The Monster as Queer Opportunity: Monstrous (Re)Construction, Embodiment, and Approbation on The Boulet Brothers' Dragula

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ABSTRACT

THE MONSTER AS QUEER OPPORTUNITY: MONSTROUS (RE)CONSTRUCTION, EMBODIMENT, AND APPROBATION ON THE BOULET BROTHERS’ DRAGULA

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Northern Illinois University, 2021
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While mainstream tides in the drag industry have largely come to signify the art form’s growing popularity, there exist multiple alternative artists and communities who have yet to find space for their expressions to thrive and find praise. The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula is constructed out of such need, giving a space to alternative, radical, or “monster” drag artists who have experienced the pains of ridicule, alienation, and alterity in both queer and heteronormative spaces. Prior research on drag artistries has often glossed over alternative drag artistries, comparing them to popular or heteronormative representations while also focusing disproportionately on gender presentation. Synthesizing a framework based in perspectives of social monstrosity, bodies and embodiment, and queer media representation, I engaged in a content analysis of the first three seasons of The Boulet Brothers' Dragula.

Through my engagement with these texts, I designate The Boulet Brothers' Dragula as an alternative media platform where radical drag artists may engage in critical, co-(re)construction of monstrosity and elevate their subjugated queer experiences and knowledges in a space of allowance and praise. Through the system of the platform the artists are revealed to engage in multiple subjective embodied practices, with the queer, monstrous body emerging as a prime
opportunity of radical expression and representation of overlooked humanities. This project offers a necessary exploration into a multiplicity of alternative drag artistry in a space created for and by alternative artists, shows new opportunities of radical queer representation, and explicates a unique perspective of queer monstrous bodies as embraced and affirmed opportunities of queer self-expression.
THE MONSTER AS QUEER OPPORTUNITY: MONSTROUS (RE)CONSTRUCTION,
EMBODIMENT, AND APPROBATION ON THE BOULET BROTHERS' DRAGULA

BY

ADAM REEDY
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Thesis Director:
Diane M. Rodgers
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first want to thank my advisor, professor, and chair Dr. Diane Rodgers for your guidance, encouragement, and understanding through this process. Your selfless dedication to the success of your students is inspiring to me, and I am forever grateful to have shared this experience with you. I also want to thank Dr. Kerry Ferris and Dr. Scott Balcerzak for the interest, advice, and positive energy you have brought as committee members. Knowing I had such a supportive committee gave me great confidence through my research and writing processes, helping me to accomplish what sometimes felt insurmountable. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Abu Bakarr Bah, who has provided me with endless opportunities to learn and grow. Over the past two years you have shown me such respect and trust, working with you as your graduate assistant has been one of the great joys of my university experience. I also want to thank my professors, peers, cohort, and our group of happy huskies for the laughter and knowledge we shared, whether it be in the office, at trivia night, a classroom, or over a Zoom meeting. Lastly, I want to thank my parents for their unwavering affirmation and support, and for giving me the gift of education.
DEDICATION

For my parents, who taught me to value learning and myself, and for my Joey
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

What, or who, comes to your mind when you think of the word “monster?” Perhaps your monster is folklore, such as an Enfield Horror, the glorious thunderbird, or the dark figure in the lake. Your monster may be from classic horror canon, like the deities of Lovecraft’s mythos or Shelley’s tragic creation. Maybe your monster is a parable of risk, much like the invisible yet looming threat of *It Follows*, or a sympathetic manifestation of otherness like the aquatic love interest in *The Shape of Water*. Your monster could be a very real figure of power and fear, or a stereotype of a people perceived as different from yourself. Monsters, no matter the specific representation that comes to mind, are varied in their conceptions and the meanings they hold. Monsters have historically been analyzed for their roles as analogies of societal fears, reflecting the horrors of failed humans, abnormal bodies, freaks of difference, and tragic signifiers of the borders of humanity. They have come to represent our critiques of society and human nature, manifestations of the consequences for our actions, and warnings of what should remain unknown. But what if the symbolism and transitory nature of a “monster” is an opportunity, a unifying ideal for some to celebrate their unique human experiences? The monster drag artists of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula* take this opportunity with clawed hands, rearticulating the meaning of monstrosity through their alternative and radical representations. These self-identified monsters utilize their subjective experiences and bodies to interpret and evolve new
meanings of what and who monsters may be, constructing a platform together to elevate their voices and to showcase monsters as embodied and praised queer peoples.

The Boulet Brothers, a duo of Los Angeles-based drag performers and nightlife producers, began their club pageants (for example, Dragula, Queen Kong, Black Unicorn, and Beardo Weirdo) to celebrate the weird, bloody, and disgusting aspects of queer life. Their shows served another purpose, to highlight the often ridiculed presentations of underground and alternative drag artistry. A Boulet production is far from the normative drag show. Bodily fluids are welcome and encouraged. Mud wrestling competitions and blood drenched performances are not unheard of. One is bound to see a lot of sex, skin, leather, humans, hybrids, and maybe a couple of bearded nuns (Ciriaco 2019). Their club platforms represented an alternative space for queer people who don’t fit inside the rigid boundaries of normative society, for those individuals who praise the trashy, the nasty, and the monstrous. And while these staples of L.A. nightlife have come and gone into the darkness, their ultimate project has only recently begun: The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula, a search for “The World’s Next Drag Supermonster.”

The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula (2016 - ), or simply Dragula, is a reality competition show centered on alternative drag artists competing to become the World’s Next Drag Supermonster. The program has expressed intent of being an alternative platform to mainstream programs featuring normative drag. The first season, premiering October 31st, 2016, was originally featured on YouTube through the Hey Qween! Channel, while later being remastered by OutTV in Canada. The second season, which premiered exactly a year later, aired through WOW Presents. The third season, airing August 27th, 2019 after a hiatus, had moved to distribution on Amazon Prime. The program now resides with its first season on YouTube and its subsequent seasons on Netflix. The Brothers also premiered a special, Dragula: Resurrection, which was
released on the platform Shudder on October 20th, 2020 and showcased returning contestants. The platform features a variety of drag artists, regarded as monsters (and endearingly as uglies), primarily representing underground and alternative styles of drag. Notable is the increasing diversity within the show, particularly the varied gender and sexual identities, ages, and approaches to the art of alternative drag. The monsters must compete in a variety of aesthetic and performance challenges throughout the series. These challenges often set a monstrous theme to be interpreted, allowing the monsters to adapt their own aesthetics to the challenge directive. Many challenges culminate to the Floor Show, in which the monsters embody the challenge category and perform for the Boulet Brothers and their guest judges. The winner(s) of each challenge is typically awarded a prize and the bottom monsters must compete in physical and psychological “Extermination” challenges framed to push the monsters to confront their fears and prove their commitment to the competition. While not mandated, refusal to participate does not bode well for monsters who back down.

The final three monsters of each season have been made to compete in the Final Floor Show. This final show, situated on a stage and runway, sets three categories for each monster to embody and perform their subjective understanding. These categories are Filth, Horror, and Glamour – the three principles of a Drag Supermonster, the aesthetic tenets of monsterhood. The performance of Glamour is dark and luxurious, refusing to rely on bright pageant colors and movements, instead taking inspiration from each monster’s conception of the beautiful. The Filth performance is gut-wrenching, a mixture of unexpected abject horrors and uncomfortable textures and fluids, evoking the sights, activities, and embodiments we typically chose to turn our eyes from. The last performance, Horror, is situated in both innovation and reference to the genre of horror, with each monster crafting their most haunting visage to their own delight.
These three fields represent the pinnacle of an engaging and committed Drag Supermonster, a creature who can subjectively understand and embody each. A monster, to invoke the Patron Saint of Filth Divine, is filth, horror, and glamour. But this outline is only the surface of the program, more lurks underneath the murky waters. The depth of meanings of monstrosity and the opportunity for a multiplicity of radical queer artists is vast, and interpretive embodiment has only evolved what this rearticulation of queer monstrosity may be. It is from this point that I seek to submerge myself in the murky depth, to analyze this constructed system of monsters and the multiple representations and opportunities of queer monstrosity.

For my thesis I expand on literature of queer television representation and the sociological study of monsters by introducing an alternative platform of various radical queer “monster” artists participating in a space constructed to elevate their subjugated voices. I utilize perspectives from Parsemain (2019) about aesthetic entertainment and queer representation in conjunction with Rambukkana (2007) and Sandoval (2009) to conceptualize Dragula as such an alternative queer platform worthy of such analysis. I first ask how an alternative queer media platform is constructed to represent a multiplicity of queer “monster” experiences. Through a grounded theory approach guided by insights from Charmaz (1985) and Leavy (2007), I analyze how the platform of Dragula is co-constructed through the participation of its hosts and creators, the Boulet Brothers; the queer community of monsters they invite; and the influences of the various individual monsters. I conceptualize a system of participatory platform construction which utilizes and constructs subjective, embodied knowledge of the monstrous through open participation and inclusion of a multiplicity of radical queer experiences. I next ask what the role of bodies is in this space as vehicles for monstrous rearticulation, interpretation, and performance, utilizing conceptual perspectives on bodies and embodiment, meaning, and action
from Barad (2003), Cohen (2007), Grosz (1994), Kosut (2010), Thomas (2012), and Waskul and Vinnini (2016). In addition to being bodies of queer knowledge, I find that bodies also serve as the sites of interpretation and signification of symbolic meaning, change and transformation, and forbidden and extreme action. I conclude on reconsidering Cohen’s (2007) idea of a monstrous system and monsters of prohibition, finding Dragula to be a participatory and evolving system of monsters constructed by and for monsters of approbation, while also considering the symbol of the monster as a culminating queer opportunity of knowing, being, becoming, and experiencing.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Bodies, Transformation, and Technologies

There is no one exact image of the human body. Norms, conventions, and standards of the human body are socially mediated, dictated by what we accept and deny as attractive, deviant, and human. The body may be regarded as a project, reflecting alterations to or against standards of the body. Shilling (1993) discusses the concept of a body project, in which the body is regarded as malleable and open to transformation and reconstruction given the desires and efforts of its respective owner. This applies to the body’s proportions, shape, appearance, and contents. The owner consciously alters or maintains their body project, transforming their body how and when they see fit and utilizing both social and personal signs in their embodiment. Shilling extends this concept to activities such as self-care, exercise, constructions of healthy bodies, and use of plastic surgery. He notes that the body has limitations, such as inevitable death and rejection to change (1993). While the body does have its limits, social or biological, the malleability or transformative potential of the human body still stands. The body is a fluid and unfixed project, the site of potential to become and the actualization of becoming.

Disrupting cultural expectations of the human body is possible through processes like reclamation, denaturalization, self-expression. Thomas (2012) finds that modifiers who reject socially accepted norms show agency and bodily autonomy, though are met with labels of
deviance, sick, or freak for contradicting normative beauty standards in favor of their subjective embodiments (Thomas 2012). The modifiers denaturalize the body in nonmainstream ways, outside of normative tattoos and piercings. Johncock (2012) states that inscription and modification mark the bodies in non-natural ways, whether it be through common modifications like body tattoos or through more extreme methods such as scarification. Modifiers can also reclaim their bodies and modify them in ways that question dominant expectations of appearance, gender, and other social norms. Through expressing their own bodily autonomy and embodying their own understandings of beauty and selfhood, modifiers challenge what is acceptable as a body and what is human (Thomas 2012).

Butler (1993) writes on the concept of abjection and queering the body as it relates to breaking boundaries of gender binary and assumptions of bodies. Butler explicates on abject bodies and abjection stating, “The abject designates here precisely those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (1993: 3). The abject being is regulated to the peripheries of society but is relied on for subjects to remain in the domain of subjects. Abject beings may push against these boundaries, asserting against norms of readability of gender, sex, and humanness. These are socially unaccepted bodies, ones that show the limits, cycles, and extended boundaries of what is regarded as human physicality (Grosz 1990). Jones, in her work studying bodies and artistry, states “The performing of difference pushes back against those forces [norms] as critique… while the shaping and regulating of what is human excludes those abjected, the lines are not sufficiently fortified to prevent gaps, tears, and leaks where the sometimes-subject may act” (2007: 70). In assessing Butler’s conception, Wilson (2001)
contends these delegitimized bodies, whether they be diseased, deformed, queer, aged, or any form out of the norm, do define the “constitutive outside” as theorized by Butler, bodies not constructed as normative or accepted but push the limits of what we assume is conventional and redefining what bodies matter as bodies.

Carretta et al., in studying the body changing attitudes and behaviors of drag queens, writes that, “performing gender involves two components: (a) social presentation of gender through interpersonal signs such as name use, vocal modulation, body language, and apparel and (b) gender beliefs, roles, and social expectations” (2019: 64). In the world of drag, transformation largely relies on what is known as the technologies of drag, ways of manipulating and adorning the body with embedded signs that produce a symbol of performativity. Technologies may also be extended to drag persona, changes in vocal tone and word usage, and performative signs or gestures. Kornstein (2019) contends that drag itself may be understood as a technology, one based in performative strategy and aesthetic outside the norm.

Moore (2013) and Parsemain (2019) argue that technologies of drag may assist in showing the performative and fluid quality of gender. Drag performers may transform their appearance utilizing less permanent options such as wigs, makeup, padding, tucking, breast plates, prostheses, props, and clothing. More permanent modifications include plastic or cosmetic surgeries, which may be utilized to achieve a desired form that will aid in the artist’s performance (Carretta et al. 2019). Carretta et al. also remarks that performers may utilize aspects of their bodies without modifications, citing performers who wish to display contrasting gendered signs with their applications of technologies. Egner and Maloney (2016) express similar findings, citing a performance in which a queen utilized her penis to shock her audience and break her feminine illusion. Hankins (2015) notes viewing performances in which everyday
social objects have been utilized, such as a banana dildo, and another in which an armchair was played off as an artist’s sex partner.

Technologies of drag may be used to achieve a specific form or aesthetic representation. Hankins (2015), as well as Hodes and Sandoval (2018), remark on the use of technologies to create presentations that reflect normative gender presentations that are readable and represent the ‘everyday’. Ideal standards of feminine beauty are often employed by drag queens, particularly in current mainstream representations of drag artistry. Greaf (2016) identifies the common representation of femininity in the RuPaul’s Drag Race franchise as hetero-feminized, whereas Hodes and Sandoval (2018) label this representation as a white, ruling class femininity that is easily readable as binary and palatable to viewers. Technologies may also be utilized to create the appearance and embodiment of alternative presentations, ones less based in binary and conventional human aesthetic.

Literature on bodily alteration and modification has varied in scope from studying transformation through fashion (Cavallaro and Warwick 1998; Koda 2004), footbinding (Hong 1997), tattoos and piercings (Fisher 2002, Sweetman 1999), cosmetic surgery and eating behaviors (Carretta et al. 2019), queer self-expression (Pitts 2000), as well as amputation and phantom limb pain (Crawford 2014) among other subjects. My study narrows in on literature pertaining to extreme examples of bodily alterations. Thomas (2012) and Kosut (2010) detail examples of extreme transformations in their respective concepts of nonmainstream body modifications and extreme bodies. From Thomas (2012) we gather an understanding of how body modification – or as Thomas notes, “also known as body alteration, body invention, body adornment, body technology, body aesthetics, body projects, and body customization” – may be
defined in its extremities (2). Thomas shares her definition of nonmainstream body modification, being,

Any permanent or semipermanent, voluntary alteration of the human body that is not medically mandated and that transgresses and challenges common assumptions and expectations of bodily presentation and/or aesthetic, and therefore may be considered extreme and/or deviant by members of mainstream Western society. (2012: 4)

Thomas typifies nonmainstream body modifications as those permanent or semi-permanent alterations outside of accepted voluntary alterations that challenge assumptions of normative body aesthetic. General tattoos, body piercings, and plastic surgery procedures are not included in her definition, though certain tattoos and piercings on the face, full body work, and piercings and tattoos on genitalia are voluntary modifications that would be included as pushing against normative conventions.

Within Thomas’s work, she notes that nonmainstream body modifiers consciously redefine and reappropriate controlling images, as posited by Collins (2000). These controlling images are symbolic inscriptions, usually in the form of stereotypes, attributed to bodies by dominant society. Thomas (2012), in surveying nonmainstream body modifiers, found that these Mods utilize their unconventional body projects to challenge societal expectations of beauty, gender norms, health, and normative body presentation by moving from conventions in favor of adopting the perceived opposite of Western beauty ideals, being monstrosity. Through their monstrous, freaky, and ugly alterations, Thomas finds that these Mods break are labelled deviant for their appearances and actions, visibly challenging common thought of what it means to be human and pushing human limitations through their agency of their bodies.

Thomas’s work supplements Kosut’s (2010) conception of extreme bodies, which encapsulates bodies and body activities outside mainstream conventions. Operating as an ideal
type, extreme bodies are conceptualized not in a specific physicality but for their malleability and fluidity. These extreme bodies are ones marked by “excessive physical modification, transformation, or activity,” including bodies modified through plastic surgery, bodies scarred or with amputations, and bodies suspended from hooks (Kosut 2010: 186). These bodies transgress normative appearance or acceptable actions, and in Kosut’s conceptualization, modify and redefine the boundaries and limits of the “normal” human body, often with the aid of technologies. Kosut’s concept not only points to alternations of the body, but the actions the body engages in, particularly salient when analyzing acts of monstrosity.

These perspectives on the body as the site of inscribed cultural meaning, the site of transformation through multiple technologies, and the site of rearticulating social themes through extreme or nonmainstream presentation lay important ground for considering the role bodies play in constructing spaces to elevate subjugated queer experiences. Dragula privileges bodies as vehicles of action, meaning, transformation, and difference, representing continuously altered bodies that serve to exhibit subjectively interpreted symbols of monstrosity.

Alternative Drag Artistry

Alternative drag aesthetics may be described broadly as those which exist outside of traditional aesthetics of drag artistry like camp or glamour. Parsemain (2019) describes alternative drag styles as those where risk taking and experimentation with aesthetic are emphasized over a stereotypical feminine presentation. Alternative styles of drag may also be classified as radical drag. Jacob and Cerny (2004) and Carretta et al. (2019) discuss the designation of a radical performer. Jacob and Cerny consider terms such as spit drag and half
drag, in which binary presentation is intentionally blurred rather than offering a binary presentation. Their findings illuminate radical performer’s intentions to critique social beliefs and values through their radical presentations, such as confronting heteronormative beauty expectations and highlighting the subjugation of women. Jacob and Cerny illuminate connections to social awareness and appearance, how the queens in their study wish to express their selves but also critique societal and drag norms through their presentation. Both Carretta et al. (2019) and Levitt et al. (2018) describe radical drag as drag that parodies gender categories and is genderfluid in presentation, opting for clashing signs of gender expressions, with Levitt et al. describing these performances as genderqueer or genderbending.

These findings harken to Muñoz’s (1997) piece on Vaginal I Davis’s terrorist drag, in which traditional drag values of realness and passing are refused and radical critiques of racial and gender inequalities are emphasized. Muñoz writes,

Davis’s drag... can best be understood as terrorist drag—terrorist insofar as she is performing the nation’s internal terrors around race, gender, and sexuality. It is also an aesthetic terrorism: Davis uses ground-level guerrilla representational strategies to portray some of the nation’s most salient popular fantasies. The fantasies she acts out involve cultural anxieties around miscegenation, communities of color, and the queer body. Her dress does not attempt to use outmoded ideals of female glamour. She instead dresses like white supremacist militiamen and black welfare queen hookers... conjuring the nation’s most dangerous citizens. She is quite literally in “terrorist drag.” (1997: 92-93)

While both Muñoz and Jacob and Cerny’s (2004) subjects embody drag in which femininity is the vehicle for expression, the femininity embodied is embedded with social critique and understanding. Jacob and Cerny remark that their subjects understood their performance with connection to femininity, reproducing normative gender divisions while utilizing femininity to make themselves intelligible. While it is difficult to escape the reach of heteronormative
structure, Jacob and Cerny state that some of their subjects recognize this paradox and desire to further present gender expressions outside of the gender binary.

Alternative or radical drag has connections to multiple drag subcultures, such as the genderfuck movement, the Club Kid scene, and the tranimal movement, all dedicated in some fashion to producing bodies unreadable as binary presentations and challenging normative presentations of body. Baker (2020) notes that genderfuck began as a queer response to discrimination in the 1960’s and took influence from other subcultures, such as glam rock and punk rock. Genderfuck may be identified as an embodiment in which traditionally coded masculine and feminine technologies are adorned to obscure binary identification and make bodies unreadable as wholly masculine or feminine. Hankins (2015) describes genderfuck drag as a multisignifying performance without binary identification, composed of “extremely (de)(re)formed representations of masculinity and femininity alongside multigendered, nongendered, or even nonhuman signs, without privileging any one category of being” (448). Baker tracks the birth of Club Kids in the 1990’s, in which mainstream fashion and gender ideals were eschewed while gender fluidity, androgyny, and vibrant fashion choices were praised. The more recent postmodern tranimal movement takes root in San Francisco with inspiration from the Club Kid movement. Jer Ber Jones, originator of the tranimal term, describes the aesthetic as “availblish,” utilizing homemade and readily accessible materials to create highly exaggerated features that celebrate ugliness, foundness, and blurred gender expression (Clifton 2012).

As stated previously, alternative drag styles may be comprised of alternatives presentations to traditional or mainstream drag performances. These may include performances by bio or faux queens or kings, performers presenting a gender performance in alignment with their biological sex. Kings may also fit into this category, as they are not typically shown in
mainstream representations of drag artistry. Although drag kings perform representations of masculinity, their performances are found to be layered with critiques of masculinity, binary, sexuality and drag itself (Berbary and Johnson 2016). Research has generally ignored drag performers who perform spooky, horror, or sci-fi drag, with these presentations largely being located outside the traditional norm.

Alternative representations of drag artistry have found their ways into mainstream culture, though not to the degree of normative drag presentations. Popular representations of alternative styles have been embodied by Divine, Leigh Bowery, and RuPaul. Divine’s persona revolved around trash, filth, and crude humor; Leigh Bowery was seen as a leader of the Club Kid movement and pioneered underground fashion trends; and RuPaul gained notoriety in the beginning of her career for embodying a genderfuck aesthetic. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, based in San Francisco, engage in activist causes while embodying genderfuck aesthetics and parodying Catholic fashion and order. Also located in San Francisco, Peaches Christ regularly produces parody theatre productions based on popular media relevant to queer culture. Alumni from the reality competition program RuPaul’s Drag Race have represented alternative styles of drag on and off the platform, though González and Cavazos (2016) find that representations of alternative and genderfluid drag is often relegated to ridicule within the program in comparison to more normative styles. Performers who may be considered alternative showcased on this platform include Nina Flowers (Season 1), Sharon Needles (Season 4), Kim Chi and Acid Betty (Season 8), Sasha Velour (Season 9), Yvie Oddly (season 11), and Crystal Methyd (Season 12). Outside of the program, Season 9 winner Sasha Velour produces “Nightgowns”, a drag show based in Brooklyn which features multiple drag performances and aesthetics. Her show has also been adapted to a short series featured on Quibi. Season 10
contestant The Vixen co-founded “Black Girl Magic,” a show devoted to uplifting Black voices in Chicago and featuring multiple acts of empowering activism. *Camp Wannakiki* (2018-) is a drag competition series that airs on YouTube and features a diverse cast of campy drag performers and aesthetics. And *The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula* (2016-), the unit of analysis for my study, now airs on Netflix and offers an alternative space for many kinds of alternative and radical performers, or “monsters,” to showcase their non-normative talents.

*Dragula’s* televised representation of alternative drag artistry, by nature an underground and radical art form of queer self-expression, offers new opportunities for research of how platforms are constructed to elevate subjugated queer experiences. My research also seeks to study alternative drag artistry in a space constructed to showcase the artistry without ridicule or inherent comparison to mainstream norms which tend to focus on the gender presentation of alternative forms. I find the minimal amount of sociological research that has attempted to include analysis or understanding of alternative drag artistries, in whatever form they manifest, to be preoccupied with incoherence of gender presentation. Drag is a radical form of queer self-expression, a rebellious and artful experience that extends far beyond concerns of gender performativity. I believe my analysis will deepen the knowledge of alternative drag artistries and the multiplicity of forms and performances that may be represented through such expression, as well as further contextualize the meanings and justifications from those who engage in alternative drag.

Monsters in Social Research

Monsters in social and sociological research have been discussed in a variety of contexts. Cohen’s (1996; 2007) writings offer theses with which to read cultures through the monsters and
meanings attached to monstrosity, taking examples from historical, textual, and sociocultural monstrosities to construct dominant cultural themes of the monster. Cohen considers the monster as a transitory construction of social fears and forbidden desires, a sign and label of various cultural meanings. His analysis details instances of the monster used to warn against unsanctioned sex practices, to discriminate against racial and ethnic groups, to exploit those with perceived abnormalities, and to set gender boundaries and roles among various other manifestations. Luckhurst (2020) attempts to expand on Cohen’s theses, articulating his own theory of monsters through hermeneutic interpretation of contemporary, situated monstrosities. The works of Haraway (1991), Betterton (2006), and Holman Jones and Harris (2016) are concerned with feminist and queer configurations of monstrosity. Haraway’s influential work assessing cyborg imagery in science fiction posits new opportunities for the liberation of women from dominant cultural dualities. Betterton considers cultural stories of monstrosity surrounding pregnancy and the mother, finding new possibilities of the maternal body in contemporary art. Holman Jones and Harris consider new empowering potential for the monstrous queer body as “a kind of creatively queer embodiment of gender, sexuality, and desire,” representing extraordinary intelligible embodiments of queerness as well as unintelligible or invisible queer subjectivities and sexualities (2016: 519).

Thomson’s (1996) formative entry to freakery and extraordinary bodies traverses sociohistorical spectacularization of freak discourse and bodily abnormality, assessing the effects of modernity on distributing freak discourse through different areas of American society. Weinstock (2020) provides an array of monstrous readings, providing a road map of understanding the multiplicities of both monsters and monster theory through primary understanding of monstrosity, monstrous difference, monsters as culture, and monsters as figures
of hope. Click, Lee, and Willson Holladay (2013) consider fan identification and monstrous rearticulation through the messaging of Lady Gaga and her Little Monsters, considering her reframing of the term an empowering cultural message of embraced difference. Ingebretsen (2001) analyzes the social rhetoric of monsters in mass media as a vehicle for cultural moralizing, considering the fear and monstrosity attached to failed humans in popular media.

In the monstrous cacophony of these works I find inspiration for my foray into the world of monsters. From Cohen (1996; 2007) and Luckhurst (2020) I seek to elucidate and interpret new manifestations of monster culture within Dragula, aided with insights from Haraway (1991), Betterton (2006) and Holman Jones and Harris (2016) to how we may approach new empowered queer and feminist possibilities in the social study of monsters. Thomson’s (1996) work serves as a basis to the spectacularization and dissemination of freak and abnormality discourse, and when paired with Weinstock (2020) and Ingebretsen (2001) these writings provide valuable insight to the monster as cultural sign. Lastly, Click et al. (2013) provide a warm look at the opportunities for monstrous rearticulative empowerment, especially for young and often subjugated groups.

New Opportunities of Queer Representation

Parsemain (2019) analyzes the various pedagogical techniques utilized by contemporary televised media to construct accessible representations of queerness, assessing an array of platforms. Parsemain’s conceptual framework borrows from research on entertainment and aesthetic in constructing representation. McKee (2013) conceptualizes an aesthetic system based in various aspects of successful and engaging entertainment. McKee highlights the importance of
entertainment techniques like vulgarity, story narrative, seriality, adaptation, happy endings, interactivity with audience, qualities of fastness and loudness, visual pleasure or spectacle, emotion, and fun as key characteristics of entertainment. Oliver and Raney (2011) argue that media entertainment is consumed for motivations of both pleasure and escapism with a search for meaning and purpose, identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations of content consumers. This perspective does not undermine the search for hedonistic escapism and enjoyment but serves to supplement it, recognizing the meaningfulness and potentially fulfilling search for insight in entertainment. Parsemain (2019) writes on the difference between authoritative and constructive entertainment framing, with the constructivist perspective based in interactive and inviting representations constructed to promote looking, thinking, and engagement as opposed to a more transmissive or “media effects” approach that may lead to less critical or interpretive learning (8).

Parsemain also addresses the importance of constructing knowledge of identity and ethics in cultural representations of queerness, or knowledge of the self and other, through images of relatable queerness and appreciations of sameness and difference. Her analysis focuses in the construction of the queer other, seeking to challenge Silverstone’s (2007) assertion of media’s inability to connect the audience culturally and ethically to the represented Other, viewing current representation as exaggerated or minimized rather than framed in “healthy engagement” (Parsemain 2019: 240). For Parsemain, representing queer alterity through constructing empathy and emotional engagement provides a powerful and properly distanced technique to promote knowledge of queerness. She concludes her study by stating,

In the past, TV queers were “too far” from the mainstream. Demonised, ridiculed, stereotyped and alienated from dominant institutions, these portrayals exaggerated difference. Others were “too close”: genderconforming and
heterosexualized, they were disconnected from the LGBT+ community. Television finally seems to represent queers at a “proper distance”: relatable and likeable, but not so close that their queerness is erased. TV queers from the 2010s are queerer than the gays and lesbians who populated American screens in the 1990s and 2000s. Importantly, they are no longer embedded in straight and cisgender contexts, but often situated in their communities (particularly on cable and streaming). This allows television to emphasize queer support, love and care as well as social and political issues. (2019: 248-249)

Parsemain’s findings, arising from recent sources of queer content like *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (2009- ), *Sense8* (2015-2018), and *Empire* (2015-2020), shows significant change in the portrayals of queer experience and the development of queer representation. She notes where further findings could lie, such as in *Queer Eye* (2018- ) or *Pose* (2018- ), sources where inclusive queerness are the norm, while also stating where there is still much room for growth.

From these findings I find inspiration to expand the research of how platforms construct queer representation. First, Parsemain asserts the importance of streaming services as spaces of opportunity for alternative and radical representations of queerness. Her analysis largely focuses on programs on established broadcast or cable networks, leaving opportunity to assess independent, alternative, and emerging platforms located on streaming spaces. Rambukkana (2007) contextualizes alternative or radical media sources as spaces that seek to give a voice to those left out by mainstream sources, are based in inclusivity, and act in an autonomous fashion. Sandoval (2009) furthers this by outlining the subjective approach to producing emancipatory alternative media, highlighting the participatory processes of media actors in constructing alternative content. Her analysis also lists minimal requirements for critical media, including critical content and critical producers. Parsemain notes the history of ridicule, stereotype, and alienation in media towards queer representation as part of the exaggerated perspective of representation. In contextualizing the program *Dragula*, it is a platform largely conceived out of
exclusion and ridicule of the alternative artistries and peoples represented in the space. In fact, 
*RuPaul’s Drag Race* has been found to serve as a primary force to continued stereotyping, 
alienation, and ridicule to a variety of alternative queer experiences and representations 
(González and Cavasos 2016). It is important to include representations of subjugated voices in 
spaces constructed for and by their community, especially when these spaces are constructed 
from the shadow of mainstream representation that continues to exclude their multiplicity of 
voices. This exclusion from queer media itself offers new opportunities for knowledge of 
queerness, queer media, and the alternative representations provided. My analysis of *Dragula* 
will introduce further multiplicities of queer experience that push against assertions of 
exaggerated, properly distanced, and minimized representation. *Dragula* is the site of real queer 
experiences, practices, and motivations that are alternative, radical, and thrilling in nature, with 
opportunity to show human experience in radical and potentially subversive representation. This 
“in your face” and meaningful representation has potential to challenge underlying assertions of 
what is “properly distanced” when relatability, engagement, and critical thought are considered. 
It also represents a system based in interpretation, allowing for varied representations for 
audiences to receive a wide array of queer portrayals. These representations also signal 
relatability and empathy to engage viewers, representing human hardship, motivations, and 
success.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL APPROACH

To begin assessing the socially mediated symbolism of queer monstrosity on the platform of *Dragula*, I look to insights from Sandoval (2009), Rambukkana (2007), and Parsemain (2019). I first conceptualize *Dragula* as an alternative media space for radical queer representations, one that is critical of mainstream standards of both queer and drag artistry representations. I extend Sandoval’s emphasis on the participatory nature of alternative media to constructing radical and critical content through representations of subjugated experiences to *Dragula*, allowing for active interpretation and evolution of the platform’s system through its participants. The contestants or “monsters” constantly evolve the goals, context, process, and meanings of the program through their individual interpretations and representation as a community, while also serving as agents of rearticulation for their radical queer community and of their own monstrous symbolism. In this way, the monsters follow the semi-autonomous potential theorized by Rambukkana, controlling the new embodied images and narratives of monstrosity they bring to the platform while surpassing the dominant symbolism and discourse of mainstream society. In this sense, *Dragula* acts as a space for the other, a queer heterotopia that offers new possibilities and knowledge production of the monstrous. Finally, Parsemain’s perspective of constructing both symbolically interpretable and engaging forms of queer representation also informs my approach to assessing the participatory system of symbolism in
*Dragula*, as the platform showcases a multiplicity of engaging queer symbolism indicative of previously subjugated queer lived experiences.

I also consider the role of bodies through theoretical perspectives on the body and meaning, modification and alteration, as well as concepts of nonmainstream modified bodies, extreme bodies, and monster culture to supplement my analysis. I first consider insights from symbolic interactionism on bodies and embodiment. Waskul and Vannini (2016) define embodiment as “the process by which the body-object is actively experienced, produced, sustained, and/or transformed as a subject body,” asserting the body as social phenomena (3). The body is embodied, opening questions to how that may be answered through multiple perspectives of abstract symbolic interactionist thought. I take lead from the socio-semiotic interactionist perspective of bodies. In this view, the body is theorized as a vehicle of signification based in lived experiences of the body and representing cultural meanings and values of the context of which it is actively located. The body, as subject and object, is thus a symbol. Related to these points, the body in this perspective may be viewed as sense or interpretant, illuminating the “innovative, intentional, interpretive, reflexive, existentially unique, and innovative powers of the self,” while noting the interactive and agential nature of bodies and meaning (Waskul and Vannini 2016).

I also consider perspectives of embodiment located in feminist and queer theory. Grosz asserts, “Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable… always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them” (1994: xi). Grosz (1994), Hoogland (2002), and Sweetman (1999) argue that bodies are innately plastic or open to infinite alternative representations known and unknown. Bodies may exist within the boundaries of known reality and innovate past these
boundaries to disrupt what is known or possible. Bodies are also subject to transformation and reinscription of signs and meanings (Grosz 1994; Hoogland 2002). Bodies are embedded with social signs and meanings, ascribed subjectively and through their connections to the social world. Through the body’s inherent malleability and the individual’s agency, ascribed signs and meanings may be rewritten (Grosz 1994). The body may be transformed with new meaning to reflect a new embodiment and conception of self, exhibiting the reflexive qualities of the body.

Considering Barad (2003) and her ideas of posthumanist performativity, we can gain a better understanding of the processes of embodiment. Barad theorizes that our world becomes (manifests) and is always becoming (embodied). Barad extends this analysis to bodies, arguing that bodies become and are always becoming, that the matter of bodies transforms and the meaning of our bodies transform as well. The conception and materialization of an individual’s embodiment is that embodiment; doing and being are linked and occur together. Barad argues for a material-discursive view of bodies, forgoing the assumption that the body is constructed discursively and instead supporting an analysis that sees matter as dynamic and active with discourse and meaning (2003). Here, Barad attempts to explicate a process of becoming, finding the body (matter) to be active and agential in becoming discursive entities. Barad also discusses her ideas of position and phenomenon. Borrowing from Hanson’s (2007) use of Barad’s work, we can state that the meaning of a specific position is an active bodily materialization of that phenomenon. The materiality or discourse of that position is interconnected with that phenomenon and arises out of embodiment of such phenomena. Hanson attributed ‘position’ to her respective concept of study, drag king embodiment, and we may attempt to do the same here with our concept of monstrosity as Barad’s theory of the body extends to both ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ bodies.
Concepts of monstrosity and the body have been discussed in works by Betterton (2006), Cohen (2007), Haraway (1991), Holman Jones and Harris (2016), Hughes (2009), Shildrick (1996), and Thomas (2012). In support of Cohen’s groundbreaking analysis of the functions of bodies of monsters previously discussed, I borrow from Thomas’s (2012) and Kosut’s (2010) crucial insights on unconventional bodies. Thomas (2012) considers monstrosity and freakery in relation to their conception of “nonmainstream body modification.” Through modification to “monstrous,” “freak,” or less than human appearance, Thomas argues such embodiments challenge what is acceptable as bodies along gendered and racial lines, as well as appearance norms and expectations of sexuality. Thomas utilizes the concept of the “normal freak” to describe those body modifiers who voluntarily alter their body to show their difference, and the “made freak,” who alters their self for exhibition (Adams 1996; Thomas 2012). These “made freaks” are invested in the narrative process of their body projects, which Thomas argues grounds the modifier’s humanity for non-Mod individuals. The narrative shows humanity through unconventional means, achieving what feels “right” for the modifier and their body. The narrative behind the unconventional (or “monstrous”) appearance contradicts or challenges assumptions of criminality, otherness, or insanity based on initial contact with the modifier, ultimately challenging humanness altogether. This may also be supplemented with Kosut’s (2010) conception of extreme action in consideration with less mainstream bodies, as the extreme acts supplement and elevate the modification of appearance. These perspectives are vital to conceptualizing rearticulated monstrosity and assessing how monsters willingly distort human aesthetic to represent their varied queer experiences through the unifying yet interpretable symbolism of the monster. They also signify the open opportunities for negotiating a nonmainstream body and engaging in extreme actions.
Cohen (2007) provides seven theses of monster culture, dominant areas if monstrous symbolism conceived from various cultural perspectives. Cohen explicates his theses as such: (1) the monster’s body is cultural and signifies something; (2) the monster changes, transforms, and always escapes; (3) the monster defies classification and organized knowledge; (4) the monster signifies social difference; (5) the monster pushes human boundaries; (6) the monster represents escapist actions of fear and desire; and (7) the monster is created from and represents human knowledge (2007). His writing takes root in historical and cultural manifestations of monstrosity, assessing the patterns of discursive symbolism that monsters may hold. I utilize concepts from Cohen’s essay, such as the monster as “a temporary egress from restraint,” an open “system” of monsters, “the monster of prohibition,” “forbidden” practices, and the terms “escape” and “epiphany,” to support my analysis (2007: 17; 7; 13; 16; 6). I modify Cohen’s perspectives on monstrous cultural symbolism while also offering new insights to how these concepts are embodied and rearticulated. Through utilizing the combined perspectives of symbolic interactionism and the body, embodied materialization, and nonmainstream modified and extreme body typologies, I seek to conceptualize Drag Supermonster as a unique queer opportunity.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

For my project I used a qualitative approach based in content analysis and grounded theory. I also approached my project with a feminist and queer perspective on methods to consider the multiplicity and fluidity of queer subjectivities within the content, as well as to better construct knowledge and meaning of queer practices, expressions, and experiences. McIntosh and Cuklanz (2014), in their explication of methodological goals of feminist media research, denote the opportunity of media research to place focus on the lives and experiences of members of subjugated groups “who have not traditionally held cultural and political power,” indicative of the queer artists represented on and constitutive of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula* (267). I take lead from their suggestion that the methodology of media research may assess the intersections of voice, spectacle, context, agency, identity categories, and representation simultaneously, as well as the ability to identify and understand “subjugated knowledges that are not readily available in mainstream mass media” (268). With *Dragula* conceptualized here as a platform created from and in response to ridicule and alienation from mainstream mass media, the goals of feminist media methods become increasingly applicable to my thesis seeking to delve into the experiences of alternative drag artists in an emerging media space constructed by and for them, as well as the cultural and social context of the queer platform itself. I also utilize Phillipov’s (2012) perspective that textual analysis may serve to offer partial yet valuable insight
to understandings of media and culture through analyzing the uniquely situated experiences presented in media spaces. Lastly, I also follow Parsemain’s (2019) examples of content analysis of queer televised texts to assess the construction of queer representation and the techniques that may educate and foster understanding of the multiplicity of queer experiences in audiences, as well as expanding the research of queer representation in contexts where inclusive queerness is the norm.

The first three seasons of the alternative drag competition reality platform *The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula*, with 26 episodes as preexisting audio-visual texts, served as the units of analysis for my study. I accessed these texts through my own YouTube and Netflix accounts, and utilized my own laptop for the coding, analysis, and writing processes. Following direction from Charmaz (1985) and Leavy (2007), I engaged with my texts to simultaneously collect and analyze data which emerged through my viewing. I engaged in two rounds of coding to ensure validity of my engagement with the texts and establish clear themes and lines of coding within the content (Charmaz 1985). The initial round of coding established emerging themes and analytic categories within the texts. I coded the interactions between three distinct but interconnected and interacting sets of people: The hosts/showrunners, the community of contestants, and the individuals who constitute the community of contestants. I coded the system that they construct and evolve through their participation, coding for a variety of meanings, processes, goals, and aspects of context that emerge through their interactions, as well as coding critiques, praise, and challenges. I also coded the processes of the program, including the various visual and audio from the floor show performances, accompanying challenges, and exterminations. This included coding of looks, performances, reception, dialogue, and my own feelings of the content. The performances served prominent sources of interest and were coded
for their symbolism, conceptualization, form, materialization, technology use, movement, and action. The symbol of the monster is a prominent point of interest in this study, and as such I coded for instances of how the monster ideal is shared, mediated, dictated, individually interpreted, connected to, and expanded through these relationships.

Through coding of multiple phenomena, I wrote memos connecting themes, codes, and data to other instances within the content, as well as making theoretical connections and notes to inform a second, focused round of coding. This coding process served as a reengagement with the text to better ensure validity of themes and codes, thus refining categories to guide the rest of the analysis process (Charmaz 1985; Leavy 2007). During the writing of findings and analysis, I supplemented my analytic writing of evidence based in performances by reengaging with the instances where they occur in the texts. This was done to best honor and describe the performative elements of the expressions, as well as to refamiliarize myself with the specific content to achieve accurate and vivid description. I also utilized my analytic memos to supplement my analysis, theory building, and theoretical application. Lastly, I practiced self-reflexivity throughout the research process to reflect upon my own social background, positionality, and assumptions, as well as how these might influence my engagement with the process, attempting from start to finish to highlight the experiences of those represented in the texts and eliminating any personal biases (Hesse-Biber 2014).
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Monstrous Knowing: Bodies of Knowledge

Through my analysis of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula*, I found the themes of platform construction and the monsters’ bodies as bodies of knowledge to be inseparable, at least at the point of base construction and the current point, three seasons in. The monsters of *Dragula*, as well as the hostesses Dracmorda and Swanthula, hold knowledge of the monstrous in terms of their artistry, their queerness, and their humanity. This knowledge informs the base context and goals of the platform, allowing the monsters to participate and evolve the meanings of monstrosity that the Boulets set, and thus constructing new monstrous knowledge for themselves and the platform. Here, I will explore the multiplicity of experiences that the monsters hold which inform their participation with the platform, thus informing its goals and further construction. I then consider the platform of *Dragula*, through its goals, context, and processes, as an alternative media platform based in critical knowledge building of subjugated, radical queer experiences, consisting of a unique, participatory system of rearticulated monsters.
Embodied Spirals of Knowing

The context and goals of *Dragula* are first informed by its hostesses and creators, Dracmorda and Swanthula Boulet. As Drag Supermonsters themselves with a long history of creating monster nightlife platforms, the Boulet’s are knowledgeable of the qualities of a Drag Supermonster. The ideal of the Drag Supermonster is a drag artist who, first and foremost, subjectively embodies and embraces the primary principles of *Dragula*: Filth, Horror, and Glamour. The Drag Supermonster is a radical queer artist who is creative, engaging, shocking, and pushes boundaries through confident and committed performances. Drag Supermonsters are also expected to be punk and fearless, thrill seekers and pain freaks, tough, dark, and dangerous. The Drag Supermonster is an alternative drag artist, a queer individual whose self-expression does not fit the mainstream queer scene or the normative standards of Western society. And much like the Boulets, the Drag Supermonsters of their platform have faced alienation and isolation, queer alterity, and hardship, the very real and very human lived experiences endured by the monster and their monstrous body.

For Dracmorda and Swanthula, experiences of their own alienation and isolation, queer alterity, and hardship are innate to their base construction of the platform, aiding them in constructing a space for monstrous knowing. In “Le Freak” Dollya reads from an interview with the Boulets about their own queer experiences of isolation, with Dracmorda quoted as saying, “I’ve never forgotten what it felt like to not have a place. So the events I create, the community I help cultivate, and the show I am a part of, I provide that thing I desperately needed as a child. A window and a weird flowerbed where seedlings are allowed to grow any way that they choose”
The Boulets recognize the need for space and community for their fellow monster drag artists, acknowledging their shared otherhood and the lack of place for their monstrous lived experiences to exist and thrive in their most radical form. The Boulets explicate further, critical of not only Western societal standards but of mainstream or homonormative queer culture which often excludes more radical and alternative bodies and experiences. In “Finale” the Boulets recount to their final three monsters,

Dracmorda: Drag has blown up in the world, but only a certain sort of aesthetic has taken off, and it’s left a lot of really creative, talented people feeling left behind. To us, we feel it’s almost a responsibility of ours to make sure that people know about all the different kind of drag that there are, celebrate them, bring them out, and put them on display for the world to see.

Swanthula: You know that’s right, because we’re kind of all a family of outcasts. That’s who we are, and that’s why we invited you into our family as well, that’s who we all are. And out of pain comes creativity, and out of creativity comes this level of art and it’s what we’ve all come together to celebrate. (S1E6: 41:35)

The Boulets invoke an enduring concept in queer communities, the found family, in their justification for establishing an alternative platform that elevates the subjugated experiences of radical queer drag artists. The Boulets recognize that as “outcasts and losers,” radical queer peoples not only face alterity from society at large, but that their bodies and expressions, and therefore their embodied knowledge, is often excluded from or uncelebrated in mainstream queer spaces. In “Cenobites” Swanthula states that she and Dracmorda pride themselves in “celebrating the strange, the wild, and the sometimes dangerous side of queer culture,” rebuking those who would have them conform because “drag is a form of radical self-expression, it’s an art. And the last thing an artist needs is to be told what to do,” again reflecting their knowledge of radical queerness and the potential that lies in the freedom to express that knowledge (S2E1: 7:40). The
platform of Dragula is therefore designed to be one of inclusivity for a multiplicity of queer bodies and knowledge, one which attempts to elevate alternative drag artists and their artistry and push these radical artists to reach their potential. As Swanthula notes in “Finale,” she and Dracmorda “wanted to create a platform that celebrates the artistry of drag… it’s going to be changing minds about what people think about drag and drag queens, and even gay and queer culture,” signaling their goal to offer new perspectives of drag and queerness to the world (S2E10: 39:19). With these goals in mind, I will explore examples of the monsters and their own embodied knowledge of alienation and exclusion from queer spaces, queer alterity, and human hardship and how these motivate and inform their participation on the platform.

Many of the monsters of Dragula, because of their alternative artistries and radical queerness, express their experiences of alienation and exclusion from their queer spaces outside of the platform. For these monsters, alienation manifests through experiences like isolation or lack of connection to space or community, constrained creativity, a perceived lack of value or appreciation to their artistry, and incorrect assumptions and comparisons of their artistries. For example, Foxie, Victoria, and James all designate normative queer spaces as those which feature “top 40 shit,” drag performances which reflect mainstream standards of drag artistry and feature popular music. For the monsters, “top 40” spaces and scenes do not align with their aesthetic and constrain their creative abilities due to the normative standards of the spaces, the performers featured, and the audiences. Victoria finds that her home scene in Orlando doesn’t have much of an audience for her aesthetic, though she often rebukes her audience’s favored aesthetics to show her own, often to mixed reception. James, though relying on their “top 40” space for their income, experiences a lack of connection to the space and its community.
These experiences of having spaces and opportunities are not universal, as Vander reveals in “Wickedest Witch.” Vander, speaking for herself and fellow monsters Foxie and Loris, explicates on their shared experiences as newer performers in Los Angeles, expressing hardship in finding spaces for their artistry by remarking,

“We make our own hair, our own costumes, our own everything. But because we’re new we’re not given these opportunities and it can be really frustrating to make everything yourself and sometimes go to a show and then you see queens who don’t appreciate the spot they have… I feel like a lot of girls get comfortable and start lazing and I’m like, dying to get these spots and nobody gives them to me, and I’m just making and making and making and producing drag and it just doesn’t get me anywhere. (S1E1: 6:05)

Despite the innovation and creativity of their artistries, Vander and her fellow newer monsters find that they don’t fit the dominant scene in comparison to their more stagnant counterparts, their bodies denied space for representation in their own communities. This is also reflected by Vander in “80’s Female Wrestler” where she states, “it’s hard to get my drag out there and get noticed, and I feel like regardless of if it’s good or bad people just don’t really give a shit,” reaffirming her struggles as a monstrous queen and a new performer, an often precarious combination in the world of drag (S1E2: 1:16). Some monsters like Dahli, based in Phoenix, lack a space and a community of “weirdos” to connect to altogether, while in “Cenobites” Erika’s inquiry to her fellow monsters, “All of us, because we’re in some way different, have paid a price locally, right or wrong?,” is met with a resigned affirmation by her fellow monsters, a commonality of struggle that ties their subjectively unique, radical artistries together in a monstrous membership (S2E1: 20:18).

When allowed to perform in these spaces, the monsters also experience instances of being discredited in their embodied monstrosity while also facing comparisons based on normative
standards. For example, Hollow expresses that her drag artistry, which she aptly describes as “fucking intense,” is often discredited for its content and denied the label of ‘drag’ by others because her artistry is different from the norm. For Priscilla, she faces the label of a “trash queen” in her home spaces, wishing to reclaim the title and neutralize the insult of the term. James recounts being told she’s both “not a real queen, or not a real type of person” in her spaces and having to fight for validation of her artistry and humanity. Frankie and Meatball discuss their experiences in Los Angeles, with Meatball noting the intelligence and creativity of their artistry that often goes unacknowledged and Frankie recounting instances where she has put work and effort into her performances only to be discredited for her horror content. Frankie notes that often “a skinny ass boy with no fuckin’ pads, no titties, 3 hairs on his fuckin’ head will come out and death drop to Beyonce and everyone’s all ‘Yasss!’ and that bitch gets the money,” a sharp yet dull contrast to Frankie’s larger than life monstrous persona (S1E5: 6:12). In this conversation, Frankie also shares with Vander, Meatball, and Melissa an instance of direct comparison of her artistry to mainstream standards, stating,

Frankie: I think what killed me when I first started, like, going out was showing up one of my first times and this guy goes ‘get it girl, love it. I love the Sharon Needles thing you have.’
Vander: Ooh…
Meatball: Oh. Oh.
Frankie: And I was like, I mean, I get that she went out there and did her thing, that’s really cool, I mean she’s evolved since then, everyone has. But I was kinda like, ‘really, you think that we’re all just doing, that’s what you’re gonna call it? Like, we’re all spooky like Sharon Needles?’ There’s just so much more to it. (S1E5: 6:40)

Frankie’s testimony reveals the pervasiveness of mainstream standards among audiences and the current industry of drag itself. Frankie expresses being compared to Sharon Needles, the winner
of the fourth season of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, who’s propensity towards dark, spookier drag aesthetics was groundbreaking for the platform at the time, airing in 2012. Needles is one of the fewer queens on the platform to consistently embody more alternative elements in her artistry, though her unique representation has, as Frankie’s story shows, brought about mainstream comparison to the varied aesthetics that fall under the umbrella of alternative drag artistry. For these performers, the normative standards, even those that are odd and alternative, persist as means to organize and classify their embodiments, ways to neutralize their artistries with what is known, safe, and often discrediting, compiling hardships for these artists that may already exist. They seek validation of their artistries and creativity, open spaces of representation and opportunities to express their selves, with many expressing gratitude and excitement for the opportunity of *Dragula*.

Vander returns in the second season as a guest judge for “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 2)” and visits the final four monsters as they prepare for their Wasteland performance. After discussing their journeys on the platform, Vander leaves them with a parting thought,

> Each one of us may have a definition of what a Supermonster is. I think, for me, a Supermonster is very much someone who has personally witnessed kind of the nasty of the world, and the evils of the world. It’s the bullied kids, it’s the kids who are left out, and I think that’s why gay people or queer people as a community tend to have such a connection to horror films, or to the villains, because the villains and the horror characters were the ostracized, the weird, the ones who weren’t understood, but they took all the things that made them different and turned them into their power. And I think that’s where all of this comes from, and that’s why so many people who haven’t experienced that don’t get it, they don’t get why we love this darkness. And I think that’s just where it comes from. (S2E8: 7:48)

Vander’s statement on the knowledge of the Supermonster is one informed by her own experiences, and is also revealed to reflect the knowledge of her fellow *Dragula* monsters. The
monsters often discuss their experiences of ostracization in their own community workspaces, though their own personal lived knowledge of human hardship and queer alterity also persists as common themes which inform their artistries and participation. Although knowing the full depth of experience of these monsters is beyond the reach of this project, the monsters often share intimate moments of their embodied knowledge of struggle which has informed their lives and expressions. Landon’s artistry as a drag king comes directly from his knowledge of human hardship in the form of cancer. Landon expresses in “The Grand Finale” that he lost his mother, a source of positivity in his life, to cancer and later battled two bouts of cancer himself. Through these experiences, Landon expresses an appreciation for life, stating that the battle his body underwent “brought me to the realization that my love of special effects makeup, my love of gross bloody horror, my love of performance, and my love of life came to a perfect blend and created Landon” (S3E10: 18:10). Dahli’s experiences with HIV and abuse supplied her knowledge of self-worth and gave her a tough spirit, reflected in her punk artistry, and Hollow expresses that drag has saved her from further inflicting harm on herself and attempting suicide, now using her drag to break free from structures that would attempt to confine her. Felony discusses achieving two years sobriety while participating on the platform, while Maddelynn and Priscilla bond over their struggles with addiction. Maddelynn was previously homeless and dependent on alcohol, while Priscilla had recently broken her substance dependency to participate on the show, wishing to be a positive influence and inspire people to get clean. Louisianna’s three-month recovery after a horrible car wreck led her to learn to enjoy life. These are few of the many examples of hardship the monsters of Dragula carry with them, having affected their bodies and given them knowledge of themselves and the world, thus inspiring their
artistry. The monsters turn these hardships into their power, knowing the monstrous of the human world and embracing the darkness of their experiences.

The monsters also express knowledge of queer alterity, having been confronted with various instances of rejection towards their queer bodies. For Erika, Disasterina, and Louisianna, their struggles with their parents weigh heavily on them. Erika reveals she is estranged from her religious father, while Disasterina expresses an inability to share her embodied artistry and queer lifestyle with her aging parents. For Louisianna, her experience with Lyme disease at 16 caused her hardship, as her nurse began asking her questions to rule out HIV as a cause of her symptoms, to which her mother threatened to kick her out of the house if she was gay.

Louisianna shares her experiences by stating,

I didn’t have a queer community for a really long time, and when I moved to Austin, I found one, and drag saved my life. It really did. I was under the thumb my whole life, either through my parents or religion. I didn’t start living my life until I was fucking 36 years old, and I started drag when I was 36 fucking years old. And now I’m 42 and these have been the most amazing, best years of my life, because I found a community and I have family and friends that support my work and just support me as a person and I’m fucking amazing. I’m an amazing person and an amazing drag queen. My only regret is waiting so long…I’m alive when I’m on stage, and it’s the first time I’ve ever felt alive, truly alive in my life… I put on my fucking bra strap, fucking put on that wig, and I go out there and fucking serve it. Because that’s what I do, and that’s what I was made to do. (S3E6: 12:10)

Louisianna has deep rooted knowledge of queer alterity and hardship stemming from her struggles with illness, her parents, religion, and isolation. Her embodied knowledge informs her participation in alternative drag artistry, finally locating a community and a form of expression that welcomes her queer body and all she has to offer. Louisianna finds liberation through drag
and her affirming community, knowing her art form and its adherents to be a life saving force for good.

Many other monsters reveal their struggles with being a queer other throughout their lives. For Dollya, her own Orlando community, as well as many other queer communities globally, was affected by the violent 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting. The monsters find that this experience brought renewed knowledge of the hate against their celebratory safe spaces, places where their bodies have traditionally found community, creativity, and fun. Evah reveals she was made to participate in conversion therapy by her parents, her queer existence not welcomed. This experience forced an estrangement between Evah and her family, though Evah reveals that through the art of drag she found something that could not be taken away from her, her own autonomous self-expression through her queer body. For Yovska, her experience as a queer immigrant from Mexico informs her embodiment of the paranormal, expressing “there been so many times in my life where I’ve been so bullied to the point where I don’t even feel human anymore. You feel like a monster, you feel like you don’t belong” (S3E1: 23:56). Through alternative drag, Yovska turns this knowledge of diminished humanity into unique artistry which rebukes all human form. Biqtch also shares her experiences with bullying and how she is motivated by her embodied knowledge of diminished self-worth and queer alterity. She states,

Growing up, I was obviously effeminate. And that was like, the hardest part about growing up, was someone labelling you something that you didn’t even know or couldn’t understand in that moment. Like, you get called a faggot, and you’re like, ‘Why the fuck do I have to put up with this shit?’ And I would go home and like, fucking hate myself. I hated myself so much on things that I couldn’t even change. And when I would go home, I would just disappear in video games. I’d boot up like, fighting games with these gorgeous Glamazonian women with like thongs and battle axes, and they would just kick the shit out of these douchebag guys. And I was able to get my revenge in these awesome phenom characters. And when I first started getting into drag, I was doing it for
fun, but then I realized I could actually be those gorgeous women that I always idolized. That’s why I do drag and that’s why I love art... There’s this guttural, visceral energy within me when I’m on stage. When I have the character on. And it’s this beast. And I feel that beast is in each and every one. And when I am Biqtch Puddin’, I can see that I inspire people to bring that out within them, that fire they kind of hinder, that passion they kind of put away because society says fuck that, you’re not good enough. But like, you are good enough. You are sickening. You are that nasty freak in the closet. Like, let it out, be that fucking cunt. (S2E10: 14:03)

Biqtch’s knowledge of queer alterity fits Vander’s previous statement on Drag Supermonsters. Biqtch has been the bullied kid, facing the evils and nasty of the world from a young age due to perceptions of her queerness. To cope with her diminished self-value and confusion, Biqtch turned to the queer escapism of video games, projecting herself to monstrous femme characters who rebuked the norms of traditional femininity through their tough fighting spirits and physicality. Biqtch utilizes alternative drag artistry to embody these women, her monstrous body informed by her knowledge of hardship and empowered queerness. She finds that the expression of her embodied knowledge is impactful to those who experience her norm rebuking performances. For Biqtch and many of her fellow Drag Supermonsters, injecting their knowledge into their artistry is a healing lived experience, one to reorient their knowledge of struggle and pain into something embraced and creative. As Biqtch states, “There’s nothing more than I live in those five minutes on stage. You can get any kind of angst you have out, or anything, any strife you’re going through, it just dissipates in those five minutes. It’s magic” (S2E10: 23:41). The magic for these monsters is lived reality, a reflection of hidden queer knowledge that demands to be known, finally erupting on an alternative, independent platform.

In considering the construction of the monstrous body on Dragula, the limitations of Cohen’s (2007) theses are laid bare in consideration of the monster’s knowledge and experiences
which inform knowing. In historical and literary practice, the monstrous body constitutes humanity which is unorganizable to accepted human knowledge, threatening delicate social structures which necessitate otherness. Cohen finds that for non-monsters, “the monstrous offers an escape from its hermeneutic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world,” opportunities for the abstraction and projection to the monstrous body (2007: 7). But what of the monster’s lived experience? Surely the designation of monstrosity doesn’t offer easy mobility, the monsters of Dragula show that embodying the monster takes knowledge, dedication, and creativity. Not all spirals faced by the monstrous bodymind are new or exciting explorations, for as Cohen asserts himself the monster is transitory, the dominant symbolic meanings of the monster persist to reassert those bodies, identities, and practices which are not acceptable. The same might be said for those ways of perceiving, which might be new for those who observe the monster but may have been established yet silenced for some time in the monster’s own existence.

The monsters represented on and constitutive of Dragula hold situated and shared knowledge through their embodied perceptions and experiences of the monstrous body, having faced many of the established spirals of ascribed queer alterity and human hardship, as well as the spirals of alienation in their own queer spaces. However, these varied experiences of hardship as humans, queer humans, and monstrous queer humans are often shown to motivate and inspire the monsters in a variety of ways, pushing them to express their knowledge through their monstrous bodies. For those whose bodies have been denied access or valued representation in their own community spaces, they may find opportunity on Dragula, a space created out of these experiences of alienation and which attempts to validate their bodies of knowledge. For those
whose bodies have experienced the nasty and mean of the world, they might find comfort in unifying around the ideal of the Drag Supermonster, an opportunity to elevate their subjugated queer knowledge and find validation. Their knowledge of alterity, alienation, and hardship therefore becomes monstrous knowledge, the monstrous body being the site of radical attempts to (re)organize human and subjugated queer knowledge, attempts which directly confront the mainstream and demand autonomous (re)construction of embodied queer narratives (Cohen 2007; Thomas 2012). Through the elevation of these monstrous, subjugated queer lived experiences and their expressions through alternative drag artistry as part of its goals and innate context, *Dragula* is a platform of critical queer knowledge building, an alternative media source which purposefully gives voice to those embodied queer experiences that have been silenced or excluded from mainstream representation (Rambukanna 2007; Sandoval 2009). The personal expressions of these lived experiences and knowledges are shown to be more than techniques of empathetic engagement for potential audiences to connect with (Parsemain 2019). Rather, the platform gives representation to monstrous bodies which rebuke many shreds of conformity or “proper representation” of queerness, with the monsters instead embodying their own queer lived realities based in their own understandings, representation welcomed by design on *The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula*.

**A System of Monsters**

*Dragula* is not only an alternative media platform which features critical knowledge building of subjugated queer experiences, but one which allows for and demands participation,
the active and semi-autonomous co-(re)construction of monstrous meanings through the
processes and allowances of the platform (Rambukkana 2007; Sandoval 2009). The Boulet
Brothers have constructed a platform, one with an innately open context and set of goals to a
multiplicity of radical queer experiences. In the third season of the show, Dracmorda begins each
floor show critique by reminding the monsters and viewers “We are not here to judge your drag.
Drag is art and art is subjective. What we are judging you on is your drag as it relates to this
competition and the challenges that we put before you,” openly stating what has previously gone unsaid (S3E1: 33:45). The Boulets design their platform around this idea of subjective artistry,
allowing individual monstrosities opportunities to thrive in their space. To this end, we may
consider the ideal of the Drag Supermonster to be highly subjective as well, as none of the
monsters of Dragula are the same, but each takes on the title and its qualities in their own
fashion. Each challenge and its themes, as well as exterminations, are open and interpretable,
providing opportunities for endless possibilities of subjective embodied performance through
directives which seek to privilege the individual artistries of the monsters. As Cohen (2007)
writes, “The too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in the
freakish compilation of the monster’s body. A mixed category, the monster resists any
classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a “system”
allowing polyphony, mixed response, and resistance to integration” (6). In considering the
platform construction of Dragula, we may regard it as a system of monsters, not just a freakish
compilation of the monster’s body as singular, but as a freakish compilation of the monster’s bodies, evolving and thriving in a space constructed both for and by them. Through their
autonomous and embodied practices, the monsters deny the traditional structures of power that
have failed them, instead coming together in their own system which celebrates their varied radical queer bodies and bestows due praise and validation upon their embodied monstrous achievements. The queer monstrous body is one with knowledge, knowing the human world, the queer world, and the monstrous world. In this system, the monster may attain and construct new forms of knowing. It’s here that I will allow the systems allowances and the monster’s participation to be displayed, showing how the monstrous body is also one of being, becoming, and experiencing, only to revisit the embodied monstrous knowledge that can be known for the monsters of Dragula, as well as those fortunate enough to engage with their journeys.

Monstrous Being: Bodies of Sign

To begin the consideration of the embodied practices of monstrous body on the platform of Dragula, I will begin with the instance of conception, the forms and symbols that the monstrous bodies represented come to hold. Cohen (2007) finds that the monstrous body signifies something, some cultural meaning, often a sign of fear, desire, or escapism that society would deem unacceptable to embrace. The monstrous body signifies what is not or is no longer human, or what is too human to handle. The monstrous body is also dynamic, a state of being which shifts and reconstitutes, never in a fixed state. These tenets of the monster are also true for the made monsters of Dragula who voluntarily engage in monstrous beings through the symbolism and interpreted manifestations of their bodies. And while Cohen posits that the monstrous signifies something other than itself, I find that through monstrous interpretation the monstrous body is deeply personal when accepted as a queer opportunity, an embrace of the
culmination of things that have created it and a controlled state of being and signification for each monster, no longer an involuntary ascription of alterity. Here, I will foray into the broad categories of monstrous forms that the monsters of Dragula engage in while also considering the dominant symbols embedded in their embodied forms. I will then briefly consider monstrous embodiment as displayed as a rebuke of traditional human aesthetics and the opportunity for inspired queer expression through various agential monstrous states of being.

Forms of Monstrosity

I found evidence through my analysis for three broad yet consistent themes of embodied forms that the monsters of Dragula engage in. These forms are represented through basic human forms, monstrous human forms, and monstrous rebukes of human form. As I have noted these monsters are human, as monsters most often are. However, these drag monsters devote their artistry to the performance and embodiment of largely monstrous human or nonhuman forms, attempting to further engage in and display the “unlivable zones” of human life through their monstrous humanity and rebukes of human imagery (Butler 1993). In fact, it is the most basic forms of humanity that present themselves as the most unlivable for these monsters, the thought of a conforming, fixed body unbearable for their freakish inclinations, and for some this is simply unattainable. And that is where I will begin, the few instances of embodied basic human forms dictated by the Boulet Brothers, the Basic Bitch challenge of “Pretty, Pink, Fishy Drag” and the scream queens of “Scream Queens.”
The term “basic” holds a negative connotation in the realm of *Dragula,* a word to throw across the room during a moment of tension (as in the beginning moments of “Cenobites”) as a signifier of the anti-monsters, the mainstream outsiders who deny the opportunities of the monstrous body. In “Pretty, Pink, Fishy Drag” we see a glimpse of the monsters exploring the privilege and unattainability of these anti-monster bodies, foraying into the basicness of human reality through the play of pretty and pink, embodiments meant to be readably femme and human. The presentation of femme is clear across all monsters, though monstrous qualities creep through. Xochi, Meatball, and Loris’s monstrosities are noticeably restrained, as they present femme, human forms that are radically different presentations from their previous transformations. Melissa, a pageant performer in her own right, embodies femme humanity without issue. Frankie and Vander, however, show embodiments that reside somewhere in the realms of their monstrosities. Frankie, a pink party girl with a tiara and pumpkin spice, remains her punk self. Her large breast plate, bladed glove, and signature messy, neon hair give her rebellious monstrosity a peak of light. Vander, though presenting a reliably femme embodiment, has painted her skin pink and provides a retro alien housewife as her basic bitch. But of course, to true monstrous fashion, the Boulets can’t control themselves or their monsters and demand a lip-sync food fight, to which the monsters gladly engage and embrace the filth of the situation.

The embodiments of the monsters in “Scream Queens” represent another attempt at the basic human form. Each monster is generally able to forgo their monstrous inclinations in favor of normative embodiments to femme humans, again in stark contrasts to their previous cenobite, ghost, rocker, and alien embodiments. The directive is “fishy,” beautiful, and victim; the monsters must be killable, the victim rather than the monster. The monsters acclimate, presenting
readably femme humans, though once more the monstrous urges persist. Biqчч provides an embodied and oversexed floor show, falling off a hammock with humor and rebounding quickly. Disasterina sticks to her trashy aesthetics as an aging, inebriated supermodel, while Abhora remains punk and Erika remains in her anime style, yet all are pared down significantly to reflect human presentation. James and Victoria are perhaps the most changed from their monstrosities, readably femme and human without transgressing any boundaries. Yet again, the monsters must engage in the gritty and the monstrous, staging short horror film death scenes at the hands of a serial killer, framed as the “fantasy” of being killed by the monster, a human thrill unattainable to the enduring and always evolving monster.

In these examples of basic human embodiments, the monsters produce readable human, and often femme, presentations. The monstrous peeks through in small ways for some of the monsters, staying true to their natural monster aesthetics among the ordinary. And there are monstrous twists, ways to show that the monstrous is always around the corner for those who wish to take the opportunity. The monstrous persists through humanity and readability, and for the monsters of Dragula the basic human form is mere play into mundanity and what is known to most.

The second embodied form to emerge manifests in the form of monstrous human presentations, a much broader and open category of potential embodiment. While the attempt at basic human forms can lead to monstrous and filthy engagement, the embodiment of a monstrous human form is firmly rooted in humanity that is traditionally regarded as filthy, tough, dirty, sexual, depraved, and horrifying. Through these symbolic forms the monsters of Dragula seek to honor or embrace the rejected humanities of society, whether through referential or uniquely
situated manifestations of monstrous human bodies. We see these monstrous humanities through the presentations in “80’s Female Wrestler,” “Shock Rock and Metal,” “Drag Monsters of Rock,” “Le Freak,” and “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 1 and 2).” In “80’s Female Wrestler” the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling (GLOW) serve as the primary inspiration for the monsters to interpret their own tough, glamorous forms with simple concepts. The GLOW persona is one of beauty, endurance, confidence, and filth, the embodiment of a transgressive and spectacularized femininity with a fighting spirit. The monsters embody this form through exaggeration, wearing big hair, flashy makeup, and costuming indicative of their wrestling personas. We may look to specific expressions of the GLOW persona to observe specific symbolic forms of this tough femme embodiment. Meatball’s “Meatball Supreme” embodies grit and glamour as a caped wrestler with large hair, conceptualizing her persona around food and forgoing a cinched waist, instead relying on her unshaven and revealed stomach for a shocking display of her physicality and filthy humor with a burger. Frankie also transforms into a tough femme persona, “Pink Flamingo,” with exaggerated reference to Divine, flexing her muscles on stage while prominently displaying her large breastplate and punk purple mohawk. Ursula forgoes any reshaping of her body, displaying her tattoos in a revealing disco look with her full beard and merkin as “Saturday Night Beaver.” Vander’s “Matadarling” presents as an androgynous wrestler engaging in rough actions with her Trump doll, while Foxie embodies “The Shit,” an excrement themed wrestler who embraces and shows her filth on stage. Through the GLOW challenge, the monsters pay homage and receive a taste of the transgressive and tough femininity of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling, drag performers and monsters with extreme and nonmainstream bodies in their own right.
“Shock Rock and Metal” and “Drag Monsters of Rock” feature further embodiments of monstrous humans, those in the form of punks, rockers, metalheads, and rebels. It should also be noted that the extermination for both these episodes features the bottom monsters receiving trashy tattoos, a comparably light extermination compared to others, though keeping in line with traditional perceptions of the rocker image as one of bodily deviance and alteration. We see this through the monster’s presentations in the floor shows and in their group rock performances, embracing the glamour, filth, and grit of the rocker image. For example, Landon provides a masterful embodiment a bearded rock god with a flamethrower guitar, while Louisianna (doing “good bad drag,” as guest judge Peaches Christ muses), exaggerates her makeup past her regularly pristine style and wears a cheetah one piece with chains, performing sexually on stage. Biqtch and James embody trashy, glam personas, with Biqtch wearing gold fringe and large hair framing her gritty makeup, and James presenting as a punk femme while simultaneously putting out a cigarette on her tongue and featuring her untucked genitalia. Dahli and Evah exhibit this play of gender and sex as well, as Dahli’s metalhead lacks much discernable gender presentation in favor of a shock-rock leather and metal look, featuring a spiked metal mohawk and bladed wings. Evah plays in mixed gender presentation through her rocker, wearing long and unruly blue hair and leather pants, showing her unshaven chest prominently below her tank top. The group rock performances of PMS (Biqtch, Dahli, Disasterina, Erika) and Slag (Evah, Maxi, Priscilla, and Dollya) also exhibit monstrous human imagery. The PMS performers engage in trashy, shock-rock embodiments free of normative imagery, adopting Kiss-like makeup and engaging in rough performances and interactions, while the Slag performers embody sexually charged femme rockers in black leather fetish gear and neon hair. Both groups embrace the
rebellious spirit of punk rock, as well as the embodied aesthetics of the music performance form. The play in shock-rock, punk, and metal symbolism allows for the embodiment of traditionally deviant and transgressive embodiments of humanity, mixing gender and sex inscriptions, and forgoing normative traditions of acceptable presentation. While the monsters of *Dragula* embody a punk spirit natural, the homage to the transgressive rockers allows for a furtherance of their punk inclinations.

Through the examples of “Le Freak” and “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 1 and 2),” we see interpretations based in past and future monstrous human forms in freakish human abnormalities and the adapted human savage. In “Le Freak,” the monsters perform a bit of performative inception. Through the embodiment of referenced sideshow freaks, the monsters of *Dragula* are normal and made freaks (from Thomas 2012; Adams 1996) or made monsters transforming interpreting the born freak of human abnormality, revealing a process and result of made freakery. The monsters display a variety of freakish humans: Landon becomes a glass eating mystery man with three abnormally shaped penises; Louisianna is a burlesque dancer, adopting a breastplate with three breasts; Dollya becomes the strongwoman through her muscled body suit, piercing her breastplate and swinging weights from the needles; Priscilla adopts the persona of the pinhead, though forgoes prosthetic transformation of her head; Evah feigns the existence of a conjoined twin through a face and appendages on her costume. It is an interesting example of play for the monstrous body, to engage in traditional freak imagery through their own forms of made freakery, to engage in freakish performance acts and honor the monsters that came before them. In “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 1 and 2)” the monsters look to the near monstrous future of nuclear fallout, embodying dirty apocalyptic warriors and scavengers who have adapted to
their extreme desert environment, monstrous humans who have lost society. Victoria and James present androgynous forms that foray greatly into masculine coded embodiments. James exhibits apocalyptic resourcefulness and ferocity in her interpretation of War, a ravaged embodiment with gashes and functional survival props to enhance her display. Victoria presents alarming war paint of yellow and black stripes and a mohawk, providing fierce screams and androgyny through her sharp metal and tech costuming. Biqtc’h’s apocalyptic form displays a masked and goggles with large, white hair and fierce glare, her body readably femme but embodying the toughness and grit of a warrior in a video game. She wields a sword and chains, an imposing apocalyptic, adapted femininity.

These monstrous embodiments reference the very real monstrosities that have been and those that are potentially yet to come, feared forms of the human body meant for spectacle in freakshows or films, mirroring the notion of safe expression through monstrous spectacle (Cohen 2007). This may also be extended to the rockers and GLOW personas, usually confined to the stage or the ring for enjoyment of the deviant and the tough, to engage with monstrosity from afar. Through the embodiment of these forms of monstrous humanities, the monsters of Dragula are no longer constrained by the traditionally accepted forms of safe expression, finding a much more thrilling and risky engagement with monstrous expression through the inscription of their extreme bodies and nonmainstream modifications, interpreting their own forms of monstrous humanity.

Situated forms of monstrous humanities may be see through the interpretive performances of the finale filth showings. Throughout the nine showings of interpreted filth by each season’s three final monsters, eight of the monsters feature strictly human forms engaging
in crass, deviant, nasty, and risky acts through the monstrous body. It is the act of the human form engaging in these activities that enhances the filth of these performances, performing acts of traditionally forbidden phenomena through the human form. As will be detailed below, the monsters utilize the imagery of the human form to engage in embodied performances of blasphemy, forced vomiting, coprophilia, necrophilia, mop water drinking and hair clump eating, sexual deviancy, and ritualistic sacrifice among other acts. For example, Victoria’s performance as a necrophile could have been performed through her masterful transformation to the form of a hybrid human or creature, but it is through her performance as a human that the expression of disgust and transgressive desire of necrophilia is embodied and conveyed, especially through her revelatory take through embodied action. An important aspect of the embodiment of a monstrous human, detailed engagement in forbidden acts with be presented in the following section.

The third and final category of monstrous forms engaged in by the monsters of *Dragula* are forms which rebuke humanities in favor of embodied hybridity, humanoidism, and creaturism, transformations to abhuman monstrosities. For some, this form of monstrous expression is the norm, and for others, it is a transitory embodiment depending on the challenge dictated or their own interpretation. There are a great deal of examples for this broad range of transformative forms, and I will start with the few who find primary expression here. Monikkie and Yovska lend their artistries primarily to the rebuke of traditional human form. In Monikkie’s short time in season two she features the use of a mask reminiscent of the tranimal movement, emphasizing the movement’s goal of obscuring the normative presentation of the human face and head in all her performances and representations in *Dragula*. Her “Cenobites” performance features her with a human body, though her mask is torn and bloodied around her mouth,
resembling mangled flesh that she staples into during her floor show, a mask technique she mirrors in “Last Supper.” Yovska is shown primarily through her enveloping creations, such as her introductory and “Don’t Suck” manifestations. Yovska is seen with masks that largely cover her face and head except for her mouth and eyes, featuring large protruding ears. Her body covered completely, obscuring her form and representing creaturism. Her vampire in “Don’t Suck” features her with exaggerated cylindrical breasts and buttocks, with fringe and a long fabric tongue. She appears in “The Lesser of Two Evils” as a hypnotic supervillain in an enveloping, shining black quilted suit dress, her face painted white with a blue spiral and yellow stars, a red mouth with fangs painted across her face. While they are few and briefly featured, these very alternative drag artistries represent a primary goal of the embodiment of monstrosity, to obscure humanity in favor of a less or non-human form.

The undead, dead, and decaying are common themes within the monstrous rebukes of the traditional human form in Dragula. “Zombies in Death Valley” sees Melissa rebuke her affinity for glamour in favor of ugliness, an achievement she is praised for by the Boulets. She transforms her face with latex, blood, and makeup to display her undead being, while also appearing as pregnant with her baby protruding through a bloody hole in her dress. Frankie displays hybridity through her monstrous mask of jagged teeth, clawed hands, and greyed skin, while Vander adopts costuming with a realistic skull mask and bones protruding through her purple brocade clothes. The Hellraiser franchise’s fiendish cenobites serve as the inspiration for the monsters in season two, with the Boulets asking the competitors to embody their demonic interpretation with embedded messages of how they have died. As such, Biqtch embodies a severely burned and bleeding being, whereas Dahli displays her unaltered chest through a leather
harness while adopting the hooves and face of a pig while also displaying bright yellow teeth. Victoria and James represent highly modified humanoid forms, with James wrapped in metal, wires, leather, and hooks, sporting skin studs, metal nail extension, and their open mouth gag with chains. Victoria appears as her flayed monster with a traditionally femme form though her artistry gives her the appearance of a bloody and exposed spine and face.

Abhora’s ghostly interpretation of a cartoonish bank robber in “Ghost Town Ghouls” rebukes human proportions, featuring her signature extended, pointed black nose on her white face and her hips bulging to an exaggerated degree. It is in this floor show that Victoria and Biqtch embody their tragic ghouls, with Victoria presenting reddened, burned flesh for her fortune teller and Biqtch resembling a drowned ghost. In “Don’t Suck” the undead return, featuring like glowering eyes, fangs, pointed ears, and varying skin tones that reflect the vampiricized human form, everlasting life and thirst. Interpretations of the undead are also visible in the finale horror showings of both Melissa and Victoria. Melissa embodies the spirit of a vengeful, murdered woman, a bullet wound on her forehead and her eyes white with fury. Victoria is featured as a zombie, her skin green and seeming fused with her tattered dress, her facial structure gaunt and boney. While these bodies represent some aspects of human forms, their complete conception, formation, and performance are that of the undead, the post-living monstrosities after human existence, interpreting and embedding inscriptions of mutilation, decay, and sex through death and the undead. The embodiment of these forms represents play of the extreme body, an exploration of creative narrative through the body and nonmainstream process of embodying. Through the embodiment of the vampire and cenobite there is play of sexuality, an opportunity to express transgressive desires through transformation and
performance through the enhanced, monstrous form. And although this is a common theme of the rebuke of a traditional human form, the monsters of Dragula engage in many more instances of abhuman play, further exploring the reaches of their bodily malleability and creativity.

Each season’s finale episode, as well as “Sci-Fi Babes,” “No Throw Aways, Not Recycled,” and “The Operating Theatre” sees the monsters engaging in a wide array of embodied monstrous play that rebukes traditional human forms through displays of creatures, animal hybrids, aliens, and cyborgs. In “Finale” Vander appears as a bloodied and mutilated creature, the figure of a femme humanoid with white skin and eyes, and deep red lacerations across her face, slithering around the stage and transfixed by her appearance in a hand mirror. Her use of gritty red prosthetic gashes and contacts, paired with her movement, elevates her form as she spins in her long, white bloodied dress and crown of glass shards and needles, a manifestation of the horrors of modification and beauty. In “The Grand Finale” Dollya takes a similar approach to horror through her creature feature, appearing as a figure in a dress made of flesh material, the faces of three drag performers seemingly sewn and fused around her head. Dollya holds a cross stitch frame of flesh material with “PRETTY” sewn into the material, signaling her embodied manifestation of the brutality of beauty. These forms as humanoid creatures critique the horrors of opulence and human beauty by willingly obscuring the human form in ways that both mutilate and utilize the traditional human figure and notions of accepted human beauty.

Animal-human hybrid forms appear throughout the program as well. Frankie and Dahli each adopt pig noses to display their dispositions to filth in their seasons. In season one’s fifth episode, Frankie appears in the sea monster extermination as an octopus monster with blue
tentacles and jagged teeth from a prosthetic mask that envelopes her face. Melissa is also featured here as an alligator humanoid with sparkling extended fingers and a mask of sharp teeth, while Vander transforms through a body suit and orange body paint into a monstrous sea sponge covered in flowers and dead fish. In “No Throw Aways, Not Recycled” Dollya appears as another abhuman manifestation, this time in the form of an animal hybrid of the human form. She portrays a rat queen, having altered her face with a nose prosthetic and made use of beady red contacts, construction paper, permanent markers, and garbage to complete her transformation, embracing discarded materials for her hybrid embodiment. Abhora and Priscilla also perform as animal hybrids. Abhora appears in “Sci-Fi Babes” as a chicken-human hybrid, adopting a prosthetic mask, feathers, and taloned feet to transform her appearance. In “The Operating Theatre” Priscilla alters her appearance to appear as a cow-human hybrid, adorning her stomach with bloodied, cut open udders wrapped in surgical bandages and painting her body with black spots.

Through the episode “Sci-Fi Babes,” as well as Landon’s and Biqtch’s horror showings in their finales, alien and cyborg monstrosities are showcased. Victoria, Biqtch, Disasterina, and Dahlia adopt alien forms in “Sci-Fi Babes” with varying degrees of embodied rebuke. Victoria utilizes her abilities to completely alter her figure through her alien body suit with a functioning pregnancy bump. Biqtch and Disasterina utilize green body paints and makeup artistry for their alien forms, with Biqtch also utilizing a green breastplate and orange wig for her humanoid embodiment and Disasterina painting extra eyes on her face, as well as displaying tentacles on her waist and feet. Dahlia appears as a purple, aquatic alien with gills and scales on her humanoid form. In the same episode, James and Erika appear through cyborg modifications. James’s
cyborg body is enhanced with wiring and circuit boards on her chest, hands, and left arm. Her head and body is painted to resemble circuitry under her organic skin, and she displays her enhanced genitalia through her aptly placed CD player. Erika’s is less integrated, relying on metallic makeup artistry on the right side of her face resembling enhancements, as well as a weaponized right arm. Landon appears in “The Grand Finale” as a horrific tin man in the horror segment, adoring his silver painted body in laced silver materials and utilizing an axe to chop into his “victim” to eat her organic material. Finally, Biqtch appears in “Finale” as what hostess Dracmorda describes as “Electro Nosferatu,” a swirling figure in the shadows of the stage with pointed red eye lights glaring through the darkness. As Biqtch appears in the light, she is revealed to have adopted semipermanent enhancements through the lights and prosthetics, flashing her gnarled teeth and tongue as she allows her lights to alternate on and off.

These rebukes of the traditional human form, as explorations into embodied symbolism of the post-living, creatures, animal hybrids, aliens, and cyborgs, represent opportunities of play and experimentation for the nonmainstream modifier, the extreme bodied, and made monsters. Through the open realm of alternative drag artistry, the human body and traditional human form is shown to be unfixed, malleable, and fluid. As those with monstrous bodies, the monsters of Dragula engage in excessive states of being between basic human, monstrous human, and monstrous nonhuman form, showing the enduring theme of variation through the monstrous body of change and becoming. We may look to two consistent examples of the monstrous body, Victoria and Biqtch, to briefly note on this variation. Over the course of the second season, Victoria and Biqtch show their abilities to alter between these three broad forms. Both embody readable femininity and humanity through their performances as scream queens, though the
system of monsters demands more. Both embody apocalyptic bodies and shock-rocker bodies, not to mention the depth of their filth performances, to transform into monstrous humanities. Each display embodiments that rebuke humanity, shifting into humanoid aliens, hellish cenobites, and post-living bodies, showing the wide range of play and being for those monsters who volunteer and accept the risks of the extreme, nonmainstream altered body, as well as the broad range of expressions of these queer monster artists. These monsters may play in gendered, multigendered, and agendered expressions through their transformations, though these broad categories are based in a human-monster continuum rather than one based solely in readable to unreadable gender transformations. While monstrosity lends itself to transgressing traditional gender boundaries, the expression of monstrosities and the use of alternative drag as a technology and a range of technologies are revealed through these forms to be more concerned with the obscuring and deconstructing of the human form in favor of nonhuman or monstrous human embodiments. This bodied variation through gender and human forms further affirms Cohen’s (2007) assertion of the monster as transitory, changing, and evolving, though through voluntarily embodied and queer empowered forms rather than in forms of historical ridicule or theoretical abstraction.

Symbols of Monstrosity

My analysis revealed a vast array of monstrous symbolism within the embodied monstrosities of the Dragula performers. Through the three broad forms of monstrosity that I have identified on the platform, enduring themes of embedded meanings were found to be
interpreted by the monsters, as individuals interpreting a situated challenge or theme, or through the community’s broad set of interpretations in a given challenge. The monster’s body signifies something, it is the manifestation of cultural meaning and a cultural moment (Cohen 2007). In the consideration the made monsters of Dragula, the monstrous form comes to signify through a voluntary embedding of cultural signs to be read, to entice, to repulse, and to shock. The monstrous body does not only serve to be read, but as an opportunity of being the monstrous signifier who may elicit a reaction for themselves and others. Here, the monster is not a construction and projection in the sense that Cohen posited, but rather a creatively culminated embodiment of one’s own monstrousity through their agential interpretation of monstrous symbolic themes and directives. The monsters of Dragula do reflect common sociocultural-historical designations of the monstrous through their symbolism, though it is through an embrace of their shared and individual ideals of the monstrous. As I have already noted on enduring themes of death and decay, sex and sexuality, mutilation, tough femininities, androgyny and mixed gender/sex signification, shock and filth, and punk rebelliousness, I will detail here examples of other recurring themes of signification and interpretation through monstrous bodies of mothers, tragedy, and forces of oppression.

The signification of a mothering role recurs through various embodiments of the Dragula monsters. The mother, in the grand tradition of Kristeva (1982), is a primal theme of abjection, the grotesque object of life giving and a source of continuing feminine alterity. The monsters of Dragula engage in traditional tropes of horrific, unsacred mothers through alien births, insane and tragic mothers, and mothers of destruction, and as such the theme of the monstrous feminine through the mother’s body endures. Melissa embraces ugliness and viscera in “Zombies in Death
Valley,” embodying a horrid undead manifestation. In a traditional Mexican dress, she careens around the Death Valley desert set, seething and hissing through a bloody mouth, while dragging a bloody doll resembling her unborn child from a hole in her dress by an umbilical cord. At multiple points Melissa bites into the baby and swings it by the cord, even utilizing the chord to feign strangulation of a “victim.” Disasterina is seen in “Ghost Town Ghouls” spinning in a white dress featuring baby dolls sewn into it, whipping them through bouts of laughter and anguish as she performs. Priscilla appears in “The Operating Theatre” embodying the result of a human-cow hybrid experiment. Her brutal portrayal, though hampered by her unrealized incorporation of a mutilated and unhealed udder to the human form, is enhanced by her interaction with a real still born calf, of which she laments in her characterization not being able to give sufficient life to. Dollya’s filth performance in “The Grand Finale” features her as a witch in a tattered brown dress, carrying a baby onto the stage (a call back to her “pregnant” portrayal in “The Last Supper”), placing the doll in a wooden bucket and mashing it with a steel bat. Dollya licks the bat and sloshes blood onto her chest and face in ecstasy, laughing through her ritual and thriving in her form. In “Sci-Fi Babes” simulations of alien births are demanded by the Boulets, in campy or traditionally horrific forms. Swanthula muses in the challenge dictation, “We just adore the idea of a cute little vampiric blob latched onto her mother, feeding away at her life force. Or a carnivorous little larva just dying to get strong enough to burst her way out… tell us a story with your look, your baby, and its delivery, and make it a show” (S2E4: 9:02). Biqtch screams throughout her portrayal and holds her baby, an insect-alien hybrid, with joy and love, kissing the babies face. Victoria, in her full purple alien transformation, clicks and chirps
through her birth, forcing her purple child through the stomach of her alien suit. She takes the “newborn” baby and bites into the head and neck, decapitating the doll.

The embodiment of a mother, either through monstrous human or nonhuman forms, represents persisting abject horrors assigned to the monstrous maternal role. Biqtch and Priscilla do offer moments of affection with their “offspring,” as Biqtch fauns over her character’s new creation and Priscilla portrays grief in raising her stillborn calf above her head, seemingly questioning a sacred figure who would deprive her troubled persona joy through a successful birth. The maternal monstrous body comes to symbolize multiple meanings, as a source to satisfy the mother’s needs of hunger, a site of failure and the generation of grief, and as a life provider to new horrors to come. The mother’s body exists in a duality, both as a continuation of horror tropes representing the maternal body as grotesque, as well as the opportunity for representing the sacred ideals of filth and horror through a mothering role. The mother’s form, in any representation, continues to serve as a grotesque representation, though it is embraced in its potential for abject horrors and often a welcome site in this community of made monsters.

Tragedy is another recurring symbol among the monsters, often an embrace of disaster, sadness, and pain through signification. This symbolic form sees embodied rearticulation of tragedy as a welcomed fragment of the monstrous body. Through “Gothic Brides” tragedy is framed through unholy matrimony and depressed brides, an embrace of gothic culture and dark, ornate opulence. The monsters embody this in a variety of forms. Biqtch interprets these themes through a ghostly white bride with brutal strangulation marks on her neck, tearing apart her bouquet of flowers in rage. Victoria appears in a black and purple gown, her lover’s severed head in her bouquet of roses. Abhora rebukes the concept of love altogether and sets her bouquet
ablaze onstage, providing a punk, reckless performance on the stage. In “Wickedest Witch” the challenge is framed to pay homage to the death of the Wicked Witch of the West, which hostess Swanthula muses is “one of the most tragic scenes from cinematic history” to the delight of the monsters (S1E1: 4:35). The monsters interpret their own wickedest witch personas, as well as their death scenes when doused with buckets of water onstage. In individual performances, tragedy is embraced through a variety of ways. Melissa’s horror showing in “Finale” is one of vengeance from tragedy, as she manifests as a murdered woman stabbing a cadaver of her lover in rage. Biqtch and Victoria frame tragedy in their “Ghost Town Ghoul” deaths through the ways in which their personas have passed, through horrific drowning and burning, respectively.

Priscilla’s glamour showing in “The Grand Finale” is also one of death and personal struggle as she embodies a beautiful blonde figure in a white dress with pill bottles and pills of multiple colors embellishing her garment, as well as a pill bottle fascinator spilling a cascade of pills down her head. Down the front of the dress is a yellow stain with multicolored jewels, resembling the result of an overdose and Priscilla’s struggles with addiction. Priscilla also portrays tragedy through loss with her calf in “The Operating Theatre,” a stark display of grief through her props. James frames tragedy similarly in his glamour showing in “Finale” as a dark widow in red and black, spilling the ashes of her partner onstage and weeping dramatically.

These examples of loss, death, and embraced despair represent the embodiment of tragedy, not always of the monstrous body but through the monstrous body, displaying the emotion and connections to tragic phenomena in a variety of embraced forms.

Lastly, I found evidence for situated embodiments which offered some fragment of sociopolitical critique of human forces of oppression. These critiques manifest to challenge or
illuminate what the monsters view as really monstrous in society, the oppressive or corrupting social forces that would denigrate made monsters or seek to impose their standards or norms upon them, or act as normative harmful social entities. As previously mentioned, both Dollya and Vander engage in critiques of beauty through their modification-based horror showing in their respective finales. In “the Lesser of Two Evils” Violencia represents her interpretation of a supervillain as the meat industry, wearing a costume made of a large steak and a cape of transparent plastic curtain. Landon utilizes the trash floor show in “No Throw Aways, Not Recycled” to embody a green merman choked by black plastic garbage, a commentary on ocean and water pollution on aquatic life. Maxi’s rocker in “Drag Monsters of Rock” rebels through androgyny and blue body paint, with Maxi pulling a crumpled dollar out of her anus with “FUCK CAPITALISM” written on it. Landon and Vander, both monsters of Hispanic backgrounds, feature rebukes of the Trump presidency in their significations. Through her performance in “80’s Female Wrestler” as “Matadarling,” Vander pummels a sex doll with the face of Donald Trump. Landon prominently displays a bottle filled with blood with the label “FUCK YOUR WALL” during his mariachi grotesque burlesque in “Don’t Suck,” reveling in the blood as he pours it on himself. Lastly, Hollow incorporates items like panty liners, tampons, and feminist reading into her “No Throw Aways, Not Recycled” presentation as a manifestation to challenge the degradation of women and more broadly the function of menstruation.

Through the incorporation of sociopolitical critiques of oppression into monstrous embodiment, the monsters signify readable manifestations of their challenges to normative society. This falls in line with the literature on radical, alternative forms of drag artistry, concerned with challenging normative displays of the body while also seeking to transgress or
subvert oppressive entities through embodied monstrosity. Any embodiment or performance on *Dragula* could be debated for its outright, layered, or implicit social critique. Through these three examples of embedded symbolism, we receive a broader view of the interpreted forms the monsters of *Dragula* offer through their varied states of being. Although the embodiment of the maternal may often rely on traditional tropes that might be read as harmful, symbolism might also be utilized to signify the embrace of the tragic and emotional, rearticulating the monstrous body as one that voluntary represents tragic phenomena, as well as the monster’s body not as an ascribed body of social fear, but one as voluntary and reclaimed critique of oppressive social forces.

**Fragments of Monstrosity**

Cohen (2007) refers to the transitory significations of the monstrous body as fragments, pieces that may represent the monster throughout its varied journey. He also contends that the monster itself is a fragment, one that informs the construction of identities and sets boundaries in multiple areas of social life. And while the monster stands as a guiding representation for what person to be and not to be, the monster itself is often a person or a people, those who do not align with traditional norms of humanity in a given cultural moment. The monsters of *Dragula* occupy this status as queer peoples with extreme bodies and as those who engage in nonmainstream body modifications, engaging in the art of alternative drag to largely rebuke acceptable forms of humanity. Normative human forms deny the opportunity of the monstrous and dictate what is and isn’t acceptable, thus denying the realm of potential embodied forms. Acceptance of the
monstrous body is therefore a queer opportunity, rearticulating the monstrous into a social body that is interpretable and personal, readable to the desire of those who construct it. The monsters of Dragula utilize alternative drag artistry not only to blur or construct incoherent gendered and sex forms, but to undergo interpretations which largely obscure human forms. The willing distortion of the human form to monstrous human and monstrous nonhuman forms takes precedence on the platform, and gender performativity, or lack thereof, is merely a symbol of play for the monsters. The monsters interpret gendered, multigendered, and agendered forms with varying levels of coherence, a symbolic field of the multiple humanfluid embodiments. This engagement with nonhuman embodied artistry may reflect Covino’s (2004) conception of “inspired abjection,” an acceptance of what is socially excluded through the body in a rebuke of traditional human aesthetic. This would hold true, as the monstrous body serves as a creative opportunity to incorporate “fragments” and thus embody multiple personal identities or states of monstrous being. The monsters of Dragula come to signify a multitude of meanings and symbols through their engagement with the platform’s processes, allowing their monstrous bodies to interpret and reconstitute into various monstrous forms voluntarily and in an empowered fashion. Though as Barad (2003) informs us, conception is one part of the embodiment puzzle. The monstrous body requires simultaneous materialization or becoming, the next embodied practice of our monsters.

Monstrous Becoming: Bodies of Change

My analysis revealed themes of the various culminating processes of materialization engaged in by the monsters in their interpretation and signification of meanings to the monstrous
body. The interpretive processes demanded by the platform requires change on the part of the monsters, transformations and adaptations that allow for such interpretation to materialize and become (Barad 2003). Following insights from Thomas (2012), Kosut (2010), and Cohen (2007), I detail here instances of technological incorporation, environment adaptation, channeling that monsters engage in to realize their monstrosities. Cohen’s theses reveal the monster’s transitory nature as a cultural construct, constantly engaging in a reconstitution of meanings. The monster possesses that ability to shift through various cultural moments and thus refuses easy categorization in established knowledge, with Cohen writing “the too precise laws if nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in the freakish compilation of the monster’s body” (2007: 7). Kosut’s ideal type of an extreme body is particularly useful to conceptualize the monstrous bodies of Dragula. Kosut’s concept theorizes extreme bodies as malleable and fluid, engaging in actions and practices that are unconventional or not regularly acceptable, the voluntary “product of excessive physical modification, transformation, or activity,” and based in lived experience (2010: 186). This may be supplemented with Thomas’s (2012) insight on nonmainstream body modification, used here to signify the semipermanent bodily alterations with narrative and personal meaning on the part of the modifier, rebuking assumptions and expectations of normative culture and taking empowered ownership of their corporeal forms. It is from these perspectives, as well as my desire to better contextualize alternative drag artistries, that I dive into the creative bodily processes of the monsters of Dragula.
Technologies of Monster Drag

In considering monstrous transformation, it is first important to consider the means through which the body is monstrous and is made monstrous. The monsters of *Dragula* have bodies that match the concepts of nonmainstream body modification and extreme bodies, engaging in voluntary permanent and semipermanent, excessive alterations of the malleable body outside the norm (Thomas 2012; Kosut 2010). For the monsters of *Dragula*, it is not only evident that multiple individual technologies are brought together through creative processes to continuously transform the monstrous body, but that the broad and evolving art form of alternative drag itself is a technology of transformation, a queer opportunity for these monstrous changes and expressions. As explicated in the literature review, technologies may be utilized to create a certain bodily form or aesthetic, encompassing a wide range of transformative opportunities relative to those who use them. Alternative drag artistry is a realm of drag expression that is found to favor incoherence, be less concerned with readable sexed or gender presentations, and value risk and experimentation of aesthetic while sometimes engaging in radical critiques of mainstream norms (Jacob and Cerny 2004; Parsemain 2019). Here, I wish to document some of these technologies and how they are utilized in *Dragula*, then foray deeper into the transformative forms to categories of monstrosity. In my analysis I found three categories emerge: primary technologies, irregular incorporated technologies, and prop technologies. While there is distinct difference between each technology and it’s use, the incorporation to the monstrous body and prevalence are the sources of categorization here.
Primary technologies here refer the vastly accepted technologies utilized by the monsters of *Dragula*. These broad technologies include costuming, body suits, padding, corseting, body paint, breastplates, special effects artistry, makeup artistry, wigs, eye contacts, and the use of unaltered bodies. These technologies are common in drag artistry in general, being used to achieve multiple forms and aesthetics, through their uses together is elevated in the pursuit of monstrosity. The body suit is one form of enveloping transformation across multiple monster presentations. For example, Frankie’s “Finale” Horror showing features her in a body suit matching her skin tone, slashed and bloodied in multiple places to give the appearance of multiple wounds, while Victoria utilizes the body suit technology to completely transform to a femme purple humanoid alien, complete with breasts, ooze, and a glowing red pregnancy bump. Landon, as a drag king, relies on the technology of self-made body suits to transform his figure to a traditionally male frame, while Yovska, a self-described drag “cryptid,” utilizes full self-made body suit creations as well to obscure the traditional human form completely.

Special effects like prosthetics, latex, and fake blood also feature prominently as technologies to enhance the monstrous form. Dollya, Abhora, and Loris all innovate their faces to appear as animal-human hybrids, utilizing special effects masks prosthetics to alter their forms. Dollya, Evah, and Landon all adopt prosthetic abnormalities in the “Hospital of Horrors” floor show, with Dollya featuring an arm replaced with a special effects leech and Landon adopting an exposed “brain.” Frankie and Biqtch adopt gnarled, monstrous teeth for their performances. Frankie’s zombie in “Zombies in Death Valley” is featured with a large mask placed over her mouth with various jagged teeth protruding, with Frankie blowing blood through the mask as she performs. She also features her incorporation of long monstrous teeth in her sea
monster performance, adopting a blue body suit and tentacle to enhance her looming threat. Biqtch’s performance in “Finale” features her with various fanged teeth and cyborg modifications to her eyes, adopting piercing red lights over her eyes while playing with the effects of light and shadow to enhance her mysterious figure. Biqtch also utilizes liquid latex in “Cenobites” and “Ghost Town Ghouls” to imitate severe burns and drowning. Victoria features latex transformation through burns in “Ghost Town Ghouls,” while masterfully transforming herself into a horrifying fiend in “Cenobites,” complete with a skinned, prosthetic spine jutting out her back, with her face altered with special effects technology to appear skinned as well and stretched upon a wheel. Victoria displays her artistry with fully padded hips and a breast plate, providing a contradictory image of monstrous femininity through her technologies. Fake blood in multiple forms, and other fluids, are featured prominently through performances, either as something being released from the body or reveled in as it is introduced.

Among these regular technologies, unaltered bodies also emerge as a recurring feature in presentation, mirroring Carretta et al. (2019) and Egner and Maloney’s (2016) findings of contrasting gender signs through drag expression, here extending to what may be considered monstrous, punk, or just part of the monster’s regular presentation aesthetic. For example, Ursula Major forgoes many regular drag technology alterations to her body, instead utilizing her monstrous body and permanent modifications as is. Ursula embodies the concept of a nonmainstream modified body and is a beautiful sight to behold: Her large frame is covered in tattoos, the word “FAGGOT” displayed in large lettering across her stomach. She features tattoos on her head, has multiple facial piercings and gauges, and wears highly exaggerated makeup to accentuate her prominent and dark beard. This is how she appears in “Wickedest
Witch” and “80’s Female Wrestler,” embracing her already realized monstrous form. We see embraces of the unaltered body or unaltered parts of bodies throughout the series, as Biqtch elects to use her real hair, performers choose to display their bald heads, and multiple performers, like Louisianna, Dahli, James, Maxi, and Evah, forgo breast plates and even display their bare chests to offer contradictory notions of what may be considered femme. We also see embraces of male genitalia through presentations from Disasterina, James, and Melissa, described at one point by hostess Dracmorda as “very punk and very Dragula.” The technologies documented here, and those broadly and briefly mentioned, represent those technologies of alternative drag that provide widely used opportunities for transforming the monstrous body, relying on the incorporation of creative artistic processes, and embracing an elevated perspective on the use of these technological forms. Special effects and enveloping technologies take special precedence in these embodiments, pushing what may be considered technologies of drag and drag in general. Through the inclusion of body features unaltered by drag technologies, the monsters forgo incorporative technological features and rely on their monstrous bodies as they are, embracing the monstrous inherent to their own forms.

I also found various irregular technologies incorporated to the monstrous body, adding to individual monstrosities through semipermanent, transient forms. While varied in use and often situated in specific performances, these technologies provide for depth in innovation of the voluntary, monstrous form and exhibit the malleable and incorporative nature of the body project. For example, Hollow’s performance in “The Lesser of Two Evils” features her with flesh staples in her face, bound to her hands with neon green elastic cording. Hollow pulls at her face, stretching her skin in multiple directions to alter her appearance. Abhora, James, and
Landon incorporate technologies to mimic primary and secondary sex organs through their monstrous bodies. Abhora uses baby doll faces as breasts in her “Cenobites” fiend floor show, projectile lactating milk through her presentation. James’s cyborg in “Sci-Fi Babes” is featured with a vagina composed of a CD player and wiring, to which James places a CD inside the and feigns masturbation on stage, flicking the disc tray open and closed repeatedly while exclaiming “upload me!” Landon incorporates a burrito into his mariachi vampire grotesque burlesque in “Don’t Suck,” taking the burrito out of his stoned crotch and eating it during his show. Both James also features what appears as an extreme modification to their face in “Cenobites,” incorporating an open moth gag to her fiendish presentation and salivating clear ooze. Finally, “No Throw Aways, Not Recycled” puts the season three monsters to the test of only incorporating irregular technologies, demanding costumes made from trash and makeup artistry done only in construction papers and permanent marker.

There are a variety of innovative, situated technologies that the monsters of Dragula incorporate into their monstrous embodiments, each serving to enhance their monstrous forms. Hankins (2015) notes on the incorporation of everyday social objects, such as a banana dildo, into the embodied performance of a drag performer, a finding prevalent through the performances of these monsters and their monstrous bodies. These forms are not as generalizable in comparison to the widely used technologies but encompass a broad and broadly featured range of innovative performative technologies that further signify the body as monstrous in some way. Through Dragula we see mirror shards, barbed wire, medical needles, spray paint, and multiple objects adorned and incorporated to the monster’s body, aiding them in their quest to embody and express through objects which would usually be rejected or even potentially feared by the
nonextreme and mainstream modified body. This also follows the traditions of alternative drag artistries, forgoing normative standards of adornment and presentation in favor of incorporating the found, the deviant, the sexual, and the monstrous.

Lastly, I must note on technologies that are not necessarily incorporated to the monstrous body but act as prop technologies. Much like the example of the armchair as a sex partner from Hankins (2015), I find another broad category of technologies used by the Dragula monsters that act as social objects that enhance the performance and presentation of the monstrous body. For example, in “80’s Female Wrestler” both Vander and Meatball engage with technologies which serve as points of action for the monstrous body. As “Meatball Supreme,” Meatball appears in a red and yellow wrestlers costume eating a burger, reveals her stomach and does a cartwheel, then body slams her burger with full force on the mainstage and eats the flattened product with a smile in a performance praised by hostess Swanthula as “a little insulting, it was a little revolting” (S1E2: 14:53). Vander, as the androgynous “Matadarling,” takes to the stage by throwing a wigged inflatable sex doll with the face of Donald Trump to the floor, and subsequently body slamming, biting into, and throwing to doll with pride and aggression. Vander’s “Finale” glamour showing features her as a dom with a sub in puppy fetish gear being led down the runway. Landon also makes use of a realistic sex doll in his “The Grand Finale” filth showing, engaging in sex and care acts with the doll while surrounded by garbage and sex toys. Babies are a common technological prop, used prominently in the enactment of alien births in “Sci-Fi Babes,” a humorous and murderous prop in “Zombies in Death Valley,” a tragic prop in the form of a still born calf in “The Operating Theatre,” and as a source for mashed ecstasy in “The Grand Finale.” Live and dead insects feature in Hollow’s “Don’t Suck” burlesque, and
Kendra uses live rats in her “Ghost Town Ghouls” showing. Intestines, viscera, cadavers, meat, and other bloody parts are incorporated into multiple performances to display acts of sexuality, animalism, shock, filth, and horror. A mop bucket filled with dirty water and mopped up contents is featured as a primary prop in Biqtch’s “Finale” filth performance, and a neatly placed crucifix and pages of a bible are used by Melissa in her “Finale” filth performance as well. These social objects assist in the display of the monstrous, serving as points of action and display for the monster to engage with. These technologies are often very effective, enhancing the performance of the monster and their transformative realizations.

Technologies represent highly creative processes for the monster to innovate, embody, and materialize, providing a depth of opportunities through the art of alternative drag. The primary, irregular, and unincorporated technologies emerge as base enhancements for the monstrous body, social objects and processes that signal bodily agency to the monstrous body projects of the Dragula monsters. The monsters utilize, or sometime rebuke, these technological incorporations to shift between human, monstrous human, and monstrous nonhuman forms which reveal the monstrous body, not in the abstract but in the real, to be malleable and transitory through its ability to incorporate, shed, and reincorporate different technologies and representations of monstrosity. The incorporation of these technologies is found not to primarily concerned with less binary presentations of gender or sex, but the manipulation of the human form through the compilation of signs on the monstrous to the body.
Adapting the Monstrous Body

Analysis also revealed a theme of adaptation to different situations and environments for the monsters. This adaptation is dictated by the Boulets, challenging the monsters to participate in various settings and tying this to their roles as monster drag performers. The main stage and runway serve as the primary setting for the monsters, with the lights and projected background changing between runways. The floor shows are performed here, comprised of modeling looks and providing performances with these looks. The main stage is also the setting for the group rock performances in “Shock Rock and Metal” and “Drag Monsters of Rock,” for which the monsters curate their group performances together, creating cohesive looks, background, set design, lighting, and lip-synced band performances. In addition to the main stage and runway, the monsters of Dragula have faced multiple other locations as components of their challenges. In the fifth episode of the first season, the monsters are taken to San Francisco to perform for an audience at Mother, a prominent drag show ran by Heklina at the Oasis club. The monsters must adapt to the makeshift delivery room to perform their alien births in “Sci-Fi Babes,” as well as face a photoshoot in an abandoned hospital in “The Operating Theatre.” “The Demon’s Blood” features a floor show and performances at a renaissance village and wooded setting. The monsters in “Scream Queens” must get in drag, perform a floor show, and film short slasher death scenes in a hilly wooded area.

While these environments present challenges of locale adaptations for the monsters, they are considerably light in comparison to environments designed to pose more significant challenges and test the monsters’ endurance, with these being intense environments. The desert
is a recurring setting for the monsters to face, with the heat often cited at around 100 degrees Fahrenheit. In “Zombies in Death Valley” the monsters are challenged to adapt to the heat and perform in an open space with run down auto parts and cacti. The space also serves as inspiration for their transformations, utilizing the setting to enhance their monstrous forms. This holds true for “Ghost Town Ghouls,” where the monsters are tested to perform in extreme heat in their haunting embodiments of heavy costuming, latex, makeup, and other technologies. The setting also serves as inspiration, as Biqtc interacts with the horses in the ghost town set, James swings on a swing set, and Abhora jumps menacingly on a wooden bridge. “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 1 and 2)” is potentially the most extreme setting in the desert, and potentially the entire platform. The monsters are invited to Wasteland Weekend, an immersive post-apocalyptic themed festival with an extreme community of punk festival goers. The monsters are tasked to do a photoshoot in the hot desert in their metal and leather technologies, as well as curate a lip-sync performance for their extreme, straight audience and match their punk spirit. The monsters are further immersed in their adapted environment through their participation in the Thunderdome, as brutal fight zone where the community cheers on fighters to participate in animalistic combat without protective gear. The monsters gladly participate, as will be detailed further on, accepting the thrilling opportunity for their extreme bodies.

Other intense environments include extermination challenges like a photoshoot in the freezing waters of the San Francisco Bay as sea monsters, a haunted house filled with traps and actors who engage in rough touch with the monsters, and a mud wrestling session between contestants to embody a tough wrestler persona. Through these environments, varying in their distinctive challenges, offer unique opportunities for the monstrous body to adapt and change, to
use the environment as a source of inspiration for their transformations. In these environments the inner monster is beckoned to be released, to find its safe space for play and transformation through the monstrous body’s placement in these locales. The monstrous body is not bound to any one place or environment, the monstrous body is transitory and must adapt; the monster shifts (Cohen 2007). The monsters of Dragula embrace new environments as opportunities to shift their forms of embodied play and engage in new transformations, accepting the opportunities of the system of monsters. Rather than being exiled or harmed to a point of retreat, the monstrous body is allowed successive adaptations and opportunities of becoming.

Channeling the Monster

I also located through my analysis themes of monstrous channeling or acting which enhance the embodiment of the monster. While the monster stands to symbolize something and incorporates in some form technologies to enhance their embodiment or to direct their monstrous forms towards, these aspects of channeling represent the monstrous affectation and enactment through the monstrous body, or the showing of personality of the monster. We may consider things like characterization, movement and body language, and presence as drag technologies, as well as technologies for enhancing monstrous embodiment (Carretta et al. 2019). The monster is not an inert symbol, it moves, emotes, and fills space, demanding attention for all that it embodies. The monstrous body acts, whether manically or ravenously, slowly or with threatening pace, and always beckons you to watch for more. Here, I will detail some examples
of monstrous characterization, movement, and presence through the embodiments of the monsters of *Dragula* and consider their enhancement of the varied monstrous bodies represented.

Characterization

The characterization or persona of the monstrous emerges as an important transformative technology in the presentation of one’s embodiment. Characterization is not a fixed technology, but a malleable one for each monster to signify their own monstrous form through. This form of characterization refers to the general affect and “life” the monster expresses through their transformation. The monsters of *Dragula* also provide personas which may communicate in language we understand or in ways fashioned for their own monstrous form. This technology might refer to acting, though it might be better thought of as a kind of enacting, the emotion and disposition assigned to the embodied monstrous form. For example, Vander and Melissa’s zombies in “Zombies in Death Valley” are shown to be unhuman transformations of the undead. Both enact the monstrous persona of their forms through nonhuman grunts and hissing, seething as they writhe about the set and forgoing human communication as they perform. Abhora’s ghostly bank robber in “Ghost Town Ghouls” is similar, a maniacally fiend who laughs evilly through a wicked smile. Victoria and James, as post-apocalyptic humans in “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 1),” are shown as scavengers, fierce beings who scream and spit through the enactment of their accepted roles, wide-eyed and ready to fight. Biqtch displays her punk spirit and releases her inner monster frequently, enacting a rebellious ghost bride in “Gothic Brides” as volatile and in sublime despair, or as an all-American sexualized scream queen in “Scream
Queens,” unable to contain her punk proclivities. Disasterina and Landon portray madness in their ghoul and doctor embodiments, the monsters show toughness and fighting spirit in their GLOW transformations, and the vampire burlesque allows for play of sexuality and seduction in characterization.

These are few examples of the many personas enacted through the transformations of the monsters, usually connected to the symbolism the monsters are attempting to convey. The monstrous body not only allows for play in form, but play through identity, affect, and emotion, an outlet to express aggression, sadness, evil glee, ecstasy, insatiable hunger, and a multitude of other characterizations that enhance or channel the monstrous. The characterization allows a further outlet for embodied play, an extension of the bodied form which gives the performance a life of its own, and a very real monstrous identity to express. Characterization must be enacted and become, materialized through the expression like other signs of the monstrous body.

Movement

Committed movement and body language also emerge as important aspects of channeling the monstrous form. The floorshow is not a mere modeling of a look on the stage, runway, or setting. The monstrous must be displayed and sold, enacted through convincing and committed portrayal to materialize and inspire a reaction. For examples of committed movement we may look to the performances of Vander and Biqtch, who both accomplish consistently embodied performances which authenticate their monstrous forms. Vander shows embodied commitment throughout her “80’s Female Wrestler,” “Zombies in Death Valley,” and “Finale” showings. Her
GLOW persona “Matadarling” displays poise through her controlled motions, posing in grandeur on stage in her ornate matador bolero. Vander also displays committed movements, engaging in rough body slams to the stage floor and landing on his doll partner, tossing the doll across the stage and engaging in flips on the runway. Vander’s zombie materializes through movement, a flexible mass of purple brocade and bones hissing and thrashing in hunger around the desert set. Vander careens and lashes out at her onlookers, performing afeat of a deep backbend and elongating upward in a serpentine movement. She drops to the ground and crawls towards the Boulets and the cameras while hissing and growling, selling her embodiment. Vander’s commitment through movement is displayed again in “Finale” through the body language of her filth and horror showings. Vander’s filth features her modelling her dirtied green dress and wild hair, flashing her backside as she takes selfies and reveling in her ugly beauty. In an act of pure disgust, Vander forces herself to vomit at the end of the stage and dives into the mess, splashing in and lathering herself with it with embrace. Her horror sees the return of her serpentine movements, engaging with a hand mirror and admiring her mutilated appearance as she slithers and spins around the stage, convulsing her torso and creating motion with her long dress, hands, and hair.

Through the consistently embodied performances of Biqtch we again see the importance of committed movement. In “Shock Rock and Metal” Biqtch allows herself to be thrashed about on stage by her fellow monsters in their PMS group performance, with Biqtch also engaging in engaging body language reminiscent of a punk rock performer. She thrashes her head and body as she lip-syncs, falls to the floor, and has a drum slammed on her head at the end of the performance, not flinching through the entire process. Her scream queen is also very embodied,
falling off a hammock and landing hard on her backside only to rebound quickly, never breaking character and incorporating the fall into her performance. Her gothic bride lip-sync creates dramatic movement by snapping back a large white veil to reveal her ghostly visage. Biqtch performs lightly first, then moves to a punk performance, ripping a bouquet of white roses in rage and skipping around the stage as she progressively strips. In “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 2)” she is imposing, allowing her monster’s rage to come out through the Thunderdome fight and beating her cage partner with fury. Finally, her horror showing in “Finale” spins in the darkness as a shadowy figure to be revealed as a cyborg witch-vampire hybrid, her whirling motion beckoning viewers to come forth and engage with her horrendous visage.

Through the examples of Vander and Biqtch we see consistent showings of materialization of the monstrous form through movement and body language. The monster signifies something but is anything but inert. The monstrous body is dynamic, looming and ever approaching. The monsters of Dragula utilize their performance opportunities to display committed feats of movement and body language through contortion, brutality, mysterious enticement, primal expression, broad and small motions, and through building up their performances to crescendos, enhancing the features of their embodiment and further materializing their forms by making the monster believable.

Presence

Characterization and committed movement are integral to the monstrous transformation, though the monsters of Dragula are also expected to display confidence and command attention
through their monstrous presence. These themes are highly relative to each monster’s performance, though the confidence and commanding nature of their characterization and movement must show and enhance these aspects. Cohen (2007) finds that the monster “will always dangerously entice,” the monstrous body is one that demands to be seen, to impose, and to be noticed. This is especially true for made monsters, who voluntarily engage in transforming their bodies to display and express their embodied artistry without reservation. We may look to the finale performances of the monsters for this tangent of presence, commanding the stage through their various interpretations and daring viewers hold their gaze.

Through their finale floor shows, Vander, Melissa, Biqtch, Victoria, and Dollya display the attainment of a confident presence in one’s monstrous presentation. Vander’s inclusion of a sub partner displays her commanding presence outright, leading her partner on a leash and guiding him around the stage. She exhibits control here, a contrast to her filth performance of indulgence and engagement with bodily fluids, embracing the materials of her own creation. Her horror is tantalizing, a nonhuman creature of mutilation whose preoccupation with her own beauty commands attention. Melissa displays confidence as well in her showings, materializing her black widow glamour with masterful poise while also engaging in fearless and indulgent blasphemy for filth. Her horror performance as a tragic murder victim commands attention through her uninterrupted gaze directly to the camera, her white eyes showing fury and vengeance as she repeatedly stabs and throws her cadaver. Biqtch also commands that stage through her glamour as a punk alien princess in merlot velvet and black leather, an imposing image of dark opulence and rebellious beauty. Her hypnotic horror manifestation entrances from the darkness, its form hidden as she swirls in a mass of black fabric, her red lit eyes piercing
through the shadow and fog to beckon victims forward. Victoria commands in her filth, a vivid display of desire and disgust with a skinned cadaver which shows her development of confidence throughout the competition. Lastly, Dolly’a’s horror as a modified creature of sewn skin features a stunning display of technology and horrifying beauty, a many-faced critique of human beauty.

The Boulet’s assert at multiple times that a Drag Supermonster must display stage presence, be able to command the attention of their audience, and show confidence in their performances of monstrosity. This enduring theme of presence may be seen in every challenge presented to the monsters of Dragula, as the goal of attaining and presenting an effective monstrous embodiment is held by each monster, all wishing to express their inner monster and artistic abilities. The enactment of a confident presence signals a further commitment to monstrosity and shows through the performances of the monsters, culminating enticing and engaging performances of made monstrosity.

Realizing Transformation

The transformative practices that the monsters of Dragula engage in are many and necessary. The monsters of Dragula are shown to engage with a multitude of technologies through differing levels of incorporation to the monstrous body to further materialize monstrous forms, as well as the roles of environment adaptation and monstrous channeling to enhance transitory materializations of monstrous becoming. In all, the transformative practices of these monsters are revealed to be highly creative and personal processes of embodiment, shifting their bodies through the technologies of alternative drag artistry and engaging in nonmainstream and extreme body modifications to reflect their interpretations of monstrous ideals. Cohen (2007)
finds that in stepping outside of normative boundaries of human presentation to phenomena of
the monstrous body, humans face the risk to “become monstrous oneself,” however, the monsters
of Dragula face no such risk (12). Rather, the made monster embraces the opportunities of the
monstrous body and its malleable, transgressive form. The goal is to materialize the monstrous
for oneself, to consciously alter the traditional human form through technologies of materials,
environment, and individual channeling in pursuit of a monstrous artistic expression. The human
body engages in becoming of the transitory body, an empowered queer opportunity of corporeal
agency that resists the assumption of a fixed form and self, and in the process construct new
becomings of the monstrous. However, at this point the transformation to the monstrous is still in
the process of realization for some monstrous bodies. While technologies, environment, and the
primary aspects of channeled monster expression are materializing, the monster’s body must
engage in further practices to manifest, to experience. It is here we must foray into the elevated
transformation of participation in forbidden and extreme actions, wherein monstrous
materialization finds its most thrilling embrace.

Monstrous Experience: Bodies of Forbidden Embrace

Through a fascinating set of embodied practices, the monsters of Dragula were also
found to engage in elevated channeling of their monstrosity through forbidden, transgressive, and
extreme acts. In the previous section I touched on channeling as an integral aspect of monstrous
change. This section focuses on the embodied participation in acts that denote monstrosity, rather
than those which may only contribute to monstrosity. Some acts speak for themselves as
monstrous, often involving extreme or nonmainstream voluntary immersion of activity. In this section I follow the notion of extreme bodies engaging in extreme action from Kosut (2010), as well as Cohen’s (2007) ideas of monsters representing the intersection of actions deemed forbidden yet desirable. The platform offers multiple opportunities through its processes for the engagement with forbidden acts. I find that the monsters of Dragula engage in acts which reflect a duality of transgressive desire and disgust while also engaging in actions of danger and bodily extremity. I also consider examples of pain and fear, and end by reconsidering Cohen’s idea of a monstrous escape and Kosut’s idea of transcendence through extremity. These examples show the monster’s propensity to willingly engage in forbidden and extreme acts of the body as an embraced, radical form of expression and experience of our monsters, one that further allows them to thrive as monsters and let their inner monsters out.

Transgressive Desire and Disgust

In the second season, Victoria’s monstrous narrative is problematized with critiques of her reliance on her transformative abilities in contrast with her perceived lack of immersed channeling, with the Boulet Brothers pressing her to come out of her shell and exude confidence through her monster performances. Victoria takes these critiques with her into “Finale” and utilizes the opportunity of the filth floor shows to embody such confidence and elevated channeling. Her performance of filth is a masterful revelation to the artistry of Victoria Elizabeth Black, for her and the Boulets. Victoria embodies filth as a human mortician in a stained white gown, wearing an apron and wheeling a skinned cadaver lying on a gurney onto the stage. Victoria removes her black latex gloves and mounts her cadaver, using forceps to make a long
incision down the torso and pulling out bloody intestines from the body. She smears the blood on her face and feigns rapturous intoxication through an oxygen mask, though the feeling of ecstasy may very well be real. Victoria is seen wrapping the intestines around her neck and auto-erotically asphyxiates her filth persona, then moves to kiss her corpse passionately. Her dress now covered in red, Victoria swings the intestines in a wide circle while walking around the stage, ending by placing the entrails in her mouth and finally looking to her cadaver ravenously. Her performance is unregulated and fully realized, representative of her affinity to engage in these acts as both a human and as a monster. Hostess Swanthula bestows due praise upon Victoria, stating,

> It was so taboo and you went there so full force, and something came over you. Like the spirit that you performed that number with was so intense and so captivating. Like, I threw my hands in the air. This is what it’s about. This is the moment when you get the chills and you see the show, and you see the performer giving everything they have. I could tell you were just feeling alive. And looking dead while you were doing it. (S2E10: 34:51)

Victoria affirms that she was living, and hostess Dracmorda recalls seeing her confidence and lack of fear in her finale showing, stating that the Brothers are proud of her performances and they now see exactly who Victoria Elizabeth Black is.

Victoria’s showing in the filth floor show is a prime example of a theme in my analysis of *Dragula* focused on elevated embodied performances of transgressive desire and disgust. Victoria’s portrayal of monstrous filth is presented as a human woman, contrast to her skillful transformations using prosthetic and makeup technologies previously shown. She portrays human and monstrous desire as one, engaging ravenously in explicit sexual practices that are traditionally viewed as taboo, unclean, and desecrating, practices of a monstrous individual.
Cohen (2007) finds that the monster simultaneously embodies human desire and fear, a being that attracts and repulses. The monster’s innate desirability may be neutralized through comedy, or ritually destroyed by the community it is perceived to afflict. In the filth floor show, Victoria faces no such destruction, but thrives through the opportunity. Victoria transgresses boundaries of the self, others, and norms through her commitment, admitting to coming to life through her embodiment and being affirmed by her highest critics. It is a rearticulation of Cohen’s idea of a safe expression of fantasy through the body of the monster. It is this duality of fear and attraction that places Victoria in a space of abjection, confronting a corpse, a representation of repulsive corporeality, with desire rather than fear, refusing performative repression in favor of irruption (Cohen 2007). Desire and repulsion are placed not only in the experience of the viewer, but articulated through the experience of the monstrous participant, a willing and agential monster allowing, and tempting, us to watch for more.

Victoria’s performance is an entry point to the varied embodiments of transgressive desires and disgust, a common theme of embodied actions among the monsters. Over the course of the series, monstrous embodiment of abject horrors and sexuality is demanded and voluntarily provided through the embodied practices of the monsters. The primary principle of filth is strong, as seen through the horrific force of Victoria’s deviant performance with her cadaver. Victoria’s presentation illuminates the engagement in both interpretive and readable signification, as well as action of the transgressive desires and disgust through the forbidden act of necrophilia. Through performances over the seasons involving zombies, vampires, and hellish fiends, we receive persistent embodiments of this transgressive desire through embodied actions. “Don’t Suck” offers further displays of monstrous repulsion and attraction through the floor show
performances of a vampiric grotesque burlesque. Hollow performs as a greyed Victorian vampire having just arisen from her grave, with large rotting insects placed on her collar, neck, and face, as well as on flesh piercing needles protruding from her forehead. Hollow strips from her clothing with great energy, reaching to her crotch to pull out a bag of live worms and grubs, which she pours on her breasts with glee. She removes the needles from her forehead, allowing the blood to be released from the wounds, and performs a feeding frenzy of her own blood as she licks her bloodied fingers ravenously. Maddelynn also provides a provocative display of transgressive desire and repulsion in her burlesque, removing a ruffled black cloak to reveal a suit of bloodied flesh material. Maddelynn tears at the suit, resembling viscera and brutal mangled flesh. She utilizes her hair, light red braids resembling intestines, to wrap around her neck. She uses a sponge to lather her stripped body with red liquid, bathing her mangled body in blood with rapturous glee.

Victoria, Maddelynn, and Hollow all portray transgressive desire and attraction with repulsion and decay, presenting purposefully abject performances with their bodies. Hollow presents life and death literally with her insects and blood, engaging in a real feeding frenzy of her own fluids and embracing the decay of her materials. Maddelynn also modifies her body to represent a place between life and death, incorporating imagery of viscera and blood, as well as enticing actions through these materials to perform her burlesque. Both are praised by the Boulets for their committed performances of vampirism and unclothing, engaging with their embodiments in sickening yet seductive ways. Victoria embraces the corpse, rejecting repulsion in order to perform immersive, repulsive sexual acts. Here, their bodies serve as the site of action for engaging with the duality of desire and disgust, utilizing the opportunity of the monster body
to play in the seductive world of enticing rot and decay and dangerously inviting their onlookers to engage. Their sexual practices, ones that must not be committed by humans, are given freedom of expression through the monstrous body, coming to life through the embrace of death.

The duality of disgust and desire need not only be framed through the portrayal of monstrous femininities. Landon’s filth floor show frames an embodied performance of repulsion and attraction, as well as the concept of abjection in the sense of embodying one who is cast off from the boundaries of society yet still very close. Landon performs as a mostly nude man living in squalor, the stage curated like a trashed frat house complete with a disgusting couch and various sex toys strewn about. Landon is seen eating pizza off the floor, pouring bottles of urine on himself, and engaging in acts of foreplay with a sex doll. His performance is bolstered by his commitment, watching pornography with and carefully putting lipstick on the doll, then engaging in sex acts with her. Here, Landon performs a shunned and ridiculed masculinity, known but rarely acknowledged or regarded due to its content. Landon’s body engages in a variety of acts that are sexual, deviant, revolting, and shocking, embracing the opportunity to engage in bodily acts indicative of a repulsive masculine identity with filthy desires. His portrayal, a monster in a traditional sense of deviance, embodies what Cohen (2007) says must be exiled, one that is “too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker,” in the sense of his repulsive, sexual desires and lifestyle (2007: 16). However, in this space Landon’s specific form of grotesque masculinity is welcomed as a revealing showing of filth, no longer forced into exile to avoid being confronted, but rather welcomed and encouraged by the Boulets.

Finally, I wish to explicate further on the duality of monstrous desire and disgust through voluntary forbidden acts of the body with the monstrous hunger of Vander Von Odd, whose
zombie embodiment (among others) serves as a rich source of analysis. In “Zombies in Death Valley,” Vander frames desire through her monstrous body in hunger and a goal to push boundaries, both of the self and of perceptions of her monstrous abilities. Vander wins alongside Melissa for her strong showing and physical commitment to her Zombie embodiment. However, Vander is called by hostess Dracmorda to join the low scoring monsters, Foxie and Loris, explaining that while they have seen incredible transformations and channeling from Vander, her punk and filth abilities have yet to be tested. Vander is asked to volunteer in the yet to be announced extermination, to which she immediately accepts. The trial is to consume pig brains without using their hands, with the monsters who eat with the best appetite staying in the competition. Vander commits to the trial, diving into her brains ravenously, channeling her zombie’s hunger while thrashing and hissing at the camera. Vander is the most active of the three, utilizing both the test and the embodiment of the zombie to prove her filth without relenting. The monster’s body, and thus embodiment of the monster, serves as an opportunity to push boundaries of the self and perceptions of the self. This is also true for Victoria, as her abilities and confidence had been questioned before, only to break free in her final showings.

Forbidden acts which frame the duality of transgressive desire and repulsion serve as opportunities for the monstrous body to both interact with embodied actions denied or ridiculed for many non-monsters, as well as opportunities for empowering expression and boundary pushing. Cohen (2007) finds that through the monster’s body, onlookers may receive a view of their transgressive desires realized. Through embracing the body and identity of the monster, the drag artists here may experience firsthand the liberation of these acts. The monsters of Dragula no longer face ridicule or repression for these acts, but confidently embody and perform them
with an embrace of their desires and repulsion. The portrayal of these acts serves as windows to
the experience of a monster, demystifying the actions as attainable and attractive opportunities
for the monster’s self-expression and the lived reality.

Risk and Extremity

A second array of performances placed extreme, dangerous, and thrilling voluntary acts
of the bodies of these monsters at the forefront. This is not to say that the acts of transgressive
desire and repulsion detailed above are not extreme or thrilling in some way, in fact quite the
opposite. I have established that the bodies of our monster drag artists may be regarded as
extreme and nonmainstream bodies, as well as monstrous bodies, who engage in extreme actions
and bodily practices. The performances through the monstrous body detailed above fit that
description, showing extreme transformations to monstrous embodiments and engaging in
extreme and nonmainstream acts and practices. However, is the viscera not feigned, the alien
births only an act, and the blood only a manufactured product? Perhaps this doesn’t matter, the
portrayals are convincing and effective enough. After all, Landon does engage in foreplay with a
sex doll, and Victoria does get a rush from her elevated channeling of a necrophile. Vander (and
many others throughout the series) does partake in a feast of disgusting foods, and Hollow does
remove flesh piercing needles from her forehead to feast on her blood. But what is missing from
this beautiful cacophony of elevated monstrous embodied acts? While the revolting yet attractive
actions of the monster are dangerous in one sense, they may also be dangerous in another. It is
here I explore these instances of extreme acts of the monstrous body that align with a radical
engagement in thrilling, dangerous behaviors, in which nothing is feigned and the monstrous consequences of the body are also very real.

Danger and risks to the body are prevalent in multiple performances of the monsters throughout the series of *Dragula*. We have probed briefly into the abject acts of the practiced professional Hollow Eve, who willingly exemplifies danger through her play of blood, needles, staples, skin stretching, and more. In “Drag Monsters of Rock” this danger of her technologies is placed in dramatic fashion, opting to place dirty needles through her cheeks after a botched performance previously. Monikkie also displays danger through her performance in “Cenobites,” taking to the stage and utilizing a staple gun on various places of her head and face. Two prominent displays of voluntary danger and bodily extremity come from Victoria and Vander. In “Ghost Town Ghouls,” Victoria performs as the spirit of a fortune teller who has burned to death in her cabinet. In true Victoria form, she immerses herself in prosthetics, costuming, and movement to embody her ghoul. However, it is her inclusion of the fortune teller’s cabinet, featuring live fire while Victoria is inside, that enhances her performance with the feeling of danger and risk. Victoria performs in the cabinet as it burns, then moves out and around the cabinet as it is overcome with flames, signaling her ghostly passage from the destroyed vessel. Vander features dangerous bodily extremity in a very different way, embracing transgressive desire and repulsion through a stunning bodily act of her own functions. Vander’s filth showing in “Finale” features her in dirty, punk drag which calls back to Divine. In the climax of her display, Vander makes her way to the end of the stage’s runway, sticks her fingers down her throat, and forcibly vomits onto what looks like feces. She dives into the consequence of her act with glee, covering herself in the mess. Risk, pain, and forced function are of no consequence to
the monstrous body. Repression and safety from danger are rebuked, because risk and thrill of
the body is far more rewarding.

Voluntarily engaging in extreme actions and situations which places the monstrous body
in a dangerous or thrilling context appears largely through the extermination challenges dictated
by the Boulets as trials for the monsters to face to continue throughout the competition. In the
third season’s “Last Supper,” hostess Swanthula recounts their desire to cast “thrill seekers, pain
freaks, and drag artists who were looking to push their boundaries on the small screen” (S3E9:
29:25). Over the course of the series, the monstrous individuals voluntarily place their bodies in
contexts where they are electrocuted, buried alive, mud wrestling, skydiving, pierced, self
stapling, close range paintballing, and physically fighting in trials meant to test their monstrous
abilities, push boundaries, and elicit the monsters to further envelop the individual. Taking from
Kosut’s (2010) thoughts on extreme bodies, these actions very much fit into her ideal type of
practices of voluntary bodily extremity, with monsters engaging in excessive physical activities
and having accepted the risks of their “radical carnal engagement” (186). Kosut notes the
potential to surpass the restraints of the body and self, finding a presence of a rush through the
engagement of these extreme acts, visible in the extermination challenges that follow.

We see rush and engagement in extreme, risky activities through the performances of
Victoria, James, Biqtch, and Abhora in “Welcome to Wasteland (Part 2)” in which they partake
in the Wasteland Weekend Thunderdome as their extermination trial. As I have described, the
Wasteland Weekend environment is one of many that the monsters had to adapt to, accepting the
extremity and danger of the setting and allowing it to inform their monstrous changes. The large
gleodesic frame that is the Thunderdome, reminiscent of the Mad Max franchise, is another of
these environments. After their performance, photoshoot, and critiques, the monsters are delighted to learn they will be strapped in bungee cords and given combat stick to beat each other with as they are launched at each other by fellow Wasteland participants. James and Victoria fight first, still enveloped in the technologies of their apocalyptic drag. Both are seen “revving up,” beginning to channel their animalistic personas and prepare for the intensity of their combat. They scream and thrash, Victoria enhanced by the alarming yellow and black striped makeup on her face, James’s gnarled smile signaling excitement to participate.

Encouraged by the Boulets and their surroundings, the monster engage in vicious combat, being pulled back continually and let to collide, tangling their cords and bodies as they attack each other with their combat sticks. While the sticks are lightly padded, the monsters forgo the human constraints of protective gear such as helmets, body padding, or mouth guards, for a monster has no need for such things. Both monsters launch themselves as well, running at each other screaming with committed glares across their faces, their monstrous bodies thriving in the unregulated grit of their actions. The monstrous body allows for this risky participation and the praise from the onlookers, a spectacle of aggressive, primal expression that rebukes restraint.

Towards the end of their match, Victoria takes hold of James’s cord, swinging repeatedly at James while yelling and overpowering her, and is declared the winner, having chipped her teeth in two places.

Biqtch and Abhora also face each other in the Thunderdome, fueled by their rivalry of working together previously in Atlanta as well as their tension on the platform. Both prepare their minds and bodies, Abhora yelling and laughing maniacally while Biqtch licks her weapon and taunts her opponent. Both appear as well in their apocalyptic personas, Biqtch a fierce
warrior woman in a black leather one piece with unruly white hair, Abhora looking demonic and depraved as ever. They collide bodies initially, swinging back and run at each other again immediately, eager to engage without help from the Wasteland participants. Biqtch lands multiple head shots, at one point taking hold of Abhora with her legs and beating her repeatedly. Both are committed and ferociously determined, continuing to brutally collide and swing, embodying the attitude and fierceness of the arena. Biqtch wins and lets out a wild scream as she thrashes in victory, slamming her stick repeatedly against her head as she yells and revels as she is lavished with praise.

The example of the Thunderdome, as with many of the exterminations on Dragula, is an opportunity for the monstrous body and self to culminate, to place the bodily subject in a situation of monstrous extremity. Cohen (2007) writes of the monster’s body as linked to forbidden acts as “a temporary egress from constraint… through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited space” (17). And while Cohen’s analysis is based largely in literary and sociohistorical representations of monstrosity, a much more thrilling sentiment rings true for our voluntary made monsters, who utilize their monstrous, extreme bodies to engage in extreme expressions without constraint, choosing to engage in activities of bodily risk. This is not merely a projection of escapist fantasy through gothic text, but a vivid example in the real participation and play of risk and danger through one’s own extreme actions and physique, an attainable and engaging experience of monstrous liberation.
Pain and Fear

My analysis also found instances of monsters engaging in extreme acts which serve as opportunities for growth and as a transgression of one’s own fears through painful yet empowering experiences to the monstrous body. Speaking in the episode “Don’t Suck” about the purpose of extermination challenges, hostess Dracmorda states,

The reasons that we designed them is to push you out of your comfort zone. We want you to face your fear. That is part of your development as a Supermonster. You have to participate in order to grow. I understand fear. Fear can be conquered. To refuse to overcome the obstacles we put before you is seen as a total disrespect to the meaning of this show. This competition is not set up to hurt you. It’s set up to test you… Let me rephrase that. It’s not set up to hurt you permanently. (S3E2: 30:50)

While exterminations act as often intense and engaging displays of action, Dracmorda emphasizes the participatory nature of the platform as an opportunity for personal growth and transgression of fear, broadening the intended purpose for these events not only for the audience but for the monsters. Her comments come after the first extermination in “The Lesser of Two Evils,” wherein Maxi and Violencia are challenged to skydive from a plane at 18,000 feet. Both express fear in doing the extermination, though Violencia’s fear of planes and heights leads her to not participate, leaving Maxi to fly, jump, and remain in the competition, having enjoyed their extreme experience. In “Last Supper” Violencia states regret in letting her fear get in the way of her participation and would participate if given another opportunity. Violencia’s nonparticipation is rare for the Dragula monsters, and below I detail two examples of boundary pushing through extreme bodily acts where fear and pain were embraced and confronted, leading to experiences of exhilaration and freedom.
After landing in the bottom for extermination in “Le Freak,” Louisianna Purchase and her fellow monsters are challenged to staple dollars to their body for one minute on the main stage. In the backstage area before the extermination, Louisianna is visibly shaken and unresponsive to her fellow monsters, attempting to collect herself before she is tested. After the monsters attempt to console her and frame the extermination as a test to her abilities, Louisianna recounts to her fellow monsters her fear of pain, recognizing that this extermination test will hurt and that she expects to faint from the experience. Louisianna is admittedly scared and livid due to her propensity to faint from experiences of pain, yet is determined, stating,

“I’m definitely doing this extermination. I am here to win and I’m here to challenge myself, and that’s the whole point of these exterminations, is to push yourself… If I go home, they’re gonna look at me like I’m a fuckin’ failure, and I can’t, because I told them I wasn’t going home til I was at the top, and I’m not fucking going home… They’re gonna look at me and they’re gonna go, “Yeah, we fuckin’ knew it.” And no, I’m not gonna let them say that about me. (S3E7: 49:00)

Louisiana’s situation is harrowing, a stark moment of personal fear in the series. She is faced with a compilation of issues: a painful test to engage in an extreme bodily act, a desire to remain in competition, and her desire to challenge her fears and grow. Louisianna takes the stage and tells all watching “Let’s rock and roll,fuckers,” before beginning. She is able to staple three dollars to her left thigh before she places her staple gun on a table and set workers rush on stage to catch her as she begins to faint, seating her as her eyes roll back and she attempts to catch her breath. Louisianna’s extermination performance is enough to keep in in the competition, signaling a success in her ability to push past her fear and commit despite pain. She recounts in “Halloween Haunt” that, “Afterwards, I was so exhilarated, and so happy I did it… I’m here because I conquered my fear. I knew I was going to faint, but, bitch, I did it anyway” (S3E8:
When asked about her showing in the extermination in “Last Supper,” Louianna acknowledges her fears of failure, pain, and losing control, finding “every time you chip away at that block of fear, it’s just more freedom” (S3E9: 32:09). While she remains concerned about her fourth-place placement in the season, her showing is still representative of the determination through fear and pain to develop as a monstrous individual.

Erika Klash also frames her first extermination challenge in “Cenobites” as a confrontation of fear, with her test a being a human pincushion, having flesh piercing needles stuck in her shoulder. Erika recounts she has never had a piercing before, a contrast to her fellow two monsters in the extermination. She is hesitant to start the piercing process, though relents and begins the process, asking the piercing professional if they have “bigger ones” after four smaller gauged needles. Erika is shaking throughout the process, with tears in her eyes at various points, though stays determined. She eventually accumulates twenty small needles in two places in her left shoulder, stating “I did this so that I could face my fears, and this has been a fear of mine. So I’m going to fucking face it, I have been facing it. Get me more” (S2E1: 43:29). She eventually accumulates twenty small needles in two places in her left shoulder, repeating to herself that “the pain is in my mind.” All three monsters take the opportunity to be pierced by an 8-gauge needle, with Erika asking for another 8-gauge needle soon after the first. After her 21 needles, Erika declares, “Me never having been through it before, the unknown was scary. For sure. I’m so fucking glad I did it though. That was really, like, really exhilarating, in a way” (S2E1: 45:52).

Through their engagement of extreme acts through the monstrous body, Louianna and Erika experience exhilaration. They push their personal boundaries of their fears of pain, loss of
control, and human failure by embracing extremity and perceived danger, developing as monsters and monstrous bodies. These instances also exemplify their commitment to pushing their boundaries and the monsters are rewarded through being welcomed back to the competition, having shown their willingness to face fear and pain, and growing from their experiences of the monstrous body.

**Transcendence and Escape**

Kosut (2010) finds that “the extreme body offers a means to begin to see how the body is continually bound and liberated by culture,” particularly salient in the assessment of made monster artists seeking to engage in and achieve queer artistic liberation through monster culture (198). Kosut also illuminates the potential for transcendence through the actions of the extreme body, transcending constraints of the self or the body, as well as transcendent pleasure or rush through painful, risky, or dangerous acts. In Cohen’s (2007) theses, he notes that the monster is a multisignifying manifestation, a transitory and continuously evolving form which defies categorization, containment, or defeat. Cohen asserts that the monster “always seems to return,” is “always at the verge of irruption,” and most importantly, “the monster always escapes” (16; 20; 4). Cohen also refers to the monstrous as a fragment, one that allows for the formation of various abject identities while also stating “monstrous interpretation is as much a process as epiphany, a work that must content itself with fragments” of the monstrous which signify its transitory journeys. In considering the made monsters of *Dragula*, who have extreme bodies and partake in nonmainstream modifications to achieve monstrous forms, I find that notions of
“irruption,” “escape,” and “epiphany” take on new meaning through their embodied culminations of interpretation, transformation, and action. An irruption is a violent burst, and escape is a liberation, and an epiphany may be both a profound revelation or a glorious ideal. The monstrous body is one of experiencing, whether that is the “living” through a performance of necrophilia, the “rush” of a Thunderdome brawl, or the “exhilaration” of stapling oneself and overcoming fear. If we consider Kosut’s idea of transcendence through extreme actions of the extreme body with notions of rearticulative escapism through embodiment of the monster, the participation in thrilling, transgressive, and extreme actions find greater monstrous meanings. With the knowledge of the performances previously described, I offer an analysis of a few more performances which intersect transgressive desire, repulsive filth, risk and danger, as well as the emergent themes of boundary pushing and overcoming not of pain or fear, but in efforts to realize monstrosity for oneself and to express it effectively for others. Through the elevated expression one’s monstrosity, the monster is let out and truly escapes.

Biqtch’s journey in the second season is problematized almost immediately with accusations against her monstrosity and monster abilities. In “Cenobites” her tension with former coworker Abhora is revealed to the group, who expresses she believe Biqtch has lost her punk sensibilities and expressing, “You’re not a monster though!” as Biqtch tries to remedy the situation. James refers to Biqtch as “basic,” with criticism mounting against Biqtch from Abhora, Biqtch, and Monikkie due to Abhora’s statements, Biqtch’s low placement in “Cenobites,” her perceived reliance on latex technologies, and her perceived “basicness.” The criticism and isolation from the other monsters has clearly effected Biqtch in “Ghost Town Ghouls,” her worth as a monster artist diminished by her community and having an adverse effect on her monstrous
abilities. In a community of affirmed made monsters, it is difficult to take the role of the traditional monster, a presumed basic outsider, the anti-monster who doesn’t share their abilities. In her “Ghost Town Ghouls” floor show Biqtch attempts to bring to life her story of a drowned woman. Her eyes are a stark white, giving emphasis to the small blacks of her eyes. Her skin is various shades of murky green, flaked and tattered. Her hair is messy, and a feathered hat is barely hanging on to her head. Biqtch is dressed in simple brown clothes with a yellow and purple brocade shawl around her arms, carrying a bucket of black water over her shoulder and a bag of rocks tied around her right leg. This is how she first appears in the floor show, walking into the Old West town location prepared to perform by the horse stables. Swanthula states in judgement, “The costume makes me question, the hair, why is the skin peeling off, there’s a bag of rocks, there’s a bucket. I’m like, completely lost. I’m thinking Biqtch Puddin’ is going down and that’s it,” signaling a sense of confusion among the judges. (S2E2: 37:13)

However, Biqtch’s disheveled, drowned woman quickly takes form through her performance of an extreme desire for thirst with a repulsive decaying form, through which she channels the spirit of her ghoul with full, irrupting commitment. This performance, mired with prior criticism from her fellow monsters, her own struggles, and the initial perceptions of the judges, is Biqtch’s first monstrous opportunity to channel her monster, to let “it” out and achieve a moment of escape. Biqtch arrives to the stable area looking worn and tired, then moving to regurgitate black water from her mouth. She begins to stumble to the ground, her eyes glaring about as she descends. We see Biqtch on her knees, screaming as she drags her bag of rocks and her bucket, feigning a perpetual desperation for water. Her haunting visage is enhanced by her eyes and her physical commitment to dragging her props through the dirt. She brings her bucket
to her mouth, taking in what filthy water she can, and crawls towards the camera, forcing
viewers to catch her piercing gaze. When looked at with a careful eye, the performance is layered
with an enhanced presence, a manifestation through performance that Biqtch had been lacking
previously. Despite her cacophony of drag technologies and any discrepancy in her story, Biqtch
channels her monster and temporarily transgress restraints through the monstrous body, offering
a transcendent performance. This is affirmed by guest judge Miss Kitty, who states in
deliberation that Biqtch was able to draw her back to with her performance, appreciating the
attitude and character, but had “no idea what the hell she was until she started performing.”
Hostess Swanthula agrees, recounting to Biqtch in judgement, “I’m thinking, Biqtch Puddin is
going down, and that’s it. Then we got to your performance, and it was what I wanted to see
from you so badly. The horses were scampering in fear. It was just so real” (S2E2 37:23). In a
performance that sends horses fleeing, the escape through the monstrous body is shown to be a
terrifying, affirming culmination, one that may elicit the monster within for others and the self to
experience in revelatory ways.

Biqtch’s journey in the second season is a display of escape through the monstrous body,
as her embodied performance increasingly let her monster envelop her in fierce, committed,
embodied fashions. Biqtch pushes boundaries of the perceptions against her and earns the respect
of all her fellow monsters, reflected in their reunion in “Last Supper.” Erika states, “You have
Dragula in your bones, babe,” recognizing the abilities of Biqtch and her character. Biqtch is no
longer the anti-monster, having found affirmation through her performances of monstrosity and
her resilience as a drag monster. In “Finale,” Biqtch utilizes her filth showing as an opportunity
to display her empowered monstrosity through a form of monstrous humanity and further
achieve escape. Biqtch utilizes the monstrous body to embody transgressive desire and disgust once again, appearing as a custodian in a stained cleaning uniform and boots, her hands filthy and her teeth browned. Biqtch’s dark hair is tangled and ratted, her face is dirty, and she picks her nose with determination. Her actions are where her performance is realized, as Biqtch is accompanied on stage by a yellow mop bucket filled with filthy water, a mop, and a dirty plunger. Biqtch begins mopping the stage floor, splashing dirty water across the space and flicking water towards the filming crew. Biqtch fished a shower drain from her bucket and removes the long clump of various hair strands, smiling and gazing at it intently as she begins chewing on the dripping mass. She licks her plunger and is seen on the floor licking her toes while staring directly into the camera, and later waves at the crew. She takes a glass of her brown water from the bucket and begins to chug, then pours the liquid directly on her face. On her performance, hostess Dracmorda remarks her filth was uncomplicated and effective, reflective of their earlier pageants, finding “I knew when you started performing and the crew were running to the bathroom to throw up or try not to throw up, I was like, “She did it!,” signaling once again that Biqtch has elicited bodily reactions of revulsion through her embodiment of disgusting, transgressive desires (S2E10: 36:35). In fact, Dracmorda affirms Biqtch’s entire journey to monstrous epiphany, “something happened I think during the ghost town challenge that just… you came to life and have been clawing your way to the top ever since,” to which Biqtch responds “thank you for letting me be me” (S2E10: 36:59). Biqtch’s monstrous self lived freely during her performances, though her escape was not without struggle. Escape is iterative, it is not a singularly attained accomplishment of the monstrous body. The monstrous body is a project, a practice of extremity and the culminating of the liberating monstrous experience.
Melissa faced similar struggles to Biqtch, not doing well in “Wickedest Witch” or “80’s Female Wrestler” in comparison to her fellow monsters. Her embodiments were deemed to be glamourous, her channeling was found to be lacking, and her monstrous abilities and standing were questioned by the judges. Melissa is an outsider compared to her fellow monsters, her drag based in a more mainstream, glamourous community of drag performers. After her floor show in “80’s Female Wrestler,” she is placed in the bottom four and challenged to mud wrestle a fellow monster. The mud wrestling pool is just that, an inflatable blue and white pool, shallow yet filled with a healthy supply of light brown mud. There are four posts around the pool with thin lines of rope connecting them, creating the wrestling “ring” for the four monsters who must participate in the extermination. The background features tarps hanging from the ceiling, lit from behind by pink, green, and blue lights. Melissa, as her GLOW persona “Kitty Kunt,” is paired with Xochi Mochi, “The Lizard Queen.” Melissa takes the opportunity to provide a full channeling of her persona, in contrast to her floor show, quickly overtaking Xochi in the mud pool. Melissa thrashes Xochi around while screaming “this is my litter, bitch,” while they both tear at each other’s wigs, hiss, and yell. At various points Melissa is seen pushing Xochi into the mud and over the side of the pool, remaining dominant in the match and becoming entangled in the side ropes. They fling mud and scratch at each other, with Melissa landing a blow to Xochi’s face. The scene ends with Melissa having Xochi in a head lock, both covered in mud with wigs barely still on their heads. Hostess Dracmorda notes that all the monsters fought ferociously, though Melissa is the monster who fought especially hard and “fought to kill.” Melissa’s performance saves her from being considered for extermination from the competition and awards her the designation of monster from the judges. Melissa utilizes the opportunities of the monstrous body
not only to engage in dangerous and risky actions with a fellow monster, but to display her monstrosity for her critics. She engages in a rough performance without reservations, embracing the filth of the monstrous humanity of the GLOW persona and forgoing her reliance in glamour. The monstrous body is one of new experience, a risky foray into the gritty, the uncontrolled, and the dangerous actions of the embodied opportunities that lead to a potential egress, an escape.

Melissa, in contrast to Biqtch, does not find a consensus to her monstrosity come the Last Supper of “Finale,” having reached the final three of her season and having her monstrous abilities attacked. Melissa is still viewed by Xochi, Ursula, Loris, and Foxie as the anti-monster, an established performer “in her community” who should stay clear of their alternative, monstrous endeavors. Melissa’s monstrosity is not accepted or recognized by the community of monsters, setting a line for who is a monster in this group and who isn’t. The monster escapes boundaries, classification, expectations, and possibilities, yet these are the boxes which are being applied to Melissa because of her status as a scene outsider, someone realizing and growing in their monstrosity. But the monster is also about growth, change, and variability, which Melissa has shown through her journey. Melissa is the looming threat, a sheep in wolves clothing, an unrecognized outsider encroaching on their subjugated categorization. Melissa takes these perceptions and combats them, as shown most strikingly when Xochi says to her, “Maybe you aren’t the monster we all are,” to which Melissa responds, “Well maybe I’m not, then!,” signaling her experience of her own monstrous body, free of categorization from these gatekeepers of monstrosity (S1E6: 17:58). The system of monsters allows for opportunities of escape if monsters are willing and able to take them, and Melissa does. While her glamour and horror are revelatory, her filth is the most vivid experience of Melissa’s monstrous epiphany.
Melissa’s display of transgressive action, viscera, and filth is one a special intersecting risk of the body, of embodied blasphemy. Melissa walks onto the stage in a sparkling black habit, the top part of her chest covered but her genitalia exposed and bloodied, a garter belt on her stomach with long black stockings attached. Melissa’s eyes are blackened and black tears stream down her cheeks. She carries a swinging censer of blood and a bible in her left hand, and turns around to display a rosary with the cross placed inside her anus. As she walks down the runway she begins tearing pages out of the bible, wiping them on her bloodied genitalia, and tossing them away. At the end of the runway she licks a bloodied page, crumples it up, and throws it as she walks away. She pours the censer of blood on her face and revels in a moment of ecstasy, and performs the sign of the cross covered in red. To end her showing, she yanks out her rosary and tosses it to the ground as she walks offstage. Melissa’s performance is a situated level of embodied risk, transgressive desire, and filth, a unique, personal play of gender and the monstrous human form. Hostess Swanthula notes,

I respect you more after having gone through all of this because you showed everybody how you were going to redefine yourself. You didn’t let anyone’s feedback define you. They saw you as one thing, a glamour queen, why is she even here? And honestly, at the end of that runway show there should be not one question in anybody’s mind. (S1E6: 46:39)

Swanthula also notes the courage of engaging in a blasphemous performance and rebuking multiple societal norms, while Dracmorda finds that Melissa has “so, so proved to the world that you are a Supermonster,” in her finale showings, having stayed true to herself and fought to compete. The monstrous body is one of an epiphany, both an unholy embodiment of one’s own monstrosity and a profound realization from those who are invited to experience the monster. The experience of the monster’s body is not easy, it is excessive, ridiculed, and denied
recognition. But once the monstrous body is embraced as a unique, personal opportunity for expression, the experience may become one of transcendent liberation.

Transcendence, escape, epiphany, egress. These terms all point to the similar experiences on the part of the monsters of Dragula, as well as potential experiences for those who engage with these performer’s displays. Think back to the performance of Victoria in her filth showing. Her monstrosity had been in doubt before “Finale,” though through her transgressive and extreme acts of the monstrous body she was able to attain a transcendence that showed through her elevated presence, an escape through the opportunities of the system of monsters and the monstrous body she embraces for herself. This affirms her monstrosity for the Boulets, and the same is found through multiple actions of forbidden acts and actions of bodily extremity. The monsters also achieve their own affirmations through these actions of the monstrous body, engaging in acts and play largely unsanctioned outside this realm of monsters and achieving the escapism through the monstrous body through fascinatingly corporeal experiences, no longer confined to the spectacular and safe expressions of the screen. Those viewers who watch may see hedonism, sadomasochism, indulgence, and ungodly abject horrors. And while those things are very Dragula, the embrace through voluntary engagement and potential for transcendence through the experiences of these bodied actions cannot be denied.

New Monstrous Knowing: Bodies of Opportunity

The embodied practices of the monster are those of interpretation and conceptualization, manifestation and transformation, and engagement and embrace of forbidden acts. The
monstrous body is also one of knowledge, having embodied the knowledge and lives experiences of humans, queer humans, and monstrous queer humans. Though through these sections, the monsters emerge as the creators of their own realities, transitioning between human and monstrous forms and symbols, engaging with an array of excessive transformations to their bodies, and taking the opportunity to engage with extremity and transgressive desires in the pursuit of transcendence, a monstrous escape. The monsters are shown to achieve their representation through their participation in the shows processes, able to co-(re)construct the monstrous through their embodied and embraced self-expressions, no longer alienated from their creativity or community, allowed to share their queer and monstrous lived knowledge. In all of this, what knowledge do the monsters hold? Here, I will consider the representation of the Dragula monsters as humans, queers, and alternative drag artists a remark on how their representation adds a depth of knowledge to the subjugated and often ignored artistries they participate in. I will also consider their own statements about their hope for the representation of their queer, monstrous bodies and what this may mean for viewers. I will also consider the role of knowing praise and validation to these monsters by the Boulets, enhanced by the monsters’ embrace of their artistry, monstrosity, and queerness, as well as what it means to have the opportunity to (re)articulate one’s own queer reality.

Representation

Having found representation on Dragula, the monsters now serve as diverse agents of monstrous (re)construction, bodies who’s layered meanings provide new and continuously
evolving knowledge of who and what is monstrous. Queer is an umbrella term for these monsters, an overarching designation that unites their common experiences, much like the identifier ‘monster.’ The monsters may also be described as Mods or body modifiers, those who engage in both mainstream and nonmainstream body mod, and who occupy extreme body types (Thomas 2012; Kosut 2010). While queer and body modified people as ‘others’ have been traditionally regarded with fear or lack of understanding, a diversity of queer identities and bodies is of no issue on Dragula, providing a distinctly radical community of queer peoples unrivaled by many other media sources.

Disasterina is an older queen who describes herself as both a heteroflexible and straight man, while also revealing herself to be married to a woman and a father. For her fellow monsters, this is a non-issue. Erika notes, “It has so much more to do with a state of mind than it does sexual identity. She is queer,” while also noting this perspective is one that has gone unheard, finding a consensus among the monsters and Boulets, as well as feelings of validation and family for Disasterina (S2E9: 31:35). For Hollow and Landon, their representation as AFAB (assigned female at birth) drag performers are further perspectives that have largely been unrepresented. Hollow describes herself as “post-binary,” refusing to conform to any gender category because these simply do not apply to her. Landon is a lesbian and a drag king, representation that has, until Dragula, never been achieved in U.S. televised drag media. Both Hollow and Landon find commonality in their shared experiences as AFAB performers, with Landon noting their representation is groundbreaking in that they are able to “show that anyone can do drag, anyone can be a monster, anyone can do this” (S3E6: 7:23). The series highlights young, alternative queer immigrant voices like those of Vander, a trans femme individual, and
Yovska, both from Mexico. Maxi proudly represents her non-binary identity through her rebuke of gendered standards of drag representation. The modified bodies of Ursula and Saint reflect their queerness, both covered in full body tattoos that represent embodied queerness that cannot be taken away from them, with Saint having done 150 of her 170 tattoos on herself as a teenager. The bodies of Ursula, Meatball, and Frankie are large and beautiful, and the bodies of monsters like James, Dollya, and Violencia rebuke normative gender expression in favor of outward queering. Everyone is queer in their own way, in their identity and with their bodies, providing representation and knowledge of a community of endless human and monstrous possibilities in their purest forms.

The diversity of the monsters is also reflected in their varied alternative drag artistries, providing a depth of knowledge of aesthetics that may be considered radical, alternative, and nontraditional. In *Dragula*, alternative drag artistry and monster drag are interchangeable, both terms encompass one another and refer to a broad range of expression. Many of the monsters align with the overarching label of a ‘drag queen,’ though their artistry is not confined to traditional queen or femme presentations, rather embodying a wide range of understandings of what drag is and can be. While queens like Victoria, Vander, James, and Dollya all identify themselves as drag queens, they also are shown to explore more androgynous and sometimes overtly masculine forms of drag artistry. Ursula presents herself as a bearded queen and regularly rebukes alterations to her frame. Meatball expresses her affinity for engaging in campy, clownish, and terrorist drag, admitting to not fully aligning with the horror side of monster drag but rather the transgressive and insulting aspects of monstrosity. Erika is dedicated to her anime and video game perspective, a unique one to have in the dark world of *Dragula*. Saint and
Melissa are shown to engage in the more glamorous areas of drag, adapting their knowledge of pageantry to dark beauty. Victoria, Frankie, and Vander regularly showcase their mastery of horror and creature drag. Monikkie aligns with the tranimal scene, Yovska is an admitted drag “cryptid,” and Priscilla expresses interest in reclaiming her trash queen status. Biqtch and Hollow align with punk and filth drag aesthetic filled with rage and societal rebuke, while Landon’s horror king provides layers of his own lived understanding. The Drag Supermonster is not any one person, not any one sexual identity, nor is it any one artistry. Alternative drag artistry is also not concerned only with rebuking presentation of gender binary, but often with rebuking binary of human and nonhuman, mixing symbols of both or attempting the rebuke humanity altogether. Through analyzing the platform of Dragula, the first of its kind, I find that no one distinct drag artistry is favored more than any other, and none are denied. The most glamorous are encouraged to evolve and explore, the most radical are encouraged to polish and refine. The devil is in the details, and the monster waits inside us all. The monsters of Dragula refer to the community found through the platform as a tribe, a clan, and as Dahli aptly muses, a “fucked up family.” They are a compilation of artists who share goals, experiences, and unify around drag monstrosity, and the representation of their unified diversity is one of queer beauty.

Through their participation on the platform, the monsters express hope for their representation in a variety of ways. Victoria’s hope is to inspire any kids who may watch the show, seeing potential to inform kids, who much like she was, are creative and interested in the world of drag, wanting the platform to be a force for “bringing out the weirder side of kids, instead of…” to which Biqtch adds “you don’t have to have a sequin dress to be a queen” (S2E7: 29:49). In the first season Vander also expresses the impact that the platform can have on kids,
stating, “Growing up like I would have loved to have something like Dragula, you know, having sort of figures that are like freakish and crazy but at the same time very sane and grounded and intelligent, as grounded as you can be when you’re a fucking drag queen” (S1E6: 28:05). When Vander returns to guest judge in season two, she expresses that the career the Dragula has given her the opportunity to reach young fans while travelling. She shares, “My favorite thing is the underage fans, they’ll wait outside of the club for you ‘cause they want to meet you so bad, and so it’s cool to connect those people and kind of plant seeds of hope that there is future for the freaks, and the geeks, and the queerdos, and the weirdos, you know?,” affirming Victoria’s belief in the potential of their representation (S2E8: 6:29). Many monsters express that their representation is validating to their careers and queerness, as many have struggled to find community, opportunity, and representation. For Frankie and Louisianna, their representation is described as “a dream come true,” or as Louisianna corrects herself, “a great nightmare, a beautiful nightmare.” Frankie expresses finding validation for her punk, monstrous aesthetic on the platform, a deep contrast from her prior experiences of alienation. Just by being on the platform Vander and Foxie express their feelings of validation, having been excluded or disconnect from prior spaces, while Biqtch, Hollow, Xochi, and James express they are inspired by their diversity and talent around them during their time on the platform, engaging with a community and creating representation together. For Hollow and Landon, their representation as AFAB artists confronts many barriers of representation and validation of drag artistry, and Landon states “Art is for everyone, there are no rules. If someone tells you there are, break them, ‘cause they’re imaginary,” having broken many rules himself (S3E9: 43:01).
In the tradition of rule breaking, the monsters express their hope to change the world of drag and perceptions of alternative drag through their embodied representations on the platform. For Vander, the impact of the platform can do both. She states, “I think Dragula’s really going to effect the future of drag in that there’s no longer just a limited reference of what drag can be, I think Dragula really opens the spectrum to be able to say anything and everything can be drag, it’s just the way you present it” (S1E6 28:05). Regarding alternative artistry perceptions, Vander finds potential for opening a greater understanding of their art through the representation of Dragula, “There’s a big misconception that the Dragula style of drag is specifically horror drag but horror is really just an element of it. I think what it comes down to is really our drag is just a sort of counterculture sort of drag,” noting that there is a level of knowledge and intelligence of culture in their artistry that goes unrecognized in the mainstream (S1E5: 7:22). For Frankie, her participation on the platform is important to her and the aesthetic she holds close to her as a self-identified creature, stating,

It’s cool to see an alternative, there’s so many of us that are different, that aren’t trying to do a certain aesthetic or a certain look or a certain type of drag, and there’s so much more to it, and I think people need to be open and to see that. There’s blood, there’s gore, I mean there’s so much more. There’s references, even comedy. There’s so much more than simply being beautiful and looking like a lady. (S1E6: 33:00)

Vander and Frankie’s statements speak to the context of the platform, one which seeks to celebrate the artistry of alternative drag and those who create and embody the monstrous. Their statements also speak to the multiplicity of aesthetics and performances possible in the art form, representing a counterculture scene that rebukes the mainstream. James also finds that Dragula is a force for good in the queer and drag community, stating he wanted to be a part of changing the
face of drag artistry and seeing “Dragula as the future of drag. They are making a whole new path for queer artists, for the LGBT+ queer movement. They’re changing the world for our community,” and noting that the monsters on the platform have already begun the great work (S2E10: 13:48).

Through their representations and embodied participation on the platform, the monsters show a continuously evolving depth of knowledge through the queer opportunity of the monstrous body. Their representation is based in lived experience and narrative processes, embodying the monstrosity they know, wish to know, and want to share with the world through their traditionally unconventional yet very queer means. The monsters have something inside of them that needs not only to be let out and expressed, but done so in a space and in an articulation that confronts the common narratives assigned to them and their bodies, reclaiming their autonomy and the monstrosity they come to embody, and thus represent (Thomas 2012). The platform allows them to bring their knowledge of subjugated experience with them add their own narratives, (re)constructing knowledge of the monstrous body and their artistries in a space meant for them. The monsters challenge Western societal, homonormative, and human normative assumptions of the body, as well as the queer body, through their embraced representations and their representation together and as individuals is groundbreaking, a celebration of lived radical queerness rarely given a voice in an increasingly mainstream queer reality.
Value and Praise

Throughout the course of my findings, I have attempted to add fragments of praise and value that the monsters receive throughout their presentations on the platform. The monsters receive praise for their interpretations, their transformations, and their actions. They are validated for their subjective artistries and understandings of the monstrous, for their embodiment of a Drag Supermonster. Their expressions have value as rebukes of social, drag, body, queer, and human norms. The Boulet’s afford embodied performances throughout the program’s three seasons, as well as for the monsters who take their critiques and come to understand new knowledge of their own monstrous abilities. For example, Victoria struggled to find confidence throughout her season and express herself outside of her enveloping transformations. As she grew throughout her journey, she accrued praise not only for her mastery of her transformations and concepts, but for her personal and artistic development. After her performance in “Finale,” hostess Dracmorda comments, “I know now exactly who Victoria Black is. I do, and I like her a lot. And I think the world knows who you are now and they’re really gonna love you,” an expression directed not only to her abilities, but to her artistry as a whole, her monstrous being and self-expression (S2E10: 38:25). After her performance at Wasteland Weekend, the Boulets and Vander provide feedback to Biqtch. Vander remarks, “There’s something that just draws my eye to you and there’s an energy that kind of emanates from within you that’s so real, I can tell you’re having a good time and you’re having fun, and so I have a good time and I have fun with you,” to which Dracmorda follows with, “You’re a punk bitch and it’s fun to watch,” high praise not only to Biqtch’s abilities, but to her innate monstrous quality to grab attention and engage
with her audience (S2E8: 22:35). To the final three monsters of the first season, the Boulets state the following about their finale floor show:

**Dracmorda:** Ladies, your floor show was absolutely breathtaking. You excited us, you thrilled us, you looked gorgeous, you scared us, you disgusted us. It was everything we’ve been looking for this whole competition.

**Swanthula:** It was brilliant, we got a little birds eye view into your nightmares, your horrors, and your most glamourous moments, it’s really what this competition is about. Sort of celebrating the uncelebrated, and we love you for it. (S1E6: 42:15)

The Boulets continue to praise Melissa’s risk taking blasphemy, Frankie’s ability to develop as an artist, and Vander’s commitment despite her lack of professional experiences, recognizing the value in the artistry of the monsters that many others have not or would shy away from, or worse. And while these are instances of larger praise, the Boulets consistently take opportunities to honor the revolting, the beautiful, and the abject artistry of their monsters, always finding a fragment to appreciate.

It is easy to say that the Boulet’s celebrate the artistry of their monsters, to see it or read it is something much more special. To live it must be rapture. Through their engagement in a variety of embodied practices through the processes of *Dragula*, the monsters come to know praise and approval for their queerness, an acknowledgement many have gone for so long without. *Dragula* represents a radical rearticulation of the monstrous body and an elevation of alternative drag artistry, along with those who engage with both. Through this rearticulation and elevation comes knowledge of the monstrous body as a divine, radical queer opportunity, rather than a burden or a threat. The monstrous body need not maintain a pristineness that so few can truly achieve, nor must it constrain its innate urges or expressions in fear of retaliation. The monstrous body is one of high queer value, a fragment of real queer knowledge that, according to
the monsters here, can be attained by all if only they seek to realize it their subjective, embodied form. It is a knowledge of queer construction, one which the monsters dictate through their own participation, one that rebukes other knowledges in favor of their own evolving knowing, both shared and individual. It is a knowledge of the limits and possibilities of one’s own body, to envision a valued form and achieve it, and act through it to find praise from oneself and others who recognize the sacred queerness of liberation and the strange.
Holman Jones and Harris (2016), like myself, find interest in the queer, the embodied, and the monstrous. In their consideration of the queer opportunities of monstrous bodies, they conclude on the following,

Queer monsters must stop running. Must turn around. Must face those who would kill us, chase us out past the city walls. Must face ourselves in the dark mirror of others’ shunning of us, remembering that shunning is a reflection of how we might redefine a life worth living... We know that monsters can be more than scary. More than scapegoats. More than the terrifying reflection in that clear, clear pool. Monsters can be spirit guides who take your hand when you’re fearful and lead you to extraordinary places. Beyond the known world, monstrously queer warriors push on into the dark and unknown territories of our minds, bodies and dreams. We in our difference are messengers of the extraordinary. (2016: 528)

In my analysis of The Boulet Brothers' Dragula, I find that the monstrous messengers of the extraordinary represented have turned around and started to fight back, not as only as individuals, but as a powerful and radical collective. I find that the platform of Dragula is an alternative media source which seeks to elevate the subjugated artistries of radical queer “monster” performers, doing so through critical knowledge building and a participatory (re)construction of monstrosity. The monsters show through their engagement of alternative drag artistry that the monstrous body is a queer opportunity, one that allows for queer knowing, being, becoming, and experiencing through radical monstrous embodiment. I propose an embodied and
rearticulated view of monsters: monsters of approbation or praise, moving past Cohen’s (2007) analysis of monstrous projections to self-actualized, embodied monsters. In considering an alternative space where monsters are the expected and evolving norm, there is little room for prohibition, but rather allowance, as seen through the participatory system constructed and evolved through embodiment. Humanity and monstrosity are both recognized, sameness and difference connect the monsters. They identify with categories of queer, drag artist, and Supermonster and bring their own expressions and experiences of each. I find that through embracing and embodying the personal and shared ideal of the Drag Supermonster, the monsters of Dragula are able to project a part of their selves to the world, that integral fragment of their identity that has been prohibited by society and their surroundings that needs to be released in some fashion and thus finding praise in a system of monsters. The monsters of Dragula are not mere spectacles of freakery, hedonism, or depravity. The monsters of Dragula engage in escapism themselves, though the process and practices of their monstrous embodiment is not mystified or inaccessible. They are people engaging in practices outside the norm, representing their queer and artistic difference through radical self-expression and alternative aesthetics in a space that allows such representation.

I find the representations of the monsters of Dragula to be, as the Boulets might muse, vile, disgusting, and perfect. It’s easy to watch a program like Dragula and see unabashed hedonism, blasphemy, and sexual depravity. Vander did force herself to puke on that runway, Biqch did drink mop water, and Louisianna stapled three dollars to her thigh. But Hollow says about her performance of monster drag, “all I want to do is unlock every cage I have ever been put into, so that someday I can finally fuckin’ be free” (S3E10: 27:29). James recounts to the
Boulets, “being a monster isn’t just what you see or what you present right away. It’s a way of life and who you are (S2E10: 21:23). Much like those engaging in extreme bodily actions in Kosut’s (2010) study, or the nonmainstream body modifiers in Thomas’s (2012) work, the monsters of Dragula represent people who live life somewhere out of what many consider the norm. Throughout the course of the program, the Boulet Brothers explicate what they are attempting to produce. In season three’s “Last Supper,” Swanthula notes they look to bring on drag artists seeking to push their boundaries, thrill seekers and pain freaks alike. In season one’s “Finale,” they state their goal to celebrate the uncelebrated in the world of drag expression. In the premiere of the second season, “Cenobites,” they wish to provide a space for drag as a radical queer form of expression, to praise “the strange, and the wild, and the sometimes dangerous side of queer culture” (S2E1: 7:39). The experiences and narratives of those who heed these calls have largely gone unrepresented, or represented in mainstream spaces with ridicule, alienation, or misunderstanding. Dragula offers a platform to articulate the understandings of these subjugated queer voices, what motivates them to perform alternative forms of drag artistry, what energy is released and found in the real experience of embodying your monster. In itself, it is a rearticulation of experience, of monsters, and of queer representation. To some degree the monsters fit Parsemain’s (2019) assertion of a “proper distance” of queer televised representation that is attainable, providing opportunities for empathetic and relatable connection. However, I find that the monsters of Dragula, being the Boulets and the monstrous artists they invite, show no real interest for anything proper or distant, but rather wish to express their artistries and radical, lived experiences in their most visceral, rule breaking forms. My analysis seeks to show how queer televised platforms may still value the radical nature of these monsters’ expressions,
queerness and humanity while providing engaging and insightful entertainment. In considering *Dragula* as an alternative and participatory queer media platform, the placement of a multiplicity of subjugated queer voices and their worthy experiences of expression come to the forefront, allowing their stories and lives to be portrayed in a way that is engaging and true.

In his sixth thesis of monster culture, Cohen (2007) laments on the escapist spectacle of monsters onscreen and in literature, particularly the comfort found in knowing the monster will be vanquished, that one will leave the content to return to their world free of monstrous threat. He warns against the neutralization of monsters to better represent a more desirable and less threatening beast, though notes the enticing complexity and fluidity of the monster as a symbol, simultaneously representing something far and close. Monsters overall are representative of humanity and human knowledge, the result of social and cultural processes. And while the representations of monstrosity within *Dragula* do lend to spectacle, they also represent escapist opportunity for not only viewers but the monsters themselves. For audiences, *Dragula* may function as a fun pastime, a weekend binge, or their favorite show to put on in the background. Escapism in the normative sense is fine. But the monsters engage in escape as well, providing riveting displays of what is possible through the art of drag and the acceptance of monstrous embodiment. The monsters represent what is close and what is far. They are humans engaged in their professions, representing real human experiences. Some of these experiences are based in subjugation and alterity, which viewers may empathize with or relate to, as well as experiences of health, family, and other issues. These are queer individuals who are creating their place in the world, people with goals and connections to doing what they love. But they also represent something far, but not completely inaccessible. The experience of a monster is relative, personal.
Only Biqtch Puddin’ or Louisianna Purchase may fully experience their own monstrosity, the rest of us are merely receiving the message, interpreting the interpretation. But the monster is an opportunity, a queer process through the art of alternative drag, an invitation to bring your own monstrous experience into the fold. Through reframing escape as an embodied and praised practice, Dragula and its monsters challenge the notion of monstrous spectacle, providing an astounding, disgusting, radical, and sometimes heartfelt and relatable representation of monsters, of people. The monsters may be vanquished or “exterminated,” but they always return, and the monster will always escape in their own way, refusing to be neutralized in their expression of human knowledge and experience.

As monsters of approbation, the monsters of Dragula are allowed multiple active opportunities of personal becoming and materialization, thus becoming their own discursive entities of queer experience and monstrosity (Barad 2003). I have explicated on the processes and practices of embodying monstrosity located within the platform of Dragula, including multiple examples and narratives of each theme. Bodies are the site of becoming in a culmination of ways. Bodies serve as the site for interpretation and inscription of meaning and symbolism. Bodies are also the site of transformation, adaptation, variation, and channeling. Forbidden and extreme acts and channeling serve to push boundaries and show commitment to monstrous performance, while bodies are also the location of experience and lived reality. These affordances of the body may culminate to instances of escape or epiphany, a revelation of monstrous expression for a monster, letting the “it” inside out in a personal way. When “it” is let out, especially when done in a revelatory or energetic fashion relative to the monster, the expression of monstrosity is praised, the subject of approbation, accomplishment, and allowance.
In a community and platform where monsters are expected as the norm, an exciting or shocking display of filth, horror, and glamour is something to be lauded, something to attain and strive for. There is humanity in abject horror, there is experience in filth, and glamour can embrace the tragic and broken. The monster is a queer opportunity, a symbol for what is possible and expressible in everyone. The representation of these queer bodies is one of critical knowledge building, a participatory attempt to elevate and approbate the bodies and lived experiences of these monster drag artists, to rearticulate their artistry, their lives, and their embodied knowledge of the monstrous in a radical, positive way.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

EPISODE INFORMATION FOR EACH SEASON

OF THE BOULET BROTHERS' DRAGULA
Season One of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula* (2016-2017)

Contestants: Vander Von Odd, Melissa Befierce, Frankie Doom, Meatball, Xochi Mochi, Loris, Foxie Adjuia, Ursula Major, and Pinche

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<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Theme and Challenge</th>
<th>Extermination</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Wickedest Witch”</td>
<td>The bottom three monsters are buried alive and told to keep their hands to their sides as they are subjected to water, insects, and dirt being thrown in their faces.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The monsters must interpret their own version of the Wicked Witch of the West from <em>The Wizard of Oz</em> and perform a melting scene when splashed with a bucket of water on stage.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>“80’s Female Wrestler”</td>
<td>The bottom three monsters must wrestle in pairs in a shallow pool of mud and embody the fighting spirit of their personas.</td>
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<td>The monsters must model and perform their interpretation of an 80’s wrestler persona in the tradition of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling (GLOW).</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>“Zombies in Death Valley”</td>
<td>The bottom three monsters must eat pig brains without using their hands.</td>
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<td>The monsters must create zombie looks and perform in Death Valley, while also filming a short kill scene with a human victim.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>“Pretty, Pink, Fishy Drag”</td>
<td>All six monsters must perform and sustain a lip-sync performance of “Nails” by Alaska Thunderfuck while having food and other objects thrown at them by their fellow monsters.</td>
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<td>The monsters are challenged to model drag that is pink, femme, and basic.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>“Trannyshack Club”</td>
<td>All four monsters are challenged to create a seamonster look and participate in a photoshoot in the cold waters of the San Francisco Bay.</td>
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<td>The monsters perform individual lip-sync performances for an audience at Heklina’s San Francisco club show “Mother,” formerly known as “Trannyshack.”</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>“Finale”</td>
<td>The final three monsters must showcase and perform their interpretations of glamour, filth, and horror in three separate showings on the mainstage to decide the winner of the season.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The exterminated monsters return and join the final three monsters in the Last Supper. The monsters reflect on their season and the final three monsters receive feedback as they prepare for their finale</td>
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floor show. The final three monsters must model and perform in the finale floor show.

Season Two of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula* (2017-2018)

Contestants: Biqtch Puddin’, Victoria Elizabeth Black, James Majesty, Abhora, Disasterina, Erika Klash, Dahli, Kendra Onixxx, Monikkie Shame, Felony Dodger

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<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Cenobites”</td>
<td>The bottom three monsters must endure flesh piercing needles to their arms, shoulders, chest, and collar areas by a professional piercer.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The monsters must showcase their interpretation of a cenobite from the <em>Hellraiser</em> franchise and relate it specifically to their own style of drag.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>“Ghost Town Ghouls”</td>
<td>The bottom six monsters are placed into pairs and must engage in close-range paintball duels.</td>
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<td>The monsters must perform as and show the narratives of ghosts from an Old West setting.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>“Shock Rock and Metal”</td>
<td>The bottom two monsters must choose and receive trashy, regrettable tattoos.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The monsters are placed into two teams and must curate and perform punk lip-sync band performances of “Pissed Away” by Suckerpunch. Individually, the monsters must model rocker drag on the mainstage.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>“Sci-Fi Babes”</td>
<td>The bottom three monsters must consume and endure three rounds of alien foods.</td>
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<td>The monsters must showcase and perform their sci-fi manifestations in the floor show. Each monster must also perform an alien birth and design an alien baby to match their sci-fi embodiment.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>“Scream Queens”</td>
<td>The bottom three monsters are asked a series of questions by the judges and answer during their judgement. These monsters are then subjected to the same questions with a polygraph machine in front of their fellow monsters.</td>
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<td>The monsters must create and showcase their scream queer personas in a cabin and wooded setting. They also act in short slasher death scenes playing the victim to a serial killer.</td>
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6  **“Gothic Brides”**  
The monsters must showcase gothic bride looks and perform a lip-sync performance to “Gutter Glitter” by Switchblade Symphony. The monsters must also design fans to showcase in their performances.  
The bottom three monsters must stand with their feet submerged in buckets of ice for half an hour.

7  **“Welcome to Wasteland (Part 1)”**  
The monsters must create post-apocalyptic performance looks and participate in a photoshoot in the desert heat.

8  **“Welcome to Wasteland (Part 2)”**  
The monsters curate a performance as a group for a tough audience at the Wasteland Weekend festival.  
All four monsters fight as their apocalyptic personas in pairs in the Wasteland Weekend Thunderdome.

9  **“Last Supper”**  
The exterminated monsters return for a brief floor show and join the final three monsters in the Last Supper. The monsters reflect on their season and the final three monsters receive feedback as they prepare for their finale floor show.

10  **“Finale”**  
The final three monsters must model and perform in the finale floor show.  
The final three monsters must showcase and perform their interpretations of glamour, filth, and horror in three separate showings on the mainstage to decide the winner of the season.

Season Three of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula (2019)*

Contestants: Landon Cider, Dollya Black, Priscilla Chambers, Louisianna Purchase, Evah Destruction, Maddelynn Hatter, Hollow Eve, Maxi Glamour, Yovska, St. Lucia (SAINT), Violencia!

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<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“The Lesser of Two Evils”</td>
<td>The monsters must showcase supervillain manifestations in the floor show.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>“Don’t Suck”</td>
<td>The monsters must perform a</td>
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<td>grotesque burlesque as vampires and incorporate reveals into their stripteases. The monsters must also design fans to showcase in their performances.</td>
<td>must consume cow organs and cow’s blood.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>“Drag Monsters of Rock”</td>
<td>The monsters are placed into two teams and must curate and perform punk lip-sync band performances of “Into to Hell-House of Whores” by The Dirty Horror. Individually, the monsters must model rocker drag on the mainstage.</td>
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<td>The bottom three monsters must choose trashy, regrettable tattoos for their fellow bottom monsters and receive ones chosen for them.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>“The Demons Blood”</td>
<td>The monsters must showcase their predetermined Dungeons &amp; Dragons characters in a renaissance and wooded setting. The monsters must also act out campaign scenes with their fellow monsters.</td>
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<td>The bottom two monsters must beg not to be eliminated to their fellow monsters as insults and food are thrown at them.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>“No Throw Aways, Not Recycled”</td>
<td>The monsters must showcase looks made completely from trash, as well as doing their makeup in permanent marker and construction paper. The monsters must also participate in an interview with special fashion correspondent Disasterina.</td>
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<td>The bottom six monsters are paired together and must compete by blowing a live roach back in forth through a tube until it is blown into a competitor’s mouth.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>“The Operating Theatre”</td>
<td>The monsters must create looks reminiscent of medical and hospital horrors and perform on the mainstage. The monsters must also participate in a photoshoot in an abandoned hospital setting for Alternative Press.</td>
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<td>The bottom two monsters must remove body parts from a cadaver surrounded by metal and endure 6,000 volts through a shock collar when a mistake is made.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>“Le Freak”</td>
<td>The monsters must create looks inspired by sideshow freaks and perform sideshow acts on the mainstage.</td>
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<td>The bottom three monsters are challenged to staple as much money to their body as they can with a staple gun in</td>
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monsters must also incorporate new wigs from Arda Wigs into their looks.

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<td></td>
<td>The monsters must recreate and elevate classic Halloween costume archetypes and compete in a group lip-sync of “Dread” by Ritual Aesthetic. The monsters must also design pumpkins that match their mainstage presentations.</td>
<td>All four monsters must endure a haunted house with rough touch actors, traps, and bags over their heads in search for an invitation to the finale.</td>
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<td>“Halloween Haunt”</td>
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<td>The exterminated monsters return and join the final three monsters in the Last Supper. The monsters reflect on their season and the final three monsters receive feedback as they prepare for their finale floor show.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The Grand Finale”</td>
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