary participants, continues to the experience of viewing and writing about the texts. While audiences may view the images of an individual’s gender transition that took place in 2010 in *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012), or a transerotic sexual encounter that took place during 2011 in *Sexing the Transman*
(Buck Angel, USA, 2011), the texts give a sense of immediacy, engagement and “privileged access” (Zubrycki 2011) into what would otherwise be private life experiences, never seen, nor heard and after the moment had passed, only present in memory and body for the individuals involved. In reflecting upon the nature of time in relation to the texts, to the fieldwork interactions within the trans, gender–diverse and queer communities, to the exegesis and to the process of writing this thesis as a new artifact of trans and queer culture, scholars such as Jack Halbertsam (2005) remind us that it is the normative notion of time and life that the queer life challenges, as we traverse a unique path that has its own temporal trajectory, a specifically queer ‘time and place’. In fieldwork with trans filmmakers and community “Acknowledging this temporality is to queer an otherwise normative rational version of ethnographic time” (Rooke 2010a).

This research approach necessitates moving between borders (Rooke 2010a). This thesis moves between empirical evidence and theoretical engagement; between fieldwork sites drawing upon the experiences of the trans community, Trans New Wave filmmakers and independent film festivals that screen the texts, to the textual worlds created by, from and about those experiences; to theoretical engagement with scholarship on gender, sexuality, queer, trans and cinema studies in discussion of the Trans New Wave.

In recognising the Trans New Wave as a new cinema that has emerged since 2008, the concepts of ‘new’ and ‘emerging’ are strategically employed as cinematic terms. The critique within trans studies scholarship that trans is still an ‘emerging’ positionality informs understanding of the issues inherent in interdisciplinary use of the terms:

But while the scholarly trope of emergence conjures the cutting edge, it can also be an infantilizing temporality that communicates (and contributes to) perpetual marginalization. An emergent field is always on the verge of becoming, but it may never arrive (Kunzel 2014, p. 285).

This thesis will present empirical evidence from the case study films, filmmakers and film festivals and through exegesis of the case study texts, that the Trans New Wave has arrived.
This research project and the fieldwork interactions with the filmmakers draws upon an autoethnographic positionality, contextualised within the background of independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer cinema and communication established during my years as Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival in Australia. Each of the case study texts within this thesis was purposively selected, focused upon transmale narratives and was an Award Winner at the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival, a year that the festival programme held a specifically focussed transgender session and panel in addition to the exhibition of trans texts throughout the festival.

The work of Queer Fruits Film Festival was situated within contemporary international film festival culture and within contemporary gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, queer subculture and was an officially recognised and funded film festival, supported by Australian State Screen and Arts funding agencies, regional Council and Community Development schemes and a community partnership with a local Lismore (NSW, Australia) gay and lesbian group (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012). The festival was recognised by queer filmmakers and screen industry peers and is listed as one of the international queer film festivals within scholarship (Loist 2013; Ford 2013, 2014b, 2015b, 2016a forthcoming). This situates the purposive selection of the case study films within this thesis, the festival and my work as Festival Director within the wider programming and discourses of international film festival culture.

1.2 Rationale for an Independent Trans Cinema and Strategies of Self–Identification in Independent Transgender Films

Recognition of trans narratives across cultural boundaries, centralising the significance of trans lives and cinematic cultural outputs are central to this research project. While Western texts are used as the case studies there is a cross–cultural awareness of the many Trans New

---


29 As outlined in Chapter 5, the case study texts are sourced from within the 2012 Queer Fruits Film festival publicly exhibited program and are all texts that focus upon transmale narratives. Within these texts there are a range of participants, addressing intersectional concerns, as will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.
Wave films that are being written, directed, produced and exhibited internationally and respect for the traditional perspectives of First Nations peoples. This includes awareness that an exclusionary binary gendered system is not ‘normal’ to all cultures. From independent film *Two Spirits* (Nibley, USA, 2010) it is learnt that the traditional Navajo worldview has four genders, with nálleehí at the centre of the crossroads and Two–Spirit people honoured within traditional society. Similarly the Hawai’ian culture places individuals who embrace both the male and female parts of their spirit ‘in the middle’ of society, valued as teachers of cultural lore (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014). For a moment imagine a world where gender–diverse people are honoured and valued at the centre of society and culture, rather than diminished at the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987) of a gender–binary hegemony.

As key examples of cultural texts, films provide a multi–screen perspective into contemporary lives, issues, society and cultural normativity, with independent texts challenging the hegemony, heteronormativity and exclusion of gender–diverse lives onscreen. Texts such as *Two Spirits* (Lydia Nibley, USA, 2010) and *A Place In the Middle* (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014) provide potent examples of the rationale and necessity for an independent trans cinema.

---

30 Queer Fruits Film Festival (QFFF) had an inclusive policy of screening texts from international countries and across narratives, styles and genres, programmed together in original languages. During this time, a range of texts handling the narratives of trans men and trans women were received and screened, including documentary *Sisterhood* (Mikajlo Rankovic, USA, 2011), focussed upon Latina transwomen and *Burning For Acceptance* (Carmel Young, Aus. 2009), which told the story of indigenous Sistergirls living in the remote Tiwi Islands in Australia. The documentary *Traditional Indigenous Values* (Ruth Villensor, USA, 2009) presented “An indigenous woman's perspective of the confrontational Yes on 8 rallies in the Bay Area, after marrying her same sex partner in 2008. Historical photos of Native American acceptance of gay people before colonisation, along with interviews of Indigenous same sex couples married during this time compares Proposition 8 to the impact of colonisation.” (*Traditional Indigenous Values*, film synopsis, QFFF 2009 program). A wide range of texts are used in support of specific aspects of the thesis discussion, cited in the Filmography.

31 Defined as an “alternate gender” by Epple (1998), which is specific to individuals in certain situations and includes specific embodiments of genders, cultural gender roles and sexualities. In the documentary *Two Spirits* (Nibley, USA, 2010), the term nálleehí is used interchangeably with ‘two spirits’ people. Gabriel S. Estrada (2011) locates nálleehí within the Navajo Diné language system as a term for “A person of the third gender, ‘nálleehí, feminine man’...The fourth gender, ‘dílbaa, masculine woman,’ makes the complementary switch to male gender roles in a female body” (Estrada 2011, p. 172) The term ‘two spirits’ refers to individuals that a Western scholar may identify as trans, or gender–diverse. It is necessary to respectfully note the First Nation’s cultural specificity and spiritual aspect of ‘two spirits’, that may (or may not) be contained in the Western concepts and uses of terms ‘gender–diverse’, or ‘trans’. The point about nálleehí is made here to introduce this thesis as a way of moving beyond culturally entrenched binary forms of identification and as an antidote to peripheral marginalisation, encountered by trans people and trans filmmakers, particularly from non–western cultures. Many First Nations languages contain concepts of non–binary gender–neutral pronouns: “In Cree, for example, “aayahlkwew” means “neither man or woman.” In Inuktitut, “sipiniq” means “infant whose sex changes at birth.” In Kanien’kehà, or Mohawk language, “onon:wat” means “I have the pattern of two spirits inside my body” (Sterritt 2016).
Recognising cinematic exclusion and misrepresentation as a form of cultural transphobia, leads to the Trans New Wave of cinema functioning as an antidote to mainstream tropic representations. Central to the filmmakers and film participants are the strategies of self–identification, self–representation and what is coined within this thesis within Chapter 7 as self–disclosure. A leading example is case study filmmaker Buck Angel, who is in a unique position in regards to his documentary themes, style and participants. Developing his filmic style and directorial vision out of his earlier experiences in adult film work, Angel created the new genre of ‘docu–porn’ (Angel 2008–2009) that was subsequently recognised by scholars (Steinbock 2011; Ford 2014a, 2015a, 2016b). Unfettered by a film studio, directing, editing and distributing the text via his own company Buck Angel Entertainment, Angel provides a key case study for independent trans cinema. The rationale for Angel’s independence is that his films could not be produced any other way. New forms and genres are created out of necessity when existing cinematic models do not provide representations that reflect the lives of specific communities. A rationale for filmmakers such as Monique Schafter and Ali Russell to independently write, direct and produce Trans Boys one of the case study films of Chapter 6, was the lack of interest from mainstream television broadcasters in Australia for the project. Having experienced a number of their friends transitioning, deeply committed to the documentary, undaunted, Schafter and Russell went ahead and produced the film, using camera equipment the filmmakers borrowed from a supportive television production company that they worked in together.

Transliterate engagement recognises this interconnection between the text and the producer/s of the text—which is an awareness of the cultural situation of textual production, embedded within gender–diverse communities, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. There is also respect—for the case study filmmakers and film participants in these documentaries are revealing

---

32 Fieldwork with Buck Angel, July 11th 2015, Silver Lake, Los Angeles. Taormino (2008) states that transporn film director Morty Diamond “stomps all over the line between porn and portrait” in his film Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papí and Wil (Morty Diamond, USA, 2007) and notes in the 2008 article, almost as an afterthought in brackets “(he calls it “docu–porn”).” The “he” being Diamond. This thesis uses Angel’s self–attribute for creating the genre of docu–porn as an empirical starting point, noting that the style and term could easily have been adopted by other filmmakers. The article by Taormino, the release of Diamond’s film and Angel’s statement all overlap and relate to the same time period and work within the same field. Steinbock (2013, p. 7) uses the term “pornumentary” in discussion of Diamond’s film and references Taormino’s 2008 article in the same paragraph, but it is unclear whether Taormino coined the word pornumentary from reviewing the 2008 article.

33 Fieldwork interview with Co–Director and Co–Producer Monique Schafter, 31 March 2014, online ethnography.
intimate aspects of their lives. As a genderqueer scholar, I use a queer, postmodern ethnographic (Rooke 2010a) research methodology, that embraces “An ethnographic approach to sexuality (that) acknowledges that gender and sexual identities, and the meanings that circulate around them, are more than merely discursive formulations. They are daily realities and practices that have real consequences” (Rooke 2010a). Leading scholar Raewyn Connell (2011) has reaffirmed this interconnection, calling it the “ontoformativity of social practise”, further stating that “Social practise is generative, fecund, rich in real consequences” (2011, p. 4). An example of one of the ‘real consequences’ arising through trans social practises is the growing international awareness within the trans community of the need for self–representation and an ability for independent filmmakers to create texts that are ‘by, for and about us’ (Loist 2012, p. 166); self–representations of gender–diverse narratives.

While a case study filmmaker such as Buck Angel has received an ongoing media coverage, wide support and also hostile criticisms for his documentary representation of the transmale body and sexualities, the importance of Angel’s texts in valorising the “political dimensions of erotic life” (Rubin 1984, p. 35) for transmen have been largely unnoticed. In keeping with Angels’ public focus on education and human rights advocacy 34 this thesis will re–position Angel’s work as a potent form of twenty first century cinematic transactivism, that is part of “The building of subcultural systems designed to facilitate non–normative sexualities” (Rubin 1994, p. 95) and which forms part of the “sexual social formation” (Rubin 1994, p. 95) for transmen and their partners, lovers and allies.

The documentary Two Spirits (Lydia Nibley, USA, 2010) cited above, is one example of a text that has been independently produced since 2008 and that can be considered part of the Trans New Wave. Throughout this thesis the term Trans New Wave is used inclusively. As a developing cinema, these are independent films across genres, styles, themes and narratives, including fictional feature length films and factual documentaries; narrative short films and animations, music videos and experimental films.35 These are films which deal with gender–diverse themes, narratives, sexualities and desires openly. This presents original research in


35 Experimental trans films are regularly produced and screened. As an example, in 2015 Outfest film festival screened an online program of experimental films which included trans experimental texts. <http://www.outfestonline.com/>.
this area. Whilst this thesis is focussed upon publicly, festival–exhibited case study films which fall within the official classifications (ratings) categories of G through R18+ as detailed in Chapter 5, in keeping with the origins of ‘The New Wave of Trans Cinema’ in transporn, there are many Trans New Wave films that contain adult film content and which would be classified within the ‘X’ rating.36

In proposing, defining and defending this new genre, it is acknowledged that not all independent filmmakers who have written, directed and produced films with trans themes, narratives and characters since 2008 might consider themselves to be part of the Trans New Wave. In part, this could be due to the Trans New Wave not having been visible as a cinema that filmmakers could align with, something that this thesis aims to be part of changing. This central research question—of which films and filmmakers to select as case study examples and further, which texts and filmmakers to include more generally within the Trans New Wave—is a defining issue. The question of what makes a trans film, or filmmaker, has been centrally raised in the literature of trans studies (Leung 2014b). This question is foundational to the recognition of an emerging cinema and was previously encountered in respect to queer films and filmmakers of New Queer Cinema.

The “first generation” (Rich 2013, p. xxiii) of New Queer Cinema filmmakers identified by Ruby Rich, included key gay male directors (Greg Araki, Stephen Cummins, Todd Haynes, Derek Jarman, Isaac Julien, Tom Kalin, Marlon Riggs, Gus Van Sant) and lesbian director Sadie Benning. Later, filmmakers such as Cheryl Dunye, are acknowledged to be part of a second generation of New Queer Cinema filmmakers by key scholars (Çakırlar 2011, p. 163).38 Though Rich specifically included lesbian director Sadie Benning as a participant in the groundbreaking 1992 Sundance panel (Sundance Institute 2014), Rich was heavily criticised for grouping disparate films together (Parmer 1993; Ford 2014a) and also for the non–inclusion of a wider range of lesbian films and filmmakers within the original New

36 ‘X’ was the original USA category, which is category X18+ in Australia—a Restricted adult (viewers over 18 years of age) genre in Australia that only contains actual depictions of sex (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012a), films with this classification do not receive theatrical (cinema) release/screenings, this is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

37 Simply spelt NQC by Rich in the Chapter.

38 Dunye’s films She Don’t Fade (1991) and Vanilla Sex (1992) are cited as examples of New Queer Cinema by Çakırlar (2011, p. 163).
Queer Cinema lineup. This led to a subsequent inclusion of lesbian filmmakers in an attempt “to bring something like equal attention to the lesbian work that had finally started to appear” (Rich 2013, p. xxiii).

While 1992 is cited by Rich as the “watershed year for independent gay and lesbian film and video” (Rich 1992b, 2013, p. 16), participation in the 1992 Sundance Film Festival panel is also used as a key identification by Rich for the original New Queer Cinema filmmakers. Four prominent gay and lesbian filmmakers—Derek Jarman, Pratibha Parmer, Isaac Julien and Constantine Giannaris, were invited to respond (Jarman 1992, Parmer 1992, Julien 1992, Ginannaris 1992) to Rich’s publication on New Queer Cinema in *Sight & Sound* (Rich 1992b). Whilst Derek Jarman offered support for the importance of the 1992 Sundance Film Festival saying: “Ruby’s right. The Sundance festival marked the birth of queer cinema in the US” (Jarman 1992), Pratibha Parmer was scathing: “Elements of Rich’s article seem somewhat misleading, in particular the marking out of Sundance as the beginning of a new queer historiography” (Parmer 1992). Isaac Julien was also “ambivalent” on the grounds that “For most white queer filmmakers there is no intersection with race” (Julien 1992). Giannaris Constantine was also critical of Rich, on a number of grounds including the “absence of women” and because “In many ways it isn’t a new aesthetic, but a collection of different aesthetics” (Constantine 1992). This overview of the initial debates surrounding the origins of New Queer Cinema highlight the multiple perspectives that cinema generates and the differences that scholars and filmmakers may have to establishing criteria for a cinematic genre.

Cross–fertilisation between cinematic Waves becomes apparent when reviewing the films of New Queer Cinema and the Trans New Wave as highlighted earlier in this chapter in relation the work of New Queer Cinema filmmaker Greg Araki and Trans New Wave filmmaker Rhys Ernst. This is also apparent in the texts of Cheryl Dunye, a New Queer Cinema filmmaker, discussed within this thesis in relation to the Trans New Wave. Known for films with lesbian themes and narratives, Dunye self–identifies as a “queer black cinema artist” (Nichols 2013).

39 The panelists were Todd Haynes, Isaac Julien, Simon Hunt, Tom Kalin, Derek Jarman, Stephen Cummins, Sadie Benning, moderated by B. Ruby Rich. A later publicity photo by: Meredith May, and Brooke Dillon also includes Lisa Kennedy in this group (Sundance Institute, 2014).
and is identified as one of the later New Queer Cinema filmmakers. As Dunye is currently directing films with transmale themes and narratives and exhibiting at trans–focussed film festivals Dunye has been included within this thesis as a Trans New Wave filmmaker. This raises central questions, also raised in regards to New Queer Cinema, of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘exclusivity’ (Aaron 2006). Is Dunye’s recent work categorisable within trans cinema, or within broader independent film as an exemplar of a multi–faceted ‘queer black cinema artist’? The proposition that “On the other hand, any attempt unconditionally to include a film or a director into the category of NQC or to undebatably deny from this category any artwork with a GLBT story and/or director, remain questionable” (Çakır 2011, p. 165), remains relevant to this thesis in respect to the Trans New Wave films and filmmakers. The critical question of defining inclusion of filmmakers currently writing, directing, producing and exhibiting films with trans themes and narratives as Trans New Wave has been kept in mind throughout the research process.

Through fieldwork (2013–2016), empirical evidence has been gathered to support the definition of filmmaker self–identification as one key to inclusion. Geographic location has also been identified as an important factor in identifying the Trans New Wave. A clustering of Trans New Wave filmmakers have emerged in urban areas, particularly the Bay Area of San Francisco and in Los Angeles in the USA, both areas with large trans populations. Schafter and Russell were also urban filmmakers (Sydney, Australia) when making Trans Boys. A specific text may be included in the Trans New Wave, while the filmmakers might then continue on to write, direct and produce subsequent texts which fit within other screen categories. Case study filmmaker Rhys Ernst is an example of a filmmaker whose creative output has moved between independent Trans New Wave films such as The Thing (Rhys

---

40 Dunye’s inclusion is from around 1996.

41 Black Is Blue (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 2014). Online ethnographic fieldwork contact with the filmmaker was attempted 26 July 2015, following in–person fieldwork attendance at the Outfest Film Festival and having the opportunity to direct a question to the filmmaker during the filmmaker panel following the session.

42 Black Is Blue (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 2014) screened on Opening Night of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival in 2014 in the Transgender Shorts programme.

43 New Queer Cinema, abbreviation in original.

44 This criteria would eliminate consideration of Dunye’s recent text Black Is Blue within the Trans New Wave, something that would seem to be a scholarly oversight and incorrectly exclusionist, given the screening of this text by Dunye at the 2013 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival (discussed later in this thesis).
Ernst, USA, 2011), independent online production *This is Me* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015) and more mainstreamed online series with trans themes and narratives such as *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014).

As a wave, the Trans New Wave is also most likely a temporal cinema. Utilising earlier New Waves as temporal antecedents, the short duration of any cinematic Wave becomes apparent. The *Nouvelle Vague* (French New Wave) is the major historical example of a Wave that was in full production for only six years between 1958–1964 and in total less than ten years (1958–1968) (Neupert 2002, 2007, p. xv, xviii), but with an influence that has been lasting on cinema. Likewise New Queer Cinema emerged in the late 1980s to early 1990s (Rich 1992, 2013), slowly being eclipsed post–1994 in the wake of filmmaker deaths. Ruby Rich (2013) specifically notes the years 1985–91 and 1992–1997 as the New Queer Cinema era (p. xix), but with an influence that has continued into the twenty first century (p. xxiv). This establishes the precious and fleeting nature of the primary eras of cinematic Waves and the potential influence into the future will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The definition made by Richard Neupert of the French New Wave may be usefully re–applied and repositioned in respect of the Trans New Wave: “For reasons that will become clear, this study prefers to summarise the New Wave as a complex network of historical forces, including all films made by young directors exploiting new modes of production as well as unusual story and style options” (Neupert 2002, 2007, p. xviii). In this, the term ‘young directors’, while usefully referring to selected Trans New Wave directors under thirty–five years of age at the time of their first film, is also not used as an exclusionary ageist term within this thesis, but to refer to ‘young’, as in emerging and new filmmakers, without an age limitation. This inclusive definition also accords with non–linear queer and trans experiences of time (Halberstam 2005; Rooke 2010a).

1.3 Trans as Non–Essentialist

Trans is used throughout this thesis as an inclusive, non–essentialist term. Following the

---

45 Ernst has worked as Second Unit Director on *Transparent* and as a Consultant to the series on trans issues, along with his partner Zachary Drucker.
A contemporary strategy of writing trans, as trans* with an asterisk 47 is acknowledged as an important development in the terminology of trans studies and one that also provides a vision of trans as an inclusive, non–essentialist term. Two interrelated issues in writing the word in this way with an asterisk were recognised during the research process. Firstly, that writing trans* with this style of writing has not been adopted by all trans activists and scholars and

46 The word trans has come into wide usage internationally, often credited to 1991 with the publication of what was to become the foundation text of trans politics “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back: A Post–transsexual Manifesto” (Stone 1991). This is a time period running parallel to the emergence of New Queer Cinema. According to Sandy Stone (2014), the text predated the official first publication (Stone 1991), having been originally written in 1987. “Publication history: Version 1.0 written 1987. First presented at "Other Voices, Other Worlds: Questioning Gender and Ethnicity", Santa Cruz, CA, 1988....estimate is that it has been translated into twenty-seven languages as of January 2007”, viewed 7 March 2014. <http://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back>. Trans was an increasingly accepted vernacular in the decade following. Trans and transgender are also contested terms, with prominent scholars making a move away from using these terms in the late 2000s in order not to: perpetuate a minoritizing or ghettoizing use of “transgender” to delimit and contain the relationship of “trans–” conceptual operations to “–gender” statuses and practises in a way that rendered them the exclusive property of a tiny class of marginalised individuals (Stryker, Currah, Moore 2008). This movement within trans scholarship, was signaled with the word Trans- being written with a hyphen to mark “the explicit relationality of “trans–” which remains open–ended and resists premature foreclosure by attachment to any single suffix” (Stryker, Currah, Moore 2008, p 1.). The term transgender has subsequently retained currency with these leading scholars, as evidenced by the launch of the interdisciplinary journal Transgender Studies Quarterly, of which Stryker and Currah are Editors.

47 Trans*: Three Definitions
1. From contemporary film festival research/trans film scholarship –
“It comes from search engine functionality, in which the wildcard * placed after a word will show everything related to it. While this is somewhat specialised knowledge, only noted in writing or code, it has been taken up fairly widely in scholarly writing and by activists. Otherwise, when spoken, ‘trans’ is still heard. Both seek to include all noncisgender gender identities, such as transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, genderless, third gendered, trans man, trans woman.” (Loist and de Valck 2013, footnote #1. in article).
2. From the wider trans* community –
“In the sense that it is a placeholder for suffixes of trans, that is, trans____, the asterisk is standing in for *gender, *sexual, *feminine, *masculine, *folks, *person, *guy, *girl, *woman, and *man (note that not all of these are one word. For example, transgender is a single word, but trans woman is two). However, it is also inclusive of identities that do not start with the prefix “trans,” but can be understood as under the trans* umbrella. These identities include, but are not limited to, genderqueer, bigender, third gender, gender*ck (see what I did there?), gender fluid, genderless, MtF, FtM, Two Spirit, non-binary, androgynous, and masculine of center (MOC). While all of these identities are distinct from one other, each can be understood as under the trans* umbrella because the folks who identify with them do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth and/or are “queering” (deviating from norms; blurring) gender expectations and assumptions.” (Jones 2013). The term trans* is noted as a twenty first century term, which a contemporary generation of trans* activists are aware and are often more comfortable in using.
3. A respectful acknowledgement is made of non–western, First Nations and indigenous traditions which include Third Gender, Two–Spirit and concepts beyond the western binary of ‘male and ‘female’. The reader is directed to important works such as Caroline Apple (1998); Gabriel S. Estrada (2011); Angela Sterritt (2016). <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/indigenous-languages-recognize-gender-states-not-even-named-in-english/article29130778/> (Ford 2016e forthcoming, footnote #2, Appendix H).
that it is contested as ‘redundant’, elitist’, ‘exclusionary’ and ‘transmisogynist’ by some trans
scholars and communities 48 who view the word ‘trans’ as already including the open–ended
diversity that the term written with an asterisk implies. Secondly, the word was not written
this way historically.49 For these reasons, the style of writing trans, without an asterisk, has
been adopted in this thesis. This is due to the inclusive and more widely recognisable nature
of the term and more specifically, in reference to the Trans New Wave—the focus of this
thesis, which was originally coined as the ‘New Wave of Trans Cinema’ without an asterisk
(*) in 2008 by Tristan Taormino.

Trans written in this way, with an open ending and without the need for any additional signs,
gender, or sexual suffixes, preemptively accords with the theoretical idea of the ‘proliferation
of sex and genders’ (Butler 1990, p. 149). Out of respect for all transgender, transsexual and
gender–diverse lives, specific terminology used in scholarship and by authors will be
retained.50 This is necessary for the rationale outlined above. Where narratives of different
generations are referenced, specific terms will be used for historical accuracy.

In acknowledging the diverse expressions of trans lives, respect is given to all transfolk, for
whom fixed binary terms such as ‘man’ or ‘woman’ does not express the full potentiality of
individual genders/sexualities. Here the use of transqueer (Leung 2014a) can be helpful to
indicate a non–binary approach to trans. The use of the term genderqueer is also utilised to
denote such a fluidity. Gender–diverse is currently the preferred term by some who advocate
eliminating all ‘T’ words: transgender/transsexual/transvestite/trans/trans*, as these ‘T’ words
are all problematic/contested sites by trans people.51 In light of the non–essentialist view of

48 Personal communication via trans social networking sites on Facebook (2013). The term trans* is a term
intensely codified by contemporary western perspectives, perhaps even more so, than the word simply written as
trans (Ford 2016e forthcoming, footnote #2, Appendix H).

49 Examples being Camp Trans in 1994, a significant moment in the border wars between transgender people
and the lesbian/feminist/womyn’s movement (Prosser 1998, p.172); or the New Wave of Trans Cinema
(Taormino 2008), both of which are written as ‘trans’, not ‘trans*’, as trans* was an unknown term at the time.
Uses of additional specific terms will also be referenced, where these terms are relevant to, or enhance
understanding of the texts.

50 This includes where the term trans* is written with an asterisk in the literature, or social media and/or as
specialised knowledge, a footnote will be included at the outset whenever the term is used, if required for
clarification. The continuous development of terms of reference in respect to transgender lives is not new. It is
likely that terms will continue to evolve as transgender studies continues to widen.

51 Personal communication, gender–diverse respondent, private correspondence, 29 September 2013.
trans, “sexual essentialism” (Rubin 1984, p. 275) is also viewed as an modern and incorrect axiom, that does not apply to the diverse sexualities discussed within this thesis.

1.4 The Problematic of Mainstream Films/Filmmakers Representing Trans Narratives

Though it is the twenty first century, a world of two genders and hegemonic sexuality still dominates society and cultural production, especially within mainstream cinema. Attitudes towards transpeople communicated via screen texts have the ability to shape, or shift perceptions. The stereotypical narratives and cinematic erasure of homosexuals identified by Vito Russo (Russo 1981) and subsequently presented in The Celluloid Closet (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, USA, 1995), has reappeared within the mainstream cinema transposed onto the trans body, echoing how trans people are negated and vilified in many places. Somewhere in the world a transperson has been murdered today, or yesterday, or this violence will happen tomorrow. Between 2008–2014, on average there were two hundred and eighty-eight (288) transpeople murdered every year—a distressing one thousand seven hundred and thirty-one (1,731) murders that were reported.52

These years are significant to this research; 2008 is the year in which the New Wave of Trans Cinema was first recognised (Taormino 2008); during this time I established and ran a Queer Film Festival (2009–2012) and commenced this doctoral project on Trans New Wave films. It weighs heavily upon my mind, that every day I have been screening queer films, communicating with filmmakers, researching and writing this thesis, another transperson has been killed. Beyond this, there are countless unreported crimes, individuals living in poverty, illness, or fear; trans and gender–diverse people disacknowledged by families, harassed in the course of their everyday lives, simply for being. As I write this introduction, I am aware of the privilege of being alive and of being able to write in an environment of intellectual and physical freedom. As a Western–born, genderqueer scholar, I live far removed from the horrific instances of abuse and violence suffered by trans women of colour and by trans men living in isolated areas. Yet even with this privilege, I move uncomfortably in the gendered

spaces that society enforces and have no doubt that hegemonic society only abrasively tolerates difference—and then, only for individuals deemed to have a social value, judged through normative measurable statuses—economic, educational, relational.

Yet, this is also a time in the twenty first century when there is a proliferation of information, images and narratives of trans inundating the media and social networking sites. Affirming portrayals of trans people are finally being screened in online series such as Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014); and Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–).

Orange Is the New Black (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–) has received widespread media attention for the casting of trans actress Laverne Cox within the series in the role of the trans female inmate Sophia. It is acknowledged that series Orange Is the New Black may be validly criticised as an example for being situated within the prison system, with characters incarcerated and inmate’s lives ‘glamorised’ for television.\(^53\) This is a textual narrative far from the horrific violence and realities of actual imprisonment and violence that trans people suffer when incarcerated within settings that refuse to acknowledge their gender, withholding hormones and other essential support. Trans images which defy mainstream conventions are also being produced with characters such as the transmale clone Tony in Orphan Black (John Fawcett et al., USA, 2013–).\(^54\)

This is a time in culture when, through access to some form of screen, whether this be a hand–held device such as on a phone or tablet, or access to a computer, a television, or the local cinema, there is the likelihood that the images and stories of trans lives have been seen.

Amidst this, films such as Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) are still being produced and canonically awarded, whilst representing trans through the lens of stereotypical

---

\(^{53}\) Whilst the story arc and depictions of Sophia within episodes screened during the first three seasons were affirming (Sophia ran a hair salon for the inmates and was well–liked), late in Season Three Sophia was subjected to a serious assault leading to isolation in solitary confinement, ostensibly for her ‘own protection’. During Season Four, the series became an increasingly problematic site for onscreen trans representation. In this 2016 season, Sophia is depicted further brutalised within the prison system, subjected to extended solitary confinement, loved ones outside the prison not being informed of her health and status. The physical brutality and isolation leads to Sophia self–harming, in what is revealed to be an attempted suicide, depicted by a solitary confinement cell covered in blood, followed several episodes later by scenes of Sophia (back in solitary) with her wrists bound with bandages. Whilst this story arc may attempt to depict a more realistic representation of the experiences of many transpeople in prison, such narratives utilise demoralising screen techniques for creating character sympathy, centred upon violent representations of the character.

\(^{54}\) Introduced in Season 2, Episode 8. During this episode the complexities of trans are acknowledged: “Tony what you are doing is so much more complicated than sex or gender.” (Transcription A. Ford 2015, from Netflix screening).
trope–driven characters, bodies deemed to be ‘fallen’ (Jacobs 1997; Ford 2016 forthcoming, Appendix H) and as in everyday life, trans people who needlessly suffer and die before their narrative journey needed to end.

**The non–proliferation of Trans in the Mainstream**

The ongoing issues in representation posed by official classifications (ratings) systems and censorship of texts are a major rationale for independent trans cinema, which is the focus of Chapter 5. The implications for non–hegemonic representations, are that the mainstream either avoids these subjects, or engages in active misrepresentation, in order to secure wider audiences.

The research will engage with broader issues of the preservation of temporal cultural creations and the value of independent films and materials that do not proliferate because they exist outside the mainstream. It will also strongly argue that the reasons why these films do not have the opportunity to proliferate in a mainstream context is due to the censorial gaze of classifications/ratings systems and the economic basis of the filmmaking and distribution within the screen industry. The role of both the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department, also known pre–2006 as the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) in Australia and The Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), will be critically examined within Chapter 5 in relation to transgender representations and ratings decisions.

The research project will analyse representations within independent films thematically (Creswell 2013) and will argue that Trans New Wave films have the potential to empower transmen to ‘own’ their sexuality and experiences, without reference to any preconceptions or self–censorship (Richardson 2010, pp.147,162) due to the agency of the independent filmmaker. Transgender films are now key texts in transactivism and education, an area that will be explored in Chapter 7. Genre conventions and *mise en scene* (Stadler with McWilliam 2009, p. 2) from each text will be discussed to demonstrate the construction of key sequences within each film, necessitated due to an awareness that readers may not have viewed the texts cited and for the centrality in constructing the “story world” that both genre and *mise en scene*
holds. The role that film representations may have in the lives of transgender people will be considered and is part of the of the transliteracy that will emerge from the research in Chapters 4 and 8. These positions will be critically reflected upon in the light of the interview participants’ experiences and awareness of producing transgender narratives, with respect to prevailing classifications systems (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2008, 2012; 2014b, 2014c, 2014d; Australian Government 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2015); Motion Picture Association of America 2014b; The Classification and Rating Administration 2014) and audience expectations.

1.5 Importance of this Research

The Trans New Wave is a new genre of cinema that has not previously been critically studied as a group of filmmakers. Individual films and filmmakers focused upon transporn (Taormino 2008; Steinbock 2013a), as exemplars of trans aesthetics (Steinbock 2012; Keegan 2014c, 2015d), or as examples of affect in trans cinema (Steinbock 2013a, 2013b) have been discussed as a singular examples of trans film contextualised to specific sites of theory. Whilst Taormino’s article was published under the group heading ‘The New Wave of Trans Cinema’, the article did not develop the individual transporn films as representative of an emerging genre beyond transporn. In reviewing the field of independent trans cinema and from my experiences as a Festival Director (2009–2012), it became clear that there was a pattern of genre characteristics and cinematic identification emerging within trans film across styles as seemingly diverse as narrative short film, short documentary, feature–length documentary, extending to experimental films and music videos. What these films exemplify are shared thematic concerns for the position, representation and agency of the trans community in the twenty first century. Identifying the Trans New Wave will contribute to contemporary knowledge of what is produced from within the trans community and also to an understanding of the broader production of independent films within cinema studies.

The thesis utilises an innovative approach, combining social science and cultural studies methodologies and fieldwork, detailed within Chapter 3, in tandem with textual exegesis more familiar from the humanities.
Recognition of the Trans New Wave and the emerging canon highlights the agency of the Trans New Wave filmmakers in writing, directing and producing work that is ‘by, for and about’ (Loist 2012, 166) the gender–diverse community, but which is accessible to the wider community through public exhibition at independent, queer and trans film festivals and through online film portals. Through recognition and discussion of an emerging canon of representations (Ford 2016b), one of the focal points of Chapter 4, current and future researchers will be enabled to engage with the texts transliterately; that is, through an understanding of the textual meanings to the community that has produced the texts. Filmmakers working within the Trans New Wave will also receive scholarly recognition for their work, ensuring that this significant new genre of cinema is included within contemporary courses across disciplines that focus upon gender and sexuality studies and draw upon cinema and media texts. This is vitally important in the twenty first century, as this is a time when mainstream films such as Dallas Buyers Club (Dir. Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) continue to misrepresent trans people in stereotypical and demeaning narratives, through non–literate readings of trans lives. Disturbingly, these films are still canonically awarded. This highlights that the existing criteria for awarding and canonization of texts is out of touch with the communities that such mainstream filmmakers are drawing upon and claiming to represent within these texts. Through the scholarly work of developing a canon of independent films (Ford 2016b), the hegemony of the mainstream is challenged and supplanted with exemplary texts by Trans New Wave filmmakers that do represent the communities depicted.55

This research fits within interdisciplinary fields and will provide original scholarly research on the significant new genre in cinema of the Trans New Wave. Based in empirical evidence and textual exegesis, this thesis will become a new artifact within the the fields of cultural studies, trans cinema studies and cinema studies and may be useful in the development of new materials and approaches within transdisciplinary courses.

Transliteracy (Ford 2014a, 2015a, 2016b), used throughout this thesis as a new research approach, is an original theoretical development that has the potential to be widely used in

55 This paragraph originally published in Ford (2016c forthcoming), p. TBA.
discussion of trans issues across interdisciplinary fields including cultural studies, cinema studies and transgender studies.

1.5.1 To the Australian and International Screen Industry

Current screen industry statistics only include independent films that are within a range of specific production budgets.\(^5^6\) These budgets, far in excess of what the majority of independent filmmakers will ever access, means that all independent films which fall below the mainstream screen industry production costs are excluded from screen industry statistics. This results in erasure for the majority of independent filmmakers and specifically, erasure of the majority of trans filmmakers and films within official screen industry documents; with current official screen industry statistics making it appear that films and filmmakers such as the Trans New Wave do not actually exist. As official screen industry statistics form the basis for federal, state, local and regional governmental funding cycles, the non-inclusion and lack of recognition of what would be classed as ‘very low’ or ‘non-budget’ films perpetuates the cycles of non-funding for these filmmakers. Through scholarly recognition of the important socio-cultural work of Trans New Wave filmmakers and texts, empirical evidence is provided that could be utilised in advocacy for policy change and for more inclusive funding guidelines, or utilised as an academic study by independent filmmakers in drafting funding applications.

The focuses of this research differ from previous scholarly investigations within trans cinema

---

\(^5^6\) How the term ‘independent film’ is used within this thesis:
The film is produced independently of and outside the Studio system—this is the major criteria. For these films, the production budget is low, or filmmaker self-funded. In Australia since 1990 between 40–50% of independent films have had a budget range less than $3,000,000 (Screen Australia 2012). Data such as this needs to be read mindful of taking into account that the Screen Australia data does not record the high number of independent films that are produced annually far below this threshold and outside the funding agency system. In America, the budget range is up to $11,000,000 according to the Directors Guild of America (DGA)(DGA 2011). Production costs are financed by the producer as an independent investor; by co-production treaties; by investors; film financing; private investment (this can be friends, family, or via Crowd-funding) or a combination of these sources. Distribution is also outside the Studio distribution network, via self-distribution, or contracted to a distributor who has invested finance into the film production and recoups 100% of that investment (often the only party to recoup full funds), this distribution investment is known as ‘LIFO’ (last money in first money out); or the film is self-distributed via website, social networking sites (such as Vimeo, Youtube), by distributing via a video-on-demand (VOD) service, or pay-per-view downloads; cinema releases may occur, but will screen on a limited number of screens, for a shorter period; often cinema release is predicated upon a previous successful series of screenings nationally and internationally on the film festival circuit—festivals such as Edinburgh, Berlinale, Sundance, Toronto all are known to lead to distribution opportunities (distributers are present). Festivals, such as Cannes, or Berlin are primarily marketplaces for new films.
studies cited (such as Joelle Ryan, Eliza Steinbock, or Cáel Keegan). The focus of this thesis upon the Trans New Wave as a new genre that includes a wide range of cinematic styles, themes and narratives and the role of classifications (ratings) systems on trans screen content production, distribution and exhibition, which is an original contribution to the field and currently an unresearched area. The thesis “advocates the need to ‘work towards bringing about shifts in our societal foundation matrix’” (Hakeem 2010, p.150). Independent and queer film festivals and film has the power to play a unique role in bringing about this shift and, in particular, independent film leads the way in innovation.

A discussion of film Ethics and the ethics of censorship—in particular whose ‘community standards’ are utilised as the basis for official classifications (ratings) decisions when non–hegemonic screen content is under review, becomes a pivotal point of discussion and an area which could provide future scholarly research in advocacy for policy change. This is will be one of the focus points of the concluding Chapter 8.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The First Chapter introduces the research area of the Trans New Wave as a new cinema and transliteracy as a new theoretical approach to reading the texts. The positionality of the research as an interdisciplinary project, drawing upon ethnographic and autoethnographic resources is framed by the currency of trans within culture. The continuing failure of the mainstream to write, direct and produce texts that represent trans narratives in ways that are relevant to contemporary gender–diverse lives, or in affirming ways, is contrasted with the independent films and filmmakers of the Trans New Wave.

In the Second Chapter a review of the literature presents the stereotypical, trope–driven representations of trans lives in mainstream films, using high profile texts Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) and Predestination (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014) to illustrate the problematics within these films. This establishes a rationale for the necessity for an independent cinema dealing with trans narratives and an independent film festival circuit that is not reliant upon mainstream box office, where texts may receive public exhibition. An ethical approach to researching trans texts, backgrounds a discussion of existing and emerging

Methodologies utilised within the research are discussed in the Third Chapter. The interdisciplinary approach of the thesis within cultural studies, utilises ethnographic methodologies (Denzin 1997; Valocchi 2005; Binnie 2009a) and qualitative research techniques (Binnie 2009b; Creswell 2013), informed by the work of previous scholars focused upon fieldwork interviews with transmen (Devor 1997; Rubin 2003). Autoethnography (Reed–Danahay 1997; Gaitán 2000; Butler 2003; Maguire 2006) emerges as a significant methodology for the research project, drawing upon my earlier work with transgender films as Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012), from which this research project emerged. Case study films within this thesis are sourced from the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival program and the Queer Fruits Film Festival Archive is a research resource cited within this thesis. The use of autoethnographic materials highlights the necessity for self–reflexivity and is an approach also called “reflexive ethnography” (Gaitán 2000, p. 3). Positionality as a genderqueer participant–researcher is acknowledged as enabling observation and study of the gender–diverse, transqueer community from within a place of grassroots involvement.

In Chapter Four, transliteracy is introduced as an innovative theoretical approach to reading gender–diverse films of the Trans New Wave (Ford 2014a, 2016b). The approach is
embedded within queer and trans social structures to enable greater insight and meaning into the films. The foundation of transliteracy is ethnographic methodology and autoethnography as discussed within Chapter 3, arising from the empirical perspectives of curating independent trans films and interacting with filmmakers and texts from the point of view of a genderqueer festival director. Transliteracy acknowledges that “literacy is best understood as a set of social practises; these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts” (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 9). Within this thesis, films are the texts which ‘mediate’ between ‘social practises’ and ‘events’ in trans lives and communities. The ability to think across boundaries is part of a transliterate approach. The necessity for a transliterate engagement with trans lives is further emphasised, when contrasted with the non–literate misreadings evident within the mainstream texts highlighted in Chapter Two. From within the research a new canon of cinematic representations of gender–diversity and sexuality is proposed (Ford 2015a, 2016b).

In **Chapter Five** Classification (ratings) systems in Australia and the USA are discussed. This sets the scene for the emergence of independent film (outside the film studio rating system), against the historical background of censorship of sexual images and non–hegemonic content, with use of the term ‘obscene’, to stigmatize and repress sexual content on screen. Against this twentieth century background, the New Wave of Trans cinema emerged in the early twenty first century directly from the X–rated category of adult film—perhaps the most ‘stigmatized’ category of film and the only rating outside the control of the USA Studio system, the Motion Picture Association of America/Classification and Rating Administration. The terms ‘obscene’ and ‘obscenity’, although now defunct as official classifications terms or categories, still maintain a powerful stigmatization when applied to creative content, particularly screen texts containing erotic and sexual materials depicting ‘real’ or fetishised sexual practises. The use of the X 18+ and RC (Refused Classification) categories in Australia to quarantine and control depictions of ‘real’ or ‘actual’ sex are discussed. The erotic ‘transgression’ of trans people performing sexual scenes intensifies the imagery. The relationship between classification (ratings) systems and independent filmmakers of the Trans New Wave is one of the key fieldwork interview questions within the research. Issues in screening texts in Australia that have emerged for independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer filmmakers are discussed, with key examples of queer films that were ‘Refused’ permission (an effective ‘ban’) to screen in Australia at recognised film festivals,
despite having received multiple screenings on the festival circuit internationally. The historical issues with film ratings, which emerged from censorial regimes, is discussed. This is to ascertain whether classification/ratings systems continue to exert influence over independent filmmakers and alter creative directions in film and festival programming and the ongoing relevance of classifications (ratings) systems in the twenty first century.

Trans New Wave films are written, directed and produced as both fictional and factual texts. In Chapter Six, two case study films, the fictional short The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) and factual short Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) are critically analysed and compared for the representational strategies of transmale narratives that each text contains. Transmasculine gender and sexuality are themes of these films, treated in specific ways. This includes the way in which genre is used, with the road trip, science-fiction and horror genres being of particular relevance to theoretical discussions of trans cinema. Three key narrative devices to represent dysphoria (Keegan 2013) of road trip, mirror (Prosser 1998) and ‘exposure’ scene (Halberstam 2001) identified by leading trans scholars are illustrated, through exegesis of the case study texts. Continuing issues of the ‘real’ and ‘reality’ within film are discussed. A critical engagement with issues of the ‘erasure’ of the trans body (Cromwell 2006, p. 513) within texts, through narratives focused upon “passing figures” (Surkan 2004), or the ‘passing couple’ arise within both texts. Does the Trans New Wave filmmaker have a responsibility to represent the trans body as non–passing?

Sexual ethnogenesis (Rubin 1994, p. 94) in the transmale community will be explored in Chapter Seven, using Trans New Wave text Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) as the case study. Rubin (1994) advocates an anthropological approach to reading texts which acknowledges “social groups with histories, territories, institutional structures, modes of communication” (p. 95). This form of approach is usefully applied to contemporary transmale sexual experience, which is not isolated, but rather connected to pre–existing subcultures of gay male sexuality in representation and practise, as documented by Angel. The interconnections between the leather dyke community and transmen will be identified, following auto–ethnographic experience in both communities documented by Patrick Califia (1997; 2003; 2013). A transliterate reading of Sexing the Transman will position this text at
the centre of the Trans New Wave, rather than as a peripheral text, with transmasculine sexualities the cultural referent, rather than a single bodily signifier.

**Chapter Eight** will reflect upon what has been achieved by the case study filmmakers to date and more broadly, by Trans New Wave filmmakers internationally, including the significance of cinematic self-representation, development of new filmmaking styles such as docu–porn and treatment of new subjects such as transsex and production of screen texts from non–Western, indigenous and First Nations’ perspectives. The increasing public awareness of trans issues through international festival and online screenings of independent films highlights the movement of texts across mediums. From stand–alone film screenings, to Subscription Video On Demand (SVOD) online streaming services and telemovies, there is an increasing audience for texts. The significance and potential future legacy of the Trans New Wave will be assessed with reference to New Queer Cinema and the influence that New Queer Cinema films and filmmakers have continued to have upon cinema. Transliteracy as an innovative theoretical contribution to knowledge, in reading films and to cultural, cinema and trans studies will be discussed, with potential applications for the future. Potential areas for advocacy emerging from the thesis will be discussed. Publication milestones achieved through the research project will be highlighted, including first publications on transliteracy (Ford 2014a) and the development of a canon of representations within Trans New Wave films (Ford 2015a, 2016b). An overview of the way in which the canon is currently developing will be included, with a concluding statement on the significance and positioning of this research, on what has been achieved to date and areas for future researches suggested by the thesis.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction—Trans Representation in Mainstream Cinema

To contextualise the significance of theme, genre, style and narrative representations of trans within independent texts of the Trans New Wave, cross-reference will be made to selected examples from within mainstream cinema including the primary transmale example, the 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry* by director Kimberly Pierce, based upon the murder of Brandon Teena. This is a text which has been subjected to thorough critical examination (Halberstam 2001; Rigney 2003; Zagler 2011; Keegan 2015c). The significance of these scholarly studies has also led to further work and ideas from the text being re-examined and re-circulated in respects to other studies on masculinity (Shamir and Travis 2002). Masculinity is of specific importance to transmale cinematic representations within the case study texts that will be discussed in Chapter 4, 6, 7.

Similarly, the few mainstream texts centred upon transfemale characters and narratives such as *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992), *Transamerica* (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005), or *Farewell My Concubine* (Chen Kaige, China, 1993), have also been thoroughly critically reviewed (Serano 2007; Cavalcante 2013; Leung 2010). The release of *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean-Marc Vallee 2013) following the continued scarcity of transgender texts throughout mainstream cinema, led to a justified outcry from within the trans community internationally. This text demonstrated that there are ongoing and unresolved problems within mainstream understanding and cinematic depictions of trans. The negative and stereotypical representation of the supporting character of Rayon (Jared Leto), a transwoman, has

---

57 How the term ‘mainstream film’ is used within this thesis:
The film is produced by one of the six major motion picture Studios (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures; Paramount Pictures Corporation; Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.; Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporations; Universal City Studios LLC; Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (MPAA 2014a, abbreviations in original, order of Studios in original); production costs are financed by the Studio and the production budget is high ranging up to $200,000,000+; distribution is via an in-house, or affiliated company; there are wide cinema releases (number of screens on which a film is exhibited to a paying audience)—this is also due to the Studios/distributers owning the major cinema chains; Major Awards are received signifying mainstream acceptance (such as Academy Award; Golden Globe, SAG Award). Of note to this research project is that both *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) and *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean-Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) are both independent films that have received mainstream reception (cinema screenings) and acclaim (including Academy Awards) and through this process became ‘mainstreamed’.
justifiably been described as “anti–trans” (Tannehill 2014; Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

These films have all been highly awarded are well–known and widely screened in mainstream theatrical releases, digital video disc (DVD) and online digital streaming platforms. Yet all these texts depict a range of trans narratives and characterisations that contain negative narrative treatments of the central trans character, not narrated or depicted from a trans perspective. The trans person being variously depicted as concealing a secret (The Crying Game; Boys Don’t Cry; Transamerica), the secret is such that audiences are asked not to reveal the secret to friends who are yet to view the film (The Crying Game); or the secret when revealed has the potential to disrupt and alienate the family (Transamerica); depicted as addicted, terminally ill and dying before the film ends (Dallas Buyers Club); being involuntarily subjected to gender reassignment surgery (Farewell My Concubine; Predestination); or brutally treated, violated and killed (Farewell My Concubine; Boys Don’t Cry). In these last two texts, the trans character is erased simply for being an individual living in a time and place within a society where normativity requires conformity to hegemonic constructs of binary gender and sexuality as a prerequisite condition of existence. In all these texts, the audience becomes complicit, watching the trans person stripped bare, humiliated, destroyed. There a few moments that celebrate the life and contribution of transpeople to society (such as the artistic vocal virtuosity of the lead character in Farewell

58 Ford (2016c, 2016e, forthcoming). Dallas Buyers Club is the subject of three research articles arising from this thesis slated for publication (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

59 Academy Award winner The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992); Golden Globe winner Farewell My Concubine (Chen Kaige, China, 1993); Academy, Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild, BAFTA Award winner Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999); Golden Globe winner Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005); Academy, Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild Awards Dallas Buyers Club.

60 While Transamerica reads as a film supportive of the trans character, there are also issues in the narrative, which will be discussed in relation to the other texts in the context of Chapter 7.

61 The term ‘gender reassignment’ is utilised here deliberately, rather than use of the contemporary term gender confirmation surgery. This is because in both of these films, the character does not express gender identity difference, does not consent to the surgeries, which are performed upon the person as an act of power and manipulation and hence, the character’s gender is ‘reassigned’.

62 As this is a fictionalised account of an actual series of events, it could be argued that there is no other way to tell this story, a point that is strongly disagreed with. Issues with this film have been the subject of rigorous scholarship as cited. A prior documentary on the murder of Brandon Teena is highlighted as a source of the feature film, with the feature omitting key parts of the actual event (including the murder of two people at the same time Brandon was killed, an African–American male and a young caucasian woman, which significantly alters the reading of his murder.
My Concubine), but this is tinged with the narrative knowledge of the brutal (and non-consensual) treatment that the person has been subjected to. The transphobia inherent within these mainstream cinematic representations reveals the deep issues and insecurities within society of maintaining hegemony, through disciplining (Sloop 2000) and erasing gender and sexual diversity.

Trans representation in films has recently intensified as an area of research for cultural studies and film scholars and of concern to audiences. The increasing visibility, recognition and activism of transpeople in society has made wider audiences far more aware of the issues that trans people face on a daily basis. Facilitated by the ease of global communication and social networking, wider public concern is voiced about the onscreen characterisations and story arcs being presented. Trans cinema studies is an emergent field, to which this thesis aims to make an original contribution. Scholars such as Eliza Steinbock (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013a) and Cáel Keegan (2013, 2014b, 2014c, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d) are pursuing specific aspects of trans cinema. Steinbock is centering work upon trans–erotic cinema (2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014); whilst Keegan is focused upon trans representations in television series (Keegan 2014a, 2015a) such as Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014– continuing in production) and Orphan Black (John Fawcett et al., USA, 2013– continuing in production); with significant ongoing researches in regards to trans aesthetics and The Matrix (The Wachowskis, USA, 1999)(Keegan 2014b, 2014c, 2015b, 2015d). A range of contemporary trans cinema scholarship will be discussed within this chapter.

The research of this thesis will contribute to this scholarly field and is situated within cultural studies, trans cinema studies, queer, gender and sexuality studies, cinema and media studies and the generational move to transgender studies as a discrete interdisciplinary field, spearheaded by Susan Stryker and Duke University. The necessity for a transliterate engagement with all screen texts, from independent texts of the Trans New Wave to the mainstream, is suggested by recent problematic mainstream films Dallas Buyers Club (Jean-Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) 63 and Predestination (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014). These

---

63 Dallas Buyers Club is noted as a film that was independently produced, which has become a mainstream text through Academy recognition and wider distribution/theatrical releases (International Movie Database 2013a–g).
screen texts are cited as examples of mainstream films that have caused considerable concern and generated increased discussions around trans representation in cinema.\footnote{\textit{Dallas Buyers Club} is the subject of three separate research articles in press. \textit{Predestination} is discussed in Ford, A. (forthcoming). Essay “Trans* Film Essay” (working title), in B. K. Bergen–Aurand and A. Grossman (eds.), \textit{The Encyclopedia of Queer Cinema}, pp. TBA. The long–form article on \textit{Dallas Buyers Club} (Ford 2016e) is attached in Appendix H.}

### 2.1.1 Dallas Buyers Club (Jean-Marc Vallee, USA, 2013)

An Academy, Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild award winner, scooping all the major cinematic honours in 2014, the feature film was simultaneously heavily criticised from within the international trans community for the stereotypical and trope–driven narrative and depiction of the fictitious trans character Rayon (played by Jared Leto). The representation of Rayon has multiple issues and showed how damaging and problematic cinematic representations of trans people continue to be within the mainstream screen industry. The film was criticised (amongst many issues) for casting of a non–trans actor/actress as Rayon, raising comparisons with now–rejected cinematic practices including ‘blackfacing’ of non–indigenous, or non–African American actors in earlier films to portray indigenous and African characters, a practise that was common throughout Hollywood and early cinema: “It is no longer acceptable to cast cross–racially, so why is it acceptable to cast someone who is not transgender in a transgender role?” (Rohwer 2013).

The story arc and characterization of Rayon contains recognisable tropes—derived from a long line of socially proscribed Hollywood ‘fallen women’ (Jacobs 1991, 1997), transposed onto the trans body (Ford 2016c \textit{forthcoming}, 2016e \textit{forthcoming}, Appendix H). This is noticeable throughout the film and may be read in this way because Rayon is a trans woman. Rayon is depicted as ‘fallen’ from the domestic space of her family and the hegemonic and economic privileges associated with the position of her father. She is also ‘fallen’ from wider society through narrative associations with criminalised economies of recreational drugs and street sex work (Ford 2016c \textit{forthcoming}). The ‘fall’ is completed through the narrative treatment of killing off her character before the film ends—the classic genre ending for
dealing with ‘fallen women’ (Jacobs 1991, 1997). Following *Dallas Buyers Club*, mainstream cinema continued to produce films with demoralising and stereotypical transgender narratives.

2.1.2 *Predestination* (The Spierig Brothers, USA, 2014)

Emerging with minimal publicity (meaning that there were no opportunities for protests from the trans and queer communities locally or internationally, leading to negative press before the screenings) this film may be read as an example of cinema with transphobic themes and narratives. This feature film has a particularly negative and vicious narrative, in which the main character—depicted as a woman, becomes pregnant out of marriage (again echoes of the ‘fallen woman’ genre, as in *Dallas Buyers Club*) and, whilst unconscious, under anesthetic having a caesarean–section delivery of her child, is subjected to involuntary gender reassignment surgery. This is not the only film to have depicted involuntary gender reassignment. The text *Farewell My Concubine* also contains this narrative situated within the historical context of the traditional Peking Opera. *Predestination* moves between time periods and characters, creating a confusing narrative—utilising temporal displacement as a narrative strategy within the film, that can be read as a contemporary version of the trope of classic time–travel themes frequently depicted within the science–fiction genre. Throughout

---


67 This is an Australian–based film. Not that you would know this from either the International Movie Database homepage for the film, or the film publicity. If you research further you discover that the main funding bodies for the film are Screen Australia (as presenting partner) and Screen Queensland (International Movie Database 2015g. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2397535/companycredits?ref_=ttfc ql_5>). The producers kept a very low profile about the Australian origin of the film, so that upon release the film was viewed as a USA production by USA audiences. *Predestination* was nominated for The Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts award in 2014 (The Australian Film Institute (AFI)/The Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) (2014)).

68 The outdated phrase ‘Gender reassignment surgery’ is deliberately used here, rather than the current phrase ‘Gender confirmation surgery’, as the character within the film did not consent to the surgery which literally ‘reassigned’ their gender from female to male, the surgery then could not have been ‘confirming’ their gender.
this text temporal displacement is also used as a trope of negative affect, bodily displacement and disjunction. 69

Transgenderism is used in this film as a trope for subjective disintegration. Phrases that may productively be applied in exegesis of *Predestination* such as “temporal dissonance” (Freeman 2010, p. 1), “temporal reshufflings” (ibid., p. 2) and the “reciprocal derangement of bodies and sequences” (ibid., p. 3), are discussed in Freeman (2010) in respect to independent queer video. There is a ‘reciprocal derangement’ between text and spectator for audiences (trying to) follow the unravelling of the narrative in *Predestination*. To this is added the trope of killing off the ‘outsider’, portrayed as a marginalised and gender–variant character. Worse still, the central character in this text, who is alternately depicted as a woman and as a man (displaying surgical scars on his chest and male genitalia, following the involuntary gender reassignment surgery), is depicted as ‘predestined’ to become a sociopath—being revealed within the narrative to be a serial murderer, known as the ‘Fizzle Bomber’, who is responsible for all the devastation experienced in the film.

This textual treatment incorrectly links transgender as the underlying cause of enormous mental instability and social disintegration, when it is the violence of enforced surgical gender reconfiguration that destabilises the central character. For audiences, all that is seen onscreen is this one character: a young woman, who becomes pregnant, then is surgically rearranged into a transmale–coded body (cinematically signified through the depiction of chest scars and male genitalia), with a child that he impregnated into his previous female body. This narrative derangement perpetuates the damaging tropes from within medical–psychological discourses on gender–variant people from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The writers and directors not only created the main character as an ‘outsider’, but as one who then wants to wreak vengeance and destruction upon an unsuspecting heteronormative world. The issues within this text lay in the cinematic identification of a character as ‘trans’, when this is a narrative trope and representation of the ‘other’ (from an outside perspective) as trans. For contemporary audiences and trans communities this is a confusing and an absolutely demoralizing text.

The imposition of change of gender by authoritative regimes is depicted, depriving the audiences of an ethical narrative. This includes that gender is configured through authoritative sanctioning and medical violation of human rights and that gender may be changed—and is contingent upon—surgery, without individual participation or awareness of any gender difference and without consent for surgery. The narrative treatment of the central character in both texts (*Farewell My Concubine; Predestination*) may be described as unethical and violent, cinematic representations of abuse through controlling and manipulating gender in historical and science fiction worlds.

### 2.2 Devices, Motifs, Metaphors, Cliches—Stereotypes as Obstructions and Constructions of Transgender Representation On Screen

Films such as the two recent mainstream examples of *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Predestination* fall into the stereotypical trope of killing off the trans character, who is depicted as a marginalised, social outcast throughout the story arcs. This pattern has become increasingly noticeable in respect to trans characters in the twenty first century within mainstream film. This was first noted in respect to homosexual and lesbian characters in cinema during the twentieth century, in the groundbreaking research of Vito Russo (1981). Subsequently transferred to screen in the epic film *The Celluloid Closet* (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, USA, 1995), this remains the landmark visual work of reference for the history of gay and lesbian representation in cinema.

Throughout 2014 and 2015 a range of new screen productions were distributed, heightening the visibility of trans narratives within the mainstream. Public recognition within the screen industry followed the landmark 2014 *Time* magazine issue, which featured successful trans actress Laverne Cox, one of the stars of *Orange Is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–continuing in production) on the cover. In 2015, screen industry journal *Variety* featured Laverne Cox on the cover of the May edition, with the tagline “Hollywood Trans Formation:

---

How Laverne Cox and a new generation of storytellers are taking the industry by storm. Online series such as *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–) (Amazon, subscription video on demand), feature films including *Tangerine* (Sean Baker, USA, 2015) and *The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper, USA, 2015) and new online science–fiction series *Sense8* (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–), which has cast trans actress Jamie Clayton as the lead character Nomi Marks are all part of this new generation of trans–focussed mainstream texts “targeted to millennial audiences, which prize authenticity (an important arc in the transgender narrative)” (Setoodeh 2015).

It is not only the use of tropes in representing trans lives that is a systemic issue within the mainstream, it is the kind of tropes that are represented that are problematic (Ford 2016e *forthcoming*, Appendix H).

While some measure of equality has now been achieved for cinematic depictions of homosexuality (after a long fight) and with the new trans texts released or in production offering a note of change; texts such as *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Predestination* continue to highlight that the mainstream screen industry has a long way to go, to write, direct and produce films which portray trans people with dignity and equality, in non–stereotypical narratives as a prerequisite of representation.

2.3 Use of Metaphors as Representations by Independent Trans Filmmakers

Exegesis of the case study texts within this thesis in Chapters 6 and 7 will demonstrate a strong usage of metaphors in screen narrative and language. In the short film *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), perhaps the clearest example of the narrative use of metaphor is evident—

---


with the road trip movie genre and car journey towards an enigmatic landmark destination used as a metaphor for the journey of transitioning. The use of narratives of movement in trans accounts and texts has been discussed by a range of scholars (Prosser 1998; Cotten 2011; Aizura 2011; Keegan 2013; Ford 2014a, 2016b). This suggests that an issue in exegesis is about representations, not just the use of tropes. Textual and subtextual genre references are also made to the science fiction/horror genre films of the 1950s, as a metaphor for societal anxieties regarding gender roles in society. In the Chapter 7 exegesis of Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) use of metaphorical language in response to transmasculine experiences of physicality will be discussed, with use of words such as ‘hole’ and ‘junk’ standing in for gendered words for sexual access areas. The use of the word ‘hole’ in these contexts conjures up clear images of what is being referenced. Difference in usage of the word ‘junk’ in the United States (where the film was produced) and other countries arises. For example in the USA, the use of the word ‘junk’ is part of slang vernacular referring to a man’s genitals. Outside the USA, the word ‘junk’ could variously be read as metaphorical for a body area that is considered to be worthless, discarded (or discardable), or something that is being carried around in excess of what is required. In I<Heart Boys (Sarah Barnard, USA, 2012), the depiction of the transmale lover engaged in an athletic display of push-ups is used as a metaphor for transmasculine sexuality. In Spiral Transition (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2010), Ewan is shown walking through a spiral, with movement towards the centre as a powerful metaphor of change and integration.

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives

The case study texts within this thesis contain narrative and documentary depictions of gender transformation, including the use of hormones and gender confirmation surgeries (Chapters 4, 6 and 7). Due to this a consideration of the theoretical position of this thesis in respect to medical discourses is necessitated. Whilst individuals may decide to access these treatments, trans people also challenge the medical hegemonies that have encircled their lives: “But at its most provocative, trans and the space it references refuses the medical and psychological categorical imperatives through which it has always been forced to confess” (Noble 2006, 75). Oxford Dictionaries (2015). “Junk”, viewed 4 May 2015, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/junk>.
The problematic relationship between trans lives and medical discourses has been powerfully critiqued by Susan Stryker (2006b) in “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage”. A range of scholars (Foucault 1978; Rubin 1984, 1992; Califia 2003; Noble 2006; Chiang 2009; Serano 2009, 2015; Siebler 2012; Steinbock 2012) have all presented the negative impacts of medicalisation and psychopathologisation on sexually and gender–diverse people. Julia Serano articulates the direct interconnection between these discourses and marginalisation for trans people:

the concern, fear and outrage expressed by trans people—even those who are the most vehemently defiant and angry at the psychological establishment—comes from a very real and legitimate place. It comes from our understanding that there is a direct connection between mainstream psychological discourses about gender variant people and the societal marginalization we face in our day–to–day lives due to our gender variance (Serano 2009, p. 2).

A text such as Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) perpetuates the cultural wound around the medicalisation of trans lives, with the characters constrained within a medicalised narrative as a consequence of HIV, which positions the trans character Rayon (Jared Leto) as a “patient, awaiting treatment” (Califia 2003, p. xli); under the control of authority figures (hospital/doctors, pharmaceutical ‘experts’); in a state of life-threatening, bodily ill–health. These representations draw upon nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses and attitudes surrounding the medicalisation and treatment of transsexuals 76 that are extensively documented and critiqued within trans scholarship (Stryker and Whittle 2006; Serano 2009). Discussion of texts from Richard von Krafft–Ebing Psychopathia Sexualis (1877), through to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III (1980) and current medical/treatment discourses, have been evaluated (Stryker 2006a, pp. 1–17). Despite his public opposition to legislation that criminalised homosexuality, Krafft–Ebing left behind a complicated legacy that was influential to the new fields of psychiatry and later, in the

76 The word ‘transsexual is noted to have been coined about Christine Jorgensen by her doctor in the 1950s. Christine in the Cutting Room (Stryker, Work–In–Progress).
emergent field of sexuality studies. The difficulties are based upon his psychopathologisation of individuals “by gathering all forms of sexuality under the umbrella of psychopathology, Krafft–Ebing cast a shadow of insanity upon all forms of sexual behaviour that deviated from the heterosexual norm”.\textsuperscript{77} This ‘shadow’ has been difficult to erase socially, politically and culturally.

The legitimation of sexual psychopathology is directly linked to the psychopathologisation of individuals who do not fulfill hegemonic roles within society. Trans people are rightly outraged by theories such as these, the effect of which has been to “\textit{invalidate} us” (Serano 2009, p. 3, italics in original).

Entrenched in mainstream cinematic representations are ‘outsider’ characters and narratives that have become cinematic tropes (Jacobs 1997). Lea Jacob’s 1986 doctoral thesis \textit{Reforming the Fallen Woman Cycle: Strategies of Film Censorship 1930-1940} subsequently published in 1991 \textsuperscript{78} is the exemplar text emerging from historical film censorship studies, which is cited as an model for using a cinematic research methodology which incorporates industrial screen materials. This is of relevance to this current thesis for illustrating how the use of a range of screen industry materials and media analysis may successfully be applied to film studies. Traditionally film theory has been concerned about representation, often using psychoanalysis.\textsuperscript{79} Within this research, I am focusing on the material conditions of film production and exhibition, incorporating industrial materials into the researches through the ethnographic and autoethnographic methodologies, in a way that such materials are utilised in the day to day world of film and film festival production. This combined methodology is supported through fieldwork with Trans New Wave filmmakers throughout the research and my autoethnographic experiences as a trained filmmaker and through my role as a Festival Director of a queer film festival.

\footnotesize


\textsuperscript{79} Noting that classical film theory does not use psychoanalysis.
The research of this thesis extends across a range of approaches to the study of independent trans cinema. This includes postmodernism, poststructuralism and the concept of being “Postposttranssexual” (Stryker and Currah (eds.) 2014). A wide range of industrial (screen industry) materials are utilised throughout the thesis in cinematic exegesis and in analysis of the exhibition cycle of films within independent queer and trans film festivals. The methodologies of this research are fully discussed in Chapter 3.

Within mainstream texts cinematic narrative depictions of trans characters who are always ‘outsiders’ recur with disturbing frequency. This transposes genre conventions previously isolated to narratives of the “Fallen Woman” genre (Jacobs 1997) onto the trans body in the late twentieth and twenty first centuries (Ford 2016c forthcoming, 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). This includes narratives where the trans person is represented outside the home/family/law (Dallas Buyers Club); depicted as a sociopath (Predestination); connected to other ‘outsiders’; living ‘outside’: in cars/on the streets/homeless/street sex worker/drug dealers (Dallas Buyers Club); visibly different on the ‘outside’: in clothing/speech/gestures, general mannerisms/appearance (Transamerica) 80; treated as an ‘outsider’ and retributively ‘punished’ by ‘locals’ (Boys Don’t Cry) and treated differently in public spaces such as shops/restaurants/hotels/bars (Transamerica). All of these depressing stereotypical representations can be found in multiple places within the mainstream films with trans characters and narratives as discussed within this thesis.

The medicalisation and psychopathologisation of trans lives is a powerful rationale for excluding psychoanalytic approaches/theories from this research project and for not using these in regards to textual exegesis of case study film as we will continue to see in Chapters 2 and 3. Eliza Steinbock has discussed the complex relationship between the agency of trans individuals, medical intervention and cinematic aesthetics pointing to the tensions apparent from even the very emergence of Transsexual aesthetics between that of a curative violence wrought through surgical cuts and the

---

80 While Bree (Felicity Huffman) is dressing and presenting to pass as a woman, as she is also presenting as a christian missionary, her choice of clothing and speech are anachronistic when considered within the narrative with her son, an urban street hustler; this marks her as an ‘outsider’.
accessing of agency by desiring and undergoing a reassemblage of embodiment (Steinbock 2012, p. 155).

Within this thesis there are texts which demonstrate transgender agency though use of surgical and medical technologies as documented within Chapter 6 in the stories of Xavier and Dex in Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafer, Aus., 2012) and in the narrative of Tristan (Hilt Trollspinter), depicted using hormones in short film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011). The use of hormones by transmen is also discussed in documentary Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011).

The decision to exclude psychoanalytic approaches/theories from this research project and for not using these in regards to textual exegesis of case study film as outlined within this chapter and in Chapter 3 as a methodology, is a theoretical position and research decision made in relation to this thesis. The scholarship cited above lends weight to careful evaluation of the history and role that medicine and psychiatry have had—and continue to have—in trans lives and in the cinematic representations of trans. It appears from reviewing the literature that these fields have exerted a disproportionate pressure and authority upon gender–diverse lives, resulting in “trans–invalidation” (Serano 2009, p. 6). Careful reading of these scholars has suggested that for this research project on the Trans New Wave, eliminating psychoanalytic and medicalised discourses as authorities wherever this is possible is a way forward, which opens a new way of thinking about trans cinematic texts that accords with underlying concepts of ‘New Waves’ as will be discussed within Chapters 4 and 6. This approach also makes space for new forms of theory to emerge that validate trans lives and creative works (such as Trans New Wave films).

For balanced scholarship, there is a need to acknowledge where some trans people have benefited from what has been called anti–pathological medical discourses/practises in the ‘sex reforming second generation of sexologists’, such as Iwan Bloch, Henry Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld (Chiang 2009). Michel Foucault (1978) notes: “It is easy to make light of these nineteenth–century psychiatrists, who made a point of apologizing for the horrors they were about to let speak, evoking “immoral behavior” or “aberrations of the genetic senses,”

81 Serano also uses the terms “trans–invalidating” and “trans–invalidations” (2009, p.6).
but I am more inclined to applaud their seriousness” (p. 64). While now considered to be part of the discipline of sexology studies (the scientific study of sexuality), all these influential men were originally psychiatrists. In this, they worked from the point of view of gender and sexual difference as a pathology (as mental disorder). Whilst ‘applauding’ these men for “their seriousness” (Foucault 1978, p. 64), Foucault also reflectively acknowledges that these new scientific studies brought sexuality “under the rule of the normal and the pathological” and as something which required “medical interventions” for the first time in history (1978, p. 67, italics added).

This point—about the links between psychiatry and the pathologisation of non–hegemonic sexualities/individuals needs to be extended to considerations of use of these approaches for cinematic exegesis as will be discussed within this chapter, mindful that theoreticians such as Freud, was also originally a psychiatrist. Later forms of psychology all have the same roots—including Jung—who also studied psychiatry influenced by reading Psychopathia Sexualis. This places widely used forms of film theory and cinematic analysis, as originating within discourses that pathologised sexuality. As this thesis works with contemporary texts that document transmale bodies and sexualities from diverse millennial perspectives in Chapters 6 and 7, it is central to the ethical approaches of this research that forms of theory that pathologise sexuality are not applied in exegesis.

It is important to acknowledge that psychoanalysis is not one field, but has numerous branches within the discipline, including reference within the literature to queer psychoanalytic insights from scholars (Halperin 2003; Watson 2005; Hakeem 2010) and interdisciplinary scholarship between the fields of psychoanalytic theory and gender, sexuality

82 Foucault specifically names “Campe, Salzmann, and especially Kaan, Krafft–Ebing, Tardieu, Molle, and Havelock Ellis” (p. 63).

83 They all also speak from the perspective of social status and privilege as western–born white males.

84 “5. Through the medicalization of the effects of confession. The obtaining of the confession and its effects were recodified as therapeutic operations. Which meant first of all that the sexual domain was no longer accounted for simply by the notions of error or sin, excess or transgression, but was placed under the rule of the normal and the pathological (which, for that matter, were the transposition of the former categories); a characteristic sexual morbidity was defined for the first time; sex appeared as an extremely unstable pathological field: a surface of repercussion for other ailments, but also the focus of a specific nosography, that of instincts, tendencies, images, pleasure, and conduct. This implied furthermore that sex would derive its meaning and its necessity from medical interventions: it would be required by the doctor, necessary for diagnosis, and effective by nature in the cure. Spoken in time, to the proper party, and by the person who was both the bearer of it and the one responsible for it, the truth healed” (Foucault 1978, p. 67).

and cultural studies (Cavanagh, Failler and Johnston Hurst 2013; Cavanagh 2014, 2015). Foucault speaks of such power as productive and repressive (1978). For some trans people, psychoanalytic theoretical approaches may be valid in both life and in reading trans cinema. A sobering thought is presented by Julia Serano (2009) “we live in a society where all people must be willing to be pathologized (i.e. diagnosed as having a medical or psychiatric condition) in order to access the healthcare system” (p. 2). Scholar Joe Macdonald provides an autoethnographic account of this distressing experience (Macdonald 2013, pp. 140–142). For gender–diverse people, this has included the requirement to conform to answering health questionnaires in specific ways that pathologise their life, conforming to the psychiatric definitions for ‘Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria’ in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), in order to access essential hormones and medical technologies that enable trans embodiment. This dominance of psychoanalytic and medical discourses systematically subjugates trans people. This is the antithesis of this research project in which the agency of the trans filmmaker and of the trans and gender–diverse participants in films is not only respected—but essential to a transliterate reading of texts and to moving researches in the field of cinema studies and trans cinema forward within twenty first century discourses of knowledge production.

2.5 An Ethical Approach to Analysing Trans Texts—Film Ethics

The thesis will consider entwined ethical issues that arise within film (Bauman 1993; Stadler 2008, 2009; Downing & Saxton 2010), from film exhibition and also ethical issues centred upon the use of film materials within the thesis. A particular ethical issue of concern to this thesis is the use of film stills (also called ‘frame enlargements’) from films—which are single still photographic frames (.jpeg, or .tiff digital files), created from within the sequence of moving images which comprise the case study texts and which were never intended to be seen as a single, static shot.

As background to these issues, ‘film’ is comprised of a sequence of twenty–five frames of image per second 86 or 1,500 frames per minute of film footage, which equates to 90,000

---

86 Digital film frame rates: in the Southern Hemisphere (PAL); in the Northern Hemisphere this can be twenty–seven, or twenty–nine frames per second for NTSC. Celluloid is most commonly twenty–four frames per second.
individual images frames per hour of film. This means that for every one minute of film viewed, the audience has actually viewed 1,500 individual frames. When a filmmaker includes something within a single shot that may last onscreen for three seconds, this is comprised of seventy-five individual frames (‘images’). This emerged as an ethical concern to this research during textual exegesis. In order to fully interrogate texts, case study texts have been viewed in slow motion, frequently stopped, or paused and single images viewed statically, turning cinematography, into photography. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6, in light of intratextuality within The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

The significance of the metatext emerged only after repeated viewings of the film, played in slow motion and stopped frequently. The text appears onscreen in the opening two minutes of the film, for approximately eight seconds (two hundred frames), within a brochure on ‘The Thing’. Once this was recognised, to transcribe the text within the brochure, required the film to be played repeatedly and paused for extended periods to enable transcription. To create film stills enabling extended theoretical consideration and exegesis, individual digital .jpeg files were created from the static film using a different software application than the film was edited in. This left questions of whether audiences would actually have been aware of, or clearly read, the metatext within the brochure on ‘The Thing’ when the film was screened during regular public exhibition, or whether this would have passed by viewers and was included by the filmmaker as a rhetorical device. In this example, the film stills (frame enlargements) were not produced by the filmmaker as part of promotional materials, or publicity kits used in marketing the film and were not intended to be viewed as static images. Film stills created in this way have been included to support textual exegesis in conference presentations, during which the images are projected onscreen through Powerpoint presentations, a verisimilitude of the viewing environment in which the filmmaker intended

---

87 Analysing the case study film in this section through frame per second to highlight ethical issues was suggested through close reading of the Thompson Report (1993): “At twenty-four frames per second, a ninety-minute feature would consist of around 129,600 frames; it seems possible that even the reproduction of a hundred frames (less than one tenth of 1 percent) would be considered too small a portion to be infringing on copyright protection” (unnumbered).

88 Cinematography which is movement (kine)—writing with light; Photography—writing with light.

89 The Preview software application was utilised to create film stills used within this research project; independent films are generally edited using commercial desktop editing software; the most affordable editing suite is Final Cut (Final Cut Pro; Final Cut X); the Avid editing suite may also be used, but as this is much more expensive editing software, independent filmmakers generally do not use this (QFFF Archives 2009–2012).
the images to be seen (i.e. vertically projected onto a screen, with a light source). Film stills created in this way have been made using the provisions of ‘Fair Use/Fair Dealing’ in respects to ‘temporary reproductions’ of images. (Copyright Basics: Fair Use 2008; Film Stills Resources 2011). These film stills (frame enlargements) have not been included within the thesis publication.

The use of film stills is contrasted with the use of publicity stills—which are reproduced throughout this thesis as Figures and were photographed by the filmmakers either on set during film production, or shot later, to simulate a section of the film. In this case, the publicity stills were created specifically for the purpose of marketing media to publicise the film and were intended by the filmmakers to be viewed as static images (which includes publications). This ethical approach has taken into account the original intentions of the filmmaker in respects to their film. Within film studies, the use of publicity stills is cited as inferior to the use of actual film stills, as the publicity still may (or may not) be an image that does not actually appear in the film and hence, may not contain the same lighting, set, or mood of the film (Thompson 1993). Of concern within this thesis is that scholarly discussions around the use of ‘film stills’ within research appears to be focussed upon the rights of the researcher, seemingly overlooking the rights of the filmmaker and their intentions in the use of their media.

There are two influential Reports which provide guidelines for what constitutes the ‘Fair Use’ of film imagery in scholarly works and publications (Thompson 1993; Society For Cinema and Media Studies 2009), supported by web–based resources (Copyright Basics: Fair Use 2008; Film Stills Resources 2011). The Thompson (1993) report provides guidelines for a film researcher/scholar to create film still/s directly from film frames and provide a Copyright (©) notice with attribution as examples of ‘Fair Dealing’.

The Society For Cinema and Media Studies Report (2009) develops this and provides detailed guidelines on uses of images for ‘transformative’ purposes (defined as changing the work for

---

90 Called ‘Fair Dealing’ in Australia.
new utility/commentary which builds upon the existing work). These Reports and sources pertain to the USA. As this thesis involves case study filmmakers in the USA and Australia and fieldwork with filmmakers and film festivals in Australia and around the world, within this research I have also followed publications on the Australian laws on 'Fair dealing'. This provides information that ‘creating temporary reproductions in the course of communication do not infringe copyright’ which could be interpreted as for a conference presentation, or an academic lecture connected to this research project as two examples. Both the 1993 and 2009 Reports raise a number of cogent issues, including that there have been no legal cases to test the validity of using frame enlargements from films without permission.

There is a general view that scholarly use/publishing for non–commercial reasons and use in classrooms all constitute ‘Fair Use’. These articles are written from the point of view of copyright and researcher use of film materials. Neither Report appears to raise related issues around Intellectual Property (IP) rights that a creator of an artwork has in any work of art (whether visual or literary). It could be argued that frame enlargements from films could have the potential to violate intellectual property (IP) rights.

93 Ibid., Division 3, 43A.
94 To facilitate scholarly publications using images from films without filmmaker permission, official positions on this matter have been adopted by leading publishers and the Society For Cinema and Media Studies. A number of academic publishers, including Oxford University Press and Columbia University Press, have adopted a policy of reprinting film, television, and internet images in books and print journals of media scholarship and in media studies textbooks without asking permission. Since the 1993 statement was published sixteen years ago, SCMS has not discovered any lawsuits filed against authors or publishers who have adopted this policy involving the use of film stills...SCMS members use a wide range of copyrighted material, including posters, advertisements, photographs, sound files, and video files, in addition to film stills. SCMS members also publish in a variety of venues including books, textbooks, print and online journals, videos included on DVDs, blogs, and personal websites, among other possible outlets. Fair use is applicable across all of these media and venues (Society For Cinema and Media Studies 2009, unnumbered).
96 It is noted that since the Report (1993) there have been new laws of relevance to use of copyrighted works, including the “Digital Millennium Copyright Act”, which appears to offer protection to US–based educators using film clips in classroom settings. viewed 20 April 2015, <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap12.html#1201>. (Film Stills Resources 2011). It is unclear whether this would give protection in respect to IP rights.
There is also no discussion of potential ethical issues that may arise through ‘Fair Use’/‘Fair Dealing’ of films/images, by not having permission from filmmakers/rights holders to use images from films. This last point is of particular relevance to this research project. Direct contact, correspondence and fieldwork with independent queer and trans filmmakers over a period of seven years has established that independent filmmakers may not wish their creative works to be used without their knowledge/permission. Examples include: not wanting films disseminated in classrooms during lectures without a fee being paid or out of valid concern that this will diminish the distribution potential for their films, including to international film festivals. Distributors and film festivals often require that a film has not been previously publically circulated/screened as a condition of selecting the film to screen, or contracting the film for distribution. A festival (or distributor) could argue that if a film in its entirety has been viewed within classroom or lecture hall settings, that it has been publically circulated, which would negate licensing rights (for a distributor) and premiere status (for a film festival). If I had followed the recommendations in the Society For Cinema Studies reports (that it is acceptable to show such films in a classroom or lecture room as 'Fair Use'), these screenings would have overlooked the filmmakers’ actual intentions in respect to their films and it could be stated that this would have infringed their copyrights and intellectual property (IP). In example one, further discussion with the filmmaker negotiated a single screening of the text from the filmmaker’s website, which publicised the filmmaker’s other works, potentially providing financial opportunity for sales; in example two the text was not screened, in accordance with the filmmaker’s expressed wishes. These examples have been provided as empirical evidence of the complexity and ethical issues that may arise in using film materials within research. The 1993 Report appears to criticise researchers who seek permission from filmmakers for use of film materials: “authors and editors should consider whether asking for permission “just to be safe” might make it more difficult for others to use illustrations from films with impunity” (Thompson 1993, unnumbered).

---

97 As a Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012); as a doctoral candidate and researcher (2013–2016).

98 This is an actual example arising from correspondence with filmmakers in 2013 when I sought permission to show selected short films that had screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012) during a guest lecture in a university course on gender and sexuality. Further details have been withheld for confidentiality. Private correspondence with filmmakers (de–identified), August 2013.

99 Private correspondence with filmmakers (de–identified), August 2013.
As this thesis is located within the textual realm of independent trans cinema and due to previous work within film festivals as will be discussed within Chapter 3, the highest regard for filmmakers and creative production has been established; goodwill is the basis upon which the research is performed. A decision to proceed respectfully of filmmaker’s rights as creatives and cautiously (which is also recommended in the 1993 Report) in regards to potential areas of copyright issues is implemented throughout this thesis. Throughout the research an ethical approach is extended to not only how the texts are read, but to the *screen texts as significant cultural artifacts of contemporary trans culture and lives*.

2.5.1 **Further Ethical Considerations—Is Curating a Film Festival About the Audience, or the Film?**

Selecting and situating screen texts within the context of a film festival aims at attracting specific audiences, with identity–based festivals presenting reciprocity between onscreen/offscreen; between the films screened and the viewing audiences. Leading films scholars have discussed this interconnection between audience and festival programming at gay, lesbian and queer film festivals (Rich 1999; Zielinski 2006; Loist 2012; Loist and Zielinski 2012).

From the point of view of the filmmaker, or the audience, the festival is all about the film; with festivals often providing international, national and local premieres of new films and in the case of many independent filmmakers, the primary (or only) opportunity to screen on a big screen to a public, paying audience. The exposure a film festival provides in terms of screening and related media publicity and activities (such as radio or print interviews), may in turn attract other distribution and screening opportunities (such as pay–per–view, or free–to–air television). The significance of a film festival in the exhibition and distribution cycle of a film is heightened for queer and trans screen texts “In this economy of queer visibility, gay and lesbian film and video festivals are especially important because they constitute a kind of double representation on and in front of the screen. So when one programs a festival, one also programs the audience and the community” (Fung 1999, p. 89).

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, from the point of view of funding bodies, film festivals are focussed primarily upon audiences and audience development. This may be understood in terms of the necessity for box office receipts to provide income to a festival and to validate
the need for a festival in an area. Certainly, as a festival increases in size, the emphasis upon (and necessity for) increasing audiences to support the screenings becomes increasingly pronounced programming focal point. This provides the rationale and necessity for attracting World Premiere screenings of films and the participation of key production personnel from exhibited films in a festival program or panels, as an additional attraction for audiences and scholars. It is in this ongoing tension between the ‘show’ and the ‘business’ that the creative–production–exhibition nexus of all film festivals exists and which may lead to ethical issues over programming, with ‘big ticket’ films being chosen to attract audiences, over screen content with experimental or challenging material. A further ethical issue can arise in ensuring that equality in screening opportunities are presented to all filmmakers (Ford 2015b). There is an ongoing necessity—and a social contract—that exists between the festival, filmmakers and the community to minimise programming bias. During the Queer Fruits Film Festival years (2009–2012) first–hand accounts from filmmakers were encountered of high quality queer and trans films that were accepted for screening at Queer Fruits Film Festival, that had not been accepted into international gay and lesbian film festivals because of the gender/sexual biases of a festival programmer.100

2.6 On Representation

Key theoretical positions underpinning the significance of temporal representations of transgender within independent films, situated within cultural studies, film theory, gender and queer studies, and transgender studies, draw upon leading and emerging scholarship on representation within transgender studies throughout the thesis.

At the outset, influential theories of representation have been drawn from key scholars in four areas of social science/cultural studies (Hall 1990); gender/queer studies (Butler 1990); film studies (Juel 2006) and transgender studies (Halberstam 2005; Stryker 2006a). This offers four perspectives of relevance to the research, offering insight into the complexity of representation as a mimetic, ontological and epistemological pursuit.

100 Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives (2009–2010) respondent details withheld for confidentiality.
Stuart Hall has offered a view of cinema that is constitutive; significantly this accords with the experiences of the Trans New Wave cinema as constitutive of the trans community, Hall suggested:

to theorise identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak (Hall 1990, pp. 236-237; 1997, p. 58).

Films which are written, directed and produced by trans people are at the centre of cinematic knowledge production on trans and hence, accord with Stryker (2006a), highlighting the centrality of transgender experience—“Transgender studies considers the embodied experience of the speaking subject who claims constative knowledge of the referent topic, to be a proper—indeed essential—component of the analysis of transgender phenomena” (p. 12). These independent films serve as exemplars of “that form of representation” alluded to by Hall, that can constitute new kinds of subjects, from a place of “embodied experience” (Stryker 2006a, p.12).

This is a significant theoretical perspective for the issue of trans representation in films; it positions cinematic representations as sites of ‘identity constitution’ and of film as having the capability and potential to change spectators to “constitute us as new kinds of subjects” (Hall 1990, p. 237, italics added). This ‘us’ can productively be read as trans people, partners, family, friends and wider community. Through viewing representations of trans lives in independent films, we are enabled to be ‘constituted as new kinds of subjects’, with an understanding of the varied expressions of trans lives represented on screen. The educational role of Trans New Wave films cannot be ignored and is not of secondary importance to any function as ‘screen entertainment’. This also positions trans films as differing in intention to mainstream texts; with independent trans films consciously aiding progressive social change. The transactivist nature of Buck Angel’s work as a case study will be discussed in Chapter 7. Whilst mainstream films dealing with trans narratives and characters are placed within the
industrial–economic model of screen production, continuing to create texts which “contribute to maintaining the existing social structure” (Lapsley and Westlake 2006, p. 1).

It is noted that leading transgender scholars such as Susan Stryker (2006a) position the necessity for an epistemological approach within transgender studies, based upon an “embodied...constative knowledge” (p. 12). This means that the basis of the knowledge on trans, how and where the knowledge is acquired is of vital importance, with constative knowledge—firsthand experience of trans lives and experiences by trans people, being privileged over second–hand theorisation from outside the community. Stryker has further articulated what is at stake in the origins of knowledge production on trans:

transgender critical theory is technically postmodern, in one narrow use of the term, to the extent that it takes aim at the modernist epistemology that treats gender merely as a social, linguistic, or subjective representation of an objectively knowable material sex. Epistemological concerns lie at the heart of transgender critique, and motivate a great deal of the transgender struggle for social justice (Stryker 2006a, p. 8).

Film as agent of social change, trans film as a way to bring equality in representation to the screen and through this, aid in the “struggle for social justice” (Stryker 2006a, p.8), highlights the necessity for an ethical approach to this research and need to ground the theoretical approaches within this thesis in film ethics (Downing & Saxton 2010; Bauman 1993).

Judith Butler (1990) has presented views that have been instrumental in development of gender and queer theories and also that have been contested by trans theorists, most notably Jay Prosser (2006), who like Susan Stryker (2016a), argues for a constative experience and understanding of gender (Prosser 2006, p. 264), rather than a view of gender as simply being performative (Butler 1990). This important point will be further discussed in relation to textual exegesis of the case study films in Chapter 6. Of relevance to this section of the thesis, Butler (1990) presents discussion on issues of representation in cinema:
representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy (to women) as political subjects; on the other hand representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category (p.1).

This definition of representation may usefully be applied to film, which has the capability and potential to “extend visibility and legitimacy” to trans people and is a subtextual rationale for independent filmmakers writing, directing, producing and screening trans films. This was demonstrated via feedback from the 2012 screening of Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) at Queer Fruits Film Festival (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012–2013). A wide range of audience members including transmen, their partners, friends, wider gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer community and general community stakeholders, including health care professionals, expressed that they all learnt much about the physical, emotional and sexual aspects of transmale lives. The documentary legitimated a wide range of trans positions, based upon the empirical evidence of participants within the documentary. One health worker provided feedback to the festival after the screening and said “this film should be seen by anyone who works in health care, so we can know how to properly address and care for transguys” (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012; Chapter 7).

Representation of transmasculinity in Trans New Wave films provides empirical accounts and cues for how a contemporary transguy lives (how to pass; dress; communicate); how to refer to the body and, significantly, points for transitioning and for life after transitioning. These films become reflexive marker points for a journey to an otherwise unknown destination as depicted in the trans road movie The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) one of the case study texts that will be discussed in Chapter 6. This film uses the road movie genre as metaphor of movement for the journey of transitioning, to locate marker points for what the experience of transitioning will be like. Use of movement in this way has been previously identified by scholar Jay Prosser “how transition as a geographic trope applies to transsexual narratives that is, transsexuality as a passage through space, a journey from one location to another” (Prosser 1998, p. 5). Following Prosser, trans scholarship has continued to recognise the trope of movement as a literary and cinematic device in trans narratives (Cotten 2011; Aizura 2011;
Keegan 2013; Ford 2014a, 2016b). This is imbued with an underlying ideology of personal autonomy to be whoever a person wants to be, illustrating the idea of the ‘self-made man’ circulated in trans scholarship (Rubin 2003). A film such as The Thing enables a complex journey to be understood and uses specific visual languages relating to movement.

A text such as Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) productively represents a range of aspects of masculinity; including the physical, sexual and social aspects of transitioning through the individual stories of transmen Xavier, Dex and Danny. Scholars have noted the tensions that surround explicit representations for the trans community “Sexual representation was a key problem for early trans activism; at issue was who would be a ‘good representative’ for the community” (Steinbock 2014, p. 157). Case study films Trans Boys and Sexing the Transman provide complex insights into the nature of sexual representation within Trans New Wave films. There is no single answer, approach or representation and there is no simple distinction between positive and negative representations (Downing & Saxton 2010), as analysis of the films within the thesis will demonstrate.

Previous doctoral theses have examined transgender representation in relation to “realness” and a “politics of the real”, positioned within gender studies and utilising a range of cultural examples drawn from photography, film, feminist theory and legal cases (Boucher 2010, PhD Thesis). The examination of the ‘real’ is of central theoretical concern to exegesis of narrative short film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) within Chapter 6. The politics of trans images (Ryan 2009, PhD Thesis) is of relevance to discussions of trans representation, in particular stereotypes—of relevance to discussion of trans in mainstream films and the contrasting representations of sexualities in Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). Each of these texts powerfully illustrates what Hall stated; each film enables us to become a new kind of subject, one that embodies an understanding of trans lives from transgender points of view. The texts also demonstrate what Butler stated about representation, that this “serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy” (1990, p. 1). The complex construction of trans identity and intersections of gender with social

101 Transboys was produced as three x 5 minute documentaries, each short film focuses upon one of the transboys; the shorts were designed to screen as either stand-alone films, or to be screened together (as took place at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012, providing a 16 minute 17 second film), with a single credits list running at the end of the third film.
background (such as ethnicity or race) age, ability, disability and sexuality, which may or may not align with preconceived notions of gender, are all depicted in independent trans films.

In reading the case study texts which are documentaries and developing a trans theory of representation in film, there are further theoretical perspectives to be taken into account. Juel (2006) offers the point of view that:

A film is not a mere representation, but a willed presentation of something made by someone in a specific way and for someone. The phrase "representation of reality" is utterly mistaken as a definition of documentary, because the idea of film as mirroring is a false one and a very misleading ideal. Also the term “reality” is confusing (p. 8).

This position will be analysed in the discussion of Trans Boys in Chapter 6 and Sexing the Transman in Chapter 7, where on the one hand, there is separation between the directors–subjects in Trans Boys; compared to the reflexive and autoethnographical positioning of the director Buck Angel in respect to the participant–subjects in Sexing the Transman. In this text, Buck exerts his unique personality and perspective of the topic from his positionality as an awarded adult entertainer/adult film star. Buck is the filmmaker/director and editor of the documentary; within the text he is the interviewer (appearing off–camera, but being heard interviewing participants). In addition, Buck also appears within the film in a sexually–charged demonstrative scene with another transman. This auteur–like connection to the documentary lends to reading the text in terms of the “willed presentation” alluded to by Juel (2006, p. 8) and as not simply mirroring reality, but as creating a new reality, a constitutive function in connection to subjects, which accords with Hall (1990, pp. 236–237) and also Stryker (2006a, p. 12). It can be argued that Sexing the Transman is a leading example of texts which support Jack Halberstam’s theory that:

Representations of transgenderism in recent queer cinema have moved from a tricky narrative device...to truly independent productions within which gender ambiguity is...part of the production of new forms of heroism, vulnerability, visibility, and embodiment (2005, p. 96).
These new forms of representation are also viewed from within the trans community and by spectators from the perspective of the diverse gender and sexualities that are represented and “who would be a “good representative” for the community” (Steinbock 2014, p. 157). Buck Angel’s work has simultaneously been praised for providing ‘visiblity, and embodiment’, whilst also being singled out for criticism by some trans guys, as not being the public representation that they want, an issue that will be returned to in the Chapter 7 discussion.

Leung (2004) notes in reference to Third Cinema 102 that “The question of sexuality...is one of the most important allegorical vehicles for the representation of power and its abuses” (p. 159). This also appears as one of the most potent representational ‘vehicles’ in current use by filmmakers in Trans New Wave films.

Currently there is no corpus of literature that deals primarily with theories of trans representation in film, this is an emerging field, acknowledging the scholarship on trans cinema cited throughout this chapter as exemplars. The work of this research project is at the ‘borderlands of transqueer’ (Anzaldúa 1987; Siebler 2012; Leung 2014a), contributing to the development of the literature of trans cinema. As in research on the Trans New Wave, transgender representation is an emergent field and one which the researches of this thesis aims to add original insight and theoretical perspectives, to work simultaneously emerging internationally within transgender studies. 103 It has necessitated developing a new theoretical perspective/approach within the research, Transliteracy which is the focus of Chapter 4.

2.6.1 On The Role of Independent Films and Filmmakers 104

Independent filmmakers of the Trans New Wave are leading the way forward in new forms of cinematic representations of trans lives. These are films that would not have been possible

---

102 “Conceived as an intimate part of the anti-colonial independence struggles in the Third World in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Third Cinema was first and foremost an engaged and oppositional political cinema... Third Cinema envisioned an independent, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist cinema that would contribute to socialist political struggles” (Leung 2004 p. 156). Located in countries throughout Africa and Latin America, but also in countries such as Hawaii, in support of their struggles for self-determination (Leung 2004, p.160).

103 To illustrate the emergence of this area theoretically and the currency of research in this thesis, the December, 2014 TSQ 1.4 (2014) posted a CFP that included a call for researches on trans representation in film and that will undoubtedly become an influential part of this emerging scholarship, viewed 18 August 2014, <https://lgbt.arizona.edu/tsq-main/TSQ1.4>.

104 How the term ‘independent film’ is used within this thesis has been detailed in Chapter 1. The film is produced independently of and outside the Studio system—this is the major criteria.
within the mainstream, which is constrained by economic considerations and hegemonic audiences. A key part of this new cinema and what defined the Trans New Wave films at the outset, is that sexuality is foregrounded within gender–diverse lives. These filmmakers are playing a key constitutive function in the creation of contemporary trans culture. A text such as *Sexing the Transman* has inspired this generation of gender–diverse people to explore new forms of sexualities, bodies and filmmaking styles. Previous theses (Rigney 2003, PhD thesis) have examined contemporary queer literature and film, drawing upon independent films to demonstrate “how contemporary writers and filmmakers attempt to map the concept of transgender in terms of bodies, genders, and sexualities”. The film aspect of this thesis examined transmale text *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) and films by Sadie Benning (from the New Wave of Queer Cinema). Recognition of the importance of researching independent films and filmmakers lays in acknowledging these texts as temporal subcultural artforms. Research extends that temporality, providing further duration, new audiences and legitimation to different audiences, which in turn, may aid in the socio–political human rights struggles for equality and recognition sought by the wider trans community. Fieldwork with independent trans and queer filmmakers was continued throughout the research years 2013–2016, with information provided by respondents discussed throughout the thesis.

2.6.2 On Creating Queer Space—Independent and Queer Film Festivals

The thesis research area emerged from a queer film festival and my work as a Festival Director (2009–2012) curating independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer films over a four–year period as will be further detailed in Chapter 3. Publications arising from this autoethnographic perspective are cited within the thesis (Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a *forthcoming*). The autoethnographic account of establishing Queer Fruits Film Festival in a regional town in Australia was initially presented to the *II European Geographies of Sexualities Conference* in 2013 and subsequently accepted for publication as a book.

---

Further publications of relevance to this area have been completed during this research. Key scholarship in the film festival field is focused within the *Film Festival Research Network*. Scholars Marijke de Valck; Ger Zielinski (2006, 2008, 2012); Skadi Loist (2012, 2013, 2015); Loist and Zielinski (2012); Loist and de Valck (2013), have all published on the development and significance of independent, queer and trans film festivals internationally. In particular, Loist (2013, 2015) has been responsible for researching a global map of all queer film festivals currently (or previously) in existence (numbered at 326 queer film festivals globally) building upon important work on the economics of film festivals examined by Rhyne (2007, PhD thesis). Queer Fruits Film Festival was added to this scholarly mapping project in 2011, highlighted with a violet colored marker, used to characterise festivals established in what Rhyne (2007) calls the ‘network building’ phase of queer film festival development (Loist 2015).

Independent queer film festivals emerge as providing a unique and often only location of public exhibition for independent filmmakers producing gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer screen content (Parmer 1992, p. 35; Ford 2015b); and are significant sites in the socio-cultural life of queer communities (Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a *forthcoming*). Fieldwork at two international film festivals that program a range of trans screen texts, the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival and the 2015 Outfest Film Festival in Los Angeles and further fieldwork with festival directors of independent film festivals that screened *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) upon initial release was purposively conducted during this research project, with the results to be discussed throughout the thesis and in Chapters 3 and 5.


2.7 Applying Theoretical Frameworks to Independent Trans Cinema

The interpretive framework for the research is positioned within queer theory and transgender studies, utilising postmodern cinematic perspectives. This research project requires a combined theoretical approach, due to the multiple sources and interrelations between creative, technological, social and economic aspects of the case study texts selected. This requires a ‘multiplicity’ of theories. The empirical approach of using industrial screen materials throughout this research project was established in the introduction, to make sense of the variety of materials incorporated throughout this thesis. These include industrial materials used within the screen industry such as official government classifications (ratings) systems and guideline documents from screen industry funding bodies; the International Movie Database (IMDB); materials sourced from within published screenplays and festival materials sourced from the Queer Fruits Film Festival archive (2009–2012). This thesis excludes the use of psychoanalytic frameworks of film analyses as we saw in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter. This research position is also supported through scholarly observations in regards to the field of film theory and film analysis that: “‘Psycho–semiotic’ theory is on the wane, and the field has become more diverse and open to varied sorts of approaches” (Plantinga 2002, pp. 17–18). This accords with the ethical positioning of the research away from a psychoanalytic interpretation, intervention and pathologisation of trans lives.

This thesis will present a transliterate, postmodern approach that incorporates industrial screen industry contexts and materials into the study of film, as an alternative to theorising film through the lens of privileged white male theorists from previous centuries (such as Freud, Marx). This is of especial relevance to the discussion of lives and texts that have arisen in the twenty first century, in circumstances of which earlier theorists had no socio–cultural experience. This thesis focuses upon the industrial contexts of film production and resources, following the model of historical film research exemplified by Lea Jacob’s groundbreaking doctoral study in 1986 of the ‘Fallen Woman’ in cinema (Jacobs 1991, 1997). This exemplar text shows how such a research methodology works in action, with use of industrial materials drawn from screen industry archives, screenplays, informal and official notes on screenplays

---

109 The screenplay of *Dallas Buyers Club* by Borten and Wallack (2012) is used in exegesis of this text.
and between screen industry organisations and directors, all valuable non–scholarly primary source materials from which to draw conclusions. Such non–scholarly and non–theoretical materials may be overlooked when other research methodologies are applied and yet, these are the very materials that comprise the daily working experiences of filmmakers and film exhibitors. The combined methodology will be further discussed in Chapter 3, including the use of “Industry analysis, reception theory, critical readings” (Collins, Hilary and Preacher Collins 1993, p. 2) of the texts under study. Scholarly studies from within film censorship (Jacobs 1991, 1997; Biltereyst and Vande Winkel 2013; Black 2013; Lewis 2013; Wittern–Keller 2013) provide foundations to Chapter 5.

The thesis will combine the two major debates in film theory: identified as ethics (Stadler 2008; Downing & Saxton 2010) and epistemology; and a “retreat” from these approaches (Petho 2010, p. 43) into a postmodern exegesis of texts. These theoretical approaches, rather than opposing each other, can be seen to support different aspects of the research. An ethical–epistemological approach is required when dealing with trans films, filmmakers and community. This is based in the autoethnographic and ethnographic methodologies of the research. Consideration of screen industry materials in tandem with textual exegesis are required to ratify the representational issues caused within the industrial and economic business of mainstream movie production and classifications (ratings) systems in Chapter 5. In this, the multiple positions of film within society are recognised as ‘always and simultaneously text and commodity, intertext and product line’ (Schatz 1993, p. 10).

Alan McKee (2014) proposes a poststructural form of textual analysis “an analysis of text that makes an informed guess about the meanings of that text made by the audiences who consume it” (p. 56). This form of textual analysis is especially suited to a text such as Sexing the Transman, where the role of the film in relation to the reception and use of the text by audiences (particularly gender–diverse and transmale audiences) are intertwined and where uses of the texts may occur in a variety of settings (public and private). This also acknowledges that gender–diverse communities may respond to the text differently to audiences from mainstream culture and that this is validated within a poststructuralist approach because “people from different cultures experience reality differently” (McKee 2003, p. 9).
Previous doctoral theses have positioned trans cinema in relation to embodiment theory (Steinbock 2011, PhD Thesis), building upon an area examined by Michael Franklin (2010, PhD Thesis) reading transgender cinema in terms of Foucauldian bio power and embodiment (Franklin 2010). Eliza Steinbock’s PhD thesis, *Shimmering Images: On Transgender Embodiment and Cinematic Aesthetics*, included a chapter on Buck Angel, discussed in terms of Freudian analysis and Marxist Feminism (commodity–economy) (Steinbock 2011, p. 63). These two theses successfully demonstrate the use of specific existing theoretical frameworks for reading trans cinema. Jonathan Williams (2012, PhD Thesis) examined issues of spectatorship in relation to trans cinema, an area of concern to this thesis in relation to reception of Trans New Wave films. In the years since this current research project commenced in 2013, Wibke Straube (2014, PhD Thesis) has presented doctoral researches on what she terms ‘Exit Scapes’—cinematic narrative devices (such as singing, dancing and dreaming) that enable the “utopian and hopeful potential within Trans Cinema” to be recognised.

Of the seven doctoral theses cited within this chapter, two of the theses examined a combination of cultural outputs: literature and film (Rigney 2003); photography and film (Boucher 2010). Joelle Ruby Ryan’s PhD thesis, *Reel Gender: Examining The Politics of Trans Images in Film & Media* (2009) focussed upon historical representations of trans from the 1950s through to 2006 using four cinematic stereotypes with one chapter of Ryan’s thesis drawing upon four feature–length trans documentaries in the new millennium discussed as exemplars of trans agency and “Transgender Revolutionaries” (Ryan 2009, pp. 240–294). Ryan utilises the term “New Wave” (p. 254) in this discussion in relation to these four documentaries, as exemplars of millennial films where trans people are represented “as engaged political agents dedicated to radical social change and cultural transformation” (p. 254). Ryan’s thesis demonstrates that trans cinema was on the cusp of increased screen production, leading to wider scholarly and public recognition. This was later recognized by B. Ruby Rich (2013), who uses a term “The New Trans Cinema” (pp. 271–277), also

110 Denoted as the: “Transgender Deceiver”, “Transgender Mammy”, Transgender Monster” and “Transgender Revolutionary” (Ryan 2009).

111 The four documentaries are *Fenced Out* (Paper Tiger Television with Neutral Zone and Fierce!, USA, 2001), *Toilet Training* (Tara Mateik, USA, 2004), *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria* (Susan Stryker, Victor Silverman, USA, 2005) and *Cruel and Unusual* (Janet W. Baus, Dan Hunt, Reid Williams, USA, 2006).
referring to transgender cinema pre–2007.\footnote{Both the Taormino (2008) article in \textit{The Village Voice} and the Ryan (2009) doctoral thesis, predate the B. Ruby Rich publication \textit{New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut} (2013); Taormino by five years and Ryan by four years. This provides the rationale for why the Rich (2013) publication is not foregrounded.}

However Ryan’s 2009 thesis differs in several significant features from this thesis, including use of the millennial marker year of 2001 (pp. 254–255) as a temporal starting point to structure discussion of the chapter on “Transgender Revolutionary” filmmakers and a focus upon the political agency of transfemale narratives in the textual selections discussed. These revolutionary films and filmmakers and Ryan’s discussion of the traits of these filmmakers (p. 253) may rightly be viewed as cinematic precursors to the time period in which the Trans New Wave emerged as a distinct genre from grassroots transporn and particularly in the contemporary focus on transactivist cinema as we will see within Chapters 7 and 8. Of further interest to this thesis is that one of the four documentaries Ryan (2009) examined was \textit{Cruel and Unusual} (Janet W. Baus, Dan Hunt, Reid Williams, USA, 2006).\footnote{As an example of the cinematic “Transgender Revolutionary” (pp. 273 –281)} Dan Hunt, one of the directors of this documentary, continued his work with trans cinema within the Trans New Wave, to later direct and produce the only documentary produced so far about the life of case study filmmaker Buck Angel called \textit{Mr. Angel} (Hunt, USA, 2013)(Figure 7.2).

The previous doctoral theses examined in this chapter all demonstrate a central point which is upheld and developed throughout this thesis through research and critical discussion of the Trans New Wave: the increasing cultural significance of trans screen production and the agency of trans participation in cinematic culture (Ryan 2009; Boucher 2010; Franklin 2010; Steinbock 2011; Williams 2012; Straube 2014).

Steinbock (2011) is the only thesis examined to date that has included one chapter on Buck Angel and an appendix (three pages) on “Trans–Erotic Filmography” (pp. 245–247). This filmography includes references to a range of independent and mainstream films produced with erotic themes of relevance to trans, a focus of Steinbock’s ongoing scholarship (2013a, 2013b, 2014). However the 2011 thesis differs in several significant features from this thesis, including the use of psychoanalytic (Freudian) and Marxist–Feminist (commodity–economy) interpretations of Angel’s work, the focus upon embodiment theory (following on from
Franklin 2010) and focus upon Buck’s earlier adult work (it predates the production and international success of the groundbreaking text *Sexing the Transman*, which is a focus of this thesis).

This provides the scholarly space for this research to build upon, recognising the Trans New Wave as an independent genre, a twenty first century cinema, dynamic in representational and exhibition strategies. Proposing the starting point for this cinematic genre as 2008 aligns with the emergence of the Trans New Wave from transporn, with sexuality as the defining characteristic of these emergent new trans films and the continuing influence of the porn genre upon specific Trans New Wave texts. The temporal marker of 2008 anchors the subsequent international surge of films written, directed, produced and exhibited ‘by, for and about’ trans lives; the publication of Taormino’s seminal article (2008) and with sexuality proving to be the defining characteristic of the most influential text *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011)—as indeed it is in many subsequent films of the Trans New Wave.

There have been no prior theses to contextually situate the production of trans cinema in relation to previous cinematic waves (Chapter 1), to use transliteracy as a theoretical approach to reading trans cinema (Chapter 4), to examine the role of classifications (ratings) systems in regards to the production and exhibition of trans films (Chapter 5), or to define characteristics of the Trans New Wave (Chapter 6). This is also the first thesis to examine films *Trans Boys* (Chapter 6); *The Thing* (Chapter 6) and *Sexing the Transman* (Chapter 7) as case study texts.

### 2.7.1 Limitations of Theories

The rationale for not applying psychoanalytic theories within this thesis has been presented within this chapter and will be further discussed as a methodology of this research within Chapter 3. The limitations of using theorists previously examined in theses on trans cinema for this current thesis, lays in the differences between the approaches of Freud and Marx and the empirical, industrial approaches used throughout this thesis, exemplified by Lea Jacobs (1986 PhD Thesis, 1997), the key text emerging out of film censorship studies that demonstrates how industrial screen materials may successfully be utilised as a film research methodology. As we have seen in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, this thesis uses a
combined methodology, with screen industry materials as primary empirical sources, supported by ethnographic accounts from fieldwork with filmmakers and festivals and through my autoethnographic experience. These research methodologies will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Various scholars have presented rationales for and against the use of different approaches in cinematic research (Braudy and Marshall 2009, first published 1974). This current thesis on the Trans New Wave continues in the tradition of postmodern, interdisciplinary scholarship that seeks to use a range of relevant approaches to the study of contemporary cinema.

In this vein postmodern theory rejects totalizing or grand theories and absolute truths in favor of practical and situated “truths” (a multiplicity of context–dependent truths)....that accounts for the socio–political nature of experience and rejects essentialist identity categories that erase differences...

Postmodern theories have prompted much more attention to methodological practises of reflexivity throughout the knowledge–building process (Leavy 2011, p. 40).

This ‘multiplicity’ of approaches required throughout this thesis, are due to the multiple sites of research and as stated by Leavy, the “practises of reflexivity throughout the knowledge–building process” (2011, p. 40). Reflexivity and self–reflexivity are required throughout this thesis in use of ethnographic and autoethnographic materials.

To position these branches of ‘knowledge–building’, or knowledge–production, within cinema studies, a review of the vast corpus of literature encompassed by the term film theory reveals that this area has been subjected to substantial earlier studies and extensive bibliographies (such as Pearson and Philips 2001; Stam 2000; Braudy and Marshall 2009). In this section, an overview review statement will be presented of the accepted history of film theory and the major strands of the debates, including postmodern approaches to the research and scholarship of cinema.
Key early theorists on the photographic image and film included Walter Benjamin (1936), André Bazin (1958), Siegfried Kracauer (1960) and Erwin Panofsky. A focus of these earlier authors was both still and moving images, as black and white film emerged from photography (Benjamin 1936; Kracauer 1960). Kracauer focused upon a “material aesthetics...concerned with content” in film (1960, p. ix, italics in original); whilst Panofsky, primarily an art historian, has become connected to film theory because of his scholarship on symbols and iconology. In particular, Bazin, considered to be one of the most influential and prolific writers and critics on film, was a co–founder of the influential film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the journal responsible for recognising the emergence of the *Nouvelle Vague* (French New Wave). This is of relevance to this thesis and discussions of the Trans New Wave in establishing identifiable foundational characteristics that are present in all later ‘New Waves’ in cinema, as highlighted within the introduction to this thesis.

Bazin is most associated with an ontological approach to cinema, an approach that is philosophical, taking into account the nature of being, becoming and existence in relation to the new artistic form, questioning the nature of what film actually is. Bazin rhetorically asked “What Is Cinema?...the preservation of life by a representation of life” (Bazin, 1958, 1967, p. 9, transl. by Hugh Gray). In developing his ontological view of cinematic *images*, Bazin drew upon ancient historical cultures that utilised images to stand for reality. Likewise Bazin saw cinema as encompassing this ideal and ability, that the onscreen image and reality were one. This philosophical approach to cinema may be further illuminated through his own words “The cinema is an idealistic invention” (Bazin 1958, 1967, p. 234, transl. by Hugh Gray) and “the cinema as the art of reality” (Bazin 1958, 1960, p. 4 transl. by Hugh Gray). This is a very different view to cinema than what is prevalent in the multiplex blockbusters of Hollywood which emphasise the aspects of audience entertainment, technological advancement and the resulting economic opportunities from film exhibition. To Bazin, the technicalities required to bring moving images to life were secondary and inferior to the *imaginations that envisioned cinema existing.*


115 Bazin specifically refers to ancient Egypt (Bazin 1958, 1960, pp. 4–6, transl. by Hugh Gray) to illustrate his cinematic perspective, which is most evident in ancient Egyptian artforms, such as wall paintings and carved reliefs. To the ancient Egyptians, the painted or carved image of a loaf of bread is a loaf of bread and the image of a person is the person, preserved at the height of life for all time.
In their imaginations they saw the cinema as a total and complete representation of reality; they saw in a trice the reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, colour and relief (Bazin 1958, 1967 p. 235, transl. by Hugh Gray).

This provides a clear insight into Bazin’s vision of modern cinema as an encompassing artistic project. Bazin was also clear in situating cinema within a modern society when he stated:

Today the making of images no longer shares an anthropocentric, utilitarian purpose. It is no longer a question of survival after death, but of a larger concept, the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny (Bazin 1958, 1960, p. 6, transl. by Hugh Gray).

These positions are of relevance in discussions within this thesis of the case study texts. It could be argued that specific Trans New Wave filmmakers are engaged in an ontological process through the production of creating trans cinematic worlds that take into account not only the physical processes of trans embodiment, but the aspects of transitioning that lead to questioning the nature of existence, the becoming and being (Prosser 2006) a man or a woman. Through cinema, such trans filmmakers are engaged in a project which presents a uniquely trans vision of life on screen ‘the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny’ (Bazin 1958, 1960, transl. by Hugh Gray).

An example of this would be San Francisco–based Trans New Wave filmmaker Ewan Duarte and his films Spiral Transition (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2010), Change Over Time (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2013) and work currently in–production Queering Yoga (Ewan Duarte, USA, status in–production 2016, crowd–funding to complete production). Duarte is an exemplar filmmaker within the Trans New Wave, whose cinematic concerns extend from the materiality of the trangender experience, to questioning the processes of becoming a man in the experimental text Change Over Time (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2013). Duarte’s films stand out amongst the emerging canon of representations within the Trans New Wave (Ford 2016b) as films which question the nature of existence and the role of cinema in the processes of transitioning; his
films encompass a non–physical, spiritual dimension of transitioning. This is particularly evident in *Spiral Transition* (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2010) which uses the universally recognisable pattern of the spiral as the cinematic representation of Ewan’s life and continuous movement towards the wholistic centre for Ewan as a transman.¹¹⁶ In his latest project *Queering Yoga*, Duarte explores the intersections of queer/trans identities and yoga. The documentary will explore the perspectives of the diverse trans and queer people who are now benefiting spiritually and physically from practising yoga, originally an an eastern, Indian–based physical/spiritual tradition.

There are culturally important cinematic texts centralising indigenous perspectives such as *Two Spirits* (Lydia Nibley, USA, 2010) which focus upon the importance of spirit in understanding the life of Two Spirit (trans) people within their communities as introduced within Chapter 1 and to be further discussed in Chapter 8.¹¹⁷ Reading cinematic texts from an indigenous perspective brings Bazin’s position into focus; like Bazin, many indigenous cultures view images as capturing or containing the essence/spirit of the person photographed or filmed. In such texts, image and reality are one.

Key texts such as these are gaining momentum, with international film festival screenings, online resources and direct DVD sales. Yet the ontological basis of Bazin’s approach remains an issue for generalised reading of all Trans New Wave films. Specifically, ontology is not an appropriate theoretical paradigm for reading the primary case study texts (*The Thing*; *Trans Boys*; *Sexing the Transman*) within this thesis. This is because these are texts that question the conception of the ‘real’ and ‘reality’ in the trans experiences of genders and sexualities and the role of film ‘reality’ is repeatedly challenged by the filmmakers.

Within Chapter 6 exegesis of the narrative short film *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) discussion will consider how the text explicitly states “the real is no longer real” (Ernst 2011) and intentionally uses ‘ambiguity’ within the cinematic narrative, in positioning the destination point of the journey as an enigmatic location called ‘The Thing’.

¹¹⁶ The World Premiere of *Spiral Transition* was at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2010 (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012).

¹¹⁷ Denoted by the abbreviation LGBTQ2 (Estrada 2011). Also denoted by the abbreviation GLBTTQ.
In discussion of the documentary case study texts *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) within Chapter 6 and *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) in Chapter 7, ‘cinema as the art of reality’ is further challenged through filmmaker crafting of the subject; through strategic choices in subject matter and editing and through questions of whether the interview subjects are self–consciously performing their lives to camera.\(^{118}\)

An understanding of Bazin’s realist approach to cinema (that what is depicted in film is that which is depicted) and formative to his ontological approach to film are the origins of his philosophical approach to moving images, within the historical cultures of ancient civilizations that utilised images (such as in wall paintings), as actually *being* the image depicted and not a metaphor for something else (Bazin 1958, 1960, pp. 4–6, transl. by Hugh Gray). In regards to twenty first century cinema, this approach presents a very difficult and readily challengeable model for reading films. An exception to this may be the filmmaking style of cinema verité documentaries—where filmmaker intervention is not meant to occur, films are meant to be ‘real–life’ records and are intended to convey ‘truth’ (verité). Given the advances, both creative and technological in cinema, in mise-en-scène (‘everything that appears in the framing’)\(^ {119}\) and technological advances in the use of editing, Visual Effects (VFX), graphics and sound effects; what is seen onscreen today may not be ‘real’, or a ‘real version’ of reality at all. Interestingly, Kracauer offered a modulating view on ‘cinematic reality’ that presupposes an ‘assumption’: “I assume, then, that films are true to the medium to the extent that they penetrate the world before our eyes” (1960, ix). This implies that film need not be ‘an art of reality’ at all, as it was in Bazin’s terms; it may only offer an insight, a ‘penetration of the world before our eyes’. What is ‘seen’ may not actually be what is ‘really’ taking place; or may not be interpreted in a culturally appropriate way, a notion of of especial relevance to the use of transliteracy as developed throughout this research in regards to reading Trans New Wave films.

---

\(^{118}\) Not to be confused with gender performativity (Butler 1990). Cinematic performance is indicated here. Examples are the interviews that were filmed, but not subsequently included in the text *Sexing the Transman* (Chapter 7) and the sequence of presentation of the story arcs within *Trans Boys* (Chapter 6) and issues of interview awareness of being filmed that will be discussed in these chapters.

Bazin proposed “cinema is also a language” (1958, 1960, p. 9 transl. by Hugh Gray). Akin to his positioning on the cinematic image as ‘real’, Bazin argues for a view of cinema which is itself ‘a language’. Bazin reflects upon the ‘social, cultural, political and economic ‘systems’ (Wheatley 2015) in which film emerges as ‘a language’. A contemporary reading of cinema presents a literacy in cinematic languages that now includes *everything that comprises a film*, from initial concept, through screenplay, mise-en-scène, to use of specific filmmaking styles and genre, of especial importance to the Chapter 6 discussion. Reading this language may continue on to the reception of the text by spectators.

Bazin’s works have been extensively translated and republished (as the original works are in the French language). The ontological basis for studying films was later heavily criticised by Carroll (1988), positioning Bazin as a film critic, rather than a film theorist. Subsequent counter–criticisms were published that “address some of the criticism that has been leveled at Bazin since the turn to politicized film theory models” (Totaro 2003). These revisit key aspects of Bazin’s writings and position Bazin for reconsideration within contemporary film theory, with the caution against general reading of Trans New Wave films in ontological terms discussed above.

Drawing upon these earlier film critics and theorists, in the 1970s film theory as a discipline commenced, based upon the major strands of existing theories in the Structuralist works of Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi–Strauss and Karl Marx (Gabbard 2011). This discipline was further developed by French philosophers, theorists and critics (Gabbard 2011). In the 1980s film theory came to be identified with Post–Structuralism drawing upon the work of Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault (especially 1978), Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Julia Kristeva (Gabbard 2011; Rosen 1986; Easthope 1993). Post–Structuralism was a response to the earlier Structuralism—“which argued that human culture may be understood by means of a structure—modeled on language” (Willis 2007, 2014 online unnumbered), identifiable as a series of signs or symbols (as in the views of Panofsky); whereas Post–Structuralism involves “the rejection of the self–sufficiency of the structures...}

---

120 (Cultural Politics 2015). “these writers all have in common an attempt to uncover the unquestioned metaphors that undergrid social and disciplinary norms, particularly as manifested in philosophy (Derrida), historical writing and the professions (Foucault), psychoanalysis (Lacan), and literary studies (Kristeva and Barthes).”
and an interrogation of the binary oppositions that constitute those structures” (Willis 2007, 2014, online unnumbered).

In the late 1990s, leading professors across a range of disciplines, including cinema, media and cognitive studies retreated away from these earlier Marxist, Structuralist, Post–Structuralist and psychoanalytic–based film theories. Noël Carroll (1988), and later in tandem with David Bordwell, presented a sustained critique of film theory for being based in what they considered to be ‘doctrine’ (Bordwell and Carroll 1996, p. xvii). An alternative was offered using the term ‘Post Theory’, with a focus on “problem–driven research” (Bordwell and Carroll 1996, p. xvii) and empirical ‘middle level’ approaches. Subsequently, Post Theory was heavily criticised from within established film theory (Smith 1998; Bennett 2000; Fujiwara 2011). This included the observation that many scholars were already distancing themselves from ‘psychoanalytic film theory’.

From a British perspective, the notion of a blanket dominance of psychoanalytic film theory seems incorrect/irrelevant. Recent experience of attending conferences in Britain suggests that academics are eager to convey a sceptical relationship with psychoanalysis, so that it is almost a matter of form to qualify any invocation of Lacan or Freud with a declaration of cautious distance. Hence Post–Theory appears to be positioned in anachronistic opposition to a model of Film Studies embodied by Screen in the late ’70s and early ’80s. This model has since fragmented through the adoption by film theorists of increasingly varied approaches from sociology, continental philosophy, and economics, to produce a much more hybrid field than that represented in this book (Bennett 2000, online article unnumbered, italics added).

Lea Jacobs (1991, 1997) presents a model for film analysis where all materials are considered at “at the same level of importance as the film itself” (Jacobs 1997, p. 26), whether

---


122 This critique is of the Bordwell and Carroll (1996) publication.

123 Developed from Jacob’s 1986 doctoral thesis.
completed film, screenplay, box office, or media and industry journals surrounding the screening of a film. Textual analysis follows from close consideration of empirical materials. Recognising film theory as a “hybrid field” (Bennett 2000), with Jacobs’ approach to using industrial screen materials as an exemplar and with screen industry materials based in ethnographic and autoethnographic research, underpins the interdisciplinary research methodology within this thesis as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

It is significant to note that the screen industry journal *Sight & Sound* is the source for the foundational essay on New Queer Cinema (Rich 1992b). As an industry journal, this material exists outside scholarly sources, yet the essay has become central to the recognition and development of queer film theory. In the twenty first century it would not be possible to keep pace with the developments in international cinema and independent filmmaking from the perspective of film theory alone; it is only through ongoing researches in current industry platforms and journals (including the International Movie Database (IMDB); journals *Sight & Sound; Variety; Screen Australia* and Screen NSW bulletins; and a range of independent filmmaker networking sites such as Queer Filmmakers in Australia), that up–to–date research is enabled. A consideration of *all materials at hand* “at the same level of importance as the film itself” (Jacobs 1997, p. 26) is central to this thesis. Earlier theories failed to take into account the *multiplicity of approaches, voices, perspectives and contexts* and also the circumstances of textual emergence/production and public reception of film. As discussed in Chapter 1, concerns about the material conditions of film production and exhibition have led to the use of a combined methodology and screen industry materials throughout this research.

Practical knowledge grounds and contributes to theory. This includes film production arising within the “particular historical circumstances” (Bordwell 1997, p. 4) of twenty first century trans culture and the innovative technological developments, that have enabled independent films to be produced. To take these aspects into account requires the consideration of a wider range of materials related to the texts under consideration, challenging notions of the ‘real’ and ‘cinematic language’ (Bazin) as not being one thing, but a multiplicity of textual artifacts. This includes materials and information that would be considered extratexual, such as subcultural knowledge, social networks and ethnographic material arising through fieldwork with filmmakers, film festivals and festival directors, attendance at community forums and
presentations. The use of a combined research methodology and a series of approaches is emphasised, critically informed by specific gender, queer, trans and cinema theories within this thesis.

This brief literature review of the complex history of film theory is imbued with a critical awareness of not foreclosing discussion around the case study texts. Throughout the thesis the central scholars of gender and queer theory will be referenced as outlined within this chapter. In Chapter 7 discussion of Sexing the Transman, Michel Foucault (1978) and Gayle Rubin (1994) will be referenced as theoretical foundations to the discussion of the text. The use of theory is integrated into the empirical approaches of the thesis.

Understanding the significance of the case study films in these multiple ways, is made possible through transliterate reading of texts embedded within queer and trans culture a key theoretical approach explored within Chapter 4. The limitations and uses of existing theories in respect to reading Trans New Wave films is critically engaged and built upon in this thesis.

2.8 Emerging Paradigms—Theories of Trans Representation and Gender Diversity

Trangender theory is an emergent paradigm and a specific body of theory and literature on transgender representation is continuing to develop from the significant early work in gender and queer theory (Butler 1990, 1993; Stone 1991; Rubin 1984, 1992, 1994; Feinberg 1998; Halberstam 1998; Connell 2002). This has continued to develop through an ongoing critical reflection and revitalisation of core queer theory, repositioned specifically for transgender studies (Stryker 1998, 2004, 2006a; Califia 1997, 2003; Prosser 1998; Halberstam 2005, 2011; Felski 2006; Cromwell 2006; Noble 2006; Stryker, Currah, & Moore 2008; Ruby 2009; Davy and Steinbock 2012; Stryker and Currah 2014a, 2014b). Key film texts from mainstream cinema such as The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992), Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) and Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005) have been utilised to establish a cinematic gaze centred specifically upon the concerns of transgender film, filmmakers and audiences (Halberstam 2001, 2005; Zagler 2011).
In particular, the work of Halberstam (2005) is a key theoretical position underpinning the significance of temporal spaces, which may be usefully applied to screen spaces for independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer filmmakers and also theoretically positions creating an independent queer film festival within the concerns of trans scholarship.

2.8.1 Contemporary Trans Cinema Scholarship

The work of earlier exemplary scholars such as Jack Halberstam (2001, 2005, pp. 76–96) opened the way for a new interrogation of cinema from a specifically trans–centred perspective. This work has continued to be developed in contemporary interdisciplinary trans cinema scholarship in response to mainstream cinema texts such as *The Matrix* (Keegan 2014b, 2014c; 2015b) and more broadly throughout the cinematic work of The Wachowskis (Keegan 2015d), acknowledging screen director Lana Wachowski as a prominent and influential filmmaker in Hollywood, to be the “world’s first major transgender film director” (Keegan 2015d).

Through his sustained focus on The Wachowskis’ filmography, Cáel Keegan (2015d) “suggests that The Wachowskis’ work can be read as an aesthetic history of transgender political consciousness as it has evolved discursively in popular media” (online monograph unnumbered). This involves a nuanced understanding of trans represented in cinema as a “movement between bodies and genders, as well as across systems, consciousnesses, times, spaces, and media formats” (Keegan 2015d, online monograph unnumbered). Keegan positions *The Matrix* (Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski (as The Wachowskis), USA, 1999) as “the first transgender–authored blockbuster” (Keegan 2015d, online monograph unnumbered).

---

124 Since late 2015 when Keegan wrote this, early in 2016 the second Wachowski sibling, Lilly Wachowski has made a public statement in major news outlets as a transwoman (Balm 2016; Stedman 2016). This positions the Wachowskis as ‘the world’s first major transgender film’ directors. This is a significant development to cinema scholars and transgender studies and will undoubtedly be reflected in Keegan’s writing on The Wachowskis.

125 The director credits have been updated to reflect the current International Movie Database entries for the film and the style in which the filmmakers are connecting their filmmaking credits. Out of respect, this thesis has not included the gender references still seen on IMDB. *The Matrix* (1999), viewed 25 March 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0133093/>.
unnumbered)\textsuperscript{126} and the text which invented “popular transgender aesthetics”, a reading which challenges Halberstam’s positioning of *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) as the primary text with a specific ‘transgender gaze’ (Halberstam 2001, 2005, pp. 76–96).

Significantly, Keegan also reads The Wachowskis’ first feature film *Bound* (Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski (as The Wachowskis), USA, 1996)\textsuperscript{127} contextualised to the era of New Queer Cinema. This new theoretical work provides valuable insights into the potency of trans within cinematic texts in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. Keegan builds upon work of earlier theorists on the significance of movement in trans narratives (Prosser 1998; Cotten 2011; Aizura 2011, Aizura forthcoming), a subject that will be explored in this thesis in Chapter 6, in relation to case study text *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

The range of Cáel Keegan’s scholarly critique extends to television series with trans characters and narratives (Keegan 2014a, 2015a), particularly *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–), with work on The Wachowskis’ seminal subscription video on demand television series *Sense8* (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–), to be included in his upcoming book (Keegan 2015d).

Eliza Steinbock is contributing to this field through a focus on trans–erotic cinema and pornography (Davy and Steinbock 2012; Steinbock 2013a, 2013b, 2014). This has included discussion of Buck Angel’s early work (Steinbock, PhD Thesis, 2011) prior to his landmark documentary *Sexing the Transman*, which is one of the case study texts of this thesis and the focus of Chapter 7. Through this scholarship Davy and Steinbock (2012) suggested that the “emergent sub–genre of ‘trans porn’ may be considered exemplary in the ways in which it produces a multiplicity of sexual bodies whilst challenging the medical interpretations and

\textsuperscript{126} With both Wachowskis publically identifying as transwomen *The Matrix* will become an intensified site of interest to cultural and cinema studies researchers. Interested in his scholarship, I corresponded with Cáel Keegan on 16 December 2014 to request a transcript copy of his filmed presentation on “Lana Wachowski’s The Matrix: Toward a new Trans Aesthetic” (Keegan 2014c). I noted in the correspondence that I had an interest in The Wachowski’s work from a couple of points of view having worked on the film *Matrix 2* (in 2002): “One of the unknown facts about the *Matrix* series, is that a huge number of extras were employed from the queer/subculture/gender–diverse community in central Sydney; the Producers did an on–street casting call in Newtown and basically everyone we knew from inner–city Sydney queer subcultures was employed in one scene or another in *Matrix 2 & 3*. It was an amazing experience” (Akkadia Ford 16 December 2014, email communication).

\textsuperscript{127} The director credits have been updated to reflect the current International Movie Database entries for the film and the style in which the filmmakers are connecting their filmmaking credits. *Bound* (1996)viewed 25 March 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115736/>.
terms of transsexuality in relation to trans sexuality” (Davy and Steinbock 2012, p. 266). Significantly, Steinbock (2013a) discussed Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil (Morty Diamond, USA, 2007) in terms of the potency and affective dimensions of the text with viewers. Trans Entities is one of the three transporn films featured in Tristan Taormino’s original article (2008) to illustrate the emergence of The New Wave of Trans Cinema as discussed in Chapter 1. Steinbock (2013b) has also published on the experimental film Dandy Dust (A. Hans Scheirl, UK, 1998), a text infused with cyber–gender and “flagrant representations of transgenderism” (Steinbock 2013b, p. 102) that draws the viewer into a gender–fluid universe. This developing body of work also focuses upon investigating trans aesthetics in cinema from a Transomatechnics perspective (Steinbock 2012, p. 157–161).

The Viennese filmmaker A. Hans Scheirl of Dandy Dust is of especial interest; like Cheryl Dunye, discussed in Chapter 1, Scheirl was also discussed by B. Ruby Rich (1992b, p. 33) in relation to New Queer Cinema as one of the directors (and actors) in the lesbian science–fiction fantasy film Flaming Ears (Ursula Puerrer, A. Hans Scheirl, Dietmar Schipek, Poland, 1992). Rich was impressed with the film’s “fresh ‘cyberdyke’ style” (1992b, p. 33). As with Dunye, Scheirl demonstrates the movement in filmmaker’s lives and work across cinematic Waves, between films that identify with specific gendered and sexual identifications, to texts with diverse styles, themes and narratives that explode gender assumptions and categorisations.

This new generation of scholars are contributing to the development of a field which follows the work of award–winning filmmaker and leading transactivist scholar Susan Stryker, who has sustained the momentum of situating independent film as central to trans studies, whilst problematising issues of keeping lives and films apart (Christine in the Cutting Room, USA, work–in–progress, 2013).

### 2.8.2 Transqueer

Transqueer has emerged from the borderlands of queer cultural researches as both verb and a noun; as an innovative methodology (Leung 2014a) and also as a definition of non–binary
genderqueer. Kay Siebler (2012) provides a working definition of transqueer identity as “a person who is not “transitioning” with hormones and surgery to a specific gender identity” (p. 75), a person who is living and embodying a physicality outside the reified codes of masculine and feminine representations. Siebler offers a provocative point of view regarding gender–binary embodiments: “Capitulation to sex/gender/sexuality ideologies is neither transgressive nor queer” (Siebler 2012, p. 75). There are scholars and trans people, for whom Siebler’s point of view may, or may not apply.

Throughout this thesis, critical reflection upon the case study texts will be made, keeping in mind the multiplicity of voices and views within transgender studies. Prosser (2006) presents an opposite view to Siebler, that “to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to be” is the goal for many transpeople (Prosser 2006, p. 264, italics in original). The constitutive nature of gender for Prosser, reminds that trans cinema is likewise constitutive of its community, rather than simply representative. In this Prosser specifically critiques Butler’s (1990) position on gender performativity as not being relevant to his experience of transitioning as a man. This includes critique of the statements that “gender is culturally constructed” (Butler 1990, p. 6), “gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practises of gender coherence” (ibid., p. 24) and that “the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated” (ibid., p. 140). For Butler, gender is performed and arises through a stylised series of acts. In contrast, for Prosser, gender is ontologically self–evident, constative and not dependent upon any social or cultural repetition.

While Prosser’s positionality is validated within specific Trans New Wave films which reify binary gender and ‘passing’, the case study films within this thesis also provide cinematic interpretations of the positions of Butler and Prosser. In this regard narrative short The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) presents a significant alternate theoretical screen text. This is because, as a fictional short film, an actor portrays a transman Tristan (Holt Trollsplinter) within the narrative. As the actor (Holt Trollsplinter) is a trans actor, the narrative raises questions of a transman performing being a transman within the text that will be explored within Chapter 6.

The documentary short films in Trans Boys are presented sequentially within Chapter 6 as in
the text; from Xavier, whom the audience meets at a major physical transitional point of top surgery; to Dex, who is at a major transitional point sexually; to Danny who is living and passing in the world ‘simply being’ a man and loving parent. Within the documentary, the self-awareness of the participants of the presence of the camera invites questions of whether they are also performing their lives for the screen. Each of these trans individuals reflect the challenges and triumphs of their lives and ‘simply being’ embodied as trans individuals. Case study text Sexing the Transman as will be discussed in Chapter 7, foregrounds and celebrates that to be transgressive, to be queer, to be transqueer, or genderqueer, to be sexually alive, empowered; to be the man you have always been, in the body you have, or in the body in any way that you want to have it, is twenty first century trans.

2.8.3 Transliteracy

First use and publication of the term transliteracy in relation to reading gender–diverse cinema of the Trans New Wave as an innovative theoretical approach has emerged from this research project (Ford 2014a) and is the focus of Chapter 4.

A literature search demonstrated the validity of transliteracy as an approach and located three main scholarly precedents for this work. The Transcriptions Research Project at the University of California Santa Barbara in 2005, directed by Professor Alan Liu in the Department of English, now known as the “Transliteracies Project”, is acknowledged as the main earlier contemporary use of the term and researches “Technological, Social, and Cultural Practises of Online Reading” and the “impact of digital, networked technologies on reading practices...(and) the practices of digital reading in online environments”.128

The 2005 project led to the first Transliteracies Conference being held, which resulted in the Production and Research in Transliteracy (PART) group being formed in 2006, in the Institute of Creative Technologies (IOCT), at De Montfort University (DMU) in the United Kingdom. The Production and Research in Transliteracy (PART) “is a small group of researchers based in the Faculty of Humanities” (Thomas et al., 2007). Professor Sue Thomas claims first use of the word ‘transliteracy’ within the context of Production and Research in


82
Transliteracy (PART). An earlier project: “Online Writing, trACE, 1995–2005, Nottingham Trent University, is now also noted as a predecessor in transliteracy.\textsuperscript{129}

All three predecessor projects focus usage of transliteracy upon reading and the literary, text-based sources; with the emphasis upon the impacts of reading in digital online environments. The definition of the concept and applications were widened in 2007 to open the debate to include “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks” (Thomas \textit{et al.}, 2007). This definition and paper are foundational source materials on contemporary scholarly uses of transliteracy.\textsuperscript{130}

Reflecting upon the challenges of ‘translating’ the narratives and imagery in transgender films to a wider audience early in the first year of this current research project brought an awareness that discussion of films that readers have not viewed raises some issues in textual analysis. This is intensified by the siting of narratives within gender-diverse communities, which have their own languages: “\textit{There are different literacies associated with different domains of life}” (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 10, italics in original). During this reflection, the concept of transliteracy emerged as a possible research approach to reading trans films. This happened because I have a background which includes archaeology\textsuperscript{131} so the \textit{concept and use of transliteracy} was something familiar from previous training and work in relation to ancient cultural traditions and transliterating Near-Eastern languages into modern English. I tested out whether applying a transliterate approach to textual exegesis would enable a literate reading of Trans New Wave films the foci of Chapters 4, 6, 7, for audiences and presented this as a paper that was successfully received and subsequently published (Ford 2014a; Chapter 4). The work of this initial paper has continued to be developed during the research processes of this thesis, with the proposal of using a transliterate approach in developing an emerging canon of cinematic representations within Trans New Wave films presented as an international conference paper (Ford 2015a) and subsequently published (Ford 2016b).


\textsuperscript{131} Specifically, a Masters Degree in Egyptology (Macquarie University, Australia).
There is a robust interdisciplinary range of contemporary applications of transliteracy internationally, from digital literacy, information management, to pedagogy. Developing the use of transliteracy as an innovative approach in relation to reading trans films in this thesis, presents original scholarship that builds upon the work of earlier and contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship.

2.9 Summary

This literature review has highlighted the chasm that continues to exist between representations within mainstream and independent film productions with trans narratives and the complexities of the settings—social, cultural and economic in which screen texts are produced and viewed. The textual and metatextual issues that arise from exegesis of films has been presented against the background of the literatures of existing film theory. The vast terrain of film history and theory; from censorship (discussed further in Chapter 5), to a text that has challenged and evaded censorship (Sexing the Transman) have been presented and will be discussed further in Chapter 7. The emergence of the Trans New Wave and transliteracy as an innovative theoretical approach to reading these texts, have been positioned. The literature review has established the basis upon which this thesis will proceed: within an ethical framework, from the perspective of independent gender–diverse films, filmmakers and film festivals, that not only challenge, but eradicate, the hegemonies that have encircled their lives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research methodology utilized in this project requires an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach sited within cultural studies, with a research design focused upon multiple case studies, texts which have been deliberately selected as exemplars in the genre and also selected strategically (Saldana 2011, p. 9) as illustrating recurrent themes, narratives and tropes in transgender representation. This chapter will discuss how this project uses a combined methodology, including autoethnography and ethnographic methodologies and qualitative research techniques, from a queer ethnographic perspective (Rooke 2010a) as a reflexive genderqueer researcher. The design of the research project focuses upon qualitative techniques approved by Southern Cross University (Australia) Ethics Committee for the research of this doctoral thesis. This includes purposive sampling of filmmakers and film festival directors, with interviews via in–person and online ethnography (Skågeby 2011), observation of the interaction between filmmakers, audiences and screen texts via in–person fieldwork at international film festivals, use of selected case studies in fieldwork and textual exegesis (Berg 2001, 2008; Binnie 2009b; Saldana 2011; Creswell 2013).

The project included the gathering of film source materials and filmmaker histories using online sites (such as filmmaker websites and Vimeo), via email and/or in–person interviews as appropriate (due to distance/location of participants), utilising audio and/or video recordings as appropriate and digital resources of filmmakers (due to distance/location of participants). Film histories were also collected by purposive sampling (Creswell 2013, p. 156) of case study filmmakers and other contemporary filmmakers within the Trans New Wave of cinema, using semi–structured and informal interview methods and indicative questions appropriate to the participants’ experience and the film texts produced and screened, or currently in production.

The methodology supports and reflects the planning for a qualitative research project, which can be conducted at the “site level, at the event or process level, and at the participant

---

133 Further circulating the concept of trans within the research project; acknowledging transliteracy pedagogy at DMU. <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/events/events-calendar/tdc-the-uses-of-transliteracy.aspx>.
level” (Creswell 2013, p. 156). In this thesis, research from Trans New Wave films, official classifications (ratings) systems; independent and queer film festivals were utilised, with a focus on Trans New Wave filmmakers, film participants, festival directors; trans community, audiences (participant level).

There is wider scholarly recognition following Stephen Valocchi, that ‘ethnographic methods are best suited for advancing a queer understanding of identities and practises’ (2005 p. 751, 767; Binnie, 2009a, p. 171). This is because the use of ethnographic methodologies enables nuanced conclusions to be drawn out from complex situations and *lived experiences*. Specifically

ethnographic approaches are well–suited for the study of transgender activism, due to a growing concern among transgender theorists that post–structural theory and mainstream sociological study are failing to offer analyses that provide useful knowledge about the lives of transgender people (Butler 2003, p. 280).

Over the past two decades researchers have been increasingly addressing the failure of mainstream institutional approaches to ‘provide useful knowledge’ about trans lives. At the foundational level, a shift in epistemological knowledge production on trans lives has already taken place, led by Associate Professor Susan Stryker 134 and Professor Stephen Whittle 135 as exemplars at the forefront of the generational moves in recognition of transgender human rights, equality in legal status and transgender studies as a discrete discipline. There has been a focus upon the production of new knowledge in the form of major scholarly publications (Stryker and Whittle 2006; Stryker and Aizura 2013) and the launch and success of an international journal focussed upon trans studies (Stryker and Currah 2014a). 136 These publications continue to build upon the foundational and ongoing work of Susan Stryker (1998, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008) in the USA and Stephen Whittle (More and Whittle 1999; Whittle 2002; Whittle et al. 2007) in the United Kingdom.


135 Professor of Equalities Law, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, viewed 26 February 2016, <http://www.law.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/staff-profile/?var1=69>.

136 *The Transgender Studies Reader; The Transgender Studies Reader 2; TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly.*
Following this international lead, scholars have redesigned research approaches with trans people in a way that works for trans people. This has included Alison Rooke (2010b, 2010c), who utilised a combined methodology engaging the “logics of recognition, creativity and pedagogy” (2010c, p. 2) focused upon a participatory arts research project called “Sci:dentity” in the United Kingdom to analyse the way in which space is constituted by transgender youth (aged 14–22). Part of this project involved a role–reversal process in which the participants formulated questions for a gender specialist regarding “the ethics of ‘gender dysphoria’ diagnostics” (Rooke 2010c, p. 8), one of the participating young transmen reported to facilitators that this process “empowered me to speak to these experts as an equal and not as a patient, which is what I have been” (Rooke 2010c, p. 9). The value of such a process cannot be underestimated for participants. In the context of knowledge production, this provides new modes of engagement and empirical evidence on the power dynamics inherent in the production of gendered spaces. This example highlights contemporary research approaches within trans studies used within this thesis, including the necessity for research into trans lives to be participatory and for the relevance of using a combined methodology.

The thematic context of the current research project on the Trans New Wave viewed within the broader context of contemporary transgender communities’ experiences/lives and with regard to scholarly reflection upon the field as discussed within Chapter 2, has informed a careful and mature approach to interview collection with gender–diverse participants. This is imbued with an awareness that “the sensibilities of interviewing are altered with the changing social phenomena that constitute ‘the interviewee’ ” (Kong & Mahoney 2001, p. 240, italics as per the original). For a sociological approach to fieldwork interviews with specifically transmale (FTM) persons, Devor (1997) provides the most comprehensive account of methodology and outcomes published. Rubin (2003) also provides critical analysis of twenty–two interviews with transmen, but without the detailed notes on the actual interviewee questionnaire sheets supplied in Devor. It is through a careful reading of Devor that the need to enquire of a range of typical responses/experiences is highlighted rather than dualistic ‘best/worse/first/last’ scenarios (199, xviii). This point has been kept in mind with regard to interviewing trans filmmakers and festival directors of independent film festivals. Jay Prosser (1998) and Susan Stryker (2006a) emphasise the essential need to keep transsexual narratives embodied, that is, to keep the narratives connected to transgender lives. This is a point to be
kept in mind in relation to reading transgender films and informs the use of transliteracy throughout this thesis. Trans New Wave filmmakers are exemplars for presenting texts with themes, characters (or participants) and narratives that emerge from and remain connected to trans lives throughout the cycle of film production and exhibition. While cinematic texts are removed from direct physical embodiment through on–screen temporal cinematic representations of bodies 137 this does not mean that texts are mimetic. Specific texts such as case study film *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) as will be discussed in Chapter 6, question the ‘real’ and ‘reality’, inviting questioning of cinema as a mimetic experience, drawing upon earlier science–fiction texts where the ‘imitative’ nature of a body is explicitly discussed.

Questions posed to filmmakers during the research focussed upon issues of a non–sensitive nature relating to the production of transgender films for public screening, including motivations and processes for writing, directing and producing independent transgender films and whether the classifications guidelines impacted upon any creative decisions made in regards to the films’ production, or whether the filmmakers were aware of the classifications processes in their country. The results of this fieldwork will be presented throughout the thesis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in tandem with the relevant discussions of case studies.

The Festival Directors of independent, queer and trans film festivals internationally that screen transgender films were asked questions focussed upon issues of a non–sensitive nature. The questions related to the processes of festival production and film selection, and awareness of classifications (ratings) guidelines. Of especial interest to this research on classifications (ratings) systems, which is the focus of Chapter 5, is whether these guidelines impact upon any creative/curatorial decisions festival directors make in regards to the film festival’s program. The number of transgender films screened each year in comparison to gay or lesbian films was also queried, along with the motivations for screening independent transgender films and subsequent audience responses during the festival to transgender films screened. A final self–reflexive question focussed upon each Festival Director assessing the major impacts and successes of the film festival in question.

137 The nature of representation in respect to transgender is a developing area. There are currently no specific theories of ‘transgender representation’. Within the thesis, current and emergent theories of relevance to trans representation are reviewed in Chapter 2.
These respondents were analysed and compared to the experience of Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012), from a self–reflexive and autoethnographic perspective (Binnie 2009b), in my role as Festival Director of the only independent regionally produced gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer film festival in Australia (Ford 2013, 2014b, 2016a forthcoming). Film Festival culture is a growing area of research internationally with a developing literature on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer film festivals (Ragan 2007; Zielinski 2006, 2008, 2012; Loist and Zielinski 2012; Loist 2012, 2013; de Valck, Kredell and Loist 2016; Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a forthcoming) and an emergent literature and recognition of transgender film festivals (Loist and de Valck 2013).

The research project also involved the collection of source textual materials including digital file formats and digital video disc (DVD) copies of films, digital and web–based film trailers, promotional film photographs (digital j.pegs), press release kits related to the films and printed materials using digital file transfer and scanning technologies. Access to the Northern Rivers’ based Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012) archive of materials was made for source materials of case study films, as well as access to existing, published web–based sources such as Vimeo and YouTube (Appendices—B: Information Sheet for Participants; C: Interview Schedule; D: Consent Form for Participants; E: Talent Release/Permission Release Form for Participants (for filming events); F: Permissions Release Form for Use of Film Media.139

Major case studies of selected independent texts will be textually analysed in Chapters 6–7: Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011); Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012), The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011). Comparative textual analysis of a range of mainstream texts dealing with transgender narratives of relevance to support aspects of the thesis have been presented in Chapter 2, as an overview review mapping out the larger field of trans representation in cinema. These texts will be returned to in discussion of the case studies. All research is approved and ethically conducted according to Southern Cross University (Australia) protocols (Ethics Approval number: ECN-14-202).


139 Appendix F: “Permissions Release Form for Use of Film Media” has been added to the existing forms to cover use of copyrighted media materials within the research project such as film stills and film excerpts in digital formats such as .jpg; Quicktime Movie; DVD; Mp4; other format.
3.2 Queer Fruits Film Festival (Australia) as an (Auto) Ethnographic case study

The significant body of archival materials generated through the four Queer Fruits Film Festival seasons 2009–2012 provides the source of fieldwork resources for this part of the research project, enhanced though my autoethnographic and self–reflexive narrative as Festival Director, a source of empirical evidence that will be discussed throughout this thesis. Maguire (2006) cites Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, which maintains that autoethnography gives researchers creative answerability/responsibility and agency. Recognising and validating agency is a central tenet of cultural studies and social sciences. The researcher becomes both subject and object, this dual role of “subjects as authors of their discursive existence resonates with the epistemological assumptions and methodological aspirations of postmodernist, interpretive scholars” (Maguire 2006). This also leads to a positionality, where “the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity disappear. These terms, which produce sciences of the subject, no longer operate because subjectivity is always intersubjective, unstable, and embodied in concrete situations of life” (Denzin 1997, p. 75, italics added).

Within the context of the festival, this intersubjectivity was ‘embodied’ in the relationship between screen texts and audiences; between the creative and financial tensions of festival production; between the expectations of audiences and funding partners; in the unpredictable reception of a queer film festival and regional gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer community expectations (Ford 2015b). This intersubjectivity was also embodied within myself as Festival Director and in the relationship of this role to all these areas, a continual interweaving and juggling of creative, public relations, producing, financing and exhibition logistics. The regionality of Queer Fruits Film Festival wholly informed the timing of the annual festival and programming decisions (Ford 2014b, 2016a *forthcoming*). An important caveat upon programming must be made: that festival programmes can only be curated from the texts that are being produced and submitted for exhibition in any given time. Costs can play a crucial role in gaining access to a text (in the form of screening fees), which many
independent filmmakers generously waive for smaller festivals to enable screening.\footnote{An example of this is filmmaker Buck Angel, who generously waived the screening fee for feature–length documentary \textit{Sexing the Transman} (Chapter 7) to enable Queer Fruits Film Festival to exhibit the film in 2012. Screening fees for USA–based independent films range from US$500–1,000 per screening (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012) drawing upon requests for screening fees in festival correspondence, between the festival and filmmakers and the festival and USA film distributors.} Audiences, unaware of the constraints of running a film festival may unduly criticise a programme for lack of specific content (Ford 2015b).

Throughout the festival years, qualitative and quantitative research was undertaken. The qualitative research on audiences forms part of the autoethnographic archive of materials from Queer Fruits Film Festival that is referenced in support of this current project to provide empirical evidence of the audience reception of the Trans New Wave films that were screened. The quantitative research, focused upon statistical reports of audience demographics and the financial aspects of day–to–day running of the festival is also part of this archive, but is not directly (or indirectly) referenced in this research because this current project is qualitative in design.\footnote{As Queer Fruits Film Festival was run prior to enrolling in the PhD, the information gathered during these years (such as qualitative ‘Audience Voting Sheets’), predates this research project. The data that was gathered was formally utilised throughout 2009–2013 in the annual Funding Acquittal Reports which I prepared (as Festival Director) for the State screen and arts funding bodies (Screen NSW; Arts NSW) that supported the festival through Audience Development Grants each season and and for the regional funding bodies (Lismore City Council, local community partners) that provided cash and in–kind support. The results of the qualitative data from the festival years has been included within the \textit{autoethnographic festival materials} within this project. Use of autoethnographic materials from Queer Fruits Film Festival has Southern Cross University Ethics Approval. The films that the audiences and Jury voted for may be viewed on the public Queer Fruits Film Festival website <http://www.queerfruitsfilmfestival.org/artists.html>.
} That both forms of research were undertaken has been noted at this point, to support the rigor with which an independent queer film festival must be run in the twenty first century. Within Australia, independent festivals rely upon the financial support of a range of government and business funding sources and sponsorships, in addition to festival box office, full accountability and formal annual acquittal reports were required to be presented. Successful annual acquittal reporting also becomes the basis of receiving funding for the next festival year for all Australian independent and queer film festivals.

The qualitative research on audiences was collected through informal voting, via a standardised sheet that was provided to all audiences at Queer Fruits Film Festival, at the close of each session. These sheets were subsequently counted by festival staff and from the tally, the Audience Choice was awarded to a specific film each year. This is a standard part of
film festival practise. These sheets also became useful to ascertain which films audiences at Queer Fruits Film Festival responded to and enjoyed the most and the least, as there was space on each sheet for additional comments on the programme. This rich body of material has not previously been published and provides insights into issues of spectatorship of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer films in a regional town in Australia in the twenty first century. As the films were ranked on the sheets, it also provides insight into which films and particularly which transgender films, may be considered to be the most influential in each of the Queer Fruits Film Festival seasons. This is one of the empirical sources of evidence utilised in developing a canon of representation of trans films (Ford 2016b) that will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 8.

In reflecting upon the textual and emotional needs of the regional festival audiences a combination of approaches (self–reflexive; analysis of audience feedback sheets; festival programmes) are used as “qualitative techniques may be more appropriate for research in this area given that they are deemed to be more suitable for the investigations of emotions, feelings and opinions” (Binnie 2009b, p. 33). This combined methodology, emerging from queer subcultures has necessitated “blurred boundaries between archivists and producers”, as validated by Jack Halberstam, who acknowledges that “the theorist and the cultural worker may be the same people” (2005, p. 162).

As background, Queer Fruits Film festival was established in 2009 in a regional area in Australia, the Northern Rivers’ city of Lismore. The circumstances of the establishment of the festival has been published during the doctoral candidacy in support of the thesis research in one journal article and two book chapters (Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a forthcoming). The circumstances which led to the decision at the end of the 2012 festival season to discontinue holding the annual film festival in Lismore was also detailed (Ford 2015b).

These three publications present a detailed self–reflexive, autoethnographic account of Queer Fruits Film Festival from the perspectives of queer theory, cultural studies, film festival research and geographies of sexualities.143

Between 2009–2012 overall, there were one hundred and thirteen (113) gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer films screened (2009 = 25 films; 2010 = 26 films; 2011 = 24 films; 2012 = 38 films) (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012), with twenty (20) of these texts (17.7%, rounded as 18%) specifically trans films. The festival also toured two programmes; one programme of thirteen (13) films toured to regional city Coffs Harbour, Australia in 2011 and a special program featuring the documentary Kink Crusaders (Michael Skiff, USA, 2010) toured to major city Sydney, Australia in 2012. This last film has an extremely moving ending, as the first transman to win the International Mr. Leather (IML)144 contest is awarded the title in Chicago. Each tour required separate classifications applications.145 To my knowledge, Queer Fruits Film Festival is the only regional queer film festival and perhaps even the only independent film festival in Australia, that has been invited to tour a program to a major city in Australia; the case of urban film festivals touring programs to regional areas being the usual situation.

Towards the end of 2012, I was invited to curate a special broadcast series of four, one–hour episodes, (17 films—including one World Premiere Screening)146 of Queer Fruits Film Festival for Aurora TV (Foxtel Channel 183), that was screened during February in the lead up month of the 2013 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Again, this distinguished Queer Fruits Film Festival as curating broadcast series for national audiences (urban and regional). These four episodes presented a ‘highlights’ package of all films screened between 2009–2012. An issue encountered in broadcasting, not encountered during festival programming,

143 “The queer film festival as a gender-diverse space: positioning the ‘L’ in GLBTIQ screen content”, in K. Browne and E. Ferreira eds. Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 177–200. Copyright © 2015. (Publisher notice as per required format).


145 This brought the tally to 127 films Exempted for screening.

146 The Star (World Premiere Screening) Aus. (2012) 52 mins (55.18) Director/Producer: Renae Moore. This documentary traces the history of the Sydney Star Observer, formally known as ‘The Star’ newspaper, which has been a part of Australian gay and lesbian culture for 30 years. Note: a ‘broadcast hour’ varies from channel to channel, depending upon advertising slots, each episode was 52 minutes duration for Aurora TV.
was that the episodes were constrained by a maximum M classification. This curtailed the ability to program the majority of the significant trans films that had been screened during the four festival years including the case study texts *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafer, Aus., 2012) and *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), which were rated at R 18+ equivalent.

Figure 3.1: Queer Fruits Film Festival 2013 Aurora TV Promotional Advertisement Featuring Vanessa Wagner, ©Aurora TV 2013. Reproduced courtesy of Aurora TV. Source: Queer Fruits Film Festival archives 2013.

---

147 Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012a). Part 2, “M – Mature”, “Material classified M is not recommended for persons under 15 years of age.” The ‘M’ rating in Australian classifications is a category defined as ‘moderate’ impact and is not a legally restricted category (that is the M 15 + rating, defined as ‘strong’ impact content).

148 Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012a). Part 2, “R 18+”, Legally restricted to adults. Audiences must be 18 years of age and over. The term ‘equivalent’ is used here, as the classifications guidelines refer to officially classified films and film festivals screen exempted programs of unclassified content, using a classifications ‘equivalent’ assessment for the content (that is, the rating the film would most likely be classified at, if officially classified by the government department). The trans films were not at a higher rating because they were trans films; it is because of the full nudity and sexual depictions throughout many of the films, which can only be shown in ‘R 18+ content in Australia. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.
One PG-equivalent film *Andie* (Paul Baker, USA, 2011) that reflected upon gender questions in relation to youth was programmed in the broadcast. The text presented the story of a young gender questioning boy at school “who loves his doll more than anything in the world”, asking the question “Can he survive the pressures of the world?” (*Andie* Synopsis).

The poster for the broadcast (Figure 3.1) featuring celebrated Australian drag performer and community activist Vanessa Wagner, highlights that there were a number of exceptional queer films screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival during these years with gender-diverse subjects including intersex, boylesque, drag queen and drag king and films featuring trans actors and production team, which have not been included in the above count of the twenty specifically trans films. Vanessa’s own award-winning documentary *Undressing Vanessa* (Matthew Pond, Australia, 2007), which screened at the first Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2009, was chosen as the lead film to premiere the broadcast series on Aurora TV due to Vanessa’s high media profile.

This tally of twenty trans films screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival, leads to the necessity for a clear definition of what constitutes ‘trans films’, which for the purpose of this research project are *films which self-identify as trans, respecting the agency of the filmmakers as central to the identification*. This will be discussed further in relation to filmmaker self-identification during fieldwork. The definition of trans films will be fully explored in Chapter 4 with respect to the Trans New Wave. To illustrate this point filmmaker Malic Amalya may be considered. Amalya screened his film *Gold Moon, Sharp Arrow* (Malic Amalya, USA, 2012) at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012, the film was presented as part of the Opening Night program (Queer Fruits Film Festival program 2012). Though featuring well-known trans participants and production team, this film is not counted as a ‘trans film’ in the above tally, but as a ‘queer film’ in the program. This is because *the filmmaker identified the film as*

---

149 Ibid., “PG”. Audiences under 15 years of age may view with parental guidance.

150 *Orchids – My Intersex Adventure* (Hart Aus., 2010); *Waxie Moo* (Hurley, USA, 2009); *Gold Moon, Sharp Arrow* (Amalya, USA, 2012)

151 Vanessa Wagner had previously been a contestant on Australian reality TV show *Big Brother* in 2002 (viewed 17 February 2015, <http://www.tv.com/shows/celebrity-big-brother-australia/> ) and had revealed on national television that she was HIV positive. Vanessa is a living hero to many GLBTIQ people in Australia and generously agreed to MC Opening Night of the 2009 and 2010 Queer Fruits Film Festivals to assist us in raising the profile of the festival.
being about “how queer communities enact, resist and creatively respond to assimilation, coercion and trauma” (Amalya 2012, film publicity synopsis, italics added). As a film scholar and genderqueer researcher, I am sensitised to the necessity to be cognisant of the movement between genres and forms, textual and intertextual identification made by filmmakers. This form of filmmaker self-identification respects individual agency in gender identification as extending to the creative works an individual produces.

As a comparative example with the same filmmaker, Amalya subsequently screened a new experimental film To Type Out Your Name (Malic Amalya, USA, 2014) exploring trans identity, at the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival. Interestingly, this text, self-identified by the filmmaker as a trans film and located for screening within a transgender film festival programme, continued many of the visual and aural metaphors and the specific filmmaking style of Amalya recognisable from earlier film Gold Moon, Sharp Arrow (Malic Amalya, USA, 2012). This establishes a valid connection between queer and trans representations and metaphors with reference to the texts of specific filmmakers.

### 3.2.1 Developing the Audience—the Unique Role of Independent and Queer Film Festivals in Screening Transgender Films

It is relevant to the autoethnographic accounts of Queer Fruits Film Festival and also to other Australian–based independent and queer film festivals, to identify that the primary sources of screen industry funding available to festivals are granted under ‘Screen Audience Development Grants’. This places the emphasis upon a festival’s role as a nexus between

---

152 Queer Fruits Film Festival (2012). Programme Archives.

153 A fieldwork observation which I pursued in correspondence with the filmmaker after the 2014 film festival (11 April 2015, 14 April 2015, 09 June 2015, 15 August 2015, 17 August 2015). Malic confirmed the observations and commented supportively “I’m excited to hear about the connections you are making between "Gold Moon, Sharp Arrow" and "To Type Out Your Name". (correspondence 14 April 2015).

154 Ewan Duarte’s film Queering Yoga (Ewan Duarte, USA, status in–production 2016, crowd–funding to complete production) is another example.

filmmakers and audiences, but more specifically, in the festival’s role in developing *audiences*, that is, in developing and *creating audience demand* for the type of screen content that a specific festival programs and exhibits. The reflexive nature of the screen industry is such that, when a festival develops an audience, this in turn creates the need for niche content to be produced, which in turn, supports and encourages independent film production.

Producing a queer film festival in a regional town in Australia presented unique challenges and rewards, including seeing an audience develop that appreciated and looked forward to the opportunity to view a range of national and international queer films locally (Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a *forthcoming*). The socially–purposive nature of an independent/queer film festival in such a location cannot be overlooked, as it becomes part of the fabric and identity of the local queer population; an event that is not only looked forward to, but is participated in and has a role in identity formation.

In respect to the trans–themed programming of the 2012 festival, the socially purposive nature of the screenings were intended “to affirm, organize, and produce infrastructure for identities marginalized and/or emerging within gay and lesbian communities” (Fung 1999, p. 89), specifically the increasing transmale populations of the Northern Rivers and South–East Queensland areas (Ford 2014b, 2016a *forthcoming*). Identification–based festivals such as the queer film festival “are also crucial sites of queer pedagogy, classrooms of queer images” (Fung 1999, p. 89).

Audience demographics in relation to the screening of trans films varies from festival to festival, from urban to regional locations, with timing of screenings (day versus evening sessions) and with ticketing (price) also being an issue. The San Francisco Transgender Film Festival noted ‘urban gentrification’ as being significant in the audience demographics for the 2014 event, which were observed during fieldwork to change each night.

\[\text{Queer Fruits Film Festival archives (2009–2012); in–person fieldwork at San Francisco Transgender Film Festival; online ethnography with festivals.}\]

\[\text{Online ethnographic fieldwork with the Festival Director Shawna Virago on 27 January 2015. As a personal observation, I had not been in San Francisco since 1991 and noticed the enormous changes to the Mission district, particularly Valencia Street (the Roxie Theater is in this area). Friends within the queer and trans communities have all moved to Oakland, which two decades ago was primarily an African–American neighbourhood. The ‘urban gentrification’ referred to by Shawna, appeared to have resulted in displacement of the GLBTIQ communities from the inner–city areas and many festival attendees seemed to choose one session, or night to attend, rather than the whole festival; issues with late–night travel on public transport were cited during fieldwork discussions.}\]
of the festival, between sessions.\textsuperscript{158} This contrasted with the experience of Queer Fruits Film Festival, with audience demographics remaining similar between years for specific sessions: with an audience of visiting (urban) and local (regional) gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer crowd attending opening nights. A higher number of local (regional) audience, especially queer and lesbian, attended the afternoon documentary sessions each year. An exception to this was the 2012 trans–focussed documentary programme and forum, which attracted a larger audience of local and visiting members of the trans community, partners and friends.

A number of rationales for different audiences for different sessions can be presented, including the affective needs of various sections of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer community. A practical explanation must also take into account the seasonal timing of Queer Fruits Film Festival and the nature of activities prior to New Year, with many gay men (visiting and local) at the beach throughout the hot summer daylight hours, then heading indoors and attending the cruisier evening screenings. Melbourne Queer Film Festival noted that screenings of trans films ‘always lose money’, but this did not deter the festival in the commitment to screening trans content each year, as the reception of the films was always positive.\textsuperscript{159} All festivals surveyed indicated that audience reception for trans films was very positive.

The significance of seeing affirming images of one’s life onscreen cannot be underestimated for non–hegemonic communities. This point has been previously made in respect to the invisibility and misrepresentation of homosexuality and gay and lesbian images onscreen during the emergence of early cinema and throughout the twentieth century (Russo 1981; \textit{The Celluloid Closet}, Epstein and Friedman 1995) and can be validly restated in terms of cinematic trans representation in the twenty first century.

3.2.2 \textbf{Autoethnography and Positionality of the Researcher}

Work with transgender texts occupied a central programming concern in my role as Festival

\textsuperscript{158} Roxie Theatre, San Francisco, November 7–9 2014.

\textsuperscript{159} Online ethnography with the Festival Director 08–09 September 2014.
Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012)\textsuperscript{160} from creative, cultural and ethical perspectives. It was during these years that I also became increasingly interested in—and concerned about—film classifications processes and ratings systems in Australia and America. Between 2009–2012, I successfully applied to the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department\textsuperscript{161} in Australia for one hundred and twenty-seven (127) gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer films to be Exempted to screen publically within the festival programs.\textsuperscript{162} This included the three films selected as case studies within this research project.\textsuperscript{163}

Early 2012, in response to the increasing transgender population in the regional Northern Rivers’ and South–East Queensland areas, my focus shifted to presenting a specially curated transgender program and forum at the 2012 festival.\textsuperscript{164} The forum was well–received and it became clear from feedback from participants in the forum and the audience attending the session, that the area of transgender representation in films and the texts that had screened at the festival in that year, suggested further scholarly investigation. It is in this way that the collective experience of the festival over those four years culminated and has profoundly influenced my personal and scholarly life, leading directly into the research area of this current PhD research project.\textsuperscript{165}


\textsuperscript{161} Also known as the Office of Film and Literature Classification prior to 2006. A number of key classification documents cited throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter 5, refer to this Office.

\textsuperscript{162} 113 GLBTIQ films screened between 2009–2012 at QFFF (2009 = 25 films; 2010 = 26 films; 2011 = 24 films; 2012 = 38 films) (QFFF Archives 2009-2012). 20 of these films were specifically transgender.

\textsuperscript{163} Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives (2012).

\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Transgender Representation in Contemporary Film}, organiser & chair, programmed to follow the Queer Fruits Film Festival transgender-focused documentary session on 30 December 2012. The 2012 Festival year is highlighted, as the 2012 festival programme is the source of the case studies texts within this thesis.

\textsuperscript{165} Ford (2013, 2016a \textit{forthcoming}).
Positionality as a genderqueer participant–researcher enables observation and study of the gender–diverse, transqueer community from within a place of grassroots involvement. This acknowledges that I write and speak “from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific” (Hall 1990, p. 222). This positionality affects my reading of the term trans and representations in films directly; it accords with fluid notions of trans as experienced in the twenty first century (that trans can be expressed in a multiplicity of ways (including as gender binary, or open–ended) and as a part of a queer “postmodern identity” (Halperin 2003, p. 340).

How the term ‘queer’ is used, is contested by scholars (Browne, Lim & Brown 2009). ‘Queer’ may be epistemological a ‘way of knowing’ (Browne and Nash 2010, p. 7; Ford 2015b, p. 182), or a ‘mode of theoretical or conceptual engagement’ (Browne and Nash 2010, p. 2; Ford 2015b, p. 182). This thesis acknowledges that trans people may/or may not identify as queer, this is a personal point of view (Ford 2015b), that is also reflected in specific scholarship (Macdonald 2013; Leung 2014a). Respectful acknowledgement is made as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 that there are individuals within the gender–diverse communities who do not relate to trans in this way, who do not consider themselves to be queer (Prosser 1998) and who do not experience their gender/and or sexuality as being fluid, but as constative (Prosser 2006, p. 264), a man or a woman; heterosexual or homosexual.

Use of the term queer by Queer Fruits Film Festival follows Stephen Valocchi (2005) who acknowledges that queer may be ontological, a subject position, or ‘identity formation’ (Valocchi 2005, p. 766; Ford 2015b, p. 182). The experiences of the film festival within the queer community of the Northern Rivers region in Australia was that people identified as queer. This informed perspectives on a range of socio–cultural aspects of life; integrated people locally across ages and interests into a vibrant social scene, centred upon destabilising entrenched binary homonormativity, with trans at the epicentre. This empirical account of queer locally is the opposite to the theoretical views on queer presented by scholars such as Browne (2009) and Browne and Nash (2010) and reinforces the necessity for transliterate fieldwork within contemporary queer and trans communities as a basis for textual exegesis of Trans New Wave films. Positionality as a genderqueer researcher in a time when transqueer (Leung 2014a) is emerging as a vibrant theory and methodology underlines the research.
In focusing upon the validity of using a combined methodology for this current research project, consideration necessarily devolved upon the conflicted role that medical and psychoanalytic professions and discourses have historically held in respect to transgender lives. A range of scholars were presented in Chapter 2, expressing the complexity of this area. This included scholars outspoken on the medicalisation and psychopathologisation of trans lives such as Patrick Califia (2003), J. B. Noble (2006) and Julia Serrano (2009, 2015), contrasted with scholars that utilise psychoanalytic frameworks in relation to gender, sexuality and trans studies such as Sheila Cavanagh (2013, 2014, 2015). The experiences of running a queer film festival, working with trans filmmakers over the past seven years and reviewing the literature, in tandem with empirical evidence from fieldwork within the trans communities, has informed the methodological positions of this thesis. I felt strongly from an ethical perspective that I did not wish this current research to use any form of psychoanalytic framework in the film analysis; it seeming disrespectful (at the least) to trans lives to apply such historically damaging frameworks to the research and discussion of the creative output of contemporary trans filmmakers who are creating new narratives in the twenty first century.

This thesis utilises a sophisticated interdisciplinary approach to film research drawing on a number of primary screen source materials including (but not limited to) film scripts, box office information, media surrounding films, ‘correspondence..., treatments, drafts of screenplays’ (Jacobs 1997) and using methodologies that include media and box office analysis (Crafton, 1996, pp. 463–467).

All materials are considered “at the same level of importance as the film itself” (Jacobs 1997, p. 26). This form of film analysis enables a nuanced understanding and exegesis of screen texts historically and in contemporary production and exhibition cycles as the industrial screen materials:

provides a sense of the mechanisms by which social conflicts impinged on a given text...Further, through sources such as the MPPDA case files...it becomes possible to document, with some precision, the way these conflicts surfaced in

166 The ‘MPPDA’ was the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America. Materials from the successor body, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) is used in this thesis.
That is, as choices among various versions of the script. Further, textual analysis, particularly discussion of film style, suggests some of the ways these constraints could be circumvented or displaced (Jacobs 1997, p. 26, Italics in original).

This approach of using all screen materials available, ascribed at the “same level of importance” (Jacobs 1997, p. 26), is of particular use in the analysis of independent films. This is due to the variety of screen materials that may be available (from websites, to film trailers, publicity kits, filmmaker blogs, online film funding campaigns, newspaper items covering screenings, festival publicity materials, question and answer sessions during film festival panels and film festival archives). This methodological approach is also useful due to the representational issues of trans that have characterised depictions within the mainstream and the hegemonic controls of the classifications (ratings) system that will be discussed within Chapter 5 and film distribution processes. To fully research these areas requires the use of a wide range of industrial screen materials. This includes film scripts, correspondence between producers, writers, directors and distributors; film festival archival materials including correspondence between festivals and filmmakers, festivals and audiences (such as surveys and voting sheets), marketing materials, classifications (ratings) exemptions, funding and sponsorship materials; media sources (such as newspapers, trade journals, magazines) and box office. Within a careful research methodology, the use of such materials can productively illuminate areas of screen industry practises. Film scholars such as Donald Crafton (1996) have noted issues that can arise with using box–office as a caveat in research, such as bias in weekly receipts from theatres, estimates, unaudited figures, audiences augmented with industry complimentary ticket attendees, differing price structures of tickets(Crafton 1996, pp. 463–468). Contemporary sources frequently used by filmmakers and film production companies, such as the International Movie Database (IMDB)¹⁶⁷ are amongst the resources that can be referenced.

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.imdb.com/>. IMDb also has a subscription version (IMDb Pro) and is an industry–source used by all major (and independent) film production companies and is frequently referenced for a range of materials including weekly box office data on mainstream film releases (autoethnographic account as a Production Assistant between 2012–2014, working directly with an Executive Producer on large budget feature films).
The examples cited (Crafton 1996; Jacobs 1997) illustrate this form a research methodology in practise, with exhibited screen texts analysed through the use of screen industry materials. In particular, it was Lea Jacobs’ study of the ‘Fallen Woman genre’ that first alerted me to the potential for this model of film research and analysis, that could productively be applied in researching the Trans New Wave within this thesis. In close reading of Jacobs’ work, in tandem with viewing a range of mainstream films as discussed within Chapter 2, I became aware of Hollywood tropes from the ‘Fallen Woman’ genre, that were being recycled within contemporary mainstream film representations transposed onto the trans body. This was particularly noticeable in the story arc of Rayon (Jared Leto) in *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean-Marc Vallee, USA, 2013)\(^{168}\) becoming even clearer through an extended examination of the screenplay (Borten and Wallack 2012) and exegesis of the text.

Prior to Jacobs’ study, there was a widespread belief that official censors had been responsible for cutting explicit and socially sensitive materials from films produced in Hollywood.\(^{169}\) Through analysis of a wide variety of screen materials, including notes between film producers and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America, Jacobs was able to demonstrate “how Hollywood’s internal censorship mechanisms produced negotiated representations of women at the level of image and narrative” (Bordwell and Carroll 1996, p. 29). Jacobs’ research, emerging from film censorship studies had far-reaching implications. This was the first research to demonstrate the way in which cinematic representations of female gender and sexuality were produced through a process of negotiation of socially sensitive themes and narratives and that film writers, directors and producers negotiated images with censors, in order to achieve film distribution. This alerted me to the way in which censorial bodies of film classifications (ratings) may exert an invisible background influence upon the direction of cinema. The overt role that classifications (ratings) systems exercise with respect to cinema will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Through empirical evidence, Jacobs demonstrated how film creative teams were complicit in negotiations and editing of films to ensure passing censorial processes (Jacobs 1997, pp. xi-

---

\(^{168}\) Three research articles have been developed from the researches of this thesis on *Dallas Buyers Club* addressing the ‘Fallen Woman’ and Rayon’s character, one article is presented as at Appendix H (Ford 2016e forthcoming).

\(^{169}\) With reference to the years of 1930–1940.
xii). The processes of negotiating with censors, led to films with representations, themes and narratives that would achieve censorial (classifications/ratings) approval and distribution. Yet such officially ‘approved’ images included the ‘Fallen Woman’, a genre of women who were socially proscribed ‘outsiders’; fallen from home, family and society, living on the street (with prostitution implied as the feared outcome of the ‘fall’) and often killed off before the film ended. Such narratives held a proscriptive moral imperative, reflecting societal conservatism and religious views that dominated the censorship boards. Yet, such images become hegemonic and influential once widely viewed and provide templates for subsequent films that likewise aim for classifications (ratings) approval and box office success. In contemporary cinema, the use of stereotypical and demeaning narratives of trans people within the mainstream (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H), continues to reflect hegemonic views and the gender and sexual biases of society. This is contrasted with the transliterate narratives of independent filmmakers of the Trans New Wave. Lea Jacobs’ research “has generated questions which treat industry, audience, narrative and style together” (Bordwell 1996, p. 29). Such an interdisciplinary approach is useful in this research in discussing mainstream films with trans themes, narratives and characters as demonstrated in Chapter 2, as background to establishing the socio–cultural significance of independent trans films and in discussion of the Trans New Wave as a new cinematic genre.

Whilst the time–frame and subject of Jacobs’ original doctoral thesis in 1930s–1940s cinema (Jacobs 1986) may seem far removed from contemporary film, the mainstream examples of films focused upon transgender themes, characters and narratives cited in Chapter 2 give pause and ongoing concern for the way in which Hollywood recycles stereotypical genre tropes. This leads to a consideration of the types of cinematic choices that filmmakers continue to make in order to achieve success, distribution and box office yields. Through this research project, the role that classifications (ratings) systems may have in the writing, direction, production and exhibition of independent trans films and queer film festivals will be examined for the first time in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, through the use of empirical evidence from filmmakers and film festivals.

---

170 The historical issues surrounding on–screen representations will be discussed in context to the classifications/ratings systems in America and Australia and the specific origins of the ratings system used by Hollywood in Chapter 5.
Throughout the research this thesis will utilise a range of industrial materials from within the screen industry—including official government classifications (ratings) systems and guideline documents from screen industry funding bodies; the International Movie Database (IMDB); materials sourced from within published screenplays and festival materials sourced from the Queer Fruits Film Festival archive (2009–2012).

Gender and queer theory and contemporary trans cinema approaches discussed within Chapter 2 are used to complement the interdisciplinary research approach within this thesis and to productively illuminate areas that may otherwise be overlooked (or misrepresented) by primary source materials.

This point is highlighted to qualify that use of a combined methodology does not eliminate use of theoretical positions in relation to textual analysis, but may be seen to complement theory. This provides a clear framework for incorporating industrial screen materials in cinematic research, all of which are valuable non–scholarly primary source materials from which to draw conclusions. Such non–scholarly and non–theoretical materials may be overlooked when other research methodologies are applied and yet, these are the very materials that comprise the daily working experiences of filmmakers and film exhibitors. Specific theoretical positions from gender and queer, theory and from trans studies scholarship are applied in exegesis of the case study texts.

This approach to researching the Trans New Wave film opens the way for a new form of theorising about screen texts and “the prospects for such a a post–theoretical renewal”

---

171 Ford (2016c forthcoming and Ford 2016e, forthcoming, Appendix H) on Dallas Buyers Club. The screenplay of Dallas Buyers Club by Borten and Wallack (2012) is used in exegesis of this text.

172 Ford (2016c forthcoming and 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). An example of this being evident within the screenplay (Borten and Wallack 2012) a primary source, screen industry material) for Dallas Buyers Club (Jean-Marc Vallee 2013), which consistently used the incorrect gender pronouns ‘he’ and ‘his’ for the transfemale character Rayon. If this screenplay was utilised by researchers without reference to gender and queer theory and contemporary trans studies, the transphobic practise within the screenplay may go uncommented upon, or the practise may not actually be recognised as transphobic. Transphobia such as this example, embedded into the screenplay, becomes the foundation for larger issues that are evident within the subsequent film. This leads to a consideration of the writers of Dallas Buyers Club and what might have occurred if the writers had been made aware of the issue of incorrect gendering of Rayon and the writing style within the screenplay—perhaps the larger problems within the representation of Rayon might also have been avoided, or at the least, addressed within Rayon’s story arc.
(Herbrechter and Callus 2004, p. 8). The use of screen industry materials within this research project does not aim to eliminate, or depoliticise, the gender–diverse representations and films of the Trans New Wave. There will be no attempt to create a metanarrative out of the varied representations in the textual selections under discussion, nor to try to assess texts as appearing to represent, or misrepresent, the experiences visual, auditory or affective of transpeople everywhere. This would simply be, not only impossible, but presumptive.\footnote{A caveat to this is noted: that where the use of genre/s to fit mainstream narrative conventions and audience expectations is highlighted (such as ‘the hero quest’, or ‘the fallen woman’ in \textit{Dallas Buyers Club}; or ‘the road movie’ in \textit{The Thing}), a more general set of interpretations about the overall intentions of the movie can be made following established genre conventions (Neale 2000; Stadler with McWilliam 2009).}

The focus upon independent films released for public exhibition within a two year production time–period (2011, 2012) and screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012, temporally constrains the range of representations. The case study texts are films written, directed and produced by \textit{filmmakers who are part of a generational movement in independent film} (identified as the Trans New Wave within this thesis), with film participants including interviewees, within an extended \textit{peer group shared by the filmmakers} (the trans/queer communities).

Whilst the general public may access these texts at public film festivals, or through online sites, the case study texts have emerged out of twenty first century trans culture and the trans communities internationally. The filmmakers employ similar and identifiable visual languages within texts. From this basis, the development of a canon of representations of gender and sexuality within Trans New Wave films is emerging (Ford 2015a, 2016b). This development recognises that certain forms of trans representations are becoming ‘canonical’ organically. This is through filmmakers visually referencing the recurring everyday languages of trans bodies that they encounter. This will be further discussed in the concluding Chapter 8, in the light of the discussion in Chapter 2. This point is noted, as Buck Angel has now established a specific visual language for transmale bodies that is being widely seen by audiences and that would not have been possible a decade ago and which is now being emulated and expanded by a new generation of filmmakers.\footnote{Of particular note in this is the transporn work of James Darling, one of the original participants in \textit{Sexing the Transman}.} Angel’s previous transgressive work within the hegemonic adult film industry certainly laid the foundation for this form of representation.
But no—one could have anticipated the transactivism that has emerged from the dissemination of his film *Sexing the Transman*.

### 3.3 Ethnography

The thesis is tightly focused upon three key examples of texts from within the Trans New Wave of Cinema (Taormino 2008; Ford 2014a; 2015b, Chapters 6 –7) and upon the representations of transmasculinity within independent transgender films. The selection of three case studies falls in line with Creswell (2013), who emphasises to “not include more than 4 or 5 case studies in a single study” (p. 157). The ethnographic nature of the research project is also clearly defined as being of “single culture–sharing groups, with numerous artifacts, interviews, and observations collected” (Creswell 2013, p. 157). This project is focused upon transmale screen texts that have emerged during the same time period within the transqueer community, including the most widely distributed and exhibited transmale text *Sexing the Transman*, by the leading filmmaker within the Trans New Wave, Buck Angel (2011). These texts represent a range of trans positions and affective experiences and require maturity and an adult perspective. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, an aim of *Sexing the Transman* is to demystify transmale sexuality and bodies. The film also deals with the sexual dysphoria that gender transitioning can raise, this will be discussed in Chapter 6, as an issue subtly handled in *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012) in the story of Dex. Other artifacts of this project include film festival programs and festival posters, film publicity stills and film posters, which represent the filmmaker’s visions of trans to the wider public and digital film files of all case study texts.

This research engages with ethnography as culturally immersive practises, with an emphasis upon the multiplicity of voices and perspectives, centred upon (in this project) trans filmmakers within gender–diverse communities and the queer and independent film festivals which publically screen the texts. Outcomes of the immersive process include the creation of new texts, including this thesis, publications and conference presentations. The relationship of the thesis to the trans communities and screen industry and the potential outcomes and benefits of the research form part of the ethical considerations upon which this project is based.
Ethnography as a methodology has been described as “that form of enquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about” (Denzin 1997, xi). Ethnographic methodology can also produce more subtle and ‘nuanced’ (Valocchi 2005) understandings of the cultural group under study. Within this project, all case study screen texts and filmmakers have been approached within the terms of reference established by the filmmakers, acknowledging the transitional nature of the subject matter and temporality of the cinematic representations produced (Ford 2016d forthcoming). This ethnographic approach to the Trans New Wave of Cinema has enabled a critically focussed understanding that “the present comes to appear most clearly and subtly as a creative temporal horizon” (Pandian 2011, p. 196). Through transliterate research practises the cinematic achievements of the Trans New Wave are contextualised within the rapidly changing socio-cultural circumstances of trans lives.

The fluidity of this research approach critically engages with and challenges some of the more traditional perspectives of expected outcomes of ethnographic methodologies, that “The ethnographer discovers multiple “truths” that operate in the social world—the stories people tell one another about the things that matter to them” (Denzin 1997, xv). Within this project, the ‘discovery of truths’ has not been an aim of the methodology, sited within postmodern methodological approaches to textual analysis of screen texts. Within this, ‘truths’ have a relative position as unintelligible and even irrelevant within a postmodern framework of ethnographic research and discussion of trans lives. There are a number of epistemological issues raised by Denzin’s statement, including the nature of ‘truth’ or ‘truths’ and how ethnography ‘discovers’ what is, on the one hand, purely philosophical and on the other, a subjective evaluation: “Things by themselves are neither true nor false; they just are or are not. What makes things true or false are our judgments and our propositions about them. Truth has to do with the assertions or claims that we make about things” (Uduigwomen 2005). This highlights the modulating role of the subjectivities and ideologies of the authoring ethnographer. Viewed from the perspective of the ‘postpostmodern’ world of Trans New Wave cinema, the sovereignty of ‘truth’ is seen as an outdated machine of hegemonic culture;

---

175 Postpostmodern, to adapt the words of Sandy Stone from “The “Empire” Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” (1993); also as referenced in *TSQ* (2014) inaugural issue “Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty–First Century Transgender Studies”, (Volume 1, Numbers 1–2).
of monodirectional, monotheistic and colonialist forms of oppression—that suppressed (and continue to suppress) the diversity of many voices and positionalities within society.

There is also a rejection of the dualistic positionality that ‘truth’ implies, as in ‘truth’/‘falsehood’; or ‘true’/‘false’; or ‘truth’/‘deception’. The reason for taking this methodological position is due to the continued assumptions and accusations that are made about transpeople, trans narratives and trans lives; about the ‘true’ gender/sexuality of the person, or that the gender/sexual presentation is ‘ambiguous’, ‘not true’, or ‘deceptive’ in some way. The view that a trans person is ‘deceptive’ about their ‘real identity’ has been presented in widely circulated screen texts, including use by the killers of Brandon Teena as one of the ‘reasons’ for his murder (Halberstam 2005, p. 48; Sloop 2000). Halberstam asks “what kind of truths about gender we demand from the lives of people who pass, cross–dress, or simply refuse normative gender categories” (2005, p.48) and also the “problems” with notions of a “transsexual desire for realness and...gender realness” (p. 48). Transgender representation in relation to “realness” and a “politics of the real” has already been the subject of a previous doctoral enquiry (Boucher 2010). Whilst not the focus of this current thesis, issues of the ‘real’ and ‘reality’ are encountered as an underlying issue with respect to not only methodological approaches, interpretation and textual analysis, but also of representations of Trans New Wave films. Case study text The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) explicitly questioning notions of ‘the real’ within the narrative as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

For these reasons, the ‘discovery of truths’ are not central to researching Trans New Wave points of view in this thesis and are also not relevant to the autoethnographic positionality of the researcher. When a research project is not seeking to discover some absolute ‘truth’ or ‘truths’, this enables the discovery of multiplicity of voices, stories and logics (Hawke & Offord 2011). Anand Pandian (2011) pointed to the “possibilities of ethnographic method as a means of confronting the temporal genesis and life of the cinematic image” (p. 196). Through fieldwork with filmmakers and film festivals, a transliterate reading of screen texts is enabled, 176

Disturbingly, this was recently presented in a television documentary “The Girl Who Became Three Boys” (ABC 2, Australia, 1 February, 2015), the story of Gemma Barker, who was not only called deceptive, but also convicted of sexually assaulting two younger women. The subject was further problematized at the end of the documentary when one of the young women, who is now dating a ‘real man’, said she knew her new boyfriend was ‘real’ because he had “boy bits” and she knew she could trust him, because he was a ‘real male’.

177 Utilising a range of cultural examples drawn from photography, film, feminist theory and legal cases.
positioning the texts within contemporary trans and queer culture and pointing to the transactivist potential of the texts outside the framework of festival exhibition. In such a rapidly changing field, Denzin reminds researchers that “The unstable relationship between the ethnographer, the cultural subject, the ethnographic text, and the cinematic and video representations cannot be avoided” (Denzin 1997, p. xiv). All research has been engaged in mindful that screen texts and research makes people’s lives public. Whilst film is a temporal medium, this research is imbued with an awareness that film records moments in a person’s life in an enduring way, that exceeds the temporality of the filmed moment. This thesis too, will become a public document in which trans lives are made visible. All of this work has been undertaken reflectively, aware that we live in a time in which societal attitudes and screen representations of the trans body are rapidly changing—in some places, whilst in others, oppression, violence, stigmatisation and murder are the daily experiences for trans people.

Through the experiences of presenting the texts to a public audience as a Festival Director and through the sustained consideration of the texts, I have developed recognition that the various texts which inform this research project (narrative short film, documentary, feature film) require “reflexivity and careful attention to positionality” and may “present unique challenges” within academic reception when texts under study are connected to, or examples from the porn genre (Burke 2014, p. 72). Whilst the case studies within this thesis are narrative short, documentary, or feature film censorial attitudes towards the cinematic depictions of nudity and sexuality may continue to influence institutional discussion and presentation of texts (Attwood & Smith 2013).

3.3.1 Qualitative Purposive Sampling—Fieldwork With Trans New Wave Filmmakers

Fieldwork and communication with the Trans New Wave filmmakers that are the case studies

---

178 It is to be noted that the films selected as case studies are narrative short, documentary, or feature film, none are classed as examples from the ‘X’, ‘XXX’ (USA) or ‘X 18+’ (Australia) rating (adult films/porn genre). However this note has been added due to earlier work of filmmaker Buck Angel and a number of texts inspired by his work, which may be referenced. Angel’s earlier porn genre films are significant to textual analysis of Sexing the Transman and the style of filmmaking which Angel employs. This will be discussed in detail in the chapter on his work. The scholarship of Alan McKee and the new work on Porn Studies (Feona Attwood & Clarissa Smith 2013) will provide a rigorous theoretical background informing any discussion of this genre.
within this thesis was established early in the research process. The fieldwork has been undertaken in two methodological forms: as online ethnography and in–person interviews with filmmakers, including via attendance at film festivals. At the outset, identical correspondence was sent to all filmmakers.\footnote{179} Case study filmmakers Buck Angel and the team of Monique Schafter and Ali Russell responded within a short time\footnote{180} supportive of the research project and accepting the invitations to participate in the research interviews. These filmmakers provided permissions for use of film materials from their production companies for reproduction and use within the research. Fieldwork contact was not able to be established with Rhys Ernst, director of the third case study film. Repeated attempts at establishing

\footnote{179} This is a sample letter that was used in initial contact with filmmakers in the online ethnographic research:

“Dear (filmmaker name),

Hello in 2014; I am getting back in touch with you (name of filmmaker) to let you know that since we were last in contact, I have begun a PhD in transgender films at Southern Cross University and I am currently getting in touch with filmmakers who have written, directed and produced films with trans narratives that were screened by QFFF to ask if you would be interested in providing feedback on the filmmaking process (a short questionnaire is attached) and also to seek permission to utilise the publicity stills for the film to illustrate any discussion of your film within the PhD research. I have Ethics Approval for the research project, so now embarking upon contacting filmmakers with further information about the thesis. I am keen to include your work (title of film) in the discussion on Trans New Wave of cinema filmmakers and with your permission, to place press photo/s of your films in the thesis.

Please find attached an information sheet on the PhD (a PDF or your files) and the filmmaker questionnaire and permissions forms as Word .doc for ease of filling in and emailing back.

Most of these documents are simply tick ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and some questions may not be relevant (where this is the case just put a line through). Digital signatures are also ok.

I am incredibly appreciative of your support for QFFF and hope that getting your work further known in academia can continue to promote your work and profile as filmmakers. If there is anything that you think needs to be added to the questionnaire, or changed, please feel free to add/change or suggest. I aim to research and write a thesis that everyone can be proud and which adds to the awareness of trans filmmakers and filmmaking internationally.

Please note, I will be changing to my personal email: seshta@bigpond.com for all future correspondence.”

(Author note: this last note about change of email was because the QFFF email that filmmakers were accustomed to being contacted on was utilised in this initial PhD research approach with the filmmakers, so that the email would be recognised and did not go as a ‘spam’ email into the trash).

\footnote{180} Early correspondence with Buck Angel was established on 30 January 2014, as I had been made aware (from friends within the local transqueer community) that Buck was coming to Australia to tour in February 2014. Buck responded the next day (31 January 2014), Buck was enthusiastic about the PhD and gave full support for the project from the outset and we arranged our first fieldwork meeting in Brisbane for 14 February 2014. Follow–up fieldwork with Buck took place in Silver Lake, Los Angeles in July 2015. An invitation was forwarded to Ali Russell and Monique Schafter with full details of the research project on 13 March 2014 and they subsequently provided full support for the PhD, including the filmmakers sending three emails of film stills (eleven stills in total) from the film and providing permission to use all eleven digital stills within the project and the filmmakers agreeing to participate on 20 March 2014.
contact with Ernst were made over a three year period. Due to this, I made an ethical decision based upon concerns articulated in Chapter 2, not to utilise any film publicity stills from *The Thing* (Ernst, USA, 2011) within the Chapter 6 discussion of the text. Establishing contact with key filmmakers early was a part of the ethical approach to research within the project, as I considered it essential that the filmmakers were all aware and supportive of the PhD research at all stages of the process. It is central to understanding the fieldwork interactions between these filmmakers and myself, as the researcher in this project, within the context of the regular communication previously established during my years as Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival. The relationship of Queer Fruits Film Festival and the 2012 festival programme to this thesis are detailed within the autoethnographic account of the festival as central to the methodology. Being unable to re-establish correspondence with Ernst was an unexpected outcome and I continued to anticipate that communication would be able to be established throughout the research processes. Seeking full and informed consent to utilise film media is a key aspect of the research project (Appendices E & F).

Through fieldwork with these early respondents, the Filmmaker Questionnaire sheet (Appendix C) was amended (19 December 2014) to include the explanatory comment “Did the classifications’ guidelines impact upon any creative decisions you made in regards to the film’s production? (note: classifications may also be called ‘film ratings’ in your country)”. This amendment acknowledged the differing terms in official and popular use for ‘classifications’ between countries, as also known as ‘ratings’ systems.

---

181 14 March 2014, 14 April 2014, 29 January 2015, 15 February 2016. In addition correspondence was forwarded via the filmmaker’s online website contact page for *The Thing* and separate correspondence sent via an online site connected to Rhys Ernst and Zachary Drucker. The online email was subsequently kindly returned via an unrelated academic email address (returnee name withheld for confidentiality), with a note that the email had been mistakenly received and the academic was unclear how the email had been received.

182 The non-response from Ernst in 2014 and 2015 could be due to any number of reasons, all of which are speculative; it may be contextualised due to his film work schedule and that 2014 and 2015 were very successful years for Ernst — being featured at the Whitney Biennale in New York in 2014. This was immediately followed by high-profile work on *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014) and then his own docu-television series *This Is Me* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015). There is the possibility that the emails are not being received at all (an example being the email from the online site that was returned; though none of the previous (2014) emails were returned), or that the filmmaker does not want to participate in an interview and has not replied. Whether renewed attempts to establish fieldwork contact with Ernst in 2016 will yield results is yet to be determined.
3.4 Case Study Selection—Rationale

The significance, relevance and necessity for the creation, production, distribution and exhibition of independent transgender films which are from “the viewpoint of transgendered people themselves” (Califia 2003, p. xl), films which are ‘by for and about us’ from within the gender–diverse communities, is the substrate upon which this thesis is formed. The case study texts were selected from the publically exhibited programme of films which I curated for the Queer Fruits Film Festival 2012 program, each of the films: Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012); The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011); Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) is a text focused upon transmale themes, narratives, lives and participants and was a major award–winner at the festival that year.

Mutual professional respect was established during these previous years of festival interactions, from the time the filmmaker/s first submitted their film for consideration for screening early in 2012, through to selection in May–July, screening in December and being awarded by the festival in late January 2013. Throughout this time I was in contact with the filmmakers continually. Interaction with the filmmakers after Queer Fruits Film Festival was further developed within the methodological framework of ethnography and autoethnography, within the specific guidelines and Ethics Approval of the PhD research project from late 2013–2016.

Due to the autoethnographic site of sourcing the case studies (Queer Fruits Film Festival) and my role in both the establishment of the festival and the subsequent selection and public screening of the texts, self–reflexivity in responding to the research processes and a high level of awareness in use of materials has been central to the use of an autoethnographic

---

183 Adapted from Loist (2012, p.166) in reference to films made ‘by, for and about’ GLBTIQ filmmakers and queer film festival programming strategies. I discuss the significance of this in relation to aspects of Queer Fruits Film Festival; in Ford (2013; 2014; and forthcoming).


185 Ethics Approved fieldwork: original Ethics Approval Number 2013: ECN-13-212; Ethics Approval number (renewed) 2014: ECN-14-202; (renewed) 2015: ECN-15-203
methodology. This approach has been called “reflexive ethnography” (Gaitán 2000, p. 3), a form of research and writing which has “strong intentions to generate change”.

Autoethnography has been called “authoring of self into a research text” which “blurs the boundaries between self and other, subject and object” (Maguire 2006, p. 1) and which can lead to varying, or frustrating and even irritating responses to how researchers do and write autoethnography (Gaitán 2000). Part of this is because the researcher holds control over what is revealed and what is not disclosed and the context in which the disclosure takes place. Unlike public archives and publications that may be easily accessed, a self–reflexive account draws upon the researcher–author’s own lived experiences. This methodology necessitates the use of personal accounts (Maguire 2006). It has also been called “a form of self–narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed–Danahay 1997, p. 9), connecting the self to larger social, cultural and historical processes. Denzin reminds that “Theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable material practises...that locate the social inside the text” (1997, xii). Autoethnography ultimately locates the self inside not only the social world, but inside the text that results from that critical engagement. John Butler (2003) validates how the autoethnographic text arises “my lived experience as an activist was related to my scholarly interest in public argument in ways worth exploring” (p. 280).

Within this research project, the self–narrative (as Festival Director) is enhanced and supported by the publically accessible Queer Fruits Film Festival archived materials available at <www.queerfruitsfilmfestival.org>. This includes all festival programs (2009–2012) and films awarded; also people involved in the festival, from filmmakers to festival team, with a separate section which includes past sponsors and funding bodies. Queer Fruits Film Festival as a fieldwork site was introduced earlier in this chapter, in line with the research conducted on international independent and queer film festivals that screened Sexing the Transman between 2011–2013 (Appendix G). The case study films are all publically available texts, via
filmakers’ online sites and film festival screenings.\textsuperscript{186}

The self–reflexive nature of Trans New Wave filmmaking is recognisable, particularly in documentaries. Using an autoethnographic methodology for part of this research project fits within contemporary trans studies and trans cinema studies, which is a postmodern, or postpostmodern field of enquiry.\textsuperscript{187} This provides the research rationale and highlights that “The introduction of the first person in research texts is a postmodern response to a crisis of representation and current angst about identity—a crisis of representation with roots in epistemology, ethics and ontology” (Maguire 2006, p.1; citing Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; Watson, 2005). Significantly Denzin (1997) states “there is a need for a reflexive form of writing, that turns ethnographic and theoretical texts back “onto each other” ” (1997, p. xii). This informs the autoethnographic project.

3.4.1 Case Study Filmmakers

Throughout the thesis the case study respondents are not de–identified; this is in line with the public nature of the screen texts which are produced and the permission to use directors’ and producers’ names and responses in the research project and related publications, as clearly marked on filmmaker Consent Forms (Appendix D) by a ‘Yes’ response.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{186} To facilitate research discussions and publication, Trans Boys Co–Directors Ali Russell and Monique Schafer kindly made the following online Vimeo links to full version of the films in Trans Boys public on 20 March 2015:

\textit{Trans Boys: Xavier} <https://vimeo.com/44435430>
\textit{Trans Boys: Dex} <https://vimeo.com/44432450>
\textit{Trans Boys: Danny} <https://vimeo.com/44433724>

This followed fieldwork correspondence between myself and the filmmakers (15 –19 March 2015) regarding an entry I was writing on the documentary (Ford forthcoming) in B. K. Bergen–Aurand and A. Grossman (eds.) The Encyclopedia of Queer Cinema.

\textit{Sexing the Transman} (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) is available as a direct digital download from the filmmaker at <http://sexingthetransman.com/buy-now/>. \textit{The Thing} (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) had previously premiered at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival (USA).


\textsuperscript{188} Consent Form for Participants (extract):

“I understand that (for filmmaker/festival director participants):

\begin{itemize}
\item others may be able to identify me through the information I provide \textbf{Yes}
\item my name/film; my name/film festival affiliation may be disclosed or published \textbf{Yes}.
\end{itemize}
The self-representational and autoethnographic nature of Trans New Wave screen texts defines the terms of engaging with the materials. Films which are self-identified by the filmmakers as trans films, acknowledges the self-reflexive form of filmmaking. This is evident particularly in Sexing the Transman, where Buck Angel is director, producer and editor of the film, as well as being audible from an off-screen position as the interviewer and then appearing on-screen, as one of the film participant/subjects. It is essential to the methodology of this research to understand that “Those we study have their own understandings of how they want to be represented” (Denzin 1997, p. xiii). Jack Halberstam emphasises that trans people “must be read and remembered according to the narratives they meticulously circulated about themselves” (2005, p. 48). Whilst this comment was made in regards to the lives of Brandon Teena and Billy Tipton, it is of relevance to reading the lives and creative works of contemporary transpeople. This form of film/filmmaker self-identification respects individual agency in gender identification as extending to the creative works an individual produces.

3.4.2 Non-Case Study Filmmakers

Throughout the thesis non-case study filmmakers will be referred to in two specific ways, as respondents to Ethics’ approved filmmaker questionnaires, de-identified to provide a group response rate and as identified Trans New Wave filmmakers responding to specific questions about their publically available films (or films in-production). Trans New Wave and queer filmmakers who have given consent for their names to be used within the research and related publications on the Consent Form (Appendix D), will have their individual responses identified as relevant to support sections of the thesis discussion.

The fieldwork included Trans New Wave filmmakers and also filmmakers who have written, directed, or produced screen texts with trans and/or gender-diverse characters, themes, or narratives, within films identified as queer and/or not solely identified as trans films. The rationale for selection of the non-case study texts followed the autoethnographic and ethnographic methodologies outlined throughout this chapter, with Queer Fruits Film Festival as the initial resource, utilising the Queer Fruits Film Festival archival database (2009–2012)
and the Queer Fruits Film Festival ‘Without a Box’ online submission system back catalogue as a starting place for filmmaker contacts.\textsuperscript{189} This was supported by online film festival research and in–person attendance at film festivals.

3.5 Qualitative Purposive Sampling—Fieldwork with Independent and Queer Film Festival Directors

The fieldwork with film festivals has been undertaken in three methodological forms: as online ethnography; autoethnography and in–person attendance at international film festivals.

As an initial fieldwork strategy, all twenty–eight independent and queer film festivals around the world that had publically screened the case study text \textit{Sexing the Transman} between 2011 and 2013\textsuperscript{190} were contacted on 8 September 2014 with an identical invitation to participate in the research project. This initial attempt at establishing virtual fieldwork communication was timed to try and avoid peak festival seasons\textsuperscript{191} when film festivals would be preoccupied with programming decisions, or day–to–day running of the festival. The research materials that were forwarded in this email included a short introductory statement which contextualised

\textsuperscript{189} Without a Box <https://www.withoutabox.com/>. Queer Fruits Film Festival held full Partner Festival status on Without a Box, with festival submission via online login, viewed 03 March 2016, <withoutabox.com/login/7806>.

\textsuperscript{190} Appendix G: \textit{Sexing the Transman} Festival Screenings 2013–2014 (Angel 2014a). Queer Fruits Film Festival is one of these twenty–eight festivals.

\textsuperscript{191} Prior to sending out the invitations, research was undertaken on each of the festival’s websites to ascertain when the festival was due to be held.
why the festival was being approached with three attachments: “Information Sheet for Participants” (Appendix B); “Interview Schedule for Informal and Semi–Structured Interviews & Focus Groups—Indicative Questions to Film Festival Directors” (Appendix C) and the “Consent Form for Participants” (Appendix D).

Additional fieldwork was undertaken in person at the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival on November 7–9, with follow–up email questions which arose from attending the festival on United States’ classifications (ratings) processes, programming decisions and audience demographics, answered by the Festival Director. Autoethnographic material, deriving from Queer Fruits Film Festival, is presented as a separate account.

An initial round of responses indicated that some festivals were still busy, either in pre–or post–festival production and that they would be happy to respond at a later time. After a low rate of finalised responses by the end of 2014 (7.14%, rounded to 7%); I commenced 2015 with a courtesy email, resending the initial questionnaire to all festivals on 6 January 2014.

192 This is a sample letter that was used in initial contact with film festivals in the online ethnographic research:

"Dear ________Festival Director, Executive Director, or Program Curator,

I am writing to you as your festival screened the landmark documentary Sexing the Transman (Director Buck Angel) in 2013 as did our festival Queer Fruits Film Festival (Australia) in 2012. Since then, I have commenced a PhD researching transgender representation in films at Southern Cross University (Australia), with Sexing the Transman as one of the major case study films in my PhD. I met Buck Angel earlier this year during his tour to Australia and have his support for the PhD research. I am currently approaching all the film festivals internationally that screened the documentary and inviting Festival Directors, Executive Directors and Programming Curators to provide feedback on their festival's experience of screening the documentary in particular, and also on programming transgender films in general, within your festival.

Please find attached a short list of questions (a Word .doc document) that can be easily filled out and returned, a consent form (to enable your answers to be referred to in the PhD thesis) that can be digitally signed and a project information sheet for your files.

I would be greatly appreciative of your participation in this research project and will be able to happy to provide a link to your festival within the thesis and any information on your program. The feedback you provide can be included either identified to you (by name/title at the festival), or anonymously (feedback de-identified).

I appreciate that all film festivals are busy and thank you for considering participating, as this is the first time that a wide range of Festival Directors/Programmers will have been able to provide feedback on screening transgender films.

Please excuse this email, if you do not wish to provide feedback, or you are not the intended recipient.”

193 Email respondent, 23 December 2014 and 27 January 2015.

194 Except for Melbourne Queer Film Festival, which had quickly responded and finalised the questionnaire in 2014.
This second round of emails began to immediately yield results, with four more festivals (14.29%, rounded to 14%) finalising questionnaires within twenty–four hours. An additional series of communications took place between 8–23 January 2014 with the Los Angeles Transgender Film Festival, with the Festival Founder conveying the news that the festival was no longer running after five years of screenings. As of 16 February 2015 seven festivals had completed the interview/questionnaire process (25% response rate), with five festivals sending emails to indicate that questionnaires would be forwarded shortly (17.85% rounded to 18% partial response rate). One festival corresponded that the event was no longer held (3.5%). Additionally, incomplete correspondence was received from two festivals (7%); one Festival Director emailed that the festival was awaiting responses to the questionnaire from team stakeholders, whilst a series of emails with another festival had indicated willingness to participate, but subsequently no replies were received after repeated attempts at communication.

Of the twenty–eight film festivals contacted, fifteen festivals responded (53.5%), with thirteen festivals (46.5%) not responding to either round of communications. On average four emails were exchanged to finalise the questionnaires (initial invitation, initial response from the festival, follow–up courtesy email sent to each festival, finalised questionnaire forwarded from the festival.

The use of online/e–research as an innovative tool to facilitate qualitative research and virtual fieldwork has a range of scholarly precedents (Wiles 2011; James and Busher 2006; James 2007) and is also known as ‘online ethnography’ (Berg 2008; Daniel 2011; Skågeby 2011). Whilst this term was originally conceived and used in relation to the study of virtual communities and online social networking (Daniel 2011), the term can be productively utilised to more widely encompass the study of any community that has an active presence online and that may be accessed virtually. Film festivals are sites that are accustomed to working in digital virtual spaces and real–time screen worlds. To communicate effectively to filmmakers across the globe, all film festivals are accustomed to interacting in the online

195 It is noted that the LA Transgender Film Festival screening on 13 June 2014 during Trans Pride LA was interrupted by a bomb threat during the session, that led to an evacuation of 200 people from the Renberg Theatre. It is speculative whether this affected the organiser’s decisions not to run the Festival in 2015. This incident was not discussed during correspondence with the Festival Founder. viewed 28 January 2015, <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/06/16/us-trans-pride-la-evacuated-due-to-bomb-threat/>.
screen world on a daily basis. The use of virtual festival promotion/filmmaker networking and festival film submission textual access sites such as Without a Box 196 are a mainstay of contemporary film festival practise.

Utilising online resources for virtual fieldwork with independent and queer film festivals is a methodology that presented a practical and financially viable strategy within the constraints of time and PhD budget to enable wide research—contacting festivals and interviewing festival directors across the world, from Berlin to Copenhagen; from Melbourne, to Tel Aviv. The financial and logistical implausibility of being able to gather such a cross-section of international film festival directors, working in independent and queer film festivals together in-person for a formal focus group in one room, without the use of online fieldwork, is apparent. A benefit of utilising email as a qualitative research tool has been noted as “allowing researchers to hold asynchronous conversations with participants, especially when they are distant from the researcher” (James and Busher 2006, Abstract). This means that the responses of participants are made in isolation to each other at different times and hence, do not affect other respondents, as could occur during a formal, or informal focus group discussion. The festival responses will be discussed further in Chapter 5 and present a unique insight into the relationship between film selection processes, issues of film classifications in each country, audiences and the programming and reception of independent trans films in specific times and places.

---

196 Without a Box is an online festival film submission portal connecting independent filmmakers and film festivals. It is widely utilised internationally by the film festival circuit. Without a Box enabled Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012) to receive film submissions from thirty-six countries around the world, an achievement that would have been impossible without such an online presence for an independent regional film festival (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012).
CHAPTER 4: TRANSLITERACY

4.1 Introduction

In thinking through the interrelationship between the contemporary trans communities and the films that are currently being written, directed and produced by filmmakers of the Trans New Wave, what emerges are the diversity of voices, narratives and affective bodily experiences of trans people being represented in the twenty first century. The image of the ‘creative horizon’ (Pandian 2011) is potent as a point of reference for cinema that comes into view at times of cultural change. Most clear when illumination is in motion (akin to the sun rising and setting), the horizon also has a vanishing point. This highlights the connection between the ‘creative horizon’ becoming visible and cultural activity. The ‘sudden’ burst of cinematic creativity, a characteristic of all New Waves, is now being experienced through the lens of independent trans films. This has coincided with the increasing visibility of people transitioning.¹⁹⁷ This includes the active recognition of bodies, sexualities and relational modes; of experiencing transformation, on an individual and collective level as a gender–diverse community. This time of trans cinema is precious, perhaps transient, following a pattern of earlier cinematic Waves as highlighted in Chapter 1. The narratives and representations of the Trans New Wave will continue to change, as trans lives continue to change and develop.

Transliteracy is a developing approach to reading transgender films from within this research project.¹⁹⁸ This approach has been necessitated by an awareness that literacy into transgender lives/experiences can be usefully mediated by screen texts; that film is reflexive and can develop literacy about a community, enabled by the filmmakers having access to digital temporal spaces to self-represent; self–disclose; to create screen texts of the transgender

³⁹⁷ This does not diminish the significance of the many people who choose to transition privately.

¹⁹⁸ Chapter 4, Sections 4.1 – 4.3.3 is published, with slight variations to this chapter (Ford 2014a, 2015a, 2016b). Section 4.1– 4.2 of the thesis is published (Ford 2014a), with slight variations to this chapter. Transliteracy as an original approach to reading trans cinema was originally presented as a symposium paper: Ford, A. (2014a). “Transliteracy and the New Wave of Gender–Diverse Cinema”, paper presented at Cultural Studies and the New Uses of Literacy, Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (CSAA) Intermezzo Symposium, at the University of NSW, Kensington, Australia, April 4–5, 2014. This paper was subsequently published in Fusion Journal.
world(s) according to their own needs and transforming languages and that this requires a new understanding and way of interacting with the texts (Ford 2014a). This accords with the idea that “literacy is best understood as a set of social practises; these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts” (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 9, italics added).

Scholarly usage of the concept and applications of transliteracy are not new, ranging from translating languages across historical and linguistic cultures, to a contemporary use defined as “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks” (Thomas et al., 2007). Transliteracy was introduced within Chapter 2. This thesis is the first time that transliteracy has been used as a theoretical approach to reading trans films and for establishing the Trans New Wave as a distinct cinematic genre. In the course of this research, transliteracy has been developed in specific ways. It is used as a nuanced term, an expression embodying cultural interactivity, embedded within queer theoretical frameworks and trans identity and community structures. The literacy that transliteracy evokes is not static, but dynamic. It is based upon reciprocal, literate and ongoing interactions between trans community–textual production, researcher exegesis, filmmakers and film festivals. Scholarly research publications and film festivals are all public sites that connect texts and audiences. The foundation of transliteracy is ethnographic methodology and autoethnography, arising from the empirical perspectives of curating independent trans films and interacting with filmmakers and texts from the point of view of a genderqueer festival director.

Developing this new approach acknowledges that “those who write culture also write theory” (Denzin 1997, p. xii); that to fully engage with and write textual exegesis of Trans New Wave films, is also to create (through writing) new artifacts of trans culture. This recognition integrates the intellectual mechanism of scholarship (theoretical engagement) and positions theory within culture and the cinematic spaces of Trans New Wave films. Transliteracy also provides one way of answering the question posed at the outset of this thesis of “how we get there” (Dodd 1992), that is, to a place of new “cultural judgements” about film that exists beyond binary oppositions of ‘culture/commerce, high/low, popular/elite’.
Independent transgender films have access to and utilise a specific framework of language that may include metaphor and allusion; the post–modern, pre–and/or post/and or non–surgical body and markers of transition readable within the queer and transgender communities. These are languages which encode a vital transliteracy, inviting a new way of engaging with texts. The concept of transliteracy is different than ‘media literacy’, because it requires literacy across a range of media and cultural settings and the ability to think across these boundaries.

These are all languages that also demand of the viewer a literacy that mainstream films may not require and which fall outside the formal reading of screen texts. While film literacy utilises theoretical analyses of narrative structure, thematic and technical aspects, to decode and enhance understanding of the overall aspects and meaning of the film, formal textual analyses from within a place of film literacy may still overlook (or misinterpret) gender–diverse texts if separated from the cultural situation(s) of production. As an example, the work of Buck Angel (2011) and the documentary Sexing the Transman could be misinterpreted from either the film’s title or Angel’s previous work if the text was not viewed in full, or contextualised to the situations of cultural production within the trans and queer communities. A transliterate engagement with the text incorporates knowledge derived within the text and from fieldwork with the filmmaker, that the participant–involvement in this text is aimed at demystifying transmale sexualities for transmen, their friends, partners and allies. This demonstrates the transliteracy into gender–diverse lives that can emerge from reading a text in context to the cultural situation of production (Ford 2014a).

A potent example of the misinterpretation of contemporary trans lives in twenty first century screen culture was provided in Chapter 2 in regards to the film Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013). This canonically–awarded screen text demonstrates what happens when cinema is separated from the community represented. The trans community internationally protested the film’s stereotypical, trope–driven narrative about Rayon (Jared Leto) depicted as a transwoman, yet issues with the film began within the screenplay (Borten and Wallack 2012), which utilised incorrect gender pronouns for Rayon throughout (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). If the screenwriters, director, or producers were literate in trans culture, such misgendering would have been recognised as transphobic and culturally inappropriate in the twenty first century. This form of cultural temporal displacement, with a
screen narrative and characterisations based in one time and audiences in another time period are the basis for many successful films, including historical dramas and science fiction. In *Dallas Buyers Club*, the representation of yet another trans person as ‘fallen’ (Ford 2016e *forthcoming*, Appendix H), though set in 1985, presented a increasingly problematic story arc in a time when gender-diverse people are present in every area of society and publically recognised for their achievements.\(^{199}\)

*Transliteracy* invites the reader to engage with unknown texts through a range of approaches, including an awareness of the social and cultural settings in which the texts were produced and through thematic narratives within the texts that may be familiar. This approach acknowledges that “Literacies are situated” and “all literate activity is indicative of broader social practises” (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000, p.1). The films and filmmakers cited within this thesis as case studies and the filmmakers of the Trans New Wave are literate in trans culture. In reading these films transliterately, a more meaningful sense of the film is conveyed. This approach is also advocated within ‘new literacy studies’, where ‘literacy is seen as a social practise’ (Gee 1996; Street 1995; Barton 1994).

In this, *films are the texts* which form the basis and starting point for analysis, examining the connection between the text(s) and practises. The texts are located in “time, space and discourse” (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000, Introduction); particularly the concept that there is a ‘queer time and place’ (Halberstam 2005) for cultural creation and that we all live in a “textually mediated social world” (Barton 2001, p. 93).

Films are produced as public texts seeking an audience; whether this be through screening at a film festival, theatrical release, broadcast on television, or direct access via online video on demand (VOD) services, or social media. Publication of a film text provokes engagement with the subject, inviting reading and interpretation, requiring new uses of literacy. In some examples, texts may also transform the viewer. The audience is always present in the production of a text and is not a passive observer. The role that film representations may have in the lives of transgender people and in the responses from paying audiences as public

---

\(^{199}\) A long list of examples could be presented here, with high-profile examples including film directors Lilly Wachowski and Lana Wachowski, actress Laverne Cox, legal expert Professor Stephen Whittle (the recipient of an OBE).
spectators and consumers of the texts will be considered, with a reflection upon the ethical positioning of texts in relation to audiences (Stadler 2008).

It is for these reasons that the way in which the transgender subject is represented in both mainstream and independent films requires critical reflection. Hakeem “advocates the need to ‘work towards bringing about shifts in our societal foundation matrix’” (2010, p. 150), in relation to trans people. Film has the power to play a unique role in bringing about this shift and, in particular, independent film leads the way in innovation. Transgender films are significant cultural records; it has been argued “trans–produced narratives are one of three revolutionary sites creating discourse interruptus and discourse eruption (‘the moment where new discourses and actions break through conventional paradigms of thinking and doing, thereby creating change’)” (Mackenzie 1999, p. 196). As agents of social change, trans films are sites which deserve careful, respectful and rigorous investigation.

4.2 The Importance of Transliteracy—Thinking Across Boundaries

In reading these films, a new approach to cinematic exegesis is proposed, one that is socially and culturally immersive as discussed within Chapter 3, embedded within the communities producing the cinematic representations (screen and trans queer cultures) and hence cognizant and literate in respect to the cinematic and cultural languages employed.

The use of transliteracy as an innovative theoretical approach to reading films of the Trans New Wave was developed and initially presented during the research processes 200 and subsequently published in a journal article (Ford 2014a).201 This article was first publication of use of the term transliteracy in relation to reading gender–diverse trans films. In this Chapter, transliteracy will continue to be developed, with specific reference to recognition of


an emerging canon of representations exemplified by the case study films and other recent films of the Trans New Wave.

4.3 Developing a New Canon of Cinematic Representations of Gender Diversity and Sexuality

The scholarly work of developing a canon of representations of gender–diversity and sexualities is at the borderlands of interdisciplinary fields, concerned as it is with the human experiences of trans gender and sexuality, positioned within specific contemporary cultural settings. The research is positioned within the emerging international field of trans cinema studies and transqueer methodologies (Leung 2014a; Siebler 2012) and is interdisciplinary, combining cultural studies and humanities approaches. This work begins with the recognition that there are canonical films and representations within independent trans cinema and the cinematic and theoretical relevancy of proposing such a canon at this point in the development of trans cinema.

In his influential article, writer and director Paul Schrader (2006) highlighted that “It's part and parcel of the notion of a film canon that it not only be established but also defended” p. 40). By proposing and defending the development of a canon of representations within the Trans New Wave, exclusionary notions of what constitutes a canon are productively undermined and replaced with a postmodernist reading of cultural texts, that are as influential to their contemporary audiences, as the ‘canonical films’ of high art cinema were in previous decades. Transliteracy is used as an innovative theoretical approach to reading film representations, that will contribute to literate reading of texts that emerge from and are embedded within queer and transgender social structures.

---

This section (4.3–4.3.3) of the thesis is published, with slight variations to this chapter (Ford 2015a, 2016b). An earlier version of this section (4.3 – 4.3.3) was originally presented as an international conference paper: Ford, A. (2015a). “Transliteracy and the Trans New Wave—Developing a New Canon of Cinematic Representations of Gender Diversity and Sexuality”, The Thirteenth International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities: From Digital Humanities to a Humanities of the Digital, 17–19 June 2015, University of British Columbia, Vancouver Campus, Vancouver, Canada. The subsequent journal article was published (with slight variations to this chapter) (Ford 2016b).
The texts that are the case studies under consideration within this thesis all screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival in Australia in 2012 as we saw in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (Figure 4.1). The discussion of the case study texts throughout this thesis will be supported by Trans New Wave films that have recently screened at independent queer and transgender film festivals internationally, to illustrate specific aspects of the developing canon.

Positioning independent films of the Trans New Wave with the development of a cinematic canon of representations of gender–diversity and sexuality in the twenty first century, presents new ways of looking at both the development of a film canon and also the role and place of independent cinema within society. A canon presents qualitative judgements about film, that are recognisable within the screen industry and by audiences. A canon presents a way of

203 Documentaries Trans Boys directed by Ali Russell and Monique Schafter (2012) to be discussed in Chapter 6 and Sexing the Transman directed by Buck Angel (2011) the focus of Chapter 7; and narrative short film The Thing directed by Rhys Ernst (2011) also to be discussed in Chapter 6.
valorising filmmakers and texts. Independent filmmakers and films, as low-budget, small release productions are frequently excluded from the culture-making awards that publically canonise texts. Developing a canon of gender-diverse films is distinctly different in intention than writing a cinematic history, or presenting the legacy of filmmakers during, or after their lives. There is a complexity to this work, as a film canon centralises aesthetic considerations and makes value judgements that are by their very nature hierarchical and which may seem out of character with the nature and contexts of a cinema which is independent, born from subcultural terrains. This is work is subversive, postmodern, eschewing the hegemonic conditions for awards, whilst applying subcultural aesthetic judgements and transliterate readings of texts. Filmmaker Paul Schrader (2006) rhetorically asked:

What is a canon? It is, by definition, based on criteria that transcend taste, personal and popular....Not only is there no agreement about what a canon should include, there’s no agreement about whether there should be canons at all. Or, if there is agreement, it is this: canons are bad—elitist, sexist, racist, outmoded, and politically incorrect (pp. 34–35).

Developing the use of the term ‘canon’ in respect to Trans New Wave films involves critical engagement with these definitions from cultural studies and queer theoretical perspectives. While specific canonical films of high art cinema may have been examples demonstrating the above positions (‘elitism’, ‘sexism’, ‘racism’), or may be considered as an expression of an ‘outmoded’ form of cinematic appreciation and criteria, there is nothing inherently within the concept of a canon that necessitates any of these positions, as any film can potentially be included. There is a link between previous cinematic canons and ‘high culture’ (Schrader 2006, p. 34), particularly ‘high art’. It is important to note that so-called ‘low art’ and subcultural forms, were considered non–canonical by those who created the canon/s. In regards to forms of art not considered ‘high art/culture’, Schrader remarked that “Culture in this case really means subculture, and, in studying these subcultural art works, the critic examines their relationship to the larger culture rather than their comparative value” (Schrader 2006, p. 40). There is no rationale for this position in the twenty first century except elitism. Texts produced from within subcultural domains may be studied and compared with other texts and also for the meaning of these texts within the culture that created the texts and to wider culture. These are not mutually exclusive activities. These interlocked activities
(studying the texts and studying the cultures the texts were produced within) are the basis of a transliterate reading of Trans New Wave films. In attempting to lock the use of canon to ‘high art/culture’, Schrader contradicts his previous comments about there being “no agreement about what a canon should include” (2006, pp. 34–35). This leaves the doors wide open for the inclusion of any artistic work or text that can be appreciated in a contemporary twenty first century canon.

That a canon emerges from culture immediately links canon formation to a definition that is based around the subjective tastes of specific people (be they cultural critics/theorists, scholars, audiences), as ultimately it is the people, the spectators and consumers of artistic works and films who make the judgement of the aesthetic quality of any text. A canon selectively ranks those works that are the most influential and which have qualities which will become reference points in later works. What may be influential within one group may be insignificant to another. This leads to considerations of the cultural power of any canon, in what is included and what is excluded: “Any time a qualitative adjective is used (“better,” “more integral,” “purer”), a canon is implied. If art objects are to be compared qualitatively they can be ranked; if they can be ranked, there must be a canon” (Schrader 2006, p. 37).

Whilst there is an historical use of such terms in respect to ‘high’ culture, qualitative values may equally be applied to texts designated as ‘low’ culture. Independent cinema may be produced for lower budgets and from so–called ‘low culture’ narratives and still end up being recognised and awarded at the highest levels of cinema.

There are cinematic precedents for canonical ranking of independent films centred upon trans narratives and characters in the films Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) and Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013), both examples of independent films emerging from ‘low culture’ perspectives and narratives, which subsequently were recognised as the outstanding films of their respective years (a qualitative, canonical ranking) and awarded Academy Awards—which may be considered as the pre–eminent recognition and canonisation for any film.\(^\text{204}\)

\(^\text{204}\) Both films were originally produced independently and subsequently were circulated as mainstream texts with major distribution and increased theatrical releases (and box office) after being canonically recognised with Academy Awards.
In terms of the Trans New Wave filmmakers which are the focus of this research, a qualitative ranking of ‘the most influential’ films/filmmakers can start from the point at which this New Wave of cinema emerged, which was in 2008, in the USA, with the filmmaker Buck Angel, who was singled out as the most influential of this emerging generation of independent filmmakers (Taormino 2008). This validates and underpins the rationale for this current research, that: “Canons exist because they serve a function; they are needed. And the need increases with each new wave of films” (Schrader 2006, p. 35, Italics added). To evade outmoded forms of elitism, both ‘high’ and ‘low’ are eliminated as terms of reference in regards to the Trans New Wave. This also accords with Dodd (1992), who foresaw that the only way to get to new cultural judgements about film was to move beyond these binaries.

Buck Angel commenced his film career as the first transmale performer in adult movies and in 2007 won the Adult Video News (AVN) Transsexual Performer of the Year award. This earlier adult film work led to Buck wanting to make a documentary. In 2011, he directed, produced and edited his first film, the landmark documentary Sexing the Transman, which is now the most widely publically screened text on transmale sexuality. The documentary contextualises the representations of transmale sexuality, through film strategies of ‘showing and telling’: by short demonstrative scenes intercut between interviews with the seventeen transmale and gender–diverse participants (Buck Angel and sixteen interview/participants). The significance of Angel’s work with this text as a focal point of education on transmale sexuality and transactivism will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Buck successfully toured the film to twenty–eight independent and queer film festivals around the world on initial release of the documentary in 2011, continuing to tour the film, accompanied by forums and presentations since then. In 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival was one of only two film festivals in Australia that screened the documentary upon initial release. The screening at Queer Fruits Film Festival led to the film being awarded the 2012


206 Fieldwork interview with Buck Angel during the Brisbane leg of his Australian tour, 14 February 2014.

207 There were more than seventeen participants in the overall project; transmen that Buck interviewed that were not included in the final edit of the released documentary are referred to later in this chapter.

Jury Prize, which was the first award to recognise the significance of *Sexing the Transman*.\(^{209}\)

A Jury Prize is a canonical award and illustrates one of the rationales of developing a canon within the Trans New Wave. Buck has continued to be at the forefront of ground-breaking independent trans films, with a series of films following this first documentary.\(^{210}\) Another criteria for ranking *Sexing the Transman* as the most influential text and valid starting point for developing this canon, are the filmmakers and filmmaking styles that have emerged from within this documentary. This includes filmmaker James Darling, one of the interview participants in *Sexing the Transman*, who now produces films centred upon transmale sexuality, but without the narrative documentary focus of Buck’s earlier work.

A new filmmaking style and genre has emerged from Buck’s directorial vision and combined use of documentary narrative and explicit imagery, forming a new genre called ‘docu-porn’ (Angel 2008–2009)\(^{211}\) subsequently recognised by scholars (Steinbock 2011; Ford 2014a, 2016b).\(^{212}\) Buck also uses the term docu–porn to describe his films on his website. This is of especial relevance to the discussion of the Trans New Wave and of developing a new canon of trans representations in cinema. David Bordwell (1997) emphasised the significance of film style: “Style is, minimally, the texture of the film’s images and sounds, the result of the choices made by the filmmaker(s) in particular historical circumstances” (p. 4, italics added).

The filmmakers of the Trans New Wave are writing, directing and producing films in direct response to the ‘particular historical circumstances’ of their lives and experiences as gender-diverse people living and working in the twenty first century. The particularity of individual experiences of gender-diversity and sexualities are acknowledged, as are the obstacles, disadvantage and prejudices that many transfolk experience in their everyday lives. Despite the social and cultural hurdles to representation and inclusion, there are also a universality of


\(^{211}\) Fieldwork with Buck Angel at Silverlake, Los Angeles on 11 July 2015, with follow-up online ethnography on 25–27 July 2015.

\(^{212}\) Later also called docoporn and ‘pornumentary’ (Steinbock 2013) to distinguish the films from hegemonic adult films. The term to ‘pornify’ (or, ‘pornifying’) (Leung 2014a) is also used to signify the immersive process of inclusion of relevant texts with sexually explicit content, within scholarly research.
recognisable trans experiences being cinematically recorded, especially by urban trans filmmakers. This has led to the emergence of key films and what is a developing ‘canon’ of trans representation. This has also simultaneously led to films that are ‘anti-canonical’ in representation as a political strategy.

At the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival the programs showcased trans diversity and intersectionality within the trans community, screening films which depicted the representation of gender-diverse lives in the broadest, inclusive ways. Within the program, there were films that were examples of an emerging canon of representations and also anti-canonical representations. Significantly, it is Trans New Wave filmmakers who are acknowledging that there are canons emerging from within contemporary trans cinema, including a “canon of documenting gender transformation” and also of documenting “the linear racial focus” (Against the Grain (dir. Seyi Adebanjo & Betty Yu 2014) San Francisco Transgender Film Festival 2014, program).

4.3.1 Gender Transformation

The gender–transformative aspect of the developing canon includes texts which depict performativity (Butler 1990, pp. 140–141; Prosser 2006, p. 261) and stages of physical, emotional and social transitioning. An example is in the Australian documentary Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter 2012) to be discussed in Chapter 6, in the story of Xavier, which follows through as Xavier prepares for, undergoes and heals from, top surgery with the support of family and friends. Xavier is shown in the stages leading up to and during the surgery and significantly, as the bandages are removed, revealing his post-surgery chest. Such images may be disconcerting and may prompt viewers not accustomed to the physical stages of gender–transformation to confront preconceptions and issues relating to the gendered presentation of bodies. The images become canonical representations, as the texts are widely circulated and screened. Such texts have a role of circulating information about transitioning...
processes and can be of use to other transpeople. These are significant “cultural artifacts: texts, performances, and/or images that explore engendered and trans subjects. These artifacts are the stuff of, quite literally life-changing cultural work” (Noble 2006, p. 10). The ‘audience as voyeur’ (Siebler 2012, p. 81) of an individual’s transition potentially raises ethical issues of spectators outside the trans community viewing the texts, without critical engagement, or understanding of the rationale for the transformations presented onscreen. This reinforces the need for transliterate reading of texts connected to the sources and circumstances of cultural production. The discussion of gender transformation using key examples from within the case study texts will be further explored in Chapters 6 in the story of Dex and in Chapter 7 in relation to the sexual dysphoria that may be experienced before, during or after gender transition. The canon of emerging representations also centres upon films which depict aspects of gender–transformation through the use of hormones, such as in the short films Change Over Time (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2013) and The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

*Change Over Time* is an animated experimental personal documentary that focusses upon “the inner life of experiences and transformation” during the filmmaker’s first year on “T” 215

![Figure 4.2: Change Over Time](source: ©Ewan Duarte Productions 2013. Reproduced courtesy of Ewan Duarte.)

215 The hormone testosterone, abbreviated to the first letter ‘T’ in regular conversational use within the transmale community.
using “an impressionistic and poetic approach” to sharing the filmmaker’s “emotional and soul experiences” of transitioning. Significantly, the filmmaker chose not to show himself using “T” in the film. He talks about using “T”. Necessary aspects of this journey (syringes, sterile swabs, bandaids) are seen obscured in several scenes, forming a wallpaper–like background, rather than the focus of a single action. Duarte focuses upon his emotional journey, diarising the changes through poetic writing and art, asking “What kind of man will I become?...What will I pass into?”. The filmmaker speaks of “integration” and of a “liminal space” and “that there is no transition finish line”.

In comparison, the narrative short film *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) uses genre conventions of the road trip movie to an enigmatic destination ‘The Thing’ to convey the experiences of gender transitioning. The narrative focus is upon the physical aspects of the journey, through isolated terrain and there is a definite (though unknown) place being journeyed towards. The significance of the filmmakers’ narrative choices and representational strategies will be fully discussed in Chapter 6. The title conjures up images of 1950s B Grade Hollywood science–fiction and horror films (International Movie Database 2011a) and suggests intertextual referencing within popular culture to the film *The Thing (from Another World)* (Christian Nyby 1951). This 1951 film has been described as “in many ways the archetypal influence for many contemporary horror/SF films, especially when dealing with the aspect of a realistic and isolated setting for the story to take place within” (International Movie Database 2011a). Films of this era played upon the heightened social anxieties prevalent in the West in the post–War years. This was a time dominated by heteronormative

216 Fieldwork filmmaker interview 19 March 2014. “T” is a reference to use of the hormone testosterone.


218 *The Thing (from Another World)*. (1951). Film Posters.

imagery in cinema and television. Yet this was also a time of social changes stirring as a reaction to the conservatism and restrictions of the war years and when cinema began to expand and explore new styles in filmmaking.

In the late 1950s the first ‘New Wave’ in cinema—the Nouvelle Vague (French New Wave) emerged and “taught an entire generation to experiment with the rules of storytelling...to rethink conventional film budgets and production norms” (Neupert 2002, 2007, p. xv). In alluding to the sci-fi/horror genre of films and the 1950s, Ernst draws the audience’s attention to the societal anxieties that surround gender identity and normativity, which impact upon trans people in everyday life and the profound time period of change that we are in globally. The narrative short film also references the many obscure tourist attractions that flank the long highway routes of America. These are destinations that draw upon people’s curiosity and interest in ‘things’ outside their everyday experience.

*The Thing* reveals some of the subtextual and theoretical concerns in the first two minutes when the lead character opens a brochure on the attraction they are driving towards called ‘The Thing’. The brochure opens briefly (for about eight seconds), to reveal tantalizing glimpses of text that does not come completely into view, but which includes the phrases (seen on the right-hand side of the screen):

> The Thing is an oasis of taboos...letting go...scratching where it itches...experience a cosmic fun house...probability for bodily mutation...Awake from psychic amnesia. At The Thing, you can expect everything,...abilities, duration, interspecies intuitions...into the other 90%, walking on water,...spontaneous sensual connections..and penetration (Ernst 2011).

The left page of the brochure at the bottom also has the text spelt in capitals: “THE REAL IS NO LONGER REAL” (Ernst 2011, Capitalisation in original).

---

220 Transcription from *The Thing* by A. Ford 13 March 2015.

221 Ibid., Discussed further in Chapter 6.
It is significant that Ernst chose the fictional cinematic form of the short film to explore issues of ‘the real’ and ‘reality’ for trans representation, rather than the factual form of the documentary, such as Sexing the Transman, or Trans Boys. This serves to emphasise the theoretical position presented within the text that “The real is no longer real” (Ernst 2011, Italics removed). The use of familiar thematic narratives and genres in reading trans films will be discussed further within this chapter and developed within Chapter 6. Ernst frames his work intratextually, using a number of texts within the text to explain the unexplainable destination of The Thing. Due to positioning within the frame, these read didactically. The range of texts the filmmaker uses will be explored in detail in Chapter 6, as he makes specific use of written words and texts throughout the film. During the journey both characters make reference to the brochure on ‘The Thing’, taking turns to read sections of the text when not driving. This emphasizes the metatextual importance of the brochure to the film.

In one key scene of The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), the lead transmale character Tristan (Holt Trollsplinter) is seen in the bathroom of a hotel, binding his chest area. The use of bandages, generally associated with protective covering after wounding, are reclaimed to represent healing and transformation within trans films. A subtextual and metaphorical aspect to the use of bandages may also be suggested that “people are wounded by cultural gender norms” (Siebler 2012, p. 81, italics in original). This ‘wounding’ routinely takes place. In every gendered space (such as public bathrooms); in taxonomies (Harwood 2013); in assumptions. The ‘wounding’ can occur as routinely as being forced to choose a binary gender designation ‘Mr’, ‘Mrs’, ‘Miss’, or ‘Ms. when completing a form. Or being unable to access the designation of choice. Each time that identifiable normatively ascribed gender is asserted as a requirement within institutionalised settings and official documentation the wound is deepened, or reopened. Use of the bandages/bindings enables and signifies healing. Trans scholars have also alluded to the significance of the scars a community bears that simultaneously are healing (Vaccaro 2013, p. 92).

As this scene continues, Tristan then puts on a white t-shirt over the chest bindings, before self-administering a regular dose of testosterone with the assistance of his partner, prior to getting into bed with her. In The Thing, the hotel room scene is followed by scenes in which the protagonists continue on their journey and are represented by the filmmaker as embodying
a boyfriend/girlfriend, gender–binary couple, successfully ‘passing’ as a couple as they travel. Throughout the film, the lead character continues to wear a white t–shirt beneath a red hooded jacket. It is not made explicit in either the imagery, or the dialogue, whether the couple identify as straight, or queer, or even whether this matters. This form of passing can be utilitarian (making it easier to go about everyday activities from shopping, to the use of public facilities) and there are issues of safety involved in being able to move unrecognised within heteronormative social situations. This can include routine aspects of travel, such as accessing accommodation and using public facilities. This has been called “the desire to pass as “real–ly–gendered” in the world without trouble” (Prosser 2006, p. 279, text spelt as in original).

Such representations of passing may be read within texts as the transbody being successful within society. There are different points of view on such readings. Trans scholar Noble (2006) contests readings of the ‘passing’ body “FtM trans–sexual surgeries are not producing passable bodies; they are producing intersexual, hybrid bodies that are outside of our gender taxonomies and queer lexicons” (p.27). Kay Siebler (2012) has also raised an alternate reading of such gender–binary displays as an “unqueering” (p. 78, italics in original) of the trans person. This accords with many trans individual who do not view themselves as queer. Jay Prosser (2006) clearly presents that there are unique and differentiating aspects to trans lives and experiences when he wrote “There is much about transsexuality that must remain irreconcilable to queer: the specificity of the transsexual experience (p. 279). In text The Thing, the director moves the narrative towards his view of how to define trans experience. The words “Seeing is Believing!” (Ernst 2011) advertise the attraction of ‘The Thing’ on billboards as the couple’s car approaches the destination. By equating “Seeing” (a ‘real’ physical function) with “Believing” (a non–physical positionality), it is the act of ‘Seeing’ a physical reality/manifestation that confers authenticity.

This film reveals many of the societal anxieties of gender embodiment, in people being ‘read’ as ‘real’ or ‘real–ly gendered’. There are also many transmen who successfully pass, presenting a masculine embodiment and who are living as men, who would contest the readings by Siebler, Noble and Prosser of their lives as ‘unqueer’, or ‘irreconcilable to queer’ and who very successfully queer the gender–binary.
4.3.2 Queering Trans

An example of this is Xavier, interviewee and one of the three participants in case study film *Trans Boys* to be discussed in Chapter 6. Xavier embodies a rugged masculine ideal, with heavy beard and muscled body, whilst he is also renowned for working and performing regularly within queer subcultural contexts in high drag; a provocative performative mix, which defies readings as either drag queen, or drag king. Xavier is also one the founders and editors of a famous queer subcultural magazine.

![Figure 4.3: Xavier](image)


From this, it becomes clear that each trans life is unique, cannot be described in reductive terminology, existing within the terms of reference that suits the individual and may be any, or all of the rainbow spectrum of gendered embodiments and sexualities as “a transed FtM body, a body simultaneously inside and outside of both genders” (Noble 2006, p. 1). Such fluidity is counter to the mono–directional heteronormativity of society.

---

222 Fieldwork observations in Sydney, 7 February 2015 at the *Oxford Art Factory*.

There is a generational shift observable within the trans community, represented in recent trans films, such as texts screened at the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival and now being recorded in scholarship such as this thesis, where the use of transqueer and genderqueer as an identity marker and representational strategies are queering trans representations beyond the gender binary in ways that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. This represents a movement away from the linear narratives and challenges/augments previous binary representational strategies. Interview participants in Buck Angel’s films reflect this diversity. Buck has extended this beyond the screen, to now include “Transqueer Dating” connected to his film site.224

4.3.3 Iconic Clothing

There is a recurring use of a white t-shirt worn within trans films, that is becoming part of a recognisably developing canon of representations to display the transmale body. Clothing plays a major role in successful passing for trans people, with the wearing of clothing deemed to be of ‘the wrong gender’ the site of social proscription throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Sears 2014).225 In film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) there is use of the white t-shirt as a specific visual reference to the pre-surgical transmale body.

The use of both bandages and white t-shirt are discussed and represented in Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). An example is one scene where interviewee Lucas, filmed wearing a white t-shirt, discusses his experiences with interviewer Buck Angel.

In another scene, an interviewee who self-identifies as ‘straight gay-acting’, talks about dating a person she identified as a ‘transgendered boyfriend’ who was:

---


225 The gendering of clothing remains an issue for many gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, transgender, queer people at work and in everyday life. During an airport transit to the Los Angeles Outfest film festival in 2015, I was subjected to a heightened security inspection at the airport when travelling, with invasive body patdowns after the security x-ray machine identified ‘anomalies’, marked as invasive blue cubic areas on the screen image of my body. This created an embarrassing public scrutiny for others in the waiting queue to see. The screen image of my body was deemed the rationale to then be physically handled, as the security officer decided that wearing of baggy cargo pants worn low around my hips (described as ‘male clothing’) was out of keeping with passport gender and name. I was instructed to ‘pull my trousers up’ (i.e. so the pants sat firmly around my waist and crotch area). I was then subjected to what can only be described as a very thorough body patdown over my clothes, including a firm crotch area feel/grab. Not very welcoming after a long haul flight.
a man...really sexy and who happened to be a transman...this guy had a full beard, he looked like a bear...a biker, greaser, bearded, tattooed guy...he ploughed me like a man... he actually didn’t have top surgery...he was strapped down...but I never ever saw him not strapped down, so he was bandaged all the time with like a white beater over it which is a hot look...a t–shirt and naked bottoms...I like that winnie the pooh look...nasty.

The intertextual reference to ‘Winni the Pooh’ a benign cartoon character from childhood, conjures up images of comfort, safety and familiarity in the appearance of her transmale lover. This protective/safe aspect is also underscored by symbolic associations of white (in the ‘white t–shirt’). In Sexing the Transman there is also the appearance of another of the interviewees onscreen dressed in a white t–shirt, whilst responding to Buck’s questions.

The use of the white t–shirt has now appeared in a range of short films from the Trans New Wave centred upon transmale subjects. The focus upon the t–shirt ‘top area’ in trans films is because this is the most obvious, visibly gendered area of the body (after the face and hands) that immediately comes into view.\textsuperscript{226} This is also an area of the body that becomes the focus of transformative bodily practises (such as chest binding/modification and surgeries), as discussed in relation to the textual examples cited. The ‘top area’/flat chest may be read as the most readily identified with masculinisation and transmasculinity, along with facial hair. It is significant that most interviewees are filmed seated (from the the waist are up), such as in Sexing the Transman interview sequences), or otherwise filmed with the lower portion of the body not the focus of the gaze\textsuperscript{227} as in the experimental short film I<3Boys (Sarah Barnard, USA, 2012). The transmale Daddy is shown as the focus of his lover’s gaze, as he repeatedly performs rhythmic pushups, whilst a soundtrack sexualises his athletic maneuvers. Filmed from the perspective of the lover’s gaze, staring into the eyes of the Daddy, the focus is fixed very much upon the ‘top area’ of the body, the arms doing the hard work, flexing the muscles, inviting the gaze to linger in admiration of masculine physical prowess.

\textsuperscript{226} Of course, you could say the crotch area is the most visibly gendered area of the body. But it is not socially acceptable to focus upon/greet a person staring at their crotch in the majority of social settings. There would be exceptions to this in situations of sexual cultural settings and communities.

\textsuperscript{227} An exception to this is also Sexing the Transman which focuses upon the lower section of each interviewee’s body in the short demonstrative scenes.
This association of the white t–shirt with athleticism and masculinity has a long history amongst working class men. This initially derives from the Bonds company in Australia, that originally commenced mass production of the men’s athletic singlets in 1920, an item of clothing that became known as the iconic ‘Chesty’. This was because the singlet was marketed with hyper–masculinised imagery of the ‘Chesty Bond’ man; a square–jawed, blond–haired, blue–eyed man, heavily–muscled man, the idealisation of masculinity and the aspirational dream man of every post–war Australian woman. This use of clothing to signify masculinity in the post–war years was heavily marketed (Hancock II and Karaminas 2014).

Figure 4.4: Mannequin torso, ‘Chesty Bond’, plastic / paint, Bonds Industries Limited, Sydney, Australia, c. 1950 A9600-1.

The true Chesty Bond was strong man, not your lumpy weight-lifting type...He was kind, likable and good-looking but he was not a male model. He was definitely Australian but acceptable everywhere. He was the heroic straight man...Chesty would be an Australian strong-man. Better still, he was made to feel transcendingly powerful whenever he wore his Bonds singlet (Morris 2014).

Of relevance to the development of ideas/ideals and cinematic representations of masculinity within Trans New Wave films, is *intertextuality*. Intertextuality works against exclusionary narratives linking ideas drawn from a range of sources within popular culture. This includes sources as diverse as Hollywood B Grade films in text *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), to the role modelling of masculinity in the life and work of Buck Angel. The idea for Chesty Bond was inspired by Popeye, a cartoon and screen character. The white singlet gave strength to Chesty Bond, in the same way that spinach gave strength to Popeye (Morris 2014).

There is a connection between this representation of masculinity and war. Images of Chesty Bond appeared within cartoon strips of the period heroically fighting war-era adversaries: “During the war, Chesty battled with Hitler, Hirohito, enemy submarines, planes, spies and ships,...He also gave Bonds cotton cut-offs to ambulances, hospitals and volunteer defence forces” (Morris 2014). The narrative short film *Vade the Poloni with the Matini* (M)-elly Nio, Aus., 2008 (name spelt as per filmmaker) explored the interconnection between masculinity, war and male bonding with a “Homage to the undocumented love stories of many World War 2 servicemen, who turned to each other for comfort and companionship during this period of history, blurring the lines between heterosexuality and homosexuality” (Film Synopsis, Queer Fruits Film Festival Program 2009). The film contains a number of historical photos of sailors, photographed as couples, interwoven with a dramatic and moving recreation of the period.

Significantly, post-War anxieties also fuelled the production of the B Grade sci-fi and horror films, during a time when gendered roles in society and masculinity were reasserted, partly in

---

229 Recollection from Ted Maloney, one of the two people behind the original design.

230 *Vade the Poloni with the Matini* World Premiered at the 2009 Queer Fruits Film Festival. The publicity still for the film shows two heavily tattooed sailors dressed in white t-shirts dragging a thick rope over their shoulders between them. There is an intense homoerotic style to the image and the film.
response to the heightened roles that women had fulfilled during the war years. The intertextual reference to 1950s B grade sci-fi films and the underlying societal anxieties regarding gender roles, are illustrated in regards to the Trans New Wave case study film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

Fictional imagery from film and masculine figures such as Popeye and Chesty Bond are not isolated examples of being influential in trans culture and in the production of trans representations. Buck Angel has similarly noted a fictionalised figure, the military action figure GI Joe, as a role model of masculinity for him as a child.231 A selection of versions of GI Joe from the 1960s (when Buck was a child), reveal images of hyper-masculinity, portrayed as members of the various armed services. When viewed in the twenty first century against a background of gay and queer cultural icons, these figures appear quite fetishistic in representation, akin to the Village People’s use of familiar icons of masculinity.

Significantly, Buck has noted that upon removal of GI Joe’s outfits, to change the character’s clothes, he was aware that the muscled figure had no typical male ‘bulge’—but the crotch area was flat, like a girl’s.232 This image stayed with him throughout childhood and later, on into adolescence and became key in role-modelling his hyper-masculinised appearance. Buck’s positionality and now widely circulated physical embodiment of manhood are reinforced through tangential arguments in trans scholarship “the argument is that masculinity has nothing to do with the male body as it has been conventionally defined. Both trans and female masculinity are each non-derivative forms of manhood where the subject is no longer secured or privileged by a referent” (Noble 2006, p. 25). It could be argued that for some transmen there are new referents; that facial hair (deriving from “T”) and flat chests (deriving from hormones/binding/surgeries) have now become privileged referents, visible because of the proliferation of the transmale community and the transmasculine cinematic representations that are now being produced.

231 Fieldwork interview with Buck Angel during the Brisbane leg of his Australian tour, 14 February 2014.

232 Ibid., Fieldwork interview with Buck Angel during the Brisbane leg of his Australian tour, 14 February 2014.
The white t-shirt, or singlet emerges from the history of the twentieth century post-war years, initially as an everyday, affordable item of working class men’s clothing, which over time, became worn by men of all walks of life, including professionals, as a regular item of clothing worn beneath a range of men’s business and everyday clothing. Over time, this simple item of clothing has become imbued with notions of masculinity, strength and heroism; ideas that have infiltrated popular consciousness through cultural uses and mass marketing representations.

The intertextuality of the representations within Trans New Wave films, are at first surprising, drawing upon a range of representations in popular culture, including Hollywood B Grade films, cartoons, children’s action toy figures, to brand imagery. What is becoming clear, is that the white t-shirt, for example, is emerging as a canonical representation of the transmale body: as a masculinised, gendered and sexualised space. The hegemonic imagery surrounding
the white t–shirt/singlet in the post–war imaginary, encodes a binary gendering of the wearer that can be visibly read as a man. This is imagery encoding a strong man, protective of his home and family—whatever form that family takes in the twenty first century. It is not suggested that every transman who wears a white t–shirt or singlet has any consciousness of the historical connections that the clothing holds; but there is an underlying series of ideas that codifies this form of clothing and very clearly evokes a social ideal of a masculine, athletic, working class man that many Trans New Wave filmmakers (and transmen) identify with. Masculinity as the attraction is discussed by Buck Angel with one interviewee, in a short segment that was originally produced for Sexing the Transman, that was not presented in the final edit of the feature documentary. During the interview, there are references to masculinity in a range of forms, including attraction to presentations of ‘masculinity in women’, echoing the groundbreaking work of Halberstam (1998). A key to understanding Buck Angel is that he self–identifies as a man, not a transman and this positionality underpins his life and filmmaking.

It is interesting to note how many representations of the transmale body are emerging onscreen wearing this item of clothing. This is not a coincidence; it is because the representations are drawing from hegemonic ideas of masculinity throughout the twentieth century. Scholars have noted the “paradoxical reification of gender and sexual stereotypes” (Siebler 2012) that cultural texts can reinforce, that can lead to the desire/need for hormones/surgery to fit a heteronormative gendered ideal, rather than an acceptance of the queer, or genderqueer body. In comparison to earlier periods in popular culture and mass media Kay Siebler has noted

Today we are far less comfortable with the sort of ambiguity embodied by transgender people. We want them to be either/or: pre–op or post–op, transvestite or transsexual.


234 Fieldwork with Buck Angel in Silverlake, Los Angeles on 11 July 2016, with follow–up online ethnography 25–27 July 2016 to confirm details of the discussion were correctly transposed.

235 Siebler specifically cites 1975 and the debut of the Rocky Horror Picture Show as providing a “a celebratory portrayal” of queerness, with a “Transvestite from Transylvania”, in a time when “There was no such term as “transgender” or the umbrella term of “queer” other than as an epithet. Judith Butler’s theories on gender as performance were yet to be written” (p. 74).
There are few representations in mainstream media of a transgender person who defies these categories (Siebler 2012, pp. 74–75).

As independent filmmakers, the Trans New Wave are producing imagery that simultaneously draws upon, reifies and defies gender and sexual categories.

**Conclusion**

Through Trans New Wave films, the emerging canon of representations up to this point has been focussed upon depictions of gender transition and sexualities, including representation of hormone use; top surgery; depictions of success in passing; of relationships. The emerging canon of representations of sexualities is diverse and inclusive, including representations of trans sexualities that span from gay, to straight, to queer; to the representation of the body with and/or without hormones/and or surgeries; of gender–binary depictions and of representations that queer the binary. Transliterate reading of the texts has enabled the emerging canon to be positioned within the cultural settings of textual production, contemporary society and trans lives.

In highlighting an emerging canon of gender specific representations within Trans New Wave films, a clear rationale and validification can be made “there are transexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to be” (Prosser 2006, p. 264, Italics in original). This is a useful description of the emerging canon of documenting a linear gendered focus. Yet this does does not eliminate recognition that within this developing canon transqueer representations of gender–diversity are produced, particularly in films that followed *Sexing the Transman*, including Buck Angel’s recent work. These films contest gender–binary representations of transmale sexuality in unprecedented ways. The San Francisco Transgender Film Festival is an exemplar site exhibiting a diverse range of textual perspectives. Potential tension between differing perspectives is circumnavigated through the production of texts which present each point of view as valid narratives of trans life.

---

236 Fieldwork observation from in–person attendance of the 2014 festival, 7–9 November 2014 at the Roxie Theatre, San Francisco.
Whilst there are ongoing debates within the transmale community as to the representations that are being produced—and frequently in relation to Buck Angel’s work as will be discussed in context to the Chapter 7 exegesis of Sexing the Transman, the agency of each filmmaker and of the participants in these productions is of central concern to the filmmakers and is validated within the texts.

4.4 **Awareness of the Social and Cultural Settings in Which Transgender Screen Texts are Produced**

The emergence of the Trans New Wave, while focussed upon films, is a time period of immense social and cultural changes. The year 2008, cited throughout this research as the establishing year for the New Wave of Trans Cinema (Taormino 2008), figures large in twenty first century world history, lived experience and personal memory as the year of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), a time period of enormous financial collapse and instability internationally, with repercussions throughout society at every level of life. This was a time when economic collapse, precipitated by unscrupulous monetary practises, hit the USA particularly hard economically. Australia did not escape from this time unscathed, with many small businesses and investors destroyed financially, as losses of jobs and unemployment led to economic institutions reporting record levels of mortgage stress, foreclosing on houses with unpaid mortgages with an unprecedented inability to resell the assets (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2009). Lower income and fixed-income sectors of society were the worse affected groups. Amongst these groups are independent filmmakers, who generally support themselves on very low incomes and also write, direct and produce films on either low, or no budgets, financing the films from their own money and using volunteer crews and participants (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012).

Significantly, periods of social crisis and upheaval are often crucibles in which new cultural and artistic forms emerge—spurred on by a new generation. In this regard, the concept of the new generation can be extended to those new (or emerging) in their field (such as independent trans film) and also to the new generation of trans people emerging around the world. Such a

---

237 Filmmaker fieldwork respondents during the researches of this thesis all attest to the low (or no) budget issues of independent filmmaking and the reliance upon volunteer crews and borrowed equipment that is provided free of charge in order to achieve productions.
new generation is not constrained by conventional linear ages. The experiences of transitioning alter the perspective of time experienced within the body.\textsuperscript{238}

Whilst there are differences between the circumstances of the twentieth and twenty first centuries in terms of cultural impetus, technological innovations and anthropogenic–induced ecological crises including global warming, it is significant that a pattern of creativity arising after times of crisis can be identified in regards to screen culture, as we saw in our discussion in Chapter 1 of the \textit{Nouvelle Vague} \textsuperscript{239} and New Queer Cinema. \textsuperscript{240} Significantly the Trans New Wave emerged in 2008 during the tumultuous Global Financial Crisis. Whilst it is not suggested that the Trans New Wave emerged \textit{because of} this crisis, this was a major time in recent world history of rethinking priorities, of economic restructuring across all sectors of society and of arts and screen organisations being merged, leading to reduced employment and funding.\textsuperscript{241} This impacted across all screen industry sectors, with independent filmmakers, independent film production companies and film festivals heavily affected. Queer Fruits Film Festival emerged in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis in an area with high levels of unemployment and poverty, a low socio–economic demographic and the largest gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, queer population outside an urban area in Australia (Ford 2014b). Against the background of reduced screen industry funding and opportunities, the festival served to bring creative energy, screening opportunities and a new source of work (and hence income) for queer artists and filmmakers into the regional area.

The observation of the social–cultural milieu of 2008 in respect to the origin of the Trans New Wave, reflects earlier periods of documented regeneration for film. The first New Wave of cinema in France, the \textit{Nouvelle Vague} (1958–1964), emerged during a time when France had

---

\textsuperscript{238} The subtext of this sentence is that people of widely varying ages transition and the experience of transitioning (no matter the linear age) involves an ‘adolescence/puberty’.

\textsuperscript{239} Following economic collapse in France, which led to filmmakers eschewing the traditional ‘cinema of quality’ high art filmmaking style for low (or no) budget films that could be immediately produced.

\textsuperscript{240} Following on and during the immense social crises of the Reagan era of American politics and the AIDS–era of activism (Ford 2016c \textit{forthcoming}).

\textsuperscript{241} 2008 was a year of major changes in the Australian film industry with the merger of three peak funding bodies (Australian Film Commission (AFC), Film Finance Corporation (FFC) and Film Australia Limited into one organisation Screen Australia. It was a time of major reductions in funding for filmmakers and redundancies across the screen industry and screen funding sectors (Screen Australia Annual Report 2008/2009). The merger resulted in the loss of many positions and opportunities and led to a focus on the larger screen industry production companies for funding.
experienced an economic downturn in 1959, with the French franc losing twenty-percent value (Neupert 2002, 2007). This necessitated new ways of producing films using lower budgets. First-time directors, under thirty-five years old, led the reinvigoration and excitement of a new cinema emerging. These filmmakers saw themselves as “culturally distinct from their parent’s generation” (Neupert 2002, 2007, p. xxi) and were critical of existing screen traditions particularly the cinéma de qualité (‘cinema of quality’) in France and sought new ways of expressing their vision of the world. As one of the first New Wave filmmakers Jean Luc Godard reflected upon those times and the positionality of the filmmakers as people “who ask themselves, why aren’t these things allowed?” (Cinéma! Cinéma! The French New Wave Part 1 (Channel 4, UK, 1992). The ‘things’ referred to ranging from stylistic innovation including films where everything is recorded in a single shot, hand-held cameras and non-studio settings, enabling new thematic and narrative interpretations of life.

Historically, ‘New Waves’ of cinema have been characterised by films which are “a low-budget” (Neupert 2007, p. 89; Hitchman 2013). In reference to the first feature film by Louis Malle, Neupert noted that “it refers to Hollywood as well as to European art film traditions; it reworks an established genre with personal touches that will eventually be defined as auteur traits…it has a soundtrack featuring improvised (music); and it simultaneously launched the careers of several talented, young, up-and-coming actors” (Neupert 2007, p. 89).242 Notably, these are characteristics that can usefully be re-applied to many of the Trans New Wave films. An example is case study film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), part of a cultural reimagining of ‘an established genre’ (the road movie) as a trans narrative.

New Wave films are significantly connected to “changes in film representations” (Sellier 2008, p.1) and changes in culture, the most famous movement, the Nouvelle Vague (French New Wave), was connected to modernism 243 with the New Wave being indicative of turning points in history (Sellier 2008, p. 2, italics added). There have been New Waves in many

---

242 Whilst these comments are made specifically in reference to Louis Malle by Neupert, the observations about Malle’ first film also may be usefully applied to Trans New Wave films.

243 (Gluck 1986) notes Modernism as “ambiguous and problematic” to define, ideologically Left and transformative across the arts, philosophy, politics and sciences. A full exploration of Modernism is beyond the scope of this thesis, which is based in postmodern and post-postmodern discourses. Modernism is connected to the twentieth century Avante-Garde and is a precursor to Nouvelle Vague cinema.
countries of the world, including three ‘waves’ within America New Wave Cinema in the 1950s, 1960s, 1980s—all of which are defined by their independence from the Studio System (Hitchman 2013, Part One). Texts within the French New Wave were often characterised by the vision of the director (the auteur/author) and what has been described as an “obsession with memory, with a personal or a historic past” (Sellier 2008, p. 5). American New Wave filmmaker Shirley Clarke’s Portrait of Jason (Shirley Clarke, USA, 1967)244 is directly referenced intertextually, with reuse of the narrative structure by director Irene Gustafson in the Trans New Wave documentary Portrait of Turner (Irene Gustafson, USA, 2009).245 In this text, trans performance artist Turner re–performs characters from seminal movies, to embody his ‘personal memory’ and illustrate his life and experiences of transmasculine gender and sexuality. Such cross–referencing between Waves become useful points of reference and present theoretical positions and methodologies for establishing the characteristics of Trans New Wave films within this thesis as will be further developed within Chapter 6.

The filmmakers who were recognised as an emergent group and called New Queer Cinema (Rich 1992), similarly emerged after a significant international financial crisis and market collapse in 1987 (Carlson 2006) and all the social and cultural upheavals of the era, which included the openly homophobic political policies and AIDS denial, leading to devastating effects (Kinsellas 1989; Ford 2016c forthcoming). Amongst the groups particularly affected were subcultural artistic and filmmaking communities in which gay male artists were


245 (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009, Programme). Portrait of Turner, “Nationally acclaimed transgender performance artist and 'movie star wannabe' Scott Turner Schofield crafts his onscreen persona here through a series of performances that stage his desires to perform, to be loved, and to be seen. As he talks to the camera, Turner also interrogates the history and meanings of his own body—a body self–consciously formed and mediated by medicine, desire, and by radical and assimilationist cultural politics.” This was also a durational film, shot in one take, in a hotel room over a 24–hour period by Gustafson. Gustafson is a film scholar and Associate Professor of Film and Digital Media at University of California, Santa Cruz.
Significantly, the New Queer Cinema films gave voice to “subgroups” within the gay and lesbian communities, were “unapologetic” about the faults of characters; the filmmakers were noted to “defy the sanctity of the past, especially the homophobic past” and “the films frequently defy cinematic conventions in terms of form, content and genre” (Aaron 2006, p. 398). This has also been described as an “‘outsider cinema’ of gay–themed films that broke with both the aesthetic conventions of realism and the philosophical sensibility of humanism” (Leung 2004, p. 155).

The documentary *Projecting the Body* (Walter McIntosh, Australia, 2008) keenly foregrounded the political–social–cultural issues of the era in which Australian New Queer Cinema filmmaker Stephen Cummins directed his films. This included key issues experienced by urban gay and lesbian artists/filmmakers at the time, including low incomes and homelessness, which led to many inner–city Sydney queer artists squatting in and around

---

246 The list of influential gay artists and filmmakers who succumbed to AIDS during this time is a list of influential cultural figures within art, music and film of the twentieth century and includes luminaries Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989), Keith Haring (1958–1990), Freddie Mercury (1946–1991), (Peter Tully (1947–1992), Stephen Cummins (1960–1994), Derek Jarman (1942–1994) to name only a few. In writing these names of prominent white, gay, male artists and filmmakers there is cultural memory of the countless trans woman and people of colour who died from AIDS during this era and communities for whom HIV remains an alarming health crisis. Artists such as Jean–Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) who lived and worked around many of these artists and filmmakers and also died during this era, (and most likely also had AIDS though the cause of his death is recorded as a ‘drug overdose’) is also remembered. Simply writing this list of names reopens the outrage and grief of those years and reminds of the extraordinary losses to culture and the immense wrong caused by the Reagan AIDS denial politics (Ford 2016c forthcoming).

247 In 2010, New Queer Cinema director Simon Hunt, one of the original participants in the 1992 Sundance film festival panel with Ruby Rich (Sundance Institute 2014), granted Queer Fruits Film Festival permission for a special retrospective screening of *Resonance* (Stephen Cummins and Simon Hunt, Australia, 1991). I met with Hunt in Sydney (Australia) during 2010 and had the opportunity to speak with him about the enduring significance of the film when he loaned the rare archival digital beta (digi–beta) copy of the film to the festival — enabling the first exhibition of the film in the regional area of Lismore (NSW, Australia) (Auto–ethnographic account, Queer Fruits Film Festival archives 2010). This was complemented by a panel discussing the life and work of Stephen Cummins with visiting director Walter McIntosh (McIntosh’ 2008 documentary on the life and work of Stephen Cummins *Projecting the Body* was screened in tandem with *Resonance* at the 2010 festival). I interviewed director Walter McIntosh as the invited Guest filmmaker for a Q & A Forum about the significance of New Queer Cinema filmmaker Stephen Cummins, following the Showcase Screening of both films (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2010). *Resonance* was subsequently awarded the 2010 Queer Fruits Film Festival Jury Prize by an independent screen industry jury (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2010) – and due to the retrospective nature of the Award, I made a comment on the festival website that is of especial (and unanticipated) significance now to this thesis and Chapter 8: “In announcing *Resonance* as the 2010 Jury Prize winner, an especial note was made that the film is as relevant now as when it was produced and that the film continues to exemplify innovation, celebration and pride in queer culture. The Festival also hopes that this will inspire current and future GLBTIQ filmmakers to recognise that queer films may remain of continuing relevance and make a genuine difference to audiences and to screen culture” (Queer Fruits Film Festival 2012a). “Queer Fruits Film Festival Award Winners”, viewed 15 March, 2016 <http://www.queerfruitsfilmfestival.org/artists.html>. Thanks and acknowledgement are made to Simon Hunt, who gave special permission to the festival for the historically important archival screening of *Resonance* (the first time the film had ever been screened regionally in the Northern Rivers, in Lismore) and graciously supplied the screening copy of *Resonance* without charging Queer Fruits Film Festival a screening fee.
Darlinghurst in disused terraces and warehouse in the 1980s and early 90s, around which vibrant queer creativity emerged.\textsuperscript{248} Of major consequence in Cummins’ work, was the stigmatisation of gay men due to HIV and the violence that was frequently experienced by gay men during that time.\textsuperscript{249} Leung (2004) emphasises this point “the original moment of New Queer Cinema was inseparable from the emergent politics of AIDS activism and Queer Nation” (2004, p.155). Likewise, it can be suggested that the emergence of the New Wave of Trans Cinema in 2008, is inseparable from the politics of transactivism.

The similar socio–economic and cultural conditions of screen production and attitudes (Rich 1992; Aaron 2006 italics added) to creative production between these Waves becomes apparent, despite the overt differences in gender or sexual orientations. Reflecting upon the disparate filmmakers of New Queer Cinema, Michele Aaron highlights that “what binds the group together… is best described as defiance” (Aaron 2006, p. 398, Italics added). This can also be be restated in reflecting upon the diverse positionalities of the Trans New Wave filmmakers.

The proliferation of trans films could really only have happened in this time because of a specific nexus of socio–cultural–technological changes that have taken place since the late twentieth century. This has included society changing enough in some places to permit open expression of diversity in gendered and sexual positionalities. Coupled with the availability of digital film equipment, online options for self–distribution of films and independent film festivals to enable exhibition, screen content can now be out of the control of studios and distributors. The availability of new forms of portable hand–held film equipment, including what Ruby Rich (1992a) called a “Fisher–Price Pixelvision” (pp. 41–42)\textsuperscript{250} and video–8 camera (Rich 2013) were cited as significant to the emergence of New Queer Cinema. Central to the discussions of the key characteristics of the Trans New Wave that will be the focus of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{248} Cummins squatted in a warehouse near Elizabeth St., Sydney, in the old Mark Foys Building according to McIntosh (2008). The experience was fairly common to low–income, gay, inner–city art school students in those days. The recurrent presence and re–use of abandoned buildings in those years became symbolic of artistic, cinematic, gay and sexual subcultures in the inner–city.
\bibitem{249} Which included being bashed in back alleys near Oxford St. Darlinghurst, which is the subject of his masterpiece film \textit{Resonance} (Stephen Cummins and Simon Hunt 1991).
\bibitem{250} (Suderberg 1991). The Fisher–Price PXL–2000 was a low–tech video camera aimed at the 10–16 year old market, described as moving “beyond low–tech and into the revolutionary zone of Anti Tech.” The camera was used by New Queer Cinema filmmaker Sadie Benning (Rich 1992a).
\end{thebibliography}
Chapter 6 is independence from the Studio System (Hitchman 2013, Part One). Availability of affordable technology and portable equipment are factors that enable filmmaker independence. In Chapter 5 we will see the role of classifications (ratings) systems in controlling cinematic independence. The impact of classifications (ratings) systems extends to hegemonic screen production and representation of transgender in mainstream films.

Prior to this research project, a recognition of the significance of this emergent body of transgender films as sharing similar characteristics had been observed within my programming strategies for Queer Fruits Film Festival (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012). It is significant that trans filmmaker Ewan Duarte used the term Trans New Wave self-identifying as a Trans New Wave filmmaker in relation to his MFA Thesis film (Duarte 2013). Scholarship centered on the Trans New Wave is now emerging in recent publications connected to the researches of this thesis (Ford 2014a, 2016b). As yet, there is no body of literature on the Trans New Wave, with this thesis presenting original research on this group of filmmakers, providing visibility within the scholarly literature. The urban location of many of the filmmakers, centred around the Bay Area of San Francisco and Los Angeles in the USA and the political–social–cultural era in which trans people are living and working, have seemed to bring with it a similar world–view that New Queer Cinema filmmakers expressed, this time experienced by trans filmmakers. This echoes the generational shift that has been experienced within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer community in recent years, away from essentialist and exclusionary identity categories of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ towards fluidic queer categories embracing a range of sexualities and gender embodiments (Ford 2015b).

251 *Transgender Representation in Contemporary Film*, organiser & chair, programmed to follow the Queer Fruits Film Festival transgender-focused documentary session on 30/12/12.

252 Ford, A., (forthcoming). Essay “Trans* Film Essay” (working title), in *The Encyclopedia of Queer Cinema*, Brian Keith Bergen–Aurand and Andrew Grossman (eds.). TBA. Whilst the urban centres and western perspective are foregrounded in this section, the significance of trans filmmakers working in non–western settings is highlighted throughout the thesis and filmography, with the concluding discussion of the thesis in Chapter 8 focusing upon recent developments in trans cinema from non–western and First Nations’ perspectives.

253 Noted with the caveat that there are essentialist gays and lesbians who reject queer (Ford 2015b), queers who identify in multiply erotic ways (homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, asexual) and theoretical presentations on ‘queer’ as not being an identity/subject position (Browne and Brown 2009; Browne and Nash 2010; Ford 2015b).
From these four examples, significant connections may be inferred between periods of economic collapse and socio–cultural upheaval leading to periods of resurgence in creativity of artists and filmmakers, that become recognised as culturally influential ‘New Waves’. The inner life of the artist and filmmaker is a locus of regeneration that may be turned to in times of crisis and from which, inspiration arises, leading to the creation of new things. This interrelationship between artist or filmmaker–led renewal is identified as “culture and regeneration” (Evans and Shaw 2004). This cycle assists in a broader revitalising of culture and society, that in turn, provides beneficial flow–on effects for economies (Florida 2002, 2011).

Three models have been identified that support the claim for this complex relationship between cultural and economic renewal identified within this thesis in the context of cinematic ‘New Waves’, these are in the forms of “culture-led regeneration, cultural regeneration and culture and regeneration” (Evans and Shaw 2004, p. 5; Evans 2005). Tara Brabazon (2014) identifies that part of the reason why the impact of the arts in economic renewal is not more prominently recognised is the “difficulty...to measure the economic impact of artistic and cultural products in terms of import and export capacity” (Brabazon 2014, p. 139) and because “The creative class is too genralizable a phrase to create a causal relationship between the presence of a particular group and economic development...Certainly there is a casual connection. Causality is much more difficult to prove” (Brabazon 2014, p. 139).

A milestone scholarly study by Australian film producer, writer and director Cathy Henkel (2006) cites screen–specific problems for ascertaining the economic impacts of filmmakers. This includes a lack of “capacity to engage with data gatherers in a meaningful way... (whilst) preoccupied with producing projects” (Henkel 2006, p. 125) and the film industry “commercial in confidence issue” (p. 125), where confidentiality agreements and co–productions impede open dissemination of information on financing arrangements, film sales, box office and the financial impacts a company may (or may not) have within the broader screen industry. Despite these ‘challenges’, Henkel’s study still projected that the regional

---

254 (Henkel 2006). Research project supported by the Australian Research Council’s Linkage funding scheme (project number LP0230519) and was Henkel’s doctoral project at QUT.
screen industry of the Northern Rivers area of NSW would have a combined budget spend in 2006 of $13.8 million dollars, with overall budgets estimated at $27.8 million dollars. The research ascertained that the economic impact of the screen industries was worth $40 million dollars and the creative industries in the Northern Rivers region worth an estimated $187.6 million dollars (Henkel 2006, pp. 126–127). Henkel concluded that this data was also “likely to be an underestimation of the true economic value of the screen and creative industries in the region” (Henkel 2006, p. 127) and that “flow–on” and “ripple effects” of the creative and screen industries also need to be evaluated in ascertaining the actual value of the sectors to an area (Henkel 2006, p. 241).

The area of artist–led renewal and economic benefit is a subject that urban geographers have also investigated (Evans and Shaw 2004, Evans 2005; Markusen and Schrock 2006), frequently challenging the model of the interconnections between economic growth, ‘human capital’ and the ‘creative class’ made famous by Richard Florida (2002). Yet such scholarship does not negate the empirical evidence of urban and regional centres regenerated through art–led activities and the importance of art and film culture in the economies of

---

255 The region in which Queer Fruits Film Festival was established and screened.

256 A significant economic impact for an area with a population of 277, 284 (Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers NSW 2013, p. 2). “The Northern Rivers region is on the north east coast of NSW, Australia and covers the area from Grafton to Tweed Heads and west to the Great Divide, comprising seven local council areas” (Henkel 2006, p. 3). The area covers 20, 706 kilometres (Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers NSW 2013, p. 2 and “The region is well known for tourism, creative industries, festivals and community activism” (Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers NSW 2013, p. 2 ), with a population of 277, 284 people across the seven council areas (Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers NSW 2013, p. 9), which is approximately 4% of the population of NSW. The economic impact of the creative industries at nearly $190 million dollars (Henkel 2006) to the region reveals a value of $685 per person. At $40 million dollars for the screen industry this equates to a value of $144 per person.

257 In context of a film festival this can include booking local accommodation for visiting filmmakers and opening night MCs /hosts, using local printeries to print brochures, programs, posters and tickets, engaging local restaurants and cafes to supply opening night food, using local transport; visiting audiences likewise also book local hotels, motels and caravan parks for accommodation, purchase food and beverages at local restaurants and cafes, go on local tours whilst visiting, purchase souvenirs and other goods, book car hire, pay for parking, or pay for other local goods and services whilst visiting. There is a very long list of ‘ripple effects’ to local economies from festivals.

258 Florida’s famous “Bohemian Index — a measure of the density of artists, writers and performers in a region” led to conclusions that “economic growth was occurring in places that were tolerant, diverse and open to creativity – because these were places where creative people of all types wanted to live” (Florida, 2002, p. x, Italics in original). Florida also recognised a pattern of gay creative involvement in urban culture/economy booms (he observed that where there was high–tech growth seemed to correspond to concentrations of gay populations).
From transliterate readings of Trans New Wave films recognition of the artisan–filmmaker as the producer of textual renewal arises. An issue identified in Chapter 1 is that independent filmmakers as low (or no) budget producers may not be represented in official screen industry statistics as being economically important. This in turn can lead to a failure to recognise, or even an erasure, of the socio–cultural significance of the texts in the time in which these are produced. This research demonstrates that the films and filmmakers of cinematic Waves are historically and culturally important products, generating direct and ‘ripple effect’ (Henkel 2006, p. 241) benefits to society with measurable economic value. This leads to a critical evaluation of independent film in general as an undervalued ‘creative class’ (Florida 2002). As agents of social change the filmmakers of the Trans New Wave are amongst the most important cultural producers working today.

4.5 Use of Familiar Thematic Narratives and Genres in Reading Trans Films

Use of familiar cinematic forms, such as the short film and documentary and genres, such as the ‘road trip’ as a metaphor of transitioning, will be explored in Chapter 6. In the context of reading trans texts, literacy is best understood in terms of social practises; observable in events such as transitioning and community formation, with film production, creating written texts (Trans New Wave films) which serve to mediate between cultural forms. Transliteracy is a contemporary example of the “cultural ways of utilising literacy” (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 9).260 There is a need for transliteracy in relation to reading independent gender–diverse screen texts, embedded within queer and transgender social structures and across media, to provide greater meaning and insight into the films. This acknowledges that Trans

---

259 Of interest to this thesis is that Florida’s arguments are widely used and accepted within the screen industry and were utilised within the Queer Fruits Film Festival funding applications to Australian State and Regional screen industry funding bodies, industries where the interconnections between the ‘creative class’ and economic value are measured (and measurable) and utilised as a basis for Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure success. Queer Fruits Film Festival was acknowledged as economically beneficially to the regional town of Lismore by state screen and arts agencies and the local regional Council in each of the fours years that the festival screened (2009–2012). This is further empirical evidence that supports the conclusions presented in Henkel (2006) of the significance of the arts and screen culture to an economy.

260 The original source text from Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 9) quoted earlier in this Chapter on Transliteracy, is re–contextualised and paraphrased to the context of this research project and trans films.
New Wave filmmakers are also literate across cultural forms and may also have performance art, multimedia and arts practise backgrounds.

An example of this is filmmaker Malic Amalya, a trained artist and filmmaker, who directs and produces queer and trans films, including the eleven-part video series *Detours and Fences* (2012–2015) of which *To Type Out Your Name* (2014) is film No. 9 in the series. Amalya draws upon conceptual art and performance art paradigms and practises and aural soundscapes, creating collaborative films, using 16mm and digital video as cinematic mediums. In his recent short film *Towards The Death of Cinema* (Malic Amalya, USA, 2015), the viewer watches as a single frame of celluloid is degraded “By allowing the film to warp in the heat of the projector, the audience is also given the rare opportunity to savor the destruction of the film” (Amalya 2015, film synopsis). Though not specifically identified as either a ‘queer’ or a ‘trans’ film, in watching the images dissolve, as spectator, I connected with this event as a solarisation of the frame, or a chemical dissolution of the frame in a way that read as a very queer, or trans film. The images stimulated thought about a lot of things at a cellular level, about change, transformation, one thing vanishing to become another that is already there (but that only comes into view after the destruction of the previous form).

It is noted that most Trans New Wave films are produced within a specific filmmaking style with documentary and short film predominating, due to the immediacy and affordability of these two cinematic forms. There are a very small number of trans filmmakers directing and producing animations such Vince Mascoli or Ewan Duarte (Figure 4.2), due to this being a highly technically specialised area of filmmaking. In the emergent filmmaking styles of the Trans New Wave, the trans body is liberated and given screen spaces through filmmaking

---


263 Extratextual source: *AgX* (Grayson Cooke in collaboration with Amanda Reichelt-Brushett 2014), the recent art–science video works which deals with “archival memory and dissolution” and which depicts “Photographic negatives being chemically destroyed”, viewed 14 April 2015, <http://www.graysoncooke.com/works-and-projects/agx>.

264 *Dear Dad, Love Maria* (Vince Mascoli, USA, 2009). “A young male–to–female transexual writes a letter to her disapproving father the night before her gender reassignment surgery”. (Queer Fruits Film Festival Program 2009, Archives, Film Synopsis).
styles that explore immediacy. There are a rarity of trans filmmakers working with specific genre styles and conventions, Rhys Ernst being an exception to the majority of Trans New Wave filmmakers in his specific use of the road movie genre and allusions to B Grade films. There are a number of Trans New Wave filmmakers who work with experimental film forms such as Ewan Duarte, Sarah Barnard; Malic Amalya, combining distinctive soundtracks/aural soundscapes with a precise use of imagery and performance art captured cinematically. In this regard, the first released short of documentary *Christine In The Cutting Room* (Stryker, work–in–progress, USA) presents a trans cinematic style that encompasses and transcends all these forms and points to the future potential for trans cinema.

---

265 *Sexing the Transman* (Angel, USA, 2011) and *Detours and Fences* (Amalya, USA 2012–2015) are examples of this approach.
CHAPTER 5: SIMULATION AND ‘THE REAL THING’

5.1 Introduction

“film classification does not operate in a legislative or policy vacuum, but is a process governed by interpretation and contestation”

(Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 33).

Between 2009–2012, in my role as Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival, a regional gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer film festival in Australia, I successfully applied to the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (Office of Film and Literature Classification) in Australia for one hundred and twenty–seven (127) gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer films to be Exempted to screen publically within the festival programs (Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a forthcoming). Each of the festival years and subsequent program tours required separate detailed applications be submitted to the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department for Exemption to screen and follow–up discussions as required with the Classification Branch Exemptions Officers to defend the selection of specific texts. In total, I have gone through the film classification processes 127 times within the Australian system in preparing the application for Festival Exemption. A legal requirement of producing a public film festival, this could be considered one of the key responsibilities and a routine part of a Festival Director’s work, however this led to a deeper interest in—and concern about—the classifications processes and ratings systems in Australia and America. This was because anomalies in the system were observed. Such anomalies are largely due to the Australian classifications (ratings) system being based on published Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012), the interpretation of which can be very subjective, as will be illustrated within this chapter through recent screen examples.

---

266 (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009 –2012). 113 GLBTIQ films screened between 2009–2012 at QFFF (2009 = 25 films; 2010 = 26 films; 2011 = 24 films; 2012 = 38 films) . 20 of these films were specifically transgender. The success of the programs led to 13 films from the 2010 festival subsequently screening during a QFFF tour to Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery in October 27–November 2nd 2011 - Four sessions screened in total. The festival also was invited to tour one feature documentary Kink Crusaders to screen in Sydney in 2012 at The Oxford Hotel, February 5th 2012.
Dunstan (2009) highlights what he calls “a high level of ambiguity” (p. 147) in the Australian system that could legitimate political influence:

Here, ‘political influence’ will be used to denote any ulterior motive for suppressing non-criminal material that should not be considered in the execution of public classification duty. Such a motive could be based on personal religious, moral or ideological values of the decision-maker or a pressure group (Dunstan 2009, Footnote 7, p. 134).

‘Religious, moral, or ideological values’ have been documented as historical issues in the development of classifications (ratings) systems and film production in America (Biltereyst and Vande Winkel 2013; Wittern-Keller 2013; Lewis 2013). In Australia, while “Actual classification decisions are made by Boards, both of which are independent statutory bodies” (Dunstan 2009 p. 136) and “the Commonwealth Attorney-General does not have the ‘right to give directions to the (bodies) or to veto (their) actions’” (p. 146); Dunstan suggests that influence can be exerted in a number of ways. This includes in the selection of Board members; for the Attorney-General to request a review of the Review Board itself; or for ‘interest groups’ to request a review of material classified (p. 147). These situations are not hypothetical; they have all taken place recently within recent Australia:

in 2000, the Howard government began stacking the censorship body. Retiring members were replaced with personnel reflecting the government’s reactionary political outlook and agenda. While the federal cabinet had rarely considered the selection of OFLC personnel, in 1999 it made an unprecedented intervention. Vetoing six prospective classifiers, it claimed they were not “ordinary” Australians (Phillips 2003).

The potential influence of ‘interest groups’ upon film classification is of serious concern in regards to non-hegemonic content. This is because such groups could bring specific ‘religious, moral, or ideological’ subjectivities to considerations of films submitted to the

---

267 Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), this was the name of the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department in Australia pre-2006.
Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department, introducing bias into the classifications’ processes and through this, determining whether audiences can access specific texts. This has occurred on a number of well–documented occasions in Australia in relation to film, by right–wing lobby group the Lyons Forum; christian fundamentalist groups; the Christian Democratic Party and well–known homophobic campaigners such as Fred Nile—who has sustained vigorous fundamentalist opposition to a number of films, leading to actual banning of texts.

This introduction contextualises the legislative overseership that classifications systems play in respect to screen content. Whilst none of the case study films within this thesis fall within the restricted category of pornography the emergence of the Trans New Wave from transporn as we saw in Chapters 1 and 2 and the widely circulated adult film work of case study filmmaker Buck Angel, necessitates a critical engagement with official classifications (ratings) systems. It will be argued that the moral imperatives implicit within the social proscription of sexuality and sexually explicit imagery have infiltrated and influenced all levels of official classifications systems internationally. This in turn, has created a screen culture which self–regulates the production of cinematic images according to hegemonic, heterosexual ‘community standards’. Within this, the representation of non–hegemonic bodies, sexualities and narratives has been the subject of particular proscription. This has led to the production of predominately demoralising mainstream texts dealing with transgender narratives and a suppression of trans from participation in mainstream cinematic culture on an equal footing with hegemonic content.

---


269 Ibid., “Last year, the OFLC Review Board banned Baise-moi by French film director Virginie Dispenste. The decision was taken after federal Attorney General Daryl Williams directed the OFLC to review its previous classification of the film. Williams intervened after Fred Nile contacted him and demanded the government prevent the film from being screened.”

270 Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012). In Australia pornography is classified as the Restricted X 18+ category. “Note: This classification is a special and legally restricted category which contains only sexually explicit material. That is material which contains real depictions of actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults.” (Part 2, X 18+ Restricted).

271 With rare exceptions such as high profile directors Lana and Lilly Wachowski and a series such as Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–); or Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014); both of which are produced as Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) series, rather than theatrical (cinema) release films. Transparent was originally launched on the independent gay, lesbian, bissexual, transgender, intersex, queer film festival circuit at Outfest, Los Angeles in 2014 (Outfest 2016, p. 29).
suppress, distort and erase trans narratives throughout the mainstream, there are a proliferation of screen narratives which routinely promote gender–normativity, hegemonic sexuality and hetero–sexualised imagery within film and popular culture. These observations, are supported by textual evidence including the films discussed within Chapter 2 and the examples of gay, queer and trans texts recently ‘Refused’ permission (an effective ‘ban’) to be screened in Australia that will be discussed within this chapter. This empirical evidence supports the view that a dualistic system of classificatory screen regulation is in operation. Legal scholars have noted that “Those who espouse the approved view may use sexual images; those who do not, may not” (Harris 2005, p. 37). This thesis shares this viewpoint and the concerns it raises and will demonstrate how the use of sexual imagery within mainstream cinema is controlled and how independent filmmakers, such as the Trans New Wave, may escape these censorial controls (particularly in the USA as we will see in this chapter) through independent screen production and exhibition strategies.

5.2 How a Gendered (Heteronormative) System of Classifications Regulates a Gender–Neutral Space: The Role of Classifications and Ratings Systems in Film Production, Distribution and Exhibition

To critically evaluate the complex interrelationship between the regulatory mechanism of classification (ratings) systems and screen representation, requires a perception of film as a temporal medium, recording space within time, though mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1936). In the twenty first century, the ‘mechanical’ technology of cinema is digital, a gender–neutral space of pixels that becomes photo–inscribed through the agency of the filmmaker. As a medium which is written upon, film is neither more, nor less, than the parchment of peoples from many thousands of years ago and heir to the dramaturgy of classical theatre. As the premiere narrative medium, film cannot be separated from the social and political times in

272 SVOD series such as Game of Thrones (David Benioff, D.B. Weiss, USA, 2011–) or Outlander (Ronald D. Moore, USA, 2014–) contain such frequent and extended routine depictions of nudity and hegemonic heterosexualised imagery, to the point that the texts could be read as examples of a new genre that could be usefully called ‘historical–fantasy soft core’. Outlander also utilised a vicious homosexual rape as the ‘finale’ of Season 1, in a disciplinary narrative that caused physical, emotional and psychological violence to the lead male character Jamie Fraser (Sam Heughan), inciting repulsion in not only Jamie, but by extension – in audiences. International Movie Database (2015f). viewed 09 May 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/news/ni58650213/>.

273 Cinematography, literally means the art of writing, or recording movement with light, as in kine=movement +graphy=writing.
which it is inscribed. Cinema departments advise students of the significances of screen culture: “As an art of audio–visual storytelling, film is a medium of communication rich with social implications, created within different social, historical and cultural contexts” (Victoria University of Wellington 2014). The time in which films are written, directed and produced and the spaces in which films are exhibited have implications upon both the content that is produced, what is made available to audiences and the experiences of spectatorship. Audiences now view films and screen content in contexts that were not available at the advent of cinema; both publically in theatres or film festivals and privately using digital video disc (DVD) and a home television or computer screen, or via digital streaming of online content (SVOD). The different contexts of viewing screen content and the varying affective needs of different audiences and communities have not been adequately addressed by current classification (ratings) systems. The films discussed as case studies within this thesis are all examples of independent cinema in the twenty first century, emerging outside the film studio rating system, against the historical background of twentieth century censorship of sexual images and non–hegemonic content and use of the term ‘obscene’ to stigmatize and repress sexual content on screen.

The historical social proscriptions against cinema, originated early in the last century and have had enduring consequences in the official classifications (ratings) responses to cinematic creativity. As an overview, film in the early–mid twentieth century became a cause of much hostility and proscription, as it caused “moral panic”, particularly in America (Wittern–Keller 2013, p. 16). This was due to the ability of cinema to reach and speak to people across all sections of society and to convey messages about life which had previously been under institutional control.274 There was a sense of the potential that this new entertainment medium held and “society’s moral guardians...were concerned....at the immense social implications of what they perceived as commercialised voyeurism” (Wittern–Keller 2013, p. 16). This fear led to cinema becoming strictly regulated by Production and Classification Codes as we will see in this chapter. Screen culture created a new kind of communication in society, one where people did not need to be able to read, or write to be entertained, informed or empowered. This also meant that the inability to read or write could no longer provide a controlling barrier to the exchange of information; now there was the potential to be able to

274 Such as that deriving in religious and family structures, the conservatively accepted loci of social training.
access images on a screen. In this form of visual cultural exchange lays the immense and enduring power of film.

Regulation of what film representations are produced and exhibited is controlled by not only who makes the films, but by the official classifications (ratings) systems that act as gatekeepers, providing the requisite ‘stamp’ of legal approval that enables films to be widely distributed in theatrical and DVD release, or exhibited at a film festival. The same system also prevents films from being publically screened. Whilst the classification Guidelines in Australia (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2008, 2012; Australian Government 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2015) and film ratings systems publically advise the legislative frameworks for classifying films, hegemonic bias can be clearly seen in the way in which classifications regulations are interpreted and applied to the films that are approved for screening. Wittern–Keller succinctly sums this situation “there can be little doubt that the most obvious and intrusive interference with what filmmakers could produce —and what audiences could see—has come from governmental film censorship agencies” (2013, p. 15).

Serious issues around anomalies within the Australian classifications system became apparent in 2012, whilst I was curating the annual festival programme for Queer Fruits Film Festival (Ford 2014b, 2015b, 2016a forthcoming), the year that the case study films within this thesis are sourced.275

In this year the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department in Australia 276 Refused (an official classification term in Australia)277 to grant Exemption for two independently produced queer films with explicit non–heteronormative narratives to be screened at premiere Australian queer film festival Queer Screen in Sydney. One film, _______________________________________

275 I became very aware of the issues discussed throughout this chapter as I was working as Festival Director of an independent queer film festival as discussed within Chapter 3 and further discussed within this chapter.

276 Previously (pre–2006) known as the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC).

277 The term ‘Refused’ is used throughout this thesis in discussion of cinematic classifications (ratings) in Australia as an official classification term, hence the capitalisation as it is used officially in Australia (it is not being used as a verb), there is no classification category termed ‘ban’ (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2, RC Refused Classification). This will be discussed within this chapter.
Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010), explicitly depicts transgender and genderqueer people in a range of sexual scenarios (public and private) and the second film, In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011), depicts two gay men engaged in consensual sexual acts in private as will be discussed further within this chapter. Both films test the limits of what might be permissible to be screened within the R 18+ category of the Guidelines in Australia.\textsuperscript{278} In this ratings category, “Sexual activity may be realistically simulated. The general rule is “simulation, yes – the real thing, no”.\textsuperscript{279} Significantly within the Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012), no matter which rating is referred to, there are no references to gender, or sexual orientation. The Guidelines would seem to be written and communicated in an inclusive way, to ensure that heteronormative and non–heteronormative depictions would receive equal classifications treatment. The decision by the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department to Refuse Exemption status to these films seems at odds with the Guidelines’ statement that “Some material classified R 18+ may be offensive to sections of the adult community” and that “There are virtually no restrictions on the treatment of themes” and nudity is permitted.\textsuperscript{280}

In stark contrast to the effective ‘banning’\textsuperscript{281} of these two queer texts from being publically screened, Australia has a history of selectively approving theatrical and DVD releases of texts which depict actual sex.\textsuperscript{282} A notable example of this is the feature film Shortbus (John Cameron Mitchell, Canada, 2006), a text which opens with a scene of auto–fellatio and continues through a narrative dense with scenes filled with actual depictions of sexual activity and nudity. Shortbus received Office of Film and Literature Classification approval for both

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}[\textsuperscript{278}]  \item Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012). Part 2, R 18+. Audiences restricted to persons of the age of 18 years and over.  
\item There are no actual references to the word ‘ban’ or ‘banning’ within Australian classifications; this is discussed further within this chapter under ‘obfuscation’.  
\item That is, not ‘simulated’ as defined within the Australian classifications system, but the ‘real thing’ (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2, R 18+).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
theatrical and DVD releases in 2006 with the classification of R 18+ of the text.\textsuperscript{283}

A further example of the anomalies within the Australian classification system are illustrated through a documentary called \textit{Donkey Love} (Daryl within, USA, 2012).\textsuperscript{284} This film was publically screened at the Sydney Underground Film Festival in the same year and in the same city (Sydney) that the queer texts cited above were Refused permission to be screened. The Sydney Underground Film Festival received an Exemption to screen the text from the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department. This is “a documentary that purports to reveal sexual relations between Colombian men and their donkeys, a practice that allegedly prepares men for sex with women and ‘prevents them from becoming homosexuals’ ”.\textsuperscript{285} This approval to screen becomes contentious when considered in terms of the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012) \textit{Guidelines} which clearly state: “Films will be refused classification if they include or contain any of the following: (under subheading sex) Depictions of practices such as bestiality”.\textsuperscript{286}

The documentary, which purports to explicitly depict a man engaged in ‘the real thing’ (actual sex with a donkey)\textsuperscript{287} would appear to exceed both the R 18+ and X 18+ classification categories in Australia and, hence would be a film most likely deemed RC (Refused Classification), had the film been presented for official classification outside a film festival.

\textsuperscript{283} Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2011–2015f). “Search the Classification Database”, \textit{Shortbus}, Consumer Advice “High level sex scenes, Actual sexual activity, viewed 29 November 2014, 08 April 2016, 11 April 2016, <http://www.classification.gov.au/Pages/Results.aspx?q=Shortbus&t=lfc>. \textit{Shortbus} (John Cameron Mitchell, Canada, 2006) is a key example of text which would seem to not fit the Australian R18+ \textit{Guidelines}, due to the number of depictions of ‘the real thing’ (actual penetrative sex) within the film, yet the film was classified and released to public theatrical and DVD releases. Such decision reaffirm that Australian classifications \textit{Guidelines} are in practise literally what these are called: ‘guidelines’ open to interpretation and each film is considered on a case by case basis (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009).


\textsuperscript{286} Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2012). Part 2, RC Refused Classification.

\textsuperscript{287} According to the publicity surrounding the film and also suggested by the film trailer. International Movie Database (IMDB) (2012) \textit{Donkey Love} <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1982102/>. The current researcher has not previewed the full text.
As the documentary was presented to a film festival for screening, prior official classification was not required. From the classification Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012) and also the earlier decisions in 2012 around queer texts containing ‘the real thing’, it would also have been expected that the synopsis of this film within the Sydney Underground Film Festival application for their annual program to be exempted to screen, would have led to the classification Exemptions Officer Refusing Exemption to screen Donkey Love at the film festival. In seeming contradiction to the Guidelines, the heterosexist, homophobic and bestial text received an Exemption and subsequently screened to a public, paying audience at the 2012 Sydney Underground Film Festival.

Decisions such as these four examples communicate profoundly confusing messages about what representations are legally acceptable to be screened in Australia and hold profound implications for filmmakers writing, directing and producing films with non–heteronormative narratives, containing gender–diverse participants and characters. This raises a central and ongoing ethical issue of social justice, which will be explored throughout this thesis of whose ‘community standards’ are being utilised to judge whether a film fits within ratings Guidelines, or is deemed objectionable and refused permission to be screened. Grounds for refusal in Australia must be solely based upon the published Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2, RC). However it is clear that other factors are taken into account in the processes of making classifications decisions. This includes factors that could be very subjective to assess, such as the artistic merit of a text, which is an area that was subjected to rigorous interrogation and contestation in Australia in 2011 across a range of legal, cultural, artistic and cinematic interpretations. There is also the potential for the individual subjectivities of the classifications personnel to influence decisions, which will be discussed further within this

---


A critical engagement with these four classification decisions leads to valid questioning of recurrent subjective interpretations of the classifications Guidelines in Australia. Was Shortbus (John Cameron Mitchell, Canada, 2006) given an official classification rating, enabling theatrical release (which equals box office income), because it contained titillating heteronormative sexual depictions intertwined within the narrative depictions of homoeroticism? Was Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) refused an exemption because it depicted subversive trans and gender–diverse sexualities? Was it because the film Donkey Love (Daryl Stoneage, USA, 2012) actively purports to “prevent homosexuality” that the documentary received an official Exemption to be screened? Or was it because the text actively promotes a male–dominated, heterosexual society? The misogynist trailer for the film depicts a smiling man patting his donkey’s head with the caption “I don’t have to buy her clothes, I don’t have to buy her shoes”.291 This explicitly links the narrative to male–dominance and a society where female participation is demeaned and devalued below the status of a working field animal. Ethical issues to do with the depictions of bestiality within the text have not been critically evaluated. Significantly, the

290 “Classification criteria – The Act. Under the Act, each of the following matters must be taken into account in classifying films:
(a) the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults;
(b) the literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the publication, film or computer game;
(c) the general character of the publication, film or computer game, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character;
(d) the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2).

Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department did not request to preview a copy of the film prior to granting the Exemption to screen. This will be returned to in Chapter 7 in the discussion of Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), also a documentary which passed through official classifications processes in the same year as the texts cited above and subsequently screened (without any negative incident) at two independent gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer film festivals in Australia during 2012.\(^{292}\) It is interesting to note that this transgender text, also a documentary, containing brief, contextualised narrative depictions of ‘the real thing’ between transmen and genderqueer participants was required to be fully previewed (entire film seen) by Classifications Exemptions’ Officers prior to the Exemption to screen being granted to Melbourne Queer Film Festival in 2012.\(^{293}\)

These are not the only examples of the confusing, conflicting nature of official classifications processes in Australia and the recurrent, subjective interpretations and applications of the classifications’ Guidelines, which actively discriminate against the screening of films which contain non–heterosexual content and which privilege classification of hegemonic representations. This position has been criticised by leading film scholars\(^ {294}\) and described as the “strange anomalies embedded in Australia’s film classification (censorship) landscape” (Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 34).

Refusal to grant exemption to explicit non–hegemonic films means that representations that are valid to the specific gender–diverse community represented are blocked from being publically and legally accessed by that community. This is due to the subjective interpretation of the principles (Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 56) within the classification Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012) by individual Exemptions Officers. This is of especial concern, given the subjectivity that an


\[^{293}\] Queer Fruits Film Festival (2012). Archive. QFFF was not required to submit the entire film at the time of applying for the Exemption to screen, as classifications referred to the previous preview of the film in relation to the Melbourne Queer Film Festival program.

individual can bring to a role, based upon *which community* they are from. There does not appear to be any formal check and balance to prevent subjective individual interpretation of classifications *Guidelines* by the Officers of the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department. Harris (2005) notes that “Australia’s censorship regime is flawed in that it is underpinned by a community–standards approach, rather than a harms–based approach” (p. 57).

Harris (2005) also questions the validity of ‘community standards’ as the determining factor in classification of sexually explicit film materials and notes that “This test was clearly rooted in concepts of social morality, and offered no explanation as to why such moral concerns should over–ride individual rights” (p. 26). The application of a generic concept of ‘harm’ that may be potentially caused by material, is an alternate way for texts to be subjected to censorship. Citing a legal judgement in Canada on a matter of a shop owner who sold pornographic materials and was convicted of dealing with obscene materials Judge Sopinka stated:

> While a direct link between obscenity and harm to society may be difficult, if not impossible, to establish, it is reasonable to presume that exposure to images bears a causal relationship to changes in attitudes and beliefs (p. 32).

In this case, a concurring judgement “placed great emphasis on the fact that what Section 163 proscribes is representations of a certain type” (p. 32 italics in original) “The type of scenes vividly described...might perhaps be legal if done between consenting adults, but they become obscene if represented” (Harris 2005, p. 33). Use of the term ‘obscene’ brings an historically unquantifiable blemish—and once raised—a tarnish that is difficult to erase. This form of social proscription creates controversy, impacting not only the reputation of the artist or filmmaker, but may also render their works of art and films unmarketable—or even liable to prosecution. The generalised wording of Section 163 of Canadian law in relation to a definition of what is ‘obscene’ in representations also leaves room for varying and subjective

---

295 Harris (2005). A statutory definition of obscenity is contained in Section 163(1)(a) of Canadian law. 
“An offence is committed by anyone who...makes, prints, publishes, distributes, circulates or has in his possession for the purpose of publication, distribution or circulation any obscene written matter, picture, model, photographic record or any other thing whatever.”
judgements in that country. Harris (2005) notes “this key issue – the disjunction between what it may be lawful to do and what it may be lawful to represent” (p. 33). Proscription of sexually explicit materials becomes justified “because of the possibility that they might foster anti-social attitudes” (Harris 2005, p. 33 Italics in original).

Whilst sexual imagery is proscribed according to ‘community standards and concerns’ under all current classification systems, there is a disturbing underlying morality inherent within these systems that has been directly restated in the USA courtroom in unambiguous terms that “pornography affects thoughts” (Harris 2005, p. 36). This statement from legal scholar Harris suggests that subtextually encoded within these classification (ratings) systems is a legal sanctioning of the ‘thoughts’ of potential viewers. How ‘thoughts’ are measured and what empirical evidence is—or could be—utilised in support of such a position has not been stated. What this comment raises is of great concern from scholarly and personal libertarian perspectives. This also positions the production and presentation of independent non–hegemonic screen content within a legal system that borders the realm of science–fiction style governance. This is a realm that has been navigated within the fictional feature film Minority Report (Steven Spielberg, USA, 2002), set in a futuristic time when technology enables a small group of ‘Pre–Cogs’ (gifted with visionary abilities) to predict future crimes. This film presents a dystopian society and what is effectively a speculative policing of citizens’ future actions and internal mindscapes, to be used as the basis for official law enforcement and crime prevention measures.

The subtle differences between what is depicted in a film, what audiences think about what is depicted and what this expresses about a subject, reveals one of the ongoing problems with subjective interpretation of a screen texts in relation to classifications (ratings) systems: “one should distinguish the subject matter of representation and the attitudes of the people represented in it, on the one hand, from the attitude expressed towards their activity by the work itself, on the other” (Harris 2005, p. 44, citing Gracyk 1991).

Harris ultimately argues for law reform and a revision of the current classifications standards, to allow for the distribution of films currently rated as ‘X’ provided that such films do not
contain images of sex with violence.\textsuperscript{296} This leads to a position on classification of films that does not suggest the need for proscription according to the ‘harm–based’ approach of current classifications regimes.\textsuperscript{297} The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) in Australia also presented a compelling argument to the Parliamentary Enquiry in Australia (Parliament of Australia 2011) that advocated for changes in the way unclassified films could be handled by ‘cultural institutions’.\textsuperscript{298}

Due to the difficulties arising from the NFSA’s large unclassified collection, it proposed the inclusion of a blanket exemption for cultural institutions which would allow them to screen unclassified material. The NFSA expected that, under such a provision, the relevant institution would self-classify material in a manner similar to that adopted by television broadcasters, and could be subject to oversight by the Classification Board (Parliament of Australia 2011, Section 7.62).

Since this Enquiry in 2011, changes in the Australian system have gradually been implemented (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2014b, Australian Government 2015), that might bring Australian film festivals in line with other international film festivals, particularly in the USA as will be discussed below. Such legislative changes in Australian classifications may also eliminate the anomalies that have

\textsuperscript{296} Harris cites specific studies that have demonstrated that “exposure to non violent sexually orientated material actually lowers levels of aggression” (Harris 2005, p. 39, Italics in original; Segel 1993, pp. 5, 12).

\textsuperscript{297} There has been a previous attempt at reform in Australia in 2000, to introduce a new category of ‘Non–Violent Erotica (NVE) which would have replaced the current ‘X’ category. This was defeated by socially–conservative politicians (Harris 2005, p. 56).

\textsuperscript{298} The classifications’ definition of ‘cultural institutions’ includes a range of ‘approved organisations’; this definition includes independent film festivals (note: becoming an approved organisation is not automatic; is subjected to verification and under the auspices of another ‘approved organisation’ until a successful track record is demonstrated. Subsequent to the Enquiry changes have been implemented for such organisations (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2014b; Australian Government 2015).
been experienced by independent filmmakers and film festivals in Australia in programming texts.\(^{299}\)

The lesson to be drawn is clear: thoroughgoing reform of the censorship regime is needed if the law is to be put on a basis that respects the autonomy of the individual, with the material being proscribed only if it meets the definition of harm as determined by empirical research (Harris 2005, p. 58).

This holds wider significance for the production and exhibition of trans representations within film.

5.3 The Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department/Office of Film & Literature Classification (OFLC) (Australia)

In Australia, a film is ascribed one of the classifications categories (G, PG, M, M 15+, R 18+) which specifically limits the audience which may access the text. This is performed “by the OFLC in accordance with the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Cth) (Classification Act ) before they can be publicly exhibited in cinemas, sold or hired” (Dunstan and Schubert 2011, p. 34).\(^{300}\) Film Festivals may apply for and receive an Exemption to screen films which have not been officially classified.

---

\(^{299}\) I have used the words ‘might’ and ‘may’ in this paragraph deliberately, as it has not been possible to empirically verify with festival directors experienced with both forms of Exemption systems as to whether the changes made by the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2014b; Australian Government 2015) would in practise lead to texts such as Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) or In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011) being screened. One of the issues encountered during the research has been that key film festival directors have completed their terms and moved on to other projects (and hence have not worked with both systems). It is also beyond the scope of this thesis to assess whether the position of independent film festivals in Australia post–2014 equates with the non–classifications programming experiences of film festivals in the USA in these same years. This could be a productive area for further researches.

The Australian system is based upon concepts of what would not offend the standards of "reasonable adults" and generic ‘community standards’. The ‘artistic merits’ of a text are taken into account as we saw previously. This can be at odds with the principle enshrined within the Code that “adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want”. Dalton and Schubert (2011, p. 44) have noted that the Australian system ‘obfuscates’ censorship through avoiding any reference to the term ‘censorship’, or ‘ban’ within the

---


Classification Guidelines and through using words such as ‘refused classification’ (RC), or ‘refused exemption’ (in relation to films not permitted to screen at a film festival).³⁰⁴

Obfuscating an act of censorship is the most effective technique used to avoid outrage and any subsequent ‘backfire’, as people cannot object to something about which they know nothing (Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 44).

Yet behind such ‘obfuscation’, censorship is central to classifications processes in Australia. This is evidenced by the word being prominently used in official government documents such as the “Standing Committee of Attorneys–General Censorship Annual Report” (Standing Committee of Attorneys–General (SCAG–Censorship) 2003–2004)³⁰⁵ which states that “The censorship component of SCAG oversees the national classification scheme” (ibid., p.2) and reports on “The significant decisions of Censorship Ministers” (op. cit., p. 5).

A further way of subverting attention away from the prominent role that censorship plays in relation to what films are seen in Australia, is by defusing classifications decisions through the ‘denigrating’ (Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 47), or devaluing of either the material represented, or the group creating the representation. This has historically been demonstrated as the most effective way of garnering public support against a group. Obfuscation may also effectively be created around a text through use of illegitimating words such as ‘obscene’.

Mainstream classifications processes and screen texts continue to promote representations which demonstrate these perspectives, through simultaneously ‘refusing’ to permit public exhibition of non–hegemonic representations of genders and sexualities, whilst promoting narratives which devalue trans lives and texts with negative, demeaning and socially proscriptive story arcs.³⁰⁶

---


³⁰⁶ Ford (2016c, 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). Recent examples have included Dallas Buyers Club (Jean-Marc Vallee 2013); Predestination (The Spierig Brothers 2014).
Given the historical proscriptions against gender/sexual difference perpetuated within monotheistic religions and the anti–gay sentiments which continually resurface in right–wing movements (as two examples), the potential and ability of specific ideological groups to influence classifications processes at any time, is of ongoing concern. Further to Dunstan, it can be suggested that individual classifications Exemptions Officers are legally able to classify, or refuse classification status to texts based upon their own interpretation of the official Guidelines. Of note in this regard, is that the Australian classification (ratings) system is administered by Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012). The very name and nature of the classifications scheme has built into it the perplexing and contradictory need for interpretation of what are published literally as ‘guidelines’ only.

How is it possible for an Exemptions Officer to interpret the Guidelines in relation to a documentary depicting men having sex with donkeys as able to receive Exemption to screen publicly, whilst a documentary with two gay men having consensual sex in private receives a Refusal to screen? Both texts contain ‘actual sex’; example 1 above, can neither be classified within the X 18 + category because this is restricted to “sexual activity between consenting adults” and a donkey is neither a consenting participant in the sexual act, nor an adult human. The text would immediately appear to fall within the RC (Refused Classification) category due to the depiction of “bestiality”. Given the subsequent Exemption to screen, it becomes apparent that the Exemptions Officer chose to consider both films within the terms of the R 18 + rating (the equivalent default rating for film festival programs), which has an ambiguous Impact Test for the classifiable element of sex, stating “The general rule is “simulation, yes—the real thing, no”. Considering all of the above with reference to the classifications Guidelines leads to a conclusion that the Exemptions Officer made two incorrect decisions and that the decisions would have made more sense reversed (in other words Refusing to grant Exemption to Donkey Love, granting Exemption to screen to In Their Room: Berlin.

308 Ibid., Part 2, RC Refused Classification.
The subjective interpretation of official classifications Guidelines is of specific concern and ongoing relevance to the classification and public exhibition of non–hegemonic content and transgender representations, which involve trans community standards and depictions which may range outside the ambit of general Australian ‘community standards’ (p. 147) used to gauge how films should be rated. These issues are also reflected in the American Motion Picture Association of America /Classification and Ratings Administration system, which is an industry–run administration from the six major Hollywood Studios (Motion Picture Association of America 2014a), that will be discussed later in this chapter, whose economic focus is upon producing family–friendly G and PG rated films.

There has been organised resistance to censoring of film in Australia including public and underground screenings of ‘banned’ texts.310 Texts of specific relevance to this current research project subjected to ‘banning’ in Australia such as Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) will be discussed further within this chapter. These texts illustrate the estrangement of official classifications systems from non–hegemonic communities and the complex relationship a queer film festival has in bridging between the worlds of subcultural independent queer filmmakers who represent specific communities with standards which differ from mainstream generic ‘community standards’ and complying with statutory obligations regarding public screening of texts.

5.4 Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)/The Classification & Rating Administration (CARA)(USA)

The Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA), established in 1922, was the forerunner of the current Motion Picture Association of America, also known as the MPAA (MPPDA Digital Archive 2014). Within the Association, The Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), with a parental advisory board, oversees film classification issues “CARA’s mission is to afford parents the tools they need to make informed decisions about

310 Dalton and Schubert (2011). A screening of banned film Ken Park (Larry Clark 2002) was organised by Free Cinema in Sydney in 2003 “The unofficial leaders of Free Cinema were all relatively public figures from respected professions, including Margaret Pomeranz, academic Jane Mills, broadcaster Julie Rigg and filmmaker Christina Andreef” (p. 46). An underground screening of banned film LA Zombie (Bruce La Bruce 2010) was organised by Melbourne International Film Festival Director Richard Wolstencroft – for which he was prosecuted (p. 32).
what their children watch”. The situation of film classification in America is complexly entwined with mainstream film production. The Motion Picture Association of America represents the six major Hollywood Studios (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures; Paramount Pictures Corporation; Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.; Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporations; Universal City Studios LLC; Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc (MPAA, 2014a, abbreviations in original, order of Studios in original). Heading this list is Disney, most famous for family–orientated films which promote hegemonic gender/sex roles and mainstream family values.

![American Film Ratings](image)

Figure 5.2: American Film Ratings (classifications) marks. Source: Motion Picture Association of America/The Classification & Rating Administration (1986–2013).

---


312 There have been “social-media campaigns to feature more LGBT characters in tentpole movies” (Nordine 2016) and ongoing pressure from fans for gender diversity in animated characters for some time now. Intense excitement was created online mid–2016 (on 29 May) by the release of the film trailer from Disney–Pixar for new animated film Finding Dory (Andrew Stanton, Angus MacLane, USA, 2016). The trailer seems to suggest that the film will feature the first lesbian characters (a couple with a child) in a Disney–Pixar film (Horton 2016; Nordine 2016). As celebrated lesbian comedienne Ellen De Generes is the star and voice of Dory (International Movie Database 2016), this may not just be a rumour.
Not surprisingly, the mission statement of the Classification and Ratings Administration reflects the studio hegemonies “we hope to provide parents with a useful social service, while allowing filmmakers to connect meaningfully with appropriate audiences”. This has serious implications and impacts for the depiction of marginalised (non–hegemonic) communities in mainstream cinema.

The historical issues surrounding on–screen representations become clearer when discussed in context to the origin of classifications (ratings) systems in Australia and America and specifically, the origins of the current ratings system used by Hollywood. According to leading scholars of film censorship studies (Biltereyst and Vande Winkel 2013; Wittern-Keller 2013) film classification in America came into being following early pressure from Protestant groups, as a moral majority concerned about film content (Wittern-Keller 2013, p. 21). By the late 1920s, Hollywood was under the moralistic control and dictates of the Catholic Church (Black 2013, pp. 241–244; Wittern-Keller 2013, p. 21). The current American ratings system developed out of a ratings–based system devised by the Catholic ‘Legion of Decency’ (Black 2013, p. 244), indicating which films were church–approved for families to support at box office. Studios quickly learnt that without the seal of approval (‘A1’ or ‘A2’, equivalent to a ‘G’ or ‘PG’ rating in current terms) of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae (IFCA — the catholic women’s organization) in pre–1960’s Hollywood, that films would not be patronised—and hence—no box office (Black 2013, p. 244).


314 The International Federation of Catholic Alumnae (IFCA) = the catholic women’s organization, which was responsible for reviewing films, ensuring that films adhered to the repressive Hays Code and issuing a ratings to permit public screening. According to Black (2013, p. 244) :
“"The Legion (of Decency) and the IFCA quickly constructed a four-tier system to classify movies:
A1 Unobjectionable for general patronage
A2 Unobjectionable for adults
B Objectionable in parts
C Condemned
The first two classifications told Catholics there was no objectionable material in the film but parents were warned to be careful of taking young children to an A2 classification. The B ratings was more confusing because while lay Catholics considered a B film approved, some Bishops and priests believed all B films unfit for Catholic audiences.”

315 The Catholic Women’s League in Australia continues to exert behind the scenes pressure upon official classifications processes, supporting that all art be classified (and hence subjected to censorial processes, which can include refusals to exhibit). The 2011 Parliamentary Enquiry into classifications review (Parliament of Australia 2011, Section 7.55) published that “the committee received submissions which strongly argued against the exemption of artworks from classification. The Catholic Women's League of Australia recommended that the National Classification Scheme apply to works of art. Similarly, Salt Shakers recommended that all artworks should be classified”
Lea Jacobs (1997) argues that far from being a system solely ‘enforced’ from these groups, that Hollywood producers were *complicit in negotiations* and *editing of films to ensure passing censorial processes* (pp. xi-xii). Such complicity included writing and editing of specific scenes and cinematic narratives in ways which presented a socially and morally proscriptive view of women identified as the ‘Fallen Woman’ genre (Jacobs 1997). Films are seen historically as the “product of a symbiotic relationship between governmental censors and Hollywood’s internal censors at the PCA” and that “there is no doubt that governmental censors came first” (Wittern-Keller 2013, pp.15-16). This debate has been called a “chicken–and–egg question” in the literature of film censorship (Wittern-Keller 2013, p. 16).

In this way influences and pressures *exterior to the creative processes* were established in mainstream filmmaking and hegemonic religion exerted a disproportionate power over cinema. 316 From the advent of sound in films, Studios were molded to produce specific types of depictions of society, with ‘family values’ (“general patronage”/ ‘G’ rated) films, equaling box office success. The industrial model of film production and economic rationale for movies, the business end of ‘show business’, ultimately overrides all other considerations, for Studios “cannot consider either the filmmaking process or films themselves in isolation from this economic, technological, and industrial context” (Schatz 1993, p.10). Whilst mainstream films continue to promote hegemonic values, the existence of subversive films and filmmakers within the mainstream affects/demonstrates the complexity of this relationship. 317

In the USA the majority of mainstream films released to cinema are G or PG rated. These ratings categories appear to automatically exclude films with trans narratives. In mainstream cinema release such texts have primarily been films with socially proscriptive, demeaning, comedic, or parodic story arcs 318 and released at the R rating, as will be discussed below.

316 The detailed inclusions/exclusions in depictions will be further discussed with reference to the Production Code Administration (PCA), known as the ‘Hays Code’. This repressive code was ‘authored by a Jesuit Priest (Daniel Lord)’ (Lewis 2013, p, 33) in 1930 and overseen and run by a catholic (Joseph Breen) between 1934-1954 supported by ‘The Legion of Decency’.

317 Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine mainstream films which subvert the hegemony, the work of an actor–filmmaker such as James Franco, is cited within this chapter as one exemplar.

318 Ford (2016c, 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H) on *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013); noting earlier text *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) as a further example of this. Films such as *Transamerica* (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005) illustrate other issues.
Historically this has deprived wider audiences of access to texts which represent trans narratives in a range of relevant, contemporary, life-affirming narratives, a situation that is slowly beginning to change with pay-per-view, Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) online television series. In turn, this leads to gender-binary and heteronormative views being privileged on screen.

Films with subjects deemed by the Classification and Ratings Administration (parental) board to contain ‘aberrational behavior’ have historically received the rating of NC–17. The Studios “introduced the NC–17 rating system in 1990 for adults–only films that were still somehow within the range of appropriate studio product lines...but have since abandoned that designation by including in their contracts the inevitable rejoinder against producing an NC–17 film” (Lewis 2013, p. 43). Due to these factors, the NC–17 rating is known as the ‘kiss of death’ for a film, many distributors will not touch these films and cinema chains are frequently unable to screen any films rated NC–17 due to being located within multiplex shopping centres which explicitly cite on their leases “a provision prohibiting the screening of such films” (Lewis 2013, p.43). A classification rating such as the NC–17 is used to strictly control mainstream cinema releases. The definition of what constitutes ‘aberrational behavior’ in terms of the NC–17 rating seems to be broadly applied. An overview of the films released in this category suggests that the content is heteronormative (e.g. Showgirls, Paul Verhoeven, USA, 1995), with sexual themes (e.g. Inside Deep Throat, Fenton Bailey, USA, 2005) and/or violent narratives that would exclude the films from the the lower R category in the USA (which screens to audiences 17 years of age (unlike the Australian R 18+ which excludes anyone under the age of 18 years). None of the ‘Top 30’ box office grossers in this category appear to be non–heteronormative, or transgender–themed films. Due to this, it is difficult to assess whether transgender narratives would be considered ‘aberrational’ according to this rating.

319 Recent SVOD examples of screen texts with trans actors, actresses and directors, trans characters, themes and narratives include Orange Is the New Black (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–), Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014), Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–), This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015). These texts will be further cross-referenced throughout this thesis. The caveat upon wider distribution/viewing of these texts is that this requires a paid subscription service (such as Netflix or Amazon Prime), high speed broadband and digital screening equipment, that may present economic and technological obstacles to these texts being seen.

This comparison suggests that the USA ratings system has (or, has had) a ‘tolerance’ for films with stronger content and sexual themes, provided the films are heteronormative. It is beyond the scope of the objectives of this thesis to analyse the narrative of each film that receives the NC–17 rating and the box office implications for this rating.

It is to be noted that NC–17 in the USA is closest to the R 18+ in Australia, however the NC–17 carries a different stigma than R 18+. Whilst both categories of films are distributed to theatrical (cinema) release films within the R 18+ classification in Australia are not noted as being ‘aberrational’ in content. Significantly, texts with trans themes and characters which receive the Motion Picture Association of America/Classification and Ratings Administration rating approval to screen theatrically in cinemas and which are distributed to digital video disc (DVD), appear to always attract the R rating within the USA classification system. It is sobering to note that all the well–known and canonically awarded trans–themed mainstream films have been released as R in America. This includes The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992); Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999); Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005); Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013); Predestination (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014). Whilst these texts appear to receive the lower R rating (i.e. lower than the NC–17) that enables wider theatrical release and viewing by mainstream audiences in the USA, the texts frequently contain socially proscriptive, demeaning and stereotypical narratives (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

A critical interpretation of this ratings’ strategy could suggest that by imposing the lower category of R, a wider adult audience is enabled to view narratives that ultimately reinscribe moralistic viewpoints and social proscription against gender diversity. Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) and Predestination (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014)


are the two most recent examples in a list of films which fit this description, including the earlier text *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999). These are films characterised by narratives in which the story arc of the trans character so closely follows genre conventions identified within the ‘ Fallen Woman’ cycle of Hollywood films (Jacobs 1997), to be able to suggest that writers, directors and producers have recycled this genre, transposing this onto the trans body in the twenty first century (Ford 2016c *forthcoming*, 2016e *forthcoming*, Appendix H). In this genre of films, the main character is always an ‘outsider’ (outside the law/home/family), on the streets, suffering humiliations and dying before the story ends. 

The feature film *Predestination* (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014) has a particularly negative and vicious narrative as we also saw in Chapter 2 and presents trans in terms of heterosexual and heteronormative narrative structures. In this text the main character, depicted as a woman, becomes pregnant out of marriage (again echoes of the ‘fallen woman’ genre) and whilst under anesthetic having a caesarean–section delivery of her child, is subjected to involuntary gender reassignment surgery (female–to–male), whilst unconscious. The distressing nature of this narrative to audiences who are gender–diverse cannot be overestimated. What it communicates about trans people to mainstream audiences is abhorrent, including that a person’s gender identity can be reconfigured involuntarily and that such a person will then seek vengeance on society.

The film moves between time–periods and characters, creating a confusing narrative—much of the temporal displacement within *Predestination* is a contemporary reimagining of time–travel themes used as tropes within the science–fiction genre; however the trope of killing off the ‘outsider’, marginalised and gender–variant character is also portrayed. Worse still, the central character in this text, who is now a transman is depicted as ‘predestined’ to become a sociopath—being revealed (plot spoiler) within the narrative to be a serial murderer, known as the ‘Fizzle Bomber’, who is responsible for all the devastation experienced in the film. This textual treatment directly links transgender as the underlying cause of enormous mental instability and social disintegration and in being an ‘outsider’, as one who then wants to

---

323 Noting that *Boys Don’t Cry* is a biographical drama, based upon the murder of transmale youth Brandon Teena. Within the film social proscription of difference in a small town leads to violence. The film makes viewers confront the damaging social consequences of gender, sexual and racial ignorance, particularly in small rural towns. This a theme also conveyed in *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, USA, 2005) in relation to the experiences of gay men.

324 A contemporary permutation of the Frankenstein story, with society standing in for the maker.

325 Ford (*forthcoming*).
wreak vengeance and destruction upon an unsuspecting heteronormative world. This is an absolutely demoralising and abhorrent text.

Throughout *Predestination*, the main character is propelled through a science–fiction narrative of temporal distortion. The temporal displacement echoes the physical spatial displacement of the main character within the narrative. This can be critically interpreted as representing the gender disembodiment and involuntary reconfiguration that the main character is forced through, that leads to sociopathic consequences in what is perhaps the most transphobic text of recent cinema. Such interconnections between temporal and bodily dissonance in filmic time have also been located in relation to video and queer narratives (Freeman 2010).

A text such as *Predestination* reveals classifications (ratings) systems at perhaps its most insidious—as wider audiences within the general community are exposed to texts with negative story arcs about trans people, reaffirming intolerance, condescension and incomprehension of the place of gender–diverse people within society. This is because these films always posit the trans character as being out of place, an outsider, or as ‘fallen’; or as in *Predestination* (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014), not only out of place, a sociopath; but also temporally displaced, not fitting into any time, out of time. The violent representation and narrative treatment of the central character in this film is starkly contrasted to the integrated view of transgender lives chronicled by Halberstam (2005), as people who are in time and place and reaffirmed by filmmakers of the Trans New Wave.

The representation of trans in films plays an important role in constituting trans identities and experiences. Due to the heteronormativity of the classifications processes and the hegemonic positioning of Hollywood in relation to general audiences, mainstream movies are limited in what they can/or will contribute to such processes. The mainstream is frequently seen to negatively contribute to the experiences of transpeople, as evidenced by the examples cited above. This all serves to further underline the importance of independent films and the unrated films of the Trans New Wave that contain narratives representative of trans community viewpoints and lives. The significant role that film representations may have in

---

326 Discussed in Ford (2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). This does not mean that we should not expect more from such films.
the lives of transgender people will be considered and is part of the transliteracy that will emerge from this research in Chapter 8.

To contextualise issues of classifications/ratings systems in respect to cinematic narratives focused upon trans, to demonstrate the ongoing issues with the use of tropes and the stereotypical representation of transgender in mainstream film, reference to Rayon (Jared Leto) in *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean–Marc Vallee 2013) is of particular relevance to this thesis. Rayon may be read as one character in a long line of socially proscribed Hollywood ‘fallen women’, with narrative displaced onto the transgender body (Ford 2016c *forthcoming*, 2016e *forthcoming*, Appendix H). In reading the text this way, the history of classification (rating) systems in America and the role and impact these systems have upon film production in the mainstream are demonstrated.


> because such films helped to define the limits of what was permissible, especially in the realm of sexuality. Many of the MPPDA’s 328 rules for handling stories which involved so–called sexual deviance were specifically elaborated in terms of this genre...By focusing on a genre, we can systematically trace the permutations of narrative conventions instigated by censorship (p. x, footnote added).

That Hollywood films use established genres as a shorthand for selling stories to audiences is well–established across films (Bordwell, Thompson and Ashton, 1997; Neale 2000; Bordwell 2006; McWilliam 2009). Of significance, is the scarcity of independent trans films which

---

327 The 1997 publication is the edition cited throughout this thesis.

328 The Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA) established in 1922 was the forerunner of the current MPAA (MPPDA Digital Archive, 2014).
consciously utilise specific genre conventions in storytelling. Chapter 6 will explore case study films in this thesis working with and against genre expectations. The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), is one of the few independent trans narrative short films to utilise the fiction genre, in this case the road movie genre, as a representational device for depicting the experience of transitioning. Yet The Thing also subverts genre expectations, whilst simultaneously holding to the genre form. The use of the documentary genre, particularly observational and cinéma-vérité documentary forms will be analysed as representational tools with respect to the film Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafer, Australia, 2012); with Chapter 7 focused upon the landmark transactivist film Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). It also becomes apparent from this discussion why independent filmmakers of the Trans New Wave would choose not to embrace the (mis)representational tropes evident in mainstream films—despite a long Hollywood usage and screen industry acclaim of such texts when writing, directing and producing independent trans films.

The specificity of genre issues of the ‘fallen woman’ historically to women is noted. Yet the universality of the demoralising narrative of social proscription, transposed onto the transgender body, may be discerned as of relevance to persons of all genders and sexualities and transcends time. Such demoralising representations of humanity are not constrained to the experiences, or understanding of women. Including reference to Rayon as of relevance to the broader research of independent transgender films acknowledges the historical connectivity within the trans community and transactivism between men and women and simultaneously renders as visible the outrage perpetuated upon the trans body as a theoretical and literal position, that a depiction such as Rayon creates. The genre of the ‘fallen woman’ illustrates “how Hollywood’s internal censorship mechanism produced negotiated representations of women at the level of image and narrative” (Bordwell and Carroll 1996, p. 29).

329 Such as science–fiction, horror, or genre conventions used as narrative devices such as ‘the road trip’ – which is perhaps the only frequently used genre convention in trans films. This comment is made to differentiate narrative choices that derive from the use of specific film styles such as ‘fiction’ or ‘documentary’.

330 Also used as a narrative device in the feature film Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005).

Whilst women were the specific historical sites targeted within early cinema, the issue of ‘negotiated representations’ cuts across all mainstream films and continues today within film production, whether the gender of the protagonist or antagonist is male or female:

Regulation today is executed by contract as the rating system is inevitably considered whenever a picture deal is signed. Directors agree to deliver their film as a G, PG, PG-13, or R and agree to do whatever CARA says they have to do to meet that contractual obligation (Lewis 2013, p. 43).

This supports the position within this thesis that classifications (ratings) systems are the invisible force within the mainstream film industry which directly control what representations are ultimately produced.

The latest market research by the MPAA carries a clear message to the marketing arms of the studio: target the young. This is important to what we see because the six major studios rarely, if ever, green light a project unless it is certified as “marketable” in America. What makes a movie “marketable” is that the marketing arm finds that it contains the action, stars, visual effects or other elements that it needs to put in 30 second television ads to activate millions of people on a particular weekend to go to the opening of a movie at thousands of screens across the country (Epstein 2011, blog).

The hegemony of the American ratings system within mainstream (theatrical, DVD release) is monolithic:

The MPAA no longer worries much about censorship, mostly because they have market research that shows that 75 percent of the nation’s parents are
satisfied with the present system. The ratings system is an unquestioned public relations story (Lewis 2013, p. 42).332

The issue of how the Motion Picture Association of America impacts independent filmmaking was approached in the recent film Interior. Leather Bar (James Franco, Travis Mathews, USA, 2013), which was created as a re–imagining of forty minutes of lost gay footage that ‘was rumored to be cut and destroyed from the 1980 film, “Cruising” in order to avoid an X rating from the MPAA (Synopsis, Interior. Leather Bar, 2013). An ‘X’ rating would have meant that no theatrical cinema release would have been possible, as ‘X’ is not a copyrighted rating used/owned by Studios within the Motion Picture Association of America, it is used only by the adult-film industry (Lewis 2013, p. 41). As noted previously, Mathews had directly experienced the power of classifications processes and the censorial gaze, when two of his earlier films In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011) and I Want Your Love (Travis Mathews, USA, 2012) were Refused the Exemption to screen in Australia at Queer Screen in 2012 and the Melbourne Queer Film Festival in 2013.333

Whilst the film Interior. Leather Bar fails to deliver the promised ‘40 minutes of lost footage’ (there is in reality only about 10 minutes of the re–imagined leather bar scene and part of it reduplicates the famous Al Pacino dance scene in the bar), what is significant about this film is that James Franco (an established mainstream Hollywood actor) is willing to go on camera and express discontent and concern about the control that the Motion Picture Association of America has over the creative direction of films. The stigmatisation of

---

332 The Classification & Rating Administration (2014e) have published results that suggest an even higher percentage of satisfaction with the present system: “98% of adults with children in the household have heard of the motion picture industry rating system”; “98% have also heard of the rating system’s descriptors”; “80% find the ratings very/fairly useful” and “84% find rating descriptors to be very/fairly useful”. The research methodology and further demographics of the survey participants are not listed. Such research shows very high levels of awareness amongst specific sectors of the film public. The wide difference between the ‘awareness’ of ratings systems between independent filmmakers as discussed later in this chapter and mainstream film audiences surveyed by the Classification & Rating Administration (as one example), is beyond the scope and rationale of this thesis to investigate. Areas for future research could potentially compare the effectiveness and validity of classifications (ratings) systems from the differing perspectives of film production and spectatorship, using a careful methodology with groups (such as independent filmmakers/film festival audiences; mainstream filmmakers/mainstream audiences). The divergence in awareness between stakeholder groups emerging from a comparison of research presents a unique window into the complexities of how classifications (ratings) systems control filmmaking.

anything gay and sexual depictions in general (especially gay sex/sexuality) is contrasted with the willingness for Hollywood Studios to produce and screen films saturated with violence, brutality and war themes in mainstream releases.

It can be argued that the historical vilification of homosexuality clearly identifiable as a tenet of hegemonic, heteronormative monotheistic religions, was directly reflected into the development of the American censorship ‘ratings’ systems through the pressure and influence of the protestant and catholic churches. This can be clearly seen in the Hays Code (1930) in sections such as Section II “Sex”, which included nine detailed points regarding depictions of sex, prefaced by the overriding statement: “The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing.” Section III specified: “Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.” The detailed moralistic proscriptions specified in the Code provide a clear background and rationale for the screen content direction of Hollywood films since the 1930s. Although this seems a long time ago, the entwined family audience/box office success formulae which began then, laid the basis for the entrenched family–orientated Studios and mainstream films of today.

The dichotomous reality of ‘violence—ok; sex—not ok’ in cinema distribution seems to be at odds with the Motion Picture Association of America statement that “More than forty years later, the system continues to evolve with our society and endures as a shining symbol of American freedom of expression” (Motion Picture Association of America 2014c). The Motion Picture Association of America system now in place developed to replace the Hays Code and is based upon copyrighted ratings (G, PG, PG-13, R) that ensured no film would be charged with ‘obscenity’ and hence, not be screenable (Lewis 2013, pp. 38-40). The issue of ‘obscenity’ also had been raised in Australia. Since 1912 Western Australia has had the power

334 Film censorship scholars have cohesively documented the historical involvement and centrality to the development of the USA system by key officials from within catholic church. This includes Father Daniel Lord a Jesuit priest, who “offered to write a better regulation” for cinema, what came to be known in 1930 as the “Production Code” (Wittern–Keller 2013, p. 21). During this era, the catholic church had maintained opposition and continued a tirade against cinema, establishing the “Legion of Decency, and threatened a nationwide boycott unless the moguls produced more family–friendly content” (Wittern–Keller 2013, p. 21); in 1934 the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA) named Joseph Breen – also a catholic and anti–semitic – as the ‘enforcer’ of the Code. The infamously restrictive ‘Production Code’ is also known as the ‘Hays’ or ‘Breen’ Code (Biltereyst and Vande Winkel 2013, p. 1).

to censor films based upon obscenity, with the early years of censorship in the hands of politicians, health authorities and the police (Graham 2013).

This is where the key role of the international film festival circuit in the success of independent, non–studio films becomes apparent, particularly films with non–hegemonic content from gender–diverse communities. The festivals become the early (and sometimes only) means to attract audiences, gather momentum via word of mouth and be seen by independent distributors, who may then contract the film for wider cinema release.

5.5 Differences Between the Australian and American Systems

The Australian system is based upon classification by an independent statutory body (not affiliated with any film studios); with classification information aimed at the public and industry. However, despite such ‘independence’, classifications processes in Australia are legislative in origin, legally enforced and administered by government and enforcement agencies. This leaves the Australian system vulnerable to political pressure and lobbying by interest groups, which is evidenced as a factor in key classifications decisions that have involved Refusals for screenings (‘banning’ of films) over the decades.

Unlike the Australian classifications (ratings) system, “The rating system in the United States is a voluntary system” administered by The Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) (2013, 2014d). This organisation and the affiliated Classification and Ratings Appeals Board

---

336 Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department (2014c). “The Classification Review Board is also an independent statutory body”, viewed 14 April 2014, 09 April 2016, <http://www.classification.gov.au/About/Pages/Who-We-Are.aspx>. Important note: since last viewing this page (April 2014), the wording has been slightly changed ‘independent’ has been removed from the first sentence, which now reads “The Classification Board is a statutory body”, later the text reads: The Classification Board is also an independent statutory body”. This wording has the effect of diminishing the independent status of the body.


“were established by the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. (“MPAA”) and the National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc. (“NATO”) as part of a voluntary system to provide information to parents...CARA is operated as an independent division of MPAA” (Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. (MPAA), National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc. 2010, p. 1). As we saw earlier in this chapter, the Motion Picture Association of America is an industry–run trade association (by the six major Hollywood studios) headed by Disney. The Classification and Rating Administration is run by “a rating board made up of an independent group of parents”, with film ratings aimed at parents and “gives advance cautionary warnings to families about a movie’s content”.

Of significance to understanding the different level of freedom which independent filmmakers producing non–hegemonic content have in the USA, unlike the Australian classification system, the USA ratings system is not enforced by law (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2013a, Commissioned Report, p. 13), this is why it is frequently referred to by the Motion Picture Association of America as a ‘voluntary system’. Incongruity in the USA system is still encountered in practise, for whilst film ratings are ‘voluntary’ and “Films can be exhibited without a rating...the majority of cinemas refuse to exhibit non–rated or NC–17 rated films” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2013a, Commissioned Report, p.13). For theatrical release of a film in the majority of USA cinemas, a ‘voluntary’ rating is a necessity. In this way, what appears to be an open–ended and voluntary system of classifications (ratings) is recognised to be in practise a self–regulating industrial system fiscally weighted against unrated content. This results in the exclusion of the majority of non–hegemonic films and independent filmmakers who produce unrated films, necessitating self–distribution, which in part may be an economic decision.

---

337 The Classification & Rating Administration (CARA) (2013), viewed 15 April 2014, 09 April 2016, 09 May 2016, <http://www.filmratings.com/why.html>. The site also identifies the USA ratings system as aimed at “giving parents the information they need to decide whether a film is appropriate for their family.”

338 (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2013a, Commissioned Report, p.13). In the USA the “Classification categories for films are as follows: G, PG, PG13, R, and NC–17”.

339 As applying for and receiving an official film rating adds production costs. For low, or no–budget independent filmmakers, such a cost may not be possible to fund. USA ratings cost from US $750 per title for films under thirty minutes, to US$2,500 per title for films under $500,000 (depending upon which production Class ‘A’ or ‘B’ that the film is in), progressing to US$25,000 for high budget films (The Classification & Rating Administration (CARA) (2014d)).
In a study commissioned by Office of Film & Literature Classification (Australia, now called the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department) which compared the classification systems of twenty–two countries internationally the researcher concluded that “The most striking distinction amongst ratings and classification systems is whether they are government or industry self–regulated schemes. Interestingly there is a trend to avoid the word “classification” in the labelling of industry–based schemes” (Brand 2003, p. 18).

In the USA, whilst “the members of the MPAA and NATO are not involved in the Rating Board’s determination of the ratings assigned to individual motion pictures” (Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. (MPAA), National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc. 2010, p.1, abbreviations in original), an anomaly may be discerned. This is because the Rating Board of the Classification and Ratings Administration is headed by “A Chairperson, appointed by the Chairman of the MPAA with the concurrence of the President of NATO, who is ultimately responsible for the rating of all motion pictures submitted to CARA” (Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. (MPAA), National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc. 2010, p. 2). In other words, whilst Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) studios and National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) cinema owners may not be directly involved in determining film ratings, the Chairperson of the Board responsible for all ratings decisions is “appointed by” both these bodies (MPAA and NATO).

Like the Australian Classifications Review Board, the appointment of persons involved in film classification and ratings in Australia and America is seen to be subjective and liable to political and screen industry influence. Douglas Gomery (1996) highlighted that the Motion Picture Association of America “is a classic trade association. In this forum, when the members of the oligopoly define a common interest, they act as one” (p. 411). This underscores that the appointment of the Chairperson of the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), by the Motion Picture Association of America (with the National


341 National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc.
Association of Theatre Owners concurring), would inevitably lead to films being rated in a manner which reflects the Motion Picture Association of America member Studios’ values and demographics. The films subsequently distributed for wide public exhibition are those rated to be economically beneficial at box office, attracting high attendances for cinema theatre owners. This is of consequence in the consideration of the ratings which films containing non–hegemonic themes/content receive. The system is weighted back to ‘family–friendly’ G and PG content—the largest box office groups and to theatres (here is the influence of National Association of Theatre Owners) not offending the primary family–friendly demographic by screening certain types of content (hence the contractual injunctions against exhibiting NC–17 films previously noted).

On a day–to–day basis, it would be simplistic to imagine that the board of parents within the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) makes the final decision on the ratings which films receive; they are in essence, gatekeepers of ‘community standards’ who ensure that a film meets the CARA ratings standards. It is the studios who contract producers to produce a film to a specific rating from the outset of a film’s development, to ensure there will be no problems at the end of the process (that is, when the film is submitted to the Classification and Ratings Administration for film rating, enabling theatrical release).

Whilst the Australian system has clear and easily accessible industry guides “on how to apply for a film festival screening” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2014e) of unrated independent films; there are no clear, or easily accessible rules or guidelines available on either the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), or the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) websites. Detailed searches have yielded no results and no official information on how a film festival in America is granted permission to screen independent films, or whether such films are subjected to official classifications (ratings) controls (such as the Australian ‘Exemption’ to screen which must be obtained by a festival prior to promoting a film screening within a festival program. The information on this process has been gathered through fieldwork with independent film

---

342 The Classification & Rating Administration (CARA) site seems to contain no information about film festivals, or independent films, viewed 18 December 2014, <http://filmratings.com/>; neither does the official Motion Picture Association of America site, viewed 18 December 2014, <http://www.mpaa.org/>. The reason for this has become clearer in the light of subsequent fieldwork as will be discussed within this chapter.
festivals and Festival Directors in line with the methodologies of the thesis as discussed in Chapter 3.

Attending the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival and fieldwork in the USA raised pertinent issues, particularly around the apparent non-classification (rating) of films screened within film festivals in the USA. This observation was prompted by informal discussions with Trans New Wave filmmakers after the Friday opening night session of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival and seemed to be confirmed by the subsequent Saturday later evening program on 'Transex'. Under the classification Guidelines that were in operation in Australia in 2014 (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department 2012) three of the films screened in this session would most likely

343 Autoethnographic material, Friday 7 December 2014, Mission Street, San Francisco (respondents de-identified).


345 A “Bill to streamline classifications” was introduced on August 28, 2014 referring to film festivals (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department 2014b). Subsequently changes were implemented in 2015 (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department 2011–2015d; Australian Government 2015). Whether the reforms in this Bill in practise would have any effect on the theoretical comparative ratings of the films discussed in this section is not possible to categorically ascertain. From a review of the documents (Australian Government 2015; Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department 2011–2015d) while the changes appear to streamline processes for screening unrated films for film festivals, the new system continues to require ‘approved Cultural organisations’ to submit detailed synopses of all films to be screened (Australian Government 2015, Section 3k), this was also a requirement under the previous previous system. A new requirement is that while “Approved cultural institutions are not required to register their events. However, event organisers must use persons trained by the Attorney-General’s Department to assess the unclassified material for the exemption to apply (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department 2011–2015d).
not be eligible to receive an Exemption to screen in Australia at a film festival. Further to this, based upon consideration of the 2012 classifications ‘Refusals’ cited within this chapter, several of the films might be deemed equivalent to X 18+ or even Refused (RC) permission under the Australian classifications Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012) to screen publically at an Australian film festival due to the depictions of ‘actual sex’ within the texts.

Subsequent fieldwork with San Francisco Transgender Film Festival Artistic Director Shawna Virago confirmed the field observation that I had made regarding the apparent non–

[346] It is theoretically possible, that the Sydney Film Festival may be the sole exception to this in Australia, because only this festival has received a special Direction, known as the ‘Sydney Film Festival Direction’ which enables the festival to curate an annual program without the need to reapply for an annual Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department/Office of Film and Literature Classification Exemption permission, an application which requires each film to be individually itemised by synopsis and a permission to screen (‘Exemption’) granted by the OFLC. “The intention behind… the Direction… is to allow the Sydney Film Festival to show films that have, or might be, classified as RC, in addition to certain unclassified films. The types of RC films in question are films that are on the borderline of being rated R, such as Ken Park and Baise-moi. These films have generally been rated as suitable for public exhibition in Europe and other jurisdictions. It is not the intention that [adult] or child pornography be allowed to be shown” (Marr 2013). “Sydney Film Festival and Censorship” viewed 28 December 2014, <http://online.sffarchive.org.au/#folio=70>, <http://www.sff.org.au/media/768555/david_marr_2_essay_dm_tk_jp-tk_final_jp.pdf>; Standing Committee of Attorneys–General (SCAG–Censorship)(2003–2004). “Standing Committee of Attorneys–General Censorship Annual Report (SCAG–Censorship) 2003–2004, ”p. 5, viewed 28 December 2014, <http://www.lccsc.gov.au/agdbasev7wr/sclj/documents/pdf/scag_censorship_annual_report_2003-04.pdf>.

The NSW Attorney General Rob Debus wrote in 2003: “I consider the eminent Film Festivals such as the Sydney Film Festival should be enabled to screen films to an adult audience, even in circumstances where the film has been refused classification” (Marr 2013). “Sydney Film Festival and Censorship”, Endnote #22, Correspondence “To Gayle Lake, 17 June 2003; copy in possession of Ross Tzannes”, viewed 28 December 2014, <http://online.sffarchive.org.au/#folio=70>, <http://www.sff.org.au/media/768555/david_marr_2_essay_dm_tk_jp-tk_final_jp.pdf>; Ross Tzannes was the Sydney Film Festival President at the time.

Of note is that in 2003–2004 a move to separate film festivals from theatrical classifications Guidelines was being advanced: “Film Festival Guidelines – Exemption for RC films. Ministers agreed that jurisdictions interested in developing guidelines to exempt film festivals from the classification scheme would develop options for consideration” (Standing Committee of Attorneys–General (SCAG–Censorship 2003–2004, p. 5). This subsequently faltered.

[347] Whilst this Australian classification (rating) would exclude the text from theatrical (cinema) release and/or screening at a film festival, it would not preclude the text being released to DVD, legally available for “sale or hire in the ACT and Northern Territory” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012), Part 2, X+ 18 Restricted).

[348] In 2014 a “Bill to streamline classification” was passed and subsequently implemented in 2015 (Australian Government 2015); it is unclear from the press releases, fieldwork correspondence with the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department Exemptions office on 03 March 2015 and comparing the changes to the earlier system whether this reform will bring all film festivals in line with the Sydney Film Festival Direction cited at footnote #341.

[349] The films which screened without incident or controversy and were well–received by the audiences were Going Here (Courtney Trouble, USA, 2014); Crashpad Behind The Scenes: Emma Claire & Golden Curlz (Shine Louise Houston, USA, 2014); Ziggy Montford and Ragged Dick or The Leather Daddy and the Bootblack (Ziggy Montford, USA, 2014).
classification (rating) of independent films exhibited at a USA film festival. In response to the questions:

In particular, if you would be kind enough to let me know if you had to submit the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival program for approval to any official body (such as the MPAA/CARA) prior to screening? Also, I noticed that the 'Transsex' program had a note ‘18+ only’; whilst other sessions appeared to be 'all ages'? In Australia, all film festivals receive a default rating of 18+, unless you apply specifically for a lower rating. Is this the case in USA?

The clear answer was provided: “We did not have to get any official approval for our Adults only program, only notifying people it would be 18+”.

This adds very significant empirical evidence to my research on the role that ratings systems play in respects to trans representation in cinema internationally. What is emerging from the research, is that in Australia, classifications systemically impacts across both mainstream and independent films/festivals whilst in the USA, independent filmmakers and festivals are not affected by the Classification and Ratings Administration. This provides a direct explanation for why films such as Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns, A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) and In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011) have been able to screen at film festivals and prestigious art galleries in the USA without incident—and yet these texts were deemed equivalent in content to RC and the Exemption to screen not granted (hence refused permission) to screen in Australia. This also provides a rationale for why USA filmmakers responded so casually to fieldwork questions around the role that classifications (ratings systems) have upon the films they produced as we saw in Chapter 3. The simple answer is: the ratings systems have no effect on the content that USA trans filmmakers produce. Trans New Wave filmmakers from the USA expressed they had no knowledge of what

---

350 Fieldwork with San Francisco Transgender Film Festival Artistic Director Shawna Virago, email respondent, 23 December 2014.

351 It is beyond the scope of this thesis to ascertain what effect the 28 August 2014 reforms have made in practise upon film festivals post–2015; it appears the the G, PG, M, MA 15+, R 18+, equivalent ratings still need to be applied to unclassified films by film festivals.
classifications (ratings) systems were at all. The exception to this was Buck Angel, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The negative answer from respondents was unexpected. As the researches of the thesis progressed and fieldwork was completed, the rationale for this ambivalence to classifications (ratings) systems in America became apparent, contextualised within the ‘voluntary’ USA ratings system.

The American and Australian classifications (ratings) systems also do not precisely correlate in age divisions, which hold further implications for production and distribution—and hence box office—of films between countries. Uneven classification of content emerges between these ratings systems. As noted above, films with trans narratives that have been released theatrically in the USA have all received the R rating, whilst receiving non–uniform ratings upon release in Australia (as an example, Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) was screened as R in America and M 15+ (restricted to audiences 15 years and over, one of three ‘restricted’ categories in Australia); Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) was screened as R in America (“Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian”) but at the higher classification of R 18+ (restricted to audiences aged 18 and over) upon release in Australia. Confusingly, audiences of age 15 and over were able to view Dallas Buyers Club in Australia, whilst Boys Don’t Cry was restricted to those age 18 and over. This illustrates one of the main issues in film classification processes:

people do not view films homogeneously; they each bring their own unique insights and preoccupations. This provides rich fodder for lively debate. However, it also inevitably impacts the decisions of those who must watch films in order to classify them. For while the classifiers are guided by legislation, many—though not all—of the principles they must consider are subjective (Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 56).

---

352 Due to the differing terms for ‘classifications’ and responses from early respondents, the Filmmaker Questionnaire sheet (Appendix C) was amended (19 December 2014) to include the explanatory comment “Did the classifications’ guidelines impact upon any creative decisions you made in regards to the film’s production? (note: classifications may also be called ‘film ratings’ in your country)”.

5.5.1 Implications of a Guideline–Based System (Australia)

Due to the difficulties inherent in gaining distribution, filmmakers are increasingly choosing to write, direct and produce films independently, distribute independently and access audiences via film festivals. As Australian film festivals receive an official Exemption status to screen films and do not require filmmakers to have already officially classified their films, this becomes an accessible exhibition opportunity. The film festival circuit internationally has become the singular avenue for the majority of independent transgender films to be seen on a big screen by a public, ticket–paying audience. Festival Director of Queer Screen Lex Lindsay has underlined the unique role and significance of independent queer film festivals:

_We are THE GOOD GUYS and the reason why we will all look back 20 years from now and not even imagine how there was once a cinema culture in which we never saw same–sex–attracted and gender–diverse individuals kissing, loving, being together_ (Refused–Classification Censorship In Australia 2012, capitalisation and italics in original).354

As an alternative to theatrical release, or film festival exhibition, many independent filmmakers now utilise social media and web–based, pay–per–view, video–on–demand (VOD) services as a means to reach audiences. This is a direct screening strategy that enables the filmmaker to control distribution, exhibition and receive full payment for films screened. It is also a strategy for circumventing official classifications processes and avoiding the censorial gaze.

Imposing limits on the films that adults can view in film festivals and cinemas, especially when these particular films have been created specifically for public exhibition, generates what can be perceived as an injustice. This is because the

354 Queer Screen had been attacked in the Sydney media for programming of two texts _In Their Room: Berlin_ (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011) and _Community Action Centre_ (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) that were Refused the Exemption to screen in the 2012 festival. This effectively is a ‘ban’ on the films screening anywhere in Australia. What this means is that the Classification Branch Exemption Officer/s had rated these films as containing content that in equivalency exceeded even the ‘X 18’ (adult film) rating. Lindsay responded “That we are attempting to screen X-rated material, or material that would receive an X-rating if classified. This is absolutely baseless, reductionist and misleading. These are serious, respectable films that have screened in very reputable forums” Refused–Classification Censorship In Australia 2012, Capitalisation and Italics in original). These texts are discussed in further detail within Chapter 5.
exact extent of these limits is set by a regime that calls upon a select group of adult individuals to ultimately impose their own views upon other adults within a legislative framework. The circumstances surrounding this perceived injustice are then compounded by the benefits viewing these films can potentially provide (Dalton and Schubert 2011, p. 57).

Dalton and Schubert here raise very significant points around the social justice issues for exhibition of non–hegemonic screen content and what such texts mean to the communities that the films represent. This discussion will be returned to in Chapter 7 in relation to the transactivist importance of *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) internationally for transmen, their friends, lovers and allies and extended network, including health care professionals within the wider community.

In order to avoid such social injustices, Dalton and Schubert (2011) argue the case for community ‘experts’ to comprise the Classification Review Boards. This would see stakeholders in specific representations empowered to actively advocate such representations being publically available. Such a move could lead to a more inclusive process, truly representative of the diverse points of view within the contemporary community. At present “members of the Classification Board are chosen to be broadly representative of the Australian community. This means that they are drawn from diverse areas, age groups and backgrounds”. From viewing the synopses of each current (2014–2017) Board Member involved in Australian classifications, it is difficult to see how diversity is represented. The Board appears to be primarily white, conservative, with legislative and enforcement backgrounds featured. Issues with non–representational and inappropriate composition of the Classification Review Board have been raised in relation to Boards in previous years. To have genuinely diverse representation would require a number of parallel Boards to function,

---


356 Phillips (2003). “Today, senior business personnel with no serious qualifications in the fields of art, film or literature dominate the six–member Review Board. They include Jonathan O’Dea, a private health insurance company director; Dawn Grassick, an industry representative on the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code Council; and Jan Taylor, president of the Queensland branch of the Women Chiefs of Enterprises International. Review Board convenor Maureen Shelley is the Australian Council of Businesswomen’s chief executive officer and company director.”
each for their own community, as advocated by Dalton and Schubert, or at least, a larger Board, with members including queer and gender–diverse individuals and from across a wider range of socio–cultural backgrounds. From the results of researches within this thesis suggestions for future policy provocations are advocated within the concluding Chapter 8.

It will be argued throughout this thesis that the classifications (ratings) systems in Australia and the USA are the underlying force in the screen industry that ultimately dictates (decides) what films audiences can (or cannot) view in public, theatrical release. This has been explicitly stated by censorship scholar Jon Lewis: “The ratings system was designed primarily to regulate entry into the legit film market” (2013, p. 42) and by Wittern–Keller who specifically identifies the “governmental film censorship agencies’....ability to keep things from the screen” (2013, p. 15).

This ‘ability’ impacts what films are programmed to screen at the local cinema and what films will be available for release at the local DVD store. It also regulates what films may be programmed and exhibited at independent and queer film festivals, particularly in Australia. It is acknowledged, that in an age of video on demand (VOD) and pay per view online services, that the consumer (audience) may, to a certain extent, override the censorial gaze of the classifications processes and access unclassified films. Film Festivals are noted to be sites which benefit from an Exemption from screening unclassified films in Australia—provided such texts fall within the G, PG, M, M 15+, R 18+ (Australian) classifications guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012).357 Due to this, even a film festival in Australia ultimately falls within the purview and restriction of the official classification body and ratings processes, despite receiving an Exemption to screen ‘unrated’ films.

In 2014, a “Bill to streamline classification” was passed (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2014b); with the legislation subsequently enacted in 2015 (Australian Government 2015). The “first tranche” reforms included that “film festivals will no longer need permission from the Director of the Classification Board to

357 Op. cit., with the singular exception of the Sydney Film Festival.
screen unclassified films provided the organisers and the events have been accredited under the Classification Act” (Minister for Justice 2014).358

It is unclear from the press releases and official documents whether this reform is similar in practise to the Sydney Film Festival Direction, or requires other, additional certification of organisers and events. Additional training is specified and this is beyond what was required of festival organisers and programmers under the previous system (Australian Government 2015, Section 4).359 Previously all film festivals and organisers were required to be listed as an ‘approved organisation’ prior to submitting an application to screen unclassified films. The new “Approved cultural institutions” status (Australian Government 2015, Section 7) seems to mirror the previous ‘approved organisation’ status that film festivals required to gain Exemptions to screen. There is now a direct reference to “contentious material” (Australian Government 2015, Section 4, Note 2), with this being defined as material that would be rated at M or higher (Commonwealth Consolidated Acts 2016, Section 5).360

This last point is of express concern to the running of independent film festivals, which


“The Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Amendment (Classification Tools and Other Measures) Act 2014 (Classification Act) amends the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 to implement a number of 'first tranche' reforms that were agreed to by Commonwealth, state and territory classification ministers.”

359 “trained person” means a natural person working for or with, or representing, or otherwise associated with, in a paid or voluntary capacity, an approved cultural institution, and who is involved in that organisation’s demonstration, exhibition or screening of publications, films or computer games, and who has completed the training requirements.

training requirements means the training required and approved by the Department for the purposes of paragraph 6F(1)(e) or paragraph 6F(2)(c) of the Act.

Note 1: The Department may require further training to be undergone if, for example, it believes that an organisation has breached the requirements of Division 2 of Part 1A of the Act or the Conditional Cultural Exemption Rules, or where additional training is required because of changes to the rules or classification standards.

Note 2: For the meaning of approved cultural institution, contentious material, Director, registered event and subject to a conditional cultural exemption see section 5 of the Act” (Australian Government 2015, Section 4).

360 “contentious material”, in relation to a film or computer game, means material that would be likely to cause it to be classified:

(a) for a film--M or a higher classification; or (b) for a computer game--M or a higher classification” (Australian Government 2015, Section 4, Note 2; Commonwealth Consolidated Acts 2016, Section 5).
program under a default R 18+ equivalent rating (that is, programming unrated films for screening to persons over the age of eighteen years). In Australia there is a further classification standard of M 15+ between the M and R 18+ ratings. The impact test for the M rating in Australia applies to films “not recommended for persons under the age of 15 years” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2). Under these new cultural exemption rules, many of the texts screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009–2012), including the case study films within this thesis, would most likely be deemed ‘contentious material’ under the new rules, that is, not fitting into the ‘M’ category. These are screen texts which fit within the M 15+ and R 18+ equivalent classification categories (legally permitted for festivals to screen). This is an untenable situation and it could be argued, conflicts with the principles enshrined within the Australian Classifications Code that “adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, The Code, Section a). From these perspectives, the changes within the Australian classification system do not seem in practise to deliver any beneficial reform for independent film exhibition and it could be argued, the reform measures actually tighten the censorial grip upon independent film exhibition. This indicative comment is based upon reviewing the raft of legislative documentation in tandem with reflecting upon the previous experiences of programming films for a festival. Without the experience of curating a programme under the new system it is not possible to make an absolute assessment.

5.5.2 Recent Examples of Refusals by the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department/Office of Film and Literature Classification (Australia) to Grant the Exemption to Screen at Independent and Queer Film Festivals

The history of film censorship decisions in Australia have been thoroughly documented in

361 “MA 15+ – Mature Accompanied. Impact test
The impact of material classified MA 15+ should be no higher than strong. Note: Material classified MA 15+ is considered unsuitable for persons under 15 years of age. It is a legally restricted category” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2, Italics added).

362 “The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified M should be no higher than moderate... Sexual activity should be discreetly implied, if justified by context...Nudity should be justified by context” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2).
relation to the role that classification (censorship) has played in the exhibition of international arthouse and independent films during the Sydney Film Festival’s sixty year history (Marr 2013) and in the development of the X classification in Australia (Cettl 2014). The issue of censorship in respect to programming at independent and queer film festivals remains a serious issue, from curatorial, socio–cultural, legal and representational points of view. As recently as 2013, leading gay and lesbian film festival Melbourne Queer Film Festival was refused the Exemption status in respect to I Want Your Love (Travis Mathews, USA, 2012), a sexually explicit gay male film about negotiating sex for the first time that was Refused Exemption to screen at the 23rd Melbourne Queer Film Festival in 2013.

This echoed classifications issues in 2012 when Queer Screen Mardi Gras Film Festival in Sydney was refused the Exemption status in respect to two gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer texts, which effectively ‘banned’ these films from being exhibited in Australia. The films: In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011), a sexually explicit gay male film featuring a couple privately engaging in (actual) sex, was Refused Exemption to screen and Community Action Centre (A. L. Steiner & A. K. Burns, USA, 2010), a film featuring trans and genderqueer participants engaged in a range of explicit queer sexual dynamics (including body modification, fetish and powerplay scenarios), was also Refused Exemption to screen in the same year. The one thematic that each of these three ‘banned’ films share in common are the depictions of consensual non–hegemonic sex from the perspective of the communities represented within the films.


364 (Benson 2013). “Making Waves The 23rd Melbourne Queer Film Festival”, in Metro Magazine, Issue 177, p. 34.

365 As highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, the year the case study texts within the thesis are sourced and the year classifications had been a prominent concern of independent film/film festivals in Australia.


368 Ibid., “Two films refused exemption by the Classification Board”.

203
Prior to this, *L.A. Zombie* (Bruce LaBruce, USA/Germany/France, 2010) had been refused exemption to screen at the Melbourne International Film Festival in 2010. The film follows a gay alien zombie, who roams Los Angeles with a “special gift” of bringing the dead back to life through sex and features “LaBruce’s infamous ‘schlock’ tactics”. According to the film’s director, “The alien zombie may or may not be a homeless schizophrenic, so the film also serves as a kind of document of the epidemic of homelessness that currently ravages the city” (LaBruce Press Release). Melbourne International Film Festival Director Richard Wolstencroft subsequently screened the banned film and was charged with screening an “obscene” movie. In 2011, the charge was subsequently reduced to a ‘Diversion Notice’ (no charges recorded) and a fine paid as a ‘donation’ to an undisclosed charity. This case illustrates how the historically tarnishing, subjectively defined label of obscenity remains in official use as a tool of censorial control of creative content within Australia in the twenty first century. The films discussed within this chapter also highlight that texts with non–hegemonic narratives of gender–diversity and queer sexuality that had previously screened internationally without incident were banned from screening in Australia each year between 2010–2013.

In addition, the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department has a public database (<http://www.classification.gov.au/pages/search.aspx>) (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2011–2015c) which lists all films which have been refused classification (RC). The curatorial history of individual film festivals may be accessed via published festival programs. Information about specific films that have been exempted to screen, or refused the festival exemption, are contained within the annual exemption direction which each festival receives from the Classification Branch. This legal notice forms part of the key documentation of any festival archive and may be requested to be produced on festival days by enforcement officers. Festivals may, or may not, choose to publicise individual films subjected to exemption refusals (banning). There are a

---

372 Queer Fruits Film Festival archives (2009–2012). The direction was part of the pre–2014/2015 changes discussed within this chapter (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2011–2015d; Australian Government 2015).
range of reasons for publicising, or not publicising decisions. These could include curatorial rationales such as that festival programmes have not been finalised, or publicised, so a simple withdrawal of a film provides a better outcome than creating controversy around the film, or festival. There are also more complex rationales, including contractual issues with filmmakers and/or distributors and/or legal advice to a festival. When information about specific films which are subjected to Refusal to screen becomes available, it is generally publicised via libertarian networks such as <http://www.refused-classification.com/> (Refused Classification Censorship in Australia (2002–2016).

The following discussion is not intended to be exhaustive, nor to repeat titles of films known to have been banned in Australia; it is a selection of textual examples tightly grouped chronologically and of direct relevance to the current research project. The aim of this section is to document non–hegemonic texts (trans, gender–diverse, gay, lesbian, queer), which have not been previously correlated in earlier studies. These are films that have been subjected to censorship, through the Exemption status not being granted (equivalent to RC – Refused Classification) for screening in Australia at a reputable film festival. Crawford and Lumby (2011) have reiterated the classifications’ anomalies experienced in Australia observing that “much of the material deemed as RC in Australia would not be refused classification in other Western democratic countries” (p. 46). It is sobering to note that each of the following texts listed above have been screened widely outside Australia.

One of the films Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns, A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) contains explicit queer, transgender and transmale narrative sequences and is described by the filmmakers as a “sociosexual video...which incorporates the erotics of a community where the personal is not only political, but sexual”. Community Action Centre (CAC) had previously screened at prestigious international film festivals such as Outfest in Los Angeles (2011), Queer Lisboa in Lisbon, Portugal (2011), GAZE Festival in Dublin, Ireland (2011) and the Tate Modern Gallery in London (2011), before being purchased (and exhibited) by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2012. Significantly the filmmakers stated “The video seeks to expose and reformulate

---

373 Fitting within the years 2009–2012 during which Queer Fruits Film Festival screened the case study texts.

paradigms that are typical of porn typologies, *intentionally exploiting tropes* for their comical value, critical consideration and historical homage” (Video Data Bank, 2010, italics added for emphasis). This approach, of ‘intentionally exploiting tropes’ will be returned to in discussion of the representational strategies employed by Trans New Wave filmmakers and the conscious use of tropes and metaphors in representation that *are validated from within the gender-diverse community*.

The influence of the porn genre on this film has been acknowledged by the filmmakers. 375 This is thematically relevant to the emergence of the Trans New Wave from transporn as we saw in Chapter 1 and the continuing influence of the porn genre upon specific Trans New Wave texts as will be returned to in discussion of *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) within Chapter 7.

The second film that was Refused Exemption to screen in 2012 was *In Their Room: Berlin* (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011), which features a gay male narrative involving an explicit casual sexual encounter in private; the text had also previously screened at prestigious international film festivals. 376 Previous screenings at reputable film festivals and public exhibition centres such as mainstream art galleries are generally utilised to support the application for an Exemption to screen in Australia when a film festival applies to the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department. This is because previous screenings internationally demonstrate that a text is suitable for general public exhibition.

Of significance, Travis Mathews went on to direct *Interior: Leather Bar* (James Franco, Travis Mathews, USA, 2013) with James Franco 377 a film that was highly critical of the classifications systems and censorship of cinema. In part, this later text may be assessed as a direct response to the censorship experienced by the filmmaker in the refusal to have an Exemption to screen granted in respect to his earlier films *In Their Room*.

---


377 In 2016 James Franco was recognised for his work and awarded the inaugural James Schamus Award at Outfest “honoring his efforts to bring LGBTQ stories to the forefront” (Outfest 2016, p. 8).
Room: Berlin, Refused Exemption to screen at Mardi Gras 2012 and I Want Your Love, Refused Exemption to screen at the Melbourne Queer Film Festival the following year.\textsuperscript{378}

The Classification Board viewed the submissions, and concluded that IN THEIR ROOM: BERLIN (2011) and COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER (2010) would most likely be X–rated if they were classified. The Mardi Gras Film Festival felt that it had no choice but to drop the titles (Refused Classification Censorship in Australia 2012, capitalisation in original).

After the Australian Classifications Board Refused Exemption for the planned screening of I Want Your Love (a film that had also been successfully screened internationally), mainstream Hollywood actor James Franco went public on You Tube about the decision:

(\textsuperscript{379}Mathews) was using sex in a very sophisticated way...I don’t think we’d be having this conversation if he had made a very violent film...adults should be able to choose...I don’t know why in this day and age something like this, a film that is using sex, not for titillation but to talk about being human is being banned.

This dichotomous approach in Australian classifications has been noted as one of the ongoing issues of film censorship in regards to festival screen culture “It’s so Australian: cut the fuck and keep the punch” (Marr 2013). This could also be applied to a wide range of films throughout the mainstream USA screen industry. Queer Screen Festival Director Lex Lindsay responded at the time to press surrounding the films Community Action Centre and In Their Room: Berlin. This excerpt of Lindsay’s responses as reported on the censorship database site Refused–Classification (2012), is quoted at length due to the important issues he raises:

\textit{You CANNOT discuss the nature of film classification without taking into account the content and cultural context of the work. Not if you want to be a grown up in a progressive free world. So, I'm thinking you guys might care to read some of the }


non-inflamatory, rational and culturally relevant things I did have to say about WHY we are screening films with a small amount of explicit sexual content in them. Here's a selection of my answers to the Herald Sun's questions...

At this year's Mardi Gras Film Festival we are exploring the intersection between erotica and narrative story telling in queer films. This is interesting to us, as essentially, as LGBTIQ people, our bodies and the way they interact with other bodies, is the one thing that separates us from the rest of the community and is responsible for us facing discrimination, persecution, violence, and at the very least, civil restrictions through law. So as well as a pleasurable indulgence, watching queer bodies engage in real sex is always a political act. It is both a defiance of the stigmas attached to what we do behind closed doors, but also an intimate image of our sexual expression.

The real sex presented in these titles helps deliver narratives and ideas about our community that are of great relevance right now. (Refused–Classification 2012, capitalisation and italics in original).

The Queer Screen experience of receiving the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department Refusals to grant Exemption (effectively a ‘ban’) on screening Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) and In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011) and the Melbourne Queer Film Festival and Queer Fruits Films Festival experiences with receiving Exemptions to screen Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) all took place in the same festival year (2012). These texts demonstrate the direct effect that classifications has upon the exhibition of representations of gender non–conforming queer lives.

---

380 Lindsay was referring to the 2012 film festival in Sydney, which screened across a range of larger cinemas and smaller theatre/screening spaces across Sydney. Community Action Centre had been slated to screen at a community–owned and operated activist arts and culture space in Marrickville called the Red Rattler, predominately known for supporting and presenting queer, lesbian, trans events. The location of this venue is extremely private, in an industrial estate and would not have attracted any casual audience, it being a ‘destination’ venue. The film would have screened in an entirely appropriate environment for the textual content and to an audience who would have understood the content contextually, being a similar community to the participants in the film. (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012). This raises the central issue of ‘whose community standards’ are used in making classifications decisions, that will be returned to in this chapter and in Chapter 8.
These are key recent examples of gender–diverse and independent films in general and Trans New Wave films in particular that have been adversely affected by classifications decisions.\(^{381}\) Of significance is that, had the filmmakers applied to the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department for official classification of their film and paid the application fee (as a 69 minute film, the cost in 2014 was $2,180 per title)\(^ {382}\) rather than seeking exhibition at an independent queer film festival, *Community Action Centre* would have been assessed under the classification Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012) and may have received official clearance from the Classification Branch to be legally exhibited as an X 18+ film in Australia.\(^ {383}\) As X 18+ rated, the film would then have been able to be *legally screened publically* in both the ACT and Northern Territory in Australia.

These examples, of classifications Exemptions and Refusals and non–uniformity of laws surrounding exhibition of unclassified screen content (at a film festival, via a festival Exemption) and X 18+ content in Australia, illustrate a number of the issues with ongoing ‘anomalies’ in the Australian classification system and also demonstrate the need for transliteracy in reading Trans New Wave texts. In the words of former Queer Screen Festival Director Lex Lindsay cited above “*You CANNOT discuss the nature of film classification without taking into account the content and cultural context of the work*” (Refused–Classification 2012, capitalisation and italics in original).

At the time that *Community Action Centre* (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010) was Refused the Exemption to screen in Sydney, I was in the early stages of programming the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival program, for screening in December of that year. Disturbed by rumours that were circulating throughout the queer and screen

---

\(^{381}\) Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives (2012), ethnographic material. This will be further discussed in the thesis in relation to *Community Action Centre*.


\(^{383}\) Receiving classification as porn genre, ‘Adult Film’. “Note: This classification is a special and legally restricted category which contains only sexually explicit material. That is material which contains real depictions of actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults” (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012, Part 2, “X18+ Restricted”).
communities of the apparent censorship of a contemporary gender–diverse text 384 and keen to argue the case and support the public exhibition of a range of trans narratives for socio–cultural–political reasons 385 I routinely contacted the filmmakers A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner via their international distributor (Video Data Bank) to discuss the screening history of the film. During this discussion, the idea was mooted as to whether another film festival (such as Queer Fruits Film Festival) could assess the film and re–apply to the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department, in an attempt to overturn the earlier Refused Exemption status (effectively a ‘ban’) on the film. The filmmakers and the international distributor were both supportive of the festival in our interest in examining whether the Festival could re–apply for the film to be Exempted to screen (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012).

As revealed in publicity materials and interviews with the filmmakers the structure of Community Action Centre is as a series of explicit encounters between lesbian, queer and trans individuals, with a short poetry introduction and then music as the sole audio throughout, a stylistic reference to the porn genre, with a lack of connecting narrative within the text.386 To facilitate a decision, detailed attention was focused upon the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department Guidelines (2012) for the R 18+ category (the film festival default rating equivalent), in tandem with analysing published textual themes according to the impact tests for this classification rating. A consideration of the text in relation to other texts recently exhibited, or Refused Exemption to screen, further highlighted the anomalies and ambiguities within the Australian classification system that are navigated.

384 As this was prior to the annual queer film festival circuit screenings beginning in February (Queer Screen) March (Melbourne Queer Film Festival) April (Brisbane Queer Film Festival).

385 Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives (2012), ethnographic material. This will be further discussed in the thesis in relation to Sexing the Transman.

386 (Video Data Bank 2010). “Because the video contains sexually explicit content, the term ‘porn’ is relevant and the artists have an interest in exploring the trappings of the term itself. Sex, sexuality and the complexities of gendered bodies are inherently political. Queer sex and feminist agency is a shared acknowledgment of reciprocal penetration. This project is a small archive of an intergenerational community built on collaboration, friendship, sex and art.”
These factors impeded developing a review application for the film that fitted within the current Australian R 18+ Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012). Upon the initial application (by Queer Screen)\textsuperscript{387} the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department had rated the explicit scenes of \textit{Community Action Centre} at high impact akin to the X 18+ rating under the then current (2012) Australian classification Guidelines. The screening history of this text (Video Data Bank 2010) highlights the differences between Australian classifications and international standards. The film’s previous international screening successes at twenty–five festivals and galleries as diverse as the prestigious TATE Modern in London, to queer film festivals from Dublin to Portugal \textsuperscript{388} provide an embarrassing background to how out of step Australian classifications is with the diversity of filmmakers internationally and the difficulty this places upon Australian film festivals to curate contemporary programs that keep pace with international film festival screen culture.

Following these considerations, as Festival Director, I reluctantly had to make the decision that Queer Fruits Film Festival did not think we could argue for a case for review of the film to fit within the current (2012) Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department R 18+ Guidelines. Like Buck Angel, the filmmakers consciously reference the stylistic tropes of the porn genre, but without the connecting narrative/interviews that enable \textit{Sexing the Transman} (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) to be classifiable as a documentary within the R 18+ Guidelines. At the time the decision to not proceed with an attempt at applying for an Exemption to screen the film at Queer Fruits Film Festival 2012 was reluctantly conveyed to the filmmakers.\textsuperscript{389} The filmmakers were still shocked at the decision earlier in 2012 (in respect to Queer Screen not being able to receive Exemption to screen the film) and what equalled a ‘banning’ of their film from screening anywhere in Australia. Whilst Australia promotes itself as an international country in the twenty first century, it is difficult to

\textsuperscript{387} The sole film festival application to screen the film in Australia to date.


\textsuperscript{389} Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives (2012).
understand how a text such as this could be screened so widely around the world, but ‘banned’ in Australia.

These Refusals to grant Exemption took place in 2012, the same festival year that *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) was the Showcase film of the transgender program for Queer Fruits Film Festival and from which the case study films in this thesis are sourced.\(^{390}\) This experience heightened awareness of the impact that classifications held in relation to independent cinema in Australia.

As mainstream filmmaking is ultimately an industry about box office and all filmmakers aspire to have their films seen by audiences, this thesis explores whether independent filmmakers who aspire to wider release of their films, make narrative decisions in order to pass the censorial gaze, writing and producing films to meet specific classification guidelines (at the lowest possible rating), to ensure distribution and screening deals. This will be ascertained through fieldwork with filmmakers of the Trans New Wave, with responses incorporated into the emerging understanding of this creative–policy matrix. That mainstream (Hollywood) production companies have a history of producing ‘negotiated representations’, to fall within the official Motion Picture Association of America classifications system has been established by scholarship (Jacobs 1997) and presented earlier in this chapter.

For independent filmmakers producing films with transgender subjects and themes that respond to and reflect the specific gender–diverse communities represented, ratings systems present unique challenges as illustrated by *Community Action Centre* (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010). Transgender narratives (whether documentary, docu–drama, fiction, experimental, animation) are non–hegemonic \(^{391}\) generally depicting topics which require maturity and discernment to view, so immediately fall outside the ratings of G and PG. Halberstam (2005, p. 1) argues using case studies including *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Pierce,


\(^{391}\) Many of the texts focus upon non–heteronormative (and it could be argued non–homonormative) positionalities and narratives. This comment also identifies that specific texts present a constantive (Prosser 2006) narrative of gender and sexuality for trans people, who transition identifying as a man, or as a woman (gender–binary) and live as heterosexual, or homosexual.
USA, 1999), that there is a ‘queer time and space’ separated from heteronormative institutions of family and reproduction. In these spaces, who decides what are “the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults”? (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012). Further, how do you gauge who is a ‘reasonable adult’? Throughout hegemonic film there are countless examples of texts which receive wide theatrical distribution that according to queer community standards are not accepted as representative of the standards of ‘reasonable adults’ at all. These include the texts discussed within Chapter 2, where the trans body is subjected to vilification, abuse, violence, rape and murder, texts not only screened, but awarded within the mainstream.

Due to the depictions of the transgendered body and non–binary sexualities, films of interest to and representative of the gender–diverse communities may fall outside the MA 15+ (Australian rating, no one under age 15 admitted to the screening), or R rating (USA rating, no-one under the age of 17 admitted), or R 18+ (Australian rating, no-one under the age of 18 admitted to the screening). The films may also be written, directed and produced in ways which communicate what emerging scholarship is identifying as a specific ‘trans aesthetic’ in cinema (Keegan 2014b, 2014c, 2015d). This unique transgender point of view is also being explored by award–winning filmmaker and academic Susan Stryker in relation to her production of a documentary about the life of Christine Jorgensen 392 entitled Christine in the Cutting Room (Stryker 2013, work in progress). This film utilises the temporality of editing as a technology and metaphor that parallels the life of Christine, who worked at one time within the film industry, living and working in America in the turbulent post–second World War era. This was a time that “refigured conventional notions of men's and women's proper social spheres, and helped unsettle familiar concepts of sexuality” (Stryker 2000, p. xii).

The “anxieties” of this era are of also a key concern as a subtextual theme in case study film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) that will be discussed within Chapter 6. Jorgensen’s unprecedented media “scrutiny” brought “questions of personal identity, sexual orientation, and gender roles” (Stryker 2000, p. viii) into the public forum for discussion and paved the way for later civil rights movements based upon gender (including feminism) and sexuality (including gay rights). Stryker’s handling of the archival historical materials is non–linear,

392 The world’s first publically celebrated transsexual and for whom the word ‘transsexual’ was originated.
using rapid edits and a pulsing soundtrack more familiar to music videos, to immerse
contemporary viewers in Christine’s life, as a person of her time, whose experiences hold
relevance and implications for the future that we now are in.

5.5.3 Implications of a Parental Advisory Board Rating System for the Production,
Distribution and Exhibition of Non-Hegemonic Films (USA)

Specific issues discussed above in relation to the Australian classification system are evident
within the American system, yet this time complicated by the industrial processes (Schatz
1993, p. 10) of film production and the entwined production and ratings systems. This is
further complicated by the parental nature of the advisory board within the Classification and
Ratings Administration, leading to a mainstream cinema which is focussed upon family–
friendly, box–office movies. Set against this background, there is scant room for non–
hegemonic content to emerge within the mainstream and the texts that are produced from
within this system inevitably have socially proscriptive narratives, with underlying moral
precepts which valorise hegemonic community views and standards. In this way the
mainstream film industry becomes a self–supporting mechanism, producing and rating films
for public consumption that do little to empower anything outside the cash register. As
detailed from fieldwork in America, independent films and film festivals and use of online
direct video services emerge as the key way in which non–hegemonic content is able to
entirely avoid the Classification and Ratings Administration and reach a public audience
uncensored.

5.6 Fieldwork Summary: Establishing the Rationale for Programming Decisions,
the Role Classifications (Ratings) Systems Have On Film Festival Programming
Decisions and the Ratio of Trans Films Within Independent and Queer Film
Festival Programs

Twenty–nine independent film festivals were surveyed during the research. The research
strategically focussed upon the twenty–eight international film festivals that screened case
study text *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) upon initial public release
(Appendix G). In addition, the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival was purposively
surveyed following in–person fieldwork in 2014, in relation to questions of classifications (ratings) systems and festival programming. The film festivals surveyed are either identified gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer film festivals, or feature queer films within programmes. The festivals returned the clear responses that film classifications guidelines and ratings systems had no impact upon the creative/curatorial decisions of the festival. This was even the case, in respect to festivals which had experienced classifications Refusals for specific screen texts as cited in this chapter, such as Melbourne Queer Film Festival.

What emerged from the fieldwork was the uneven playing field that festivals around the world operate in with respect to classifications; with cities such as Berlin not having any classification code to take into account and festivals such as in San Francisco only needing to advise audiences of any films with adult 18+ themes, but otherwise not being restricted as to what is programmed. At the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival, at least three of the films would most likely not have been able to be screened by similar queer, or trans film festivals in Australia, due to the restrictive classifications guidelines around the screening of content with sexual depictions, with actual depictions of sex not being permitted under the R 18+ rating and the equivalent festival Exemption to screen in Australia, as we saw earlier in this chapter.

The ratio of trans films programmed in relation to the full programs of screen content varied from festival to festival, with a high of 100% programming at dedicated transgender film festivals, to an equal ratio between films at the Tel Aviv International LGBT Film Festival, to ‘no specific ratio—just the aim to show good movies’ at the Porn Film Festival Berlin, to approximately 20% of content at the Melbourne Queer Film Festival. The 20% content also approximated to the ratio of trans films screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival (18%). The 18%–20% ratio, though seemingly low in terms of other international festivals surveyed, may be understood in terms of the number of categories of texts screened (gay/lesbian/bisexual/intersex/queer). From the point of view of Queer Fruits Film Festival, each year was programmed with these category ratios specifically in mind—to provide the opportunity for

---

393 An example of this includes the Berlin Porn Film Festival, or the 19th Women Make Waves Film Festival (Taiwan).
each section of the community to be screened in an approximately equal percentage of screen texts (Ford 2015b).

5.7 Fieldwork Summary: Establishing the Rationale for Trans Filmmakers
Writing, Directing and Producing Independent Trans Films and the Role Classifications (Ratings) Systems Have On the Production of Independent Film

5.7.1 Case Study Filmmakers
Three case study films and filmmakers were strategically selected from the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival program, with identical initial invitations to participate in the research as discussed within Chapter 3. Subsequently, extended fieldwork was successfully conducted with the filmmakers of Australian documentary Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012 and USA documentary Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). The fieldwork responses of these filmmakers are incorporated into the discussions within the thesis in the relevant chapters. When interviewed in regards to classifications systems, the directors of Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) responded that they were aware of Australian classification processes, but the classification guidelines did not have any impact upon the creative decisions in regards to the text.

In considering the major impacts of transgender filmmakers and films upon screen culture and audiences, Monique Schafter responded:

There’s been an increase in the visibility of transgender people in society – in both queer and more mainstream circles over the past four or five years. I feel that by seeing trans stories on screen, the trans experience has been humanised and audiences have a wider vocabulary to discuss transgender issues (Monique Schafter 2014).

Schafter’s use of the word ‘vocabulary’ is very interesting here and underlines the necessity for a literate approach to reading trans’ lives and narratives; this is central to the developing theoretical approach of transliteracy within this thesis.
During an in–person interview and fieldwork with Buck Angel, during the Brisbane leg of his Australian tour, the filmmaker responded that he was aware of USA classification processes—specifically because of prior adult film work, but the classification guidelines did not have any impact upon the creative decisions in regards to *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). Buck stated that “he never thought about classifications”, though he knew there was a classification board in America. He had “wanted to make a documentary... and made *Sexing* as an art film”.

Angel’s responses were completely unexpected, as classifications are central to what can be publically screened at a film festival in Australia as discussed throughout this chapter and the classification *Guidelines* (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012) were always in my mind when programming his documentary for the 2012 season of Queer Fruit Film Festival.

Due to his responses, I continued the line of questioning with Buck regarding classifications, asking if he had edited the ‘action’ sequences in the film with classifications in mind? On viewing the film, it appeared that the explicit scenes had been cut (edited) specifically short, lessening the impact of the scene and contextualising these within the documentary as being ‘illustrative’ of the interviews, rather than appearing to read simply as sexually charged adult scenes. Buck’s answer presents a unique insight into the filmmaker’s perspective: “the edits came from my knowledge of watching porn—not wanting to get bored”.

Buck was aware of the potential background issues with exhibiting his film in Australia, as I had discussed this with him early in 2012 and I had also updated him about the

---

394 In–person fieldwork with Buck Angel during the Brisbane leg of his Australian tour on 14 February 2014.

395 This term will be used as an abbreviation for ‘actual sex scenes/explicit scenes’ in the film.


397 Prior to the successful screening of the film at the 2016 Melbourne Queer Film Festival.
classifications’ processes. When the program successfully cleared the official processes and an Exemption for the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival programme was received, there was huge relief within our festival office, as the text formed the Showcase Screening of the intended trans–focussed session (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012).

As noted earlier in this chapter, fieldwork with Rhys Ernst director of *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) has been attempted in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Despite having established excellent communication with the filmmaker during the processes of film submission, selection, exhibition and post the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival attempts at communication during the research processes yielded no results in correspondence.

The outcome of fieldwork with the filmmakers of the case study texts, Ali Russell and Monique Schafter (Australia) and with Buck Angel (USA), unexpectedly yielded identical results in regards to classifications (ratings) and the production of independent films: the filmmakers were aware of the classifications systems in their respective countries, but classifications played no role in the films that were produced.

### 5.7.2 Non–Case Study Filmmakers

As discussed in Chapter 3, non–case study filmmakers were initially sourced from the Queer Fruits Film Festival archival databases (2009–2012) following the methodologies of the research project. All filmmakers who had written, directed and produced films with trans and gender–diverse characters, themes and narratives that screened at the festival were contacted with identical invitations to participate in the research (Appendix A). In total eighteen non–case study filmmakers were contacted. Of these, sixteen were filmmakers who had screened

---

398 I had kept to myself the fairly anxious year that ensued whilst waiting to receive the Classification Branch permission to screen *Sexing the Transman* at the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival. This involved waiting for the Exemptions Officer to go through the 2012 application and read the extremely detailed synopsis and scene breakdown notes that are required to be presented for each film. In the case of *Sexing the Transman*, this involved noting specific scenes which involved nudity, actual sexual depictions and explicit language for trans bodies used throughout the film — and it was uncertain how the Exemptions Officer/s would respond to this detail, when viewed against the background of the Refusals to screen that Queer Screen had experienced that same year (the same Exemptions Officers would be reading all the 2012 applications).

399 To personally notify the filmmaker that the film was Awarded Outstanding Short Film. QFFF Archives (2012), “Outstanding Short – *The Thing* (Director: Rhys Ernst; Producers: Cary Cronenwett, Logan Kibens/USA)”, viewed 23 February 2016, <http://www.queerfruitsfilmfestival.org/artists.html>.

at Queer Fruits Film Festival, with two additional filmmakers contacted following the 2015 Outfest film festival in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{401} Eight filmmakers completed the full questionnaire process. A series of ongoing online correspondence took place with five filmmakers, who were initially contacted and responded expressing interest in participating in the research, but subsequently did not complete the interview process. In total ‘no responses’ were received from a further five filmmakers out of the eighteen.

Responses from the non–case study filmmakers are de–identified as highlighted within the Chapter 3 methodology, with the exception of specific Trans New Wave and queer filmmakers who agreed to be identified by name within the research.\textsuperscript{402} As an example, fieldwork with filmmaker Ewan Duarte was established on 14 March 2014, with full support for the research project. Duarte’s earlier film \textit{Spiral Transition} (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2010) was exhibited (World Premiere) at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2010 and so was outside the rationale for selection of case study films for this thesis. As outlined in Chapter 3, all case study texts within the thesis screened at the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival and each film was an award–winner that year. Subsequently in 2015, in–person informal fieldwork was continued with this filmmaker during the weekend of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival on November 7–9 2014. Duarte is a key filmmaker of the Trans New Wave and has self–identified as a Trans New Wave filmmaker (Duarte 2013), which supports the use of this term as active within the contemporary independent trans filmmaking community, particularly the Bay Area of San Francisco. Whilst not one of the case study filmmakers, Duarte is an exemplar trans filmmaker, his recent work will be discussed in context to recent developments in trans cinema within Chapter 8.

\textsuperscript{401} The two filmmakers were purposively selected from the program for the following reasons: I was following up on the recent work of one filmmaker whose recent trans film had screened at both the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival and the 2015 Outfest film festival (both of which I had attended); and the work of Dean Hamer, and the compelling First Nations trans youth documentary \textit{A Place in the Middle} (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014) which has been discussed in Chapter 1 and will be returned to in Chapter 8. I was unable to establish fieldwork contact with the first filmmaker. Dean Hamer kindly replied with support for the research project and permission to screen the documentary in an upcoming Southern Cross University class that I had been invited to present a Guest Lecture on my research area.

\textsuperscript{402} Thank you to Ewan Duarte (14 March 2014, 18 March 2014, 19 March 2014, 23 February 2016), Malic Amalya (14 April 2015, 09 June 2015, 15 August 2015, 17 August 2015) and Florina Titz (15 December 2014, 18 December 2014, 31 December 2014, 28 January 2016) for permission to cite their responses identified with names within the research.
The outcome of the fieldwork questionnaires in relation to classifications was that only one of the respondents during this research was aware of the classifications (ratings) system in their country. Though aware of the system, for this respondent the Guidelines (Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney–General’s Department 2012) had no impact on any creative decisions made in regards to their film. The remaining respondents were unaware of the classifications (ratings) systems in their country and indicated that classifications (ratings) played no role in the films that were written, directed and produced. These results were unexpected, given that most of filmmakers contacted during this research are university and/or film school educated and the role that classifications (ratings systems) ultimately hold as the gatekeeper by which films reach audiences, of especial significance to Australian filmmakers and film festivals. Whilst independent filmmakers and film festivals in the USA have an enviable independence from censorial controls when producing and programming texts, this chapter has highlighted that this is not the case in Australia and that official classifications (ratings) maintains an overt control upon what films are screened publically. Through surveys such as The Classification & Rating Administration (2014e), the mainstream system in the USA presents a monolithic and seemingly unchallengeable system, that is able to foreclose discussion on the effectiveness, wider socio–cultural significance and validity of film ratings in the twenty first century. Suggestions for potential future policy change with respect to the Australian classifications system, will be discussed in Chapter 8. These results, in tandem with the discussions presented throughout this chapter, suggest that classifications (ratings) systems are areas that could productively be incorporated into existing screen and media studies courses, or added as new courses in filmmaking curricula, with an emphasis on the role of classifications (ratings) systems in regards to independent filmmaking, the production of films festivals and curating screen content.

403 An Australian filmmaker, de–identified.
CHAPTER 6: TRANS NEW WAVE OF CINEMA

6.1 Introduction

Whilst the Trans New Wave is a new genre, the socio–cultural rationale for the emergence of these films and the attitudes and perspectives of filmmakers engaged in writing, directing and producing independent trans cinema⁴⁰⁴ is akin to experiences of earlier New Waves in film as we saw in Chapters 1 and 4. In the following chapters, a transliterate theoretical and textual exegesis of the case study films will demonstrate how gender, queer, trans and film theories and cinematic practises converge and diverge within Trans New Wave films.

6.2 Characteristics of the Trans New Wave

As we saw in Chapter 1 the key to film/filmmaker inclusion within the Trans New Wave is that the filmmaker is independent, representing the subject of transgender in its myriad of meanings across genres, themes and styles and trans identified. These are screen texts that have been written, directed, produced and exhibited since 2008, the key year in which the New Wave of Trans Cinema was recognised with Buck Angel at the forefront (Taormino 2008; Ford 2014a; 2015a; Chapter 7). Emerging from transporn, explicit depictions of sexuality are a defining characteristic of the early Trans New Wave films and the continuing influence of the porn genre is recognisable within specific texts. From these origins, the genre has developed rapidly, as we will see this chapter. The term Trans New Wave has begun to receive usage outside the independent film circuit, with scholarly use evident in recent independent trans films and research within the academy.⁴⁰⁵

Chapters 1 and 4 established that cinematic New Waves are significantly connected to “changes in film representations” (Sellier 2008, p. 1) and changes in culture; turning points in history (Sellier 2008, p. 2); independence from the Studio System (Hitchman 2013, Part

---

⁴⁰⁴ Based upon fieldwork during this research project; Chapter 5 presented key attitudes and perspectives from case study and non–case study filmmaker respondents, with case study filmmakers to be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Including Change Over Time (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2013), the creative work for his 2013 MFA thesis (San Francisco State University).
One) and “obsession with memory, with a personal or a historic past” (Sellier 2008, p. 5). Characteristics identified within both the French and American New Waves of cinema may be discerned as vital aspects of both New Queer Cinema and Trans New Wave films, where the personal narratives of films frequently follow times of consequence in the life of the filmmaker (the director) and independence in telling these stories is vital. Trans New Wave filmmakers in particular, utilise autobiographical and biographical materials in the construction of their film stories, as a means of understanding, tracing and constructing identity. Fieldwork with filmmakers throughout this research project has supported these primary definitions of the Trans New Wave established within this thesis, with the identification of independence as being central to all the filmmakers surveyed.

Trans New Wave filmmakers are often first–time (or emerging) filmmakers; directors who independently write, direct and produce their films on very low (or no) budgets, frequently self–funding (and/or crowd–funding) their films, or receiving minor funding from screen, or philanthropic agencies using unknown and lesser–known actors and participants (who may, or may not, be reimbursed for out of pocket costs), using portable digital equipment, self–editing the films using editing software now widely available and telling stories within the immediate settings available (Ford 2014a).

406 Filmmakers were keenly aware of this, with one respondent providing a specific definition of independent film as “I would classify independent film as films that do not have studio backing or large budgets” (Respondent de–identified, online ethnography 10 June 2015).

407 Fieldwork with Trans New Wave filmmakers throughout this research project has established that the filmmakers recognise and value their independence and have self–defined their work. As an example: “An independent film is made by a self–identified independent filmmaker. The definition depends on the individual. For me, as an independent filmmaker and creative professional, it means that I’m working outside of the mainstream film industry, Hollywood, or a media corporation that is funding the costs of my production” (Trans New Wave Director Ewan Duarte, digital ethnography 18–19 March 2014).

408 Sourced through semi–structured interviews via online ethnography and in–person fieldwork 2013–2016. One respondent highlighted the high value (and personal cost) of cinematic independence: “I think making the film that you want to make...an ‘independent film’ for me meant being broke but still making the film I wanted to make”. (Respondent name de–identified, online ethnography 31 December 2014).

409 As an example, Trans Boys “received an Aus $4,000 grant from the Aurora Foundation to help...this ended up being (the) entire budget” to make the film project. When contextualised against the two year process of making the documentary, the amount is understood to be an incredibly low budget to produce a film. Fieldwork interview with Co–Director of Trans Boys Monique Schafter, semi–structured interview questionnaire response via digital ethnography, 31 March 2014. A separate response from a non–case study filmmaker identified a definition of ‘independent film’ that centred upon the financial aspects of the production meaning: “A lack of corporate sponsorship/funding” (Respondent name de–identified, online ethnography 12 April 2015). The filmmakers surveyed all had a strong awareness of what being an independent filmmaker involved.
These filmmakers are often under thirty–five years old or were under thirty–five, when writing, directing and producing their first or early films. A number of key examples of these films were directed either in graduate school, as major works, or by early career filmmakers after recently graduating from screen/media arts University courses. There is a generational shift in the screen content that trans people wish to access and these early career filmmakers are amongst the foreground in Trans New Wave Cinema. The mainstream screen industry (larger budget, theatrical release, Studio films) continue to produce content that neither represents the gender–diverse communities in life–affirming ways, nor plays a constitutive role for trans people. Since 2013 there has been an emergence of intelligent content with gender–diverse themes and characters online, produced as original series via Subscription Video On Demand Services (SVOD) such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. Whilst not examples of the Trans New Wave, two of these series Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–) and This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015) directly draw upon Trans New Wave talent, creative direction and consultancy on trans issues (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

The availability of new forms of technology (digital video cameras, digital desktop editing), new forms of funding (such as crowdfunding) and new forms of distribution which the filmmaker controls and may receive a direct revenue from (such as Video On Demand, pay–per–view downloads and streaming, Vimeo, Youtube), evade old models of film production and distribution and to a large extent, bypass the gatekeepers of official cultural censorship.

Buck Angel is a key example of a filmmaker who fits within these criteria. These

410 Buck Angel is an exception.

411 This includes filmmakers cited within this thesis: Rhys Ernst, Ewan Duarte, Malic Amalya, Florina Titz. There are non–case study filmmakers, whose responses have been de–identified, that are also University trained filmmakers. Independent queer filmmakers often screen their thesis films on the GLBTIQ film festival circuit, either before, or after graduation. The educational status of many of the filmmakers may account for the higher awareness in responses, such as answers to questions what is an ‘independent film’ and in regards to financial aspects of film production. Several filmmakers whose films are cited within the thesis are also University Lecturers, Assistant Professors and Professors in screen/media studies, this includes Cheryl Dunye; Irene Gustafson).


413 Rhys Ernst is prominently connected to both of these Amazon Prime online series Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014) and This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015), further detailed in the concluding Chapter 8. Rhys’ partner, trans artist Zachary Drucker, is also part of the production team of Transparent, involved in consulting on trans issues for the show.
contemporary social, cultural and technological factors must be taken into account in considering the relevancy and successes of Trans New Wave films.

The ‘changes in film representations’ (Sellier 2008) in respects to trans themes, characters and narratives, have been so noticeable in screen texts and media during the years of this research project (commenced in 2013), as to require further elucidation. Trans New Wave cinema is developing at a rapid pace. This has included a shift towards writing, directing and producing trans youth narratives. A canon of representing gender diverse and non–conforming youth is emerging. There is also an increasing screen production from the non–hegemonic and non–western points of view of indigenous and First Nations peoples. These important screen narratives were highlighted in Chapter 1 and will be returned to within Chapter 8. There has also been increasing media attention on trans issues and individual trans people within the mainstream film industry with new initiatives aimed at mentoring trans people into the industry. This has all been taking place simultaneously as new online television series were released with trans characters sympathetically, intelligently and accurately depicted on–screen, portrayed by talented trans actresses.

The social currency of Trans New Wave cinema discussed throughout this thesis continues to be demonstrated on the Festival circuit, through the number of awards received by films with trans narratives, including Grand Jury and Audience Awards. Trans people and issues have regularly been featured as front page news, in high profile magazines, or as the main

---

414 Observation from in–person fieldwork attendance at Outfest film festival Los Angeles, July 9 – 17 2015.

415 Including Directors Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski (famous for numerous screen projects including The Matrix trilogy and Sense8).

416 The Transfirmative initiative, to be discussed in Chapter 8.

417 Including Sophia (Laverne Cox) in Orange Is the New Black (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–) and Nomi (Jamie Clayton) in Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–).

418 Examples include: from Outfest (2015) Audience Award to A Place in the Middle (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014); Jury Prize Award or Documentary Short Film to BrocKINGton (Sergio Ingato, Mason Sklut, Maggie Sloane, USA 2014); Special Programming Award for Artistic Achievement to Carmin Tropical (Rigoberto Pérezcano, USA, 2014), viewed 31 August 2015, <http://www.outfest.org/fest2015/2015-awards/>. from Queer Fruits Film Festival (2012) – Jury Prize Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), Outstanding Documentary Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) Outstanding Short The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), Outstanding Experimental I<3Boys (Sarah Barnard, USA, 2012) (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives), viewed 31 August 2015, <http://www.queerfruitsfilmfestival.org/artists.html>.
interview guests for prime–time television.\footnote{This included actress Laverne Cox on the cover of Time magazine: Steinmezt, K. (2014). “The Transgender Tipping Point”, Time, 29 May 2014, viewed May 30 2014, <http://time.com/>}. Whilst on the one hand, this media attention may have served to feed the never–ending mainstream community audience appetite for stimulation and curiosity, stories such as those of actress Laverne Cox emerged to inspire, educate and become new role models of success \textit{within} the trans community.

Whilst analysis of all the media that has been published during the years of this research project containing trans themes is beyond the rationale and scope of this thesis, these key examples have been highlighted to anchor the cultural significance of trans at this point in time. With trans now seemingly everywhere, the timeliness and significance of this thesis and the Trans New Wave filmmakers has been heightened, one of the concluding areas for discussion that will be returned to in Chapter 8.

\section*{6.3 Case Studies: Fiction to Factual—Criteria for Selection and Overview}

Comparison of Films Analyzed

The case study films within this thesis were publically exhibited at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012 (Figure 6.1), the films were all award winners in their respective categories\footnote{Queer Fruits Film Festival (2012). Jury Prize Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), Outstanding Documentary Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafer, Aus., 2012) Outstanding Short The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives), viewed 31 August 2015, <http://www.queerfruitsfilmfestival.org/artists.html>}. and are texts which focus upon \textit{transmale} narratives. These central criteria and rationale for selection was presented within Chapters 1, 2 and 3. The significance of each film being an award winner as one of the selection criteria is addressed through a recognition of the canonical nature of film awards within the screen industry (Ford 2016b). Such awards serve to promote films internationally and become ‘calling cards’ for the filmmaker utilised in promoting their

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
productions. That each film was an award winner in the same year also serves as a benchmark of what was successful at the festival that year in terms of screen industry assessment (Festival Jurors) and audience reception. This also serves as a methodology for providing films of similar quality for exegesis within the thesis. As qualitative rankings, the use of award status for a film fits within the methodologies outlined for this research project as discussed within Chapter 3. Queer Fruits Film Festival archival materials provide the source of fieldwork resources for this section of the thesis, enhanced by autoethnographic

421 As an example, Rhys Ernst publicises the film awards for The Thing (Ernst 2015b) as part of the exhibition history of the film. Buck Angel also utilises the award from Queer Fruits Film Festival in marketing as this was the first award that Sexing the Transman won (Angel 2013–2015). Award recognition forms part of the materials that demonstrate to future exhibitors and producers that a filmmaker is marketable.

422 The festival received an Exemption to Screen each film up to four times and to audiences of 18 years and over (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012).
narratives from my perspective as a Festival Director and subsequently as a scholar immersed in fieldwork with filmmakers, employing textual exegesis and theoretical perspectives from film, gender, queer and trans studies.

Since 2012, fieldwork has been undertaken within this research project with the directors and producers of the selected case study films Trans Boys to be discussed within this chapter and Sexing the Transman as will be discussed in Chapter 7. During thesis research since 2013 repeated attempts at communication with the director of The Thing (Rhys Ernst) have been attempted, but Ernst has not been able to be contacted. The Thing has continued to be included as a case study text within the research, as this is a significant text of the Trans New Wave, unusual for the use of fictional genre tropes in communicating a trans narrative. In the years since the research commenced, Ernst has become an increasingly successful and publically recognised trans filmmaker all of which has provided further rationales for continuing research into his film as a case study text of the Trans New Wave.

At the time The Thing was selected as a case study text, it was unknown that Ernst would subsequently work on the award–winning series Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–), or that he would direct his own online trans docu–series This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015), further enhancing his reputation and significance for scholarly investigation as one of the leading, openly identified, trans filmmakers of his generation to be discussed within Chapter 8. In this, Ernst is moving ahead in a cinematic field now secured by the work of directors Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski.

6.4 The Short Film Compared to the Short Documentary Treatment of Transgender Narratives

The Thing is a fifteen minute narrative short film which utilises the road movie metaphor. Trans Boys is a fifteen minute documentary, comprised of three interlocking shorts (each five minutes duration). These films may immediately be compared temporally, as texts of similar

---

423 Southern Cross University (Australia) ethics–approved doctoral research. 2015: ECN-15-203.

424 This is detailed in Chapter 3 under “Qualitative Purposive Sampling—Fieldwork with Trans New Wave Filmmakers”.
duration (fifteen minutes), being created by the same generation of filmmakers and with similar thematic concerns. Both films are independent texts produced between 2010 – 2012, subsequently exhibited in the same festival year of 2012 and each text explores transmale narratives, one from the point of view of a fictional text, the other from the point of view of factual. While these two filmic modes may seem to be oppositional in intent, exegesis of these texts in tandem reveals some striking similarities. These films bring into question issues of the real, authenticity and performativity in Trans New Wave films as textual exegesis will reveal and also of comparison of filmmaking styles. It has been noted that “In and of itself, the documentary is no more realistic than the feature film” (Trinh 1993, p. 98, italics in original omitted, quoting filmmaker Alexander Kluge). As we will see in this chapter, both forms of filmmaking require navigating the theoretical paradox outlined by Cinema scholar Trinh T. Minh–Ha who said: “How is one to cope with a “film theory” that can never theorise “about” film, but only with concepts that film raises in relation to concepts of other practises?” (Trinh 1993, p. 92, italics in original).

The issues of applying film theories to twenty first century trans cinema, as highlighted by Minh–Ha that “can never theorise “about” film, but only with concepts that film raises”, have been supplanted with transliterate reading and critical exegesis of the case study texts in terms relevant to the contemporary gender–diverse community. What is at stake here, as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, is moving beyond traditional forms of film theories, including those based in psychoanalytic approaches, to postmodern approaches that recognise what can be called a symbiosis between texts and community: what trans cinematic representations that are written, directed and produced by trans and genderqueer filmmakers mean to the community represented and how such texts work for and on behalf of contemporary trans and gender–diverse people. This is the basis of transliteracy utilised throughout this thesis as we saw in Chapter 4. The transactivist potential and importance of Trans New Wave texts will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

Screen literate Trans New Wave filmmakers are consciously writing, directing and producing texts which question theory and practise. An example is the film Black Is Blue (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 2014), identified as a short drama (a fictional short film), on the International Movie

425 The reference here is to the Queer Fruits Film festival screenings.
Database. Having viewed the film twice within the settings of independent film festivals during fieldwork at the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival (2013) and at Outfest (2015), each time the question lingered as to the unique filmmaking style presented. This text seems to mix fictional and factual narrative elements, including direct address to the camera by the leading actors at the end of the film. During a filmmaker panel following the Outfest screening, I was able to ask the filmmaker about this style and the way the ending of the film (which reads as documentary), pulls the audience out of what read as a fictional narrative short up to that point. From the panelists on–stage, Dunye answered with the compelling line that “truth is fiction”. This questioning of reality reappears throughout Trans New Wave films and will be discussed in detail in the following exegesis of The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

There are three key recurrent devices identifiable within cinematic trans narratives (Keegan 2013). The narrative use of the road trip and mirror was identified by Jay Prossser (1998). Through exegesis of Boys Don’t Cry, Jack Halbertsam opened scholarship on the ‘exposure’ scene (2001; 2005, p 77, 78). These three recurrent tropes are now clearly identified and frequently cited as representational devices for dysphoria in literature and cinema with trans narratives (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

Following Jack Halberstam (2001), the ‘exposure’ scene or narrative has received thorough scholarly critique and recognition with reference to films such as Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999; Halberstam 2001; 2005; Zagler 2011; Keegan 2015b) and Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005; Keegan 2013) and will be further discussed in Chapter 7. The ‘exposure’ scene of trans bodies has been utilised as a negative trope in mainstream films to indicate the “failure” of the non–normative, queer and transed body in society (Halberstam 2011; Keegan 2014a; Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).


427 Fieldwork at Outfest film festival, Wednesday July 15th 2015, “Trans Identities” screening session, during public filmmaker Q & A after the screenings.

Whilst mainstream cinema has provided well-known examples of screen texts which utilise these narrative devices, exegesis of Trans New Wave films within this thesis demonstrates that trans filmmakers are also utilising these representational devices. As the narrative devices have previously been used to represent dysphoria and in texts that have been heavily criticised from within the trans community, it was surprising to recognise that trans filmmakers are using these same tropes in their independent films. This can be rationalised as filmmakers using a shared cinematic language; or simply because the narrative devices fit their films. These three narrative devices, utilised within mainstream films, are also of significance to exegesis of the independent case study films within this thesis. In text *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), the devices of road trip and mirror scene are employed by the filmmaker. In text *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012), whilst there is no road trip, the mirror scene is utilised in a key sequence in Xavier’s story as we will see within this chapter. Whilst none of the case study films utilise the ‘exposure’ scene or narrative, trans bodies are presented within the texts at different life cycle stages, including narrative depictions of consensually filmed dressing and undressing and partial and full nudity contextualised within the texts. The reveal of the trans body in *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) will be examined within this chapter as a scene which problematises reading of the film.

To differentiate the cinematic strategies employed by Trans New Wave filmmakers, the text *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) presents an exemplar oppositional representational strategy to these dysphoric narrative devices, particularly to the mainstream ‘exposure’ scene, in what is being coined within this thesis as *self-disclosure scenes* within Chapter 7. The differing intentions in the usage of specific narrative devices by independent Trans New Wave filmmakers within texts may be usefully contrasted to the mainstream cinematic examples and becomes apparent through textual exegesis.

### 6.5 *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst 2011)—Transgender is a Journey But to Where?

“just trust me. I know where we are” (Tristan, in *The Thing*).

In Chapter 4 the context of narrative short *The Thing* was established, as a film consciously utilising tropes of the road trip genre and an enigmatic destination ‘The Thing’, as a potent
metaphor for the experience of transitioning. The ‘road trip movie’ is a genre which “actively privileges alternative lifestyles”, effectively using “setting and space/containment and escape” (Downing & Saxton 2010, p. 41) to convey a transformative journey. This is present in the key narrative elements of the wide landscape and the enclosing/protective space of the car in which the protagonists drive. As such, this is a genre particularly suited to metaphorically representing the transgender experience and journey of transitioning. The road trip has been previously utilised onscreen in feature films with trans narratives such as Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005), which depicts Bree (Felicity Huffman) on the eve of her long–awaited gender–confirmation surgery and follows Bree’s subsequent journey across America, which involves reconciliation with a previously unknown son, leading to acceptance from her family (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

In The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), the landscape (and outside the car) can be usefully interpreted to represent hegemonic society, whilst the interior of the vehicle and the unknown destination may be considered as representing the trans experience. What Keegan (2013) observed of the character Bree (Felicity Huffman) in Transamerica, can productively be restated in respect of Tristan (Hilt Trollsplinter) in The Thing; the road trip narrative represents a “body that journeys from negative to redemptive affect” (Keegan 2013, p. 2). Following Jay Prosser (1998), scholars have continued to develop theorization of the road trip and narratives of geographic movement as significant to representations of trans (Aizura 2011 forthcoming; Cotton 2011; Keegan 2013; Kunzel 201; Ford 2014a, 2016b, 2016e).429

The intertextual reference to the 1951 science fiction/horror classic film The Thing (from Another World) (Christian Nyby 1951) was also noted as relevant, to not only the social and cultural issues of the era, but the conservatism and fear of ‘the other’ which is played out onscreen in the science fiction and horror genres (Ford 2016b). Ernst makes use of these three genres in his narrative short, in text (road trip genre) and subtext (science fiction and horror genres) and each reveal layers of reading anxieties about not only what experiences await on the other side of transitioning, but the position of trans people within contemporary society.

during and following transition. The science fiction genre also emerges as a subtextual reference in *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) in Xavier’s story.

The 1951 film has been credited as providing a template for narratives which utilise a “realistic and isolated setting for the story to take place within” (International Movie Database 2011a). There has been direct re–use of the title and concept in contemporary films classed as horror, mystery, science–fiction, with *The Thing* remade twice by directors in the USA; in 1982 by John Carpenter and subsequently in 2011 by Matthijs van Heijningen Jr. Of significance, is that the 1982 version is concerned with a “shapeshifting alien” (International Movie Database 2015a), which takes the form of what it enters/kills and this in turn becomes a ‘thing’ that humans must destroy. The film deals with fears of “assimilation”, “imitation” and “infection”, caused by ‘the thing’ (Carpenter, USA, 1982). The later 2011 (Matthijs van Heijningen Jr.) version of the film used the promotional tagline “It’s not human yet” in marketing promotions.

Movement, or ‘shifting’ between forms and bodies is central to trans experience. In reading Ernst’s trans film, the multi–textual layering comes into view. The re–use of title, or implicit cultural referencing, to these earlier science–fiction film versions of *The Thing* cannot be overlooked in exegesis of Ernst’s Trans New Wave film.

As a title word in a trans film, ‘thing’ may be interpreted to be used here as a linguistic substitute for “an object that one need not, cannot, or does not wish to give a specific name to”. Within the text, there are concerns about a range of ‘things’, including private and public aspects of gender transitioning and the destination of the journey, which requires use of external ‘things’, including navigational devices—maps and an onboard Global Positioning Systems (GPS) called ‘Mandy’. Lead transmale character Tristan (Hilt Trollspinter) says “I hate that thing” (Ernst 2011), referring to Mandy (the GPS device), as a disembodied female

---

430 Words used in the film, transcription by A. Ford from the film during television screening on Australian channel SBS 2 on 20 May 2015.


voice from the dashboard announces “you will reach your destination” and “you have reached your destination” (Ernst 2011) as the car pulls up at the enigmatic place of ‘The Thing’. This invites multiple readings, as both the Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and the destination are narrative devices, ‘things’. In stating that he ‘hates that thing’, Tristan articulates distaste and displeasure for the intervention of external assistance in his journey. That the device is called ‘Mandy’ and has a female voice is significant and can reflect the “gender stereotyping” (Gustavsson 2005) of bodies in nature and technology. In the context of this film, the female voice also acts as a audio hypertext which the viewer can access either immediately, or at a later time.

On one level, the reaction by Tristan to the female voice on the Global Positioning Systems (GPS) in the car can simply be read as distaste for female direction on the journey, something that the couple argue about whilst driving (that his partner Zooey takes control). This could also be interpreted as a repudiation of Tristan’s prior ‘female’ self or body. Whilst the Global Positioning Systems (GPS) is a human–made technological navigational device/machine which assists in navigating during the journey, ‘The Thing’ is a natural phenomenon and the destination. This can be interpreted as a cinematic representation of the journey of the trans body, which is born and created; technologically and surgically inscribed; a self–made man (Rubin 2003).

The use of the Global Positioning Systems (GPS) may also allude to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the subtextual referencing to the science–fiction genre in the film. Within this text, the filmmaker uses the science–fiction trope of the ‘isolated setting’ which plays upon spectators’ fears, as the location of the destination of ‘The Thing’. This can be usefully read as

---

433 The use of female names, personae and voices for AI machines including in smartphones (Siri), as online technological assistants for companies and for GPS has provoked wide debate from the points of view of gender, sex, and affect. Female voices have been shown to have an “emotional link” to brands and the idea that women should be in the position of “serving” (subservient) has also been raised (Beres 2016). Gustavsson notes that the “stereotypical female image of caring, empathy and altruistic behaviour has become a standard component in a service script” dictating that AI are presented as female (2005, p. 402). Gustavsson also discusses how the virtual and real worlds can be read, rather that as a duality, but to simply “assume the virtual world is simply part of the real one” (2005, p. 405). This article led to considerations of the use of the female voice by Ernst as a form of “hypertext” within the film. Whilst it is is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop the theoretical issues presented by the use of female gendering in AI it is a recurrent theme in recent science–fiction films including Ex Machina (Alex Garland, USA, 2015) that can be positioned with a history that stretches back to the inception of the genre with Metropolis (Fritz Lang, USA, 1927).


233
a representational trope and as a metaphor for the isolation of transitioning (mentally and emotionally). The setting for the film is a remote landscape. Whilst the location is not explicitly stated, the setting of long highways flanked by tall cacti is reminiscent of Arizona or New Mexico.\textsuperscript{435} This leads to the observation that inspiration for the film setting may be in one of the many enigmatic, isolated tourist attractions that flank the highway (Figures 6.2, 6.3). Such a location may be productively compared to the sign that announces ‘The Thing’ in publicity materials.\textsuperscript{436}

At one point in the film, Tristan’s partner Zooey (Ruthie Doyle) expresses anxiety around the journey when she says “maybe we should just go back” (Ernst 2011). But back to where? Tristan does not seem to hear this comment, as he is in the bathroom at the time. The isolation of gender dysphoria and of transitioning are experienced individually, even though family and friends may be supportive. This isolation is represented in the hotel scene where Tristan (Hilt Trollspinter) is alone in the bathroom, in front of a mirror above the hand basin, binding his chest. Tristan then prepares a shot of ‘T’\textsuperscript{437} in front of the mirror, before walking out of the bathroom to ask his partner to assist. Zooey walks into the bathroom and assists Tristan, giving him the shot of ‘T’, while he stands in front of the mirror looking down, avoiding visually engaging with what she is doing. Tristan only briefly looks up as the shot is given. Zooey looks into the mirror at the end of this scene and smiles. Through Tristan not looking into the mirror throughout this scene, the power of the mirror is negated as a dysphoric device. This is emphasised when Zooey looks into the mirror and smiles, which is an affirming performative gesture. In this scene, Ernst challenges notions of reality. Whilst \textit{The Thing} is a fiction film, these scenes read as a factual, documentary sequence. There is no intervention by the filmmaker in these scenes, either in timing, or shot angle. The actions are completed naturalistically, as in everyday life.

\textsuperscript{435} This rationale for this comment is clearly seen in the location setting of the film in the publicity trailer: International Movie Database (2011b). viewed 25 April 2016, \texttt{<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2119553/>}

\textsuperscript{436} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{437} Testosterone.
Figure 6.2: Arizona roadside attraction—Dinosaur Footprint Tracks.

Figure 6.3: Dinosaur Tracks Parking Sign (Arizona).
This scene also represents the medicalisation of a relationship that can take place before, during and after gender transition processes and will be returned to in Xavier’s story later in this chapter. Drawing upon scholarly criticism of the representation of Brandon Teena in Boys Don’t Cry (Peirce 1999), these scenes of chest binding and testosterone use show Tristan “preparing for masculinity” (Esposito 2003, p. 232).

*The Thing* reveals some of the subtextual and theoretical concerns quite directly in the opening few minutes (at 1.22–1.29). Tristan briefly opens a brochure on the attraction they are driving towards called ‘The Thing’, “A Place That Defies All Expectations” (Ernst 2011). This reveals tantalizing glimpses of text that does not come completely into view onscreen, but which includes the phrases:

> The Thing is an oasis of taboos...letting go...scratching where it itches...experience a cosmic fun house...probability for bodily mutation...Awake from psychic amnesia. At The Thing, you can expect everything,...abilities, duration, interspecies intuitions...into the other 90%, walking on water,...spontaneous sensual connections...and penetration.

The left page of the brochure also has the text spelt in capitals at the bottom: “THE REAL IS NO LONGER REAL” (Ernst 2011, Capitalisation in original).\(^{438}\)

The issue of “realness” and a “politics of the real” are theoretical concerns of an earlier transgender focussed PhD thesis (Boucher 2010) that explored “the paradoxical nature of "realness" and its function in both dominant culture and transgender communities. As a driving concept for transgender representation and as a strategy for resistance". Boucher utilised examples from photography, film and legal cases to examine “the slippery nature of “realness,” its cultural power, and its ability to escape the parameters of determinacy”. Significantly, contemporary Trans New Wave filmmakers, such as filmmaker Cheryl Dunye Black Is Blue (USA, 2014) have also identified this ‘slipperiness’; Dunye expressing this

\(^{438}\) Transcription from *The Thing* by A. Ford 13 March 2015, film paused to enable transcription (and hence reading of the text), which as noted only briefly comes into view when the film is screened without stopping. Ethical considerations around this were discussed in Chapter 2.
through saying that “truth is fiction” and Ernst (2011) stating this in *The Thing* through the text “the real is no longer real”. The interlocked issues of representation and reality are raised repeatedly by scholars. Cinema scholar Trinh (1993) has identified “how representation relates to or is ideology” and defines “the real” in terms of “the social ideal of good representation” (p. 97). This definition of ‘the real’ becomes problematic in consideration of Trans New Wave films, as it positions the ‘real’ in terms of an hegemonic ‘social ideal’ and an indefinable and subjective qualitative binary category of ‘good’. Such a stance also positions ‘the real’ in a mimetic and idealistic realm, away from the ‘real lives’ and day to day concerns of gender diverse people in the twenty first century—which are the material concerns of the Trans New wave filmmakers within this research. Positioning ‘the real in terms of ‘social ideals’ may also invite subjective consideration of what is considered to be a ‘good representation’ for gender–diverse people.

In Chapter 7, we will see that the prominent recognition of Buck Angel as a ‘role model’ and inspiration for many transmen and gender–diverse individuals around the world, is simultaneously contested by some who ‘do not’ consider Angel to be a ‘good representative’ for the trans community. In part, this has been because of the personal statement made by Buck about his own body, that has been incorrectly applied and considered to have been a public statement by Buck about the bodies of all transmen and that, in turn, many transmen have publically criticised and distanced themselves from.

The interlinked issue raised here applies to the case study films and in particular, the representations of transmale bodies within Angel’s films including case study text *Sexing the*.

---


440 In–person fieldwork interview with Buck Angel, during the Brisbane leg of his first Australian tour, 14 February 2014.

441 It was the first person singular statement made by Buck identifying himself as a ‘man with a pussy’ to promote his adult films that created the initial controversy; subsequent misquoting and generalisation derived from this statement resulted in a perpetuation and distortion of the original comment. As discussed within this thesis, fieldwork with Buck (Silverlake, Los Angeles, in 2015) has provided empirical evidence of the original context and meaning of this statement, this has also been correctly quoted in his recent interviews (Schwick 2015, online unnumbered).

442 In Herman (2015). Buck is quoted as saying: “I've fought against my own trans male community telling me, 'You don't represent me.' Thanks to you, everyone's going to think all trans men like their vaginas.” Interview with Buck Angel in *IBT*, viewed 30 July 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/transgender-porn-best-seller-it-good-trans-people-2028219>. 237
Transman. Are such texts and the representations of the transmale and genderqueer bodies cinematically portrayed to be qualitatively considered in terms of a ‘social ideal’, or in terms of whether these are/or are not ‘good representations’? Scholars such as Keegan, in his discussion of the online series Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014), have rightly pointed to the damaging narratives that emerge when ‘social ideals’ and stereotypical expectations are incorrectly applied to the trans body (Keegan 2014a). This has also been raised in earlier scholarship as discussed within Chapter 2, and the generic issue that “Sexual representation was a key problem for early trans activism; at issue was who would be a “good representative” for the community” (Steinbock 2014, p. 157). The interconnection between the ‘social ideal’ (Trinh 1997, p. 97) and the ‘who’ or ‘what’ is the ‘good representative’, or ‘good representation’ for the trans community becomes an uncomfortable and subjective discussion depending upon the point of view. Who decides what is ‘good’ (a very generalised term) ?

In Chapter 3 the methodology and positionality of this thesis was outlined, including the focus upon a multiplicity of perspectives (Hawke & Offord 2011), away from any binary points of view (such as ‘true/false’; ‘good’/bad’). This is an area that has provoked much discussion internationally within the trans community in the light of recent films with contested representations of trans such as Rayon (Jared Leto) in Dallas Buyers Club (Vallee, USA, 2013)(Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

In Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Scafter, Aus., 2012) what is ‘real’ emerges in context to discussions with Xavier about his experience of his gendered embodiment and invites exegesis in terms of subtextual referencing that can also be traced back to science fiction. No one point of view on trans emerges as relevant for everybody, everywhere. Once this multiplicity of views is accepted as not only relevant, but necessary, theoretical and practical constraints to conceptualising ‘the real’ in Trans New Wave films and to identifying ‘good representations’ become less problematic, though always present in the background reading of texts. The referencing by Trans New Wave filmmakers to science fiction and to questioning of reality and representation are intertwined. There is also a sense of the potential that emerges (or is already immanently present), from dislocation in time and place, from the
geographic migration of the road trip narrative, to the recognition of the trans body as simultaneously here and not here, as existing both now and in a future time.

The science–fiction/horror genre versions of *The Thing* (International Movie Database 1982; 2011c) that predated Ernst’s trans film of the same title, intentionally centred audience concerns upon paranoia—of ‘who’ is ‘real’ and ‘who’ is ‘the thing’ masquerading as ‘real. This was particularly evident in the 1982 version of the film. About forty–five minutes into this version 443 one of the characters, named Childs (Keith David) asks: “If I was an imitation, a perfect imitation, how would you know it was really me?”. 444 This question holds incendiary potential within the text, raising intersectional issues of gendered ‘otherness’, as the character interrogates his companions as to whether he is “an imitation” which equates with the alien ‘thing’ having taken over his form, or “really me” (an African–American man).

In scenes of Trans New Wave film *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), notions of the real are challenged from multiple points of view. In one scene in the car, Tristan, the lead transmale character, uses a camera, whilst making comments about an image. He talks about the way marketing uses the image of a single berry, replicated multiple times on a cereal box to look like a bunch of berries and questions why multiple berries are not photographed in the first place. This brings the concept of reality, images and replication into the narrative, away from the trans body, yet still discussing something that is biologically real, existing in nature and also not real, existing as a technological replication. Later, in the hotel room, what appears to be a wide angle shot of a ‘real’ landscape is seen full screen, to be revealed as an image of a landscape on a postcard that Tristan is looking at. The transgender gaze (Halberstam 2001) is here revealed to be simultaneously fixed upon a ‘real’ place (the natural landscape) and the human replication of reality (the image on the postcard). Contemporary trans filmmakers and scholars question issues of ‘authenticity’ (Boucher 2010) and what is ‘real’ (Ernst 2011; Dunye 2015), whilst seeing the potential for the real transforming and reforming at will. Halberstam offers the view that “Realness—the appropriation of the attributes of the real, one

---

443 *The Thing* (John Carpenter, USA, 1982).

could say—is precisely the transsexual condition. The real, on the other hand, is that which always exists somewhere, and as a fantasy of belonging and being” (Halberstam 2005, p. 52). This is articulated in *The Thing* (Ernst, USA, 2011) when Tristan looks at the image of berries on the box, or stares at the postcard of a landscape, he is aware that this is not the original berry, or landscape that he is holding; and yet, it does exist somewhere, it has a temporal place in the future...and that is the point of the journey to ‘The Thing’. The journey is necessary for Tristan to finally embody the real of his authentic self, that he knows exists, but which is still ‘out there’ as he is presently in transit.

Cheryl Dunye’s use of mixed filmic styles, shifting between a fictional narrative and factual to–camera interviews with the actors and actresses in *Black Is Blue* is similar to the way in which *The Thing* moves between ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’. Both films feature transmale actors in the lead roles (Hilt Trollsplinter as Tristan in *The Thing*; Kingston Faraday as Black in *Black Is Blue*) and queer actresses in the supporting roles. This heightens the ‘real’ aspect of the ‘fiction’ in both screen texts and the concept of cinema texts as “postmodern ethnographies—ethnography in the sixth moment” (Denzin 1978, p. 75). This intensification of awareness, that the lead character is a transman in ‘real’ life 445 raises issues of ‘performativity’ (Butler 1990) of trans within these texts. As we saw in Chapter 2, for Butler gender is performed and arises through a stylised series of acts. This contrasts with the non–performative, constative experience of being presented by Prosser (2006). Within the narrative of *The Thing*, when private aspects of gender embodiment are stylistically presented and enacted (‘performed’) by a transmale actor within a fiction film, the actions of chest binding, ‘T’ shots and navigating everyday requirements such as finding a bathroom and negotiating using public men’s bathroom spaces become performative. These are sequences in which art imitates life. In *The Thing* a transman performs being a transman. This in turn creates a theoretical problem as the text “reduces performativity to performance: that is, it focuses on a single instance of a gendered practise and so forgets the historical chain of repetitions that makes each instance possible” (Gerdes 2013, pp. 148–149).

These texts demonstrate “why progressive fiction films are attracted and constantly pay

---

445 The *Thing* film credits include Hilt Trollsplinter as the lead character Tristan, viewed 21 April 2015, <http://rhysernst.com/portfolio/the-thing/>. Hilt is also known as a trans musician (extratexual information).
tribute to documentary techniques” (Trinh 1993, p. 99). This stylistic fusion becomes necessary to enable a fictional narrative to contain factual elements and to read as ‘real’ (factually) for audiences, who know when something is ‘real’ or not. This is heightened when a narrative contains specific actions borrowed from everyday life familiar only to specific audiences.

*The Thing* presents a visual representation of the complexities of trans-reality and a constative trans positionality, through the onscreen performance of transmasculine identity by a transmale actor. This narrative strategy textually links the contrasting views of Butler and Prosser about gender, illustrating that “Performativity is the connection between gendered embodiment, gendered experience, and gender’s discursive force (Gerdes 2013, p. 132).

The play of the real/created worlds and the temporal shifts utilised in the science fiction genre are cleverly backgrounded into the narrative of *The Thing*. From these genres a sense of the transitional potential that encapsulates aspects of trans experience is conveyed. The way in which trans filmmakers are presenting similar narratives through the use of fiction or factual film styles will be compared through exegesis of sequences in documentary *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012) later in this chapter, particularly in the story of Xavier, who is depicted unbinding his chest in front of a mirror following surgery (turning the mirror from a dysphoric to a euphoric device) and in Dex’s story where Dex is shown preparing to administer a shot of ‘T’. Dex explicitly refers to the need to “relearn how to relate to people because people relate to you from a different gender perspective” (Dex in *Trans Boys*). These Trans New Wave texts demonstrate what happens “when the dividing line between performativity and performance disappears” (Denzin 203, p. x). A similar filmic mode is present in *Black Is Blue*.

It is clear that Ernst is culturally literate. As a publically recognised and awarded trans filmmaker and artist, featured at the Whitney Biennale in 2014 with his trans partner Zachary Drucker, Ernst made news in the *The New York Times* with an article that supportively stated: “It is just more evidence of the increasing presence of trans people at the centre of popular culture” (Bernstein 2014). As a trans film director, directing a trans lead actor in a trans
narrative, the multi–textual layering evident within film *The Thing* is exemplary. Ernst fluidly moves from image, to use of text, within the text.

### 6.5.1 Use of the Road Movie Genre as a Representational Metaphor for Transitioning

In use of the road movie genre, *The Thing* shows “how transition as a geographic trope applies to transsexual narratives: that is, transsexuality as a passage through space, a journey from one location to another” (Prosser 1998, p. 5). Movement, being in “transit” (Franklin 2010), “geographic migration” (Keegan 2015d) and scholarly awareness that “Trans often functions as a metaphor of geographic movement” (Kunzel 2014, italics in original on word ‘trans’ omitted) and as a trope of significance to trans narratives, has been widely discussed in recent scholarship (Cotton 2011, Aizura 2011, Aizura *forthcoming*; Keegan 2013, Ford 2014a). This movement is enabled through a vehicle. This can be read (on one level) quite literally as the body.

In *The Thing*, this vehicle is represented in one form by the car that Tristan drives. This reading is problematised by Zooey taking a turn to drive (albeit, with Tristan expressing displeasure at her taking control). The car becomes a site of multiple readings. This is signified through the use of text, that is inserted in a number of scenes as a scene device (prop), the director using adhesive stickers on which text is written, adhered to the passenger’s side of the dashboard (starting at 1.32–1.33 minutes into the film). The first sticker displays the simple statement “is overrated” (Ernst 2011). This brief initial glimpse leaves the audience to complete the sentence of what “is overrated” during the journey. The text is visible on the dashboard of the car throughout the film, whenever sequences of Tristan and Zooey are filmed through the windscreen of the car. Given the preceding sequence with the brochure for the enigmatic destination of ‘The Thing’, the words “is overrated” communicate messages, that perhaps life and experiences of the body, gender and sexuality are ‘overrated’ for the “other 90%” who are referred to onscreen in the brochure. This draws upon cultural awareness for some audiences that 10% is frequently stated as a general

---

446 Ernst has recently been working as the Second Unit Director on *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014). His International Movie Database profile lists short film *The Thing* as one of his writer–director’s credits, he is an out trans filmmaker.
percentage of society that are gay, following Alfred Kinsey (1948, 1998). In 2014, the population percentage of “Australians of diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity” (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex), has been reported at up to 11% of the population. This means that in Australia, eleven people out of every hundred people in the population are non–heterosexually identifying, living sexually and/or gender–diverse lives.

The uses of text within the film, as these examples illustrate, foregrounds the authorial voice and concerns of the director. This includes a later sequence where Tristan’s girlfriend Zooey pulls the exclamation mark off a different blue sticker that is stuck beneath the dashboard which simply says “YES !” in capital letters (at 9.49 minutes into the film) (Ernst 2011). This leaves the word “YES.” being spelt with a full stop throughout the rest of this scene. Again, the audience is left to consider how ‘yes’—an affirmative word which implies agreeing to something—has now become no longer an exciting prospect “YES !” (as indicated by the exclamation mark and capitalisation), but now is represented as a foregone conclusion, “YES.” signified by the word being spelt with a full stop. The use of text within scenes of the film continues during the journey, as both characters make reference to the brochure on ‘The Thing’, taking turns when not driving to read sections of the brochure. In a hotel room, as the couple lay in bed watching television, the television screen is seen with an unknown film playing. In this text within the text, a man warns the female character about an immanent...
journey uphill to a place called “Widow’s Peak”, that “it’s going to be a bumpy ride”. This can be read as an externalisation of anxiety about the overall journey the couple have embarked upon together, or perhaps even as an externalisation of Tristan’s inner concerns about his journey of transitioning, what he is yet to experience and what the experience may be like for Zooey.

The words “Seeing is Believing!” advertise the attraction of ‘The Thing’ on billboards as the couple’s car approaches the destination. This is the most significant use of text within the film and is clearly seen on all publicity materials for the film, including the main publicity still used for marketing and the official film trailer (International Movie Database 2011b; Ernst 2015b). These words reflect back at the audience the spectre of the unwelcome interrogative gaze that many trans people experience on a daily basis. Spectators are shown the journey, but ultimately left without narrative closure unable ‘to see’ anything, as Tristan enters the interior of the destination by himself at the end of the film. Throughout the journey the car heads along an isolated road to a destination that may be real (a natural phenomenon), or may turn out to be an artificially constructed destination, an imaginal destination. The use of sight, “seeing” and ‘The Real’ as theoretical concerns of trans films discussed in Chapter 2, is highlighted throughout this chapter in relationship to cinematic representations in fiction and factual (documentary) films. The words “Seeing is Believing!” also position the empirical experience as creating the ontological account within the trans narrative.

In this sequence, the role of the traveller, the tourists on vacation become a readily recognisable image for audiences to connect with, in order to gain a fleeting, temporal and affective sense of the experience of gender-transitioning; that this involves disconnection from everyday expectations, may involve anxiety and excitement and is a temporary mode of transit. Interviews with trans women who have travelled overseas for gender confirmation procedures have revealed that “It’s something kind of tangible and symbolic, to take a journey (to have gender reassignment surgery...(To) do things and see people in a situation outside your normal circumstances” (Aizura 2013, p. 504). Being somewhere else, disconnecting from the everyday are important in the experience of transitioning. Aizura notes that “the geographical ‘journey’ is almost ubiquitous as a metaphor within English–language trans narratives to relate transsexual transformation from man into woman or vice versa” (2013,
Theoretical issues around the ‘passing’ body emerge within the narrative of *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) with the disclosure of Tristan’s body in the bathroom scene to the audience, whilst the couple then continue on their journey ‘passing’. Without this scene, the film would read simply as a heterosexual road trip film, a holiday narrative to a remote, fictional tourist destination, playing upon all the fears and expectations of the road trip genre. Yet with this scene in the film, the audience is now given privileged knowledge and “privileged access” (Zubrycki 2011) to the private bodily status of not only Tristan (the fictional character), but also of Hilt Trollsplinter, the actor performing Tristan. This in many ways serves to take the narrative out of the realm of fiction, placing the scene within the genre area of documentary, as a ‘docu–fiction’. When considered within the prestigious festival setting of Sundance at which the film premiered in 2012, the experiences of even film literate hegemonic audiences to this scene could be difficult to anticipate. Does the film now become simply read as a trans buddy film? At the least, the scene undoes the fiction that Tristan and Zooey are simply another couple on a holiday.

Whilst reticent to label this scene as an example of the negatively received ‘exposure’ scene or narrative, so damaging to trans representation in mainstream cinema (Halberstam 2001; 2005, p 77, 78; Zagler 2011; Keegan 2013, p. 6; Keegan 2015b), it is difficult not to feel discomfort in these scenes. It also becomes increasingly difficult to not read this scene as being an ‘exposure’ scene—of not only the character—*and* the actor playing the character. This is because whenever Tristan and Zooey are depicted in an exterior setting throughout the rest of the narrative road journey, they are portrayed as a ‘passing couple’, or “passing figures” (Surkan 2004), enjoying white, heteronormative privilege as they travel. While the status of their relationship is not explicitly stated, it is implied within the narrative through Zooey wearing a simple gold ring on the fourth finger of her left hand, which reads as a wedding ring. By the filmmaker showing the scene of chest binding and the shot of ‘T’, Tristan’s status as a man in the film is contested and his representation is turned into a ‘gender secret’, akin to the reveal of the ‘secret’ which Dill (Jaye Davidson) has in *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992)(Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). The couple then conceal this through ‘passing’ as they continue on their journey. As the director and lead actor are
transmen, these depictions of the trans body must be assumed to be consensual and knowing —of the consequences and meaning of the bodily reveal and potential readings of the reveal and subsequent passing. The display of the transmale body in this way as a narrative ‘reveal’ by the director to the audience will be contrasted in Chapter 7 with the scenes in Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011), where participants in the documentary take control of their images, in what are intensely private scenes in which Buck Angel acts as the ‘mirror’ in which the transman’s sexuality is enabled to be revealed to themselves.

The representation of the ‘passing couple’ as an extension of ‘passing figures’, as individual/s who present as gender–binary (male or female) and who move unquestioned in daily life, may represent the constative positionality, or an aspirational status for the filmmaker (an out transmale director), or for the participants involved in the film (one of whom is a transmale actor). The character choices made by the filmmaker, of presenting the narrative of the passing, gender–binary couple, raises critical issues of an increasing transnormativity (Keegan 2013) of cinematic representations of trans lives. These representations follow gender–binary narratives centred upon ‘passing privilege’, transnormalizing the roles of gender–diverse people within society to enable acceptance. This is returned to later this chapter.

The concept of ‘passing privilege’, or ‘privilege theory’, originating within feminist and Marxist studies (Gill 2014), exposes intersectional oppressions (class, race, gender, sexuality) within society. The socially oppressive conditions for trans people in daily life and the threats of interception, inspection, violence and murder that are experienced, underlines one rationale for the necessity for ‘passing’ as a binary man or woman, or as a couple, of not being noticed in daily life. The constative (Prosser 2006) experience of gender for many trans people underscores what to non–trans people may be misinterpreted as ‘passing’. Yet the very act of “passing also includes being erased as transgendered” (Cromwell 2006, p. 513) and has been criticised. The representation of the passing white male body, has been critiqued in relation to the depiction of Brandon Teena in Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999), where the performance of white masculinity is linked to the “failure” of the trans body (Esposito 2003). This “failure” based upon hegemonic social ideals is continually critiqued by leading trans scholars (Halberstam 2011; Keegan 2014a). In the 2003 article, Esposito rightly notes that the ‘white, male’ body was an incorrectly dominating force in history (2003, p. 230). Due to this
privileged positionality, issues of fictional narrative representations of trans, as white passing figures, become intensely problematic. Though frequently cited in relation to trans lives, ‘passing privilege’ is a highly contested state in relation to trans.

To “pass” for something immediately connotes deception and untruth. Think of plagiarists passing off someone else’s work as their own,...To look at trans* people expressing their authentic selves and say that they “pass” for men or women is to diminish their identity by implying that it’s an act. Telling a trans* woman that she “passes” is like saying “You’re not a real woman, but good job faking it (Kosciesza 2015, spelling of trans* in original).

Why would cinematically literate independent trans filmmakers such as Rhys Ernst replicate mainstream normative narratives and gender–binary depictions that evoke white privilege? The competition for recognition within the screen industry and resultant financing opportunities for subsequent productions provides a strong economic incentive for ‘mainstreaming’ narratives. It is relevant to note that The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) Premiered at Sundance film festival in 2012. Sundance is one of the prominent independent film festivals on the international circuit, classed as having “high status rankings” and a “fortunate affiliation with Robert Redford’s Sundance Institute” (de Valck 2007, p. 136), which makes this a professionally attractive festival for filmmakers at which to Premiere screen. The annual Sundance and Outfest film festivals are recognised as the “two major launching pads for independent LGBT cinema” (Outfest 2016, p. 5). Through association with a festival such as Sundance (or, Outfest), an independent film and unknown filmmaker attains status by association, gaining a prestigious ‘calling card’ for their work for subsequent productions. The Premiere status of a film is a major drawcard to obtain a ‘high status’ exhibition opportunity and is one of the initial marketable values a film contains upon completion. The Premiere screening of The Thing at Sundance suggests the aspirational focus of the filmmaker towards mainstream (wider release, higher budget) screen industry success. Ernst’ subsequent work on Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–) and his recent This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015) trans docu–series (with Soloway as Executive Producer), supports

this observation. Following the Sundance Premiere, *The Thing* was offered to independent queer and trans film festivals around the world, including Queer Fruits Film Festival, where the text screened in 2012 and was subsequently awarded Outstanding Short (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012).

Recognition of cinematic transnormalisation and contested passing figures presents a valid critique of specific film narratives within Trans New Wave cinema such as *The Thing*. Whilst the representation of gender–binary individuals and heteronormative couples may seem monolithic throughout hegemonic culture, there are flourishing oppositional counter–cultures that invalidate the binary and such hegemonic representations. As an example, the 2014 San Francisco Trangender Film Festival presented a program of films which strongly contested the view that the trans body is being normalised throughout independent cinema. Within this program, the trans body was presented in a kaleidoscopic range of diversity, inclusive of ethnicities, abilities, sexualities and genders, without censorship. As a community film festival embedded within the gender–diverse communities that the festival represents, the program demonstrated the potency of transliterate engagement with screen texts.\(^{450}\)

Unusual for the road movie genre, *The Thing* has no negative story arc, eschewing the genre convention of an ending where the protagonists are punished, either through imprisonment, or death. Instead *The Thing* depicts an open–ending, as the arrival at the enigmatic destination, ‘The Thing’—the point of the whole journey—which invites spectator interpretation through the experiential lens of transgender lives. As Tristan enters the destination, at first alone, then accompanied by his partner Zooey, the audience is not shown the interior of the destination, but is left to wonder about the challenges of the journey, the tentative arrival—and the road ahead.


The trope of movement, encountered so eloquently in *The Thing* through use of the road trip

\(^{450}\) In–person fieldwork attendance November 7–9 2014, San Francisco.
journey metaphor, is continued within *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012), in a different way, through use of a narrative structure that follows three trans guys as they move through specific stages of their lives. *Trans Boys* utilises a mixed observational/performative documentary approach, with staged to–camera interviews with the key participants: Xavier, Dex and Danny, intercut with scenes of everyday life and shots focused upon showing aspects of the interview narratives.

Co–Director Monique Schafter provided a detailed statement containing significant background to the motivation, rationale and necessity for *Trans Boys* to be produced. Significantly, this ethnographic material echoes the autoethnographic experiences that motivated programming of the 2012 trans–themed session and forum at Queer Fruits Film Festival.

In 2010 my co-director/co-producer, Ali Russell, and I decided to make a doco on Australia’s FTM community. It was around that time that we’d noticed a number of our friends, who had previously identified as “dykes”, were coming out as transgender men and we thought it was important to document this aspect of local queer culture. The previous year I’d attended the Trans March in San Fran and was blown away by what appeared to be an explosion of trans male culture—thousands of men and gender non–conformists walking topless through the Castro proudly sporting chest scars, moustaches and beards.

While this was happening on the streets, trans guys were close to invisible in the non–LGBTI media—even though YouTube was bursting at the seams with video diaries of FTMs across the world undergoing dramatic physical and emotional changes in their journeys from female to male (Monique Schafter 2014, co–director/co–producer *Trans Boys*).

Documentary has been defined as “a corner of actuality seen through a temperament”

---

451 Monique Schafter case study respondent on behalf of *Tran Boys*, online ethnography, 31 March 2014.
(Rabiger 2011, online PDF unnumbered). Whilst this centralises the role of the director in factual film, the characteristics, thinking and behavior of all key people involved in the project must be taken into account. This includes the producer/s and editor, in addition to the offscreen interviewer and the onscreen film participants. The grassroots, activist and independent uses of the documentary form, so familiar to audiences today, have developed since the 1970s. During this period, the democratisation of film and availability of hand–held camera equipment brought documentary filmmaking into independent hands, out of the control of “government, commercial sponsors, or the establishment groupthink of broadcasting” (Rabiger 2011, online PDF unnumbered), where it had existed for most of the twentieth century. The line between fictional and factual cinematic genres appeared to be clearly drawn during this period of cinema. Specific definitions of ‘what’ a documentary was were delineated. This included a central tenet observed by a succession of filmmakers and film scholars in establishing essentialist definitions of what documentary filmmaking entailed: “If the material is actual, then it is a documentary. If the material is invented, then it is not a documentary” (Trinh 1993, p. 92, italics in original omitted).

This stance is challenged by postmodern texts, such as the Trans New Wave films cited within this thesis. When a transliterate reading of these films is made, these earlier definitions would now be an oversimplification that may lead to misreading of texts containing trans themes and narratives.

Factual documentary film is singled out within cinema as a genre that was originally aimed at handling the real and reality, a weighty temporal responsibility: “It takes real people and real problems from the real world and deals with them...The real world: so real that the Real becomes the one basic referent—pure, concrete, fixed, visible, all–too–visible (Trinh 1993, pp. 93–94, italics in original). Key theoretical areas of concern that are discernible from engagement with the case study films and fieldwork with Trans New Wave filmmakers include issues of trans representation and reading of trans authenticity and reality—what is


‘real’ and ‘truth’ in context to screen texts as we saw in the discussion of *The Thing* (Ernst, USA, 2011) earlier in this chapter.

Contemporary filmmakers and film participants may view documentary as ‘dealing with’ the complex issues of trans people raised in texts in a non–material way. That is through the cinematic ability of the texts to ‘show and tell’ the experiences and points of view of individuals who have encountered circumstances that may resonate with documentary participants and with audiences. Imbuing documentary with the weighted responsibility and the static essentialist notion expressed by Trinh (1993) may have defined selected films from the past, but does not accord with contemporary Trans New Wave film narratives and postmodern representational strategies.

Scholars such as Boucher (2010) have focused upon engagement with theoretical issues encountered in conveying trans narratives to the screen. Filmmakers such as Rhys Ernst, who has stated “the real is no longer real” (2011, capitalisation in original text omitted), or Cheryl Dunye who has stated “truth is fiction” as we saw earlier in this chapter, problematise approaches to the cinematic genres of factual and fictional films. Texts such as these stimulate new modes of enquiry and thinking about the cinematic and scholarly definitions of factual (documentary) and fiction genres, in the contexts of the use of specific genres by trans filmmakers. The theoretical approaches of contemporary trans filmmakers in cinematic productions are read as positionalities that question, destabilise and replace outmoded representational strategies and for whom prior textual modes no longer apply. The pre–eminent example of this is Susan Stryker’s *Christine in the Cutting Room* (Susan Stryker, USA, work–in–progress, 2013). In this film movement is recognised as one of the essences of trans narratives; this is represented within the text through filmmaker choices of fast, striking edits and high–energy audio and in the lives within the text, through the movement of Christine Jorgensen from one side of the camera (working in the film industry) to the other — as a frequently photographed public identity (Stryker 2013). These examples all emphasise the need for a transliterate engagement with texts.

---

454 Fieldwork at *Outfest* film festival, Wednesday July 15th 2015, “Trans Identities” screening session, during public filmmaker Q & A after the screenings.
The film *Trans Boys* (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) is positioned within this trajectory of movement, utilising temporality to follow movement in the participants’ lives and is comprised of three stand–alone documentaries (each five minutes duration), with three different representations of transmasculinity.

The filmmakers were focussed upon

finding unique individuals who each had a different story to tell, but most importantly, finding guys who were OK with sharing their experiences and being “out”—a very courageous and potentially risky thing to do in a world that still struggles to get its head around anyone or anything that’s a bit different (Schafter).\(^{455}\)

The filmmakers utilised a narrative form of factual storytelling, with interviews with each participant interwoven with “moments of ‘actuality’” (Schafter)\(^{456}\) during which key experiences in the participant’s lives were filmed. In Xavier’s story, this is during the preparation for his gender confirmation surgery, with the actual surgery filmed, with follow–up footage one week after the surgery and then a year later, after he has emerged from the healing processes. In Dex’s story, the filmmakers focus in around the time he decides to explore homoerotic experiences. In Danny’s story, the first birthday party for his son Elton is filmed, with follow–up one year later after the relationship with his partner has ended. This temporal strategy, of initial participant observation and interview, with follow–up one year later enables the documentaries to see a real–time change in the lives of the men in relation to their bodies, sexualities, families and friends.

Each of these documentary shorts presents a specific life cycle narrative stage, representing the experiences of transmen from three unique points of view. The foci is upon gender transitional narratives, the sexual dysphoria that can be experienced during gender transition and passing in society, partnered with a child. The complexity of passing as a contested trans positionality has been raised earlier in this chapter in relation to the fictional narrative in *The

---

\(^{455}\) Fieldwork interview with Co-Director of *Trans Boys* Monique Schafter, semi–structured interview questionnaire response via digital ethnography, 31 March 2014.

\(^{456}\) *Ibid.*
**Thing** (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011). Whilst the canon of documenting gender transitional narratives is established within Trans New Wave films (Ford 2016b), acknowledgment and discussion of the sexual dysphoria that can be experienced during gender transition is an area that is only now emerging as an openly discussed subject within the Trans New Wave. As such, *Trans Boys* was breaking new ground in 2012 with Dex’s story and dealing with a highly personal area for transmen. This subject is also touched upon in *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) and will be returned to in Chapter 7.

Documentary filmmakers must make critical decisions regarding the selection of material to be filmed. This is perhaps the central issue with factual filmmaking. Unlike the creative processes involved in fictional screenwriting, the material of factual film is the “actuality” (Schafter 457; Rabiger 2011) of the participants’ daily lives, made possible only through “privileged access” (Zubrycki 2011, online PDF unnumbered), into the behind-the-scenes of those lives. This calls into question the necessity for filmmakers to make ethical choices in the materials included within the film, bearing in mind a moral responsibility (Ruby 1995) towards the film participants when sensitive materials form the basis for documentary subjects. There is an awareness that a documentary “can change your and your subjects’ lives forever—for the better or for the worse” (Barbash & Castaing-Taylor 1997, p. 2). Schafter demonstrated that the filmmakers of *Trans Boys* were aware of this when saying that participation in such a documentary was a “very courageous and potentially risky thing to do”.

Award-winning documentary filmmaker and screen Lecturer Tom Zubrycki raises the vital issue for filmmakers of informed consent questioning when does consent become informed consent...and is it a useful concept anyway? How can a filmmaker with any confidence second-guess what might happen to their characters as a result of their film being shown to a general audience? (2011, online PDF unnumbered).

---

457 Fieldwork interview with Co-Director of *Trans Boys* Monique Schafter, semi-structured interview questionnaire response via digital ethnography, 31 March 2014.


459 At the prestigious Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), viewed 13 October 2015, <http://www.aftrs.edu.au/search?query=Tom+Zubrycki>
With trans community participation the stakes are raised higher, given the historical background and continued exclusion, vilification, violence and murder suffered by transpeople worldwide. Ethical work and research conducted with Informed Consent (Chapter 3; Appendices B–F) are central paradigms of University research and scholarship. The ethical responsibility of the filmmaker in respect to their subjects, extends to the researcher in the use of textual materials as raised within Chapter 2.\(^{460}\)

While documentary is also called factual filmmaking, this does not eliminate the role of the filmmakers in crafting the film. This can be at any stage, from initial selection of topic and participants, to interview questions posed, to the final cut edit of what footage makes it to the screen. While the authorial voice of the filmmakers is backgrounded in factual film, it is also there. There is recognition of the ‘performative’ nature of interviews (Butler 1990; Denzin 2001) and that all “Interviews arise out of performance events. They transform information into shared experience” (Denzin 2001, p. 24).

An important point in regards to applying ethnographic and auto–ethnographic methodologies to exegesis of the case study films is that “There’s no precise distinction between ethnographic and documentary films” (Barbash & Castaing–Taylor 1997, p. 4) and that both ‘start with the real world’ (Trinh 1991; Denzin 1997). As screen texts emerging from and sited within trans and genderqueer communities and produced by literate filmmakers, Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012) and Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) are texts immersed in the cultures they represent. This becomes central to exegesis of the interview–based documentary case studies within this research project and is of relevance to Sexing the Transman which is also an interview–based text.

Film has been consciously utilised as an ethnographic research tool, including specific use in respect to the trans community. A key example of such a text is Transfiction by anthropologist

\(^{460}\) It is noted at this point that apart from the decision to not use any publicity stills from The Thing due to being unable to establish fieldwork correspondence with the filmmaker (even though such use may be permitted under ‘Fair Use’ scholarly provisions); I also made a considered ethical decision to not include specific digital film stills from Trans Boys that depicted certain scenes within the film. This includes images of surgical scenes and images of the individual transmen from childhood. This decision was made in recognition of the permanent nature of a completed doctoral thesis and that anyone can gain access to a digital thesis online. A transliterate awareness that many transmen do not want their pre–transition identities/images seen and that surgical images form part of an historical moment that individuals move beyond, informed the decision not to present these items in the permanent form of the thesis.
Johannes Sjöberg (UK, 2007), which was made within the academy as part of a “practice PhD in drama exploring ethnofiction” (International Movie Database, 2007). Ethnofiction is “an experimental ethnographic film style in which the participants collaborate with the filmmaker to act out their own and other’s life experience in improvisation” (Johannes Sjöberg, UK, 2007). The filmmaking technique focuses upon reflexivity between participant and filmmaker. Reflexivity and self–reflexivity are also central to cultural studies research approaches. Ethnofiction has also been called ‘anthropological docu–drama’ by Jay Ruby (Interview, year of publication not specified), through re–enactment combining the factual and fictional screen forms into one. In Transfiction, the daily lives of transgendered Brazilian women are explored. Two transwomen enact the experiences of life and discrimination experienced in São Paulo by transwomen employed as hairdressers and as sex workers. The aim of such a text is to create a “nuanced understanding” (International Movie Database, 2007) of trans lives. Such a film can be usefully compared to Sisterhood (Mikajlo Rankovic, USA, 2011), a Trans New Wave documentary which follows the daily lives of Latina transwomen who are employed as hairdressers in a salon in Brooklyn, New York.461

In the comparison of these two texts, the stylistic differences between documentary ‘performance’ and ethnofiction become clearer. In Transfiction, the women are clearly enacting (performing) the roles of hairdresser and sex worker self–consciously to camera. Yet with the buffer of ‘fiction’, these screen performances provide the freedom to add deeply personal details, such as the prevalent use of female hormones and silicone to enhance body shape without medical intervention and physical abuse by clients. This can be compared with the actuality of a documentary text and to–camera interviews, during which participants might find such details too personal or jarring, or even dangerous, to be discussed during interviews.

In the documentary Sisterhood (Mikajlo Rankovic, USA, 2011), the camera follows the women in the hair salon as they work, intercut with to–camera interviews. During the interviews, one of the women is clearly ‘performing’ to camera, playing with her hair and flirting with the off–screen interviewer. In Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012), the filmmakers have crafted the to–camera interviews so that there is less self–

461 Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives (2012). Screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012 as part of the trans–focussed program.
consciousness during the interviews, but it is still apparent that there is a ‘performance’ to camera. An example is in the opening minutes of Danny’s story, when his awareness of the camera is evident, as he looks at the camera following him at work in an art gallery. Yet each of these texts utilises ethnographic fieldwork within the trans communities as the basis for the screen text.

Recognising ethnographic fieldwork exists within documentary production, connects critique of ethnographic forms of interview that are central to the interview–based documentary. This awareness includes that an interviewer within any ethnographic fieldwork setting is not a neutral participant and is involved in “performing the interview”, with a specific “interviewer’s personna” (Barbash & Castaing–Taylor 1997, p. 277).

The interview is an active text, a site where meaning is created and performed.
When performed, the interview text creates the world, giving the world its situated meaningfulness. From this perspective, the interview is a fabrication, a construction, a fiction (Denzin 2001, p. 25).

Within the context of film, this raises a cogent question of whether documentary interview participants such as Xavier, Dex and Danny are performing their lives to camera within the context of the film. That there is an awareness of the camera (as in Danny’s story) and there is an on–screen performance, even in documentary texts cannot be avoided.462

By acknowledging the ‘fiction’ in ‘factual’ films and the ‘factual’ elements in ‘fictional’ films, the reality of the real is questioned, with no single position, nor simple answer to be found. Reality is seen to be an experiential multiplicity of perspectives created in each temporal

462 Acknowledgement of a discussion on documentary performance with director Jacqui North, a Teddy Jury Award winning documentary filmmaker (Berlin Film Festival 2000) and Festival Director (Big Screen, 2006–2014, National Film and Sound Archive, Australia). North, who directs and produces longitudinal documentaries, offered the following insights into documentary filmmaking and participation: a key is CAPTURING: "moments of change in people's life. This is easier when the participants are engaged in an activity, it lessons their self–consciousness with having a camera or camera crew around and importantly North said "the filmmaker is an implicated participant" in the action filmed (Personal communications, 29 September 2015, followed up 16 May 2016, 26 May 2016, capitalisation in original, italics added for emphasis). The longitudinal style of North's award–winning filmmaking, is of significance to Trans Boys, which follows the participants over a year of their lives.
space. This was highlighted earlier within this chapter in exegesis of narrative short film The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

Co–Director and Co–Producer Monique Schafter has said that if the team was making Trans Boys now “I’d also consider featuring a transmasculine guy who hadn’t undergone surgery to illustrate diversity within the trans* community”. \(^{463}\) This point is raised to acknowledge that any film is a temporal document, created from the material available at the time and also the prevailing perspectives to the subject area. In producing such a text, a temporal representation of trans reality as experienced in that moment, by those individual transmen is recorded. This is also of relevance to exegesis of Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). The experiences of trans in motion, leads the careful reader to recognise that each of these recorded moments in the lives of the trans guys has been experienced and is now part of their inscribed histories. In particular, in following the narratives of the individual participants, much movement is internally evident. For example, by the end of the film Danny is no longer with the partner he was with when the filming commenced in 2010. Xavier continues his career as a queer performance artist, beyond the gender binaries. Since the time Trans Boys was produced (between 2010 and 2012), the recognition of trans gender–diversity has continued to widen, to encompass and publically embrace a rainbow diversity of bodily and affective positionalities. This was made most clear during screenings at the 2014 San Francisco Transgender Film Festival \(^{464}\) where trans was represented as non–essentialist and non–exclusive; from every positionality possible. This included screen texts focused upon individuals who had made the personal decision to receive hormone and /or surgical treatments; to individuals who were transqueering their gender and sexualities without recourse to any forms of hormones, or surgeries.

In Trans Boys, the audience meets three transmen at critical points in not only their lives, but the cultural time of transgender emerging into wider social recognition. From the text, the audience is given privileged access (Zubrycki 2011) and insight into the complexities of the everyday lives of gender–diverse people in the early twenty first century.

\(^{463}\) Op. cit., Fieldwork. Trans* spelt as per the filmmaker’s interview response.

\(^{464}\) In–person fieldwork attendance.
6.6.1 Xavier’s story—Becoming a Man

The first short in *Trans Boys* is thematically centred upon issues of gender and introduces trans to the audience through the experience of Xavier, a young urban transguy as he approaches the major life transitional process of ‘top’ surgery 465 one of the gender confirmation surgeries that are available. The surgery is a major life journey milestone for Xavier, having already been involved in therapy and hormone treatments for approximately three years. The narrative depicts medical treatments that are beneficial to trans people, with sympathetic and caring medical practitioners involved in the processes. Such a contemporary account is an antidote to negative encounters that many trans people have experienced as discussed within Chapter 2. With friends and partners involved in these processes, this depiction in the film raises the issue of the medicalisation of a relationship that can take place during transitional processes, discussed in exegesis of *The Thing* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011).

---

Xavier talks about his experiences from childhood of wanting to be “a real boy” (Russell & Schafter 2012). This echoes theoretical perspectives raised in regards to “passing figures” in cinema discussed within this chapter in exegesis of The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), in regards to robots and cyborgs as characters in the science fiction genre of film. Such fictional characters are the “transgressors of many different binary systems” (Surkan 2004, p. 114), revealing what is at stake in being “read” and the “cultural anxiety surrounding the ‘undetectable’ passing figure” (Surkan 2004, p. 115). Surkan notes that the phrase “I want to be a ‘real’ boy” is stated by the central character David (Haley Joel Osment), who is a robot in the film AI Artificial Intelligence (Spielberg, USA, 2001) and that this statement “succinctly articulates the female–to–male (FTM) subject position, one only rarely heard onscreen in small–budget transsexual documentaries” (Surkan 2004, p. 116). This connects ideas of created bodies within science fiction, to the critique by Susan Stryker (2006b) of the intervention of science (in the form of medicine) into trans lives. It is also clear that the use of science fiction tropes and documentary style both play a major role in visualising these experiences. Contesting and questioning the ‘real’ and ‘reality’, are recurring themes in trans scholarship (Boucher 2010) and screen texts centred upon trans narratives. This includes being explicitly questioned in The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), in the form of inserted text foregrounding authorial concerns and positionality as we saw earlier in this chapter.

Xavier discusses the “discomfort with (his) chest” that he experiences and a recognition of ‘feminine and masculine aspects’ within. Xavier says “I don’t really know what kind of man I am” (Russell & Schafter 2012), echoing the self–reflexive questioning expressed in Trans New Wave film Change Over Time (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2013), when Ewan asks “what kind of man will I become”. While neither text offers closure to the audience (Ewan is still in the first year of his testosterone therapy at the close of his film; Xavier has “mixed feelings” about his body, but is generally happier), these texts centralise the physical gendered aspect of transitional processes, with the binary masculine gender foregrounded, in tandem with an

466 Following the theoretical concerns raised in Surkan’s (2004) essay, I noted during a subsequent viewing of Prometheus (Ridley Scott, USA, 2012) that a similar direct statement is made about the hybrid cyborg, who is also called David (Michael Fassbender), created to appear and sound as a handsome white man, with a soft, even–toned voice that puts the crew at ease. One of the characters says to David that he is “not a real boy”. This provokes David into a sequence of revenge. Reading from Prometheus 14 September 2014. Prometheus was produced eight years after Surkan’s article and demonstrates the currency of the concepts raised – that are still circulating throughout screen culture.

467 Transcription from Change Over Time by A. Ford 07 September 2015.
emotionally resonant self–reflexive questioning. Post–surgery, Xavier’s first reaction upon seeing his chest is “That’s amazing” and that he now has “little man nipples” (Russell & Schafter 2012).

Xavier embraces the effects of ‘T’ and his successful surgery, discussing his body and luxuriant beard, which he describes as “ace” (Russell & Schafter 2012). As the film draws to a culmination (Chapter 4, Figure 4.3: Xavier, at the beach), Xavier expresses that he still has “mixed feelings with (his) body”, identifying his “hips” as a specific area; but that he “feels more comfortable in day to day life” (Russell & Schafter 2012), since hormone and surgical treatments. Advice that he would offer his earlier self would be that transition would be “messy”, “hard”, “but it will be ok” (Russell & Schafter 2012).

---

468 Transcription from Trans Boys by A. Ford 25 August 2014.

469 Transcription from Trans Boys by A. Ford 13 October 2015.
6.6.2 Dex’s story—Transhomoeroticism—Coming out as a Gay Male

In the second short within Trans Boys (Ali Russell & Monique Schafter 2012), the filmmakers subtly handle the issue of the sexual dysphoria that gender transitioning can raise in the story of Dex. The complex issue of sexuality and dysphoria for transmen have been highlighted with reference to narrative in the online series Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–), which has been rightly critiqued by Keegan as a text that “directly addresses negativity by centering on the “gender failure” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 4) of transsexual dysphoria” (Keegan 2015a, p. 1). Through a transliterate engagement with an urban transmale community, within Trans Boys the filmmakers focus upon the successful integration of Dex into a fulfilled homoerotic sexual life. This is a text that valorises gender success for transmen and turns audience attention to the euphoric potential of contemporary trans lives. The audience is introduced to Dex at a time in his journey when there is discussion around his awakening recognition of “being gay” and the “planned trip back to (his) family to say goodbye” (Russell & Schafter 2012), before embarking upon gender transitional processes. Dex’s family is initially non–accepting of his gender identity.

Figure 6.6: Dex.
Reproduced courtesy of Monique Schafter.
The short is thematically centred upon the sexual awakening that accompanies Dex’s physical transition, with the use of ‘T’ (testosterone) shown, accompanying dialogue where Dex recounts how a friend said to him that “you’ll start with boys once you go on T” (Russell & Schafter 2012). Dex notes that “a lot of trans guys go through a phase (of attraction to men) and he understands why men have sex all day” (Russell & Schafter 2012). Dex’s story specifically connects use of ‘T’ with sexual attraction to men. In Chapter 7 the significant interconnections between the transmale and gay male communities is explored. Dex is open about his emerging recognition of himself as a gay man, after living his adult life as a dyke, only attracted to women. In this newly discovered attraction to other gay men, Dex notes an impediment with potential sexual partners is that they “don’t know if you will react to them as a man or a woman” (Russell & Schafter 2012).

Dex discusses his first “hookup” with a guy, that was a wonderful experience and not “feeling like a woman anymore...freeing up (his) perception of the body...(but) feels a little bit stuck between genders....not a woman....not the full package of a man” (Russell & Schafter 2012).
This has led to the need to “relearn how to relate to people because people relate to you from a different gender perspective” (Russell & Schafter 2012).\textsuperscript{470}

This is an important text within the Trans New Wave. The text links a physical gender expression (male) to a sexuality (gay), giving sexual attraction and sexuality a physically gendered, biological, hormonal basis. This is continuing to emerge in transsex practise as will be further discussed within Chapter 7. Such a recognition underscores “the narrative of becoming a biological man or a biological woman (as opposed to the performative of effecting one)” (Prosser 1998, p. 32, italics in original omitted). Dex’s story also demonstrates how “Identities are formed in dialog with significant others” (Rubin 2003, p. 15), as his newly embraced sexual identity is ‘formed’ in dialogue and engagement with gay men.

Dex’s story challenges aspects of gender and queer theory, giving pause for critical re–evaluation of theoretical concepts in the twenty first century. In particular, the theoretical position that “gender is culturally constructed” (Butler 1990, p. 6) is in many ways supplanted by \textit{Trans Boys}, which provides empirical evidence that physical gender and sexuality for transmen are constructed by chemical and social interaction, suggesting that if anything is ‘culturally constructed’ for transmen, it is \textit{sexuality}. The significant empirical evidence from Dex’s story and also from \textit{Sexing the Transman} to be discussed in Chapter 7, suggests that “transgender demands and contributes to the basis for a new queer theory” (Prosser 2006, p. 258) in relation to transmasculine sexualities.

\textbf{6.6.3  Danny’s story—the Father/Lover}

In the third narrative, the audience is introduced to Danny and the experiences of trans life beyond the transitional gender and sexual narratives of Xavier and Dex and on into the life of a family man, with a partner and young son. While Danny’s childhood “as a tomboy; dressed like a boy” and his later experiences after taking ‘T’ that he “felt a lot softer, more gentle” are mentioned briefly in the film, it is the family narrative that is the focus of this final section of the documentary. Danny says that he “takes being a dad quite seriously” and that he wants to

\textsuperscript{470} Transcription from \textit{Trans Boys} by A. Ford 25 August 2014.
be “a wise dad, a respected dad” (Russell & Schafter 2012). Danny is shown in scenes of everyday parental activities with his partner and son, including a birthday party for their son, Elton. Danny discusses how he negotiates his trans identity with his son and that he will “definitely tell Elton about being trans; (he will) put it in stories...fit it in like that...‘when dad was a little girl’...but is that really right?” because I wasn’t a little girl” (Russell & Schafter 2012).

The film follows Danny for over a year and there is a relationship breakup, with issues surrounding separated parents and the shared responsibilities of continuing to raise his son as a single father.

Within Danny’s story, whilst the point of view is Danny, his son Elton is present throughout the text as a key figure in Danny’s life that reflects his position within society as a family man. In everyday life, out in public, Danny and Elton would ‘pass’ much as any father and

---

son. Because Elton was young (only one year old) at the time *Trans Boys* was produced, the film did not have the opportunity for Elton to reflect upon his experience of growing up with a trans father. This perspective—from the point of view of a young child growing up through childhood and adolescence with a trans father—would present a significant addition to the emerging canon of trans films that document youth narratives. The youth perspective is a key narrative of the developing canon of representations in trans cinema (Ford 2016b). This observation is made at a time when the experience of gender–diversity from the point of view of an adult child, has been screened in *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–), drawing upon the auto–ethnographic experience of the filmmaker (Soloway) and her trans father.

While family issues are backgrounded to the narrative in Dex’s story, with biological family initially non–accepting; in Danny’s story, the documentary cycle comes full circle, with family at the centre of his experience and world, rather than the periphery. This cycle shows a twenty first century family, where gender is openly discussed. For spectators, *Trans Boys* (Russell & Schafter 2012) ultimately gives optimism for change in the attitudes of the present
and next generation in society towards trans people, who are no longer unknown ‘others’, but cherished parents, friends and lovers.

6.7 The Transliteracy That Emerges From Each Film

In *Trans Boys*, all three narratives deal with issues of ‘family’, showing the importance of having the support of family before, during and after transition. This is key to Xavier’s story as he prepares for, undergoes and heals from surgery. In this, family is defined in a non-essentialist and broad sense to include lovers, partners and friends and is not limited to biological relations. The impact of initial non-acceptance by biological family is handled in Dex’s story, as is the significance of subsequent family acceptance. Being centred within a family of choice—as a loving partner and father is Danny’s story.

The filmmakers identified the need for this documentary in 2010, connecting their motivation and rationale for directing and producing the documentary within an urban trans and queer community, clearly positioning trans within and connected to queer culture and hence, sharing a range of theoretical concerns with queer theory. Prosser suggested that “transgender demands and contributes to the basis for a new queer theory” (1998, p. 258), which is now firmly in the realm of scholarly disciplines with transgender studies. The focussed socio-demographic and age range of the participants in *Trans Boys* is contextualised through this background interview quote with Schafter. The filmmakers were drawing from a pool of friends within an urban queer community. As a small community, these are also transmen of the same generation, who knew each other (or knew of each other), before the documentary was filmed.472

Through exegesis of these case study texts, it has been demonstrated that Trans New Wave filmmakers employ narrative devices, known from mainstream cinema, such as the road trip in *The Thing* and the use of the mirror scene in *Trans Boys*, both of which are discussed in this chapter.

---

472 Schafter noted that both directors contacted the Sydney Gender Centre “to discuss our idea (for the documentary) and invite feedback from the community”. Fieldwork interview, semi-structured interview questionnaire response via digital ethnography, 31 March 2014.
Science fiction emerges as a cinematic genre that contains concepts, characters and tropes of relevance to Trans New Wave films and identified within the texts through exegesis of the case study films in this chapter. Fictional genres (including science fiction and horror) have previously been located by trans scholars as containing significant thematic trans narratives and aesthetics (Surkan 2004; Keegan 2014b, 2014c, 2015b, 2015c). This connection has also been presented by leading scholar Stryker, who has written what is perhaps the most poignant insight into the literary narrative of trans, with the powerfully evocative essay “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” (2006b, 2011):

I am not the first to link Frankenstein’s monster and the transsexual body...A creature, after all, in the dominant tradition of Western European culture, is nothing other than a created being, a made thing...I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non–human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities...Monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary. They served to announce impending revelation, saying, in effect, “Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening.”  
(Stryker 2011, pp. 84–86).

It is significant that Ernst, like Stryker, have both strategically chosen to utilise the word ‘thing’ to convey the profound empirical and ontological journey that leads to the ‘created being’ and constative experience of the trans body. Through locating the genre tropes of science–fiction and horror films within the Trans New Wave as highlighted within this chapter, the cinematic narrative has come full–circle within independent films.

6.8 Summary

The vital significance of Trans New Wave films is succinctly stated by Schafter:

---

473 Oxford Dictionaries (2016). “Thing”, viewed 20 August 2016, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/thing>. ‘Thing’ may be used as a noun and an adjective: it can be (or stand in for) the ‘thing’ referred to, or it can describe the ‘thing’.
There’s been an increase in the visibility of transgender people in society—in both queer and more mainstream circles over the past four or five years. I feel that by seeing trans stories on screen, the trans experience has been humanised and audiences have a wider vocabulary to discuss transgender issues.\textsuperscript{474}

The use of interviews within many Trans New Wave films centralises the autobiographical and autoethnographic forms of storytelling used by independent filmmakers. However “the film–interview text must convince spectators that they should have confidence in the truth of what they see” (Denzin 2003, p. 74). Denzin presents the idea that “We are in the seventh moment of qualitative inquiry, a postexperimental phase, performing culture as we write it” (2003, p. ix). Theoretical concerns around ‘performance’ emerged from exegesis of both case study texts in this chapter.

In \textit{The Thing} (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011), the issue of a trans actor \textit{performing} a transman in a fictional narrative, highlighted the line between an individual with a constative trans identity (Prosser 1998; 2006), in a screen performance, as differentiated from gender performativity (Butler 1990) of trans. This may usefully be contextualised and contrasted with the long history of male actors and female actresses \textit{performing} their respective gendered roles on stage and screen. The use of interviews, such as within \textit{Trans Boys} (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012), were identified as ‘performance texts’ (Denzin 2001), that destabilise the genre of documentary as a ‘factual’ cinematic form in the twenty first century. Issues of verisimilitude encountered within any theatrical performance, or text may be discerned within Trans New Wave films. Theoretical considerations of performance versus performativity in relation to these texts, needs to be grounded with a strong understanding of the positionality raised by trans scholar Jay Prosser, “there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformatивe, to be constative, quite simply, to \textit{be}” (1998, p. 32; 2006, p. 264, italics in original). Each of the case study texts reveal layers of constative transmasculine being in the twenty first century. As audiences become increasingly transliterate, the uncomfortable performance of gender–diverse characters by non–trans actors and actresses will be less willingly tolerated. Heavily criticised cinematic portrayals such as Rayon (Jared Leto) in

\textsuperscript{474} Fieldwork interview with Co-Director of \textit{Trans Boys} Monique Schafter, semi–structured interview questionnaire response via digital ethnography, 31 March 2014.
Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013), (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H), could be made obsolete by a greater number of trans actors and actresses being featured in fictional screen roles. The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011) demonstrates that films produced with trans actors are potent texts, that invite multiple readings, but which must be carefully written and directed to ensure that the narrative does not simultaneously erase the trans identity that the text celebrates.
CHAPTER 7: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOYS—TRANSACTIVIST CINEMA

7.1 Introduction

The reveal of the transgendered body, in what have been called ‘exposure’ scenes or narratives (Halberstam 2001; 2005, p 77, 78; Zagler 2011; Keegan 2013, p. 6; Keegan 2015b) have been utilised in mainstream films *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992); *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) and *Transamerica* (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005). In each of these films, the central trans character is disingenuously disrobed within the narrative at some point, body laid bare for appraisal by spectators.

This disciplinary narrative has continued to the small screen, with online Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–) and *Sense8* (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–). In *Orange Is the New Black*, Season Three, a violent physical assault coupled with the threat of bodily exposure is used against the transfemale character Sophia (Laverne Cox). This takes place through other inmates threatening to remove Sophia’s clothes to reveal her transfemale body as a form of controlling subjugation–revenge.475 In *Sense8*, Season 1, the transfemale character Nomi (Jamie Clayton) is subjected to a chilling exposure scene in a retrospective narrative back to her childhood. In this scene, in a communal bathing room, young Nomi is subjected to being brutally held under boiling hot water in a shower by a group of young boys, until she suffers severe burns.476 In *Boys Don’t Cry*, the central character is subjected to the double violence of the unwelcome spectatorial gaze and sexual violation, intensified by the knowledge that Brandon Teena was actually murdered. In each screen text, the ‘exposure’, or threat of exposure, is a violent violation used to disempower the trans character and to state the ‘failure’ of the trans bodies in heteronormative society, which simultaneously reinstates the power of hegemonic society, via the audiences’ spectatorial gaze.


Aware of the dynamics between text and audience, filmmakers are also subverting this rhetorical narrative, with texts that now also hold ‘reparative’ (Sedgewick 2003; Noble 2014) potential. For Sedgewick, this involves a turning inwards:

> to use one’s own resources to assemble or “repair” the murderous part–objects into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, *not necessarily like any preexisting* whole. Once assembled to one’s own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn.../The desire of a reparative impulse...is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will have resources to offer to an inchoate self (2003, p. 128/149, italics in original).

Trans New Wave films are sites where filmmakers have made such an inward journey and have returned with cinematic texts ‘assembled to (their) own specifications’ and in such reassembled narratives the reparative process unfolds. This produces sites able “to be identified with” (Sedgewick 2003, p.128) and that reciprocally “confer plenitude” (ibid., p. 149) upon both the filmmaker and spectators.

For the Wachowskis in online series *Sense8*, depicting Nomi as living on beyond her youth, to become a sexually dynamic, beautiful, articulate, intelligent individual, in a narrative that is perhaps the world’s first onscreen intersectional translesbian relationship provides a site of immense reparative value—for both the filmmakers (who have publically transitioned as transwomen over a decade whilst working as famed screen directors and one of whom is married to a woman) and for their audiences. This comment acknowledges that transliterate filmmakers are now writing, directing and producing texts for contemporary audience demographics who are actively seeking texts with reparative qualities. This simultaneously calls to account the long–time failure of the mainstream screen industry. That there has been a systemic ‘missing’ (or unaccounted for) demographic of audiences for screen texts that hold non–hegemonic themes and narratives was noted by Patrick Califia who said “There is a powerful assumption here about the audience, as well, that it is constituted for the most part of

---

477 Nomi’s girlfriend is African American
“normally” gendered people” (Califia 2003, p. 2). From the empirical evidence of running a queer film festival and from fieldwork at international trans and gay and lesbian film festivals as discussed within Chapters 3 and 5, it becomes absolutely clear that there are large and increasing audiences that have been routinely ignored by the mainstream and that are actively pursuing reparative cinematic viewing experiences, particularly around sexuality and gender diversity. Sedgewick acknowledged this when saying “At a textual level, it seems to me that related practises of reparative knowing may lie, barely recognized and little explored, at the heart of many histories of gay, lesbian and queer intersexuality” (2003, p. 149).

Buck Angel is also producing texts with reparative values. As an independent filmmaker, Angel is engaging in producing texts that can usefully be described through a term coined within this chapter as self-disclosure scenes, with each participant in Angel’s films in control of what is revealed. Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011) is built around interview scenes in which transmen discuss their lives, bodies and sexualities, verbally and visually, in short explicit scenes to camera. The point of view in these interviews and explicit scenes is Buck Angel. As Buck is the director and cinematographer of the film, the transmen are directly responding within each frame to not only his interview questions, but also to him sexually as another man. This adds to the electric charge of the scenes. Buck understands how to skillfully utilise the stylistic tropes of the porn–genre and in particular, the gay male porn genre, to great effect. Each demonstrative scene is just short enough to pass the censorial gaze as a documentary, but also just long enough to get the audience keyed into the transman’s world. In this environment, there is no negativity in the self-disclosure, there is full acceptance of the men’s bodies and sexualities. This is what is liberating both within the text and in the world outside the text, when the film is viewed by audiences (many of whom are from within gender–diverse communities, family and friends). The language of the film is affirming; the men discuss their bodies in terms relevant to their lives and experiences. There is use of non–gendered language, such as “hole”, “junk”, or “bonus hole”, for sexual access areas, in addition to masculine–gendered vernacular, such as “jacking my cock”.

During fieldwork, February 2014 in Brisbane (Australia), I asked Buck whether he timed the filming of each explicit scene to a certain duration, to specifically avoid an X 18 + rating. Buck’s reply is interesting ‘It had nothing to with ratings. I know what shots I like; I just don’t like getting bored’.

Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). This continues within scenes that were not included in the final public documentary, where the use of the words “junk”, “business” and “whatevers” are also used.
This positions readings of words such as “hole”, or “bonus hole” in the text, away from privileging “being penetrated” (O’Rourke 2014, p.7, italics in original not included) as a primary mode of transmale sexuality, to inclusive of penetrative transmale sexualities. The “hole” as an *extruder* of fluids (sexual and excretory) is also relevant to transmale experiences of the body. Sexual codes, deriving from gay male sexual subcultures infuse these words with extratextual meanings of relevance to exegesis of *Sexing the Transman*. This includes a subcultural understanding of ‘penetrative’ forms of sexuality equated as active, or dominant; whilst ‘being penetrated’ is understood as a passive, or submissive form of sexuality. The interconnection between trans male and gay male sexualities is further explored within this chapter.

Figure 7.1: *Sexing the Transman* publicity poster.
Source: ©Buck Angel Entertainment 2011.
Reproduced courtesy of Buck Angel.
Trans culture and trans cinematic productions are developing rapidly, with new films and television series featuring trans characters and trans characters played by trans actresses and actors appearing on a regular basis as we have seen highlighted throughout this thesis. Due to this, a critical engagement with scholarship on Angel’s earlier work (pre—Sexing the Transman) illustrates how rapidly the understanding and reading of trans cultural productions has progressed, as trans images and narratives are becoming further contextualised within trans and wider culture. A central area of critique has emerged, surrounding statements made about the transmale body prior to Sexing the Transman. Earlier scholarship discussed within Chapter 2 presented a number of statements in relation to Angel’s work that are challengeable in the light of transliterate reading of Sexing the Transman. Whilst contextualised against the background issue encountered by many transmen, that lower surgeries may not (or do not) produce sexual sensitivity, the generalist statement was then presented that “One might say that the open secret amongst transmen is that most FtM transsexuals, are, in fact, men with vaginas” (Steinbock 2011, PhD thesis pp. 67–68). This view has emerged as perhaps one of the most problematic not only in terms of reading transmale films, but in terms of understanding the increasing transactivist importance of Buck Angel’s films as we will see within this chapter, in empowering transmen with a new understanding and engagement with their own transmasculine sexuality.

The idea that “most FtM transsexuals, are, in fact, men with vaginas” is challenged by interviewees within the text Sexing the Transman; by Buck Angel himself; from within the

---

480 High profile productions include Netflix series Orange Is the New Black (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–) and Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–); Amazon series Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014) and Emmy–nominated docu–series This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015) and feature film Tangerine (Sean Baker, USA, 2015).

481 Examples include Laverne Cox as Sophia in Orange is the New Black (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–); Jamie Clayton as Nomi in Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–); Zachary Drucker as Eleanor and Ian Harvie (as himself) in Transparent.


483 In–person fieldwork, July 11th 2015, Silver Lake, Los Angeles and follow–up email correspondence on 26th and 27th July, 2015.
wider transmale community and by recent scholarship (Keegan 2014a). Keegan has pointedly criticised, not only the narrative depictions of transmale genitalia, but the view that transmen “view ourselves as “men with vaginas” and calls this an “Objectification, fetishization, and obsession with genitals that all feed transphobia” (Keegan 2014a).

The idea was derived from publicity/marketing for Buck Angel in his early career that was intended to signal the unique position of his films amongst the porniverse of transsexual films then available. At this point in his career, Buck marketed his adult film work with the tagline of ‘the man with a pussy’. Key to understanding this description, is that Buck was self-identifying his work from the point of view of a man, who also had a ‘pussy’. In discussions with Buck during 2015 Buck was very clear that the emphasis in that sentence was intended by him to be upon his identity as a man and that he had added the descriptor of ‘with a pussy’, following personal experiences, which had necessitated finding a way to explain his physicality to potential partners. Buck was very clear that this was a personal statement made about himself. It was never intended as a generic statement about ‘all transmen’. This research also contends that it is not how ‘most’ transmen see, themselves in everyday life, it is not how transmen want their bodies to be spoken about and it is not how transmen want to see themselves represented in film, as evidenced by the Trans New Wave filmmakers. As we saw

---

484 For an example from within the transmale community: CaptainDL (2014). “Buck Angel ??”, “I’m sorry, but I do not want to be talking about genitals...not everyone feels like this...I do not believe that what is down here makes me a man or a woman”, DL then expresses confusion about whether he “hates or respects Buck, or wants to be him”, viewed 30 April 2015;https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZRQFWtv4w8-. Transcription by A. Ford, 30 April 2015.

485 Keegan (2014a) noted transphobia as present in the television series Transparent in the depiction of the transmale character played by trans actor Ian Harvey.

486 Use of the word ‘porniverse’ (a contraction of pornography-universe) is used here following the methodology of current queer and trans film scholarship which utilises a number of terms derived from the word ‘pornography’, including ‘doco-porn’ and ‘pornumentary’ to separate out hegemonic adult films from activist films which utilise explicit content and also to denote the scholarly study and reflection upon porn texts. Porn studies is a growing field of academic enquiry, across a range of disciplines, with “a new urgency and significance given the continued position of pornography at the centre of controversies around media, gender, sexuality and technology” (Attwood & Smith 2014, p. 2). Feedback on research processes utilising non-hegemonic porn texts was also given (TransQueer Masterclass, held at The University of Melbourne with visiting Associate Professor Helen Hok-Sze Leung (11/02/14) - that you can ‘pornify research’, (making it a verb, not a noun). Reflecting upon the recent scholarship has led to the term ‘porn genre’ being adopted in this current research project (Ford 2014a), to differentiate texts under discussion from hegemonic ‘adult films’.

487 In–person fieldwork, July 11th 2015, Silver Lake, Los Angeles and follow–up email correspondence checking fieldwork details were transcribed verbatim on 26th and 27th July, 2015.
in Chapter 6, this statement by Buck was made in the first–person singular.\textsuperscript{488} That transguys in general do not see themselves as being embodied in a form with female–coded genitalia \textsuperscript{489} or promote this view publicly, is demonstrated in current use and representations (as the case study texts illustrate), including that transguys do not use feminine pronouns for their bodies, but preference non–gendered, or masculine–gendered vernacular, which is repeatedly emphasised in \textit{Sexing the Transman}.

Within \textit{Sexing the Transman}, interviewees use non–gendered language such as “hole”, “front hole”, “extra hole”, “bonus hole”, “the bonus”, “touching of goods”, or masculine–gendered language such as “jacking my...cock”, to refer to their bodies. Buck has also produced a number of interviews with transmen that were not included in the final edit of the feature documentary. In these \textit{Sexing the Transman} additional interviewee video clips, there is also discussion around the use of the words “junk”, “business”, “whatevers” and “mangina” (which is used in a joking fashion).\textsuperscript{490} Buck uses the word ‘vagina’—a bodily term to refer to his genital area that he is personally comfortable with using.\textsuperscript{491} He asks interviewees about their relationship to their bodies and also to the ‘V’ word and to their perceptions and experiences of the gendered attribution and binary/hegemonic assumptions that accompany use of the word ‘vagina’. Buck asks interviewees: “were they comfortable with their vaginas?” and this very recognisably gender–specific word.

\textsuperscript{488} This comment was made by Buck \textit{about himself} a personal statement about his own physicality. The context of the original statement has been corrected and repositioned through recent fieldwork with Buck, within this thesis (\textit{Op. cit.}, In–person fieldwork, July 11th 2015, Silver Lake, Los Angeles and follow–up email correspondence checking fieldwork details were transcribed verbatim on 26th and 27th July, 2015).

\textsuperscript{489} The often misquoted “men with vaginas” phrase, presented in Chapter 2. Within this comment the emphasis is not on whether the body part is identified as ‘vagina’ or ‘pussy’, but that most transguys do not see themselves, nor refer to their bodies in this way:


\textsuperscript{491} During the question and answer panel following the screening of \textit{The Trans List} (Timothy Greenfield–Sanders, USA, 2016) at Outfest film festival in Los Angeles on 17 July 2016, Buck again clearly stated that his public views about his body (and genitals) were \textit{about himself and remain centrally important to him as a human being}. Buck was again subjected to a vitriolic outpouring of abuse via his Facebook site from trans guys, following this in–person attendance to promote the new documentary, which also features Laverne Cox (and who was on the panel), amongst a range of celebrated trans people. The Facebook criticisms posted included that he is not a ‘role model’ (because of his adult film work and public sexual advocacy) and that he does not deserve the recognition and support that Laverne Cox receives. (Angel 2016b). “Buck Angel was live. The Trans List at Outfest Los Angeles”, viewed 18 and 19 July 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel/?fref=ts>. 276
Some interviewees then discuss a pre-transition discomfort with their bodies, including an experience of the genital area as “the betraying part of the body”\textsuperscript{492} an experience that shifted after transitioning enabled “inhabiting of the body”.\textsuperscript{493} One interviewee uses the word “vagina for shock value”. Interviewees expressed awareness of the non-functional aspect to ‘bottom surgery’\textsuperscript{494} so did not want to have ‘bottom surgery’. Use of terms such as ‘cisgendered’ and “cis as something non–transient, not changing” are compared to “trans, which is changing”, “trans as a shapeshifter, between worlds”. There is discussion about masculinity and same–sex sexual attraction: “Something about a gay guy being attracted... feels super–masculine”. The interviewees are candid in their discussion of subjects ranging from use of ‘T’\textsuperscript{495} and effects on sexual responsivity and personality: “since taking hormones...changes in sexuality...in libido”; also “going on hormones and not getting turned on”, “feeling introspective, quiet”; “didn’t want dudeishness...doesn’t appreciate dudeishness”. Discussion of the visual aspects to bodies; discussing top surgery as “warrior scars”; “so turned on seeing someone with a body like mine”; “identity of trans as a selling point” for pickups. Use of porn “dude to dude” films\textsuperscript{496} “transmen porn” if available (including Buck’s earlier adult films)\textsuperscript{497} and the transmale body having an erotically arousing


\textsuperscript{493} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{494} This is directly referred to within Sexing the Transman. It is acknowledged that this subject is perhaps the most sensitive and contentious within the transmale community. Many transmen have expressed being hurt by negative information/misinformation and negative views of ‘bottom surgery’ (genital reconstruction surgeries) (Cotton, T. (ed). (2012). Hung Jury, Transgress Press, Oakland. viewed 26 April 2105, <http://transguys.com/book-reviews/hung-jury-testimonies-of-genital-surgery-by-transsexual-men>. For a very respectful account of lower surgery, see Electric Dade (2015). “Do I regret Lower Surgery? Perspective from a Dr. Crane Patient, viewed 02 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKHUie9a10o>. Buck has come under personal attack and criticism from within the trans community as a public figure for his expressing his personal views on this subject within the public sphere (which are not expressed within the film, as he is the interviewer and not an interviewee), but set against this background, as a researcher, I have the impression that Buck was respectfully trying to gauge a wider cross-section of transmen’s views on the subject within the film with his questions. As this subject is not further pursued in the film and to avoid misinterpreting, or adding extratextual material to the interviewee’s discussions, this thesis follows the advice for media reporting provided by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) “Avoid focusing on medical issues. It is inappropriate to ask a transgender person questions about their genitals or other surgeries they may have had. Typically those questions are only asked out of prurient curiosity. They also distract the journalist and the viewer from seeing the whole person – and from discussing larger issues that affect transgender people like discrimination, poverty, and violence”. (GLAAD (2015). “GLAAD Media Reference Guide – In Focus: Covering the Transgender Community”, Emphasis (bold) in original, viewed 30 April 2015, <http://www.glaad.org/reference/covering-trans-community>).

\textsuperscript{495} The hormone testosterone.

\textsuperscript{496} Gay male porn.

\textsuperscript{497} Such as the film which first made Buck famous: Buckback Mountain (Angel, USA, 2007).
smell of “ripe honey”. From these interviewee comments made to Buck Angel within the text, it becomes clear that transmen have a wide range of affective responses to their bodies and the bodies of other transmen and gay men. This demonstrates that cinematic representations of transmen need to take into account a fuller range of experiences, in order to present the variation of experiences and points of view and in order not to stereotype transmen in any way.

This issue of reading transmale representations in terms of genitalia has drawn scholarly criticism to the series *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014). Referring to the only transmale character Dale (Ian Harvie) in *Transparent*, Cáel Keegan writes:

> Throughout the two episodes featuring Harvie, his character rapidly becomes a fetish that reflects some of the most negative stereotypes about trans men: That we're open to discussing our genitals with strangers, that we all view ourselves as “men with vaginas,” that the only reason anyone would want to sleep with us is out of curiosity, that we exist to fulfill others’ sexual fantasies of experimenting with “safe” masculinity, and that we're ultimately sexually defective because we do not have “normal” penises (Keegan 2014a).

This comment, reflects a range of personal and scholarly views and raises theoretical issues frequently discussed within the contemporary gender diverse trans/queer communities. It is clearly not relevant or appropriate to think that any person wants to be ‘exposed’ though discussion of their bodies/sexual functionalities ‘with strangers’, or for a screen text to present a transman as only ‘attractive’ because of other people’s ‘curiosity’. There are a range of complex issues at stake in reading the transmale body within screen texts that will be critically discussed within this chapter. This includes the need for films with a range of representational and narrative strategies. The desire and necessity for ‘affirming’ trans cinematic representations by gender–diverse communities reflects not only the limited number of texts circulating at present (particularly in the mainstream)—which intensifies the power of the screen representations in the texts that are public, but the desire to avoid a cinematic narrowing of possibilities in the texts that are exhibited. As discussed within

---

498 This affective sensory aspect is symbolically depicted in the film *Community Action Centre* (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010), where a transman is shown in an onanistic solo scene with a dripping honeycomb.
Chapter 2 and the journal article appended at the conclusion of this thesis, cinematic narratives may depict damaging and stereotypical assumptions about trans people that have negative consequences in everyday life (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H).

As a transactivist filmmaker in Sexing the Transman, Buck Angel presents an opposite perspective to the criticisms directed at Transparent. Within Sexing the Transman the men are presented as sexually dynamic, in control of their sexuality and when partners are discussed, it is in the context of sexual encounters that are mutually enjoyable and empowering. This of course does not preclude that on the way to becoming fully realised sexual men that the participants have not experienced any (or all) of the negative aspects Keegan refers to—it is just that these aspects are not the subject of the documentary. The title overtly emphasises the filmmaker’s concerns: the film is proudly about ‘sexing’—an active verb and form of urban slang to denote any form of sexual activity 499 ‘the transman’; the focus is upon the transmasculine experience of sex in any form this takes and ensuring that the transmen get as much sexual activity, with as wide a variety of partners, as the transmen want in their lives: “naming is a key element in the struggle for recognition, that being assigned a place in the social order requires acknowledgement by ‘the powers of constitution’ ” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 20, citing Bourdieu 1989, p. 22). By so naming, the text accords sex a primary constitutive function within the lives of contemporary transmen.

7.2 Buck Angel

A key to understanding Buck Angel is that he self–identifies as a man, not a transman 500 and this positionality underpins his life and filmmaking. This may at first seem a strange statement, given that much of Angel’s work is focussed upon transmen and trans issues and that he initially became famous as the world’s first transsexual male adult film performer. Yet his work also includes content related to his own polysexuality, to his primary audience of gay men and to the interconnected sexual subcultures that weave in and around the adult industries. Through the biographical documentary Mr. Angel (Dan Hunt, USA, 2013), much about Buck’s earlier life, his family and struggles for identity are revealed (Figure 7.2). This is

---


500 Fieldwork communication July 11th, 2015, at Silver Lake, Los Angeles.
material that is not contained in Sexing the Transman and so is extratexual to exegesis of the documentary. Yet in this regard, it must be noted that Buck Angel is the media personnae and screen performance identity by which Angel initially entered into the public arena via adult film, a name that is now synonymous with him as an individual. Separating Buck Angel the artist as a “personality brand”, or “celebrity personnae” (Nandy 2015b, p. 103) and Buck Angel as an everyday man are beyond the scope of this thesis, which is focussed upon textual exegesis of the Trans New Wave films and not discursive biographies of the filmmakers.\footnote{I became aware of the different sides to Buck during fieldwork in February 2014, when I had interviewed Buck for the first time at a cafe in Brisbane (Australia) and then attended the Australian Premiere of his film Mr. Angel later that night, which also involved two live performances by Buck. There was a very different performance personality evident during the night event (as you would expect of any professional performer), than during the afternoon interview – which I had experienced as talking to a friend, a very kind–hearted generous guy, deeply concerned about trans issues and particularly the high suicide rate amongst trans youth.}

![Figure 7.2: Mr. Angel (Dan Hunt, USA, 2013) publicity poster.](image)


Reproduced Courtesy of Buck Angel.
To critically engage with Angel’s transmale documentary and transactivist work as a researcher and scholar has involved a different positionality than that of a casual film viewer, fan, or transman seeking advice, as three examples. This has involved simultaneously engaging in fieldwork with Buck and within the transmale community as a genderqueer individual and as a genderqueer participant–researcher, who fully accepts the individual agency and personal narratives presented, whilst simultaneously being mindful of critical theoretical engagement—which may bring into question issues of authenticity (Boucher 2010; James and Bucher 2006; Nandy 2015b), performativity (Butler 1990) and representation (Chapter 2: Hall 1990; Butler 1990; Halberstam 2005; Stryker 2006; Juel 2006).

In the literature, media studies scholar Samita Nandy (2015b) identifies the issues involved in researching public personalities:

Public personalities comprise of complexities and context–based understandings, and celebrities and media scholars are not exempt from those understandings. Yet, both celebrities and media scholars can restore complex realities through the process of reflecting, performing, and activating connections with contexts (p. 102).

This comment is very true of Angel’s life and filmmaking, both of which are only fully understandable within the context of his earlier life and career and within the contemporary cultural recognition that trans people are receiving. Though “activating connections with contexts”, or as applied in this thesis, through a transliterate approach to the case study films, the “complex realities” of trans lives are approached. Through the text Mr. Angel (Dan Hunt, USA, 2013), we learn about the private home life of the person who came to be known as Buck Angel. The documentary follows Buck’s story as a young child and teenager growing up coping with self–doubt and then as a young man becoming himself despite societal hostility to trans people. Through Sexing the Transman, we meet Buck Angel as a self–assured filmmaker and performer, at ease in front of and behind the camera, skilled in drawing out and communicating the sexual complexities of transmasculine life.
7.3 Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011)

Buck originated the new genre of docu–porn in 2008/2009, from his earlier experiences in adult film work which led to him wanting to make a documentary about transmen, which later unfolded as the ground–breaking text Sexing the Transman in 2011.\textsuperscript{502} When Tristan Taormino acknowledged Angel at the forefront of the ‘New Wave of Trans Cinema’ in 2008, he was still an adult film star and had recently won the Adult Video News Award for ‘Transsexual Performer of the Year’.\textsuperscript{503} This positions the later production of Sexing the Transman and of the Trans New Wave as having originated within a screen tradition of independent sexually explicit filmmaking (X rating) and more specifically, the subgenre of transporn as discussed within Chapter 1. Buck is also identified “As the pioneer of an entirely new adult industry genre (FTM Porn)”.\textsuperscript{504} Outside the control of the Studios and outside the official Motion Picture Association of America film ratings, these are categories that require ‘independence’ and ‘defiance’ (Rich 2013), two characteristics of New Waves of cinema. This connects the Trans New Wave with New Queer Cinema and for example, the work of filmmaker Todd Haynes Poison (Todd Haynes, USA, 1991), one of the films described as “Homo Pomo” by Rich (1992b, p. 32, Rich 2013, p. 18).\textsuperscript{505} It is the interconnection between subversive queer films such as Poison and unapologetic representations of gay male sexuality that characterised early New Queer Cinema. Similarly, the early work of Buck Angel, an adult film star who performed in homoerotic films with men, initially characterised ‘The New Wave of Trans Cinema’. The sexual representations originating within non–hegemonic male sexuality connects these New Waves of Cinema two decades apart. The gay male gaze is also central to both.

It is important to emphasize at this point of the discussion, that Sexing the Transman was Exempted to screen at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012 as a documentary (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012), legally viewable by audiences at ‘R 18+’ equivalent category (18 years and over). It is crucial to note that the film is not considered to be an example of X

\textsuperscript{502} In–person fieldwork communication July 11th, 2015, at Silver Lake, Los Angeles.


\textsuperscript{504} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{505} As discussed in Chapter 1, short for ‘Homosexual Post–Modernism’ (Johnston 1992).
The short explicit scenes within the film, are fully contextualised by the interview narratives. Critical issues around sexually explicit imagery in film and pornography as a genre of film, are cited in this chapter in order to theoretically position the thesis within the wider scholarly debates around explicit imagery in screen media and the body as a sexualised space.

Actors and actresses employed within the adult industries are rarely given the opportunity to express their experiences of the industry, either to the public who may consume, or reject, the films they star in, or to academia, where there is a difficult relationship to pedagogy involving explicit materials (Noble 2014). When trans performers from the adult film world, including Buck Angel, participated in a panel on the current increase in trans representation in adult film in 2015 in Los Angeles 507 each performer spoke of their work as being a source of pride, personal autonomy, as sexually liberating and economically beneficial. The panelists were each involved in producing their own films and hence of controlling the representations within the films and the income streams generated by the content. I asked each of the panelists whether the term ‘porn’ carried connotations of the film genre that did not accord with their personal accounts of the industry and whether adult film needed a different name. Significantly, each performer was happy to state that they were ‘reclaiming porn’ as an ‘empowering’ genre. The simple title of “erotica” was offered as an alternate for the adult film genre.508 The significance of researching films with sexually explicit content and the porn genre and listening to the performers discussing their work within these films such as during this panel, has several scholarly rationales:

By studying porn as a form of labour, as an entertainment industry, and as a mass medium, academics can begin to challenge the stigma, shift perceptions, and raise awareness about the working conditions of performers....(this) helps take away the shame, destabilizes its designation as a dirty little secret no one discusses, and

---


508 Ibid., In–person fieldwork, Silver Lake Los Angeles, July 11th, 2015.
analyzes it in broader contexts of media, popular culture, capitalism, and politics (Voss 2014, p. 205).

In Chapter 1 we saw the development of the Trans New Wave emerging from transporn. Throughout this thesis and as discussed in Chapter 4, through transliterate reading of films contextualised within contemporary trans culture, the meaning of the films to both performers and communities represented may be better understood.

Sexing the Transman as an independent film fits within contemporary screen culture as an example of a lower budget documentary. Like many other contemporaneous documentary–filmmakers, Angel utilised a portable digital camera to shoot the film and a limited number of locations. Unlike other filmmakers, Angel used an innovative style of mixing conventional documentary interviews, intercut with explicit imagery (hence originating the new genre of ‘docu–porn’). As the director–producer–interviewer–cinematographer–editor–distributer of the text, Buck is in the position of an auteur, a role generally applied to arthouse directors of feature films, but which is now being recognised in regards to contemporary trans filmmakers (Leung 2014b). The film does not follow the documentary styles of either cinéma-vérité (which requires no directorial control), or observational documentary (which may span years), as Sexing the Transman is a staged series of to-camera interviews, held in a specific place (a hotel room) and time and with Buck directing the participants’ action, through conscious control of lighting and temperature in the hotel room. Recruitment strategies for documentary participants was also clearly directed, with Buck making the final selection of participants from a public casting call. As the project is ongoing (with adult–rated sequels), the actual number of participants in the Sexing the Transman series is not finalised. Within the initial documentary (2011), seventeen transmale and genderqueer individuals are filmed (Buck Angel and sixteen additional participants).

The screening at Queer Fruits Film Festival in 2012 was a groundbreaking public event; only the second public screening in Australia up to that point (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012). This was not only because of the regional location of the festival; but because the film openly shows transmale sexuality and we were all watching this together as a public

---

audience, comprised a diverse mix of transmen, partners, friends, the wider gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer community and audience from the general local regional community, which included health care professionals. There are differences in public and private spectatorship of screen texts with sexually explicit imagery. In public, the informative, educational and entertainment values of the text are more apparent, in comparison to private use of the text, where the sexual aspects of the documentary may be more pronounced. The screening led to the Queer Fruits Film Festival Jury awarding the film the Jury Prize for 2012. This has been acknowledged by Buck as the “First film award” that Sexing the Transman received 510 something that the festival did not realise at the time. Upon reflection, this is now a fact of which that I am extremely proud; an independent queer film festival in a regional town in Australia, being the first to publically recognise the cultural significance of the film. Aligning the festival in 2012 to a documentary on transmale sexuality signalled to the increasing transmale community locally and in nearby South–East Queensland that transmen are valued members of the community, recognising that their needs for representation in screen media had previously not been met. The overwhelming level of support that the festival received for this screening (and the accompanying panel) has been presented in publications (Ford 2014a, 2015a, 2016a forthcoming) and earlier in the thesis.

In discussing the text, the methodologies utilised within this thesis as discussed within Chapter 3 of textual exegesis and scholarship from cinema studies and the emergent fields of trans cinema studies and porn studies (Attwood & Smith 2014), are combined with queer theory perspectives. This is necessitated, as Sexing the Transman is not only groundbreaking in terms of representations of transmale bodies and sexualities, but also groundbreaking theoretically. The use of a combined methodology in research on sexual texts as utilised throughout this thesis (such as Social Sciences combined with Humanities) has precedents within the literature (Alan Mc Kee 2014). As the first text in a new genre—or to be more precise two new genres—the Trans New Wave and docu–porn and within an emergent field of trans cinema studies, new ways of discussing Sexing the Transman are required. While there has been scholarship discussing sexually explicit imagery in cinema (such as Forshaw 2015) outside the paradigm of porn, there has been only limited discussions of sexually explicit

images of trans people in film to date (for example Steinbock 2013a; 2014); particularly noting that such images have previously been localised within the porn genre. Angel straddles both worlds and his work is informed by both positionalities. Attwood and Hunter (2009) suggest the possibility for framing porn genre films within a Film Studies context and highlight that “while it helpfully positions sexually explicit media as media rather than a social problem, it might obscure porn texts that cannot be dignified in this way, as well as downplaying important social and political issues” (p. 550, italics in original). As an emergent scholar, I have interrogated the question of how best to present the discussion of this text in a way that does not misrepresent either the text, or the community within the text and which does not overlook the theoretical issues the text raises.

This chapter aims to contribute to the emergent literature on ways of discussing sexually explicit imagery of transmen, as exemplified by this film; as a text that documents a specific moment in trans culture, enacting specific self-representational strategies and as transactivist and educational form of screen text. The discussion will proceed transliterately from the point of view of the transmasculine sexual imagery presented and of the audience reception of the film—which has been experienced from intertwined points of view over a number of years: autoethnographically as a Festival Director of a queer film festival with a public audience and as a genderqueer cultural studies scholar.

As a researcher, the position of addressing theoretical issues within the text is based upon an open engagement from a ‘sex–positive’ positionality. This is a position supported from within the text, the film’s participants and from the broader context of Angel’s life and work. Burke (2014) has identified that being clear about positionality is important as a researcher in this field. However taking a sex–positive approach “should not be understood as simply celebratory or uncritical” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 13). It is helpful to provide a definition for the approach of this chapter, framing consensual sexuality as a ‘cultural philosophy’ as explained by Queen and Comella:

for others, sex–positive is ‘the cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a potentially positive force in one’s life’, that ‘celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationships structures, and individual choices based on consent’
Each researcher brings to a project their own positionality and subjectivities. In an area that engages (and arouses) body–mind–emotions, as viewing sexually explicit/suggestive imagery can do and is intended to do (Forshaw 2015), the personal experience may be tempered (or altered) by previous ideologies and experiences with not only sexually explicit materials, but also sexuality and gender, engaging a person’s experiences and perceptions of their own body. The “social and cultural significance of the media” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 11) and indeed of sexuality, are central to an understanding and positioning of a text such as Sexing the Transman. This is where a transliterate reading of the text is crucial to a fuller understanding of the importance of the film.

Historically there has been a resistance to open depictions of sexuality, particularly onscreen (Biltereyst and Vande Winkel 2013; Lewis 2013; Wittern–Keller 2013). In the realm of arthouse cinema, there has been greater latitude for sexually expressive imagery to be exhibited, with arthouse films often synonymous with hegemonic sexualised depictions, or ‘softcore’ (Andrews 2013; Forshaw 2015). Occasionally, a sexually explorative film that celebrates sexuality has been produced, rather than films which utilise sexuality as simply titillating, didactic, or in moralising narratives. Shortbus (Mitchell, USA, 2006) is the exemplar text that was able to cut across the censorial regimes and receive a wider theatrical release internationally, whilst depicting actual sex from queer, polysexual perspectives (Ford forthcoming).511 As a touchstone, Shortbus is theoretically useful for reading texts that are not categorised as ‘porn’, but that contain sexually explicit imagery (actual depictions of real sex—the classification defining line in Australia between the R18+ and X18+ (adult/porn) film categories).512 Significantly, Shortbus was publically released in Australia for theatrical screening at the classification rating of R 18+, equivalent to the official Festival Exemption


that Sexing the Transman received in 2012 to screen in Australia (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2012; Ford 2014b).

The resistance against open discussion and depictions of sexuality has extended into the twenty first century to those writing about sexuality. Smith and Attwood (2014) have noted the prevalence of such resistance even to rigorous scholarship on the subject. In 2013 there were “800 or so signatories of the Stop Porn Culture petition” (p. 8), who attempted to prevent academic publisher Taylor and Francis from launching the Porn Studies journal: “It was assumed that, because the academics associated with the journal do not take harm as their starting point, we must be producing propaganda, lobbying or cheerleading for the porn industry” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 8).

Such resistance to the academic study of sexually explicit texts is difficult to understand when contextualised against the historical background of the “Gentleman–scholars and curators of museums of forbidden texts (that) were instrumental in cataloguing and categorizing sex media and so producing the term ‘pornography’ ” (Attwood and Hunter 2009, p. 548). This points to the study of ‘sex media’ as already in existence in a different era, with the term constituted by previous scholars.

These points are made in order to position this chapter as engaging in a discussion about the role of a sexually explicit text such as Sexing the Transman within twenty first century trans culture, cultural studies, cinemas studies, trans cinema studies and the wider circuit of independent film production. The ‘reparative’ (Sedgewick 2003; Noble 2014) potential of such a text is not separate from the role of the film as documentary. Whilst acknowledged within the literature “the usual stories about pro–pornography and anti–pornography feminist in-fighting” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 8; Noble 2014) will not be the basis for the discussion. This is because nothing new will be added to the chapter by focussing upon these debates. However, much space could be used up in presenting a defensive position for the sex–positive stance of the discussion.

Sexing the Transman is structured between the traditional documentary format of to–camera interviews with the participants; intercut with short demonstrative scenes akin to scenes from
adult film, in which the transmen explore aspects of their sexuality in solo scenes. This includes medium and close-up shots of the transmen demonstrating onanistic techniques, with crotch areas either clearly shown in-shot, or suggested beneath clothing. There are also partnered scenes. Buck appears early in the film, engaged in a partnered sexual scene with another transman. The rationale for his on-screen participation is to position the depictions of transmale sexuality that follow, as robust, exciting encounters. Buck as a drawcard for audiences (and sales of the film) must also be considered. The extratextual knowledge that Angel is an adult film star, amps up the atmosphere of the film and plays to the audience expectations of the title, that centres upon sex, or more specifically ‘sexing’—the ‘how to’ action. A critical engagement with Buck’s participation on-screen (rather than as the off-screen interviewer who can be heard but not seen), questions whether his participation alters the readings of the interview/scenes with the transmen that follow, blurring the line between “fantasy and reality” (Comella 2014, p. 65) and whether this is useful within a documentary. Was Buck simply filming a personal encounter with another transman? It is also unclear whether the film’s participants were aware of Buck’s on-screen scene and if so, whether this set a level that other transmen then felt the need to match, or follow. While non-adult film participants are involved in the film, it is interesting to note that one of the interviewees (James Darling), subsequently established his own transmale adult film production company post Sexing the Transman. The scene with Buck is the only scene in the film which depicts a fully nude sexual encounter between two transmen. In all other scenes, the transmen are partially clothed, or unclothed in solo scenes. In one scene two transmen (who engage in sexual role-play in everyday life) are filmed exploring their sexuality from a leather perspective. This is signified by the transmen wearing items of leather clothing and talking about their shared enjoyment of bondage and other BDSM practises.

In critically evaluating the significance of Sexing the Transman, the text is positioned as being produced by and for the community that consumes the text, as advocating an open, optimistic framework for sexual encounters with transmen from diverse perspectives (trans, male, female; queer, gay, straight). The film presents affirming images of sexually desirable


514 Colloquial expression for BDSM/fetish lifestyle and practises, encompassing a wide range of practises.
transmen, enacting transmale sexualities. Escoffier (2009) noted in regards to gay male porn that the “performances of sexually desirable, masculine, and energetic performers helped to create positive images of gay male sexuality and identity” (p. 6). The representations of transmale sexuality in Sexing the Transman may be said to fulfill a similar function in respect to the trans community. Such images contribute to what has been called an “education of desire” on male sexuality (Escoffier 2009, p. 6). Masculinity is emphasised within the text as a desirable state of being and as a sexual attractant. In this, ‘masculinity’ for transmen is akin to the issue of masculinity for many gay men—as a masculine personae and physicality deflects issues and questions of gender and/or sexual identity. The text is a potent antidote to the ‘anti–sex’ regimes of the mainstream, which equate hegemonic forms of sexuality with correct political positions and a conception of “being normal”; whilst alternate forms of sexuality are generally constructed and interpreted as “bad” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 12). The documentary includes interview participants from a range of backgrounds including American, Asian, African American, but features non–racially diverse transmen in the explicit scenarios. In later iterations of the Sexing the Transman series (Figure 7.3), intersectional representations with gender–diverse and racially–diverse participants are featured. This is theoretically important as “The multiple dimensions of pleasure – viewing bodies experiencing pleasure, being a body experiencing pleasure—might well offer their own (and radical) political critique of class, gender or racial hierarchies” (Smith and Attwood 2014, p. 13). That Angel is producing documentaries with an ever–increasing range of diversity in participants speaks of the increasing support and interest in his work; it also suggests that at the time the first version of Sexing the Transman was produced, fewer transmen were interested in appearing onscreen in explicit scenes.

A critical issue in textual exegesis of this documentary is whether the text participates in a fetishization, or exoticization of transmen and transmale sexuality and whether the viewing gaze of audiences towards the transmen is constructed to be voyeuristic. The point of view of the interviewees is Buck Angel, a man and this constructs the position of the audience point of view at eye–line with the transmen. The ‘desiring gaze’ of the male body and the gay male

515 Later iterations of Sexing the Transman XXX, Volumes 1–4 (2012–2014) are all classified as ‘X’ rated. Only the initial Sexing the Transman (2011) film discussed within this thesis as a case study text is not ‘X’ rated.
gaze are identified through shot construction of medium and close-up shots focussing upon faces, hands and crotches; with one scene in *Sexing the Transman* (2011) of particular note, in which Angel elicits an extended reveal of a guy’s ‘package’ in an incredibly arousing manner.

Cinema scholar Cáel Keegan was cited earlier in this chapter as an exemplar of contemporary scholarship on trans narratives who has expressly critiqued genital displays and framing discussions around transmale genitalia as ‘objectification’ and ‘fetishization’ that “feeds transphobia” (Keegan 2014a). It is significant that this comment, whilst not directed towards *Sexing the Transman* was directed towards the narrative of a transman in two specific episodes of *Transparent* (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–). This Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) series is noted for the production team involvement of trans filmmakers Rhys Ernst discussed within Chapter 6 and Zachary Drucker as Consultants to the series on trans issues

---

516 Vernacular in use by the gay, queer and trans community for the male crotch/genitals.
and representation. From this perspective, it is difficult to equate that Ernst, a prominent transmale filmmaker, would have considered the narrative in question (around the Ian Harvey character) to be ‘transphobic’ and it is unlikely that this scene would have been produced within the series if it was. In Chapter 8 the role that *Transparent* is playing in regards to screen mentorship for trans filmmakers will be discussed.

This raises exceedingly difficult and sensitive questions of how transphobia is experienced and whether what one person may consider inappropriate, may be completely acceptable to another. This brings into focus issues of individual subjectivities and qualitative judgements, the basis of canonical film ranking. Beyond this discussion, there is an embodied understanding of the distress that objectified bodily representations have caused and continue to cause gender–diverse people within culture. Keegan’s comment and critique of *Transparent* has led me to deep reflection and questioning within this research, of where and how the artistic space may be opened and exist for discussion and narrative inclusion of a fuller range of the transmale body and experiences, such as exemplified though Angel’s work.

Downing and Saxton (2010) have raised the ethical issue that appears when only affirming narratives are depicted in screen texts, as such images may actually misrepresent an individual, or a community. A form of phobia can also be seen in the desire to suppress any negative imagery. Is an internalised phobia seen in the desire for only affirming images of the trans body to be depicted onscreen? If the critique of the transmale character in *Transparent* was applied to all arts and screen media and to hegemonic displays of the body and sexuality, this would potentially result in an erasure and then absence of sexualised images and dialogue throughout culture. In turn, this could be interpreted as a form of censure, censorship, or self–censorship from within the trans community. This is something that Angel has repeatedly encountered in his work.\(^{517}\) What is understandable, is when there are only a limited number of screen texts treating trans themes and narratives, gender–diverse audiences want and need to see affirming images portrayed. In part, this serves as an antidote to the erasure that accompanies lack of textual representation. An intwined issue is that the general viewing public may misinterpret screen images as being representative of trans people; negative representations, narratives and images can have serious consequences for transpeople in

\(^{517}\) In–person fieldwork, Silver Lake, Los Angeles, July 11th 2015.
everyday life (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). Forshaw highlights that “The treatment of sexuality in film can be multifaceted, and, just as in literature, it may function as an index of the zeitgeist, often through a reading of what is permitted or omitted” (Forshaw 2015, Introduction).518 Sexing the Transman serves as a ‘cinematic zeitgeist’ of gender–diverse transmasculine sexuality in the early twenty first century, recognising the interconnections between trans, gay and queer subcultures. The text aims to counter misrepresentation and erasure through opening discussion around transmasculine sexuality, centralising the transmale body as a sexualised space.

Against the background of these readings, the displays of the transmale body in the text emerge as representations that ultimately counter transphobia by providing information and demystification of transmale sexuality and through a vital incorporation of transmen into living a fully realised sexual life.

7.3.1 Gender Disruption

The disjunction with perceived notions of gender and hegemonic gender hierarchies and a break with normative forms of gender attribution, is a recognition that what is perceived to be ‘male’, or ‘female’ never really existed, does not need to exist and that “gender is culturally constructed” (Butler 1990, p. 6) and “theories of gender are a Western invention” (Connell 2014, Part 1). This breaks the binary and recognises the multiplicity of spaces between, what Kate Bornstein called “creating a Third Space” (1994, p. 98). The social and cultural specificity of gender discussions comes into view. The disruption of the binary opens the possibility of the new emerging and this includes onscreen, where queer and trans cinema exists as a form of Third Cinema (Leung 2004). Whilst originating in Latin America in the 1960s as “a political cinema that addresses the urgent social problems of the time” (Taboada 2011), Third Cinema was identified as a “fluid and flexible category not to be contained within any single formula” (Willemen 2013, p. 95), which sounds very much like the definition of genderqueer and trans today and of the Trans New Wave of film.

518 Oxford Dictionaries (2014). “Zeitgeist. The defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time.”
Sandy Stone (1991) identified “transsexuals ...as a genre – a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored (1991; 2006, p. 23, Emphasis in original, italics added to ‘disruption’). Trans scholars write in ways that are deeply personal to themselves and rightly so. What Stone truly intended by the evocative comment of ‘trans as a genre’ and what these words meant to Stone in 1991 can only be imagined now in the twenty first century. But what resonates across these decades is the concept of trans as a self–evident creation, an ‘embodied text’, self–inscribed, written upon and open to replication within culture. Prior to this, Butler had also articulated the complex possibilities of gender unfettered from normative trajectories and not foreclosing potential with the statement: “Gender is a complexity...an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure” (1990, p. 16).

How does Sexing the Transman contribute to the important cultural work of gender disruption? On the one hand, a number of participants in the film (including Buck Angel) strongly identify as men and aspire to recognisable physical gender attributions of being male, including a strong physique, muscles, flat chests, facial hair (beards/moustaches) and prominent body art (tattoos). Such images in Sexing the Transman could be read as presenting an aspirational masculine representation of transmen; when ‘men’ range in everyday physicality from soft–muscled and softly–spoken, no facial hair, no skin art, through to the gym–toned physique which Angel presents. On the other hand, there are participants in the film who express more subtle forms of masculinity, identifying as trans men, transqueering the binary. Raewyn Connell (2005) identified different masculinities, each with ‘different positions of power’. Trans scholar Bobby Noble (2006) presents the view that “a transed FtM body, (is) a body simultaneously inside and outside of both genders” (p.1). These are both views supported by specific interviewees in Sexing the Transman.

Angel’s earlier career introduced a potent image of gender disruption in the form of a heavily muscled man without the ‘privileged referent’ (Noble 2006, p. 25) of binary masculinity. Unafraid to publically announce his status, the gender–disruptive significance of this image within culture since 2007 cannot be underestimated. This is also an image that has provoked such a range of responses, that the underlying rationale for why this image is so provocative

294
requires further comment. In short, Angel disrupted what society has for millennia enmeshed into iconography as identifiably male and the locus of masculine power. This openly signalled to screen audiences viewing Angel’s texts, that what society thinks it means to be a man and what it is to be a man are not aligned. Angel is paradigmatic of what Stone (1991) anticipated: the transsexual as “a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire”, which in Stone’s time was “yet to be explored”.

In the lives of twenty first century transpeople and specifically in Angel’s case, this potential for ‘productive disruption’ is now being fully realised.

The non–alignment of sex and gender, a central theoretical terrain of gender, queer and trans studies (Butler 1990; Bornstein 1994; Halberstam 2005; Noble 2006; Stryker 2006) is a central theoretical concern of exegesis of Trans New Wave films. The important recognition that once an individual stops performing one gender, that other possibilities arise, is articulated in the gender work of Butler (1990) and reaffirmed in the trans scholarship of Noble (2006) when he wrote “becoming any gender is a socially constructed process that is ongoing, contingent, non–foundational and self–producing” (p.23). These theoretical positions have been transformed and translated into cinematic images of gender disruption within the independent films of the Trans New Wave discussed within this thesis. This includes the participants in Sexing the Transman in the self–disclosure scenes, where transmasculinity is secured by sexuality as the referent and gender is represented through a range of bodies. In Chapter 6 we saw case study text use of the image of a transman binding his chest to flatten the area, removing the visible exterior signifier of a female body. Whilst outside the exegesis of this chapter, potent gender–disruptive images are simultaneously being produced and distributed in transporn adult films, by contemporary “gender outlaws” (Bornstein 1994).

7.3.2 Transsex

In the construction of transsex, community recognition and formation around the trans body

---

519 Buck Angel also pioneered the scene of a transman engaging in sexual scenes with transwomen. There are now a number of trans performers producing their own adult films centred upon versions of what are being called ‘T Boy/T Girl’ images. This includes James Darling with Venus Lux; Michelle Austin with Dicky Johnson.
as a sexualised space has been rapidly building momentum since the release of *Sexing the Transman* in 2011 and Buck’s subsequent tours—which have involved community forums and events to raise awareness of the specific languages and ways of integrating transmale sexuality within gay, queer and trans social structures. Not that there is anything new about transpeople being sexual beings. But what is new from Trans New Wave filmmaking is the open, public celebration of sexuality from trans perspectives. Sexuality is central to the corpus of Buck’s public work and he has stated “I feel like talking about your sexuality is part of being trans” (Herman 2015). Through public texts, such as the Trans New Wave films and public figures such as Buck Angel there has been an increasing centralisation of the trans body as a sexualised space. This is directly linked to Angel’s “deployment of sexuality” (Foucault 1978, p. 106) as a cinematic tool of representation and education. The representations of the sexualised transmasculine body and specifically deploying the power of sexuality in a cinematic medium has enabled “an intensification of the body—with its exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element in relations of power” (Foucault 1978, p. 107). Through an increasing knowledge of transmale bodies and sexualities, a powerful tool in negotiating new forms of relationships is enabled and new modes of power are generated within contemporary culture. These are groundbreaking and life-changing recognitions. The vital role that Trans New Wave cinema has played in this new knowledge formation cannot be underestimated and will be further explored later in this chapter.

The processes of transmen integrating into society as fully sexualised beings is not a singular trajectory. When the concept of ‘transsex’ is used in this section as a shorthand for ‘transmale sexuality’ the research is not talking about a singular experience, but a diversity and ‘multiplicity’ (Hawke & Offord 2011) of points of views. *Sexing the Transman* as a text presents the points of views of seventeen individual transmen, of diverse ages and backgrounds—including American, African American; Asian. With this comes the sharing of diverse experiences of transsex—from the points of view of transmen who engage sexually with other transmen; of transmen who identify as gay and relate to other gay men sexually; of

---

^520 It is noted that ‘transsex’ is not a gender–dependent concept and could also be applied to transwomen, or transqueer people. The term “Transsexing” is used in Stryker and Aizura (2013) in relation to the ‘Humanimality’ chapters of the volume (Section III, pp. 145–198). The term is also not species–dependent, with “Transsex” defined within one of the chapter sin this section as “a term that is about queering ideas of re/production, and refers to dynamic ecosystemic relations of multiple “bodies”, energies and things” (Kier 2013, pp.189–190).
transmen who identify as heterosexual and relate sexually to female partners; as transmen who identify in polysexual ways. The range of transmale sexualities expressed, from queer, to gay, to straight is perhaps one of the most revelatory aspects of the text.

A specific dynamic that has emerged and which is celebrated in *Sexing the Transman*, is the integration of transmen into gay and queer sexual subcultures. This chapter repositions the process of “sexual ethnogenesis” (Rubin 1994, p. 94), first studied by Rubin in regards to the formation of sexual communities of gay men into leather, to the contemporary transmale sexual experience. 521 The development of such communities around/inclusive of transmen, becomes a powerful social force for the participants. This accords with Foucault that “historically it was around and on the basis of the deployment of alliance that the deployment of sexuality was constructed” (1978, p. 107). 522 Rubin recalls a conversation during a dinner with Foucault when he stated “the deployment of sexuality: like the deployment of alliances it connects up with the circuit of sexual partners, but in a different way” (1994, p. 85; citing Foucault 1978, p. 106).

This is of consequence for recent developments within the transmale community on a number of counts.523 Firstly because of the emphasis on masculinity within the gay male leather community (Rubin, 1994, p. 96), shared by many transmen. Secondly, because of the emphasis on what Rubin identified as ‘gay kinship’ (1994, p. 86), that is now recognisable.

521 ‘Leather’ is used in this section as shorthand for a broadly defined grouping of activities around interests in BDSM and fetish lifestyles.

522 Noting the usual gloss for ‘alliance’ here is in reference to strategic alliances with social/economic purpose that involve a sexual component, such as heterosexual marriage (Foucault 1978, p. 106). Foucault utilises the phrase “deployment of sexuality” (ibid., p. 106) as an alternative ‘system’. Taking these rich theoretical insights as starting points and repositioning this to gay and trans cultural experiences in the twenty first century, I have read ‘alliances’ in a non-traditional sense in this chapter, to reflect the social ‘alliances’ based upon sexuality that are central to gay subcultures, empirically supported by Rubin’s (1994) researches. Such ‘alliances’ based upon sexuality, exceed the ‘deployment of sexuality’ in the sense articulated by Foucault and reposition these as a *community of kinship based upon sexualities*. Rubin (1994) documented this in relation to gay men in San Francisco. Such experiences are within contemporary gay, queer and trans subcultures. Sexual communities have their own “system of rules” (Foucault 1978, p. 106) of engagement. Foucault attributed such ‘rules’ specifically and solely to the “deployment of alliances”—and did not include in his consideration of the “deployment of sexuality”.

523 Whilst recent developments (particularly in Trans New Wave films) have represented and publically acknowledged the crossover between groups, there is a long history of transmen identifying as gay men. In memoriam of Lou Sullivan, pioneering advocate and Founder of FtM International, who identified as a gay man in a time when official diagnostic systems did not believe that such a person could exist. Rhys Ernst produced a film on Sullivan for World AIDS Day in 2014 entitled *Dear Lou Sullivan* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2014) using archival footage of Sullivan intercut with messages from gay chat rooms.
between gay male, trans and queer communities. Thirdly, a very significant, but quietly noted, crossover between the leather communities and trans communities.

Patrick Califia (1997; 2003; 2013) is one of the few trans scholars who has publically noted the recurrence of dykes involved in the leather communities, who subsequently come out as transmen and transition.\(^{524}\) This reading by Califia was made possible through his autoethnographic experiences in both communities over decades. A close reading of Rubin provides further keys to understanding the interconnection between communities (gay–leather–trans), as originating in the emphasis on masculinity within gay leather lifestyles, as different from the effeminisation and emphasis on the feminine within heterosexual forms of leather (Rubin 1994, p. 96). “Masculinity as the attraction” for transmen is specifically discussed within *Sexing the Transman* in the interview with Victor, a segment that was directed and produced for the film, but was not included in the final edit. Constructions of masculinity for transmen, through use of clothing imbued with historical notions of the working class man, heroism and strength, was discussed in Chapter 4. The discussion now is extended to constructions of transmale sexuality as exemplified by the text *Sexing the Transman*, keeping in mind that Buck Angel self–identifies as a man.\(^{525}\)

The integration of sexuality within trans culture raises an important theoretical concept from Foucault, of relevance to *Sexing the Transman*: “The deployment of sexuality has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way” (Foucault 1978, p. 107, italics added). The non–reproductive focus of this statement shifts sexuality towards the potentiality and potency that sexuality holds for “proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies”. Whenever sexuality is employed in non–reproductive ways, whether as a solo, partnered, or group activity, the fecund potential of the physical act is unleashed to create new forms. This is where sexuality within gay, queer and trans subcultures is experienced, not as a shackling to a reproductive end–game, but as a communal encounter with power as potent creativity. Whether Foucault envisioned the ‘deployment of sexuality’ in the multiplicity of

\(^{524}\) Co–Director of Trans Boys Monique Schafter was cited in Chapter 6 as having observed a similar interconnection between dyke and transmale cultures.

\(^{525}\) In-person fieldwork with Buck Angel July 11th, Silver Lake, Los Angeles; follow–up correspondence on July 26th and 27th, 2015.
ways enjoyed by twenty first century transmen, Sexing the Transman has ensured that the ‘innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies’ of contemporary transmen and their sexual partners—many of whom are increasingly gay men—are recorded in detail. Buck has repeatedly stated that gay men are the biggest audiences of his films. More specifically, Buck has also publically acknowledged the very powerful role that gay leathermen played in his earlier life (Schwick 2015). In response to a question posed by Schwick “Who were the people who supported you most throughout your career?” Buck replied “Hands down in my early days it was gay men, mostly the leather scenes and the bears. They just got me! It was crazy because some men wrote me to tell me that they have always fantasied about a man with a pussy and they just could not believe that I was here” (Schwick 2015, online unnumbered). This empirical account supports the observations about the interconnection of transmale sexuality and gay leather subcultures within this chapter made from critical analysis of Sexing the Transman, from the autoethnographic account of the screening at Queer Fruits Film Festival and from subsequent fieldwork with Buck between 2014–2015 in Australia and the United States.

When Butler theorised the central role of the ‘proliferation of sex and gender’ (1990, pp. 141, 149) in the performance of identities; the succeeding generation of theorists have affirmed that “Gender is performative because it inscribes itself as a discourse each time it inscribes itself on a body, as a lived experience” (Gerdes 2013, p. 149, italics added). What Butler (1990) did not theorise, even though Foucault (1978, pp. 106–107) had previously stated its importance, was the central role of ‘alliances’ in the construction of sexuality and that “The deployment of sexuality operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power” (Foucault 1978, p. 106). Rubin (1994) furthered this through empirical work within the gay male community showing how the deployment of sexuality is the basis of community formation—centralising “sexual ethnogenesis” (Rubin 1994, p. 94) through the experiences of gay male communities. Sexing the Transman is the exemplar text for providing empirical evidence of the proliferation of sexualities in the context of contemporary transmale experience and for recording sexual ethnogenesis in the transmale community in the early twenty first century. In turn, the text has led to a proliferation of subsequent films on

transmale sexuality—as it is lived and experienced now.  

7.4 The Documentary As A Transactivist Tool & Educator

Since the 2012 screening at Queer Fruits Film Festival, awareness of the significance of *Sexing the Transman* as a tool for transactivism and education has continued to increase, with Buck now regularly presenting at academic forums and conferences, using the text as the starting point for conversation. Awareness of the potential for use of the documentary in educational contexts has steadily increased, as Buck has continued to receive affirmative feedback from screenings around the world and from people who have benefited from viewing the text. This was also noted after the Queer Fruits Film Festival screening discussed earlier in this chapter, through audience feedback. As Buck has stated in a recent media interview:

> At first, it wasn't that I wanted to make the work educational...But I soon realized it is. I am educating people on what it is to be a trans man and be sexual in your body, educating them on transmasculinity....I get letters daily from people thanking me about making them feel better about their bodies (Herman 2015).

This quote from Buck serves to answer questions raised in the literature, such as Albury (2014) who has questioned exactly what is taught from sexually explicit material and “how it


528 An example is “Sexing the Transman – Exploring Transmasculine Gender Identities and Sexualities”, Presenters: Michael Giordano, MSW, LICSW & Buck Angel, 47th AASECT Annual Conference, June 3–7 2015, Minneapolis. “Description: How does sex influence a transmasculine person’s identity? And how can a healthy, erotic sexuality diminish body dysphoria? Join therapist Mike Giordano, LICSW and activist, sex educator, and pornographer Buck Angel for a workshop exploring transgender men’s lives and how mental health professionals can assist in building positive self-regard and promoting pleasurable sex lives. Utilizing Mr. Angel’s sexually graphic documentary, attendees will engage in a frank discussion on queer sexualities and become more culturally adept working with this population. Objective(s): At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will be able to: recognize how to help clients name their genitals in ways that are congruent with their gender identities; describe to a client how a healthy sexual expression can decrease body dysphoria and discomfort.” viewed 5 May 2015, <http://www.aasectconference.org/program/workshops/>.

529 In–person fieldwork interview with Buck Angel during the Brisbane leg of his first Australian tour, 14 February 2014.
works as an educator” (p. 172). Buck is clear that his films educate audiences “on transmasculinity”. He cites the empirical evidence of “letters daily from people thanking me about making them feel better about their bodies” (Herman 2015, Italics added), to support his claims about the important educational aspects of his work, revealing the affective dimension of how his films work as educators.

Feminist pornographer, author and Board Member of the Porn Studies Journal Tristan Taormino has also raised a similar issue:

> What if we could use explicit sexual media to teach people about sexuality? That is the central issue I am tackling with my sex education films. I want to teach people techniques for pleasure, but I also want to explore concepts that we are rarely taught: consent, communication, boundaries, and negotiation. I would like to see more explicitly educational porn. People are hungry for knowledge about sex (Voss 2014, pp. 203–204).

*Sexing the Transman*, whilst a documentary and the films that have followed in the series are exemplars in providing what Taormino calls “educational porn”. As we saw in Chapter 3 following the screening at Queer Fruits film Festival in 2012, in my role as Festival Director I spoke with many audience members and later also received emails from health care professionals commending the festival on screening the film. One health care professional said that the film should be “seen by everyone who cares for transguys” (Queer Fruits Film Festival archives 2012, respondent de–identified). There was a general consensus in the audience after the trans panel talk following the screening, that everyone had learnt much from watching the film together, that it had freed up communications with the transguys in our local community, that we had all bonded together around the cinematic depictions of consensual transsex. It was very much an experience of cinematic sexual ethnogenesis.

Depictions of transbodies in Angel’s films project ‘personal ownership of the body’. Part of the significance of these texts is the underlying impetus that ‘erotica equals
empowerment’. This is a direct contrast to what Angel has observed happening within the wider trans community, he has been quoted as saying “the trans community, in an attempt to normalize themselves, are desexualizing themselves” (Herman 2015). Sex as an ‘energising’ element within film (Forshaw 2015), such as within *Sexing the Transman* has the ability to provide a relief to activist exhaustion.

While the documentary is the creative output, the online world provides the media, marketing and communication tools that enable connectivity between Angel and his audiences. This is a form of horizontal integration widely used within the mainstream film industry, in action at an independent filmmaker level.

Social media as a significant site of activism is rapidly strengthening in importance as larger number of people use multiple sites. The use of social media is not unique to Angel and is a generational phenomenon. An entire thesis could be developed upon the role of social media sites (such as Youtube) and transmale experience, particularly the use of autobiographical films in coming out and transition narratives. The role of social media in developing community is beginning to be recognised by scholars (Castells 2012), who have long considered that “Community formation has always been considered a central objective of alternative activist communication and more generally of projects of political emancipation” (Poell & van Dijck 2015, p. 532). This chapter also contends that social media is playing a central role in connection to *sexual ethnogenesis amongst transmen*. Scholars have previously recognised “how online contention is deeply entangled with offline activist practices” (Poell & van Dijck 2015, p. 528). Recent scholarship on the uses of social media has acknowledged “The widespread use of social media in contemporary activism constitutes a new phase in the development of alternative communication” (Poell & van Dijck 2015, pp. 527), which enable thousands of individual and for mainstream political events—hundreds of thousands of participants—to be reached simultaneously across the globe. Buck Angel utilises social media extensively and posts frequent (daily/weekly) across a wide range of social media currently

530 Fieldwork July 11th, 2015, Silver Lake, Los Angeles, question directed to a panel of four prominent trans performers in adult film (Buck Angel, Michelle Austin, Morgan Bailey & Tori Mayes) at “Trans Talk, Stockroom Transgender Panel”.

531 A business model where use of platforms spread globally.
available including Facebook 532, Tumblr 533, Instagram 534, Twitter 535, two channels on Youtube 536 and his personal websites. 537 The use of multiple online sites, accords with the recognition of the ‘different audiences’ each space engages and what is ‘appropriate’ to be shown on each platform (Lasén 2015, p. 68). It is also necessitated in order to create and sustain a high–profile social media personae: “A celebrity is rather a media text that is constructed by technologies” (Nandy 2015b, p.104). In some sites there is a continuation of Angel represented in adult–focussed imagery in what can be expressed as forms of ongoing “auto(erot)c–ethnography” (Blinne 2012) and digital “self–pornification” (Lasén & García 2015, p. 6; Lasén 2015, p. 62). 538

Through this range of online resources, Angel keeps in contact with his public audiences, across the diversity of trans, queer, gender non–conforming and gay communities and his increasingly wider reach to new audiences. Of this wealth of ever–increasing online sites, the “World of Wonder Youtube Partner Buck Angel’s Channel” 539 deserves recognition for the wealth of materials made publically available. These sites are rich resources on contemporary trans experiences and include personal images of Buck Angel and his friends; trailers from Angel’s films; public presentations at Universities and Colleges (including Cornell and Yale); queer storytelling nights; health and training tips and advice for partners of transmen. The

539 Angel (2015h). viewed 02 August 2015, <http://buckangelentertainment.com/>, this is a general site for all Buck’s work, with redirects to specific sites for Sexing the Transman sales (DVD and digital downloads).

538 Lasén & García (2015). “self–portraits and self–images set to elicit excitement and sexual interest, as well as the practices and verbal exchanges involved”. (p. 6).
*Sexing the Transman* website includes a specific site for trans queer dating which can be read as a contemporary online example of the sexual ethnogenesis that is taking place. The cumulative impression of all these media sites its that Angel is intensely engaged with public community activism and education; is extremely media–savvy; connects constantly and directly with his audiences (Figure 7.4); provides an immediately recognisable and accessible entry point for contact and information on transmen and communicates a very likeable personality through his open media representations. This has been called “personalization”

---

540 (Angel 2015L). This bonus promotional image is one way that Buck interacts with his supporters and fans online; the image (a wallpaper intended as a screen saver, for computer or phone) was offered by Buck to thank fans for their support via complementary direct download via FanBridge, viewed 15 May 2015, 05 May 2016, 20 August 2016, <http://buckangel.fanbridge.com/downloads/file.php?file_id=8090&sid=229228873&conf_code=K6Fkc3BU6K4U775dUY2F6r3eFdrhkYXe&anon=0&cid=1177849&download=1>.

(Poell & van Dijck 2015, p. 532), where an “individuals’ own narratives rather than collective identity frames become important in activist mobilization and communication processes” (Poell & van Dijck 2015, p. 532). The use of digital self–representation in activism may call into account “the question of authenticity”; while the “confession of intimate details, commodification of emotions, and promotion of self counteract effects of social justice that many celebrities aim to promote” (Nandy 2015b, p. 101).

Poell & van Dijck (2015) “argue that it is not just important to examine contemporary activist communication as complex socio-cultural processes,...but also as techno-commercial processes” (p.529, Italics in original). This is of especial relevance when considering the intertwined nexus between Angel’s activist work and his online business (Buck Angel Entertainment); that his films are independently produced by him as commercial productions, available for sale as DVDs and digital downloads via his website and newly launched online shop. 542 In this regard, Angel has noted that he is being careful to “quarantine” his earlier adult film work, away from his public activist work, being mindful of the reach into universities and the usefulness of his work for pedagogy within high schools, where students (as minors) are not legally permitted to be in contact with adult content.543 Public promotion for Angel now focusses attention on his activist work with the line “Inspire Create Change Human Rights Advocate” written beneath his name.544

In this online age, it is a moot point whether it would ever be fully possible to completely segregate Angel’s earlier/adult work from his current education and activism focus. This would require computer/internet access to be restricted (such as through the use of ‘parental locks’), or by official censorial regimes; in the majority of circumstances there is easy access to the full range of Angel’s output. While it is unclear whether Buck’s recent activist and educational work could ever effectively be fully ‘quarantined’ away from his earlier/adult work, Angel’s clear intention is that there are different foci for his work with different audiences. The basis for the youth activism focus of Angel’s work comes across strongly in the biographical documentary Mr. Angel (Hunt, USA, 2013), which reveals Angel’s own

543 In–person fieldwork, February 2014, Brisbane, Australia.
struggles throughout youth with his male identity, with family acceptance, bouts of depression, attempted suicide and incidents of self-harm. Against this personal background, Angel’s focus upon education and activism are easy to understand, as is his desire to provide information and support to youth with gender non-conforming identities currently experiencing issues with family, friends, school, or health services.

Poell & van Dijck have suggested that “there is no natural progression from ‘togetherness’ to ‘community’ (as Castells suggests), but rather the reverse appears to be true: in social media-dominated online environments, processes of togetherness are always ephemeral” (2015, p. 534). Angel has now been a publically identified transman for almost a decade, with an increasing public profile and with an ever-increasing audience both online and across the world. This has created a specific community around his work. The process of creating and developing a trans community internationally, when viewed against the intertwined struggles for recognition, rights and acceptance appears to be far from ‘ephemeral’ and can be clearly linked to social activism in the online worlds.

7.5 The Transliteracy That Emerges From This Film

The explorations in this chapter have moved between the cinematic world of the documentary *Sexing the Transman*, to the audience reception of the film and how the text is documenting a specific time in community sexual ethnogenesis for transmen; to the social media and online worlds surrounding both the text and Buck Angel and to the ongoing public presence of Angel as a trans activist, spokesperson for trans issues and media personality (Figure 7.5). During this discussion, scholarly perspectives have positioned the film as a contemporary screen text emerging from a specific place and time in twenty first century trans culture; as the groundbreaking text that has opened the way for a new generation of trans filmmakers to openly explore issues of gender-diverse sexualities in ways that would not have been possible even a few years ago and as an exemplar text of the Trans New Wave. Angel has been identified as pioneering new genres of film: docu–porn and FtM porn and as the first identified filmmaker of the Trans New Wave. The transliteracy that has emerged from the combined textual exegesis and examination of the worlds surrounding the text, is that the film *Sexing the Transman* cannot be separated from either the life and work of Buck Angel as a
man and transactivist, nor from the lives of the gender–diverse interview–participants within the film, many of whom are also publically known as sex–positive trans queers. This accords with Smith and Attwood (2014), who stress the importance of contextualising the producer of porn to the consumer and communities which use the media and that “knowledge is socially and culturally wrought” (p.11).

Figure 7.5: Buck Angel, transactivism. Poster for gender neutral bathrooms. Source: ©Buck Angel Entertainment 2015. Reproduced courtesy of Buck Angel.545

545 (Angel 2015m). This transactivist poster was posted online via Buck’s official Facebook page (Angel 2015a), viewed 05 May 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel/>.

546 Example include interviewees Margaret Cho (International Movie Database (IMDB) 2012c) and James Darling.
The text has revealed the languages that contemporary transmen utilise in discussing their bodies and sexual experiences and that transmale sexuality is not a single trajectory, but a multiplicity of affective experiences and potentialities. The text has also enabled a transliterate reading of the sites where transmale sexualities are explored and that there are a multiplicity of potential partners for transmen across sexual identities, including queer, gay, or straight and with diverse sexual partners whether trans, male, or female. A profound transliteracy into gender–diverse lives and experiences emerges from this text and this has the ability to educate and inform audiences about trans lives. The transformative potential that exists within screen texts has been identified by previous film scholars, such as Pandian (2011) in relation to the filmic practices of South India and Tamil Cinema, raising relevant questions for further exploration of the practises of autoethnographic filmmaking employed by Buck Angel in \textit{Sexing the Transman}:

What if the practice of filmmaking itself – irrespective of the distinctiveness or status of its authors – expressed not the purity of its makers’ intentions but instead the \textit{immanent potential of the situations} in which these images arise? Does the cinema’s revelation of time in its flux depend upon the immersion of its makers in the experience of such a time themselves? (p.197, italics added).

Transliterate engagement with \textit{Sexing the Transman} has provided an answer to this question: that for an authentic representation of trans experiences, the filmmaker does need to be ‘immersed’ in the ‘experience themselves’.

\section*{7.6 \hspace{1em} Summary}

The historical clinical prohibitions against “genital sexual pleasure whilst living in the gender of choice” (Stone 1991, 2006, p. 228) provides background to why films that openly engage and promote genital sexual pleasure in trans people are revolutionary sites of empowerment and embodiment. While Foucault (1978) “proposes “sexuality” as an open and complex historical system of discourse and power that produces the misnomer of “sex” as part of a strategy to conceal and hence, to perpetuate power relations” (Butler 1990, p. 95), in \textit{Sexing the Transman}, the power that is created and perpetuated is circulated amongst the transmen.
The work of sex–radical scholar Rubin (1984, 1992) identified transsexuals and transvestites “at the very bottom of the pyramid” in the hierarchical system of Western sexual values (pp. 11–12). Set against the weight of ‘sexuality as perpetuating power’ and the historical relegation of trans people to a stigmatised category of ‘erotic transgression’ (Rubin 1884, 1992, p. 12), Angel emerges as a rare kind of filmmaker and activist, who can rightly take the credit for pioneering new genres of screen texts that elevate sexuality amongst trans people and openly show the world that being trans and relating to yourself and other people sexually is the way forward.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS—TOWARDS A TRANSLITERATE FUTURE

8.1 The Necessity for Demolishing Trans Gender & Sexual Stereotypes in Cinema

Before, during and after the mainstream industry celebrations for Academy–Award winner *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) discussed in Chapter 2, outraged voices of the trans community could be heard around the world, in disbelief at the stereotypical misrepresentation of Rayon (Jared Leto) within the text.\(^{547}\) Leto’s award recipient speech — where he failed to mention the words transgender or transsexual (Ford 2016c forthcoming, Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H)\(^{548}\) and failed to acknowledge the transgender people whom he had publicly stated that he had based his performance of Rayon as a trans woman (Criswell 2014), added insult to the film’s depiction and narrative (mis) treatment of Rayon. Now disbelief turned to disgust at the clear erasure of trans from the public stage. While gender–diverse people viewing Leto’s Academy Award speech might have felt like screaming back Rayon’s seminal line “Just a simple fuckin’ thank you would do” (Borten and Wallack 2012, p. 75, Scene 111), this seemingly simple ‘oversight’ succinctly summarises and demonstrates the issues within mainstream cinema. As discussed in Chapter 2, these issues include the ongoing and unresolved problems within mainstream understanding and cinematic depictions of trans; negative and stereotypical representations; negative and demeaning story arcs for trans characters and recognition that the thematic tropes of the “Fallen Woman” genre (Jacobs 1997) have been translocated onto the trans body in twenty first century cinema (Ford 2016c forthcoming, Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). Narrative tropes in cinematic representations that routinely misrepresent trans and present discriminatory views that trans people do not fit into society and hence are ‘fallen’ from the hegemonic spaces in which society performs gendered and sexual roles, must be demolished from cinema. This is a pressing social justice issue.

---

\(^{547}\) Examples include Rohwer (2013); Rayner (2014); Tannehill (2014); Reynolds (2015).

There is an absolute necessity for demolishing trans stereotypes in cinema across all intersectional areas, of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, dis/ability. As discussed in Chapter 2, not only does the mainstream screen industry continue to misrepresent trans lives in the twenty first century in films such as *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013), or *Predestination* (The Spierig Brothers, Australia, 2014), there is a systemic failure to even acknowledge that trans lives and narratives are harvested and distorted as source materials for cinema—as evidenced from Leto’s Academy Award speech. Gender and sexual stereotypes continue to be used in misrepresenting trans people that have not been tolerated for decades in connection to the representation of women, or in connection to indigenous peoples; representations that have successfully been deleted from a wider range of heteronormative cinematic and literary texts.

A text such as *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013) reflects societal misunderstandings of gender diverse lives. This includes assumptions of how trans people live and interact within society, in both cultural and subcultural settings and how audiences around the world would receive the film—including how gender diverse audiences would read the text in the twenty first century (Ford 2016e forthcoming, Appendix H). The filmmakers misunderstanding of trans lives is displayed within the text and it is these incorrect and stereotypical views that led to the international backlash against the film from within the trans community, at the same time as the mainstream Hollywood screen industry—seemingly oblivious to the problems represented within the text—canonised the film with major awards.

Cinema has the power to communicate to millions of people around the world simultaneously. When a text such as *Dallas Buyers Club*, or *Predestination* is viewed, audiences consume images of trans people that reflect the filmmakers’ misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the complexity of gender diverse lives and experiences in the twenty first century. *Dallas Buyers Club* perpetuates damaging narratives and reflects the hegemonic views of society, which marginalizes, shadows and criminalizes participation in street economies, including those related to the documented practises of sharing medications (O’Brien 2013) due to the inability to access vital medications/and or the costs involved, recreational drug use and adult industry work. Through gesture, clothing, mannerisms and textual references, Rayon is
positioned as a street sex worker. The narrative depiction of Rayon as a patient, continues the disenfranchising and misleading trope that transgender and transsexual people are ‘ill’ in some way, needing medication and hospitalization and also places the character of Rayon under the control of authority figures, including doctors, hospital, pharmaceutical company and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—who were in control of the drug trials and approval/or non–approval of AZT.549 Predestination presents the extremely disturbing views that gender may be involuntarily assigned at a surgeon’s whim and that a trans person is a sociopath, that will destroy the world.

Such texts represent trans from the position of hegemonic society, the opposite of the transliterate views of independent Trans New Wave filmmakers presented within this thesis. It is hegemonic society that views trans people as in need of authoritative interventions and subjection to disciplinary regimes; or as engaged in economies, considered by the mainstream to be ‘criminalised’. This includes employment in the adult film and sex work industries, that may be undertaken out of dire economic circumstances due to the high levels of inadequate employment and unemployment experienced by trans people (Molnar 2014).

The 2015 Iris Prize–Winning film Vessels (Arkasha Stevenson, USA, 2015)550 is a narrative short film representing the story of a trans woman who accesses breast implant surgery in Los Angeles from illegal street sources, as her only affordable choice for gender confirmation surgery. This subject (of breast augmentation using street economies) is also explored in regards to Latina transwomen in Brazil, utilising ethnfiction techniques in the ethnographic documentary Transfiction (Johannes Sjöberg, UK, 2007). Texts such as these highlight serious health and social justice issues for individuals, particularly trans women, who resort to illegally accessing dangerous (and life-threatening) surgical interventions out of necessity. There are related issues of the supply and use of body transforming pharmaceutical drugs by trans people (O’Brien 2013).

Whilst hegemonic society ignores the perilous and life–threatening circumstances that many


trans people are forced to endure, trans people experience making such choices on a daily basis as a necessity for survival, from dire physical, emotional and economic circumstances. Whilst mainstream films continue to vilify transgender people, misrepresenting the life choices made, transactivists will continue to protest such texts. In the words of leading transactivist scholar Susan Stryker “I’m not going to listen to you say that about me, or people like me, any more” (2006, p. 2).

8.2 Representations that Represent All of Us

As an antidote, the emerging canon of representations within independent cinema of the Trans New Wave detailed throughout this thesis and the focus of Chapters 4, 6 and 7, has continued to develop at a rapid pace beyond the adult transitional narratives, with a canon of inclusive representations of gender diversity and gender non-conforming youth. Powerful films emerged in 2014 and 2015 including documentaries *Raising Ryland* (Sarah Feeley, USA, 2015); *Tomgirl* (Jeremy Asher Lynch, USA, 2015); *BrocKINGton* (Sergio Ingato, Mason Sklut, Maggie Sloane, USA 2014) and *A Place in the Middle* (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014). These documentaries have all explored complex narratives of trans youth from the points of view of the parents, teachers, school friends and social situations in which the young people live their lives. These are films positioned within a range of contemporary American, African American and Hawaiian societies and cultural traditions.

*Raising Ryland* (Sarah Feeley, USA, 2015) is a very moving film told primarily from the point of view of Ryland’s parents Hilary and Jeff. Ryland is a young boy, transitioning before school and accepted by other children and teachers as a boy. Ryland’s parents are interviewed throughout the film and at one point say that when Ryland first presented as a boy (around ages two to three years old) he would say to them ‘I will cut my hair when you are dead’ (to look like a boy rather than a girl). Ryland’s parent’s—understandably upset and concerned about such a comment—responded by saying ‘why do you need to wait until we are dead?’. This was because Ryland did not understand that he would receive his parents unconditional support and love. In the film, Ryland’s parents explicitly state that having a healthy child who
is a boy, rather than a distressed (or dead) daughter, is the only way forward, citing the devastating statistic that 41% of trans people will either attempt, or commit, suicide.  

Rightfully, the social currency of these films has been recognised by festival juries and audiences, with a number of these recent texts internationally awarded, including the highest accolade of the Grand Jury Awards. At the 2015 Outfest film festival in Los Angeles, BrocKINGton received a Grand Jury Award for Documentary Short Film; Tchindas (Pablo García Pérez de Lara, USA, 2015) received a Grand Jury Award for Documentary Feature Special Recognition and A Place in the Middle (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014) received an Audience Award. At the 2015 Iris Prize Festival in Cardiff, narrative short film Vessels (Arkasha Stevenson, USA, 2015) won the highest accolade, the internationally prestigious Iris Prize. This clearly shows the continuing affirming reception of independent trans narratives by audiences and screen industry panels.

There has also been an increasing production of films from the points of view of indigenous and First Nation gender–diverse peoples. This includes the inspiring documentary A Place in the Middle (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014), told from a Hawaiian cultural perspective and Tchindas (Pablo García Pérez de Lara, USA, 2015), set within the West African country of Cape Verde. A Place in the Middle is perhaps one of the most elating of the recent Trans New Wave documentaries to emerge and is about “Eleven year old Ho'onani dreams of leading the hula troupe at her inner-city Honolulu school. The only trouble is that the group is just for boys. She's fortunate that her teacher understands first–hand what it's like to be 'in the middle' – the ancient Hawaiian tradition of embracing both male and female spirit. Together they set out to prove that what matters most is to be true to yourself.”

In particular, A Place in the Middle is significant, as it tells the story from a First Nations’ perspective, continuing the important narrative of trans lives explored in documentaries such

---


as *Burning For Acceptance* (Carmel Young, Aus. 2009) a documentary about the indigenous sistergirls of the Tiwi Islands of Northern Australia and *Tchindas* (Pablo García Pérez de Lara, USA, 2015), about Tchinda, a transwoman in Cape Verde, West Africa. Documentary *Two Spirits* (Lydia Nibley, USA, 2010), which recounts the distressing murder of Navajo nádleeh youth Fred Martinez, is an important text that gives voice to contemporary indigenous Two Spirit transactivism. The nádleeh interviewed within *Two Spirits*

...cinematically reclaims the Navajo Nation as inclusive of multiple genders and resists decades of heterosexist cinematic appropriation of Navajo lands in Westerns... *Two Spirits* invites a gender–balanced understanding of the nature of Navajo cosmology in which nádleeh exist as a natural reflection of the cycle of male and female inherent in all aspects of the universe (Estrada 2011, p. 171, italics in original).

Such groundbreaking cinematic work has continued with the feature film *Fire Song* (Adam Garnet Jones, Canada, 2015), which introduces Shane, a Two Spirited Anishinaabe of Northern Ontario. Directed by First Nations’ director Adam Garnet Jones, this film shows the complexity of living between traditional and contemporary worlds for Two Spirit people.

Amongst recent Trans New Wave films, the documentary *BrocKINGton*—told from the point of view of Blake, an African American transmale youth, also powerfully conveys the devastating results of societal non–acceptance of trans people. In documentary *Game Face* (Michiel Thomas, USA, 2015) the experiences of transgender and gay athletes is presented from intersectional perspectives; of being an African American, trans woman and lesbian in the story of Mixed Martial Arts’ first transgender professional fighter Fallon Fox and the story of African American rising college basketball star Terrence Clemens, who is coming to terms with being a young gay man. Non–hegemonic narratives of Latina transwomen in films such as *La Visita* (Mauricio Lopez, Chile, 2010) and *Sisterhood* (Mikajlo Rankovic, USA, 2011),

---

554 This film World premiered at Queer Fruits Film Festival 2009 (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives 2009–2012).
both screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival \(^{555}\) demonstrate the value of cross-cultural transliteracy into trans lives.

Such films have significantly contributed to developing this genre, collecting cinematic texts that inclusively represent trans within wider society; with narratives from youth, to elders; from indigenous, to Latina, to western perspectives. Films that depict a wide range of trans life narratives, social issues and perspectives. Texts are emerging which explore the interconnections between the physical, emotional and spiritual health of trans people, in documentaries such as *Queering Yoga* (Ewan Duarte, USA, status in–production 2016, crowd–funding to complete production). This text is also an example of the emerging transqueer perspective discussed within Chapter 2. Whilst this thesis has focused upon particular cultural contexts and transmale texts that screened at Queer Fruits Film festival in 2012, there are studies into African American, Latina/Latino and indigenous trans cinematic perspectives that would be productive areas for further investigation. The increasingly diverse representations produced by Trans New Wave filmmakers each year are eagerly awaited, to be exhibited and celebrated around the international film festival circuit.

### 8.3 The Unique Role of Film

As Trans New Wave filmmakers continue to emerge, become established and distinguished within the international screen industry, the opportunity for new film projects will arise. As we all live in a screen–mediated world (Ford 2014a), consumers of screen texts are accustomed to a wide range of visual imagery for work, information and leisure. With so much visual material available, a simultaneous decrease in the attention span of viewers is occurring (Thompson 2011; Watson 2015).\(^{556}\) Mainstream cinema increasingly utilizes rapid edits and relentless soundtracks as a “stylistic trope” to create and maintain high momentum, with the result that “an increase in image velocity has resulted in a decrease in complexity and substance” (Thompson 2011, online unnumbered). In the midst of this, audiences are

---

\(^{555}\) *Sisterhood* screened In 2010; *La Visita* screened in 2012. Both texts are focussed upon transwomen, hence outside the scope of this thesis, which is focussed upon transmale texts for exegesis.

\(^{556}\) Watson (2015). “Researchers surveyed 2,000 participants in Canada and studied the brain activity of 112 others using electroencephalograms. The results showed the average human attention span has fallen from 12 seconds in 2000, or around the time the mobile revolution began, to eight seconds. Goldfish, meanwhile, are believed to have an attention span of nine seconds.”
increasingly accessing materials from independent filmmakers and from a range of socio-cultural perspectives that contain substantive content. Yet it cannot be assumed that all viewers who engage with trans screen texts will be culturally literate in understanding the narratives presented. Trans New Wave filmmakers have a unique role and opportunity in presenting films with narratives, themes and characters that accurately reflect their experiences as trans filmmakers, of trans lives. This in turn, can play a key role in educating audiences. Buck Angel’s films have become exemplars for this self-reflexive filmmaking.

Since the years in which the films detailed within this thesis screened at the 2012 Queer Fruits Film Festival, the case study filmmakers have all gone on to new screen projects. Buck Angel is now perhaps one of the most recognisable trans media figures internationally and is a highly sought-after educational speaker on trans issues in both the academic and public spheres. Angel has directed and produced increasingly gender-diverse texts, with four subsequent adult versions of the original *Sexing the Transman* (Angel 2014c) and a film focused upon transfemale sexuality planned to parallel the original *Sexing the Transman* (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). Buck has now moved into the positions of trusted adviser, role model and ‘elder statesman’ within the trans community, especially for many genderqueers and transmen and is affectionately know by the name “Tranpa” (Schwick 2015).

Following the success of *The Thing*, Rhys Ernst has directed the Outfest Jury Prize winning film *She Gone Rogue* (2012) and worked as Co-Producer and 2nd Unit Director on the Golden Globe award–winning series *Transparent* (Ernst 2015c). Inspired by *Transparent*, this led to Ernst’s next trans–focussed television mini docu–series as director and producer called *This is Me* (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015) (Ernst 2015d; International Movie Database 2015c). This series was subsequently nominated for an Emmy award in Short–Form Nonfiction in 2015 (Ernst 2015d). The narratives within trans cinema have been expanding beyond adult transitional narratives, to represent the stories of gender non-conforming youth and also from the perspectives of the children of trans parents, as in the Australian feature film *52 Tuesdays*

---

557 As of 13 January 2016.

558 Tentatively titled *Sexing the Transwoman* (E.P. Buck Angel, TBA). Fieldwork with Buck Angel, during the Brisbane leg of his first Australian tour, 14 February 2014.

559 (Angel 2016a). Buck has also designed a t-shirt, available on his site, where he is portrayed with a tattoo–like image and the name ‘tranpa’ under his figure.
(Sophia Hyde, Aus. 2013). In 52 Tuesdays teenager Billie (Tilda Cobham–Hervey) experiences her parent transitioning as a transman, at the same time that Billie is coming of age and awakening to her own sexuality. This film handles complex themes of gender and sexuality from multi–generational perspectives. As discussed earlier in this chapter there has also been an increase in narratives from indigenous and First Nations’ perspectives.

A question that arose from the research processes, from fieldwork with filmmakers and attendance at both the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival in 2014 and Outfest film festival in Los Angeles 2015, was whether Trans New Wave filmmakers would continue in their future careers to write, direct, produce and edit screen content focussed upon trans themes and narratives and whether this is a desired outcome and career trajectory for the filmmakers. A filmmaker such as Cheryl Dunye, acclaimed during New Queer Cinema (Rich 2013), was directing trans–focussed cinema in 2015 that fits within the Trans New Wave, illustrating the movement of filmmakers across themes and genres. This is a relevant area that would be productive for further investigation. I would also be keen to see to whether there is an isolation of Trans New Wave filmmakers over time within the screen industry. Will filmmakers remain contained and constrained within subcultural contexts, themes and narratives and the independent film festival circuit. Or over time will filmmakers crossover into the mainstream and begin to write, direct and produce non–trans screen content in order to secure a viable income. Such research would question the socio–cultural positionality and economic opportunity for trans filmmakers within the screen industry, comparing the experiences of those who remain writing, directing and producing independent films with gender–diverse narratives, in comparison to trans filmmakers who enter the mainstream.

In the few short years since this research project began and since the premiere of The Thing at Sundance in 2012, Rhys Ernst has already made major leaps forward into the mainstream screen industry, with mentoring from Jill Soloway, Executive Producer and one of the Directors of Transparent. Soloway is a prominently positioned screen industry professional, with screen credits on numerous high–profile television series including United States Of Tara and Grey's Anatomy (International Movie Database 2015d). With such support, Ernst has “co–created and runs Transparent’s Transfirmative Program, which builds bridges for
transgender people into the film industry”.560 This is extremely heartening and demonstrates that there are career pathways and industry mentoring support for trans filmmakers to work within the mainstream screen industry, if that is the pathway that they choose to follow. Ernst continues to direct screen content with trans narratives as we saw earlier in this chapter. Such a crossover and high–level support is also evidenced in Trans New Wave films such as *Raising Ryland* (Sarah Feeley, USA, 2015), a documentary edited by Kate Amend, editor of previous Academy Award winning documentaries and member of the Board of Governors of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, as well as sitting on the Board of Directors of the American Cinema Editors.561 In these cases independent films have led Trans New Wave filmmakers directly onto the yellow brick road of Hollywood.

A further reflection upon the future potential legacy of the filmmakers may be made through a comparison with the trajectory of New Queer Cinema filmmakers such as Todd Haynes. Haynes’ 1991 film *Poison*—now considered to be one of the landmark films of New Queer Cinema, aroused hostility and controversy at the time of initial release and screening. The film was noted by Ruby Rich to be “one of a series of scapegoats (the “NEA Four”, Mapplethorpe etc.) attacked by the forces of the Right in an ongoing attempt to do away with National Endowment for the Arts...When screenings were arranged in Washington, D.C., for members of Congress...one congressman’s wife said she needed to Bathe in Clorox to cleanse herself of it” (Rich 2013, p. xvii). Yet Haynes persisted in creating homoerotic cinematic narratives that communicated to not only his generation of the 1990s but to contemporary generations. In 1991, who would have predicted that twenty–five years later Haynes would direct a film centred upon a lesbian dramatic narrative that would be hailed as a masterpiece, starring a multi–Academy Award and Golden Globe winning actress (Cate Blanchett), nominated in five categories for Golden Globe awards and nominated in six categories at the 2016 Academy Awards, amongst an increasing array of accolades, awards and nominations


During a screening of *Carol* (Todd Haynes, USA, 2015) at a local cinema amidst an experience of immense cinephiliac pleasure, I reflected upon this filmmaker’s career from New Queer Cinema to the present. The potential that Hayne’s career trajectory could suggest for the Trans New Wave filmmakers of today becomes apparent. Many Trans New Wave filmmakers have also been (and are) subjected to hostility and vilification for not only their art, but their lives. The influence that New Queer Cinema films and filmmakers have continued to have upon cinema is undeniable. What influence will the Trans New Wave filmmakers of this era continue to be recognised for long after the initial Wave has passed? Undeniably, the significance of cinematic self-representation for non- hegemonic communities will remain. The necessity for trans people to be centrally involved in creating the representations that are written, directed, produced and exhibited (through the use of self-distribution platforms/and or independent film festivals) is beyond doubt from a comparison with the mainstream texts within this thesis. Trans New Wave films demonstrate the agency of the filmmaker, whilst engaging and educating the audience in transliterate perspectives of contemporary trans lives.

The Trans New Wave have developed stylistic and thematic innovations in order to communicate trans subjectivities clearly. This has included entirely new filmmaking styles such as docu-porn initially emerging from the work of Buck Angel (2008–2009), now widely informing, educating and influencing this generation of genderqueers and trans people. Filmmakers have subsequently emerged following Angel’s style with increasingly diverse and innovative representations of transsex. Pre-eminently, Buck Angel will most likely long be remembered for what is his major contribution so far, for positioning sexuality at the centre of trans lives, rather than at the periphery. Through Angel’s film work, transmen around the world have been able feel comfortable with their bodies, through the cinematic experience of seeing other transmen sexually engaged. Angel is the exemplar for focussing textual

---

562 Haynes is an exemplar, who continued on post-New Queer Cinema to an awarded screen career, including a list of cinematic credits with high-profile actors pre-eminently *Carol* (Todd Haynes, USA, 2015), a lesbian romantic drama starring Cate Blanchett (Haynes 2015); and *Velvet Goldmine* (Todd Haynes, Australia 1998), a polysexual glam rock musical, starring Ewan McGregor, Jonathan, Rhys Meyers and Christian Bale (Haynes 1998).

563 Fieldwork viewing 18 January 2016 at Palace Cinemas Byron Bay, NSW, Australia.
discussion on sexuality for trans people—a subject that was previously excluded in cinema, outside adult film. While Angel’s work has been criticised from within sections of the transmale community as noted in Chapter 7, his work has also been recognised, awarded and praised for the groundbreaking representations of transmale sexuality.

As discussed in Chapter 6, with trans now seemingly everywhere within culture, the significance of the Trans New Wave filmmakers—and this research project, unexpectedly increased in the years since the 2012 screening of Angel’s revolutionary text *Sexing the Transman* at Queer Fruits Film Festival.

### 8.4 Policy Provocations—Advocating Change in Classification (Ratings) Systems

Chapter 5 highlighted that censorial regimes for classification (ratings) within Australia were clearly out of touch with the international screen industry and film festival circuit. Examples from 2012 were cited, when the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department ‘Refused’ to provide an Exemption to screen several screen texts with sexual narratives from trans, queer and gay perspectives—despite these texts having been widely exhibited internationally (a defense for exhibition in Australia that film festivals may cite). The effects of these classification policies situate the production of independent films and film festivals as ultimately under the control of censorial authorities, negating the very ‘independence’ of the independent filmmaker and film festival circuit. Fieldwork in the USA on two separate occasions during the research processes, at two distinct independent film festivals screening trans and queer texts (San Francisco Transgender Film Festival 2014; Outfest film festival Los Angeles 2015), highlighted the enviable independence that film festivals have in the USA to program texts without the censorship experienced in Australia.

This leads to a consideration of the need for current and future provocations for change in the composition of Boards that review and classify films in Australia. In particular, whose ‘community standards’ are utilised as the basis for official classifications (ratings) decisions must be addressed when non–hegemonic gender–diverse screen content is under review.
Contrasting the Australian and the USA film festival experiences provided empirical evidence that highlighted the very different ways in which trans films are officially treated internationally. This is not only a screen industry issue, but a pressing social justice issue. This becomes a pivotal point of discussion and an area which could benefit from future scholarly research in advocacy for policy change, in the way in which classifications (ratings) systems are administered.

At the very least, it has become clear through the research of this thesis, that Classification Review Boards need to be composed of representatives from the *actual communities represented* in the screen texts. As we saw in Chapter 5, Dalton and Schubert (2011) argue the case for community ‘experts’ to comprise the Classification Review Boards. In regards to films with gender–diverse content, the significance of having participants on Review Boards who are able to engage transliterately with the screen content is heightened and could mean the difference between texts receiving official Exemptions to screen, or, as has been the case in Australia (especially in 2012), texts being effectively ‘banned’ from screenings, never reaching the audiences intended. In such an atmosphere, everyone ultimately loses; the filmmaker—who may have spent years of their life writing, directing and producing a text that could have importance socially and culturally, whose work is not seen and ultimately to the society trapped in outmoded forms of enforcement and suppressive governance. In addition, the appropriateness of the venue proposed to screen films and the intended audiences that specific venues attract needs to be taken into account. The current disjunction between classifications decisions in Australia and proposed screenings was further highlighted in Chapter 5, in the discussion of the Refused film *Community Action Centre* (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010), which was slated to screen at a time and place and to an audience entirely appropriate to the textual content.

Since the years in which Queer Fruits Film Festival received the official Exemption to screen, the process for receiving an Exemption to screen unclassified films in Australia has been streamlined, with a new online e–portal to “allow event organisers to self-assess the suitability of material for an audience that includes people under 18 years” (Classification Branch
A number of key Australian queer film festival directors cited within this thesis, who were thoroughly acquainted with the previous classification Exemption system in relation to programming and exhibiting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer screen content are no longer directing film festivals. As it is beyond the scope of this current research project, at this stage it has not been possible to follow-up with other festivals/festival directors and effectively examine whether this new ‘streamlined’ process for festival ‘self-assessment’ is in practise any different than the previous system that film festivals went through, in manually evaluating submitted films and in preparing the lengthy document defending the texts as suitable for public exhibition under the festival ‘Exemption’ rule. This would be a productive area for further investigation and could potentially have impact in advocating for policy changes in Australian film classification (ratings) administration.

8.5 The Transliteracy That Has Emerged From This Analysis

This thesis has established the necessity for a transliterate reading of gender–diverse screen texts, embedded within the communities represented, and has presented transliteracy as an innovative theoretical perspective. Emerging within cultural studies, this new theoretical approach has significance for fieldwork and exegesis across disciplines, with particular relevance to film studies and trans studies at this key point in the convergence of interdisciplinary approaches to scholarly studies on trans lives and cultural outputs. Transliteracy is a theory that may be applied across a range of disciplines. Publications produced during the research have been internationally peer–reviewed across interdisciplinary fields (cultural studies, geographies of sexualities, trans studies, screen studies, communication and media studies, humanities), supporting the relevance and significance of this work in interdisciplinary perspectives.

Trans and gender–diverse people will continue to increase in visibility within society and in

564 “Important notice regarding film festival exemptions”, email received by Queer Fruits Film Festival, 27 August 2015 (Queer Fruits Film Festival Archives).

565 Examples include Lisa Daniels, previously the Festival Director at the Melbourne Queer Film Festival (a fieldwork respondent in this research) and Lex Lindsay, previously the Festival Director at Queer Screen in Sydney. As a Festival Director prior to this PhD Candidature – I also could have commented on the differences between the two systems, but have not programmed since the 2012 festival (under the old system).
culture; there will be more films with trans narratives, themes and characters. The value of scholars being transliterate in their researches has been demonstrated through exegesis of the case study texts in tandem with fieldwork within the trans and gender-diverse communities, leading to discussion and understanding of what cinematic representations reflect about contemporary trans lives and what this means to trans people.

8.6 Cinematic Ethnogenesis

Part of the transliteracy that has emerged from this research is a conceptual awareness of the Trans New Wave emerging through a process of cinematic ethnogenesis—when a new cinema is born from within a community and a cinematic community develops around the texts. The term cinematic ethnogenesis is presented as a concluding point in this study, as an original and potentially significant screen concept coined from within this thesis, adapting the concept of sexual ethnogenesis from the work of Gayle Rubin (1994) within the gay male community, to a new cinematic context. Rubin’s groundbreaking work was encountered anew in Chapter 7, translocated to the transmale community, with sexual ethnogenesis explored as relevant to the development and cinematic depictions of transmale sexualities as exemplified in the central case study text within this research project of Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011). Emerging from this research, as one of the transliterate outcomes of the thesis process, cinematic ethnogenesis is an area that would be productive for further investigation.

In assessing the potential future legacy of the Trans New Wave, New Queer Cinema provides valuable examples of filmmakers who continued to write, direct and produce groundbreaking works after the initial ‘Wave’ had passed. Director Todd Haynes, prominent during New Queer Cinema, provides an exemplar of how non-hegemonic filmmakers emerging in cinematic Waves may continue on to widely influence screen culture. Patterns of movement from independent film across mediums may also be discerned in comparing New Queer Cinema and current Trans New Wave filmmakers. Online Subscription Video on Demand Services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime are currently demonstrating the validity and viability for producing screen texts with affirming representations of trans themes, narratives
and characters. In two of these current online series, a Trans New Wave filmmaker discussed within this thesis has already moved into new screen mediums. In this movement and in the production of these texts, the reparative potential for cinema may be realised; perhaps even leading to a reparative process within the future textual outputs of the mainstream screen industry.

The significance of the Trans New Wave filmmakers and films to cultural studies and humanities scholars will continue to increase as textual sites, as academic courses are developed and as students increasingly seek to work literately with the creative media of this time. The implication for scholars across disciplines is that now is the time to become transliterate in reading these texts.

| 566 | Including Netflix original series: Orphan Black (Dir. John Fawcett et al., USA, 2013); Orange Is the New Black (Dir. Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–); Sense8 (Dir. Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–); and Amazon Prime series Transparent (Dir. Jill Soloway, USA, 2014–); This Is Me (Dir. Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015). |
| 567 | Director of The Thing, Rhys Ernst, as discussed has worked as a trans consultant, co–producer and 2nd Unit director on on the Golden Globe and Emmy Award–winning series Transparent (Dir. Jill Soloway, USA, 2014), before directing his own online trans docu–television documentary series This Is Me (Dir. Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015). Both available online via Amazon. |
| 568 | This paragraph is published (Ford 2016b, p. 15). |
FILMOGRAPHY

A Place in the Middle (Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson, USA, 2014)
Against the Grain (Seyi Adebanjo & Betty Yu 2014)
Andie (Paul Baker, USA, 2011)
AI Artificial Intelligence (Spielberg, USA, 2001)
Black Is Blue (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 2014)
Bound (Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski (as The Wachowskis), USA, 1996)
Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999)
BrocKINGton (Sergio Ingato, Mason Sklut, Maggie Sloane, USA 2014)
Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, USA, 2005)
Buckback Mountain (Buck Angel Entertainment, USA, 2007)
Burning For Acceptance (Carmel Young, Aus. 2009)
Carmin Tropical (Rigoberto Pérezcano, USA, 2014)
Carol (Todd Haynes, USA, 2015)
Change Over Time (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2013)
Christine in the Cutting Room (Susan Stryker, USA, work–in–progress, 2013)
Cinéma! Cinéma! The French New Wave Part 1 (Channel 4, UK, 1992)
Community Action Centre (A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, USA, 2010)
Couch Surfers: Trans Men In Action (Trannywood Pictures, USA, 2008)
Crashpad Behind The Scenes: Emma Claire & Golden Curlz (Shine Louise Houston, USA, 2014)
Cruel and Unusual (Janet W. Baus, Dan Hunt, Reid Williams, USA, 2006)
Cubbyholes: Trans Me In Action (Trannywood Pictures, USA, 2007)
Dallas Buyers Club (Jean–Marc Vallee, USA, 2013)
Dandy Dust (A. Hans Scheirl, UK, 1998)
Dear Lou Sullivan (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2014)
Detours and Fences (Malic Amalya, USA, 2012–2015)
Donkey Love (Daryl Stoneage, USA, 2012)
Edward II (Derek Jarman, UK, 1991)
Emma Claire & Golden Curlz (Shine Louise Houston, USA, 2014)
Ex Machina (Alex Garland, USA, 2015)
Farewell My Concubine (Chen Kaige, China, 1993)
Fenced Out (Paper Tiger Television with Neutral Zone and Fierce!, USA, 2001)
Finding Dory (Andrew Stanton, Angus MacLane, USA, 2016)
Fire Song (Adam Garnet Jones, Canada, 2015)
Flaming Ears (Ursula Puerrer, A. Hans Scheirl, Dietmar Schipek, Poland, 1992)
Game Face (Michiel Thomas, USA, 2015)
Gold Moon, Sharp Arrow (Malic Amalya, USA, 2012)
Going Here (Courtney Trouble, USA, 2014)
In Their Room: Berlin (Travis Mathews, USA, 2011)
I<3Boys (Sarah Barnard, USA, 2012)
Inside Deep Throat (Fenton Bailey, USA, 2005)
I Want Your Love (Travis Mathews, USA, 2012)
Interior. Leather Bar (James Franco, Travis Mathews, USA, 2013)
It Gets Messy in Here (Kai M. Green, 2011, USA)
Kiki (Sara Jordenö, Sweden/USA, 2016)
Kink Crusaders (Michael Skiff, USA, 2010)
Khush (Pratibha Parmer, UK, 1991)
La Visita (Mauricio Lopez, Chile, 2010)
L.A. Zombie (Bruce LaBruce, USA/Germany/France, 2010)
Metropolis (Fritz Lang, USA, 1927)
Mr. Angel (Dan Hunt, USA, 2013)
My Own Private Idaho (Gus Van Sant, USA, 1991)
Paris is Burning (Jenni Livingston, USA, 1990)
Poison (Todd Haynes, USA, 1991)
Portrait of Turner (Irene Gustafson, USA, 2009)
Predestination (The Spierig Brothers, USA, 2014)
Projecting the Body (Walter McIntosh, Australia, 2008)
Prometheus (Ridley Scott, USA, 2012)
Psychopathia Sexualis (Brett Wood, USA, 2006)
Queering Yoga (Ewan Duarte, USA, status in–production 2016, crowd–funding to complete)
Raising Ryland (Sarah Feeley, USA, 2015)
Resonance (Stephen Cummins and Simon Hunt, Australia, 1991)
RSVP (Laurie Lynd, USA, 1991)
Screaming Queens: the Riot at Compton’s Cafe (Susan Stryker, Victor Silverman, USA, 2005)
Sexing the Transman (Buck Angel, USA, 2011)
Sexing the Transman XXX, Volumes 1–4 (Buck Angel, USA, 2012–2014)
Sexing the Transman Downunder (E.P. Buck Angel, TBA)
Sexing the Transwoman (E.P. Buck Angel, TBA)
She Don’t Fade (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1991)
Shortbus (John Cameron Mitchell, Canada, 2006)
She Gone Rogue (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2012)
Showgirls (Paul Verhoeven, USA, 1995)
Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1991)
Sisterhood (Mikajlo Rankovic, USA, 2011)
Spiral Transition (Ewan Duarte, USA, 2010)
Swoon (Tom Kalin, USA, 1992)
Tangerine (Sean Baker, USA, 2015)
Tchindas (Pablo García Pérez de Lara, USA, 2015)
The Celluloid Closet (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, USA, 1995)
The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992)
The Danish Girl (Tom Hooper, USA, 2015)
The Hours and Times (Christopher Munch, USA, 1991)
The Living End (Gregg Araki, USA, 1992)
The Matrix (Lana Wachowskhi, Lilly Wachowskhi (as The Wachowskis), USA, 1999)
The Rocky Horror Picture Show (Jim Sharman, Australia, 1975)
The Thing (from Another World) (Christian Nyby, USA, 1951)
The Thing (John Carpenter, USA, 1982)
The Thing (Matthijs van Heijningen Jr., USA, 2011)
The Thing (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2011)
The Trans List (Timothy Greenfield–Sanders, USA, 2016)
Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, USA, 1991)
Toilet Training (Tara Mateik, USA, 2004)
Tomgirl (Jeremy Asher Lynch, USA, 2015)
To Type Out Your Name (Malic Amalya, USA, 2014)
Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1989)
Towards The Death of Cinema (Malic Amalya, USA, 2015)
Traditional Indigenous Values (Ruth Villensor, USA, 2009)
Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005)
Trans Boys (Ali Russell and Monique Schafter, Aus., 2012)
Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil (Morty Diamond, USA, 2007)
Transfiction (Johannes Sjöberg, UK, 2007)
52 Tuesdays (Sophia Hyde, Aus. 2013)
Two Spirits (Lydia Nibley, USA, 2010)
Undressing Vanessa (Matthew Pond, Australia, 2007)
Vanilla Sex (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1992)
Vaseline (Malic Amalya and Nathan Hill, USA, work–in–progress, 2015)
Vade the Poloni With the Matini ( (M)–elly Nio, Australia, 2008)
Velvet Goldmine (Todd Haynes, Australia, 1998)
Vessels (Arkasha Stevenson, USA, 2015)
Young Soul Rebels (Isaac Julien, UK, 1991)
Ziggy Montford and Ragged Dick or The Leather Daddy and the Bootblack (Ziggy Montford, USA, 2014).

TELEVISION SERIES
Game of Thrones (David Benioff, D.B. Weiss, USA, 2011– continuing in production)
Grey's Anatomy (Shonda Rhimes, USA, 2005– continuing in production)
Orphan Black (John Fawcett et al., USA, 2013– continuing in production)
Orange Is the New Black (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013– continuing in production)
Outlander (Ronald D. Moore, USA, 2014– continuing in production)
Sense8 (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015– continuing in production)
This Is Me (Rhys Ernst, USA, 2015)
Transparent (Jill Soloway, USA, 2014– continuing in production)
United States of Tara (Diablo Cody, USA, 2009–2011)

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE CURRENT DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Refereed Journal Articles

Refereed Book Chapters


SEMINAR AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2016

2015

2014


14. Invited participation in the TransQueer Methods Melbourne Masterclass, presented by Associate Professor Helen Hok–Sze Leung. Hosted by: Research Unit in Public Cultures and School of Culture and Communication at The University of Melbourne, and Cultural Typhoon Melbourne, 11 February 2014. In collaboration with Frontiers of Transnational Queer Studies Conference, 13–14 February 2014, Sydney, organized by The University of Sydney, Australian National University and The University of Melbourne.

2013

2012 16. “Transgender Representation in Contemporary Film”, organiser & chair, 30 December 2012, programmed to follow the Queer Fruits Film Festival transgender–focused documentary session during which Trans Boys (Russell and Schafter 2012) and Sexing the Transman (Angel 2011) screened on 30/12/12
REFERENCES


____(2014f). “Additional Interview with Ash”, viewed 9 April, 2015, 

331


______(1997). On the History of Film Style, Harvard University Press, USA.


Cettl, R. (2014). *Offensive to a Reasonable Adult Film Censorship & Classification in Australia*, Robert Cettl e–books, Shandong China; Adelaide.


_______(2016b).“Transliteracy and the Trans New Wave—Developing a New Canon of Cinematic Representations of Gender Diversity and Sexuality”, The Journal of Communication and Media


Franklin, M. D. (2010). “Spectacles in Transit: Reading Cinematic Productions of Biopower and Transgender Embodiment”, PhD Dissertation, Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, USA.


_______(2015d). The Wachowskis: Imaging Transgender (Working Title – Book Proposal), PDF provided by direct request to author via Academia.edu, 05 September 2015.


_________ (2007). “Archiving queer feelings in Hong Kong”, in Inter–Asian Cultural Studies, Volume 8, Issue 4, pp. 559-571.


______ (2013). *New Queer Cinema The Director’s Cut*, Duke University Press, USA.


361


362


366


White, R. (2013). *Contemporary Film Directors: Todd Haynes*, The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, USA.


Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear __________,

Hello in 2015. I am getting back in touch with you as a key filmmaker who screened at Queer Fruits Film Festival between 2009–2012. Please find an invitation to participate (by answering a short questionnaire via email) in a PhD research project on transgender films, that I have been involved in researching and writing since we were last in contact, at Southern Cross University (Australia).

I am currently getting in touch with filmmakers who either identify as trans filmmakers and/or have written, directed and produced films with trans themes, narratives and characters across genres and styles, that were screened by Queer Fruits Film Festival to ask if you would be interested in providing feedback on the filmmaking process (a short questionnaire is attached) and also to seek permission to utilise the publicity stills for the film to illustrate any discussion of your film within the PhD research.

I have Ethics Approval for the research project, with a number of key trans filmmakers supporting the project, so now contacting a wider range of filmmakers with further information about the thesis.

Please find attached an information sheet on the PhD (a PDF or your files) and the filmmaker questionnaire and permissions forms as Word .doc for ease of filling in and emailing back.

Most of these documents are simply tick 'yes' or 'no' and some questions may not be relevant (where this is the case just put a line through). Digital signatures are also ok.

I am incredibly appreciative of your support for QFFF. If there is anything that you think needs to be added to the questionnaire, or changed, please feel free to add/change or suggest. I aim to research and write a thesis that everyone can be proud and which adds to the awareness of trans filmmakers and filmmaking internationally.

I appreciate that you may wish to provide answers to the interview, but not be identified for reasons of privacy, this would be respected (see the Participant Consent sheet).

Films are identified by name. If you give permission for use of your film still in relation to the project, both the name of the film and your name as director, or producer, or writer will be identified and appear below the film still.

If you have written/directed/produced any new films of relevance to the research, I would greatly appreciate hearing about these.

Please note, I will be changing to my personal email: seshta@bigpond.com for all future correspondence, Your response is greatly appreciated and highly valued.

Kind Regards, Akkadía.
Appendix B: Information Sheet for Participants

Transgender Representation in Mainstream & Independent Films

Transgender films are of increasing significance nationally and internationally, both within the transgender and wider communities. This research project takes this opportunity to reflect upon the recent body of films within the ‘Trans New Wave’ of cinema, in comparison to the representations of transgender lives within mainstream films.

The researcher aims to produce a range of outcomes from this research:

· PhD Thesis
· scholarly papers and conference presentations;
· materials for a comprehensive timeline of transgender films

In this research process you have the ability to determine how your contribution may be used. This is very important. Your participation is voluntary, and information collected for this project will be carefully stored in accordance with SCU ethics requirements and used according to your wishes.

If you would like feedback on the results of this research you may indicate this on the Consent Form you will be asked to sign. Should you have any other questions about the ‘Transgender Representation in Mainstream & Independent Films’ research project feel free to contact the project researcher Akkadia Ford at any time.

Thank you in advance for your time and your assistance.

The researcher who is conducting this interview / focus group is Akkadia Ford and may be contacted by phone on +61 2 6687 1984 or by email at: seshta@bigpond.com;
or by email at: a.ford.30@student.scu.edu.au

This project is being supervised by senior academic staff at SCU who may be contacted.
The Principal Supervisor is Associate Professor Elizabeth Stephens, who may be contacted by email at: Elizabeth.Stephens@scu.edu.au

The Co-Supervisor is Dr. Erika Kerruish, who may be contacted by email at: erika.kerruish@scu.edu.au

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

The Ethics Approval numbers are: ECN-13-212; ECN-14-202.

*If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research or the researchers, the following procedure should occur:*

*Write to the following:*
*The Ethics Complaints Officer*
*Southern Cross University*
*PO Box 157, Lismore  NSW  2480  Email:  ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au*

*All information is confidential and will be promptly handled with courtesy.*
Appendix C: Interview Schedule for Informal and Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews will be based on prior research and questions arising from that research.

Indicative questions to filmmakers could include:

· What were your primary motivations for producing an independent transgender film? What processes did you/do you use for writing, directing and producing independent transgender films?
· What do you think makes an ‘independent film’?
· Did the classifications’ guidelines impact upon any creative decisions you made in regards to the film’s production?
· Are there any aspects of your film that you would change if you were making it now?
· Are you aware of the film classifications processes in your country?
· I have read in my research/you are quoted as saying … . Could you say more about this?
· In your estimation, what have been the major impacts of your film?
· In your estimation, what have been the major impacts of transgender filmmakers/films upon screen culture/audiences?

Note: answer questions as applicable to your experience as a filmmaker.

Please feel welcome to add any other comments on your experience as a filmmaker in relation to transgender films.

Indicative questions to film festival directors could include:

· How do you select the films screened in your festival programs?
· Do the classifications’ guidelines impact upon any creative/curatorial decisions you make in regards to the film festival program?
· Do you recall there being any specific issues in relation to classifications’ (ratings) requirements for screening Sexing the Transman?
· What ratio of transgender films do you screen in comparison to gay or lesbian films?
· What were your primary motivations for screening independent transgender films?
· How did the audiences at your festival receive the transgender films screened?

· Do you recall any specific audience feedback to your festival screening *Sexing the Transman*?

· Do you think that there are *tropes* (devices, motifs, metaphors, cliches), evident in the independent transgender films you have seen (whether your festival screened the films, or they were only seen by a selection panel at preview time)?

· In your estimation, what have been the major impacts/successes of your film festival?

Note: answer questions as applicable to your festival.

Please feel welcome to add any other comments on your experience as a Festival Director on programming transgender films.

**Indicative questions for focus groups could include:**

· Do you think that this film represents transgender persons/themes appropriately?

· Have you seen transgender persons/themes represented in this way in other films?

· In your estimation do you think that there are *tropes* (devices, motifs, metaphors, cliches), evident in independent transgender films?

· Are there things you would prefer not to be shown in films about transgender people?

· In your estimation, what are the major impacts/successes of this film?

· What has been your favourite transgender film/television show?

· Are there any topic/s that you wish a filmmaker would make a film about?
Appendix D: Consent Form for Participants

Consent Form for the Transgender Representation in Mainstream & Independent Film research project

Please tick the boxes that apply, then sign and date and give to the researcher.

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above

I understand the information about my participation in the research project which has been provided to me by the researchers

I agree to take part in an email and/or audio-taped and/or video-taped interview or focus group with the researcher

I agree to allow this interview to be used for:

· PhD Thesis
· scholarly articles
· conference presentations
· materials for a comprehensive timeline of transgender films

I agree to make myself available for further interview if required

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I can cease my participation at any time

I understand that (for participants in focus groups):

· any information that may identify me will be de-identified
· no identifying information will be disclosed or published
· others may be able to identify me through the information I provide

I understand that (for filmmaker/festival director participants):

· others may be able to identify me through the information I provide
· my name/film; my name/film festival affiliation may be disclosed or published
I understand that unless it is archived all information gathered in this research is kept securely for 7 years at Southern Cross University.  

I give permission for the information provided by me to be used in publications.  

I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries.  

Their contact details are provided to me.  

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee.  

Participant’s name: ______________________________________________________  

Participant’s signature: ____________________________________________________ Date: __________________________  

Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive a summary of the results: Email/address: ___________________________________________________________
TALENT RELEASE/PERMISSION TO USE

This consent is given on ________________ day of ________________

To
Southern Cross University, a body incorporated under the Southern Cross University Act 1993 (NSW), of Military Road, East Lismore, NSW 2480, Australia (University)

From
Name: .............................................................................................................
Address: ...........................................................................................................
Telephone: ......................... (Author/Performer)

Event/Activity

1. The Author/Performer agrees to participate in the Event/Activity and acknowledges that the University will:
   - take photographs;
   - make a sound recording;
   - make an audio/visual recording,
   of the Author/Performer and/or the Event/Activity (Recording).

2. The Author/Performer agrees that the University may, in its absolute discretion, or subject to any special conditions noted below:
   (a) use the Author/Performer's name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with the Event/Activity and the Recording;
   (b) reproduce in a material form in any format, publish, cause to be seen and heard in public and/or communicate to the public, the Recording or any part of the Recording; and
   (c) sell, let for hire, or by way of trade offer or expose for sale or hire, the Recording or any part of the Recording.

3. The Author/Performer acknowledges that, unless otherwise agreed in writing, he or she will receive no fee or payment in connection with the Event/Activity or the Recording (including in connection with the University's use of the Recording).

4. The Author/Performer releases the University, its servants and agents from any claim made by the Author/Performer arising out of any loss, damage, accident or injury as a result of the Event/Activity and the Recording.

5. The University acknowledges that:
   (a) this form does not operate as an assignment of rights subsisting in any works (as that term is defined in the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)) owned or controlled by the Author/Performer; and
   (b) any personal information (as that term is defined in the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)) collected by the University in connection with the Event/Activity or the Recording will be handled in accordance with the University's applicable privacy policies and procedures.
   (c) If the Author/Performer is under the age of 18 years at the date of signing, the signature of the Author/Performer's parent/legal guardian is also required.

SIGNED by the AUTHOR/PERFORMER in the presence of:

Witness

SIGNED by the PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN in the presence of:

Witness

Author/Performer

Parent/legal guardian

Name of parent/legal guardian (please print)

Special conditions (if any):
1. ....................................................................................................................
2. ....................................................................................................................
PERMISSIONS RELEASE FORM - USE OF FILM MEDIA

I (name)_________________________________________(‘the filmmaker’)

Title: (circle as relevant Director; Executive Producer; Producer)
of (address)__________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

Telephone & email:____________________________________________

Hereby grant permission for the use of my original creative media (‘the media’) Film Title:

Film Title_______________________________________________________

publicity stills, film and audio material in the format/s provided to ‘the researcher’
(circle as relevant . jpg; Quicktime Movie; DVD; Mp4; other format (           )

and I hereby grant Akadia Ford (‘the researcher’) a non-exclusive restricted license to reproduce, publish, exhibit and utilise ‘the media’ only in relation to the PhD thesis “Transgender Representation in Mainstream & Independent Films” (Southern Cross University, Australia). Information Sheet attached.

I acknowledge that use of ‘the media’ will only be for the purpose of being published within the PhD thesis and may also include the following uses:

- PhD Thesis Yes No
- scholarly articles Yes No
- conference presentations Yes No
- materials for a comprehensive timeline of transgender films Yes No

It is acknowledged that Akadia Ford (‘the researcher’) holds no rights in the copyright of ‘the media’ and that ______________________ (‘filmmaker’) will be fully credited for ‘the media’ according to the name_position/title provided on
this form. This credit will be prominently placed under any ‘Figure’, ‘Filmography’, ‘Footnotes’, ‘References’, or ‘Bibliography’ within the thesis where ‘the filmmakers’ work/media is referenced, with the words “Reproduced courtesy of ‘the filmmaker’”.

I acknowledge that there is no fee of for ‘the media’ to be used within the scholarly contexts outlined.

This permission release signed (digital signature can be used)

by (name)______________________(signature)__________________________

on__________________________Production Position/Title__________________

The following person witnessed this signature (optional)

(name of witness)______________(signature)___________(date)_____________

2013 Film Festivals *Buck Angel personal appearances.
1. Brussels, Belgium: Nov. 7–16, 2013 | Pink Screens
2. Barcelona, Spain: Oct 18, 2013 | Cultura Trans
4. North Carolina, USA: Aug 9–18, 2013 | NC Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
5. Wellington, New Zealand: May 30–June 9, 2013 | Out Takes Film Festival
6. Auckland, New Zealand: May 23, 2013 | Out Takes Film Festival
7. Seattle Washington, USA: May 9–12, 2013 | The Seattle Transgender Film Festival
8. Amsterdam, Netherland: May 8–12, 2013 | Amsterdam Transgender Film Festival
9. Bologna, Italy: May 2–5, 2013 | 6th International Transgender Film Festival
10. Kiel, Germany: March 21–March 23, 2013 | Transgender Film Festival

2011-2012 Film Festivals
13. Byron Bay, Australia: December 29–30, 2012 | Queer Fruits International Film Festival
14. Hong Kong, China: November 16–Dec 4, 2012 | Hong Kong LGBT Film Festival
15. *Minneapolis, USA: November 13, 2012 | Out Twin Cities Film Festival
16. *Berlin, Germany: October 25, 2012 | Berlin Porn Film Festival
17. *Hannover, Germany: October 24, 2012 | Hannover Queer Film Festival
18. Taipei, Taiwan: October 12–21, 2012 | 19th Women Make Waves Film Festival
19. *Dublin, Ireland: August 2–6, 2012| GAZE:Dublin International LGBT Film Festival
20. San Francisco USA: June 17 | Frameline36 International LGBT film festival
21. Tel Aviv, Israel: June 9–16, 2012 | Tel Aviv International LGBTQ Film Festival
22. São Paulo, Brazil: May, 2012 | POPPORN Film Festival
23. London, UK: March 28–30, 2012 | BFI LGBT Film Festival
24. Melbourne, Australia: March 15, 2012 | Melbourne Queer Film Festival
25. *Winnipeg, Canada February 16, 2012 | University Of Winnipeg
26. New York, USA: February 11, 2012 | CineKink Film Festival
27. Los Angeles, USA: November 10, 2011 | LA Transgender Film Festival
28. *Copenhagen, Denmark: August 11, 2011 | MIX Film Festival
Appendix H: Selected Publication


* Author pre-print version (in Screen Bodies format Chicago style).

Whose Club Is It Anyway?: The Problematic of Trans Representation in Mainstream Films, “Rayon,” and Dallas Buyers Club

Abstract: Dallas Buyers Club (Jean-Marc Vallee 2013) offers a stereotypical, trope–filled representation of trans that does not fit contemporary gender–diverse communities, creating negative images and damaging connotations that will last for years. The reality of Rayon’s (Jared Leto) world in the film is temporally displaced and far removed from the world of many contemporary trans people, in a time when transgender rights and recognition are increasing daily. Yet the depiction of Rayon is the image that has been acknowledged and awarded (Academy Awards, Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild Awards 2014) and is what the majority of audiences around the world will come to view as representative of transgender people. This paper explores the stereotypical characterization and narrative devices deployed to create the fictitious character of Rayon in Dallas Buyers Club, exploring the ongoing problematic of trans representation within mainstream texts, with reference to The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992), Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999), and Transamerica (Duncan Tucker Tucker, USA, 2005). To contextualize the ongoing issues raised by the text, Rayon is analyzed as one character in a long line of socially proscribed Hollywood “fallen women” (Jacobs 1997), with narrative displaced onto the transgender body. This article is first publication of use of the ‘fallen woman’ genre to theoretically position trans representation in mainstream cinema.

Keywords: Trans, “Fallen Women,” Rayon, Dallas Buyers Club, Jared Leto
On March 2nd, 2014 as Jared Leto was awarded the screen industry’s highest accolade, an Academy Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role, he received a standing ovation from the audience — in what was a popular win with Hollywood. As Leto accepted the award he gave a heartfelt and gently–spoken speech:

```
incredible...so proud to share this journey with you...to all the dreamers out there...
in places like the Ukraine and Venezuela...we are here and as you struggle...we are
thinking of you tonight...this is...for the 36 million people who have lost the battle to
AIDS...to those of you out there who have ever felt injustice because of who you are,
or who you love, tonight I stand here in front of the world with you...
```

(Jared Leto, 2014 Academy Award acceptance speech, Italics added).¹

Whilst Leto was awarded for his depiction of the transsexual character Rayon in *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean-Marc Vallee, 2013), despite his politicized acceptance speech and rightly acknowledging the millions who had died from AIDS around the world, Leto made a gaping omission. Significantly he failed to thank or recognize the transgender, or transsexual community.

**THE PROBLEMATICS OF MAINSTREAM FILM**

*Dallas Buyers Club*

*Dallas Buyers Club* is a feature–length film (117 minutes), classed as “Biography/Drama/History” (IMDB 2013a), using traditional Hollywood genre conventions, fictional narrative structures and filming styles to convey the ‘real’ story of Ron Woodroof, portrayed as a heterosexual rodeo cowboy credited with establishing a HIV medications Buyers Club in Dallas, after being given a bleak prognosis of ‘about thirty days to live’ (Borten and Wallack 2012: 11). The film is set in the midst of the 1985 AIDS crisis in America, a time noted for hostility to homosexuals and in denial of AIDS (Kinsella 1989: 3). This was one of the most devastating episodes of twentieth century politics and history for gay and transsexual people. *Dallas Buyers Club* serves as a powerful reminder of the historical and social backgrounds in which mainstream films continue the hegemonic stereotyping of narratives and characters. The setting of the movie alternates between the heterosexual rodeo culture of Texas and the authoritative wrangling of the characters between the hegemonic establishment settings of hospital, pharmaceutical companies, police and jurisprudence.

The portrayal of Rayon provides an invaluable insight into the representation and misrepresentation of transgender in contemporary cinema and the narrative and stylistic tropes that such narratives employ to make the story salable and readable for mainstream distribution and cinema audiences. This is so that films meet mainstream audience expectations onscreen, which equals box office income. Through critical engagement with *Dallas Buyers Club* and comparison with
other contemporary films which have narrative treatments of trans themes and lives, it becomes apparent that due to the heteronormativity of the film classifications (ratings) processes, the hegemonic positioning of Hollywood in relation to general audiences and the economic basis of the screen industry focused upon general audiences, mainstream movies remain problematic textual sites for trans representation.

Within this article *trans* is used as an inclusive, non–essentialist term. The specificity of the term trans within western settings (Binaohan 2014) does not take into account the wide range of cultural and affective relationships of people to their bodies within non–hegemonic settings across space and time. As this article is focused upon a mainstream film, written, directed, produced and awarded within the hegemonic film industry of Hollywood in the twenty first century, about western–born white characters, the term trans is appropriately utilized as a descriptor for Rayon.

The characterisation of Rayon is problematic within the written screenplay and in the subsequent film, especially for audiences in reading Rayon as a person. This is because Rayon is described and written within the screenplay as a “cross–dresser” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 21 Scene 30), with the screenwriters then using male pronouns throughout the script in regards to Rayon, displaying not only their transphobia, but their ignorance of how Rayon’s identity will be perceived by twenty first century audiences. Rayon is then portrayed onscreen by Jared Leto as a transsexual—Rayon does not simply dress in women’s clothes (the definition of a ‘cross–dresser’ as used in the screenplay, or the problematised term ‘transvestite’); Rayon lives, acts, walks, talks, works and loves as a trans woman, with her femininity early in the stages of transitioning within the film.

Despite the themes of the film—centred upon AIDS, sourcing of HIV medications out of dire necessity illegally across the border in Mexico and the subcultural communities of gay men and trans people, the director was able to cast marquee name actors in the leading and supporting roles, with Matthew McConaughey as Ron Woodroof, Jared Leto as Rayon and Jennifer Garner as Dr. Eve Saks. Both McConaughey and Leto were subsequently awarded Oscars and Golden Globes for Best Performance in their respective roles.

Though heavily awarded by the screen industry, the film provoked considerable ongoing controversy, with a backlash from the trans community internationally against the representation of the fictionalized transsexual character of Rayon within the narrative. Rayon (Jared Leto) was described as “anti–trans” (Tannehill 2014), ‘offensive’, ‘super transphobic’ and the producers ‘a bunch of wankers’ from within the trans community at the time the film was released (Facebook messages 08 March 2014, names withheld). Representing trans through the image “…of a patient awaiting treatment” (Califia 2003: xl), Rayon continues a long history of the disenfranchising treatment and portrayal of transpeople in mainstream film and society: “In medical and feminist discourses, transsexuals are stereotyped as patients…” awaiting, or undergoing sex reassignment surgery (Califia 2003:1).

The film was produced at a time in mainstream cinema when there is a shortage of substantive texts dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (GLBTIQ) themes and, in particular, a rarity in the mainstream of texts with transgender characters and narratives. It is acknowledged, in the three years since the film was released, that there have been mainstream screen
texts released online via subscription video on demand services (SVOD), that are portraying trans characters in affirming narratives, played by trans actresses. This includes Laverne Cox in *Orange is The New Black* (Jenji Kohan, USA, 2013–) and Jamie Clayton in *Sense8* (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, USA, 2015–). While the online screen world moves forward at a rapid pace in representation of gender-diversity, the world of the mainstream theatrical release remains out of touch with cultural trends.

This article is situated within the broader disciplines of screen, media and cultural studies and the critical field of contemporary trans cinema scholarship that includes exemplars Jack Halberstam, Eliza Steinbock, Anthony Clair Wagner, Jonathan Williams, Wibke Straube, Joelle Ruby Ryan, Cáel Keegan who have all written significant contributions to developing a trans-informed, transactivist scholarship on cinematic representation in film and television series.

**PERFORMING TRANS**

The screen performance/character portrayals associated with the narrative traditions (Baron and Carnicke 2008:7) of feature film, and in particular of drama, biography and history, as used in creating the narrative of *Dallas Buyers Club*, demand a high level of performance preparation and commitment to character portrayal onscreen. This was recognised in 2014 when *Dallas Buyers Club* won all the major awards in Hollywood. The huge tally included fifty awards and thirty nominations (IMDB 2013b), including the prestigious Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Academy Award to McConaughey); Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role (Academy Award to Leto); Best Achievement in Makeup and Hairstyling (Academy Award) and the equivalent awards at the Golden Globes, and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards. In addition, the film won a Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture (IMDB 2013b).

Whilst only appearing in approximately half of the film (entering in Scene 30, exiting in Scene 119), the characterisation of Rayon (Jared Leto) within the text presents a range of stereotypical representations and negative tropes about transgender people in general and transwomen in particular. The writers held off on only a few intersectional depictions (age/ethnicity/ability) in creating Rayon. The character is positioned in terms of being a socially ostracised and marginalised person, with HIV/AIDS, at a time in 1985 when social panic consider HIV to be a highly contagious virus, contractible through casual contact and a pathologised terminal disability. Not only is the representation stereotypical and trope-driven, such a depiction emphasises the “failure” of the non-normative, queer and transed body in society (Halberstam 2011; Keegan 2014).

Whilst the character of Rayon has no direct equivalent in mainstream cinema, there are cinematic precedents for the treatment of gender-diverse and trans characters. These include texts such as *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, USA, 1992), in which a mysterious nightclub singer Dil has a gender ‘secret’; *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999), a biographical feature film based upon the life of transmale youth Brandon Teena, who was violated and murdered; and *Transamerica* (Duncan Tucker, USA, 2005), a fictional feature film focused upon the narrative of Bree, a trans...
woman on the eve of her long-awaited gender confirmation surgery. Unlike *Dallas Buyers Club*, the characters of Dil in *The Crying Game* and Bree in *Transamerica* were conceptualized as trans within the screenplays and this plays out onscreen with clear trans-centered performances. In *Boys Don’t Cry* Brandon presents a different trans characterization than Rayon and in a different time period. This is because the fictionalized character is biographical, based upon the life and murder of a young trans man Brandon Teena in 1993.

In texts *Boys Don’t Cry* and *Transamerica* there is also geographic movement. In *Boys Don’t Cry* Brandon moves to the small town in which he is subsequently violently ‘exposed’ (Halberstam 2001), violated and murdered. *Transamerica* uses the road trip genre, a transitional narrative device utilized in cinema that represents “transition as a geographic trope” (Prosser 1998:5). This is one of three key “symbolic representations of dysphoria” (Keegan 2013:3) identifiable within films with trans narratives. For Bree, the road trip narrative represents a “body that journeys from negative to redemptive affect” (Keegan 2013:2). Following Jay Prosser (1998), scholars have continued to develop theorization of the road trip and narratives of geographic movement as significant to representations of trans (Cotton 2011; Keegan 2013; Ford 2014; Kunzel 2014). Bree learns that she has a son from an earlier relationship and the therapist insists that Bree acknowledge her son, before signing off on Bree’s surgery.

**HOLLYWOOD TROPES**

Whilst superficially these films may appear to have little in common with *Dallas Buyers Club* and are separated by two decades, during which the trans community won significant legal, cultural and social advances, a closer exegesis reveals interesting comparative theoretical contexts. This includes a recognizable Hollywood negative story arc for non–heteronormative and non–hegemonically gendered characters, first outlined by Vito Russo (1981) and subsequently documented onscreen in *The Celluloid Closet* (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, USA, 1995). Through Rayon being the first character to die in *Dallas Buyers Club*, the film falls into a vicious Hollywood trope of killing off gay and marginalized characters (Russo 1981; Epstein 1995). This also follows established genre rules and narrative traditions formed within a Hollywood cinematic subgenre called the ‘Fallen Woman’ (Jacobs 1997: x), in which female characters who do not subscribe to normative lifestyles and gender expectations ascribed to their perceived gender roles (of family life, as a wife and mother), end up on the street, suffer humiliations and die before the film ends. This is a cinematic way of bringing the audience back into a state of ‘wholesomeness’, of hegemonic control, which has been an underlying moral of cinema and imperative of censorship since the advent of sound (Wittern–Keller 2013: 17, 18, 21). The message is clear, if you are an outsider (read outside the hegemonic repro–hetero/nuclear family structure, outside hegemonic defined gender/sexual roles), you will not last in society.

This narrative is clearly recognizable, transposed onto gender–diverse individuals in mainstream films with trans characters, including *Dallas Buyers Club*. Following this narrative cycle, the homosexual, lesbian and gender non–conforming character suffers during the narrative and dies before...
MISREPRESENTING THE TRANS BODY AS ‘FALLEN’

Within *Dallas Buyers Club*, Rayon’s position within society is insinuated as a sex worker through costume, gesture, mannerisms and positionality in relation to Woodroof and the cis–gay and transsexual communities. Rayon in persona as a ‘working girl’ wears a short skirt, ripped stockings and walks in high heels, sometimes stumbling along seeming dazed (implying drug use), hands on her hips as she walks towards the car in which Woodroof sits. Rayon is then shown leaning in over the window, a common gestural posture for a working girl soliciting a client, before getting into the car. In this scene money and insults are exchanged as they discuss the selling of HIV/AIDS medications to Rayon’s friends (Borten and Wallack 2012: 38–39, Scene 57).

This depiction of Rayon further represents trans in a demoralizing, negative light; involved in what was a criminalized occupation in the 1980s and for mainstream society and audiences – would still be considered a distasteful and ‘outsider’ occupation. When nearly every media portrayal of a transgender woman is as someone who is incapable, sad, and/or pathetic, it makes it that much harder for us to be taken seriously and dig ourselves out of the hole we're in (Tannehill 2014).

These depictions of Rayon: as a patient awaiting treatment and as a sex–worker, position Rayon as marginalized, an outsider engaged in a criminal occupation; a user of illegal drugs (further criminalizing the depiction) and living with a deadly disease. These combined representations burden the narrative of *Dallas Buyers Club* and communicate to mainstream audiences the disheartening, misleading messages that transgender people are ‘sick’, ‘need treatment’ and are ‘criminals’. These messages communicated via the medium of a fiction film and outside the context of the actual lives of trans people are dangerous. The necessity for transpeople to seek treatment (including for gender confirmation procedures), or during periods of ill health (including HIV in many countries) and that many trans people around the world are sex workers/users of street drugs including hormones and subjected to daily violence and discrimination is extensively documented by scholars including Joseli Maria Silva (et al. 2014) in relation to Latina transwomen and by Beau Molnar in respect of transmen (Molnar 2014). These scholars have immersive experiences in the lives of the people they are writing about. Molnar frames his discussion of transmale sex work within terms used by sex workers as “radical sexuality by choice or necessity” (2014: 5), speaking of the “relative invisibility of the emotional and affective labour” (2014: 8) of sex workers, backgrounded against the HIV and sex work activism of many contemporary trans men and women. This is critical in positioning what such work means to the people involved.

It is also a powerful reminder that many sex workers are activists and that in *Dallas Buyers Club*, whilst Rayon is on the front–lines of connecting HIV medications with gay and trans people,
This is not depicted as an activist work, but as an activity that she engages in simply for profit, undercutting the immense meaning of her labor. Such information is utilized within the fictionalized and sensationalized form of a feature film, displaced from gender-diverse lives and communities, lacking a transliterate (Ford 2014, 2016) understanding of how these serious issues impact trans people’s lives as a result of systemic oppression. When garnished with cinematic tropes, a stereotypical characterization such as Rayon results—this is what happens in *Dallas Buyers Club*.

This representation of Rayon—a transwoman, positions the depiction within the Hollywood genre of “the fallen woman”, traditionally “...a woman who commits a sexual transgression...is expelled from the domestic space of the family and undergoes a protracted decline. Alone on the streets she becomes an outcast—often a prostitute—suffering various humiliations which usually culminate in her death” (Jacobs 1997: x). This ‘fall’, from a middle-class family to the streets, is explicitly indicated towards the end of the film in Scene 110 (Borten and Wallack 2012: 73a–74), when Rayon dressed in male attire (a business suit she borrows from Ron Woodroof), visits her father—a bank manager—in order to secure funds to continue the work of the Buyers’ Club (by cashing in a life insurance policy).

In reading Rayon in this way, as one character in a long line of socially proscribed Hollywood ‘fallen women’, with narrative displaced onto the transgender body, the history of classification (rating) systems in America and the role and impact these systems have had—and still have—upon mainstream film production is demonstrated and situated within historical and cinematic representational contexts. This is because the ‘fallen woman’ genre is particularly noted as a means by which producers have historically ‘dealt’ with a range of narrative depictions of ‘outsiders’ in mainstream film—enabling Motion Picture Association of America approval and theatrical release. This genre illustrates “…how Hollywood’s internal censorship mechanism produced negotiated representations of women at the level of image and narrative” (Bordwell and Carroll 1996:29).

Lea Jacobs’ 1986 doctoral thesis (published as a book in 1991 and 1997) highlights the significance of ‘the fallen woman’ genre of storytelling within mainstream cinema:

…because such films helped to define the limits of what was permissible, especially in the realm of sexuality. Many of the MPPDa’s rules for handling stories which involved so-called sexual deviance were specifically elaborated in terms of this genre...By focusing on a genre, we can systematically trace the permutations of narrative conventions instigated by censorship (1997: x, footnote added).

That Hollywood films use specific genres as shorthand for selling stories to audiences is well–established across films (Bordwell, Thompson and Ashton, 1997; Neale 2000; Bordwell 2006; McWilliam 2009). The representation of Rayon problematizes the position of transpeople within society, presenting an implication to audiences that transpeople are ‘fallen’. This is because the majority of general audiences may never (consciously) meet and interact with a trans person in everyday life, or understand trans lives and from screen representations may form negative and
incorrect assumptions. The characterization of Rayon also serves to position the character of Ron Woodroof heroically within the film.

Significantly, the film uses different genres for specific elements of the story (characterization, story arc, story world). The primary story arc (main story) follows the heterosexual character of Ron Woodroof on a ‘hero quest’ used so frequently by screenwriters in Hollywood (Vogler 1992), deriving from the work of Joseph Campbell (1949), with ‘mentor figures’ such as Dr. Eve Saks (Jennifer Garner) and Dr. Vass (in Mexico) (Griffin Dunne). Though positioned as the ‘hero’ in this narrative, Woodroof’s character is written and portrayed anti–heroically (he uses recreational drugs, has unprotected sex with multiple partners, lives in a trailer). The secondary and parallel storyline involving Rayon, uses the ‘fallen woman’ genre to characterize her story. There are also subplots involving the gay and transsexual communities who become members of the Buyer’s Club. As well, the film uses a mixture of stylistic elements, including some from the “Rodeo Film” a sub–genre of Hollywood Westerns (Lusted 2014: 228) (characterization, costume, dialogue, rodeo and bar settings). Narrative elements and style are also derived from the “Medical Drama” genre as the (anti) hero quest of Ron unfolds within the authoritative settings of the hospital and courtroom. There are further ethical implications for use of aspects of the Western genre (and Rodeo sub–genre) which contains elements of homosexual–cowboy subtext readable for some audiences, in relation to the construction of the character of Ron Woodroof as a proudly heterosexual rodeo/cowboy. According to Downing  Saxton (2010:13) “The cowboy is the figure whose intimate connection to his own end, and the knowledge of it as a limit–point, makes any act of protection or sacrifice a pure act in and of itself...” From early in the film, Woodroof knows he is going to die. Positioning Woodroof as a rodeo/cowboy on a hero’s quest and Rayon as a street sex worker—both ‘outsider’ figures—holds ethical implications for how the story arc of Dallas Buyers Club unfolds through the contrasting endings of both characters.

In addition, framing the overall film as ‘biography/drama/history’ ‘authenticates’ the story (despite major elements being fictional). Major issues in this mixture of genres and styles of the heterosexual main plot, a transsexual secondary storyline, gay/trans subplots, all of which weaves the narrative between opposing gendered and sexual worlds, hegemonies and subcultures. This creates tension and conflict within the story. However this mixture of genres may also provide a rationale for the range of spectator responses (Hsu 2006), particularly the visceral, negative responses from within the trans community and differences in audience reception, which Dallas Buyers Club has generated

In Dallas Buyers Club, like many cinematic ‘fallen women’ before her, Rayon, a trans woman, is depicted on the streets, on drugs and terminally ill and dies about thirty minutes before the film ends. In Boys Don’t Cry, whilst the film is focused upon a young trans man Brandon Teena, the genre conventions identified within the ‘fallen woman’ are also unexpectedly recognizable through close exegesis; this time transposed onto a transmasculine body. Brandon lives in a small town, where he is an outsider; he is vilified, violated and murdered for failing to conform to societal expectations of gender and sexed embodiment.

Whilst the Brandon Teena story is biographical, based upon the life story of a transmale youth who was brutally murdered in Nebraska in 1993, it cannot be overlooked that the 1999 feature film
appears to share narrative structures and characteristics identifiable within the fallen woman genre—
whilst carefully acknowledging the different gendering of Rayon (a trans woman) and Brandon (a
trans man). Reading these two films carefully in tandem reveals how the genre conventions of the
‘fallen woman’, whilst gendered as female in the twentieth century, may be shifted across genders and
sexualities as a genre. In these films the main character is positioned as an ‘outsider’ or an outcast
from society, vilified for not conforming to hegemonic gender/sexual expectations and suffers
accordingly for living their life as an individual. In the time the Fallen Woman genre originated (the
1920s–1940s), women were the primary target for vilification if they failed to conform to hegemonic
expectations. This does not foreclose new interpretations of this genre across genders and sexualities
and the cinematic transposition of genre conventions in the twenty first century onto the screen bodies
of trans women and trans men.

Significantly, themes of money are noted within the fallen woman genre. In early Hollywood
films there is the ‘gold digger’ female character who attaches herself to a strong and financially
attractive man and from this liaison, gains access to what is considered to be ‘ill–gained’ money. In
other narratives within this genre, on the street sex–work, or other societally disapproved avenues of
obtaining money are implied. (Jacobs 1997). This theme is clearly discernible within Dallas Buyers
Club, where money is obtained through the sale of on the street of HIV/AIDS medicines not approved
by the FDA and through the sale of Rayon’s life insurance policy due to her terminal illness with HIV/
AIDS. In Brandon Teena’s story, though not made explicit within the feature film version, based upon
an earlier documentary (The Brandon Teena Story, Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdóttir, USA, 1998),
there were issues of money being fraudulently obtained by Brandon, through cashing of ‘fake
cheques’ and use of credit cards (Sloop 2000), all this taking place in a low–income, geographically
isolated small town.

Indicative of the ongoing problematics of trans representation in mainstream cinema, the
Fallen Woman genre, though long outdated and unacceptable for narratives centered upon women,
may now be clearly identified as reappearing in the mainstream in late twentieth and early twenty first
century films as a disciplinary narrative structure, transposed onto gender non–conforming bodies. The
representation of Rayon provides a key textual example of how the genre of the fallen woman
is transposed onto the trans body.

TRANSFACING

Salient issues are also raised within these texts by the casting of non–trans actors and actresses to play
trans characters, a practice called “transface” (Reynolds 2015). This raises comparisons with the now–
rejected and discredited practice of ‘blackface’. In this practice white actors wearing black face paint
portrayed African American characters and non–indigenous actors portrayed First Nations characters,
a practice that was common throughout Hollywood and early cinema. In regards to onscreen trans
representations it has been observed that “It is no longer acceptable to cast cross– racially, so why is it
acceptable to cast someone who is not transgender in a transgender role?” (Rohwer 2014).

387
While Bree in *Transamerica* is a transwoman played by a non–trans female actress, Felicity Huffman—raising similar issues to Jared Leto playing Rayon; the depiction of Bree (and Huffman playing Bree), did not arouse the strong anti–sentiments and criticism that were raised by Leto playing Rayon. This is possibly because Huffman, a woman, was cast in the role of Bree, a trans woman. The character of Brandon Teena, a transmale youth in *Boys Don’t Cry* is similarly played by a non–trans female actress Hilary Swank. In each of these three texts, an actor or actress from a privileged background (white, non–trans) plays a marginalized trans character onscreen. Swank’s portrayal of Brandon Teena was also criticized from within the trans community and, like Leto was simultaneously awarded an Academy Award—Swank was awarded as Best Actress in 2000 (IMDB 1999).

In the fourth textual example, *The Crying Game*, the character of Dil a trans character, is played by a gay actor with a Ghanaian background (Jaye Davidson). While the film became known for the ‘big secret’ (the gender plot twist involving Dil), Davidson’s portrayal of Dil did not arouse the criticisms of Swank playing Brandon Teena, or Leto playing Rayon. This could be because of the intersectional background of the actor (within the cis–gay community, from a Ghanaian family). These observations give pause for consideration of issues of spectatorship and the rationale of why general audiences responded affirmatively to the character of Bree and why trans audiences responded negatively to the character of Rayon. This demonstrates the normative subjectivity of general audiences and mainstream filmmakers.

In *Transamerica*, Bree is a character that is sympathetically created, conservatively portrayed and positioned in a story arc centered upon reconciliation with a previously unknown son, whom Bree attempts to get off drugs and away from street sex work. To do this, Bree poses as a plainly dressed, christian missionary, an example of a group who have a “deep stake in maintaining the gender–binary” (Stryker 2008:27), on a road trip aimed at helping the young man (the son who is unaware until late in the film that Bree is his parent). The road trip genre in this film serves, not only as a trope of geographic trans migration, but as a journey of family redemption, an acceptable narrative for mainstream hegemonic audiences.

**THE ROLE OF ‘EXPOSURE’ SCENES IN TRANS NARRATIVES**

The ‘exposure’ scene or narrative (Halberstam 2001; 2005, p 77, 78; Zagler 2011; Keegan 2013, p. 6; Keegan 2015), a central part of films with gender–diverse and trans characters, in which the body of the trans person is laid bare for spectators, takes place in *Transamerica* when Bree needs to use a bathroom and the son walks in, briefly glimpsing male genitalia in side profile. This is similar to the ‘exposure’ scene in *The Crying Game*, when Fergus (Stephen Rea) takes Dil back to a hotel room and Dil disrobes, revealing a male–coded body, much to Fergus’s shock. Notably, Bree does not die at the end of *Transamerica*, validating mainstream views that if an individual affirms normative values (monotheistic religion, gender–binary family structures, an anti–drugs and anti–sex work positionality), then a person has an enduring place in society.

In short, Bree is the opposite to Rayon, who is outside the family, on drugs, on the street and a
sex—worker, implying that Rayon lives (or has lived) a sexually uninhibited life. This is opposite to the journey of trans bodies in geographic transitional narratives (Keegan 2013:2). Rayon’s story arc is about a body that has no redemptive journey, on a downward spiral of negative affect.

In Dallas Buyers Club, several exposure scenes are present within the text. Towards the end of the film Rayon undresses in front of a mirror (removing the suit she borrowed from Woodroof) and views her emaciated body, stating that “I’m gonna look pretty if it’s the last thing I do” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 74 Scene 110a). The mirror scene is another of the key narrative devices used within cinematic and literary traditions to represent dysphoria (Keegan 2013: 3). This scene reveals Rayon’s body to the audience, who are clearly shown that Rayon does not have breasts. This exposure scene, which takes place in front of a mirror, challenges audiences with the complexities of trans representation.

Rayon’s positionality is implied within the text as a transsexual, who may wish to have gender—confirmation surgery, yet this is problematized in this scene. Cheetaking (2014) notes the necessity for hormone therapy pre—surgery, not suggested by the appearance of Rayon’s body. What could be added here—is that this is the appearance of Rayon’s body at this time. The comments by Cheetaking may not take into account the counter—effect that HIV medications—and specifically AZT — have had upon Rayon’s appearance as evidenced by her emaciated body in the mirror scene. This scene could also be read through the screenwriters’ conceptualization of Rayon as a “cross—dresser” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 21 Scene 30), although this does not play out onscreen with Leto. Susan Stryker provides further insight into the complexities of the term ‘cross—dresser’, while this is “A term intended as a non—judgmental replacement for “transvestite”…The practice of cross—dressing can have many meanings and motivations: Besides being a way to resist or move away from an assigned social gender, it could be a theatrical practice…part of fashion or politics” (2008:17–18).

On a deeper social level, the exposure of Rayon that takes place during the narrative in Scene 110 (Borten and Wallack 2012: 73a–74) is far—reaching in implications. In this scene, Rayon is dressed in men’s clothes when she visits her father (a bank manager), in order to sell her life insurance policy, to access funds for the Buyers Club. This scene presents one of the more troubling character exposures within the text and also within mainstream films with trans characters. Here, Rayon is emotionally exposed, shown at her most vulnerable. Rejected from her biological family, Rayon’s picture is excluded from the family pictures on her father’s wall. The father is embarrassed by her presence. The discomfort of this scene is intensified by erasure of Rayon as a person through having to wear ill—fitting men’s clothes (one of Ron Woodroof’s suits) and appear as ‘male’ (Ray), in order to bypass the gaze of bank employees in order to gain access to her father. This is a devastating scene, which implicates how normative society crushes the ‘personhood’ (Stryker 2008; Bettcher 2014; Bettcher 2015) of trans people through enforcing conformity. It could be argued that this is the only scene in the film where Rayon actually ‘cross—dresses’. Throughout this scene, Rayon has a submissive body posture—unlike her sassy gestures and postures earlier in the film; now shoulders slumped, she sits opposite her father, whilst he berates her and she has to plead—with her life, for money.
MISGENDERING MATTERS

The screenplay is written in a transphobic manner throughout, with only masculine pronouns used in reference to Rayon. This continues in the confused onscreen characterisation of Rayon, who is described as—and spoken to within the film by other characters—in terms of ‘he’, ‘his’ and ‘him’. This misgendering and misidentification is evident from the first time Rayon enters the narrative at Scene 30 of the screenplay: “Sitting on an examining table, meet RAYON, a cross–dresser in his early 30s, in long eyelashes, earrings, painted nails with a pink scarf tied around a full brown curly wig” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 21 Scene 30). This scene continues, with Rayon depicted as more interested in the neckline of her blouse, than the results of the AZT study (Borten and Wallack 2012: 22 Scene 30). The representation is later positioned with reference to images of the gender–bending rock star icons that Rayon lines the walls of the Buyers Club (such as Marc Bolan). This image, of gender and sexual fluidity emerged from the era of 1970s glam rock. As Dallas Buyers Club is located within the early 1980s, these ideas were continuing to resonate through culture, including music and fashion. For these reasons, the exposure scene in front of the mirror (Scene 110a) is inconclusive as a definitive identity–marking scene for the character. Whilst Rayon is revealed as flat–chested, this does not prove (or disprove), that the character is a ‘cross–dresser’. Rayon could simply be a young transwoman, early in transition, hence signs of bodily transition are less apparent.

The screenwriters’ choice of terminology in Scene 30 where Rayon is described as a “cross–dresser”—a word that could be considered demeaning or pejorative, a word that denies any gendered embodiment or sexual specificity, reveals the deep issues within the text. This careless script construction and misgendering continues to the last scene in which “Rayon lies alone in bed, delirious from morphine, mumbling beneath his oxygen mask” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 79). This is despite Rayon being addressed with a female name, dressed in women’s attire and makeup, being presented with the attributes, vocal intonation, bodily movements and gestures of a trans woman throughout the narrative. Key characters in the film all participate in this misidentification of Rayon. Even the sympathetic character of Dr. Saks (Jennifer Garner) indignantly yells at Ron Woodroof after Rayon’s death “He was my friend too, you know !” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 83a).

Through misgendering and misidentification, Rayon is denied any actual identity, either as a transwoman, who may or may not wish to access hormonal or surgical therapies, or as a transsexual living in a complicated, transphobic and homophobic era, who enjoys the aspects of femininity and wearing clothes that she feels beautiful in publically—because she is a young trans woman. The screenwriters fail in creating a narrative depiction of Rayon simply as an embodied human being. Within the text Rayon’s identity as a “cross–dresser” is challenged, with her gender identity as a transwoman suggested within the text (albeit in disparaging language) by Woodroof, who remarks on Rayon ‘spending money on titties’, or that ‘he will give you (Rayon) that sex–change you’ve been hopin’ for’ (her gender transformation surgery).

Upon close reading of the screenplay, it becomes apparent that the screenwriters have devised a clichéd portrayal. Whilst Rayon is described as being feminine in appearance (Borten and Wallack
2012: 21), in the scene in which Rayon dies, the description includes the script instructions:

Rayon lies alone in bed, delirious from morphine, mumbling beneath his oxygen mask. After a few beats, he takes it off, leans over to the side table, takes a compact and a tube of lipstick from his purse, and starts to apply it, his hands trembling as he does. His mission accomplished, he sets the lipstick aside, then leans his head back. And as he closes his eyes and drifts away... (Borten and Wallack 2012: 79).

The incorrect male pronouns are used a distressing total of ten times in this final scene. Examples of such entrenched misgendering are evident throughout the entire screenplay. With such disrespect and misunderstanding evident in the text, the issue of the transphobia evident throughout the screenplay is amplified onscreen throughout the characterizations of Rayon. Leto has publically stated that his research preparation for the role of Rayon was directly with members of the trans community (Criswell 2014) and that he utilized trans knowledge in constructing Rayon’s onscreen persona. This raises the stakes in Leto’s subsequent failure to recognize the trans community in his Oscar acceptance speech and also directs attention to his failure as an actor to intervene in the transphobia evident within the screenplay, when he could have utilized his star power and agency to interpret the representation of Rayon in less stereotypical ways. This is intensified through the depiction of Ron Woodroof as racist and homophobic, a rodeo cowboy living in the center of a homophobic rodeo scene at the time he is diagnosed with HIV and given ‘about thirty days to live’ (Borten and Wallack 2012: 11). Whilst the character of Woodroof engages in unprotected heterosexual sex and recreational drug use, rather than stigmatizing the character, this is all part of the characterization of the heteronormative, red–blooded, masculinity of the rodeo scene. Woodroof is depicted as a very masculine ‘man’s man’, in contrast to Rayon, who is feminine.

The screenplay and film production for Dallas Buyers Club was in development for a period of twenty years (International Movie Database 2013h). During this time, the legal, social, cultural, political and economic positions for trans people around the world were constantly changing, with many significant legal rights won. Readers are left to question how such disrespectful misgendering, trans ignorance and transphobic writing was able to be produced after twenty years’ work and with Leto having prepared for the part of Rayon using trans community knowledge in developing the character. What social responsibility do writers, directors, producers, actors and actresses have towards marginalized individuals and communities that they make their living from onscreen?

HOW TO WIN AN OSCAR

Jared Leto underwent an immense physical transformation in order to play this role, losing thirty–nine pounds in weight (Leto 2013), to present the diminishing physicality of Rayon. Throughout the film, Rayon becomes increasingly emaciated, due not only to HIV/AIDS, but also her implied and depicted recreational drug use. Leto’s physical transformation (and subsequent Oscar for the role), can be
usefully compared to the physical transformation required of Nicole Kidman to play Virginia Woolfe in *The Hours* (Stephen Daldry, USA, 2002), or Charlize Theron as Aileen Wuornos in *Monster* (Patty Jenkins, USA, 2003). Each of these portrayals are Academy Award winners, noted for the physicality of their individual performances and the physical demands that such roles make upon actors and actresses (Baron and Carnicke 2008). Leto’s portrayal of Rayon has a specific range of character gestures. Throughout the text she diminishes from an initial characterization with a fairly confident personae, walking with a posture that suggests a privileged background, later borne out within the text at Scene 110, in which Rayon’s father is revealed to be a bank manager. When Rayon and Woodroof first meet in hospital, Rayon initially does not convey a street–person personae, but conveys an attitude more that of a ‘lady of the house’, with feminine clothing, makeup, hand gestures and vocal tones. Leto spoke about his physical changes in preparation for the role and the challenges presented by the accompanying immense emotional and perceptual changes (Leto 2013).

Supporters of Leto’s performance/depiction of Rayon, as evidenced by the screen industry accolades, become a separate, though interlinked, issue to the representational problems throughout the text. This is because an actor in a privileged positionality (white, male, non–transgender), portrays a trans character, in a representation that is intersected with class issues due to the portrayal of Rayon as a drug–using, street sex–worker. Rayon is depicted using drugs in only a very small number of scenes within the text, including two explicit scenes of injecting and nasal use of drugs. The drug use is shown, particularly towards the end of the film and is part of the deterioration of the character and accompanies Rayon’s progressively worsening physical condition. This presents a moralistic stance on drug use. Intersectional issues and the negativity towards sex–workers and recreational drug users within normative society conveys to audiences negative and incorrect stereotypes about transpeople in general: “There are Rayons out there, but according to the media, we’re all Rayons” (Tannehill 2014, italics in original). That many transgender people live within what hegemonic society deems marginalized subcultures (including as sex workers, recreational drug users and other criminalized activities out of necessity for survival), complicates reading of *Dallas Buyers Club*. This is because, taken against the background of the daily experiences of many transpeople’s lives, Rayon could be read differently, perhaps as a valid cinematic representation of trans. Yet the widespread outcry against Rayon from within the international trans community at the time of the film’s release serves to underline how this image is widely rejected by trans people.

The cultural temporal displacement of screen narratives and audiences—*Dallas Buyers Club* is based in the mid–1980s with audiences in the twenty first century, means that audiences received the text through the lens of trans experiences in this time. This is one rationale for why reception of the text led to protests of the cinematic depiction of the trans body (Rayon) as transphobic. In this, there is no attempt within this discussion to read Rayon within terms of respectability politics, or that all films need to portray affirming representations of trans people—or any group in society. The representational issues surrounding Rayon that burden the plot of *Dallas Buyers Club* almost overwhelm the story arc and are so frequent in this text—as to suggest that transgender is treated as a cinematic trope and misrepresented throughout this film.
Throughout the narrative, Leto enacts Rayon with nuances of expression and gesture (Baron and Carnicke 2008) and specific postures and movement that have been criticised from within the trans community by transwomen:

The very way Rayon moves also very clearly is this stereotypical "straight man trying to act like a stereotype of femininity" thing. Rayon walks with her hands up in the air almost like a Disney Princess would, strutting around in her heels, waving her butt with a very–obviously–deliberate hip sway, visually flaunting her femininity (Cheetaking 2014).

Such a strongly negative reaction may be interpreted, following Baron and Carnicke, who suggest explaining “variations in audience response, recognizing that interpretations of filmic gestures are influenced by viewers’ personal associations with comparable social gestures” (2008: 4). The physicality of Leto’s interpretation of Rayon raises the issue of embodied memory in performative gestures and “the role of embodied practices as repository and vehicle of collective memory” (Laster 2012: 211). The criticism by Cheetaking (2014), that Rayon moves like a “straight man trying to act like a stereotype of femininity”, reveals how gendered bodily memory of movement and gesture influence performative gestures—even for highly trained actors. In short, for trans people, Rayon simply does not read as trans, but as a performative (Butler 1990) parody of trans, out of touch with the twenty first century. These criticisms could be deflected by noting “transitions in the meaning of gender within a given cultural context” (Sloop 2000:167); or by temporal defense of the text—that it is situated within 1985, in the late twentieth century and reflects trans people at that time. Yet rigorous historical scholarship of these years (Stryker 2008) would lead to a rejection of this view; for there was a powerfully focused trans activism throughout the decades in which the film is located fighting against the types of marginalization and exclusion represented within Dallas Buyers Club.

Cheetaking (2014) also criticised the “…obsession with super–feminine clothes, super–feminine actions, makeup, heels, and all of the most frivolous aspects of femininity…” in the characterization of Rayon. Whilst presentation in feminine clothing and makeup is not of itself marginalizing, the narrative depictions of Rayon in both the entrance and exit scenes within the text are focused only upon superficial aspects of physical appearance and in transphobic language. This is marginalizing. Within Rayon’s final scene, this is intensified as Rayon is in a state of severe pain, medicated on morphine and on her deathbed. The screenplay notes that Rayon puts on makeup as “His mission” (Borten and Wallack 2012: 79). This trivializes the individual, diminishing the significance of Rayon’s story arc, whilst continuing to ascribe normative societal images of what is considered to be attractive for a woman, to a trans person. The denial of ‘personhood’ has been noted by leading transgender scholars such as Susan Stryker as an historical discrimination and political strategy to limit a trans person’s effectiveness and place in society (Stryker 2008; Bettcher 2014; Bettcher 2015).
PLAYING GAY STRAIGHT

In order to secure a mainstream audience, the character of Ron Woodroof in the feature film is created as heterosexual. This is despite speculation about Woodroof’s sexuality during his lifetime, that he may have been gay (Minutaglio 1992; Hall 2014). But this creates a narrative problematic of how to connect a heterosexual character in 1985 with the subculture of predominately gay and trans community ‘buyers’ for the HIV/AIDS medications. The writers created the fictitious feminine trans character of Rayon to act as a bridge between the heteronormative world of Woodroof and the gay subcultures in which he must learn (from Rayon) to move in order to sell the drugs. If Woodroof was portrayed either as bisexual, or even as a straight–acting (closeted) gay man, the character of Rayon would not have been required in the narrative. It is important to recognize that the producers, director and writers could have chosen to create any combination of characters to support Ron in his quest, or could have told the story with Woodroof as a gay man.

Due to the speculation that Ron was gay, or of ambivalent sexuality, the cinematic representation of Woodroof becomes doubly regrettable. This is because it makes a heterosexual character a hero of the AIDS crisis, at a time when the majority of mainstream society was psychopathologising and stigmatizing gay men and transsexuals, both in the media and in the private spheres. This also fails to situate the activist origins and intention of the historical Buyers Clubs, which were started in the USA predominately by gay men living with HIV/AIDS, with the largest Club the PWA in New York (Hodel 2013). The year in which the film is located—1985, was a particularly dangerous time to be homosexual or transsexual in America, with vilification and homophobic violence regularly occurring. This also is not conveyed within the film.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues are raised by the starkly contrasting depictions of the death of Rayon, who is portrayed as emaciated “...alone in bed, delirious from morphine, mumbling beneath his oxygen mask” and Woodroof—whose death is significantly not shown. In stark contrast to Rayon, as Dallas Buyers Club closes Woodroof is confusingly portrayed “...20 pounds heavier, looking healthier”. Riding in the rodeo ring “...the image freezes on a PERFECT FRAME on this cowboy in action to control the beast. The crowd’s CHEERS are echoing in the distance”. The audience is deprived of an ethical ending to the film. Woodroof gets an heroic ending (riding out in the rodeo ring to a cheering crowd), whilst Rayon is left drugged, withering in a hospital bed, the same location/characterization where she is first encountered in the film. This selection of images also overrides the concluding text of the film, which identifies the actual date that Ron Woodroof died. The ending of Rayon reinforces the negative tropic representation of trans ‘as a patient’ within this text. What Downing and Saxton (2010: 43) said of the ending of Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott 1991) aptly summarizes this issue at the close of Dallas Buyers Club:
The ethical work that needs to be undertaken to show one cannot escape outside of power structures in a feel–good way is simply not followed through in this film, and it lies with the critical viewer to restore this ethically indeterminate dimension to a deceptively triumphal spectacle.

The characterization of Rayon provokes ongoing considerations of the ethical issues raised by this text (Downing and Saxton 2010; Bauman 1993), in the light of contemporary trans culture and the socio–cultural implications for cinematic representations in the twenty first century. This is because the representation of trans in film can have a constitutive role for trans communities. Mainstream films, whilst positioned within the hegemonic screen industry, are written, directed and produced by production teams who are aware of and often directly connected to non–hegemonic, gender–diverse sections of society. Whilst the mainstream may seem to be limited in what the films can/or will contribute, in the twenty first century we can and should expect more from the highly paid production teams and actors who interpret trans lives for wider audience consumption. Inroads into tackling transphobia within Hollywood are being spearheaded from within the SVOD online sector.\(^\text{15}\)

Until such initiatives become an integral part of all film production the issue remains, that when the only films that are being widely seen by audiences, widely promoted, and canonically awarded (Ford 2016) are films with such devastating portrayals as Rayon, a very imbalanced and one–sided view of a community is presented. Until there are an equal number of screen texts produced that show trans people as successful, healthy, loved, cherished, with adequate money that does not have to be earnt in marginalized settings and characters that are alive at the end of the narrative, the problematics of the representation of Rayon in *Dallas Buyers Club* will remain.

**About the Author**

Akkadia Ford is a PhD Candidate in Cultural Studies, School of Arts Social Sciences, at Southern Cross University, Australia and is a trained filmmaker, establishing and working as Festival Director of Queer Fruits Film Festival (2009-2012).

Current areas of interest are focused upon transgender representation in films, transliteracy, queer film, film classification (ratings systems) in Australia and USA, gender disruption, film festivals, audiences and issues of spectatorship. Recent publications have focused upon transliteracy as an innovative theoretical approach to reading gender–diverse cinema of the Trans New Wave.

Contact : akkadiah.ford@scu.edu.au; seshta@bigpond.com

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to Associate Professor Elizabeth Stephens and to Dr. Erika Kerruish (Southern Cross University, Australia), Supervising my PhD, for encouragement, detailed feedback and ongoing
theoretical discussions. Thank you to Professor Baden Offord (Curtin University, Australia) for encouragement and earlier Supervision. Especial appreciation to my partner.

ENDNOTES


2 A respectful acknowledgement is made of non–western, First Nations and indigenous traditions which include Third Gender, Two–Spirit and concepts beyond the western binary of ‘male and ‘female’. The reader is directed to important works such as Caroline Epple (1998); Gabriel S. Estrada (2011); Angela Sterritt (2016). http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/indigenous-languages-recognize-gender-states-not-even-named-in-english/article29130778/. The term trans* has not been used within this article as it has not been adopted by all trans activists and scholars and is a term intensely codified by contemporary western perspectives, perhaps even more so, than the word simply written as trans (Ford In–Progress).

3 It is acknowledged that in 2016, in the age of retroviral medications, many people live full lives, living with HIV and that it is now not considered to be a terminal illness in Western/affluent countries. However, in 1985, AIDS was terminal. Even in 2014, HIV/AIDS continues to be a terminal disease in many developed and developing countries, particularly Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) “HIV is perceived as a problem of marginalized groups such as injecting drug users, refugees and men who have sex with men.” http://www.apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/d/Jh2930e/3.html. (Italics added).

4 What is ‘Mainstream Film’? Working Definitions

The film is produced by one of the six major motion picture Studios (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures; Paramount Pictures Corporation; Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.; Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporations; Universal City Studios LLC; Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (MPAA 2014a, abbreviations in original, order of Studios in original); production costs are financed by the Studio and the production budget is high ranging up to $200,000,000+; distribution is via an in-house, or affiliated company; there are wide cinema releases (number of screens on which a film is exhibited to a paying audience) - this is also due to the Studios/distributers owning the major cinema chains; Major Awards are received signifying mainstream acceptance (such as Academy Award; Golden Globe, SAG Award).

5 These comments do not reflect the position of the current author. The comment is made from the point of view of the screenplay and hegemonic society/audiences.

6 The Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA) established in 1922 was the forerunner of the current MPAA (MPPDA Digital Archive, 2014).

7 Dallas Buyers Club IMDB (2013c).

8 Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack, Dallas Buyers Club / Green Revision / Dec 2, 2012 / p. 9, Scene 13. (Capitalization, abbreviation, indentation, formatting in original screenplay). The HIV diagnosis is in the first 10 minutes of the screenplay.

9 Ibid., p. 11, Scene 13. (Capitalization, abbreviation, indentation, formatting in original screenplay).


12 Ibid., p. 93, Scene 148. Italics added.
Ibid., Scene 148, Capitalization in original script.

Ibid., Scene 148.


FILMOGRAPHY
Daldry, Stephen. 2002. The Hours. USA.
Epstein, Rob. and Friedman, Jeffrey. 1995. The Celluloid Closet. USA.
Jenkins, Patty. 2003. Monster. USA.
Jordan, Neil. 1992. The Crying Game. USA,
Muska, Susan and Olafsdóttir Gréta. 1998. The Brandon Teena Story. USA.
Peirce, Kimberly. 1999. Boys Don’t Cry. USA.
Scott, Ridley. 1991. Thelma and Louise. USA.
Tucker, Duncan. 2005. Transamerica. USA.
Vallee, Jean–Marc. 2013. Dallas Buyers Club. USA.

TELEVISION SERIES
Kohan, Jenji. 2013– Orange Is the New Black. USA.
Wachowski, Lilly. Wachowski, Lana. 2015– Sense8. USA.
Jill Soloway, 2014. Transparent. USA.

REFERENCES


