

**Dirty sound:
The Camp Materialism of *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls* (1988)**

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Diggin' Out Ms. Lucas, or, the Feminist Exploitation Film Sensation that Never Was *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls* is a little known, hard to find,¹ 16mm low-budget trash feature that was produced in San Francisco, California in the Mid-1980s by budget rock/garage surf musician Michael Lucas who drafted a bunch of his friends to act as cast and crew (Fielding 2010b, c). The film never made it to professional distribution, and was finally released on VHS in 1988 by the obscure independent label *Forbidden Cinema Archives*. Its narrative setup harks back to the "Female Outlaw"-themed American exploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s. Like Russ Meyer's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1966) and Herschell Gordon Lewis' *She-Devils on Wheels* (1968), *Blood Orgy* revolves around a gang of (juvenile) delinquent women who mercilessly hunt down, humiliate and mutilate a group of male antagonists. Though their violent acts are often unprovoked and thus not justified by the narrative, the outlaw women are presented as impressive heroines who emerge victorious in the end. *Blood Orgy* is a work of 'dark' camp in both its subject matter and its aesthetics: as will become evident in my discussion below, the film deliberately flaunts messy sound and image editing, privileges a parade of stubbornly negative stock characters over sensible complex storytelling, and generally seems to target viewers and listeners who primarily seek to indulge in the thrills of tacky, haptic, visceral materiality rather than to those who want to make sense of and reflect on a finely structured tale.

In general, Female Outlaw Trash Film has met with mixed reactions from various (academic) feminist discourses on popular film and media (Despineux & Mund 2000, 13-19). As Pam Cook points out, the often lurid depiction of female characters as sexualized spectacular Others typical of the genre has led many feminist reviewers to dismiss it as sexist – or simply ignore it altogether (Cook 1976, 2005). On the other hand, individual audiovisuals have been discussed as harboring a progressive element in terms of their politics of representation, since they allow their women protagonists character traits and a range of agency that exploitation cinema usually bestows upon male characters only, while defying the common formula of punishing such transgression in a final morally motivated plot twist that domesticates (or destroys) rogue females (Rich 1995, Hatch 2004).

¹ By the time of drafting this article, the film has never been officially re-released on DVD, nor was such a release planned (cf. Fielding 2010a, 2010b). I obtained my personal DVD copy from Twisted Anger, a borderline legal burn-on-demand service of "public domain and orphan works" (as they claim on the DVD) based in the UK. According to Wallid H. Fielding, legitimate VHS copies are available directly from the director (2010a, b).

While *Blood Orgy* certainly qualifies for sympathetic feminist address in the light of the latter argument (the *Leather Girls* torture and kill at least four adversaries to avenge a rape that has never happened, and reflect upon their crimes in fiercely unrepentant voiceovers like “When I think about how weak I used to be ... it just doesn’t seem like the same person: now, I’m so strong, so sure of myself – like, capable of *anything*” in the closing scene of the film), it has also served as a puzzling provocation for feminist reception. After all, the titles credit one Meredith Lucas as writer and director. The back cover of the 1988 VHS release claims that Meredith was producer Michael Lucas’ sister, who sadly committed suicide in her mid-30s after having accumulated excruciating debt over shooting *Blood Orgy*. Michael Lucas retells this version of events in his liner notes to a soundtrack LP album released on Planet Pimp Records in 1994. Within exploitation aficionado circles, feminism-positive reviewers like Annie Choi (2014) and Wallid H. Fielding (2010a) treated the unearthing of Meredith Lucas as a substantial discovery, since the trash film canon knows precious few female directors. Michael Lucas’ story of the tragically deceased director sister went largely uncontested² until November 2010 when a series of interviews conducted by Fielding for his website *Waldfield’s Corner* disclosed that the alleged exploitation auteur Meredith Lucas had obviously never existed (Fielding 2010b, c). As Michael Lucas relates, he had actually written and directed *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls* on his own, but invented the character of Meredith Lucas to create extra credibility for his, as he terms it, “violent feminist film” within the 1980s San Francisco art house scene (Fielding 2010b).

As it turns out, Lucas’ misgivings about promoting a male-authored, male-directed Female Outlaw Trash Film to feminist audiences are spot on, even in the 2010s. Reviewers who were thrilled by *Blood Orgy* when watching it as a trailblazing statement by a woman director, cool down considerably in updates that acknowledge the unceremonious dismantling of Meredith Lucas in the Fielding interviews. Annie Choi, for instance, who originally decided that the film “share[d] the same ambition, politics, and DIY aesthetic as *Bikini Kill*, but [...] came two years before riot grrrls came screaming out of Olympia,” now argues that Michael Lucas’ promotion strategy was “certainly misplaced,” since it undermined his film’s feminist stance: “By posing as a woman, [Lucas] was exploiting women, which was exactly what he was repudiating” (Choi 2014). My own initial reaction to the *Waldfield* scoop may also be illustrative here: having used Meredith Lucas as *the* killer example for “genuinely” feminist appropriations of trash/exploitation sensibilities for quite some time in my teaching and research, I *did* feel deprived (and a bit of a dupe for buying into the story in the first place). Yet, I agree with Annie Choi that *Blood Orgy* nevertheless merits further feminist address as “it still explores the smoggy area where feminism and exploitation converge” (Choi 2014). In fact, this murky muddled space of convergence may prove an

² The Internet Movie Database imdb.com, for instance, still lists Meredith Lucas as writer and director of *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls*. See www.imdb.com/title/tt0131978/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1. Accessed 5 May 2014.

even more promising subject for feminist inquiry than a chase for (lost) female authorship – which, after all, most often dangerously depends on rather static concepts of gendered identity. The key to *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls*' critical feminist potential, I want to argue in this chapter, lies in engaging with its excess.

Excess, Camp, Exploitation

For a film like *Blood Orgy*, excessiveness marks a central generic modality.³ After all, exploitation cinema is a genre that celebrates hyperbole and surplus: it routinely relies on the display of sensationally exaggerated difference (including, but not limited to gender, sexuality, race and class), privileges stock roles over complex psychologically rounded characters, seeks to evoke visceral movements of thrill, titillation and arousal instead of telling a coherent story, and builds from an often trashy materiality that gives extensive room for lo-fi, lo-res, the quick, the rough, the noisy (Sconce 1995, 374, 385f, Schaefer 1999, 42-95, Jancovich 2002, 309, Sconce 2007, 2, Gorfinkel 2011, 96f). *Blood Orgy*'s most prominent excessive quality seems to lie in dishing out large portions of the haptic textural spillover that Kristin Thompson calls cinematic excess, namely, those aspects of a film that distract a viewer's attention away from the narrative towards the audiovisual's materiality (1986, 132ff). In Thompson's definition, cinematic excess opposes and destabilizes content. Other than "proper" stylistic and formal elements which serve the narrative in an unobtrusive, unifying manner, cinematic excess calls attention to itself without clear motivation. Moments of cinematic excess do not represent or communicate meaningful ideas, but usually remain "incomprehensible," and finally, defy most attempts of proper analysis by the viewer (Thompson 1986, 133). Thompson especially points out surface textures as those material dimensions that disturb narrative coherence most readily. According to her, exaggerated or wooden acting styles, lavish props, textured complexions on performers' bodies, and distinctive colors, cuts and fabrics of the wardrobe worn on screen highlight materiality on the level of the profilmic, while haptic and visceral photographic aesthetics and "the material qualities of [...] sound" do so on the level of technologies of recording and production (1986, 132).

Blood Orgy creates abundant moments of excess in all these aspects. In fact, online reviews and cult film lexica have repeatedly highlighted the film as overwhelmingly excessive, even when measured against seasoned exploitation fan tastes.⁴ The *Leather Girls*' and the supporting cast's

³ Susanna Paasonen describes modalities as "the qualities of mode, mood and manner" that mark a genre's "recurring characteristics" (14).

⁴ For instance, FilmBizarro.com ("Your online source for independent and underground film") decides that *Blood Orgy* was "nothing other than a ridiculously shitty amateur backyard production" (www.filmbizarro.com/view_review.php?review=bloodorgyoftheleathergirls.php. Accessed 12 May 2014). The long-standing paracinema fanzine *Critical Condition* ("Obscure and Bizarre Films on Video & DVD") warns that the movie was "like watching a filmed headache" (criticonline.com/horror%20a%20-%20c.htm. Accessed 12 May 2014).

performance is heavy and stilted, and includes many direct looks into the camera. Nonsensical lines and hyperbolic rants are delivered haphazardly with shifty pronunciation, or slipping into exaggerated nasal twangs, or unbecomingly lowered registers. The disembodied voiceover standing in for the character of Detective Morton is inexplicably spoken by two different speakers (with two very distinct voices). In terms of props, drugs are served from a plastic gallon jug that is labeled “LSD” in scrawled capitals, the blood and guts gracing the gore parts are very obviously yielded from corn starch, food coloring and offal, and the gang’s morning routines take place in domestic interiors cluttered with net curtains, smiley decorative plates, oversize stuffed animals and plastic bats hanging from the ceiling on what appear to be nylon strings. A psychedelic episode showing one of the Leather Girls’ victims on an involuntary acid trip features an extra wearing a scruffy homemade owl costume. Backdrops are minimal – indoor scenes often consist of barely more than an empty room with a mattress on the floor – and lighting tends to be poor to the point of obscuring most of what is going on onscreen. In terms of textures generating from technology, shots from a rented 16mm Arriflex camera are combined with footage produced with cheaper consumer-level equipment (cf. Fielding 2010c). Most notably, a movie-within-the-movie sequence that takes place inside a drive-in cinema consists of Super 8 footage taken from one of Lucas’ earlier projects called *Teen Rasputin* (Fielding 2010b). In addition, the film’s opening scene combines snippets of found and stock footage (like newsreels and a medical educational film showing the birth of a baby), which introduce yet another range of aesthetic characteristics clashing with those of the material shot by Lucas’ crew. In the copy I based this chapter on, both the 16mm and Super 8 footage bespeak considerable wear in countless black marks and scratches, and the transfer to VHS and later DVD has added further media-specific artifacts and distortion like occasional tape wobbles and moiré glitch. In addition, Lucas’ experimental (and at times almost cruel) sound editing – small snippets of booming, heavily distorted musical and atmospheric tracks are spliced together without fade-ins, fade-outs or other transition effects – pulverizes the viewer’s chance of contemplatively losing herself in the narrative, or even of pondering too hard what on earth the film was trying to “say.”

When framing it as cinematic excess, *Blood Orgy*’s trashy materiality resonates with Susan Sontag’s 1964 definition of camp: it resembles the camp surplus she describes as registering as “pure artifice;” it marks the camp material aesthetic that “blocks out content;” and it shares the campy modality of remaining on the surface of things, and thus, repeatedly refuses being pinned down to a literal or symbolic meaning (Sontag 281). Online reviewers pick up on this resonance, and often refer to the film’s pronounced excess as a captivating campiness. *Urban Dictionary*, for instance, identifies “over-the-top camp elements” as the movie’s driving force,⁵ and Fielding grounds his celebratory 2010 review in the film’s “omnipresent campy humor” and the “pure camp saturating every frame” (2010a).

⁵ Cf. de.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Blood+Orgy+of+the+Leather+Girls. Accessed 13 May 2014.

Camp, however, is a risky term to adopt for sounding *Blood Orgy's* critical potential. As I have discussed elsewhere, paying attention to excess in *Female Outlaw Trash Film* allows tackling a problematic conception that has haunted feminist theories (and feminist address of exploitation cinema) for a long time: the problem of the (sovereign) subject (Hofer, 2014, 31ff). An invention of bourgeois modernity, the subject can speak, that is, it can argue rationally and comprehensibly on behalf of its cause. While this subject has occupied a central position in many feminist struggles, it has also proved a source for constant unease in feminist reflections (Ankele 2008). After all, this subject can only claim a privileged position as long as it concomitantly produces an Other, which is constructed as unintelligible, and remains cut off from most of the subject's privileges (Meißner 174). Approaches that dismiss an audiovisual's seemingly "incomprehensible," excessive dimensions as irrelevant run the risk of reproducing the binaries and exclusions produced by the modern subject/Other logic. While Sontag's conception of camp does acknowledge material excess, it nevertheless fails to grasp the critical edge of the specific convergence of feminist concerns and excessive exploitation modalities at play in *Female Outlaw Trash Film*. Denouncing camp as only being capable of uninvolved, purely ironic statements, she insists that camp sensibilities – and thus camp materialities – are "disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical," since they transpose "serious" objects and concepts into "frivolous" flourish (276).

The obvious problem with such a reading for *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls* is that if material excess is just "camping around" for irony's sake, then the film can only ever be read as a parody. This is exactly what happens in a review by *Film Bizarro's* Preston, who rates *Blood Orgy* "not a feminist film but a satirical parody of extreme feminists," and dismisses viewers who discussed its feminist potential seriously as simply not "get[ting] the joke."⁶ Equating camp with ironic detachment also considerably limits the possible ways of thinking Michael Lucas' invention of Meredith Lucas as strategic. If all camp is automatically speaking in jest, then Lucas' publicity stunt can only be understood as a mischievous prank played on actual feminists, or, as Annie Choi suggests in her review discussed above, on "women" in general (whoever they may be). Considering these dynamics, camp runs the risk of becoming a very limiting frame with which to address a film like *Blood Orgy*: first, it infers that there was one (and perhaps even only one) correct interpretation regarding the film's intention (which in the specific case also hinges on the author's gender), and second, it implies that material textures only became (rightfully) meaningful by means of an author who inscribed them with irony, and a savvy audience of an in-crowd of viewers who correctly decoded this inscription as ironic. To introduce camp as a critically productive category for engaging with the excessive materialities of exploitation cinema, it is necessary to depart from Sontag's conception of camp as always already depoliticized, as pure satire or detached pastiche. Juliane Rebentisch's recent take on camp materialism (2013) proves insightful

⁶ www.filmbizarro.com/view_review.php?review=bloodorgyoftheleathergirls.php. Accessed 13 May 2014.

here as it allows grasping the excessive materialism of camp audiovisuals as picking up on a queer critique of the (sovereign) subject.

Camp Sound: *Blood Orgy* and the Politics of Materialism

Discussing the work of Jack Smith, Juliane Rebentisch introduces the notion of camp materialism in which she makes a strong case for taking the material excesses of camp seriously as a queer political strategy. Observing that material dimensions – “props, things, and textiles”⁷ – play an equally important role in Smith’s films as the human performers, she proposes that this haptic, insistent materiality of camp audiovisuals unfolds a queer criticality in its own right (Rebentisch 167). By pushing into the foreground (which, translated into Thompson’s terms, marks a moment of cinematic excess), material objects enter into an “interrelation” with human subjects, which is characterized by equality instead of privilege of one over the other (2013, 167). This equality is queer as it potentially de-stabilizes identities: here, camp sensibility does not generate from human subjects taking possession of campy objects in order to solidify their (camp) identities, but from subjects desiring excessive “incomprehensible” objects as an expression of a “desire for a world in which subjects do not assert power over objects at all” (2013, 171). The engagement and interaction (or, as Rebentisch calls it, “community”) implied in camp materialism is thus not based on establishing identity via camp, but on a much more tentative sensibility for similarly *being of* and belonging to the excessiveness materializing in campy objects (2013, 173). Rebentisch’s re-working of the political implications of camp become very useful for reclaiming *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls* for feminist inquiry in spite of having lost Meredith Lucas as a female feminist director. Like Jack Smith’s films, *Blood Orgy* harbors excessively foregrounded material presences that offer themselves for interrelation. Feminist criticality, so my thesis, does not just generate from the film’s (presumed) author’s gender, but also from the audiovisual’s dirty sonic signature.

Blood Orgy’s overall dirty sound builds up from multiple layers of noise. First of all, the diegetic and extradiegetic music is noisy in its tonal and compositional quality. In a scene showing the Leather Girls at a High School Dance, Michael Lucas’ band David Nudelman And The Wild Breed perform a punk rock song called *Hate Teen* at an ear-shattering volume, all treble, painfully high frequencies, and out-of-tune guitars. The musical score composed for the film consists of repetitive minimalist synth tracks with grainy peaks and rudimentary organ sketches dominated by the sinister drone of the bass registers and the saw-toothed pitch of the two-finger leads. For good measure, a number of Rock’n’Roll, Surf and Doo-Wop songs from the 1950s and 1960s are thrown into the mix which, not surprisingly, all include novelty sonic elements, like hoots (*Nite Owl*, Tony Allen & The Champs), teenage girls screaming (*What A*

⁷ Though Rebentisch’s article was published in *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* as a translation from English, I could not locate an English version for drafting this chapter. Consequently, all quotations in English are translations of my own.

Way To Die, *The Pleasure Seekers*), and fake bird calls and rumbling bass drums (*Isis*, *The Megatons*). Both atmospheric tracks and pop songs are mauled and mutilated by the film's extremely fast collage-style sound editing that I have already addressed above. In addition, sound snippets are often arranged in echoing overlaying loops that build upon each other until they blur into an indistinguishable mush of booming reverberation.

The second layer of noise consists of the permanent hiss, hum and crackle that Andy Birtwistle describes as the "sound of technology" (2010, 85ff). Birtwistle explains that this "ground noise" generates from the sound carrier medium (like an optical sound strip or a strip of magnetic tape) passing across the physical piece of technology responsible for reproducing the sound, like a play head in a tape machine (2010, 86). While a certain level of ground noise is unavoidable in every recorded sound (2010, 91), *Blood Orgy* foregrounds it to an exceptional degree by employing audibly outdated recording equipment. According to David Steiner, one of the camera operators on the *Blood Orgy* set, sound was recorded directly to a Nagra tape deck (Fielding 2010c). Herschell Gordon Lewis, who employed a similar tape recorder and direct sound for *She-Devils on Wheels*, relates that such a setup already bordered on the outmoded in 1968.⁸ The setup's datedness also manifests in the presence of media decay, as in the phantom voices pushing into some voiceover scenes, which are the result of audio information printing through multiple layers of magnetic tape wound too tightly around the spool.

Finally, the entire sound track is marked by lo-fi sound recording and reproduction practices, that is, technologies and techniques that capture a large amount of unwanted sound alongside the desired signals. Most prominently, the direct recording of all dialogue to a single reel to reel recorder usually amounts to a "direct transcription of all ambient sound," which often leads to the sidelining of narrative-driven sonic events in favor of unmotivated spillover audio (Altman 1985, 49). This phenomenon comes to full effect in *Blood Orgy*, where the shuffling of feet on the ground, the rustle of clothing, or room reverberation often drown out the performers' voices, and push the sound and meaning of their words to the margins. However, the dirty quality of the dialogues blends in perfectly with the rest of the soundtrack. The vintage pop songs featured often sound as if rendered from scratched vinyl records or audio cassette tapes (instead of master tapes or restored tracks), and the original score recorded for the film bears the sonic signature of a DIY home recording setup rather than a high end professional studio.

Blood Orgy's camp sound is made up of audio dirt that has often been treated as a marker for ultimate alterity, that is, utter Other meaningfulness. Noise, as the 'sound of technology,' the presence of ambient spillover, or the result of material wear and decay, lolls at the very bottom of the hierarchy of

⁸ Personal e-mail correspondence with Herschell Gordon Lewis, 26 and 27 Aug. 2013. Also cf. Lewis' audio commentary to *She-Devils on Wheels*, *Something Weird Video* 2002.

cinematic sounds (Doane 1980, 52f, Levin 1984, 55-9 Bordwell & Thompson 1985, 186, Altman 1992, 5f), marks the least wanted of disturbances in film sound engineering, and has long been ignored in film studies, who similarly treat it as a contamination of – and thus as exterior to – the sonic events that are aesthetically and narratively significant (Birtwistle 2010, 2, 85ff, 151). If noise is granted any agency at all in these conceptions, it is a destructive, disrupting, violent agency crossing the rational, sense-making projects of the sovereign subject (Hofer 2014, 36). Listener and noise are thought of as opposing dimensions whose tug-of-war struggle reinforces the subject / object split as well as the hierarchy that puts the subject firmly above the Other. After all, here, noise can never make sense by itself, and subject-noise relations are similarly dominated by the desire for mastery. If subjects make use of noise, they do so to demonstrate their cool ironic detachment from its gibberish and excess – which is, we remember, exactly how some reviewers understood *Blood Orgy's* campiness.

With Rebentisch's perspective, on the other hand, it is possible to think the relationship between *Blood Orgy's* dirty camp sound and its viewer/listener not as one of opposition, derision, and dominance, but of belonging. Camp, she argues, does not easily accommodate positions of superiority (2013, 173).⁹ Camp sensibilities embrace tape decay, strange sounds and the material spillover of outdated or DIY recording practices exactly because they recognize their off-ness as part of one's own politics. After all, not being understood (and thus classifiable) in terms of the sovereign subject is an important part of what makes queer projects: queer interests are wary of establishing fixed identities, and of claiming speaking positions that come at the price of sidelining other individuals or groups (or even objects) as incomprehensibly Other. As a consequence, a camp materialist engagement with excessive sonic signatures does not separate relevant sonic events from irrelevant noise in order to enjoy the excessiveness of dirt as an in-joke. Rather, it explores sonic surfaces in all their excess, and sounds them for resonances that do not depend on such binary separations. As Susanna Paasonen has convincingly argued, the appeal of excessive genres to viewing subjects often lies exactly in suspending attempts at mastering these audiovisuals, and letting oneself be moved by their haptic material dimensions in seemingly irrational incomprehensible ways (2011, 104). Translated back into Rebentisch's terms, the pleasure subjects take in watching camp audiovisuals may also lie in entering interrelations with excessive textures without desiring to take them into a dominating possession.

The dirty sound of *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls* realizes such a camp materialist sensibility of belonging, but not possessing, on a very manifest level. As already noted above, the film's release on VHS was followed by the release of a soundtrack album on a 12" vinyl record by Planet Pimp Records in 1994 (PPR-009). Soundtrack albums usually contain a selection of the music featured in the film, and serve the purpose of providing a listener with the means to consume this music without having to watch

⁹ "Es gibt im Camp keine Position des Überlegenen."

the audiovisual itself. In 1994, a point in time before online video sharing platforms virtually put the most obscure musical tracks at any interested user's fingertips, buying a soundtrack LP also meant owning the music heard in a specific film, incorporating it into one's record collection, and having it at one's disposal. Planet Pimp's *Blood Orgy* album, however, quite obviously squashes the attempt of owning a soundtrack. Instead of faithfully releasing the songs that can be heard in the film, it assembles a seemingly unrelated collection of tracks by 1980s and 1990s garage punk and budget rock bands that do not feature in Lucas' movie.¹⁰ In the few instances where sounds from *Blood Orgy* appear, spoken word snippets rendered from Detective Morton's double-voiced voiceover narration are interspersed between the musical tracks. Still, from a camp materialist perspective, this soundtrack album offers a significant dimension of the actual film to take home and engage with: its dirty sonic signature, and its sonic excess. Like the pop songs chosen for *Blood Orgy*, the tracks on the Planet Pimp collection are rife with noisy novelty sounds. Like the film soundtrack, the album recordings are drenched in ground noise and the sound of obsolete technology. Like the dialogues in the movie, the productions on the record are full of ambient residue that at times threatens to override the music. In other words, the album *is of* the camp materialist sensibility that also generates from *Blood Orgy's* excessive sound, but counters the expectations that such a sensibility could be possessed.

As a queer strategy, the camp sound of *Blood Orgy* and its soundtrack album suggests that the political edge of a camp sensibility did not come from consuming campiness (or campy objects) alone, but from picking up on them, and being moved by them to doing something of one's own. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick puts it, for a queer engagement with textures "to perceive of texture is never only to ask What is it like? nor just even How does it impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?" (2013, 13, emphasis in original). A camp materialist engagement with dirty sound is thus not a strategy of reassuring identities by "eating the Other" (hooks 1992) alive, but a calling into question of the very process of identity making by discovering the extent to which excess in fact already made up a large part of one's own doing.

"Doing" something with excessive textures, however, does not imply the positive-thinking neoliberal logic of turning dust to gold in order to succeed in a world that works by competition. Rebentisch stresses that embracing excessive materiality also means embracing failure and decay – not as undesirable states that need to be disavowed, overcome or transcended, but as unavoidable conditions that are part of all persons, figures and things, and that bear a "breathtaking" beauty of their own (2013, 173, 175). This beauty can become a queer beauty as it often falls outside the normalizations of heteronormative capitalist standards (2013, 175). Judith Halberstam makes a similar point when she

¹⁰ For a full track list, see www.discogs.com/Various-Blood-Orgy-Of-The-Leather-Girls/release/2743628.

argues that failure is a “queer art”: while success will always be measured by “male standards” and “patriarchal ideas,” failing, negating and rejecting positive thinking and the will to make the game at all costs can harbor “unexpected pleasures,” and finally promises transformations that will not eradicate anything Other (2011, 4). The muddled area where excessive exploitation modalities converge with a feminist critical edge, which Annie Choi is on to but does not elaborate on in her review of *Blood Orgy*, may lie exactly in an empathic, camp materialist appreciation of failure and decay for tracing possible feminist strategies that do not play right into the hands of neoliberal ideologies.

Meredith Lucas is dead, long live the Meredith Lucas, or: An Exploitation-Feminist Film Sensation

From a feminist point of view, exploitation cinema and exploitation cinema fandom have often been described as a “masculine” or male-dominated arena, where audiovisuals and the pleasure in watching them are predominately produced and reproduced by male agents, thus serving male needs and functioning by patriarchal logics and terms (cf. Hollows 2003, Read 2003). Indeed, female-authored or feminist works in exploitation and trash cinema are sparse (Cook 1976, Despineux & Mund 2000, Cook 2005, Fielding 2010a). In this chapter, I have suggested a camp materialist approach to Female Outlaw Trash Film that allows tracing its critical feminist potential independently from the gender identity of its auteurs. I have argued that the excessive textures that these audiovisuals utilize to tell hyperbolic stories of unrepentant, violent, and extreme empowerment of their female protagonists communicated a queer desire for taking seriously what normative standards excluded as unintelligible. This approach is not to mean that gender or existing social hierarchies were of no consequence for the political impact a (trash) film may have, or that excessive textures like dirty sound harbored a magical resistant essence that unfolded its political powers unrelated to the social agents that produced, consumed, and circulated them. In fact, I read the insistent presence of camp sound, as it appears in dialogue with the radical feminist narrative of *Blood Orgy of the Leather Girls*, as a critique of the unevenness of the social world surrounding exploitation cinema and exploitation fandom. To me, *Blood Orgy* does not present an ironic, but a quite serious take on feminism. After all, it is dedicated to a prominent suffragette and First Waver – Susan B. Anthony – in the opening credits, and has played on the emancipation angle credibly enough to have sparked extensive discussions on its feminist intent in trash cinema fan forums online. My camp materialist approach, however, wants to highlight that taking *Blood Orgy* seriously also demands taking it seriously on its own terms, that is, including and embracing the excessiveness generic to exploitation cinema. This makes the specific kind of feminism that *Blood Orgy* can offer an exploitation feminism, a feminism that provokes and questions inequalities by making way for the agency of the haptic, the material – in short: the unintelligible. In a way, this also brings Meredith Lucas back into the game. In camp materialist terms, Michael Lucas’ invention of Meredith was not the assumption of a fake, female, feminist identity (for, as has been suspected, selfish, “misled,” or even sinister reasons), but a bringing-

into-the-world of a feminist voice that did not make itself heard by the language of authorship or the sovereign rational subject, but as the excessive presence of dirty sound.

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