

Smells like Teen Vomit: Abjection, Unruliness, and Genre
in *Black Swan* and *Jennifer's Body*

Gender has long been associated with genre. In my paper, I want to examine two contemporary films, *Black Swan* (2010) and *Jennifer's Body* (2009), and think about the ways gender and genre behave appropriately or inappropriately. I chose these two films because they are both perhaps best categorized as horror films, but they blend genres such as melodrama and comedy. Although both films star women in relationships with other women, *Jennifer's Body* is written by Diablo Cody and directed by Karyn Kusama, while *Black Swan* is directed by Darren Aronofsky and written by three men. Although women are just as capable of internalizing dominant ideologies as men, I want to think about the changes in perspective a film directed and written by women might necessitate. One of the major differences on which I want to focus involves the secondary genres both films negotiate. While *Black Swan* is so excessive that it sometimes feels campy, it primarily mobilizes the genres of horror, melodrama, and soft core pornography.¹ *Jennifer's Body*, on the other hand, while it focuses on melodramatic categories like female friendship, leans more toward horror, teen flick, and comedy. Both films, however, focus on young women, sexuality, and bodily horror. By focusing on scenes that are similar between the two films and that deal with themes of abjection, such as relationships to food, vomiting, and non-normative sexual practices, I hope to examine the ways *Black Swan* and *Jennifer's Body* present femininity and whether those presentations are abject or unruly.

The concepts of unruliness and abjection have their own sorts of feminist genealogies,

¹ Amanda Klein notes the way *Black Swan* manipulates these body genres specifically to generate a "full body experience."

derived from the works of French feminists Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous and adapted by feminist film critics Barbara Creed and Kathleen Rowe Karlyn. Barbara Creed uses *Alien* (1979) in “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection” to illustrate the ways Kristeva’s psychoanalytic concept of abjection gets mobilized in horror films. She suggests that “Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies as a means of separating the human from the nonhuman and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject” (36). The abject, which is what is discarded by the symbolic and the subject—Kristeva uses an example of food loathing, her retching in response to the skin on the top of milk as a way of distancing herself from her mother and her mother’s milk—in order to constitute the subject, is related to the feminine, the nonhuman, and human excretions, such as menstrual blood, feces, and vomit (Creed 37-38). Creed emphasizes the abject’s relation to the maternal, and uses a variety of types of abject mothers—the archaic mother and the phallic mother, among others—to read *Alien* (58). Owning abjection can be powerful, as Anne Helen Petersen points out, and as the examples from *Alien* also indicate,² but abjection, even when it comes with power, always ultimately constitutes the abject as nonhuman and not a subject. It provides a mode of resistance to patriarchy, according to Petersen, but it also renders those who are abject as monstrous. Frequently in narrative, abjection must be punished and eliminated to satisfy the demands of the story, so a woman’s abject resistance usually comes with an expiration date (Petersen). Unruliness, however, is another mode of resistance to patriarchy, but it is somewhat gentler than abjection. Kathleen Rowe

² Petersen’s wonderful gloss on the power of abjection: “To be a bitch, to practice ‘bitchcraft,’ is a particular demonstration of female power, at once magnetic and repulsive. Just think of how we wield that word: as a means of policing behavior (‘God, stop being such a bitch’). But ‘bitch’ can also be recuperated and celebrated; to declare oneself a ‘bad bitch,’ for example, is to revel in and acknowledge the transgression of behavioral norms.” “Bitchcraft” is a great way to think about Jennifer and Needy in *Jennifer’s Body*, but mostly because the pun-portmanteau combines the transgression of abjection with the humor of unruliness.

Karlyn address their differences in her book *The Unruly Women: Gender and the Genres*: “while mythology taints and dooms Medusa”—who is associated with the abject, the monstrous, and the castrating by Freud but also with laughter by Cixous—“the unruly woman often enjoys a reprieve from those fates that so often seem inevitable to women under patriarchy, because her home is comedy and the carnivalesque, the realm of inversion and fantasy where, for a time at least, the ordinary world can be stood on its head” (11). Although the unruly woman is frequently abject through her size, her grossness, her femininity, and her inappropriateness—pregnant old hags are Mikhail Bakhtin’s examples—she escapes the fate of the monstrous-feminine because she dwells in the genre of comedy rather than horror (Karlyn 2). By thinking about the ways *Jennifer’s Body* employs many similar techniques of abjection that *Black Swan* does, but the ways that abjection is recuperated as unruliness, I want to compare the two films’ treatment of female characters—what degree of agency is open to them and how the camera perceives them.

The first point of comparison between the two films I want to explore is the way the female protagonists are introduced and endowed with agency. *Black Swan* begins with white titles on a black background accompanied by the music from “Swan Lake.” When the titles are over, a spotlight illuminates a white-clad ballerina seen in a long shot. Her face seems to be in profile, but it is obscured because of the lighting, a single spotlight that illuminates less than half of her body, and because of the distance of the shot. As she begins to move, the camera cuts to a close up of her feet, which execute complicated ballet steps in time with the crescendo of the music. As the music decrescendos, the camera pulls back to reveal the ballerina in a full body shot that is closer and better illuminated than the first one; we see that the ballerina is Nina, played by Natalie Portman. She sinks gracefully to the ground, and the movements of her head

combined with the music make her seem like she is waiting. Nina is indistinguishable from some other dancer when she enters the film; the camera shows her feet in detail before showing her face. By showing her feet first, the camera both dismembers her and fetishizes her status as ballerina; when the camera finally shows her face, which distinguishes her from other ballerinas, she is in a submissive pose. The then camera cuts to an unsteady, hand-held shot from behind Nina. At first it seems as though the camera is from a point of view shot of someone stalking her, but a male figure appears in front and to the left of the camera as it advances on Nina. She rises and they begin to dance together; the camera rotates around them as the music crescendos again; the man, with a rush of black feathers, transforms into a beast, and gathers the obviously unwilling Nina into his arms. Before the embrace, Nina was wearing a white long-skirted tutu, but when she escapes his clutches, her outfit has transformed into that of the white swan. The camera retreats behind her as she flutters her arms in the spotlight en pointe. The cinematography here draws on classic horror tropes by observing her from behind through a shaky camera. Nina seems innocently expectant, but we know from the camera-style and the music that something bad is about to happen. The encounter with the monster, which reads like balletic rape, is the catalyst that enables her to transform from drone swan into the white swan, but her unwillingness is clear. This opening scene codes her transformation as something that needed to be enforced by a male monster, something that she was not agentive enough to accomplish on her own. When the camera retreats from her, she is doing the balletic equivalent of treading water—not taking action for herself but waiting, perhaps for another man to move her plot along.

The beginning of *Jennifer's Body* draws on similar horror camera techniques, but with different results than in *Black Swan*. The film opens with a Steadicam-like shot, similar to those used in *Halloween* or jury-rigged in the *Evil Dead*, which gives the impression that the camera

movements towards the house are the point of view shot of an unseen stalking character. The movement forward is interspersed with clips of Jennifer (Megan Fox's body), first a close up of her picking a scab on her forearm, and then a close-up of her mouth chewing her hair. These shots, like the ones in the beginning of *Black Swan*, dismember her and present her to the audience as already broken into parts, rather than as a whole character. They also present her as slightly pathologized, in a combative relationship with her body. The camera cuts to another point of view shot slowly peeking through the window, and then cuts again to a close-up of the foot of the bed, where cursive pink letters proclaim the title, "Jennifer's Body," before panning up to view Jennifer's body. She is wearing leg warmers and listlessly watching some sort of fitness show; in a sly joke, the camera focuses on the characters speaking excitedly about their fitness regime while the television captions this particular exercise move as the "Butt Squeeze." In the first few minutes of the film, even though the camera work is borrowing heavily from horror films, humor is introduced in the contrast between the lamely over enthusiastic exercise program and teenage apathy. The joke is abruptly terminated by a loud, ominous noise and a cut back to Jennifer's head, this time shot in profile. In the background, we see Needy (Amanda Seyfried) staring at her through the window. The male stalker/slasher whose point of view the camera conventionally follows has been replaced here by a female character. The camera rapidly cuts back and forth between Jennifer and the window to show that Needy has ducked out of view. As the camera zooms in on Jennifer settling into her pillow, Needy's voiceover informs us, "Hell is a teenage girl." That voiceover, combined with the absurd exercise program, assures the audience that humor will consistently accompany horror in this film. Additionally, the implication that the predatory gaze mobilized in the beginning is a female rather than a male gaze sets up a different dynamic in which both the protagonist and the antagonist—although it

turns out later that Needy is the protagonist—are filled by women.

The next two pairs of scenes that I will pair in *Black Swan* and *Jennifer's Body* are related to food. Not only is consumption integral to both films, with Nina controlling what she eats and Jennifer eating only people, but it is also important to abjection, since food loathing is one of the first ways Kristeva introduces the concept of abjecting the mother to constitute the subject (Creed 37). Instead of jumping straight to the most abject examples, however, I want to first examine quotidian food consumption and maternal nourishment. After Nina wakes from the dream sequence that opens the film, her mother prepares breakfast. The transition from Nina's description of her dream to her breakfast is signaled by a shot of her mother placing a plate with half a grapefruit and a blob of some unidentifiable, not terribly appetizing pinkish substance. The camera cuts to Nina in a medium shot as she coos, "Look how pink, so pretty." The camera then cuts to her mother, who smiles widely as they declare in child-like unison, "Preeetty." Although Nina seems to be somewhere in her twenties, she and her mother have an infantilized routine. The pinkness of the grapefruit, combined with their wide smiles and cooing voices, generates an uneasy feeling of childishness with a hint of indecent eroticism—the pink grapefruit, halved and glistening beneath the handheld camera, evokes exposed female genitalia. The scene concludes when Nina's mother gets her up and looks at Nina's back, discovering a small rash near her bra line. Instead of a concerned, nurturing gaze, Nina's mother's smile abruptly turns cold. She warms again as Nina puts on her shrug, putting her hand to Nina's face and calling her, "my sweet girl." She draws Nina toward her in an embrace, and the camera captures her mother's face in close-up as her eyes remain creepily open. Although the women are clearly close, the camera work and dialogue indicate that they are perhaps too close; the shots are mostly in close-up and they emphasize the claustrophobia of Nina and her mother's apartment and their relationship.

These tropes of melodrama—the domestic, enclosed spaces and the mother and daughter relationship—work alongside those of horror to present a model of the monstrous-feminine in Nina’s mother that only becomes more apparent as the film progresses.

In contrast, the scene of quotidian eating in *Jennifer’s Body* begins with a medium shot of a ferret scampering on some linoleum as Needy asks “Want some bologna, Specktor?” The scene contextualizes the socio-economic status of Needy: she eats fried bologna, she owns a ferret, and her kitchen has seen better days. The camera cuts to Needy in a comfortable medium shot, foregrounding the radio she’s listening to and showing her frying bologna in a frying pan. Unlike Nina, Needy cooks and feeds herself. The camera follows her assembling the sandwich, cutting from the medium shot to a shot of the buttered white sandwich bread that she tops with slices of fried bologna, then cutting again to a closer profile of her face as she lifts her head up exasperatedly in response to the Low Shoulder, the band we later learn has sacrificed Jennifer, hero-worship that’s happening on the radio. Meanwhile, the camera cuts back to the woods where Jennifer partially devoured the high school’s quarterback—a scene I’ll discuss alongside another dangerous consumption scene in *Black Swan*. The camera shows a football player whose entrails are nibbled daintily by a deer before cutting back to Needy’s kitchen, where she drops half of her bologna sandwich for her ferret, who begins to eat just as happily as the deer in the previous shot. The juxtaposition of the ferret and the deer aligns Needy with Jennifer’s abject power but turns that horror into comedy through the unlikely comparison of the mundane bologna sandwich with the quarterback’s offal. Needy’s mother, who is played by veteran comedian Amy Sedaris, already experienced in playing “white trash weirdo” characters from her role in television show *Strangers with Candy*, then sleepily enters the scene. Needy and her mother engage in wacky, rather unruly dialogue, when Needy’s mother describes in a dream in

which she protected Needy from a witch-hunt because she is a “hard-assed, Ford-tough, Mama bear.” Needy responds that she can take care of herself, but her mother insists that “one day you’re gonna be cryin’ out for me and I’m not gonna be there.” Although this line seems like foreshadowing, there are moments when Needy is in grave danger, but she never cries out for her mom. Needy makes her own bologna; she kills her own succubus. Both *Black Swan* and *Jennifer’s Body* present inadequate mothers—Nina’s because she smothers and Needy’s because she’s not around. While Needy’s mother is indirectly criticized for her absence, Nina’s mother is made dangerous.

While danger lurks in these scene of quotidian eating—Needy’s from the juxtaposition with Jennifer’s appetite and Nina’s from the emotional unpredictability of her mother—I want to turn to food scenes from *Black Swan* and *Jennifer’s Body* that pose a threat, to the protagonist, the victim, or the spectator. In *Black Swan*, the scene of dangerous eating involves a cake. The cake scene begins with Nina in the bathroom dealing with her bleeding rash. Her mother calls her into the kitchen, where she announces proudly, “My daughter, the Swan Queen!” Nina’s mother makes a graceful gesture of presentation, but rather than gesturing toward her daughter, she indicates the large, overwhelmingly pink cake decorated with roses and a ballerina figurine that was obscured behind her. Instead of dwelling on her daughter’s achievements, the mother emphasizes her own by introducing the cake she bought. Nina rushes, ballerina-style, into her mother’s arms proudly, but the tone of the scene changes when her mother brings up the cake: “It’s our favorite; vanilla with strawberry filling.” The camera angle that shows Nina’s mother cutting a large, corner slice topped with an elaborate icing rose positions the camera between the two women, looking over their shoulders. Although the angle isn’t exactly a dutch angle, it creates the same, slightly vertiginous, uncomfortable sensation that the situation being filmed is

about to go sour, which it does. Nina doesn't want such a large slice of cake, but instead of moderating her own desire, the mother abruptly changes mood and prepares to throw the cake in the trash. When Nina submits to her mother's wishes, the mother brings the cake back, puts it on the counter and says, "I'm, I'm just so proud of you." Nina, in another close-up shot from a slightly high angle, so her face looks extra vulnerable and repentant, says, in order to make up, "It looks so yummy." Nina's mother smears a finger with icing, and extends it toward the camera, which subsequently reverse-shots an image of Nina bending forward and sucking the icing from her mother's finger. Like the grapefruit scene earlier, the food Nina's mother feeds her takes on a sexual connotation. Even as the mother and daughter giggle together, the scene retains an underlying feeling of uneasiness and danger. Although Needy's mother is also portrayed as a less than perfect mother in the scene with the fried bologna sandwich, her unfitness is a source for humor and emphasizes generations of female strength. In the cake scene in *Black Swan*, the mother's interaction with the daughter is antagonistic and controlling—Nina's mother is the dangerous mother who abjectly refuses to acknowledge her child as a separate person.

Jennifer's Body clearly presents the danger of female appetite, but in this case the danger is directed at men rather than women. Jennifer has been transformed into a succubus and eviscerates and devours boys in order to retain her good looks.³ The first scene in which we witness her harvesting is a counterexample of female power, this time aimed at men. A melancholy football player standing at the edge of the football field looks to his left, where Jennifer is approaching in the distance. The camera cuts to view him in a medium full on shot,

³ The concept of *Jennifer's Body* is itself a joke, based partly on Megan Fox's reputation as a newly-minted sex symbol. Many youtube viewers have caught on, and have posted *Jennifer's Body* montages to the song "Maneater."

and Jennifer appears unexpectedly on his right. Jennifer's clichéd cheerleader dialogue is made funny and inappropriate by its context; she declares herself "crazy sorry for [his] profound loss" and quickly convinces him to seek comfort in her yellow-striped, terry cloth-clad breasts in the woods behind the school. As they make out, it becomes abundantly clear to anyone who has ever seen a horror movie that something bad is about to happen. He notices something odd about her—"you're so warm; why are you so warm?"—and animals begin to gather around them. In a grotesque parody of a Disney princess movie, the forest creatures gather around to see what Jennifer will do to her prey. He notices, and Jennifer remarks, as she unzips her hoodie to reveal bra-less breasts beneath, "they're waiting." Jennifer rips off his shirt and unzips his pants, but as he looks upward, presumably preparing to get a blow job, she instead pushes him roughly against a tree. The camera cuts to a medium shot of her from the football player's point of view as she advances and unlatches her jaw to reveal a piranha-like set of teeth. Instead of an extra set of teeth below the belt, Jennifer has a snake-like, expandable jaw. These jaws took the special effects team a considerable amount of time to create. Erik Nordby, who was the visual effects supervisor, recounts that maintaining a balance between too scary and not scary enough was important: "From a marketing point of view, from all the test screenings they did, there was a lot of work figuring out how to make this a scary film as well as a funny film." He also mentions that, in addition to keeping Jennifer's transformation from being too scary, they wanted to maintain the sexiness of Megan Fox. Nordby describes the difficulty: "we wanted the eyes to maintain some sort of the Megan Fox allure, which was incredibly difficult because as soon as you warped her face in any direction, the shine kind of came off it. So what we ended up doing was that anything below her nose, we were allowed to have full reign to make as horrific as we needed to, and then we above her nose, we could manipulate it somewhat with warps and color correction in her eye sockets. So even at her worst, she had some of that sexiness throughout." In a modification of the *vagina dentata*, Jennifer is

beautiful above her mouth but monstrous below. Her appetite is in contrast to Nina's; while Nina cannot resist eating what she doesn't want to eat, Jennifer eats what doesn't want to get eaten.

In addition to scenes of consumption, both films also feature scenes of vomiting. Nina repeatedly makes herself vomit in *Black Swan* as a way of exerting her control over her body and over the stress of her situation. Since purging in *Black Swan* happens more as a repeated trope than in any specific scene⁴, I want to think about the common elements to all these scenes in order to understand how they portray femininity and abjection. Frequently, the emphasis in these scenes is on the quotidian nature of Nina's purging. After the audition when she fails to finish the black swan coda, the camera shows what we assume to be her ballet-slippered feet under the bathroom stall as she stands up in front of the toilet. The camera never enters the bathroom stall, but the conventions around ballerinas and eating disorders are so established that when we hear the sound of liquid falling into the toilet, we assume that Nina is vomiting. She lifts her leg to flush the toilet in pointe shoes, picks up her bag, and leaves the stall. The camera then cuts behind Nina walking in the subway. Because of the distance of the camera and our inability to see her, the purging is presented matter-of-factly, unlike other scenes of bodily abjection, like those of the rash on her back, which are intensely charged in terms of music and camera technique. Even the night before opening night, when Nina comes home after seeing Beth stab herself in the face, her vomiting is coded as a natural response to all of the horror she's experienced. When she enters the apartment, desperate, she sees her mother lurking in the darkened corner of the kitchen and runs into the bathroom to vomit. The camera is relatively steady and shows her in a medium shot, in contrast to the close-ups used later in the scene in the apartment to indicate her terror as she confronts her transformation into a swan. Nina uses her

⁴ See, for example, the number of *Black Swan* "thinspiration" videos on youtube which essentially create purging montages.

vomiting the way Kristeva describes her food loathing: a way to distance herself from the abject inside herself and reject it in order to construct herself as a controlled, stable subject.

When Jennifer vomits in *Jennifer's Body*, however, her vomiting is a symptom of the abject transformation that is happening to her, rather than a way to cope with it. The scene begins in a typical horror film style. Needy hears a noise, and scared, descends downstairs to check. No one is at the door, so she feels silly, but checks the basement—nothing down there either. The suspense builds and she inches around the corner to peek into the kitchen, where the faucet is dripping. No one appears to be there, so she nervously moves forward to turn off the taps. When she turns back to go, however, the camera cuts to a close up of Jennifer's face, which is covered in blood. Needy, understandably, screams, and asks Jennifer what happened. Jennifer's mouth slowly contorts into a demonic, blood-stained grin, and she turns to the fridge, crouching on the floor to devour a Boston Market rotisserie chicken. When Needy mentions that the chicken is for her mother, Jennifer lifts her head back and roars. As if the roaring has set something off, she begins to choke. The camera switches to a reaction shot of Needy with Jennifer facing her in the foreground as Jennifer proceeds to projectile vomit all over the floor, and then the camera quickly switches to an extreme close-up of her mouth as the vomit spews from it. It cuts to a close-up of Needy looking horrified and then to a close-up of the vomit on the floor, which seems to be moving and growing spikes as if alive. In contrast to *Black Swan*, this vomiting scene reads less as an example of disordered eating and more as a parody of drunken excess. Jennifer has gone out and gotten wrecked and ends up half-conscious at a friend's house, where she proceeds to eat without inhibition and puke uncontrollably. Jennifer isn't feeling any pain, but it's less because she's drunk and more because she's no longer quite human. The vomiting that Nina uses to assert control in *Black Swan*, to dispel the abject, is here an example of

Jennifer's loss of control, something else in Jennifer's body. While the quotidian nature of the purging scenes in *Black Swan* were emphasized through cinematic techniques, in *Jennifer's Body*, the conventions of horror cinema work to emphasize the unnatural and horrific aspects of the scene. The emphasis at the end of the scene is female friendship, however. Jennifer seems ready to devour or otherwise manhandle Needy, until she comes close to their friendship necklace, and, like a vampire before a cross, runs angrily away.

Closeness between women is another common theme in the two movies. Although I've mainly talked about Nina's relationship with her mother, *Black Swan* also traces her relationship with Lily, a fellow ballerina. "Relationship" is almost too strong of a word for their interactions, since it becomes uncertain which of those interactions are real and which of them are Nina's fantasies. The scene I want to discuss is one of the many pornographic scenes in *Black Swan*, but perhaps the most infamous—on youtube it's titled "Black swan - Nina and Lily lesbian scene (FULL SCENE)" and boasts over 6 million views, despite the low quality of the recording and the fact that it's dubbed. After a fight with Nina's mother, Nina and Lily go to dinner and then a club, where they take ecstasy, drink heavily, and flirt with boys. Nina eventually tries to leave the club, and Lily shares a cab with her. On the way home they hold hands and Lily puts her hand on Nina's genitals, although Nina moves it away. The youtube clip begins when Nina and Lily, returning to Nina's apartment, flee Nina's mother by shutting the door to Nina's room. Once Nina has closed and blocked the door, she glides, with the confidence of the black swan and an accompanying noise of the rustle of feathers, to kiss Lily on the bed. The shots are all in medium and close up, and focus on sexual acts or acts leading up to sex—frenetic kissing, removing underpants, etc. The women are not completely nude, and we never see breasts or vaginas, but we see Lily working hard at Nina's clitoris and Nina's face in close up as she emits

moans of pleasure, so the scene could be described as pornographic. When Lily raises her head, however, she says, “Sweet girl.” The camera cuts back to Nina’s reaction, and when it cuts back to Lily, Lily has been replaced with Nina, who smothers the first Nina in a point of view shot that blanks out the camera. The lesbian desire in this scene is apparent, but it is also interwoven with Nina’s own anxieties around her role as Swan Queen and her sexuality. Although the scene is sexy enough to merit 6 million views, the sexuality it portrays is, in this context, not only pathologized but ultimately dismissed as a fantasy of onanism and self-destruction.

Unlike *Black Swan*, the lesbian kiss scene in *Jennifer’s Body* is much shorter and has garnered surprisingly less youtube attention. The initial kiss is shot in such extreme close-up, the actresses could have used kiss doubles; we only see their lips, and it’s only through the contextualization of the previous shots that we know whose lips are Needy’s and whose are Jennifer’s. Jennifer inserts her tongue into Needy’s mouth; Needy accepts it. Then the camera cuts out and we see Jennifer lying back on the bed and Needy following her in a medium shot. They continue to kiss to no soundtrack until a roaring sound crescendos and Needy jumps aside screaming, “What the fuck!” The make out session itself lasts for less than a minute, and although it’s highly charged, the scene is more important narratively for what Jennifer later tells Needy. Needy asks, “What do you want from me?” Jennifer responds, “I just want to explain some things to you.” Jennifer’s words (rather than, say, her body) become the focus of this scene, as it flashes back to her experience in Low Shoulder’s van. “Where are we going?” she asks, frightened. The lead singer replies, “You don’t have to talk if you don’t want to.” Jennifer is presented to everyone as someone who does not talk or does not have anything worthwhile to say, and for the most part, the film follows suit by making her stereotypically funny without being smart. In this scene, however, Jennifer has serious exposition-work to accomplish. She

tells Needy how she was sacrificed by Low Shoulder, came back, and began eating boys. There's a brief interlude, however, when Jennifer admits that she tried to eat Needy and couldn't, since Needy is her friend. Although the extended exposition of the scene might read as sloppy, it is a clear example of a scene where women do not work against narrative, but rather drive it, against Laura Mulvey's suggestion that women's "visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (63). This scene is one of the few moments in *Jennifer's Body* where Jennifer's words drive the story. Lesbianism is not coded very positively in this scene; Jennifer, after all, is not fully human at this point, and when she suggests that she can stay and "play boyfriend-girlfriend" like she and Needy used to do, the offer seems less genuine than exploitative and taunting. At the same time, however, the scene emphasizes Jennifer's desire to communicate to Needy and her right to communicate, even though she is a woman and, even worse, a hot one. The female speech here exists in contrast to *Black Swan*, which may reveal narrative more artfully than *Jennifer's Body* or even eschew it altogether, but mostly abides by the idea that Nina should be seen and not be heard—much of what happens to her is presented through images rather than words.

Both films sort of end in death for Nina and for Jennifer—I say "sort of" because Jennifer has arguably been undead for most of the film and because by the end of *Black Swan*, we can't tell what is diegetic reality and what is Nina's fantasy—but the way those deaths are presented emphasizes the generic differences between the two films and their manipulation of unruliness and abjection. When Nina takes her place at the top of the stairs as the white swan about to die, the camera zooms in on the wound in her stomach. It's oozing and expanding and contracting as she breathes, evoking a menstruating vagina. Nina's death wound is tragic but also pathological and abject, representing her menstrual blood, her desire to be perfect, and how she has submitted

to her inner black swan. In *Jennifer's Body*, Jennifer also sustains a chest wound, but she acknowledges its vaginal quality by asking Needy for a tampon. The comic erupts in an intense emotional moment—Needy's boyfriend Chip impales Jennifer on a sharp, phallic pole. By joking about the tampon, Jennifer turns the phallic penetration into a yonic monthly cycle. It is also a perfect example of the way the unruly woman turns the abject—a wound that evokes menstruation—into the comic through a joke about a tampon. Although the film does not end well for Jennifer, the horror aspect of it saves Jennifer and Needy from the traditional heterosexual coupling of a traditional comedy. Instead, Jennifer dies (killed by Needy) and Needy avenges her. Karlyn remarks that “transgressive women must ... be ‘emplotted’ ... in the genres oriented toward the private—*romantic comedy*, which emphasizes love, or *melodrama*, which emphasizes loneliness and/or motherhood” (99). Nina's transgression is resolved through melodramatic elements: her relationship with her mother and her final, triumphant but lonely death. Jennifer and Needy's emplotment is more complicated. Both women are transgressive; Jennifer in her desire to eat boys and Needy in her aggressive, rebellious status at the mental institution, which bookends the film. Although Needy ends the story alone, the tone is not one of loneliness or despair. By avenging Jennifer's killers, Needy ends the film on an unrepentant note appropriate for a horror film, but her vengeance speaks to her love for her dead friend.

In an interview with Sheila Roberts for moviesonline.ca, Diablo Cody discussed the tricky blend of genres she tried to achieve in the script for *Jennifer's Body*. She admits, in response to a question about the humor in the movie, that “when I first set out to write this, I intended to write something very dark, very brooding, a traditional slasher movie, and then I realized about a third of the way into the process that I was incapable of doing that because the humor just kept sneaking in.” Although horror and comedy are not necessarily new together or

incompatible—the *Evil Dead* movies are a classic example—Cody claims that the humor in her script was not completely under her control. In effect, while Jennifer and Needy are unruly women, *Jennifer's Body* was an unruly script. Although the film was not universally panned, many objected to this combination of funny and scary elements. The rottentomatoes.com review aggregate website summarizes the critical consensus around the film: “*Jennifer's Body* features occasionally clever dialogue but the horror/comic premise fails to be either funny or scary enough to satisfy.”⁵ The unease that many viewers experienced during *Jennifer's Body*, which many attributed to the blend of horror and comedy, may support Laura Mulvey’s call “to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film” (60). By not satisfying, by flaunting Megan Fox’s body only to distort it with an artificial jaw, by combining teen slasher horror with genre-savvy comedy, *Jennifer's Body* denies ease of viewing and subverts the expectations of a teen comedy and a horror film. The blended genres in *Black Swan* also made many viewers uneasy, but Darren Aronofsky’s already established position as an auteur gave *Black Swan* art house film status, a genre that anticipates narrative difficulty and unease.⁶ *Jennifer's Body*, however, starring an actress with a reputation for something other than acting, was not perceived as a serious film, so generic uneasiness or difficulty was not anticipated by much of the viewership. The unruliness of the characters and the script did not combine to make the movie a hit, like Rosanne or Mae West or other unruly women Karlyn describes, but it does work to help the film negotiate ideas of agentive femininity that escape the fate of the abject—death—or that of the woman in romantic comedy—the marriage plot.

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⁵ See the rottentomatoes.com page for *Jennifer's Body* for more reviews.

⁶ Klein describes *Black Swan* as an art film, defined “against the classical Hollywood paradigm of linear cause and effect narratives, strong, logical character motivations, and conclusive endings.”

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