To those attributes I offer two further considerations. First, *Bewitched* shares the plot underpinnings of superhero stories, whose tales of virtuous common folk repressed by the need to conceal their secret identities have instinctive value for queer adolescents just coming to terms with their own distinctiveness. While evidence of the popularity of these stories in broader culture has been subject to the ebbs and flows of most popular media genres, the durability of their hold on public consciousness is undeniable. Second, the timing of the production of *Bewitched* situated it as something of a bridge between the rising tensions in the gay communities that led to the riot at Compton's Cafeteria and the uprising at Stonewall, and the realization of the potential for lesbian/gay power that followed those momentous events. Situation comedies of the period, *Bewitched* among them, were both utopian and escapist. In this case, the hopeful world they gestured toward appeared to be within reach.

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HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH, DIRECTED BY JOHN CAMERON MITCHELL (2001)

Los Angeles: New Line Cinema

Reviewed by Shelley Park, University of Central Florida

Identifying just one instance of queer media to foreground as a 'classic' for this inaugural issue of *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture* was difficult. It seems, however, that any archive of queer popular culture must certainly

include the cult classic *Hedwig and the Angry Inch.* Directed by and starring the fabulous John Cameron Mitchell as its title character, *Hedwig* was a crowd favourite from the moment of its release in 2001, winning Audience Awards at Sundance and at the San Francisco International Film Festival as well as numerous acting and directing awards in the United States, Canada and Europe. Notably, it won the Best First Feature Film Award from the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and the Teddy Award for the Best Gay/Lesbian Feature Film in Berlin, where the film's story begins, prior to the end of the Cold War.

The story about a genderqueer East German singer with a Farrah Fawcett flip wig and 'a one-inch mound of flesh where [his] penis used to be, where [her] vagina never was' clearly foregrounds questions about gender and sexual identity. Hedwig begins his life as the East German Hansel, 'a slip of a girly-boy' with an obsession for US glam punk. His mother gives him her first name (Hedwig) and passport and arranges for him to have a sex-change operation so that he might marry an American soldier, Luther Robinson (played by Maurice Dean Wint), and escape to the capitalist West. The botched back-alley surgery leaves Hedwig neither male nor female – and thus also neither gay nor straight. Evoking Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender as a product of reiterated actions, Hedwig's femininity is entirely performative. Her ode to her wigs ('Wig in a Box') includes praise for their ability to transform her into various incarnations of femininity, from the 'midnight checkout queen' to 'Miss Beehive 1963' to the more iconic Farrah Fawcett and Dorothy Hamill. Hedwig's second husband and bandmate, Yitzhak, also embodies an ambiguous gender identity. Revealed in the film's outtakes to be a Jewish Croatian drag queen, Yitzhak is played by a woman (Miriam Shor) who plays a man who longs to present as a woman. Shor performs this queerly gendered performance of genderqueerness flawlessly.

Importantly, Hedwig departs from (homo)normative scripts of gay pride and gay liberation as well as from standard narratives about transsexuality and transgenderism. Notably, Hansel does not become Hedwig because he is in love with Luther nor because he feels himself a woman trapped in a male body. Hansel is largely coerced into the operation by Luther and by his own mother who advises that 'to be free, one must give up a little part of oneself'. Here and elsewhere, Hedwig's backstory emphasizes the compromises that one must make in order to pursue so-called western freedoms. In addition to losing a penis, Hedwig loses her home, family and sense of self and receives little in return. Hedwig does not turn away from real pain and tragedy. The transition from Hansel to Hedwig is marked by a scream worthy of a horror film. In this scene and many others (e.g. when Hedwig's musical mentee and lover, Tommy Gnosis (played by Michael Pitt), recoils in horror at discovering her angry inch and when Hedwig rips up Yitzhak's passport in order to force him to stay with her), *Hedwig* reminds us that even fluid sexual identities may be accompanied by pain and suffering.

Another reason *Hedwig* deserves to be re-viewed as a classic film is its savviness about the neo-liberal politics of globalism. *Hedwig* attends unflinchingly to the intersections of gender and sexuality with capitalism and nationalism. On the same day Luther leaves Hedwig for another male, the Berlin Wall falls, bringing an end to the divisions between the communist East and the capitalist West. As the distinction between oppression and freedom blurs, (literally) poor Hedwig and her band of misfits seem doomed to perform in an endless series of tacky chain restaurants to largely unappreciative and

abusive American audiences. This cynical perspective on the immigrant experience may explain, at least in part, why Hedwig (the character) develops a kinship with the Korean army wives who are, for a short while, her backup singers. It may also explain why *Hedwig* (Mitchell, 2003), the play upon which the film is based, has developed an international following. Although the bulk of the story is set in the United States and the Broadway musical is a distinctly American genre, *Hedwig* has been adapted for audiences in Brazil, Japan, Korea, Peru, Puerto Rico and Thailand as well as a wide variety of European audiences.

Notably, *Hedwig* is genre-bending as well as gender-bending. Although perhaps best known today as a Tony Award-winning 2014 Broadway revival starring Neil Patrick Harris, *Hedwig* originated on the small stage of local drag clubs in the early 1990s and, after a brief off-Broadway run, was adapted for film. A critically acclaimed box office flop, it developed a cult following when it was released on DVD. (This is the media form in which I was exposed to it.) Like its queer filmic predecessor *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is a rock opera. As a stage production, it thus queers the genre of the Broadway musical, one typically featuring upbeat show tunes and dance numbers with a boy-gets-girl motif. At the same time, *Hedwig* also queers the genre of the rock opera by seamlessly mixing glam punk with torch songs and references to singers Toni Tennille, Debby Boone and Anne Murray with nods to Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and David Bowie. In addition to mixing musical genres, *Hedwig* mixes dramatic genres. Part tragedy, part drag show, part camp, part burlesque and part vaudeville, *Hedwig* resists easy categorization as a narrative type.

Hedwig also masterfully interweaves high culture and low culture: Broadway typically plays to an audience familiar with high culture (namely, those who can afford the price of a ticket); yet Hedwig develops a white-trash aesthetic (akin, in some ways, to the work of John Waters). Thus, in *Hedwig*, references to Greek mythology (Aristophanes), philosophy (Plato and Kant) and classic folk tales ('Hansel and Gretel') exist alongside references to McDonald's, gummy bears and Barbie dolls. Perhaps it is just because I am a philosopher by training, but I cannot resist a film that interweaves an animated retelling of Aristophane's speech in Plato's *Symposium* (1999 [c. 385–370 BC]) with a tragic story of unrequited genderqueer love(s) (i.e. the song 'Origin of Love'). And describing the result of a botched genital surgery as 'a Barbie-doll crotch' (in the song 'Angry Inch') is just ballsy.

In short, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is queer in both its content and its form, resisting – and encouraging us to resist – the binaries of male and female, straight and gay, East and West, oppression and freedom, tragedy and comedy, Broadway and low-budget movies, philosophy and popular culture. This makes it intellectually provocative and affectively moving. In keeping with the queer traditions of drag and camp, it pokes fun irreverently at all sacred figures and causes, making us laugh and sing along even where – and perhaps especially where – we may be uncomfortable doing so.

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