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Camp, Kitsch, and Suburbia – Origins of a Queer Colour Palette in Cult Film and Its Expansion into Contemporary Art

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Figure 1 - Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader (1999)

Coleman's work within this piece discusses the challenges, legitimacy, and dominance of queer identity. Focusing on the intersections of Queerness in cult cinema, introducing the idea of a "Queer Colour Palette" throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Bring together the discussion of a contemporary art colour palette, to screen. Fusing together how art and film hold many similarities when analysing them.

Read Time (Approx.): 27 minutes

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Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence.

As stated by David Halperin (1997, p.62). Looking at Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999) as a critical foundation for Queer Theory, this essay will explore the intersections between Queerness and cult cinema, specifically how what this essay will define as a *Queer Colour Palette* is used within cult cinema and how it has developed over the 20th and 21st century.

Figure 2 – Screenshot from Velvet Goldmine (1998)

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Although it is by nature very much *'un-queer'* to define the term Queer as said by Nikki Sullivan (2003, p.43), this essay will be using the term as a way to reference the LGBTQ+ Community, taking into consideration everyone who identifies outside of the label of heterosexual - being attracted to the opposite sex - and cissexual -identifying with the gender assigned at birth-. However alternative explanations of the term are as such: *'Queer is an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation'* (Berry and Jagose, 1996). Or Cherry Smith (1996, p.280) defining Queer as a strategy of understanding oneself: Queer articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality, and the family. We are beginning to realise how much of history and ideologies operate on a homo-hetero opposition.

Transgressive, obscure, and rejected by the mainstream; just a few of the words that frequently appear when referring to cult cinema within the collection of essays within Mark Jancovich's *Defining Cult Movies* (2003), which can also be said about Queer people as a result of their ostracisation from heterosexuality. This essay will follow the definition of cult films provided by Jeffrey Sconce in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (2003). This considers cult cinema in relation to *paracinema*, grouping together a variety of films that are not accepted by critics and mainstream culture (2003, p.1). The term *paracinema* was first used by Jeffrey Sconce and refers to a variety of film genres that exist outside of mainstream blockbusters.

Cult films do not all share a single feature that defines them as such, but rather are unified by a subcultural ideology that opposes what is popular in the mainstream. However, Matt Hill (2006, p.160-169) presents the idea of a cult blockbuster where a film popular within the mainstream develops a cult following within a larger fanbase. Whilst *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) is a well-known film, it has amassed a strong Queer fanbase that is considered cult.

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Figure 3 – Screenshot from The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)

Chapter One will study three films: *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Desperate Living* (1972), and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999). Analysing the use of colour within each film. It will consider what those colours mean using Patti Bellantoni's *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die* (2005) and *Film: A Critical Introduction* (2011) by Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis to form a critical analysis of colour within film.

Then discussing how - what this essay is labelling as - a *Queer Colour Palette* has formed and developed through the 20th century and what that means and entails. Additionally, taking into consideration how significant points of Queer History coincide with moments in Cult Cinema Using Barbara Mennel's *Queer Cinema: Schoolgirls, Vampires, and Gay Cowboys* (2012) as a reference point for those intersections. Then looking at how they affect the development of the *Queer Colour Palette*, and the significance of different colours within gay culture e.g., Gilbert Baker's pride flag.

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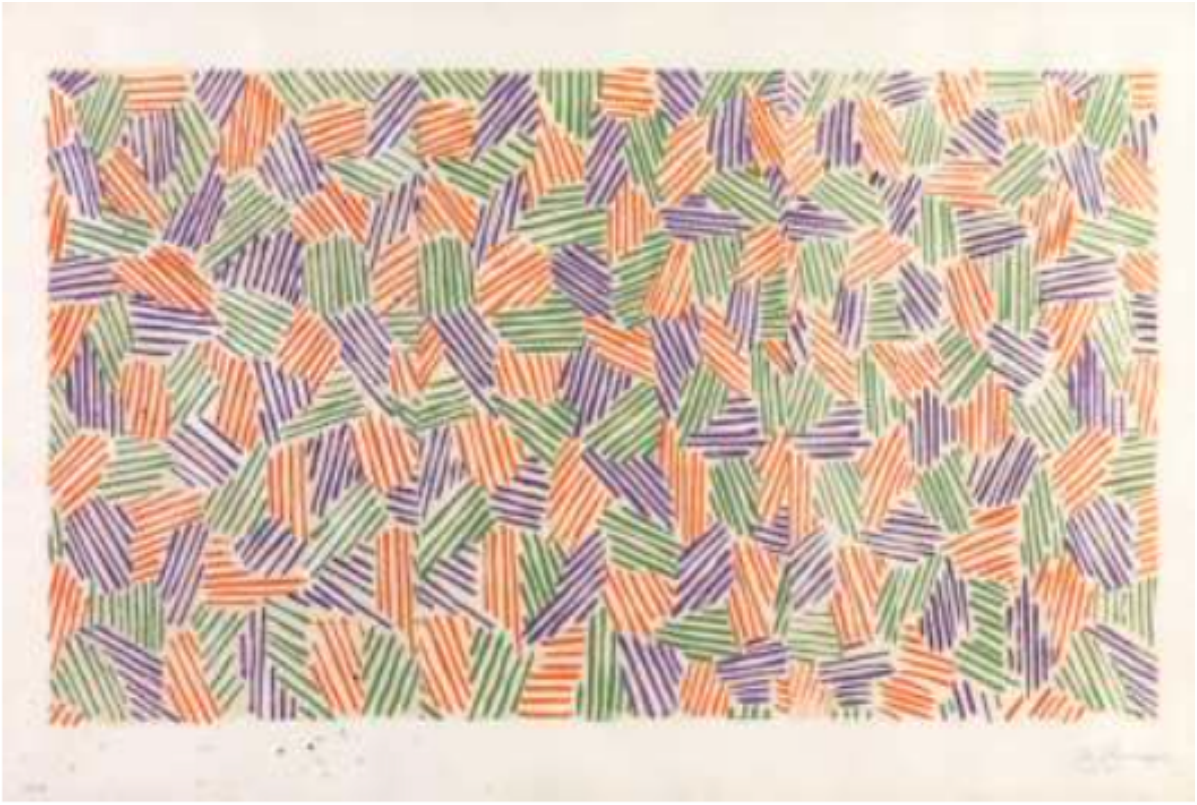

Figure 4 – Scent, 1976, Jasper Johns, Color lithograph, linocut, and woodcut from four aluminum plates, four linoleum blocks, and four woodblocks on heavy white wove paper, 79.5 × 119.5 cm

Chapter Two will explore the expansion of the *Queer Colour Palette* into *Contemporary Art*, beginning with the links between cinema and culture, the ways they affect and influence one another. Taking a brief look into what may have been some of the original inspirations for the palette such as the deep history between gay terminology and flowers, which is discussed within Christopher Looby's *FLOWERS OF MANHOOD: Race, Sex and Floriculture from Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Robert Mapplethorpe* (1995).

Contemporary Art is a term that describes to a broad variety of genres and styles of work, and in simple terms refers to *'the art of our time'* (Rebentisch, 2015, p.223). This essay will be using the term to refer to art created within the latter half of the 20th century continuing to present day.

With Richard Meyer and Catherine Lord's *Art & Queer Culture* (2013) as contextual underpinning for the Queer history within art, this chapter will look at *Pop Art* in a Queer

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context and the similarities between Queer ideologies and those of the movement, using the 1963 interview *What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters* between Andy Warhol and Gene Swensen as a key reference point.

The rest of the chapter will discuss *Contemporary Art* of the 21st century, particularly focusing on the work of Dew Kim, Juliana Huxtable, Wai Kin Sin, and Zoe Walsh as examples of the *Queer Colour Palette* still existing and being utilised outside of film. Additionally, exploring how it has developed conceptually and visually within the work of different artists.

Colour as a Means of Queer Expression in Cinema

Just as Queerness has always existed within history, Queerness has existed within artistic spaces; Sappho writing poetry for female lovers in Ancient Greece, which is why Queer women choose to use the term sapphic to refer to women who are attracted to women. Men dressing in women's clothing to depict female roles in 17th century theatre. The trouser roles of Weimar cinema which featured women cross-dressing to portray men. However, Queer art has been more of an explicit presence within the modern centuries; Richard Meyer (2013, p.10):

> From Oscar Wilde and The Picture of Dorian Gray to Susan Sontag and 'Notes on Camp', from the molly houses of eighteenth-century London to the Harlem drag balls of the 1920s, the flamboyant refusal of social and sexual norms has fueled the creation of Queer art and life throughout the modern period.

These are but a small sample of Queerness within the history of art. This chapter will focus on 20th century cult cinema and how Queerness is expressed through colour within film as an art form.

According to George Chauncey (1994 cited in Mennel, 2012, p.2) art historian who worked in New York from the 1890s to the 1940s, gay men and lesbians developed a complex system of subcultural codes because of the taboo against sexualities and genders outside of the cis, heterosexual norm and the need to recognise and communicate with one another. These codes were then brought to the viewing and making of films, which has left imprints of a hidden presence through the styles, codes, connotations, and subtext throughout cinema (Mennel, 2012, p.2). This chapter will explore Queer expression through the use of colour within 20th century cult cinema, where heterosexual society is represented through dull colouring, and Queerness is the stark contrast of that with. The films *The Wizard of Oz*

(1939), *Desperate Living* (1977), and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999) will be the case studies for this chapter.

Figure 5 – Screenshot from The Wizard of Oz, 1939

As established earlier on, although *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) may not appear to be either cult or Queer, it has gathered a strong Queer fanbase with gay men being referred to as *'friends of Dorothy'* (Leap, 2003, p.98) which is a reference to Dorothy's acceptance of those who are different. Dorothy came to be a representation of those accepting of homosexuals, which will be explored further in depth within this chapter. Gross (The Atlantic, 2000) describes Dorothy's journey as '*the lonely, misunderstood small-town kid who has a great adventure in a wild new world where fabulous friends appear to help her on her way, and where no sorrow can overwhelm her'* emphasising why Queer people connect to her character.

She begins in Kansas, which is shown in sepia tones (Figure 5), representing a 'normal' life (Pugh, 2008) and sings of 'somewhere over the rainbow' wishing for a life better and

brighter than Kansas where she won't come across any trouble. The rainbow flag used as the symbol for gay pride was first unveiled in June 1978, designed by artist and activist Gilbert Baker (Quartz, 2015) stating:

The rainbow is so perfect because it really fits our diversity in terms of race, gender, ages, all of those things. Plus, it's a natural flag—it's from the sky!

The original flag featured eight colours, all with symbolic meanings (SFO Museum, 2018): pink as sexuality, red as life, orange as healing, yellow as sunlight, green as nature, turquoise as art, indigo as peace and harmony, and purple as spirit (Figure 6).

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Figure 6 – 1978 Original Rainbow Flag, 1978, Gilbert Baker

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Unnaturally large synthetic appearing flowers in shades of pink and yellow, and large expanses of bright green interrupted by the yellow brick are the first thing Dorothy sees when she steps into Oz. Natural imagery is in abundance, green grass ever present in every setting, a stark contrast to the barren dryness of the farm in Kansas. The idea of Queerness being unnatural is something that is often brought up within homophobic rhetoric, which is why green representing nature in the pride flag is so important.

Whilst Oz is extravagance personified, the natural imagery serves as a reminder that the grandeur is not wrong or unnatural in a similar manner to Queerness and camp. Benshoff (2006, p.68) refers to Oz as *'a land where difference and deviation from the norm are the norm'*. The yellow brick road (Figure 7) serves as both a warning sign and a promise; a sunny warmth that promises happiness over the rainbow, and a bright alert of danger, (Bellantoni, 2005, p. 6) warning the obstacles Dorothy will have to overcome. Like the myriad of difficulties that Queer people face on their own journeys to happiness and safety.

Figure 7 - Screenshot from The Wizard of Oz, 1939

In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) Dorothy describes the munchkins as *'the Queerest people she had ever seen'* (Baum, 1900, p.20) which is true within the film with the munchkins appearing in brightly coloured, obnoxiously patterned outfits (Figure 8). An

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accurate descriptor for their appearance would be camp. Dorothy herself is clothed in pale blue gingham, she is powerless, and therefore needs the strength from the ruby slippers given to her. The ruby slippers are flamboyant and have become a symbol of transformation, the plain farm girl who runs away from home on a journey to find herself, creating a found family of misfits and rag-tag individuals on her way a mirror of Queer experience (Bennett, and Johnson, 2019).

Figure 8 – Screenshot from The Wizard of Oz, 1939

Not only was Dorothy a beloved figure within Queer communities, but her actress Judy Garland became one too, and with her death in June 1969 formed a myth that her death was the cause of the Stonewall Riots. This myth does a disservice to the actual people at the forefront of these riots which were a response to a police raid at a gay bar called Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York (Waxman, Time, 2019). These riots were a major catalyst for the gay rights movement not only in America but around the world.

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Stonewall is a watershed moment that separates Queer history into the before Stonewall and after Stonewall. Before refers to the complex subculture with codes, double lives, and bar culture, whereas after refers to the contemporary Queer identities which are politicised, the demand for equal rights, and pride. This was reflected within cinema, although not immediately due to the high cost of film and production. Post-Stonewall cinema involved Hollywood undergoing a transformation in response to the cultural and political climate spanning from late 1960 to the late 1980s (Mennel, 2012, p.49-50).

The low budget films during this period featured the heavy use of camp which Mennel (2012, p.27) describes as a defining feature of Queer aesthetics. Susan Sontag (1966, p.1) states that the essence of camp is the love it has for exaggeration and artifice, it is extravagant and outrageous, art that is proposed as serious but cannot be taken as such because by nature it is too much. Susan Sontag (1966, p.9-10):

> Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp" not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as Playing a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.

Camp and drag were used as an access point for Queer subculture within film by filmmakers Andy Warhol, John Waters, Jack Smith and Kenneth Anger. John Waters films are filled with an urban grittiness, defined by shock value, and feature unrealistic acting with completely fake sets sometimes due to budgeting issues, or sometimes intentional as Waters (1995, p.167) expresses, *'I hate reality, and if I could have my way, everything I captured on screen would be fake – the buildings, the trees, the grass, even the horizon'*.

Waters 1972 film, *Desperate Living* follows a suburban housewife who murders her husband with her maid and their ensuing run from the law which leads them to Mortville, a town of perverse sexual behaviour, Queer people, and a range of underground sexual culture, connecting art-house experimental cinema to trash (Mennel, 2012).

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Figure 9 – Screenshot from Desperate Living, 1972

The film begins in suburbia, shrouded in shades of brown (Figure 9), any hint of colour displayed in the palest shade. Suburbia represents the expectations of heterosexual life, no deviations from the status quo, therefore it is depicted with neutral or pale colours. It follows the structure of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), starting in a sepia soaked socially acceptable home, then a catalyst event thrusts the protagonists into a vibrant, artificial wonderland (or in this case, a land of trash).

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Figure 10 – Screenshot from Desperate Living, 1972

Everything in Mortville is formed from garbage (Figure 10) from the clothes to the buildings, resulting in clashing patterns and colours on every surface, a large juxtaposition from the clean, plain looking suburban environment from the beginning of the movie. Thus, depicting a literal visualisation of the association of Queer people with *'trash on the margin of society'* (Mennel, 2012, p.43) and creating an unintentionally kitsch aesthetic from the tacky belongings that others deemed as unusable. 'Red and green should never be seen' becomes a moot statement when options are limited.

The human instinct when being told not to do something is to do exactly that, so when Queer people are shunned by mainstream society, it creates the need to become the exact opposite of what is considered acceptable, so when suburbia expects a polished environment with a cap on colour and vibrancy, the Queer aesthetic becomes maximalist – an aesthetic that celebrates excess (Rivers, 2008, p.11) - in nature with an abundance of colour and mismatched patterns.

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Figure 11 – Screenshot from Desperate Living, 1972

A large portion of the film is set within the home of Muffy and Mole (Figure 11), who are exaggerated representations of *butch* and *femme* lesbian roles. Stereotypically, in a heterosexual relationship, the woman would oversee the decoration of the home, naturally leading to more 'feminine' touches around the house. Muffy and Mole's house contains more than a touch of femininity; the exterior is striped with pink and purple, the bedroom overflowing with pink florals and lace, and the kitchen a patchwork assortment of silk fabric, zebra print and pink lace curtains. This exaggeration of gendered stereotypes within heterosexual relationships becomes an over the top, camp performance. Here we begin to see the *Queer Palette* defined as either the opposite of societal norms or the inflation of them which results in kitsch.

Another example of this would be Jamie Babbit's satirical film *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999) which follows 17-year-old cheerleader Megan who appears naïve and demure, but everyone

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in her life suspects there is something wrong with her in the form of homosexuality. She is then sent to 'True Directions' a five-step rehabilitation programme to 'cure' her homosexuality. Babbit (Nitrate, 2000) cites John Waters as one of her inspirations for the style of the film alongside photographer David LaChapelle, Barbie, and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), describing herself as having '*a pop sensibility*'.

Figure 12 - Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader, 1999

Babbit paid extra attention to production design and how it reflects the themes, particularly the construction of gender and its artificiality. With the production and costume designers, she worked out that she wanted the movie to progress from an organic, neutral look to a world that appears plastic. The beginning, which once again is set in suburbia, features shades of brown (Figure 12) and an array of wooden furniture. Megan is donning an orange cheerleader uniform (Figure 13) which was necessary for Babbit (Rah Rah Rah, 2006) as a:

> ...pinnacle of the American dream, and the American dream of femininity. The idea that girls grow up and they are brainwashed to want to be a cheerleader, you know, while, like, the guys play the aggressive sports and make millions of dollars. The girls cheer them on, you know, and make five cents, and show their legs. We just wanted it to be like this sort of stereotypical, you know, teen, teen — teen dream.

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The colour orange is described by Patti Bellantoni (2005) as a colour of no surprises, generically nice, and naïve. Her role of a cheerleader is exactly that, a conformation of heterosexual society and its expectation of her roles as a female.

Figure 13 – Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader, 1999

As soon as she enters True Directions, the comfortable organic tones are lost and replaced with fake technicolour shades, Megan trades cotton for polyester, and as the film progresses it gets increasingly absurd with fake skies and plastic outfits which Ted Gideonse (2000, p.59) notes that the *'plastic costumes and intense and unnatural colors show how false the camp's goals are'*.

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Figure 14 - Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader, 1999

The colours used are what Chris Holmlund (2004, p.183) refers to as *'gender-tuned'*, with the classic pink for girls and blue for boys. The girl's bedroom (Figure 14) is entirely pink, from the carpet to the bedding to the walls to the ceiling, which can also be seen in the rooms showcased in the 'rediscovering your gender identity' step within the programme. A bridal room of soft pink and white, and the motherhood room (Figure 15) which consists of the same colours and overt symbolism to do with babies and parenting.

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Figure 15 - Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader, 1999

Similarly, the boys are shown to be performing tasks like fixing cars, chopping wood, and the constant readjustment of genitalia to demonstrate masculinity led by camp leader Mike played by RuPaul – ironic due to his famed drag queen status – and surrounded by the colour blue (Figure 16). Alongside the phallic imagery which Babbit (Nitrate, 2000) says is a depiction of *'how if you repress something, it comes out in other ways'*. Although colour is used to reinstate gender roles, it is done in such an over-the-top way that it becomes Queer by nature, an example of the *Queer Colour Palette* taking parts of heterosexual culture and transforming it into something camp.

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Figure 16 - Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader, 1999

In contrast to the artificiality of True Directions, *But I'm a Cheerleader* depicts the gay rights activists in a similarly excessive manner but lacks the falseness that comes with trying to force someone to lead a straight lifestyle. Whilst the rainbows and references to being Queer adorn every surface (Figure 17) in an overbearing way, it doesn't act as an overcompensation to hide a part of their identity, it comes from a place of pride (whilst still light-heartedly poking fun at overenthusiastic gay rights activists). Commenting on the history of camp as primarily being associated with gay men, Babbit (Nitrate, 2000) describes the film as a *'feminization of the camp aesthetic, bringing emotion to something that's hyperrealized.'*

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Figure 17 - Screenshot from But I'm a Cheerleader, 1999

Within these three films, there is an established motif wherein heterosexual society is represented by bland, muted colours; an indication of repressed urges and the demand to fit in with everybody else. When Queer groups are showcased, it is in bright technicolour, gloriously kitsch and camp and the opposite of suburbia. Such juxtapositions are also visible in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), etc. Therefore, the *Queer Colour Palette* is the antithesis of what heterosexual society expects - it is tacky, lacks regard for polish, is full of expression, and is honestly joyful.

The 'Queer Colour Palette' in Contemporary Art

The *Queer Colour Palette* established within Chapter One exists as a response to heteronormative society, because this essay argues that idea of heterosexuality is presented in neutrals and washed-out colours. The *Queer Colour Palette* is flamboyant and bright with shades of pink, blue, orange, green, yellow, purple, or a combination of multiple colours. Chapter Two will seek to establish its presence within *Contemporary Art* throughout the late 20th century and the 21st century.

Fearing (1947) discusses the relationship between film and culture, and the influence both have on one another supported by Colin Young (1969, p.24) on documentaries who states:

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The documentary was influenced by, and later itself influenced, the fictional film. Audiences now, not knowing which came first, find it impossible to distinguish between style and subject.

Similarly, films are influenced by society, culture, and human behaviour, but when that film becomes available to the public it, in turn, begins to influence society, culture, and human behaviour. So, whilst the *Queer Colour Palette* in cinema had been inspired by existing Queer culture, it developed and then became an inspiration itself for the Queer culture. The Queer cinema of the 20thth century had drawn from the complex codes and secret subcultures of homosexuality.

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Figure 18 - Botanical drawing of lavender, 1798, William Curtis, Pencil on Paper, Dimensions Unknown

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For example, the green carnation became a subtle symbol of men who loved men after Oscar Wilde suggested his friends wear them to the opening of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Following the floral theme, violets are associated with women who love women, due to their repeated mentions within the poetry of Sappho (Prager, 2020). In Flowers of manhood, Christopher Looby (1995, p.145) notes that *'to the early twentieth-century popular slang terms for flamboyant gay men, "daisy," "buttercup," and especially "pansy," which were then generalized in the term "horticultural lad",'*. Lavender is inseparable from Queerness, with the notable use of the term a streak of lavender from historian Carl Sandburg about Abraham Lincolns possible Queer side, as well as the Lavender Scare, the persecution of homosexual employees within the federal government (Shibusawa, 2012, p.723-752). Lavender Menace was a term used by Betty Friedan in reference to lesbians who she believed to be a threat to the National Organization for Women. This term was then reclaimed by lesbian feminists in protest of this exclusion of lesbians (Shumsky, 2009).

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Figure 19 - For Oscar Wilde, 1995, Virgil Marti, Photograph of Installation

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These floral associations and a multitude of other Queer codes and languages e.g., the handkerchief code, are part of the underpinning for the critical underpinning for the *Queer Colour Palette* refined within 19th century cinema. This chapter will discuss how this palette then expanded outside of film and into *Contemporary Art.*

The 1950s in Western Culture were what Richard Meyers (2013, p.99) describes as '*the most politically conservative and expressly homophobic decade of the twentieth century'* with significant repercussions and punishments for homosexuality. In response to this, Queer groups and artists would function under secrecy and codes as a form of camouflage and were a key part in operating undercover to kick off the gay rights movement (Meyers, 2013, p.99). During this period artists such as Ruth Bernhard, Jess Collins, Andy Warhol, and Valentine Penrose were producing work that had connotations of desire and sexuality whilst still navigating the homophobic constraints during this time.

Additionally, during the 1950s, the *Pop Art* movement surfaced originating in the United Kingdom and the United States. Utilising imagery from popular culture within art in defiance to the traditions of fine art (Livingstone, 1990). Its ironic use of mundane and kitsch elements of culture to challenge upper-class elitism reflects what many Queer cult films were also aiming for; subvert the expectations of those who believed they were above them.

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Figure 20 - Marilyn Diptych, 1962, Andy Warhol, Acrylic paint on canvas, 205.44 cm × 289.56 cm

In 1963 Gene Swenson interviewed Andy Warhol transcribed by Jennifer Sichel (2018) as part of his series *What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters*. The leading question Swenson jokingly presents is *'What do you say about homosexuals?'*. The rest of the interview follows in a similar tone with Warhol proclaiming that the entire interview should in fact be about homosexuality. During the interview Swenson asks *'Do you think Pop Art's Queer?'*. An interesting notion to consider. Whilst this essay cannot label the entirety of *Pop Art* as Queer, it can point out that there are intersections between *Pop Art* and camp and therefore Queerness. In fact, *Pop Art* itself is sometimes regarded as misogynistic as it was male dominated with the frequent use of sexist imagery featuring overly sexualised portrayals of women seen in advertisement (Richardson, 2021). Male *Pop Artists* were inspired by the sexual freedom of the 1960s (Richardson, 2021), but this led to the commodification of feminine bodies as supported by Meghna Chakrabarti (2011, Radio Boston):

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> The rich irony is, of course, that as so many women artists toiled in obscurity, male pop artists made their names and their fames through images of women. You can't think of Warhol without thinking of Marilyn Monroe.

The subjects within *Pop Art* are often mass-produced objects, imagery from advertising or popular culture, or celebrities such as Warhol's Marilyn Monroe works. These subjects are camp in nature, extraordinary in their ordinariness. Alongside that, the art from this movement tends to bear vibrant block colours, similar to what is defined within the *Queer Colour Palette* of Chapter One. Queerness and *Pop Art* have similarities both visually and ideologically; the rebellion against 'normal' society.

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Figure 21 - Glory! Glory! Glory!, 2019, Dew Kim, Photograph of Installation

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In the late 20th century, the *Queer Colour Palette* can also be found in a multitude of artistic spaces outside of *Pop Art*, and outside of traditional two-dimensional art, however, the rest of this chapter will focus on the 21st century and how this essay argues that palette is still visible as a Queer identifier within art.

There are many self defined Queer artists within *Contemporary Art* e.g., Juliana Huxtable, Dew Kim, Sunil Gupta, Vaginal Davis, Cheddar Gorgeous, Evan Ifekoya, Bruce Asbestos, etc.

Dew Kim is a South-Korean artist who works with sculpture, installation, video, and performance art, and explores sex, religion, fantasy, and post-gender society within his work (Millington, 2020). Kim's 2019 exhibition *Can-Can Boys* looks at Queer cruising culture and how it metamorphizes in response to locations and physical spaces. Kim (2019, hornyhoneydew.com) discusses how '*Queer desires and existence unfold through the uncertainty and hallucinogenic phenomena of gay subcultures such as cruising, BDSM, chemsex, and cybersex*.'

Within this exhibition, Kim's installation *Glory! Glory! Glory!* (Figure 21) features a public toilet stall with a glory hole drilled into the wall which is embellished with stickers. The decoration of a space that is viewed as repellent with objects that are colourful and synonymous with fun corresponds with the notion that was showcased in *Desperate Living* (1972), where Queer people will transform trash into treasure.

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Figure 22 - Succulent Humans, 2018, Dew Kim, Photograph of Installation

Succulent Humans (2018) tells a story of a post-gender futuristic society where the remaining survivors of the human race must create a new reproductive system (Kim, 2018). Featuring subcultural imagery and geometric structures, Kim explores the idea of the 'posthuman' with a sense of irony. Pink and purple neon lights, a nod to the Queer culture which thrives within the nightlife of gay bars. The post gender society imagined here is not dull – rainbow tinted glitter and hot pink sand (Figure 22) surrounding children's toys and stickers – in contrast to the usual sleek chrome environments referenced in sci-fi and other representations of future society. With this, comes the suggestion that wherever Queerness exists, there will be colour.

Multi-media artist Juliana Huxtable explores gender, sexuality, identity, race, and the intersections between them. Huxtable was born intersex and assigned and raised male, but did not identify as male (Sargent, 2015). She often references her own body within her work alongside political issues and history, particularly her nude self-portraits which reflect on *'interactions among the physical body, the public self, and the cultural forces that shape and repress an individual'* (Guggenheim, (n.d.)).

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Figure 23 - Figure 23: Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm), 2015, Juliana Huxtable, Inkjet print, 101.6 x 76.2 cm

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Untitled In the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm) (Figure 23), contains references to Nubian and Egyptian cultures through the landscape and portraiture style and is a beautiful portrayal of black identity. Simultaneously, she celebrates her body and her gender identity by emphasising it through a sexualised and feminised pose (Sargent, 2015). The colours are heavily stylised with green skin and neon yellow hair, entirely unnatural but visually stunning; a Queer body does not have to conform to heteronormative society to be considered beautiful. *Queer aesthetics* are frequently presented through unnatural colours or artificial objects, perhaps a reflection on the notion presented within homophobia that Queerness is unnatural and wrong, reclaiming what is used to oppress.

Figure 24 - Narrative Reflections On Looking Preface / Looking Without Touching, 2017, Wai Kai Sin, Screenshot of Video Performance

Wai Kin Sin who is also known as Victoria Sin uses drag, photography, video, performance, print, and writing to defy the normative conceptions of objectification, desire, and identity, specifically the experience of a Queer body within the heteronormative society (Millington, 2020). Influenced by Judith Butler's (1999, p.138) ideas on drag, '*the parody is of the very notion of an original*' Sin works to criticise the categorical nature surrounding gender and sex (Millington, 2020). Their inspiration comes from icons of exaggerated femininity such as Marilyn Monroe and Jessica Rabbit (Luke, 2018) drawing on the notion that the *Queer*

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Colour Palette can come from a place of exaggerated gender stereotypes. In the 2017 video, *Narrative Reflections On Looking Preface / Looking Without Touching* (Figure 24), Sin is swathed in shades of red, the *'visual caffeine'* colour (Bellantoni, 2005, p.2) with strong associations of passion and power. Red amplifies their confidence as they display their Queerness through heightened femininity.

Sin is also heavily influenced by cult sci-fi movies of the 20th century, interested in the way narratives presented in media resonate with people and become ingrained within the fabrics of their psyche. (Baconsky, 2019) This not only shows the effect films have on people, but the way Queer people connect to cult cinema, and how the *Queer Colour Palette* has come to be used within *Contemporary Art*. Sin, (Dazed, 2019) states:

With the end of the world comes a lot of space and possibility. I like exploring the idea of how we would recreate ourselves from scratch.

The 2015 work *Fun Bag* (Figure 25) is a comedic representation of breasts using balloons, containing a multi-coloured palette. The use of humour and this type of colouring is essential to *Queer aesthetics*, making a camp commentary on the body and how it is perceived.

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Figure 25 - Fun Bag, 2015, Wai Kin Sin, Inflated balloons, carrier bag, coat hanger, 33 × 43 × 23 cm

Aiming to construct a place for trans identities fixed within visual pleasure, Zoe Walsh uses heavily fabricated images of gender and sexuality, e.g., photography of actors on pornography sets (Tenzer, 2019). The imagery is processed through photo editing software until the subjects appear genderless, and in the process of erasing any hyper-masculine signifying elements, Walsh (Cultured, 2019) creates a reverse of the social construction of gender, stating:

> These levels of transformation from the source material help me find ways to talk about a particular subjectivity that is about watching from a distance, imagining something that is not actually there... It alludes to the painting

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process, camera movements and Photoshop layering effects, I was thinking about the different forms of movement in each medium.

Figure 26 - You who never tasted the fruit, 2021, Zoe Walsh, Acrylic on canvas-wrapped panel, 182.9 × 121.9 cm

Planes of magenta and cyan are common to Walsh's work, combining pink and blue as the colours of the highest gender coding within the genderless imagery (Tenzer, 2019). A clear example of the *Queer Colour Palette* taking from heteronormative society and repurposing and remoulding constructs to fit a Queer agenda. Where pink used to mean 'girl', and blue

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meant 'boy', Walsh seamlessly combines the two into an image that exists outside of the binary, in vibrant technicolour.

This essay argues that Dew Kim, Juliana Huxtable, Kai Win Sin, and Zoe Walsh are examples of the *Queer Colour Palette* being used within *Contemporary Art* of the 21st century. Queer culture is still being impacted by popular culture, a form of escapism from a world that excludes and persecutes those who are different, finding refuge in an artificial world (Eleftheriadis, 2019). When Queer people are consuming media – particularly cult cinema which offers a safe place for those who are rejected by society – they are absorbing what they see which in turn influences what they create. *The Queer Colour Palette* is still being used because it not only servers as a sign for Queer people to recognise each other, but perfectly encompasses what it means to be Queer with its unabashedly bright colours, confidence, and pride. To the average cisgendered heterosexual person, the use of bold colour does not act as a signifier, but to a Queer person, specific colours can exist as coded messages of pride and empowerment (Stevens, 2021).

This essay has studied the use of colour as Queer expression in cult cinema and *Contemporary Art* through analysis and extensive research. In chapter one a *Queer Colour Palette* is defined from the case studies of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Desperate Living* (1972), and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999). *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) acts as the blueprint for a formula which is visible within each film, beginning with a sepia representation of what is supposed to be 'normal' life. This then transitions into an artificial world of overwhelming technicolour that is fantastical in nature. This is a repeated motif within Queer cult cinema with the sections of film that are deprived of colour signifying a heterosexual society, often with depictions of suburbia and the nuclear family.

Then the protagonist of the film will be thrust into a location that acts as the antithesis of that, with vibrant colours that are exaggerated by the lack of colour that came before it. Oftentimes accompanied with camp imagery, kitsch patterns, and unusual characters.

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Figure 27 - Screenshot from Edward Scissorhands, 1990

Gilbert Baker used the rainbow as a symbol for gay pride because of the diversity within its colouring (Quito, 2015), which is precisely why the *Queer Colour Palette* features such a large range of colours: pink, blue, orange, green, purple, yellow, red.

The components of the *Queer Colour Palette* are colours that subvert or exaggerate the norms of heterosexual society, when society asks for monotony and adherence to the conventional, Queerness will deliver something that is bold and extravagant. When suburbia is lacklustre, Queer society is camp, offering hot pinks and clashing colours in place of brown and cream.

After establishing the *Queer Colour Palette*, it is discussed within chapter two outside of film and within *Contemporary Art*. Starting with *Pop Art* and exploring how it can sometimes crossover with the values of camp and Queerness. Although *Pop Art* is often considered to be a male dominated movement which has come under criticism for being misogynistic, it's subversion of fine art traditions mirrors the subversion of heterosexual tradition within the *Queer Colour Palette*. Additionally, its subject matters of mundane objects or people with

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icon status feel quite camp in nature and the use of bright block colours is similar to the use of colour determined within chapter one. However, this essay cannot label the entirety of the *Pop Art* movement as a Queer movement, because these convergences are but a small part of *Pop Art* as a genre.

Figure 28 – Patina du Prey's Love Dress, 1992, Hunter Reynolds, Photograph, Dimensions Unknown

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Dew Kim, Juliana Huxtable, Wai Kin Sin, and Zoe Walsh demonstrate the *Queer Colour Palette* being used within 21st century *Contemporary Art*. Bright colours are ever present whether it is in reference to gay cultural history such as Dew Kim's neon pinks and purples which refer to the gay nightlife scene. Or Juliana Huxtable and Wai Kin Sin's use of colour as empowerment, showing their differences from heterosexual society as a strength rather than a detriment. Or Zoe Walsh reclaiming gender-tuned pinks and blues and using them in a Queer context, breaking apart the notion of colours dictating a gender binary.

Whilst the *Queer Colour Palette* can mean different things in reference to Queer culture and history, the palette itself remains the same; bright, diverse colours in defiance to those who wish to suppress Queer people.

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Figure 13: Babbit, J (2021) *But I'm a Cheerleader.* [Amazon Prime] California: Lionsgate Films. [screenshot by author].

Figure 14: Babbit, J (2021) *But I'm a Cheerleader.* [Amazon Prime] California: Lionsgate Films. [screenshot by author].

Figure 15: Babbit, J (2021) *But I'm a Cheerleader.* [Amazon Prime] California: Lionsgate Films. [screenshot by author].

Figure 16: Babbit, J (2021) *But I'm a Cheerleader.* [Amazon Prime] California: Lionsgate Films. [screenshot by author].

Figure 17: Babbit, J (2021) *But I'm a Cheerleader.* [Amazon Prime] California: Lionsgate Films. [screenshot by author].

Figure 18: Curtis, W. (1798) *Botanical drawing of lavender.* [online image] Available from: https://dressingdykes.com/2021/08/20/from-lavender-to-violet/ [Accessed 28 December 2021]

Figure 19: Marti, V. (1995) *For Oscar Wilde.* [online image] Available from: http://www.virgilmarti.com/work/for-oscar-wilde/ [Accessed 13 January 2022]

Figure 20: Warhol, A. (1962) *Marilyn Diptych.* [online image] Available from: https://smarthistory.org/warhol-marilyn-diptych/ [Accessed 29 December 2021]

Figure 21: Kim, D. (2019) *Glory! Glory! Glory!* [online image] Available from: https://www.hornyhoneydew.com/Can-Can-Boys-2019 [Accessed 30 December 2021]

Figure 22: Kim, D. (2018) *Succulent Humans* [online image] Available from: https://www.hornyhoneydew.com/Succulent-Humans-2018 [Accessed 3 January 2022]

Figure 23: Huxtable, J. (2015) *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)* [online image] Available from: https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/34476 [Accessed 2 January 2022]

Figure 24: Sin, W.K. (2017) *Narrative Reflections On Looking Preface / Looking Without Touching* [online image] Available from: https://www.artsy.net/artwork/wai-kin-sin- narrative-reflections-on-looking-preface-slash-looking-without-touching [Accessed 3 January 2022]

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Figure 26: Walsh, Z. (2021) *You who never tasted the fruit* [online image] Available from: https://www.zoewalsh.com/ [Accessed 3 January 2022]

Figure 27: Burton, T. (1990) *Edward Scissorhands* [screenshot] Available from: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099487/mediaviewer/rm1515606784/ [Accessed 16 January 2022]

Figure 28: Reynolds, H. (1993) *Patina du Prey's Love Dress* [online image] Available from: https://gayletter.com/hunter-reynolds-patina-du-prey-from-drag-to-dervish-p%C2%B7p%C2%B7o%C2%B7w/ [Accessed 16 January 2022]

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