8 A Camp Fairy Tale

The Dirty Class of John Waters' *Desperate Living*

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Filth is my politics, filth is my life
take whatever you like.

Divine

Dealing with the poor people is a waste of time.

Queen Carlotta

A very elegant table, set with silverware and bone china plates positioned next to a bouquet of red roses, is the image that inaugurates the title sequence of John Waters' *Desperate Living* (1977). A puffy brown hand enters the image from off-screen left, pouring red wine into one of two stem glasses beside the plate. The person who is pouring the wine, we start to imagine, is standing in the position of someone serving at the polished table. Shortly after, a second hand, this time white and thin with coral pink nail polish, enters the screen from lower right, in front of the plate, reaching towards the wine glass and bringing it off-screen to be drunk – or so we are left to imagine – by the person who is sitting at the dining table. The glass is brought back and both white hands enter the image to take hold of the napkin, elegantly wrapped in a napkin ring at the center of the plate. From the left, the servant's bare brown hand comes back into the picture bringing off-screen the plates and a single silver spoon: the meal is finally served and consists of a dead cooked rat served on fine china, laid on lettuce and adorned with red cherry tomatoes winking in harmonic symmetry with the six red roses in the bouquet. The white hand is back and proceeds to season the meal with salt before cutting a small piece with the knife and bringing it off-screen to be eaten – or at least so we suppose – by the dining person. The entire scene is introduced by an old-fashioned dramatic musical piece with thematic crescendos of violin, piano and flute.[1]

This sequence is, literally, a foretaste of the film *Desperate Living*. It introduces the colors, the tone, the imagery, and the flavor of the film: the taste of a cooked rat surrounded with tomatoes and beautiful objects. It introduces, also, body parts of two of its protagonists – Grizelda Brown (Jean Hill) and Peggy Gravel (Mink Stole) – and the power

relation between them as mistress and maid. It introduces, as well, class as the pivotal theme underlying the entire film, a theme that will be carefully orchestrated by means of a fantastic symphony of camp references.

The phantasmagoria of filth imagined by John Waters, and embodied in the city of Mortville in *Desperate Living*, is in a sense a camp fairy tale about class struggle. It is a political statement adorned with mud and performed by scum, sinking in queasiness, generating in the spectator both repulsion and a queer form of recognition. It is a camp critique of the very notion of value underlying social structures of exploitation, social control, hygiene, sexuality and work. It is a passionate homage to a culture of "waste," dragging in, as we see, even the "waste of history" to be found in American culture.

In the stratification of such waste, in the moldy accumulation of repulsive wonders, there seems to be something crucial to both the political critique articulated by John Waters and to a reflection on a counter-concept of camp, as advanced by the editors of this volume, who have invited us to open up the sensual, ancient, political relation between camp and dirt, so as to explore both its intrinsic potential of resistance and the materiality of its unacknowledgeable pleasure.

Once upon a Time in Maryland

Once upon a time there was a town called Mortville somewhere in Maryland. In Mortville, a population of social outcasts – various criminals, along with other citizens cast aside by society as "perverts" – lived in conditions of extreme poverty and hygienic degradation, in a slum built with garbage and found materials, but painted in bright colours and decorated like a decadent children's playground, or a travelling circus. The inhabitants of Mortville lived under the sovereign power of Queen Carlotta (Edith Massey), a cruel creature concerned only with the satisfaction of her own whims (such as devouring elaborate sweets and being sexually aroused by a gang of sadomasochist [S/M] leather goons), and torturing her subjects with bizarre and humiliating royal proclamations. This derelict and fantastic town is the place where Grizelda the maid and Peggy the bourgeois neurotic lady (whose hands we have seen in the title sequence) escape to after having been accomplices in the murder of Peggy's husband, suffocated under the weight of Grizelda's huge backside. For the price of a few dollars and a Maryland lottery ticket, Grizelda and Peggy rent a room in Mortville in a shack inhabited by the lesbian couple Mole McHenry (Susan Lowe), a former wrestler who identifies as a man trapped in a woman's body, and bombshell Muffy St. Jacques (Liz Renay), "the most beautiful woman in Mortville," formerly a respectable housewife who arrived in Mortville after smothering her child's acid-tripping baby-sitter in a bowl of dog food. The lottery ticket will turn out to be a winning one, and with the money provided by the

Maryland lottery Mole will reach Baltimore to buy weapons for her revolutionary project and have a sex-change done at Johns Hopkins. Mole's decision to have a penis, however, will not be appreciated by her lover Muffy, who will demand the truncation of Mole's new body part in one of the most heartbreaking moments of the tale.

In the meantime, in Mortville, not only do Grizelda and Peggy reverse their relation of power, but they also become lovers, and start participating in the queer social life of the town. Meanwhile, the Queen's daughter, Princess Coo-Coo (Mary Vivian Pearce) escapes her mother's clutches in order to marry a nudist garbage man against her mother's will, and is chased around town by the Queen's boys, the same who regularly serve also to gratify Carlotta's utterly heterosexual desire. Whereas Grizelda dies trying to protect the fugitive Princess Coo-Coo and to fight back against Queen Carlotta's power in solidarity with the other queer citizens of Mortville, the "social climber" bourgeois Peggy betrays the group of "sisters" and becomes the Queen's best ally, putting her own madness at the service of cruel sovereign power, collaborating with the Queen to spread rabies among the citizens of Mortville. To this end, Peggy prepares a witch-like steamy cauldron of "rabid bat pus" and "little rat piss," and injects Princess Coo-Coo with it, with the plan to send her onto the streets of Mortville to spread the disease among the population. Before the project can be completely accomplished, however, the gang of lesbians (led by Mole and Muffy) have already organized their revolutionary armed struggle. Finally, they take over the Queen's Palace, murdering both her and Peggy, and declaring "the day of independence" to the denizens of Mortville. In the feast that follows the takeover of the palace, the derelict crowd celebrates the successful revolution with a collective ritual banquet, eating "the biggest turkey in the world": her majesty Queen Carlotta, cooked like a pig and adorned very much like the rat that was served on the fine platter at the beginning of the fairy tale.

A Matter of Taste

Significantly, for the spectator, both the first and the last encounter with the language by which *Desperate Living* articulates such a phantasmagoria of filth and class struggle is a matter of *taste*. However, we are not confronted simply with a question of "bad" or "good taste" (a question long associated with the aesthetics of John Waters, famously awarded the title of "The Baron of Bad Taste"),[2] but with the very materiality of taste: in the movie, taste appears first and foremost as "flavor," and defines less an attitude of (personal or universal) judgment or inclination than an embodied relation with experience. Hence, from the first sequence on, taste is reconfigured in the film in specific relation to both pleasure and repulsion, as the field of a conflict between the two, and

serves as a complex tool for the creation of the imagery in which the film's narrative and politics take place.

A few years before *Desperate Living*, in a 1971 text Roland Barthes had described in precise terms the crucial position of taste in both the political project and the imagery of Charles Fourier, pointing to a politics of use for the notion of "taste" which resonates interestingly in relation to the context we are observing:

> The combination of differences implies the respecting of the individuation of each term: there is no attempt to redress, to correct, to annul taste, whatever it may be (however "bizarre" it may be); quite the contrary, it is affirmed, it is emphasized, it is recognized, it is legalized, it is reinforced by associating everyone who wishes to indulge it: taste being thus incorporated, it is allowed to act in opposition to other tastes at once affirmative and different.
>
> (99)

In Fourier's utopia, the realm of Harmony is one in which passion (character, taste, mania) is irreducible, and at the same time is the basis for a combinatory logic in which a new linguistic order can be established and played with. By liberating the absolute legitimacy of taste ("however 'bizarre' it may be" 99), Fourier conceived of a new social world in which "association" would not be regulated by a humanistic principle of understanding or tolerance, nor by narcissistic recognition of sameness; rather, such association would be triggered by contrast and conflict, and be grounded in and nourished by an idea of excessive pleasure (Barthes 100).

The context in which Barthes speculates on Fourier is a broader reflection on writing as pleasure and as excess, bringing together the figures of three different writers – Sade, Fourier, Loyola – that in Barthes' analysis are abstracted from the traditional economies of meaning in which they are commonly received and normalized (namely, sadism, political utopia, and religion), and observed first and foremost in light of their common trait: their respective formulation of new linguistic systems (5). Furthermore, none of these linguistic systems are aimed at communication, but at creative invention, through the pleasure of assemblage and combination according to alternative logics functioning beyond the prominence of meaning. Such formulations, Barthes emphasizes, are elaborated in the writing of all three by means of a strong, preliminary detachment from "the other common, idle, outmoded language, whose 'noise' might hinder it" (4) and through the invention of an isolated space which the new language can inhabit in its excess. A crucial operation, in all three cases, presides over such an invention: *theatricalization*, "not designing a setting for representation, but unlimiting the language" (5–6).

Along the same lines, I propose to read John Waters' phantasmagoria as a relentless linguistic invention, functioning as well through assemblages

and combinations separating the realm of Mortville from the ordinary domain of meaning, and defining it as a space of excess in which taste "is allowed to act in opposition to other tastes at once affirmative and different" (99). In *Desperate Living*, Mortville is the isolated space inhabited by a different "language of natural reality"[3] (to recall the terms in which Pasolini, an author especially dear to Waters,[4] described the domain of reality out of which the filmic text is composed), one functioning according to a logic of discourse characterized by pleasure and its excess: affirmative and yet different.

Mortville, then, is the realm of a struggle for the power of, and the right to, pleasure, a struggle not only encompassing the revolutionary happenings in the narrative, but investing the very textual and visual language in which the story is narrated. This struggle, in fact, is not only – or not primarily – enacted in the movie through the narrative (which, however, encompasses the tale of a paradoxical coup by a group of *lumpenproletariat* and the overthrowing of Queen Carlotta's monarchic and Peggy Gravel's bourgeois power), but more importantly through an operation of theatricalization which – as in the case of Sade, Fourier and Loyola – serves to unlimit the language and make it function beyond representation. It is an operation which re-opens language to the possibility of experimenting with what pleasure, or repulsion, may be after all; an operation of struggle *within* the language of reality against what can be understood as the sovereignty of meaning, as well as the sovereignty of the bourgeois codes of sexuality, hygiene and décor.

John Waters' training in the craft of such theatricalization had started quite early in his artistic career, and we could perhaps trace it back to his experience, as an adolescent, of performing puppet shows at children's birthday parties in Baltimore (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 139). A few years later, such theatrical apprenticeship can be seen as continuing with the establishment of a "repertory company" (The Dreamlanders),[5] composed mainly of friends and acquaintances of Waters' youth (such as Divine, Mary Vivian Pearce, Mink Stole, David Lochary, Edith Massey) who perform in all Waters' 1960s and 1970s movies, as a stock of "typical characters," and as a queer family of recognizable personas.[6]

Curiously, since its start, Waters' theatrical apprenticeship (which would culminate in 1964 with the beginning of his work with 8mm films) seems to have gone hand in hand with a consistent interest in two directions: the domain of fairy tales and camp taste. If during his adolescence one of Waters' most popular puppet theatre shows was *Cinderella*, even more significant is his 1967 aborted project – and, afterwards, his long cherished idea – to realize a sequel to *The Wizard of Oz*,[7] whose title would be *Dorothy, the Kansas City Pothead*. In this sequel, Dorothy would return to Oz tired of living a life in Kansas far from magic shoes, green-skinned witches, and gay lions. Going back to her hallucinatory dreamworld, Dorothy would find in Oz a place which is at the same time

exciting and frightening, and which is just about "everything that it is the point of going to the movies."[8]

Fairy tales and camp, in a sense, stand at the core of John Waters' theatrical invention of film language, but Waters experiments with both, adding to the picture a crucial element, one that functions as the core engine of his political critique, and of his queer politics. This element, recalling Waters' own vocabulary, is filth.

Fairy Tale, Camp and Filth

In *Desperate Living*, the structure of the fairy tale functions as an amusement park for Waters' camp invention, and such an encounter seems to suggest that the basic functioning of camp is intrinsically kindred to the fairy tale domain. Both conjure alternative linguistic orders (or counter-orders) of discourse in which a legendary quality surrounds objects, images, behaviors, and makes them "extraordinary" for those who encounter them. In order to perform such a function, as Fabio Cleto put it, camp circumscribes an "indiscrete relation between the object and the gaze, improvising a space of performance, a mobile complicity and a sense of solidarity" (10). Furthermore, camp establishes and sustains a "domestic economy" of sorts, in which such complicity and solidarity can take place. I take the word *economy*, here, in its direct etymological connection with the idea of *oikos*: as the household management, the setting up of a dwelling and the way of its being inhabited. Camp generates a linguistic habitat in which images and signs not only appear, but actually function as in a theatrical masquerade: like in fairy tales, camp casts a spell for a specific *oikos* of properties, affects, forms of pleasure, in an extended suspension of "reality," or at least of plausibility.

Desperate Living is a very good example to explore the way in which such a "domestic economy" entails *sustenance in time* of a particular kind of "complicity" and "solidarity" between the gaze and the object, in camp, or perhaps I should better say: in the kind of camp discussed in these pages. The particular time and place (the 1970s New York underground cinema) in which the movie was shot is an interesting locus for reflecting on different "uses of camp" (recalling Andrew Ross' famous essay),[9] and on the potential for resistance that such *sustenance in time* stood for. In fact, in 1977, camp was on its way to reach the peak of its market value through its incorporation into standards of glamour, pop culture and style: the 1970s work of Andy Warhol and the mainstream exposure of his eccentric "underground" crowd at the Factory had been one of the powerful vehicles for such a valorization.[10]

In 1964, thirteen years before *Desperate Living*, Susan Sontag had famously named and reflected on the idea of camp in fifty-eight significant notes that have to this day been a crucial reference point for all those who have engaged with camp since. Sontag's essay, as argued elsewhere,[11] certainly contributed to and participated in the complex shift that the

concept of camp underwent since the mid-1960s (and especially after the 1960s), and in this shift the notion of taste is interestingly mobilized. In the introduction to "Notes on Camp," Sontag discussed the notion of taste as quasi-synonymous with sensibility, a term she would often associate in her provisional definitions with the fugitive idea of camp. According to Sontag, "to patronize the faculty of taste is to patronize oneself. For taste governs every free as opposed to rote human response" (276). If such a statement proves especially interesting when confronted with John Waters' work (where taste stands in a very close relation to filth, countering bourgeois patronizing along with any moral judgment that claims the legitimacy of repulsion), Sontag's general discussion of taste as an ineffable, ephemeral, fugitive phenomenon stands in ambivalent relation with what I understand as the *materiality of taste* informing John Waters' cinema. Such a materiality entails a bodily persistence, evoking the flesh of what we could call the downside of an "affluent society" in which, according to Sontag, "by nature camp is possible" (289).

The Downside of Glamour: A Utopia of Taste

As in most of John Waters' movies of the 1960s and 1970s, in *Desperate Living* "filth" functions precisely as a reminder of such a downside of glamour, of the materiality and duration of the class divide in affluent American society, of the side-show acts in which a population of "freaks" was performing far from – or close to but invisible in – Baltimore's happily regulated suburbia. Filth is in Waters a peculiar engine of camp play that triggers repulsion and disgust, and at the same time a sense of wonder on the part of the viewer. The character of Divine (missing in the film, along with David Lochary, who had passed away from a drug overdose a few months before the shooting) is in a sense the most emblematic embodiment of such filth and such wonder.

In *Desperate Living*, Mortville is an unhygienic space described by Hoberman and Rosenbaum as a "Technicolor Dogpatch […] built out of moldy patchwork quilts" and "littered with derelict cars which have been covered with moronic, crudely drawn psychedelic patterns" (167). Many of the movie's background actors had been recruited by Waters among "Baltimore's skid row" (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 167), and the room which Grizelda and Peggy will rent in Mole's house and in which they will make love is occupied, at their arrival, by a corpse lying in blood on the bed. The whole setting of the town reminds one of a cheap amusement fair, and this feeling is enhanced by the outfits of the inhabitants who, in accordance with Queen Carlotta's diktat, are obliged to walk in the streets of Mortville in costumes looking "just like they really are." Hence, shortly after their installment in the realm of Mortville, Grizelda and Peggy also go through a transformation of their appearance, giving up their previous maid's uniform and elegant bourgeoisie dress for circus-like glittering costumes and grotesque make-up.

If an attraction to filth, disgust and queasiness characterizes the entire corpus of Waters' film work (one of his movies' most notable scenes is that of Divine eating a fresh turd in her fight for the title of "the Filthiest Person Alive" in *Pink Flamingos*), in *Desperate Living,* filth seems to be orchestrated through the frame of the fairy tale for specific reasons: the camp phantasmagoria carries on an encoded, but recognizable imagery. John Waters' politics of use with regard to taste informs both the time and the space of its narrative: in its intrinsic separateness from the world, its fantastic displacement from reality, Mortville is, indeed, no-place, hence, literally, it is a *utopia of taste.* As in Charles Fourier's hygienic utopia no garbage, dirt or filth was supposed to disturb Harmony's communal life of pleasures (where neither desire nor taste were considered "perversion"), so in Mortville the architecture of filth stands as the embodiment of a bizarre utopia of taste: everything considered perverse, abject or shameful – according to the parameters of bourgeois décor – finds a shelter there.

It is in accordance with this principle that in Mortville, not only is the population subjected to the Queen's bizarre tastes, but at the same time, a queer sexuality happily flourishes alongside a nudist lifestyle where Muffy's fantasy of becoming a diva, and Mole's painful desire to be a man coexist and become the base for a queer form of home. It is in this rotten and extraordinary space that a group of leather boys play "pervert" tricks with the overweight cantankerous Queen Carlotta, while also experiencing forms of intimacy among themselves. It is in this fantastic place that Grizelda, the brown maid who initially entered the fairy tale as the "helper" (helping Peggy to kill the husband who was trying to tame her madness with tranquillizers), becomes in a sense the hero of the story, sacrificing her life for the cause of the solidarity that she has embraced in Mortville. She is the same hero of taste who enjoys, in a filthy bed (where a corpse was lying shortly before), an intense experience of sexual pleasure in which she offers the taste of her own body to the enjoyment of her previous employer Peggy, who – on her part – in the realm of Mortville abandons herself to the taste of Grizelda's pussy, forgetful – at least for this long sequence – of her own neurosis, heterosexuality and bourgeois hygiene.

It is also in accordance with such a utopia of taste that, at the end of the film, sovereign power is cannibalized by the crowd of desperate living citizens who have long been forced into starvation or, in the best cases, into feeding themselves with rats and cockroaches. Taste becomes here the engine for the cruel fairy tale ending with the moral: "eat the rich."

Backwards Day, or a Waste of Time

A close observer will notice that the entire language of *Desperate Living* is crowded with riddles for the spectator, or more precisely, that Waters has disseminated in the film a multiplicity of clues to a

certain appreciation of his "fairy-tale for fucked up children" (Waters in Hoberman and Rosenbaum 165). At the beginning of the movie, Peggy shouts hysterically at the children playing in her garden that her house is not "some communist day-care center" in which a "malicious destruction of property" is allowed; afterwards, Princess Coo-Coo is proclaimed by Peggy "the proud owner of rabies," and the latter is also accused by Mole of being a "social climber" when she allies with the Queen, aspiring to become the new princess. The whole film seems to be subtly orchestrated through camp references to a question of class, the most significant among which is Queen Carlotta's line in a conversation with Peggy which suggests – or at least so I take it – an interesting reading of the entire politics of filth enacted in *Desperate Living*: "My subjects are beyond contempt. Dealing with the poor people is a waste of time."

A *waste of time,* indeed, is what Mortville seems to be made up of in its queer appearance: in the town, we find, literally, a stratified waste of historical time in American culture. In other words, what John Waters "drags" into Mortville (back to the etymology of "drag" proposed by Elizabeth Freeman, as having strong associations with "retrogression, delay and the pull of the past upon the present," 728) are a series of visual references belonging to a specific past of American culture and its relation with poverty, as well as with fairy tales: the 1930s. To be more precise, *Desperate Living* brings inside its imagery and offers to the spectator a phantasmagoria of three instances of the 1930s visual repertoire.

The first, which I mentioned earlier, is, of course, the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. The movie did not achieve great box office success when it appeared, but it received several awards such as the Best Original Song for "Over the Rainbow." The audience's appreciation of the movie, however, grew significantly after 1956 when it was first broadcast on television, which in the course of the 1950s had made its way into American houses, offering itself as a space for the mythological celebration of 1930s–1940s Hollywood cinema, while at the same time contributing to the productive crisis that the Hollywood industry had to face in the course of the 1960s. John Waters was a spectator of this film on television, as were an entire generation of queer artists growing up in the 1950s United States. In several interviews he remembers having adored this movie and his strong attachment to the "exciting and frightening world" it embodied.

The second visual reference is Tod Browning's 1932 *Freaks*, a dark fairy tale, in a sense, which by the 1970s had already long achieved a cult status in the midnight movies circuits where Waters' films were also usually screened (Hoberman and Rosenbaum). Shot with a cast of performers who, in the early 1930s, were still employed (and exploited) in the vanishing institutions of the freak-show and side-show, Browning's

movie is likewise a story of violence, power and wonder, and portrays the freaks living in shanty apartments and wagons in precarious conditions and in a sordid atmosphere.

The third and less explicit visual reference is, in a sense, an image of "natural reality" (echoing again Pasolini's expression) from American history, one which was "produced," as it were, at the same time as the two Hollywood movies previously mentioned, and which constitutes, indeed, the downside image of the 1930s American culture of glamour: the shameful urban experience of the "Hoovervilles." These were shanty towns built by the unemployed and other outcasts in America during the Great Depression, and nicknamed after the Republican President Herbert Hoover, considered largely responsible for the social degradation, homelessness and unemployment in the United States of the time. Very much like Mortville, the Hoovervilles were makeshift settlements built with found materials, hosting a derelict population squeezed together in extreme density of habitation, and living in unhygienic conditions (Lawson 72). Although not institutionally recognized, the shanty towns were nevertheless tolerated, and existing at the margins of the cities they had their own internal systems of power and governance. Significantly, a characteristic element in the Hoovervilles was garbage cans, which were employed in multiples ways, for example as building materials, as furniture, as cooking utensils, as sanitary services.

One of Queen Carlotta's eccentric royal proclamations, featuring prominently at the center of *Desperate Living*, concerns the "Backwards Day": following the queen's diktat the entire population of Mortville is obliged not only to wear their clothes backwards, but also to walk backwards in the street. Such an eccentric imposed habit, which transforms the streets of Mortville into the stage for a parade of strangely dressed weirdoes forced to walk without any direction to go, is also an interesting trick of language. It suggests an internal relation between these three references from 1930s fairy tale poverty, and their appearance in Mortville's camp phantasmagoria.

Desperate Living, in a sense, could itself be considered a "Backwards Day": on this special day, in 1977, as in a kaleidoscope, images of a discarded, disappeared, forgotten past – the Technicolor realm of Oz, the travelling circuses and freak show industry of the 1930s, the malaise of pre-New Deal America – were evoked as phantasms, and staged by John Waters in "a theatre of filth." All these images in the phantasmagoria of Mortville are, in a sense, still rotting, and still reappearing in their shanty glamour today. They feature as opening acts for the vicissitudes of the hero of this fairy tale.

The hero – "a four-hundred pounds Baltimore substitute teacher" (Hoberman 165) in her screen debut, a black woman who was working as a servant at the beginning of the movie, a "flaming creature"[12] dying out of solidarity in a moldy habitat – is the one we can recognize,

with wonder and repulsion alike, in the long scene of queer pleasure in which she praises the power of taste and the sensual pleasure of filth, while her image is doubled by footage of the porno-like orgasm of Muffy, who is making love to Mole in the room nearby. Indeed, in this moment, we can suddenly realize why camp, after all, is also a "stag movie seen without lust" (Sontag 278), but we confront, likewise, a queer form of attachment to the materiality of that pleasure, to its inhabiting of the screen and its overcoming of any sense of repulsion as if, indeed, the bedroom of love was a fairy castle and not a rotten shanty reeking of dead blood. The materiality of Grizelda's pleasure, as it were, has nothing ephemeral or fugitive to it; it is made to stay, in its excess, as one of the riddles of Waters' invented language in his fairy utopia of taste and revolution.

Notes

1 The soundtrack of *Desperate Living* was original, and composed by Chris Lobingier and Allen Yanus.
2 See for instance Michael Ehrhardt. "Of P'Town, the Pope, and Pink Flamingos." *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, vol. 17, no. 5, 2010, p. 10.
3 Pierpaolo Pasolini. *Empirismo Eretico*. Milan: Garzanti. 1972.
4 In an interview, John Waters says that Pasolini is for him like a "saint of the Catholic Church," in J. Waters, "Why You Should Watch Filth," 2011, bigthink.com/videos/why-you-should-watch-filth. Accessed 10 June 2015.
5 The name comes from John Waters' production company: Dreamland Productions.
6 On the character of the "repertory company" of The Dreamlanders, see Stefan Brecht, *The Original Theatre of the City of New York from the Mid-60s to the Mid-70s. Queer Theatre*, Book 2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978. On the notion of queer kinship and its functioning in the 1960s and 1970s underground social scene and artistic production in the United States, see Giulia Palladini, "Queer Kinship in the New York Underground: On the Life and Legend of Jackie Curtis." *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2011, pp. 126–153.
7 References to *The Wizard of Oz* can be found in many of Waters' early movies (such as *Female Troubles*, or *Pink Flamingos*) and are a crucial reference point also for *Desperate Living*.
8 "The Wizard of Oz: Commentary by John Waters": www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh2-x27Qm3M. Accessed 10 June 2015.
9 Andrew Ross. *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
10 Andy Warhol's work constitutes an interesting example of the interim space inhabited by camp in 1960s pop culture, and although the artist and his environment played a central part in the reconfiguring of the value of camp in mainstream culture, it is also worth noticing that during the 1960s and early 1970s a great part of Warhol's work (especially the one realized in collaboration with underground performing artists such as Jack Smith, Mario Montez, Jackie Curtis or Holly Woodlawn) was still very much embedded in the queer imagery and kinship experimented with in this context. For a detailed discussion of Warhol's camp, see Jennifer Doyle, and José Munoz et al., editors. *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. See also

Giulia Palladini. *The Scene of Foreplay: Theater, Labor and Leisure in 1960s New York*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2017.

11 See for instance, Fabio Cleto, "Intrigo Internazionale: spie pop e segreti chic degli anni Sessanta," in Cleto ed, *Pop/Camp*, p. 504.

12 Cf. Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creature*. On Jack Smith and his "burden of disgust" see Dominic Johnson, *Glorious Catastrophe. Jack Smith, Performance and Visual Culture*. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2012.

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