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THE
FILMS
OF
JESSE
FRANCO

EDITED BY
ANTONIO LÁZARO-REBOLL AND IAN OLNEY

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ALESS
FRANCO

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SCREAM QUEENS AND QUEER DREAMS

*The Politics of Monotony and Zoning Out
in Franco's Direct-to-Video Productions*

Finley Freibert

The late 1990s marked the reinvigoration of Jess Franco's prolific output. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, there was seldom a year in which fewer than two Franco films were released, but the late 1980s and early 1990s saw few new releases from the director. However, the distribution of his films on video through niche mail-order catalogs and the proliferation of cult fanzines had by then secured him a relatively strong transnational fan base.¹ Moreover, video was becoming a viable option for commercial filmmaking after a long history of development in television and the avant-garde (Antin 57–72). And the video rental and retail boom in the United States had created a direct-to-video market that provided an opportunity for the production and distribution of independent shot-on-video horror films such as *Boardinghouse* (1984), *Blood Cult* (1985), and *The Burning Moon* (1995). These circumstances proved advantageous for the affordable turnaround and distribution of Franco's work on video and DVD from the late 1990s to around 2005.

At roughly the same time that Franco was enjoying a late-career renaissance, a lively academic conversation began around his earlier films. Much of this scholarship has appraised Franco's work in relation to dominant ideologies around gender, often in national contexts of production or reception.² Additionally, there has been emphasis on the spectatorship and reception of Franco's films by female and queer audiences.³ Consideration

of Franco's work after 1980 has remained limited, however, aside from unfavorable comparisons to his earlier cinema. For scholars like Tatjana Pavlović, his films "became less interesting technically and visually as a result of financial constraints that called for faster and faster production, the overuse of zoom, and mediocre actors" ("Gender and Spanish Horror Film" 140). This chapter takes his later works seriously for their potential as sites of queer cultural production that facilitate non-normative viewing positions. Financial and aesthetic constraints do not necessarily limit avenues for queer reception; indeed, I demonstrate that such constraints, in conjunction with certain subcultural signifiers, can encourage queer viewing practices.

While the term "queer" is occasionally used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ identities, in this chapter it is most often used to foreground the coalitions among socially marginalized constituencies that involve LGBTQ+ practices or desires but are irreducible to a specific sexual identity. This chapter engages queer studies in order to tie scholarly debates in that field to the overlooked queer production and reception of cult cinema.⁴ Late in his career, Franco made direct-to-video films that open avenues for queer spectatorship while simultaneously frustrating a heteronormative male gaze. The queer sensibility of these films can be linked with the larger tradition of camp in horror cinema and beyond.⁵ My intent in using the term "queer" is twofold. First, the term acknowledges the continued relevance and genealogy of lesbian and gay film studies to which this and other Franco film scholarship is indebted. Second, while "queer" has its pitfalls, it captures how the films I discuss represent sexuality in ways that outstrip identity categorization.⁶ The term is used here to affirm viewing positions and readings that are bisexual, gay, lesbian, or otherwise, while also acknowledging the possibility of non-normative perspectives that are irreducible to these or other identity categories. Thus at stake in this chapter is a reflection on how Franco's less-acknowledged later work is open to a multiplicity of viewing positions.

In the pages that follow, I examine the queerness of Franco's transnational coproductions with One Shot Productions in the late 1990s. The

first section examines the interface between Franco's status as an auteur in European cult fan circles and One Shot's scream queen casting as reflective of American shot-on-video "Z"-grade horror practices. While subcultural scream queen media of the 1980s and 1990s employed marketing techniques and production strategies aimed at heterosexual men, there is a queer following for these films, and some of them exhibit queer labor through their camp sensibility.⁷ Queer labor comprises forms of exertion that actively oppose or covertly encode opposition to the intended meaning of a product—for instance, a distinctly queer sensibility asserted within a film otherwise targeting a heterosexual market.⁸ While Franco's later films were often marketed as "straight" soft-core, in this chapter I argue that the combined labor of scream queen performance and Franco's direction coalesced in these films as a form of queer dissent that challenges the heteronormative gaze. The first section concludes by describing the effect of this dissent on the films' popular reception, which has frequently been characterized by misogyny and ageism. Building on these discussions, the next two sections then explore the techniques of queer dissent employed by two of Franco's late-1990s productions: *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula* (1998) and *Lust for Frankenstein* (1998).

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS: FRANCO'S TRANSNATIONAL VIDEO COPRODUCTIONS AND THEIR RECEPTION

Franco's foray into video was facilitated by a transnational collaboration with the U.S.-based media company One Shot Productions. During the production of *Killer Barbys* (1996), Franco and his longtime partner, Lina Romay, were introduced to One Shot's Kevin Collins; Collins was interviewing Romay for a British book, *The Lina Romay File: The Intimate Confessions of an Exhibitionist*, coauthored with Tim Greaves ("First Taste" 24–26). Franco's extended collaboration with One Shot spanned twelve films, culminating with *Snakewoman* (2005). One Shot's first feature with Franco, *Tender Flesh* (1997), drew from a diverse pool of collaborators, among them Euro horror fans. Producers of the film included Hugh

Gallagher, notable to fans of American shot-on-video horror and scream queen subculture for his early 1990s *Gore* trilogy and scream queen fan magazine *Draculina*; and Christian Kessler, a German film critic who co-authored *Obsession: The Films of Jess Franco* with Peter Blumenstock and Lucas Balbo.

Franco's initial three productions for One Shot, *Tender Flesh*, *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula*, and *Lust for Frankenstein*, were each shot on Super 16mm, whereas the other films he directed for the company in the late 1990s, *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* (1998) and *Vampire Blues* (1999), were shot on video.⁹ All the films were processed through video postproduction, allowing for the implementation of the effects that contribute to the remediated video aesthetic of these works, such as ultrasaturated colors, chroma key overlay, and superimposed images. After *Tender Flesh*, a number of collaborators returned for further work with Franco and One Shot Productions. Gallagher continued in the producer role for four more films, also making a cameo in *Mari-Cookie*. Amber Newman starred in the next two One Shot films, *Lust for Frankenstein* and *Mari-Cookie*. Of course, Romay continued to star in Franco's subsequent films even after his association with One Shot ended; and Analía Ivars returned for five more of the One Shot films. What this production history indicates is the increasing propensity for transnational collaboration that informed these films' mode of production.

While seeking to engage both American and European cult-horror markets, *Lust for Frankenstein* and *Mari-Cookie*—and Franco's later political thriller *Blind Target* (2000)—heavily courted American 1980s and 1990s “B” horror audiences through the casting of Michelle Bauer and Linnea Quigley in starring and supporting roles. In the mid- to late 1980s, Bauer and Quigley had achieved subcultural star status as scream queens through their appearance in a number of low-budget horror films and their presence in horror magazines and at horror conventions. In popular horror vernacular, the expression “scream queen,” popularized in part by Calvin Beck's 1978 book *Scream Queens: Heroines of the Horrors*, typically denotes any female star who has made a career playing women who survive extreme

trauma or peril—a character type Carol Clover has dubbed the “final girl” (35–64). For example, in early- to mid-1980s pop culture publications, Jamie Lee Curtis was often described as a scream queen for her appearances in slasher films (Knoedelseder). During the period under discussion here, it was also more specifically employed as a marketing term to denote a specific horror subgenre and kind of subcultural star. Although initially promoted to a heterosexual male audience, the scream queen films starring Bauer and Quigley developed a queer fandom, and David DeCoteau, one of the frequent directors of these movies, is openly gay. My usage of “scream queen” is therefore meant to evoke the term's relation to the queer space of late 1980s and early 1990s American “B” horror cinema.

The cult usage of “scream queen” is distinct from its general usage as a synonym for an actress playing a final girl. Unlike the asexual final girl, the cult scream queen is diegetically endowed with both sexual and physical prowess. In keeping with the horror-comedy genre hybridity of their films, cult scream queens usually exude a sardonic wit reminiscent of Cassandra Peterson's Elvira. At the same time, they share qualities with “B-movie bombshells”—actresses in “B” horror movies who are attractive by the normative standards of American femininity. Within the cult-horror nexus of the late 1980s, the specificity that scream queendom acquired was largely due to the emergence of a trio of stars: Linnea Quigley, Michelle Bauer, and Brinke Stevens. Indeed, the renewed popularity of the term “scream queen” was in no small part due to the success of a set of horror-themed sex-comedies in which the three starred. Scream queen cult subculture thrived into the early 1990s with the proliferation of various media: comics, trading cards, and magazines (*Femme Fatales*, *Draculina*, and *Scream Queens Illustrated*) featuring photo spreads and interviews. This fan subculture even became visible, perhaps briefly, to more mainstream horror fans in *Fangoria*'s May 1991 issue featuring Brinke Stevens on the cover and a special section titled “Scream Queens Complete A-to-Z Guide” tying the subcultural phenomenon of the scream queen to the more general presence of women in horror films, the topic of that issue.¹⁰ This history provides an important context for *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein* because the

cult celebrity of Quigley and Bauer informed not only the casting of those films but also their marketing campaigns.

In 1998, ten years after first costarring in David DeCoteau and Fred Olen Ray's camp horror classics, Bauer's and Quigley's last major appearances had been in movies released in 1995: Bauer in Ray's *Witch Academy* (1995) and Donald Farmer's *Red Lips* (1995), and Quigley in *Jack-O* (1995). Thus there was considerable fan anticipation for Bauer and Quigley's comeback with the release of *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein*. There was also excitement among Francophiles over his productions for One Shot. Scream queen cult fandom and Franco fandom are not necessarily congruent, but there was overlap between the two in this case. Between 1997 and 1999, Hugh Gallagher's *Draculina* remediated *Tender Flesh*, *Mari-Cookie*, and *Lust for Frankenstein* as photo-comics that comprised stills from the productions, cropped into panels and overlaid with speech bubbles in a linear comic book format (a form evoking Italian *fumetti* and Spanish *fotonovelas*). Regular issues of the magazine also featured production coverage and photo spreads, such as Amber Newman's interview in issue 29, on-set field notes for *Tender Flesh* in issue 29, and a feature on *Lust for Frankenstein* in issue 32. Brook Edwards Video handled the initial VHS distribution in the United States for One Shot Productions' first releases: *Tender Flesh* in 1997, as a box set including a making-of documentary, and *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein* in 1998.¹¹

After a few more years of anticipation, the early One Shot productions received widespread retail distribution in the United States through the companies E. I. Independent and Sub Rosa Studios.¹² This was at the historical moment of DVD's ascent and VHS's slow fall into obsolescence, so E. I. Independent and Sub Rosa initially released the films on both VHS and DVD, the DVDs usually including a number of special features. *Tender Flesh* was the first to be released, in June 2000, by Seduction Cinema, and *Lust for Frankenstein* soon followed in May 2001 under the Shock-O-Rama label. Both are subsidiaries of E. I. Independent: Seduction Cinema specializes in cult soft-core and Shock-O-Rama in cult horror. There is evidence that Sub Rosa released *Mari-Cookie*, *Vampire Blues*, and *Blind*

Target all on VHS in 2001 and waited to release DVDs beginning in late 2002 and into 2003. The rest of the One Shot titles were only released on DVD, by Sub Rosa—first on individual discs between 2003 and 2006, and then in multi-packs between 2008 and 2011.¹³

The cover designs for the releases of *Lust for Frankenstein* and *Mari-Cookie* prominently promote their connection to the scream queen subculture described above.¹⁴ Michael Raso's cover art for the VHS and DVD releases of *Lust for Frankenstein* displays Michelle Bauer's name in the largest font size used for the three actresses listed. Bauer's image is featured twice on the cover, and in the back-cover blurb she is the only player described in terms of her star legibility, as "legendary Scream Queen Michelle Bauer" (Faoro). Similarly, the VHS release of *Mari-Cookie* lists Bauer and Quigley first, and although Quigley has only a supporting role in the film, she hosts the DVD's tongue-in-cheek "nude" commentary.

The marketing of these Franco films as "scream queen movies" is worth noting because it links them not only to the historical context of their emergence but also to the queer production and reception practices discussed later in this chapter. The queerness of the scream queen is a function of at least three factors: the formal qualities of the films that privilege camp as a form of queer irony, the cult celebrity of scream queens as diva-like female stars exceeding male heterosexual consumption, and the queer reception of scream queen media. First, while generally marketed to a heterosexual male audience, many cult scream queen films privilege campy elements over enactments of soft-core spectacle. Second, following soft-core scholar David Andrews's observation that cult scream queendom evokes the classical Hollywood star system (240), one could connect the queer iconicity of scream queens with that of Hollywood divas such as Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Marlene Dietrich. Finally, there is an avid queer audience for scream queen cinema, especially the early scream queen films directed by gay filmmaker David DeCoteau.¹⁵ The key point is that the queerness of many scream queen movies and their viewers challenges the historicization of soft-core and its audience as invariably heterosexual.¹⁶

This becomes clear from analyzing audience data on popular websites featuring reviews of *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein*, which provide us with a sense of their mainstream reception. As Andrews points out, it is difficult to track public discourse about soft-core due to the silence around it, which is engendered both by the design of distributors and by the stigma surrounding consumption of the genre (184–89). While Franco's cult films arguably exceed the category of soft-core, at least two of the early One Shot films were marketed as such. One exception to the silence around soft-core, Andrews notes, is the online cult network, which is dominated by vocal, overwhelmingly male viewers who often review titles on niche fan sites as well as on mainstream retail sites. Although there have been some reviews of *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein* on fan sites, reviews of both films appear on these sites only intermittently. Additionally, while reviewers on fan sites occasionally comment on their subjective experience of viewing a film, they tend to restrict themselves to plot synopses and evaluations of the "quality" of the releases specific to the medium of distribution. For these reasons, I focus here on reviews from mainstream retail and rental sites.

Andrews's project traces the industrial emergence, distribution, and reception of soft-core films post-1980. Examining reception of these films on *Amazon* and *IMDb*, Andrews notes three categorical trends with regard to the balance reviews strike between an attention to narrative and an attention to sexual spectacle (197–98). These trends include: reviews that disavow the sexual spectacle as a deficiency that disrupts the film, reviews that acknowledge the dichotomous form of soft-core yet evaluate it negatively due to budget, and reviews that "understand" the generic status of soft-core, but ultimately disdain it, often due to its perceived distance from "Real Cinema" (Andrews 199). Andrews thus concludes that the valuation of soft-core is universally negative: "this is not a game softcore can 'win.'" (198). An examination of the reception of *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein* reveals another important negative trend, one that is specific to these two films. Sampling the reviews on *Amazon*, *IMDb*, and *Netflix*, one notices an overwhelming misogyny expressed through an evaluation

of women's bodies in the films. This tendency intersects with reviewers' ageist inclination to judge the actresses' attractiveness in comparison to how they appeared in earlier films.¹⁷ Reviewers' misogyny is expressed at different rates with respect to the two films, however. On *Amazon*, there are currently six reviews of *Mari-Cookie*, while there are ten for *Lust for Frankenstein*; one-sixth of the former and half of the latter display this trend. On *IMDb*, there are currently only three reviews of *Mari-Cookie*, two of which display the trend, and seventeen reviews of *Lust for Frankenstein*, nine of which display the trend. *Netflix* reviews do not include usernames, which permits members to review films with a greater confidence of anonymity. It currently features around fifteen reviews for each film, and reviews commenting negatively on the actresses' bodies similarly skew toward *Lust for Frankenstein* (in this case, nine of fifteen, compared to *Mari-Cookie*'s five of fourteen). *Lust for Frankenstein*'s overall accumulation of more misogynistic comments might be due to its overt misandry. As Andrews says of soft-core: "male viewers might denigrate such vehicles because they feel attacked by them" (199).

Yet because the comments are not just negative toward the films but toward the female cast members' bodies, I would argue they are also a symptom of something else. In part, they point to the fact that the sexual objectification of women has persisted in scream queen fandom despite the growing number of scream queen media producers and consumers operating outside a heterosexist economy.¹⁸ That *Lust for Frankenstein* has accumulated more reviews on all sites and appears to have a larger proportion of misogynistic responses is also likely due to the different marketing strategies deployed by Shock-O-Rama and Sub Rosa. Shock-O-Rama's cover design for *Lust for Frankenstein* employs soft-core codes through the framing, placement, and display of Newman's and Bauer's bodies. At least four reviewers explicitly claim that the cover deceptively features women not actually present in the film ("EEEEWWWWWWW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"; Bottom; Mesmerise; "Terrible . . ."). Misogynistic reviews mentioning the cover include the following comments: "the hot chicks on the cover are nowhere to be seen, the nude scenes will make you wretch [*sic*]" (Bottom),

and “unlike the cover, most of the girls in this film are ugly” (“Terrible . . .”).¹⁹ On the other hand, Sub Rosa, known more as a horror label, seldom marketed their films as soft-core; their cover for *Mari-Cookie* more resembles that of a cult film featuring an ensemble cast, with the ten lead actors, tinted monochromatically, encircling the film’s title. Rather than engaging in titillation, this marketing stresses the film’s tongue-in-cheek comedy and wacky comic book intrigue.

But I argue that the key reason for the misogynist reception of *Lust for Frankenstein* and *Mari-Cookie* online is the queerness of these films. While there does not appear to be substantial online documentation of their queer reception, I will show that they are geared toward queer perspectives. These movies expand on the queerness of earlier cult scream queen media both by privileging the diva-like agency of their scream queens and by combining narrative and soft-core elements into a queer admixture that frustrates the heteronormative gaze typically invited by soft-core. To a large degree, the aversion to *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein* evident in their reception can be directly attributed to this queer quality and its disruptive power. In the sections that follow, I will engage with and build on the literature on Franco spectatorship by articulating how *Mari-Cookie* and *Lust for Frankenstein* invite a queer gaze through their subversion of normative forms of narrative, spectacle, and reception. Ultimately, I aim to establish that while they have been dismissed and denigrated by fans and scholars alike, Franco’s direct-to-video productions are unique in their insistence on the pleasures of abandoning both linear narrative and heteronormativity.

MARI-COOKIE AND QUEER ZONING OUT

Whereas *Lust for Frankenstein*’s narrative follows a kind of melancholy love story, *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula* plays out as an exuberant post-punk spoof of pulp crime cinema packed with vibrant colors and a multiplicity of characters intermingling in unpredictable ways. *Mari-Cookie*’s loosely woven narrative revolves around an “avant-garde punk rock star” named Tarantula van Spielberg (Lina Romay), who can transform

into a tarantula with a human face. Romay also plays the second character of the title, Mari-Cookie, a mild-mannered, upper-middle-class platinum blonde whose connection to Tarantula is ambiguous within the narrative (near the conclusion it is implied that they are the same person). During and after her burlesque performances, Tarantula seduces and subsequently kidnaps her audience members. An initial kidnapping victim, Chuck Morrison (Pedro Temborry), is already hanging in her web in an early scene when she brings Leona Tarantino (Mavi Tienda) to her lair. As a result of these kidnappings and a complicated rivalry between Tarantula and another burlesque performer, Queen Vicious (Analía Ivars), the plot finally coalesces around the supporting characters’ attempt to infiltrate Tarantula’s lair en masse.

Mari-Cookie continually delays construction of a clear protagonist, instead distributing possibilities for spectatorial identification among a broad number of characters, including Mari-Cookie/Tarantula, Marga (Michelle Bauer), Tere (Linnea Quigley), Amy (Amber Newman), Queen Vicious, and Leona. The resulting spectatorial negotiations recall those prompted by earlier Franco films discussed by Joan Hawkins and Ian Olney. Hawkins analyzes the way in which the formal techniques employed in *Gritos en la noche* (*The Awful Dr. Orlof*, 1962) shift viewers away from the heterosexual male gaze and challenge “police hegemony and control through the measured use of a female’s point of view” (207). *Mari-Cookie* also employs a police procedural subtext, yet within its tenuous narrative web, the majority of characters with narrative agency are gendered female. In dialogue with Hawkins, Olney has placed some of Franco’s earlier films within a genealogy of Euro horror that encourages viewers “not only to adopt a variety of viewing positions and to experiment with different subjectivities in a potentially transgressive way, but also to define themselves on a personal and social level while challenging cinematic and social norms” (*Euro Horror* 99). *Mari-Cookie* prompts such spectatorial play through its large ensemble cast, and I argue that this play additionally engages strategies of queer dissent by inviting the spectator

to partake in the kind of queer promiscuity associated with the camp sensibility (Babuscio 121).

Take, for example, the sequence following Tarantula's kidnapping of Leona in which Tere and Mari are sunbathing by a pool. Narratively, the sequence functions to introduce Sheriff Marga (the law enforcement officer investigating the kidnappings) and her suspicion that Mari is Tarantula. The presence of Tere and Amy in this sequence frustrates the fulfillment of this function, however, and instead the sequence acts extradiegetically to suture the cast into a scream queen ensemble whose performed personalities become its focus. Rather than maintaining Mari as the central figure, the sequence begins by privileging Tere's perspective, then oscillates among others in a circular fashion via the ensemble's interaction. A long shot frames Tere's approach from behind Mari, who sits on a reclining chair in the foreground. The camera actively privileges Tere during a monologue about her inept and adulterous husband. Through a variation on shot-reverse-shot editing, Tere's point of view is maintained as follows. When she speaks, there is a zoom to a close-up from over Mari's shoulder, then a cut to a full shot of both women reclining, and a subsequent repetition of the over-the-shoulder zoom. The back-and-forth between zoom and full shot is repeated three times with a variation that zooms into a plate of peanuts. The effect of this technique is an emphasis on Tere's perspective. Another shift occurs with the arrival of Sheriff Marga. As Marga approaches, the camera follows her movement with a long pan. Tere exits the scene, and the framing and editing now favor Marga, who begins to interrogate Mari. Prior to this moment, Mari has been portrayed as the protagonist, but the viewer's identification slips toward Marga as Mari becomes aligned with the scheming and murderous Tarantula. In a final refusal of singular perspective, Amy, Tere's bubbly daughter, interrupts the interrogation by handspringing into the scene to ask where her mother has gone. In all, this sequence introduces four characters and, like other scenes in the film, opens up a range of possibilities for spectatorial identification by employing variations on standard cinematic techniques. Unusual over-the-shoulder shots, pans, zooms, and shot-reverse-shot editing all

work to frame and accentuate multiple individuals and their agencies. The film practices a technique of queer dissent in its prohibition of individualized forms of identification. In their place, it offers a multiplication of viewpoints evoking a queer collective sensibility.

Additionally, this sequence becomes queer through its formal enactment of camp via exaggerated performance and gaudy costume design. For example, the confrontation between Marga and Mari described previously serves more to foreground the queer pleasures of immersion in the stilted back-and-forth exchanges between the actresses and Bauer's tongue-in-cheek take on her pulpy detective role than to accomplish a narrative function. The campiness of Bauer's performance is enhanced by her costuming, which generically encodes her as part noir detective and part Western sheriff: she wears a black fedora, matching jacket, hip holster, and boots. The diva-like acting and the kitschy wardrobe work to queer the figure of the scream queen. They also contribute to the film's queer perspectival play by enabling a range of camp scream queen characterizations as opposed to the limited woman-in-peril role emphasized in more traditional scream queen films. As the film progresses, these shifting viewpoints foster a queer collectivity in which unitary identifications are replaced by what I call queer zoning out: an embrace of camp solidarity and revolt against the convergence of narrativity and heteronormativity.

In its efforts to queer "the act of spectatorship itself, by destabilizing the heteronormative male gaze and introducing ways of seeing that run counter to it" (Olney, *Euro Horror* 173), *Mari-Cookie* is similar to earlier Franco films. Yet there are important differences to note as well. Rather than filming "obliquely—in reflections in mirrors with segmented glass, pulling in and out of focus—making it difficult for the viewer to see exactly what is going on" (Olney, *Euro Horror* 174), Franco instead disrupts the heteronormative male gaze with a barrage of camp and trash iconography, from pulp crime drug syndicates to slow motion psychedelic burlesque to feminist post-punk performances in neon and tinsel fright wigs to queer giant tarantula kidnappings. While the film thus undoubtedly opens a "queer zone"—Doty's term, applied by Olney (168) to Franco's earlier

films—I would argue that it does so by encouraging a queer zoning out, a negotiation between the spectator and its heterogeneous affective economies and possibly meaningless digressions into queer monotony.

Such negotiation portends a feeling that distinctively breaks from the ennui previously observed in Franco's films by Tim Lucas, who describes an "oneiric detachment" ("How To Read" 26) and "projection of existential boredom" (27) resulting from the spectator's identification with a male protagonist's leisurely traversal of the distinctive architecture and barren landscapes of the Spanish coast. Here, ennui indicates the spectator's melancholic idleness, which is motivated by the narrative as it presents a lull preceding moments of more sensational spectacle; in Lucas's words, it is "the state of mind wherein (it could be argued) all aberrant behavior begins" (26). Queer zoning out is connected not with notions of bourgeois leisure and idleness but instead with a queer collectivity evoked through shifting characterizations and viewing positions that unravel the narrative and spectatorial conventions of soft-core. Rather than advancing the narrative, this kind of zoning out knocks it askew, and perhaps reverses it. Camp and trash signifiers gesture toward ways of encoding and perceiving linked to a mode of reception historically associated with queer audiences: the feeling that one "is trying to enter a hole backwards, trying to go back in time, through the looking glass, to find a phantom" (Koestenbaum 53).²⁰ The queer pleasures of Franco's scream queen films depend on a backward or against-the-grain reading of media typically understood as privileging a heterosexual viewing position. The queer spectator's backward traversals into "zoned out" disorientation are made possible not only by the films' spatial and temporal disarticulation but also by their rejection of perspectival singularity and suturing of the viewer into the queer collective represented on-screen. Ultimately, queer zoning out leaves the viewer "in a state of confusion about the intention of the film, unsure whether to align themselves with the gaze of the camera or not" (Krzywinska 205). It is precisely because they actively work against heterosexist spectacle in this manner—leading to their violent rejection by some mainstream viewers,

as we have seen—that Franco films like *Mari-Cookie* represent a fruitful site for the revaluation of scream queen media.

In *Mari-Cookie*, queer zoning out reaches its greatest intensity in the final scene, in which the entire cast descends upon Tarantula's lair as she is seducing Amy. This sequence resists linearity, disrupts the heterosexist gaze, and stages a final act of misandry that disciplines the sadistic voyeur (Martin) while cementing a queer kinship. After Amy is brought into the lair (located on "Jess Franco Street"), Tarantula begins embracing her and then pushes her onto a mattress. As the seduction unfolds, the camera zooms in on the couple, who occupy the midground amid three spiderweb ropes running parallel to the back wall and spanning the set's pillars. One web partly obscures the camera's view, while the others evoke the depth of the space the zoom traverses. This zoom, accompanied by a reverberating, oscillating drone on the soundtrack, initially codes the moment voyeuristically, implying that a scene of sexual spectacle is about to occur. However, this coding is immediately undercut as Amy sees Leona and Chuck trapped in Tarantula's web. Amy says, "They look like human beings," and the camera swiftly zooms out, negating the previously implied voyeuristic scenario. The miniature human-spider form of Tarantula begins to taunt Chuck with a pair of scissors positioned at his groin; she demands, "Sing for me, stupid," and then, "Sing for me or I'll cut your thing off." While humming a song, the miniature spider dangles down the web, with fishing line visibly articulating her movements. Finally, anchored on a table beside glass goblets and a skull, Tarantula recites a brief poem with the lines, "I'm the spider. Oh yes. I'm the killer. Oh yes. I'm the tarantula. Oh yes." During the sequence, the backward drift of queer zoning out is facilitated first by the literal zoom-out, which disrupts a voyeuristic gaze, and then by the close-ups of Romay's face superimposed on the tiny spider as she recites the poem, a detour from the narrative that places us within the spider's microrealm. The digressive presentation of the spider's performative misandry—an absurdist spectacle that could be read either as a diegetic interlude or as Amy's hallucination—creates a phantasmic post-punk camp aesthetic that readily lends itself to a queer reading.



A scream queen collective framed in depth between neon webs. Queen Vicious (Anafía Ivars), Marga (Michelle Bauer), Tarantula (Lina Romay), Tere (Linnea Quigley), and Amy (Amber Newman) in *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula*. (One Shot Productions and Sub Rosa Studios. Screen capture.)

In this brief yet complex interlude of camp animal agency, there is a repositioning of human characters onto a spectrum of queer human-animal seduction and spectacle. The viewer becomes caught in the web of identificatory trajectories that materializes on-screen. Franco visualizes it via the colorful spiderweb that the actors gaze through in slow motion, looking both at the sexual spectacle unfolding and back at the disoriented spectator in shot-reverse-shot. Although a crude version of cross-species intermingling, the queerness of the tarantula-human and her oppositional relationship with Marga, Tere, and Amy gestures toward Jack Halberstam's concept of "creative anthropocentrism" (51), which "imagines oppositional groups in terms of real or fantasized beasts" (51) to "invent the models of resistance we need and lack in reference to other lifeworlds, animal and monstrous" (51).²¹ It is worth noting that this queer collective has extradiegetic significance. As first-wave cult scream queens, Quigley and Bauer's presence in protectoral roles (parent and sheriff) in relation to characters like Amy (played by a second-wave cult scream queen) can be read as an ironic comment on the ebb and flow of stars in the industry. Additionally,

Romay's role as the nexus of this sardonically misandrist constellation of scream queens reflects her extradiegetic status as a Eurocult icon retroactively added to the scream queen canon by magazines and online forums (Alexander 19). But this queer collective is primarily meant to denote a refusal of identificatory singularity. In the crucial final moments of the film, Tarantula, Sheriff Marga, Tere, Amy, and Queen Vicious, along with Chuck and Leona, who are still dangling from Tarantula's web, bring the narrative of pulp infiltration and intrigue to a grinding halt by forming an oppositional alliance of queer kinship. Chuck croons "we are a happy family" as he dangles naked and hungry from the web. Then the sole figure of paternal authority, Mari's husband Martin, is killed off by Tarantula's microphone, which doubles as sex organ and lethal stinger. After his incapacitation, the remaining characters make collective plans for a life outside anthropocentric patriarchy. The spectator's ability to "take sides" or identify with any one character is compromised by queer kinship—both the literal entanglement of bodies on-screen and the spectatorial zoning out they enable.

LUST FOR FRANKENSTEIN AND QUEER MONOTONY

In the previous section, I described queer zoning out as a type of spectatorial distancing that operates through a backward consideration of *Mari-Cookie's* form and content. In this section, I consider the related feeling of monotony that can accompany enactments of queer zoning out. Monotony's queerness has been discussed by Lee Edelman as backward turns and mechanistic repetitions that negate meaning: "'monotonous repetition' evokes the machine-like, desubjectivizing aspect of the *sinthomosexual's* jouissance—the antipathy to natural meaning intrinsic . . . to nature itself" (178).²² Repetition as an aesthetic strategy is not unique to Franco's films or to exploitation cinema in general.²³ Yet, unlike other movies, where recurrences might serve to convey a character's internal struggles, Franco's later films employ repetition as an explicit rejection of linear productions of meaning. Repeated dream sequences and motifs inhibit

narrative progression and do not contribute to characterization. Instead, these recurrences, in conjunction with the nonstandard use of framing, blocking, and editing, create a queer monotony. They demonstrate that, as Winnubst writes, “to be queer . . . is to be involved in acts or pleasures that offer no clear or useful meaning. To be queer is not to respond to the law of desire: it is to have no idea who or what you are, or where you’re going” (91). In this section, I examine how disorientations and estrangements from meaning work in *Lust for Frankenstein*, specifically through its engagement with camp iconography.

Lust for Frankenstein’s narrative loosely revolves around the efforts of Moira (Lina Romay) to decipher messages from the ghost of her father, Dr. Frankenstein (Carlos Subterfuge). Via these messages, which are often intercepted by her stepmother Abigail (Analía Ivars), Moira finds her father’s reanimated creation, Goddess (Michelle Bauer), a patchwork Frankenstein monster with both male and female genitalia. The film evolves into a love story between Moira and Goddess in which the two work to sustain Goddess’s (living dead) existence by providing her nourishment through the transference of vital energies from human bodies. This love story consumes much of the film, making it a unique example of a queer scream queen romance, made all the more fabulously camp by Bauer’s stiff gait and monotone voice in the role of Goddess and Romay’s high-strung performance as an outcast from the house of Frankenstein.

Beyond these broad strokes, the story is difficult to reconstruct due to the film’s repetitive retreats into unexplained flashbacks and refusal to clarify what its antiheroines (Moira and Goddess) are ultimately attempting to accomplish, if anything. Since the movie begins in medias res with Moira waking up from a dream—a sequence in which the opening credits play over psychedelically tinted, slow-motion images of events that occur later in the film—all background information is conveyed through the narration of Dr. Frankenstein, whose voice is altered by pitch conversion and tonally saturated choral effects. This device is consistently employed in conjunction with others that engender and reflect the concentric monotony of the viewing experience. Examples include a repeated “record” motif (discussed

below), shots of characters asleep, lengthy soft-core sex sequences filmed in slow motion and accompanied by an acid-rock soundtrack, flashbacks employing overexposed lighting, and images of characters or animals stylized via telescopic or kaleidoscopic effects. The repeated use of these devices is occasionally linked with the disjointed story, but generally resists any subordination to narrative function and frustrates the delivery of typical soft-core spectacle.

All but ignoring the narrative focus of its literary source, *Lust for Frankenstein* instead unfolds as a series of narratively repetitive yet stylistically distinct sequences involving Moira and Goddess’s campy romance and their attempts to find Goddess sustenance. At the level of production and reception, the film may appear dangerously close to what Caryl Flinn calls “body camp” (54), a form of camp encoded (and received) via specific material and performative codes of embodiment. As Flinn argues, one problematic version of “body camp” (54) holds aging female stars up for ridicule by coding their bodies in terms of death and decay. *Lust for Frankenstein* does feature actresses who were once (and arguably still remain) stars within a specific subculture; however, it does not devolve into a derisive “necro romp” (Flinn 55), but rather figures living death as catalyzing queer forms of being and fulfillment. Decay is still present, but not embodied as femininity, subject to misogynistic ridicule; instead, the film transfers decomposition and delegitimation, by way of a queer, camp-infused misandry, to the bloody apparition of Dr. Frankenstein. The ageist-misogynistic tendencies rampant in consumer readings of the film, I would argue, are the reaction of an audience demographic frustrated by the fact that the film does not deliver the anticipated heteronormative spectacle. The posturing of these viewers can be read as an attempt to shore up hetero-masculinity as the “proper” soft-core viewing position.²⁴ Furthermore, it communicates—often with lame attempts at witticism—which “proper” signifiers of femininity are valued from such positions, and who the ideal consumer of those codes is.²⁵ This posturing can be seen as a version of what Bruce LaBruce has dubbed “bad straight camp”: a reactionary appropriation of camp that is marked by a “complete normalization and de-contextualization away from subversive

or transgressive impulses in the service of capitalist exploitation.” *Lust for Frankenstein* deploys queer countermeasures that work against such bad straight camp normalization.

Dr. Frankenstein is initially situated as the driving force of the narrative, appearing to Moira with directions and clues so that she might decipher his untimely death. The implication is that he was murdered by Moira’s stepmother, Abigail. Yet as the story progresses, the male-driven, linear narrative of clues followed by revelations is short-circuited by queer monotony and subsumed by Moira and Goddess’s living-dead relationship. Like the queer zoning out described previously, this process recalls Koestenbaum’s discussion of record collecting as temporal reversal: “to collect is to go backward in time: you don’t amass objects unless you believe, on some level, that you’ll never die, or unless you want to defy death” (63). In fact, in one early scene, the ghost of Dr. Frankenstein, blood streaming down his face and nose pressed against a glass door, appears to Moira, urging her to “find my records.” Moira and the viewer finally realize that he is referring to vinyl grunge records, which she locates and places on the turntable. These “records” provide a campy visual and aural refrain connoting a melancholic resistance to death and are juxtaposed with other gaudy artifacts, including Goddess’s gold platform boots, multiple shots of a seemingly random dog (once shown in a giant cage), a porcelain rendition of three wise angels (kitsch Westernization of the three wise monkeys), and matador and flamenco dolls. On a basic level, this kitsch effects the “perverse democratization” (Flinn 63) of the objects’ materiality in a classic camp sense where “surface, feel, and texture bring their campiness to life” (Flinn 77), but it also has implications for spectatorial positioning. The gratuitous presentation of these artifacts, insignificant to the narrative, upsets normative avenues of spectatorship—in this case, masculinist connoisseurship both of “high” art and of “low” trash culture. What this collection of kitsch without “clear or useful meaning” (Winnubst 91) ultimately produces instead is the spectatorial experience of queer monotony.

Such monotony also suffuses the many scenes revolving around sensual encounters between the human, the partly human, and the nonhuman.

In one psychedelic dream sequence, Moira voyeuristically gazes through a screen that she caresses for an extended period of time. The appearance of Dr. Frankenstein’s ghost mentioned earlier involves his close encounter with a glass window. In another scene, Moira finds Goddess in the midst of a sexual encounter with a palm tree and joins in as Franco deploys his signature swoop zooms, periodically cutting away to track across the shirtless chest of a man cutting wood. This extended sequence thus sutures the non-human (tree, axe), the partly human (living-dead Goddess), and the ostensibly human (Moira, woodcutter) into a visual entanglement of queer desire defined largely by its bewildering, unhurried quality.

The monotony of this last sequence queerly enacts what Patricia McCormack calls “necro folding and unfolding” (351), a synthesis of activity and passivity that “de-parts bodies and sexual acts iterated through perception as reification” (351). In other words, relational reflections that work to constitute the self as a distinct entity are disallowed as bodies are staged and interact or fall out of contact. The fact that absolute sameness or difference (which might be evoked via purely dyadic concepts like hetero/homo, human/nonhuman, etc.) is not permitted facilitates a monotony



Queer arboreal intimacy. Goddess (Michelle Bauer) and Moira (Lina Romay) in *Lust for Frankenstein*. (One Shot Productions and E. I. Independent Cinema. Screen capture.)

that challenges normative viewing positions. Attempts to adopt a voyeuristically objective or diegetically aligned gaze are all but impossible, and spectatorship is queered by the viewer's immersion in Franco's campy take on scream queen sensuality, effected partly through the director's discordant use of sound and *mise-en-scène*. The soundtrack initially consists of a single bowed instrument, which is soon joined by an alluring saxophone; both clash, however, with diegetic sounds, including the ultrareverberated moans of Goddess, the incessant thuds of the woodcutter's chopping, and the clatter of palm leaves. Such contrapuntal aural arrangements complement the off-kilter cutting between Moira and Goddess and the woodcutter. The sequence does not serve a teleological end and "contrasts with an investigative purpose of the audience setting-up of specific questions that must be answered" (MacCormack 360). Instead, the intimacy between Moira and Goddess engenders a queer form of monotony. Serious to the point of impassivity, their faces connote exhaustion as they are compositionally embedded within their sensuous tropical surrounding. The spectator is pulled through a series of affective registers, leaving his or her perception divided among them. By all but negating this sequence's relevance to the narrative and by scrambling the perspectival focus, Franco accentuates the queer camp pleasures to be taken in the scream queen performances, the unconventional aural-visual rhythms, and the peculiar tropical-pulp imagery.²⁶

The sequence finally ends with a zooming shot of Goddess sleeping on a leather couch, snoring and still wearing her fabulous golden platform boots. Since most of the multicolored hallucinations of *Lust for Frankenstein* are implied to be dream flashbacks, there are a number of sleeping sequences in it. In a sense, the film falls asleep on the viewer. It deflects the critique that it puts viewers to sleep by being the first to arrive at that state, highlighting the monotony of staying awake in the presence of another's slumber. The final sequence returns to this notion by downplaying what could have been a crucial narrative reveal for an attentive spectator—a dream sequence suggesting that Moira was complicit in her father's murder—and instead lingering on a shot of Moira and Goddess embracing while

asleep. Dr. Frankenstein's ghost rambles on about not being able to visit her again, but as she and Goddess sleep, Moira's voice-over counters with a dismissal as the close-up of her fades to a fragmented, kaleidoscopic visualization of Frankenstein's face. She states, "I hope I never dream of stupid things again." Thus, in its final frames, the film effectively communicates a disregard for the spectator's desire for narrative meaning in favor of queer monotony. This queer monotony is congruent with Eve Sedgwick's reparative impulse that "wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self" (149). By refusing to homogenize or foreclose viewing positions, the film encourages the spectator to remain open to the vagaries of camp reception and queer pleasure. At its conclusion, the dream sequences and narrative threads to which the viewer has attended are rendered insignificant in an ultimate camp trick played on the audience. What matters, in the end, is its profound disregard for narrative meaning, its delight in the camp pleasures of scream queen performance, and its queerly collective challenge to the singular normative viewing position.

CONCLUSION

Franco's later 16mm and video work has often been denigrated by mainstream viewers and cult fans alike as boring, pointless, shoddy, and, in misogynistic terms, as "grotesque" or "ugly." Furthermore, academic consideration of this work has been scant and generally negative. Ironically, it was created at the very moment when Franco's earlier films were being rediscovered, celebrated, and remediated for the digital marketplace. In comparison to his earlier films, Franco's later productions are admittedly minimalist and often baffling, marked by their repeated use of the same locations, a grainy video aesthetic, low-quality sound, and highly elliptical narratives. Yet I would argue that their amateurish quality and repetitive character lend them a political edge. While Franco's decision to film on 16mm and video was no doubt economical, the resistance of these media to cinematic norms of image resolution and sound quality matches the

resistance of the films themselves to normative meanings and values. The present chapter has aimed to take his later works seriously both as important historical artifacts and as films with the capacity to facilitate spectatorship open to the pleasures of queer monotony and zoning out.

Whereas both fans and scholars have recuperated Franco's earlier films by highlighting their ties to "legitimate" cinema—their art house associations (Hawkins 87–116) or Franco's connections to Orson Welles (Hawkins 88) and other renowned auteurs—his direct-to-video films are not as easily canonized. Consequently, even Franco's most ardent fans tend to dismiss them or consider them deficient.²⁷ In my view, the value of the director's late 16mm and video work lies in the way it addresses queer audiences. His direct-to-video productions encourage and support queer dreams in ways that his earlier, more renowned films do not. As I have shown in this essay, a key source of their queer sensibility is the subcultural figure of the scream queen. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine them having the same impact absent their cult stars. At the same time, we should also recognize Franco's role in revitalizing scream queen culture. While cult scream queendom developed in the late 1980s as an American subcultural phenomenon that forged a distinctive camp sensibility and a queer following, Franco's late films helped to extend that legacy into the twenty-first century. Moreover, as they were among the first transnational coproductions starring Linnea Quigley and Michelle Bauer, they helped market scream queen stardom to audiences outside North America. They also added a new star to the pantheon of cult scream queens: in 2006, Franco's partner and frequent star, Lina Romay, was celebrated by the Canadian horror magazine *Rue Morgue* as not only "Europe's most famous and fearless exhibitionist" (Alexander 19) but also a "sexploitation scream queen" (19). Ultimately, then, Franco's intervention in the scream queen subgenre both infused his cinema with new forms of queer dissent and recoded the scream queen phenomenon for audiences around the world.

NOTES

1. See Antonio Lázaro-Reboll's *Spanish Horror Film* (156–97) for a discussion of horror fan cultures in Spain with reference to the circulation of discourse on Franco's later work. Also, see Joan Hawkins's *Cutting Edge* (3–32) for a discussion of cultural taste and Euro horror's circulation in the United States.
2. An early example is Hawkins's reading of the transgressive aspects of *Gritos en la noche* (*The Awful Dr. Orlof*, 1962) that disrupt a male gaze (102–3). Others have considered Franco's representation of gender in a national context—as, for example, challenging the "representation of women in (Spanish) subgeneric cinema as inferior" (Lázaro-Reboll 63). Recently, queerness in Franco's work has been decoded through close visual-textual analysis by Ian Olney in both *Euro Horror* (142–81) and "Unmanning *The Exorcist*" (561–71).
3. Tatjana Pavlović has emphasized the pleasures of Jess Franco's films for female spectators (*Despotic Bodies* 119) and also discussed their lesbian and gay reception: "The lesbian following centres on Franco's lesbian vampires and WIP ('women in prison') genres . . . that especially appeal to the gay audience, with their campy legacy of sadistic wardresses, (female) dictators with strong sexual appetites, innocent young women corrupted in jail, cruel lesbian guards, and so on" ("Gender and Spanish Horror Film" 141).
4. Queer studies is a scholarly field that emerged in the late 1980s out of gay and lesbian studies and was inspired by AIDS activists' reclaiming of the derogatory term "queer" for anti-assimilationist purposes. For a discussion of this emergence, see David Halperin (339–40).
5. Camp was historically a method of communication and world-making within gay and bisexual male subcultures predating twentieth-century liberation movements. Over the years, horror cinema has often provided a home for camp and queerness more generally. For instance, Bonnie Zimmerman (23–24) and Andrea Weiss (84–108) appraise lesbian representations in films like *Les Lèvres rouges* (*Daughters of Darkness*, 1971), and Jack Babuscio discusses gay camp's relation to film, particularly the horror genre (121–22). See Fabio Cleto's introduction to *Camp* (1–42) for genealogies of camp's discursive and cultural legibility.
6. I am wary of the pitfalls and blind spots that queer studies has created, such as the erasure of bisexuality (Richter 273–74). This is why I invoke the coalitionary version of its usage, rather than the deconstructive version that often results in such erasures.

7. The explicit marketing of scream queen films to heterosexual men is evinced by the tactic of prominently featuring scantily clad women in advertising materials. This tactic is evident in the marketing of such canonical scream queen films as *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* (1988), *Nightmare Sisters* (1988), and *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama* (1988). Production strategies such as the abundance of female nudity also point to the intention to appeal to straight men. But the marketing and production of these films was not uniformly heteronormative. In the audio commentary on the DVD for *Nightmare Sisters*, gay director David DeCoteau discusses his resistance to the inclusion of full-frontal female nudity in the film, explaining that he regarded it as being at odds with the camp sensibility he intended.
8. For a discussion and theorization of queer labor in film industries, see Matthew Tinkcom's *Working Like a Homosexual*. Tinkcom describes how queer men, as well as other marginalized groups, have engaged in distinct forms of labor (such as camp) to negotiate ambivalences and oppositions in film production (9–11).
9. This has been verified on Franco fan platforms by actor and filmmaker Pedro Temboury; see the comments thread on a blog post from 2009 (Mendíbil). Temboury appeared in four of Franco's One Shot features and directed a recent documentary on Franco, *La última película de Jess Franco* (2013), for the French company Eurociné (a French coproducer and distributor for many of Franco's earlier films).
10. The term "scream queen" crossed back over into mainstream horror vernacular with the slasher renaissance of the late 1990s, which was spearheaded by the *Scream* (1996–2011) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997–2006) franchises. And it still has mainstream cachet today, thanks in part to the popular television series *Scream Queens* (2015–16), in which Jamie Lee Curtis plays a major role.
11. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the American releases and reception of these films.
12. Tim Lucas's article "Catching up with Jess Franco" appeared in 2001 and functioned as a report to American Euro horror and genre fans on the wildness of the One Shot productions, stoking cult anticipation of their commercial release.
13. To briefly comment on the difference in distribution: while I recall the two films from E. I. Independent being available widely in the Midwestern United States through the Musicland and Trans World retail chains, I recall observing the early Sub Rosa DVD releases only at Best Buy. The former recollection is confirmed by the wide distribution advertised on E. I.'s website at the time ("Retail"). The latter is confirmed by the still prominent quote on One Shot's website: "All Jess Franco titles are also in stock at Best Buy and many JC Penney stores" (*One Shot*). Their stated availability at JC Penney, a department store, is somewhat surprising.
14. *Lust for Frankenstein's* cover art was designed by Michael Raso, with photography by Ward Boulton. *Mari-Cookie's* DVD package design is credited to the distributor, Sub Rosa Studios, LLC.
15. For both an interview with DeCoteau and an example of the gay reception of his early films, see CampBlood.org (Juergens). Queer camp content and reception have become even more prominent in contemporary scream queen media and fan subculture. For example, DeCoteau's *1313* franchise (2011–12) and *3 Scream Queens* (2014) openly revel in homoerotic depictions of scantily clad men.
16. In his innovative book *Soft in the Middle*, David Andrews traces the genealogy of American soft-core film. While I agree with Andrews that soft-core's history is not analogous to that of hard-core, his argument that "softcore is more uniformly heterosexual" (13) than hard-core ignores the queer dimensions of soft-core we see in cult scream queen cinema.
17. For example, one Amazon reviewer states: "I have one other Jesus Franco film with Lina Romay . . . and in it she is young and beautiful" (Kane). The reviewer then goes on to describe Romay in *Lust for Frankenstein*: "I don't believe anybody who buys Franco films is hoping to see a woman in her mid-50s at youngest, complete with liverspots and vericose veins, expose herself and have love scenes" (Kane).
18. Again, as noted previously, the production and reception of DeCoteau's recent scream queen beefcake films offer a powerful testament to the queer pleasures offered by the subgenre. The fact that Stevens, Bauer, and Quigley star in some of these movies serves to underscore their centrality to the scream queen canon.
19. Other reviewers were frustrated by the presence of Romay (not pictured on the cover artwork) in the film. This frustration is expressed with varying degrees of objectifying judgment ranging from "not sexy" (Mesmerise) to "an OLD dumpmy [*sic*] lil seahag" ("EEEEWWWWWWWW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"). That the actresses from the cover, Newman and Bauer, actually do appear in the film may reinforce the reading that Franco did not intend to deliver sexual spectacle via codes legible to a soft-core audience.
20. Koestenbaum is specifically speaking about a material aspect of the collection and appreciation of opera records by gay male fans. His articulation of a backward acclimatization resonates, from my perspective, with Richter's view (273–80) that queer optics are not exhausted by codification within

- a monosexual dichotomy. For instance, I would argue that Koestenbaum's backward mode of reception is open to queer people who are bisexual.
21. Halberstam's concept stems from his study of animated enactments of collective anthropomorphic revolt, specifically in Pixar films (27–52). However, he indicates its applicability to exploitation horror films such as *Invasion of the Bee Girls* (1973), which focuses on the nonreproductive queerness of apian women (52).
 22. In Edelman's discussion, monotonous depictions of "suspended animation" (55) and arachnid narcissism (56) allegorically correlate with queerness, which is positioned as abject in the context of reproductive futurist politics. However, as Edelman argues, abjection can be used to facilitate queer opposition to such politics (1–31).
 23. For discussions of repetition as a structuring tenet of European horror and American soft-core, respectively, see Olney's *Euro Horror* (23–45) and Andrews's *Soft in the Middle* (1–22).
 24. See Hollows (35–53) and Read (54–70) for histories of the exclusion of women and the celebration of masculinity within both academic and subcultural discourses. Several online reviews of the Franco films discussed in this chapter imply, through their complaints, the reviewers' exclusionary view of the films' proper viewers—men with normative heterosexual ideals of feminine beauty. Recall the reviewer who writes in response to *Lust for Frankenstein*, "I don't believe anybody who buys Franco films is hoping to see a woman in her mid-50s at youngest" (Kane).
 25. For example, an anonymous reviewer of *Lust for Frankenstein* on Netflix is obviously making an attempt at humor when he or she writes: "The skin in this skin flick is really wrapped around some ugly women—when you can see it" ("First Let Me Say . . .").
 26. The queer camp sensibility has been linked to the multiplication of and play with perspectives in various media, as well as to the pleasure in encountering the sensuous and material aspects of the objects or images represented (Babuscio 121).
 27. For instance, in an excellent survey of the first half of Franco's career, Stephen Thrower describes the "drawbacks" (45) of Franco's cinematic freedom in his later films, such as the necessity of shooting on video in his own home.

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