

ang070 S/Ü "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies"
Assignment "Film": Identity, Discourse, Media

This assignment is a mandatory part of your portfolio and needs to be handed in on time. It is ungraded but you will receive feedback. Additionally, a sample solution will be published on the Institutswiki.

Please make sure to submit your assignment stapled together but not bound in any folder. Every assignment must include a cover sheet and the statement on plagiarism. You may write up to three pages of text, according to the formatting specifications of our style sheet. Any text beyond the first three pages will be ignored.

Please analyse the following frame by addressing the tasks below:

1. Formal and media-specific analysis

Describe the mise-en-scène in the given frame, i.e. the visual and the cinematographic design. Identify and briefly comment on relevant discourses.

Visual Design

- **Set Decoration/ Art Decoration**
The conflation of operating theatre and swimming pool/water basin results in a set design that imitates and simultaneously merges two prominent/ notorious spaces of the literary and cultural imagination, i.e. the laboratory of the 'mad' scientist (operating theatre) and the emblematic space of excessive queer desire/ *jouissance* (swimming pool); however, this imitative construction of space is intentionally camp/ parodic as the original details, e.g. the surgical lamp and the surgical tools, are richly ornamented and at least partly replaced with bizarre items such as paint tubes, etc.
- **Costume Design**
Dr Frank-N-Furter wears a green surgical gown, complete with gloves, while Magenta (presumably still in the waiter's apron of a maid) and Columbia wear surgical masks; again however, these 'uniforms' parody and subvert the very identities they presumably produce as they are stylised/aestheticized in ways that suggest an intentional queering of the costumes, e.g. via the uses of the pink triangle (with all its political and historical implications of discrimination), applied to FNF's surgical gown; or the colour of the gloves, which are pink as well. Rocky, not yet animated, is dressed as a mummy, while parts of his skeleton – rib cage, etc – are already visible/ discernible, as he is about to be "made" a man by FNF.
- **Lighting and Colour Scheme**
The screenshot presents a contrast between the low-key lighting of the frame, with its barely lit tiles (extradiegetic lights) in the background and the surgical lamp as the only (intradiegetic) source of light on the one hand, and the bright colour scheme of the rainbow flag projected onto/ emerging from the water basin on the other. Both lighting and colour thus contribute to the juxtaposition and simultaneous merging of the two themes here, i.e. the lighting evokes the Gothic atmosphere of the 'mad' scientist-motif, emphasising the link between *Dr. Frank-N-Furter* and his literary predecessor *Dr. Frankenstein*, while the rainbow colours suggest a camp/ parodic appropriation of the reproduction/ procreation process.

- **Makeup and Hairdo**
Makeup and hairdo seem to be of secondary importance here, as the faces of the three recognisable characters cannot be made out (cf. long shot, below). They seem to wear their hair in the 'usual' way; i.e. Columbia's hair is short and dyed pink, while Magenta is wearing her red mane permed and middle-parted. FNF's hair is partly concealed by the surgical lamp.
- **Acting**
FNF is busy squeezing the paint tubes above his head in a procedure supposedly reminiscent of a surgeon preparing for an operation, while Magenta and Columbia assist him, standing to his left and to his right respectively. Rocky is floating in the pool, his body stretching horizontally from one end to the other.

Cinematographic Design

- **Arrangement of the Frame**
The swimming pool/ water basin, with Rocky in it, is placed in the foreground of the frame, stretching from one end to the other, thus occupying the most prominent position. However, even though the other three characters find themselves in the middle ground, they are by no means marginalised. Rather, FNF is placed at the centre of the shot with the intradiegetic surgical lamp placing him in the spotlight, while Columbia's face is highlighted by an extradiegetic light the reflection of which also affords a 'halo' for Magenta.
- **Distance**
The frame is a long shot that shows all characters, whether standing or floating, from top to toe, even though the lower bodies of Magenta, FNF, and Columbia can only be made out from the silhouettes that shimmer through the water of the basin.
- **Angle**
In the frame, a slight low angle is being used so that the dominant staging of the queer 'birth' of Rocky, the creature, is once again underlined, while FNF and his two 'assistants' still remain in a powerful position, towering over their soon-to-be-delivered 'baby'.
- **Focus**
A shallow focus is used that allows the viewer to see all the characters in the foreground and in the middle ground clearly, while the background, i.e. the tiles on the wall, are blurred in a mock-Gothic, noir style.
- **Point of View**
As the camera does not associate the viewer with the p.o.v. of a particular character, zero ocularisation is being used.

Discourses

- **Literature**
Terms/ Vocabulary: intertextuality (references to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or even James Whale's *Frankenstein* movies)
Settings/Institutions: operating theatre, laboratory
Roles/ Subject Positions: 'mad' scientist (Dr Frank-N-Furter vs. Dr Frankenstein); creature (Rocky vs. Frankenstein's 'Monster'); assistants (Magenta and Columbia vs. Igor [in the Whale movies only])

- Medical Discourse
Settings/Institutions: operating theatre, labour ward
Roles/ Subject Positions: FNF as medical doctor/ gynaecologist; Magenta and Columbia as midwives; Rocky as (yet unborn) baby
- Biology
Terms/ Vocabulary: reproduction, procreation, birth
Roles/ Subject Positions: FNF as father; Rocky as son; absence of mother figure
Others: water basin/ pool vs. womb
- Sexuality
Terms/ Vocabulary: camp; queerness vs. heteronormativity
Settings/Institutions: swimming pool; rainbow flag
Roles/ Subject Positions: Rocky as hyper-masculine object of desire (*later*)

2. Functional analysis: Toward a problem-oriented sample analysis

Based on the findings from your formal and media-specific analysis, provide a **coherently written** analysis of this frame, i.e. one that identifies and states a clear research problem and moreover, addresses the following points:

1. the discursive construction of identity through representations in the media;
2. relevant contexts (historical, cultural, literary, generic, etc.).

Research Question: Representations of Queer Reproduction/ Procreation

Rocky Horror vs. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

- Subversive/ Revisionist contextualisation of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (Dr. Victor Frankenstein's Gothic creation of the 'Creature', a 'monster' with superhuman strength vs. Dr. Frank-N-Furter's camp creation of Rocky, a hyper-masculine bodybuilder/ 'gym queen' with a 'perfectly'-built body)
- Similarities
 - 'Mad' Scientist (stock character) playing 'God' by interfering with the act of procreation/ reproduction
 - (Blasphemous) Representation of reproduction/ procreation as an all-male homosocial act, not involving women
 - Visual Design: laboratory; surgical gown, surgical lamp and tools, water basin (more prominent in James Whale's 1930ies *Frankenstein*-movies than in Shelley's novel)
- Differences
 - Camp deconstruction of the identity of the 'mad' scientist reveals the pompous megalomania of this stock character as well as his dilettantism
 - Camp deconstruction of the identity of the creature revises the function of the creation: Frankenstein's 'monster' turns into a murderer; Rocky turns into a sex symbol/ object of desire
- Close Reading Results
The frame subverts various manifestations of institutionalised heteronormativity, e.g. biological/ medical/ religious/ educational, by (among other things):
 - exposing the debate on 'natural' procreation/ reproduction to ridicule through a camp/ parodic representation of giving birth
 - playfully valorising the act of playing 'God' as a frivolous pleasure rather than a serious transgression (cf./ vs. Dr Frankenstein)
 - promoting queerness as an alternative, less regulatory approach to desire and 'sexuality' through representing Rocky, i.e. the creature, as an object of desire for virtually every character in the film, esp. Brad and Janet, the key representatives of conventional heteronormativity
 - turning the father figure into an advocate of queer pedagogy (cf. Lamm)

- Secondary Material
 - The frame can be meaningfully related to a number of relevant ideas from the current academic debate on the topic
 - Judith Butler: (sexual) identity construction, seeing as Rocky is "made" a man (and in "just seven days")
 - Zachary Lamm: queer pedagogy, seeing as Dr FNF (vs. Drs. Scott and Frankenstein) teaches a queer approach to desire and 'sexuality' that does not turn out to be a cautionary tale after all

3. Comparison and/or contrast: second frame

Suggest one other frame from the film that contrasts and/or corresponds with the given frame in an aspect relevant to your research problem. Briefly discuss how both frames relate to the problem by addressing differences in representation and their possible functions.

Comparison/ Contrast: Representations of Queer Reproduction/ Procreation

Rocky Horror vs. Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*

- Subversive/ Revisionist contextualisation of Michelangelo's painting regarding set decoration (ceiling of Sistine Chapel vs. bottom of a swimming pool 'over at the Frankenstein place')
- Implication/ Exposure of homoerotic subtexts (God and Adam vs. two naked man touching at the bottom of a pool)
- Implication/ Exposure of religious hypocrisy regarding the alleged 'naturalness' of procreation/ reproduction (Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (also) illustrates creation as a homosocial, possibly homoerotic act, involving only God and Adam; conspicuous absence of women; Mary being a 'virgin' according to scripture; camp/ subversive rereading of the myth of *immaculate conception*)

4. Lecture

In a short concluding paragraph, relate your analysis to knowledge and skills from the lecture.

