Angelic Frankenstein and the History of Bob Mizer's Pre-Stonewall Muscle Monsters

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In the mid-1960s Bob Mizer—Los Angeles-based male physique photographer and founder of the Athletic Model Guild (AMG)—produced a series of short monster films sold on a mail-order basis via both catalogs and advertisements in publications like Mizer's *Physique Pictorial*. These films spoofed the homoeroticism implicit in their source material, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and also generated their own sexual appeals to queer men through the display of scantily clad male physiques. Culminating in at least nine short monster films, Mizer's productions primarily circulated within the underground gay film niche. However, a notable exception was *Angelic Frankenstein* (1969), a film that crossed over to the realm of horror fandom when it was mentioned in the magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.[1]

Bob Mizer's muscle monster films are an underexplored and relatively prolific branch of the history of queer horror cinema. The conspicuousness of sexual expression in Mizer's films is notable given that contemporaneous feature films only hinted at homosexuality. As films with an obvious gay sensibility and undisguised homoeroticism that acknowledged their maker's and audiences' non-straight sexualities, these films provided a maximum of gay visibility on the cusp of Stonewall—an event that historians often consider a turning point for gay activism toward the tactic of gay public visibility—that was distinct from the closetedness of more mainstream horror cinema. Even popular horror features produced during the post-Stonewall surge in gay visibility did not directly posit gay characters in their narratives. As Harry Benshoff observes of horror films from the late 1960s to the 1970s, "the proto-gay male figures are never identified as such, and must be read as homosexual by the spectator" (1998, 220). Mizer's horror shorts are thus precursors to the cinematic mode that Darren Elliot-Smith calls "Gaysploitation horror" (2016, 89-110), a set of homoerotic films from the 2000s—spearheaded by David

[1] In this article, film release dates follow the date of each film's public availability. For a list of Mizer's Frankenstein shorts and their release dates, see *Table 1* below.

DeCoteau's *Voodoo Academy* (2000)—that centered the semi-nude male body as their primary visual feature. Congruent to how some of DeCoteau's films found audiences of women outside of their clear gay male target audience, Mizer's *Angelic Frankenstein* gained broader recognition when knowledge of the film circulated outside of his consumer base of gay men.

This article unearths the history of Bob Mizer's gay monster shorts to argue that even before the Stonewall uprisings of 1969, the "monster queer" (1998, 20) identified by Harry Benshoff was an overtly visible entity in both gay subcultural contexts *and* horror fandom circles. While at least one of Mizer's monster films was exhibited at a gay theater, the fact that his monster films were shorts produced on a small gauge for private viewing allowed them to circulate more widely, even in locales where there was not a local gay theater. In tracing the history of Mizer's *Frankenstein* adaptations, this article stages a conversation between recent social and cultural historiographic methods (Johnson 2019; Powell 2019), queer media studies' dual methods of textual analysis (Benshoff 1998), and cultural study (Elliot-Smith 2016) that have been applied to horror media. Synthesizing these methods provides an avenue for bringing into relief how pre-Stonewall gay public visibility permeated all levels of Mizer's media transmission spectrum, from overtly gay content forged in production by a gay-identified filmmaker, through the conspicuous advertising of gay mail order and theatrically-distributed products, to the reflections of gay audiences and peers of Mizer who provided ideas for his later productions. The first section of this essay details the production and distribution contexts of Mizer's short film operation. In doing so, the section identifies Mizer's nine known Frankenstein monster shorts and analyzes how the marketing of the films emphasized their gay sensibility. The second section focuses on the formal qualities of Mizer's monster films by providing a close reading of his two available monster shorts. The final section chronicles the more public visibility of *Angelic Frankenstein* and situates Mizer's monster shorts within the tradition of queer horror filmmaking.

A Production and Distribution History of AMG's Monster Filmmaking Operation

Bob Mizer was a prominent and pioneering physique photographer who began his operation in the 1940s and eventually became a major force in the industry. As a contemporary of Tom of Finland, Mizer has recently attained a significant cultural status with the endeavors of the San Francisco-based Bob Mizer Foundation and the publication of several retrospective tomes by German

boutique art book publisher Taschen.[2] Yet beyond his artistic prowess, Mizer was a significant political force in pre-Stonewall gay activism. Historian David K. Johnson has argued that Mizer's work was an overlooked catalyst of gay liberation politics in Los Angeles: "although often portrayed as something of a bumbling loner, Mizer was at the center of an increasingly sophisticated gay network and came to be a leader of an effort to unite and defend the rights of gay men" (2019, 51). Film scholar Ryan Powell has estimated that Mizer's filmic work spearheaded an emergent counterpublic formation in conjunction with the films of Kenneth Anger and the communal organizing of the Mattachine Society: "the AMG films of the 1950s and 1960s constitute a precursor to a whole domain of cultural production and commercial development for and by male-desiring men" (2019, 44). In conversation with Johnson and Powell's work, this section details the emergence of Bob Mizer's monster film line inspired by the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

In 1957, after an over ten-year expansion of his photography operation and a six-year run of his magazine *Physique Pictorial*, Bob Mizer looked to his customers to gauge the demand for diversifying his product offerings by running a series of surveys in *Physique Pictorial*. One of those surveys ("Are You Interested in Physique Movies?" 1957) was designed to measure the viability of offering small gauge films for private home viewing. The survey included queries on various topics to determine customers' access to projection technologies, preference for 8mm or 16mm, favorite AMG models, interest in seeing models in posing straps (thong-type briefs) or nude, and affinity toward physique film genres such as "posing routines, wrestling, day in the life of athlete or model, dramatic stories, humorous stories, adventure" ("Are You Interested in Physique Movies?" 1957).

Within months, Mizer's company, AMG, publicized their entry into the film production and distribution realm with the announcement of seven films in production ("AMG Physique Movie Production Schedule" 1957), most written by Mizer, but occasionally written by Mizer contemporaries such as sculptor David Tomlinson of Inca Studios, who wrote a treatment for a short adaptation of *Pygmalion*. Contrary to widespread belief, Mizer's available film offerings began with so-called "story films" (Wuest 2017, 69), full-fledged short narratives rather than the more "primitive" posing films or wrestling films identified as their predecessors in the broader industry (Waugh 1996, 259). In fact, the linear progress narrative outlined in previous scholarship—from posing films to wrestling films to narrative films—contradicts how Mizer developed

[2] See for example Dian Hanson's *Bob's World* (2009).

his commercial film enterprise, which initially comprised mail order story films.[3] Mizer stated in an early announcement: "AMG has a good deal of footage of physique posing, Muscle Beach contests, etc [sic]. which will be made available a little later. But primarily we are going to film simple little stories which will give the models an opportunity to display their bodies in natural activities, rather than in strictly stilted posing." ("AMG is Going into the Movie Business!" 1957). In the summer of 1958, Mizer made his first three catalog films—*Street Fight* (1958), *Cowboy and the Sailor* (1958), and *Brother Cinder-Elmer* (1958)—available to consumers, and in the same issue of *Physique Pictorial* he announced the release of five more story films on a once-a-month basis from August to December of 1958 ("Physique Movies" 1958). The initial AMG film offerings were story films that each fell squarely into a narrative genre akin to categories established in the Classical Hollywood period: crime (*Street Fight*, *Motorcycle Thief* [1958]), western (*Cowboy and the Sailor*, *Cowboys and Indians* [1958]), Orientalism (*Pharaoh's New Slave* [1958], *Aladdin* [1958]), and fantasy (*Brother Cinder-Elmer*, *Danny and the Muscle-Merman* [n.d.]).

While AMG did not initially engage with the horror genre, in 1958 they announced their first monster film, entitled *Young Dr. Frankenstein* (n.d.) ("Scene from the film: 'Aladdin'" 1958). While it is unclear whether that film was ever produced or if it perhaps was released under a different title, what we do know is that AMG began branching out into a few other horror themes before producing several mad scientist films inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It is significant that Mizer's first monster film was announced in 1958 since this year marked both Hammer's revival of Gothic horror with the release of *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) and the first publication of James Warren and Forrest J. Ackerman's *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine. Thus, Mizer's monster films are situated within the broader development of 1950s "monster culture" (Skal 1993, 266), as they appropriated the mainstream horror iconography of studios like Universal and Hammer, and often infused it with a tongue-in-cheek camp sensibility. As Thomas Waugh has described broadly of Mizer's employment of Hollywood-inspired genre iconography, the physique films "mix the activity of

[3] For example, Thomas Waugh traced a narrative progression more broadly in the physique film industry when he argued, "the posing film soon became eclipsed by the other two genres" (1996, 259), and then explicated that "the narrative film genre, the most developed form of the mail-order cinema, evolved within a decade from minimally anecdotal variations of the posing and wrestling loops" (1996, 262). Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin also assert a similar linear historical trajectory of physique genres, "The first to appear was the posing genre, … however, this formula quickly grew stale, and the wrestling genre was born … eventually physique filmmakers began adding small narratives" (2006, 114).

borrowing with the making of the new. In such works the shock of theft merges seamlessly with the pleasure of creation out of whole cloth, and an empowerment is felt that moves beyond the pleasure of the scrapbook. And who says camp precludes the erotic?" (1996, 57). Early entries in AMG's horror line include the hybrid mad scientist horror/fantasy *Witch Boy* (1959), the Halloween-themed *Trick or Treat* (1962), the shapeshifting comedic narrative *Mad Scientist* (1964), and the werewolf-mask camp of such films as *Cyclist and the Werewolf* (aka *Cyclist and the Wolfman*) (1964), *I Dreamed You Were-A-Wolf* (1966), and *Bewitched Hunters* (1974).[4]

By late 1965, AMG had completed a series of at least eight Frankenstein-esque films (note: this count does not contain *Psychedelic Frankenstein* [1968], which was likely produced later; see *Table 1*) that were all filmed on similar laboratory sets and all enacted mad scientist scenarios with bare-chested actors wearing posing straps. While the idea for the films may have been Bob Mizer's, he was known to have solicited ideas from his contemporaries (Freibert 2020, 37) and also his customers ("AMG Physique Movie Production Schedule" 1957). In an advertisement for the earliest film in release, *How to Make an Athlete* (1964), Mizer underscored his desire for collaboration with customers, a sentiment often reiterated in his magazine: "Though the plots may be specifically tailored on the spot, none the less we benefit tremendously from the ideas customers send us, read them carefully and keep them in the back of our mind ready to press into service when the occasion presents itself. Please send us your ideas" ("How to Make an Athlete" 1964, 23). The second film released in the series, *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment* (1965), had a title which proclaimed its overt queer orientation via the name of the Dr. Frankenstein stand-in, Dr. Faggerty (Ardell Langford), that referenced a derogatory word for a gay man. Yet the title also indexed the culture of collaboration and interpenetration of physique photography industries in its rhyming allusion to Tag Haggerty, a physique studio run by Don O'Donnell, Leonard Robinson, and Harris Eidner ("Certificate of Business" 1957) that had previously photographed Langford.

[4] Mizer also made several mummy-themed films (with the mummy in pharaoh-garb rather than wraps), but it should be noted that most of these films fell more within the Orientalist genre than horror. For example, a film like *Mummy and the Dancer* (1963) used very similar set, costuming, and scenario as *Belligerent Slave* (1965).

Film Title	Release Date
How to Make an Athlete	December 27, 1964 (PP, GGSQ)
Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment	November 21, 1965 (PP, GGSQ)
Dr. Bigelow's Monster	January 9, 1966 (GGSQ)
Psychedelic Monster	July 1968 (PP)
Angelic Frankenstein	October 5, 1969 (GGSQ)
Making of a Monster	July 4, 1971 (GGSQ)
Dr. Doty's Creation	December 1971 (PP); September 29, 1974 (GGSQ)
Scientist and the Demon	January 7, 1973 (GGSQ)
Dr. Schulz's Manikin	December 29, 1975 (GGSQ)
The PP label means the film release date was indicated in an issue of *Physique Pictorial*. GGSQ means the release date was stated in *Grecian Guild Studio Quarterly*, no. 16 (Winter 1965).	

Table 1: Bob Mizer's Frankenstein monster shorts and their release dates.

Mizer's series of Frankenstein films were shot on markedly similar sets, sometimes identical. Most of the films contained at least some form of electrical machine (often with a climbing high voltage arc), a gurney or laboratory table, makeshift cabinets that on close inspection had drawn-on hinges and doors, and a mat on the floor for wrestling.

Figure 1: Still from *Making of a Monster*, Courtesy Bob Mizer Foundation.

As Mizer described an early film in the series, "this is another example of making up a plot to fit the models & background available at the time" ("How to Make an Athlete" 1964, 23). In a retrospective oral history interview, Mizer reflected on further expanding this production method a bit later in his career: "I would set up four different sets in the

studio at one time, so you could take the same actors and take them through four entirely different groups" (Mizer 1992). Indeed, the films Mizer efficiently produced in his Frankenstein series not only recycled props and sets but also actors from previous films; for instance, *Angelic Frankenstein* and *Scientist and the Demon* starred Ray Greig, Jim Johnson appeared in *Scientist and the Demon* (1973) and *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* (1966), and Paul Bigelow starred in *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*, *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment*, and *Making of a Monster* (1971).[5] As Mizer recalled, "I would custom design something to make use of the people that were here, and if somebody left at the beginning or just before we got started you'd change it just enough to adapt to the people you had" (Mizer 1992). Mizer's Frankenstein shorts represented one branch of the factory-like production operation that he developed over the years, which circulated available acting talent through different settings for the purposes of maximum production output.

Figure 2: Still from *Scientist and the Demon*, Courtesy Bob Mizer Foundation.

Given this efficient production system, Mizer also needed a distribution arrangement that emphasized his product variety. He accomplished this by interspersing the release dates of films across thematic product lines (such as the Frankenstein shorts) so that similar films were not released simultaneously. The Frankenstein-line averaged a new film in release every year or two. To make customers aware of the films, Mizer publicized them in both his periodical *Athletic Model Guild Bulletin* and his physique magazine *Physique Pictorial*, and he would often include stills from the films, as well as information on current availability and release dates. In 1964, Mizer distributed the *1964 Physique Movie Calendar*, which was essentially a catalog for over a hundred films he had completed. The calendar advertised

[5] Mizer's creation of a makeshift star system designed for indoor sets is a precursor to the star building endeavors of Pat Rocco, a contemporary of Mizer who frequently shot his physique shorts outdoors (Freibert 2021).

8mm and 16mm versions of the films, a "Physique Movie of the Week Club" that offered discounts, and a relatively cheap film viewer (the Mansfield Cine-Vuer) for those who could not afford a projector (*1964 Physique Movie Calendar* 1964, 2-3). The following year an entire issue of *Grecian Guild Studio Quarterly* (1965) was dedicated to enumerating Mizer's copious short film roster, including film stills and release dates for the films that were featured.

Beyond the eight posing strap films produced in Mizer's Frankenstein series, by 1968 he shot a ninth film, *Psychedelic Monster*, that thematically tied into the muscle monster theme of the series, but included full frontal nudity (rather than featuring scantily clad models), featured significant special effects supplements, and was exhibited theatrically a month after its 8mm mail order release. The August issue of *Physique Pictorial* offered the 8mm film for $25 with the advertising copy, "It's full of colorful lighting effects and other nonsense. It will be something really different for your party showings. This is a natural film and purchasers must establish an age of 19 or more" ("Psychedelic Monster" 1968, 10). The "natural film" descriptor and the age restriction were coded ways of signaling the film's main attraction of full frontal male nudity. Recent to the film's production, the legality of nudity in physique films had been clarified by a federal district court in the case *U.S. v. Spinar and Germain* No. 4-67 CR 15 (D. Minn. 1967). In the case, Bob Mizer's earlier nude film *Blackie and the Pirate* (1967) was considered alongside various physique magazines published by Lloyd Spinar and Conrad Germain. Judge Earl Larson ruled that *Blackie and the Pirate* was "high camp" (Larson 1967, 9) rather than obscene and that despite its depiction of full frontal nudity "the film does not exceed contemporary limits of candor" (Larson 1967, 9). This federal decision ushered in a new wave of nude male films of which *Psychedelic Monster* was a part.

In spirit and aesthetic focus, Bob Mizer's Frankenstein shorts are unique branches of the long tradition of exploitation cinema, a sector of the commercial film industry that, as Eric Schaefer (2001) has argued, are defined by their emphasis on spectacle and advertising over narrative trajectory. With *Psychedelic Monster*, Mizer elicited the tactics of exploitation cinema—particularly, the fact that "a major component of exploitation movies was their use of timely and sensational topics" (Schaefer 2001, 236)—for commercial appeal. The film's title and surreal effects played on the timely subject matter of mind-altering drugs, situating Mizer's film within what Andrew Owens calls the "psychedelic tapestry of queer occult images" (2021, 74), a contemporaneous trend of queer psychedelia—epitomized in the work of Kenneth Anger—that often invoked the conventions of horror. In addition to its psychedelic sensibility, the film's

aesthetic core is the visual display of male frontal nudity, as we will see in the next section.

Parallel to the 1967 federal decision that allowed for commercialized male nudity for private consumption, there were increased endeavors to publicly exhibit queer erotic films, particularly in Los Angeles. After previous years of fits and starts in screening gay films, on June 26, 1968, Continental Theatres transitioned its Park Theatre on Alvarado to an exclusively gay policy, which lasted until June 1, 1971. Initially, the theater drew from an eclectic mix of physique films (primarily made by Pat Rocco) and underground films (such as *My Hustler* [Andy Warhol, 1965] and *Flaming Creatures* [Jack Smith, 1963]). Due to a product shortage in gay-oriented film, Continental approached Bob Mizer with the prospect of exhibiting his mail order shorts (Mizer 1992). By August the Park was showing Mizer's posing films of individual nude models including Blackie Preston, Rick Collette, and Bobby Nelson, and in September the Park began screening Mizer's story films like *Annie's Angry Android* (1968) and *Boy Factory* (1968). From September 4 to September 10, 1968, *Psychedelic Monster* played alongside Mizer's posing film featuring Monte Hanson, and two campy foreign features *The Day the Fish Came Out* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1967) and *My Son, the Hero* (Duccio Tessari, 1962). While the reception of *Psychedelic Monster* is unclear, the film's aesthetics, which included special effects and full frontal nudity, diverged significantly from the eight previously produced monster shorts.

Sustained Spectacle and Shifts in the Formal Structure of Bob Mizer's Frankenstein Films

Dr. Bigelow's Monster (1966) and *Psychedelic Monster* (1968) are the only two extant films of Mizer's muscle monster cycle that were accessible for the purposes of this article.[6] The overall narrative structure of the two films is very similar: a mad scientist brings a muscular monster to life, the two initially get along, and finally a fight ensues, resulting in a wrestling match between the two. However, beyond their narrative similarities and despite the fact that only two years separated the films' release dates, the two could not be more different in terms of how they unfold to emphasize different forms of spectacle. This section

[6] Of the nine known films, it is currently unclear how many are extant. For example, *Dr. Faggerty's Strange Experiment* (1965) was screened in the late 2010s at The Magazine in San Francisco, but the film was not available to view for this article.

argues that the earlier film's visual style is coordinated to emphasize dual entwined spectacular elements—scantily clad male bodies and forms of contact between them—while the latter film is structured around a primary spectacle—full-frontal male nudity—complemented by a secondary spectacle of special effects.

Dr. Bigelow's Monster begins with a full shot of the laboratory containing various implements, a Jacob's ladder arc machine in foreground, and a laboratory table covered with a sheet in midground. Dr. Bigelow (Paul Bigelow) enters from the left, clad only in a posing strap and a physician's circular mirror attached to his forehead. Approaching the laboratory table, Bigelow uncovers a nearly nude male body (Jim Johnson) wearing only a striped posing strap. The centrality of the male body to the mise-en-scène in the first shot of the film underscores the blatant nature of the film's homosexual appeal. The linkage of audience appeal to this film's display of masculine bodies is akin to early silent films' focus on visual spectacles; by centering the seminude male as an attraction, "its energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative" (Gunning 1990, 59). While previous physique photography operations had to rely on the alibi of artistic study (Waugh 1996, 223–224) in order to allow for the spectacle of the disrobed male body, by this time legal precedents had effectively codified as licit the dissemination of both nude male physique content and literature that appealed to gay consumers.[7] By the time of *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*'s release, Mizer's operation had already overtly acknowledged its appeal to queer consumers with *Physique Pictorial* columns referring to ONE Inc. as "friends" (Editorial 1964, 11) and directing readers to be in touch with Mattachine Society in order to learn "how to get the most out of gay life" ("Physique News Items" 1965, 2).

The gay appeal in *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* is heightened with a nearly immediate shift to a focus on not only the exposed male physique, but nearly nude male bodies in contact. After uncovering Johnson's body, Bigelow mounts him, straddling Johnson's bulging posing strap-covered crotch. Bigelow begins to closely examine Johnson's eyes; the tactile intensity of the examination is heightened by an extreme close-up of Johnson's face with his rolled back left eye revealed as Bigelow peels open his eyelids. Bigelow then injects something into Johnson's arm before adjusting the electric arc rod machine. Smoke emits from Johnson's head as his body begins to twitch from the electric current.

[7] See respectively *MANual Enterprises, Inc. v. Day* 370 U.S. 478 (1962) and *One, Inc. v. Olesen* 355 U.S. 371 (1958).

Johnson sits up and begins flexing his muscles, vigorously moving his jaw and eyebrows before breaking a chain that binds his hands. Bigelow caresses Johnson's arms in an attempt to calm him down. Bigelow's persistent touching of Johnson suggests a sexual assertiveness that could not be fully realized onscreen until the ushering in of hardcore in the early 1970s. *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* makes do with invasive tactility—Bigelow's acts of mounting, injecting, eye examining, and caressing—that, while obvious in their appeal to gay customers, could not fully manifest male-male sexual contact.

An extended wrestling sequence concludes *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*, acting as the film's denouement of male touch. Taking up nearly six minutes (three-fifths) of the film's ten-minute runtime, wrestling is clearly the film's main feature, and perhaps its most anticipated given the ubiquity of wrestling sequences in Bob Mizer's "story" films. With this shift in action, there is a notable shift in cinematography when the wrestling sequence commences. Whereas the beginning of the film tends toward full and medium-full shots at eye level, the wrestling sequence employs a closer camera distance with the camera positioned at either a high angle or straight on at knee level in order to tightly frame the men's writhing and struggling bodies. In a textbook example of intentional camp's pursuit to "dethrone the serious" (Sontag 1964, 527), the wrestling sequence holds in tandem the earnestness of the sport and the ridiculous context of the Frankenstein-spoof. While the actors' expressions appear rather serious, the close camera distance reveals several artificial aspects of the mise-en-scène that throw each actor's intense countenance into relief. The doors and hinges of the laboratory cabinet become clearly visible as squiggly black lines drawn onto a cardboard-like base, a wrestling mat inexplicably appears beneath the actors, and Bigelow bursts into giggles as the smirking Johnson feigns zapping him with an electrical instrument. The film ends with Johnson gnashing his teeth and beating his chest as he sits on the unconscious Dr. Bigelow's torso.

Unlike *Dr. Bigelow's Monster*, *Psychedelic Monster* begins with an extended credits sequence that initiates the film's secondary spectacle of special effects. Gloomy clouds created with a liquid dye effect descend upon the silhouette of a castle as the titles dissolve in and out, crediting the special effects to Dave Harris and Ben Vincent. Akin to the earlier film, the first noncredit shot of *Psychedelic Monster* is a full shot of a laboratory, in this case filmed through an arched doorway, wherein we see a midground table and large machine topped by high voltage arc rods in the foreground. The nude mad doctor (Tom Jones) enters from the right with a box labeled "Monster Parts." During a comical incident based on the spectacle of male nudity, Jones burns his exposed genitals

while pouring liquid into a retort flask machine. A visual joke ensues as he attempts to cover his lower body with an apron, but a hole is ripped out of the apron in the crotch area, so he shrugs and throws the apron away.

Drawing from classical studio produced monster cinema that coded mad scientists as homosexual with subtextual cues like an everpresent-male assistant (Benshoff 1998, 144), *Psychedelic Monster* is forthright in its depiction of Jones' sexual identity with the employment of reaction shots to signal attraction to male or female body parts. Jones cackles as he peers into the "Monster Parts" box. The contents of the box are displayed in a stop-motion collage of clippings of nude body parts from muscle magazines. Reaction shots of Jones's face are intercut with rearrangements of the body parts, with a particular emphasis on close ups of male genitalia. Jones's queer sexuality is demonstrated in this sequence via his reaction shots that display excitement at the sight of male penises and buttocks, and a look of disappointment and disapproval at a brief shot of a nude female torso. Jones builds an ideal male body with the parts and then pulls his bricolage monster (Mack Reed) out of the box to strap him onto an inclined gurney.

Jones brings Reed to life in a sequence that employs special effects, experimental cinematography, and an emphasis on male nudity. Connecting an electrical conductor to Reed's hand, Jones then turns some switches that initiate the electrical current, as signified by a rising electric arc on the arc rod machine. A full shot of Reed on the gurney is overlaid with a sequence of shapes that signify lighting and electricity. After a shot of Reed's wiggling toes, a montage of medium full and full shots of Reed is presented with overlay effects of moving psychedelic swirls and other shapes that culminate in a close-up of Reed's twitching penis and scrotum. The sequence ends with an aerial close-up of Reed's face that zooms out and twists sideways as Reed breaks the leather straps that confined his body. Reed's first interactions with Jones amount to a comical sequence of misunderstandings between the two: Jones attempts to put cowboy boots on Reed and Reed tries to eat them, Jones tries to apply oil to Reed's body and Reed drinks it, and Jones pours Reed a cup of coffee that Reed throws at Jones.

While *Psychedelic Monster* does conclude with Mizer's signature wrestling sequence, in this case the wrestling takes up less than a minute of the film's runtime, which is a marked difference from the earlier film's prolonged emphasis on male-male contact. The wrestling pair knock over a table that starts a fire, evidenced by flames that flicker at the bottom of the screen as the two wrestle in medium shot. An exterior shot of the castle silhouette is overlaid with a liquid effect that suggests clouds of smoke billowing from the castle. In a

medium full shot, Jones pushes Reed and runs offscreen toward the camera; Reed attempts to follow and the shot ends with a still frame of his torso lunging toward the camera. Two dark spots appear on his immobile chest and the still burns up. Further shots of Reed grabbing Jones end in another freeze frame of the two that ignites. A "The End" title card flashes over another shot of smoke effects on the castle silhouette. While there are significant differences between the two films and a notable increase in visual display of the male body from the first to the second, both films emerged from the same mix of formal traditions derived from exploitation and horror film cultures.

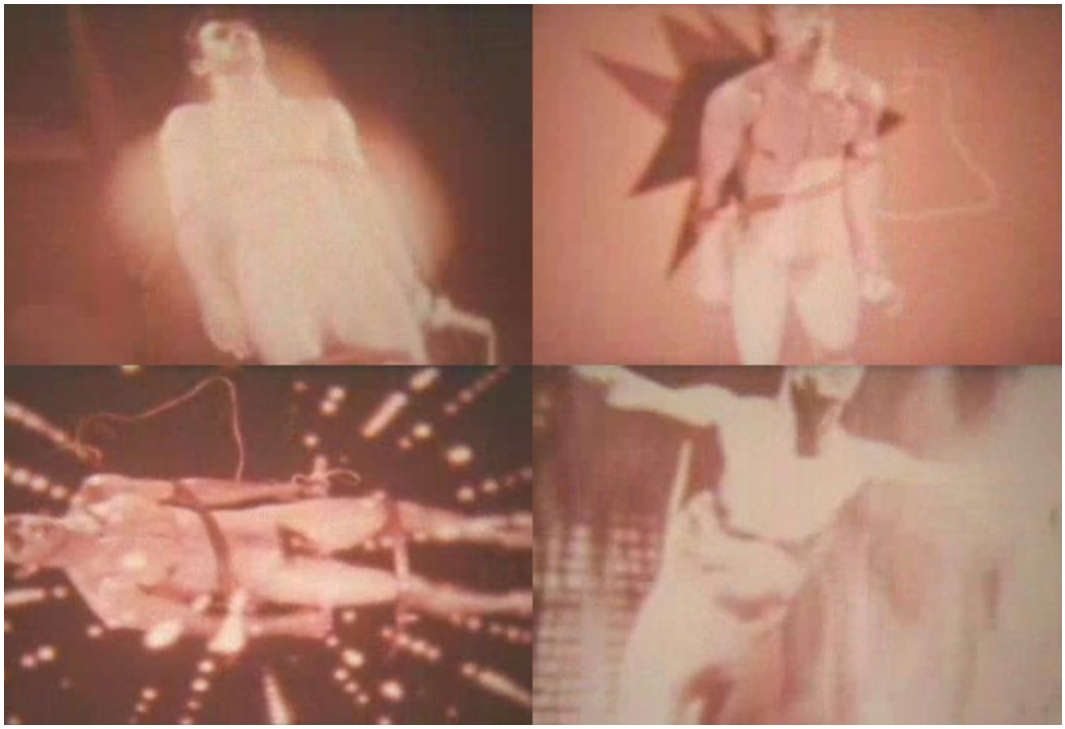

Figure 3: Optical effects and the centered male body in four shots from *Psychedelic Monster*, Courtesy Bob Mizer Foundation.

Both *Dr. Bigelow's Monster* and *Psychedelic Monster* were film products that existed primarily as avenues for displaying the male body for the pleasure of the films' queer male target audience. Where they differ is in how that primary spectacle of the male body is qualified, in the first case, by supplementing partial male nudity with a dual emphasis on the tactile aspects of bodies touching and, in the second case, by foregrounding total male nudity often with the help of visual effects and experimental cinematography. As alluded to in the previous

section, these films are closely aligned with the category of exploitation cinema because their impetus is sensation and spectacle rather than narrative immersion; as Eric Schaefer has defined the category: "The centrality of spectacle in exploitation films tended to disrupt or override the traditional cause-and-effect chain in narrative, while it also permitted filmmakers to be slack with classical devices like continuity editing. As a result, the forbidden sights stood out in relief from the shambling wreck of the diegesis" (2001, 80). As softcore precursors to later gay hardcore films, Mizer's monster shorts are quintessential examples of how corporeal spectacle is so central to both horror and pornography, two of the film categories that Linda Williams famously dubbed "body genres" (1991). Akin to Schaefer's observations about spectacle's centrality in exploitation films and Williams's theorization of horror and adult film as "genres whose non-linear spectacles have centered more directly upon the gross display of the human body" (1991, 3), Mizer's shorts specifically position the male body at the crossroads of horror and pornography's flesh-based attractions. Both films employ congruent narrative structures that culminate in a wrestling sequence, although wrestling is more central to the contact-based spectacle of the earlier film and an adjunct to the special effect supplemented male nudity of the second film. The films' spectacular appeals unmistakably acknowledged their queer audience and, in the case of *Psychedelic Monster*, encoded a gay-identified character in the film itself; thus, such films fit uniquely within the tradition of queer horror cinema, as we see below.

Pre-Stonewall Muscle Monster Shorts in the Lineage of Queer Horror Cinema

Angelic Frankenstein is a unique entry in Mizer's Frankenstein cycle because as a cultural product it crossed over from an exclusively gay context into the broader consciousness of cinephile culture and horror fandom in particular. While originally announced in a 1965 physique publication as planned for an October 1969 release (*Grecian Guild Studio Quarterly* 1965, 7), in May 1969 *Angelic Frankenstein* was discussed in the French film journal *Premier Plan* in an issue on the subject of Frankenstein monster depictions in cinema. Whereas the Frankenstein films of studios like Universal and Hammer were extensively considered in the issue, *Angelic Frankenstein* appeared in a section on "Quelques films un peu spéciaux" [some peculiar films] primarily focused on erotic adaptations of Mary Shelley's book (Bouyxou 1969, 116-126) such as the softcore American movie *Kiss Me Quick* (Peter Perry Jr., 1964), the Italian

exploitation documentary *Sexy Super Interdit* (Marcello Martinelli, 1963), and the French short *Frankenstein Cherie* (1967). Bouyxou's discussion of *Angelic Frankenstein* briefly introduced Mizer's AMG operation while also evaluating his films' makeshift overtly queer style as "parfaitement grotesques" [perfectly grotesque] and "délibérément pédérastiques" [deliberately homosexual] (1969, 119).[8] The subsequent discussions of Bob Mizer's *Angelic Frankenstein* within horror fandom appear to have derived (without citation) from the reference to the film in *Premier Plan.* At least two pieces of evidence suggest that the *Premier Plan* issue was the origin of information on *Angelic Frankenstein* in horror fan circles: these horror fandom discussions often reference the other erotic films mentioned in *Premier Plan* in nearly identical order, and the subsequent descriptions of Mizer's film appear to be condensed versions of the *Premier Plan* capsule review.

Notably, *Angelic Frankenstein* was mentioned in a March 1970 article on Frankenstein adaptations in the kid-oriented horror fan magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, once again, alongside an enumeration of "adults only" adaptations ("Mary's Amazing Monster" 1970, 24). The reference to Mizer's film in effectively the "bible" of youth-driven horror fandom is remarkable given that postwar homophobia was often undergirded by child-protectionist urges to segregate knowledge of gay culture away from children (Strub 2013, 112-113). *Famous Monsters*' acknowledgment of a gay monster film provides a historically grounded instance of queerness within Stonewall-era youth culture that reverberates with the broader confluence of gay liberation, exploitation cinema, and youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s (Staiger 1999, 39-40). References to Mizer's film in later horror-fan tomes continued through the 1970s. In his book on the transmedia iterations of the Frankenstein monster, Donald Glut described *Angelic Frankenstein* as "the first homosexual Frankenstein film" (1973, 232) and made a similar observation to Bouyxou crediting Mizer's directorship in a context of attributional anonymity. References to the film would further circulate in Michael Parry's *The Rivals of Frankenstein* (1977, 218) and John Stoker's *The Illustrated Frankenstein* (1980, 73, 121).

As is evident, discussions of the *Angelic Frankenstein* short crossed over from the gay counterpublic of Bob Mizer's physique magazines into the broader public sphere via distinct yet intersecting venues from French cinephile culture

[8] Here the adjective "pédérastiques" aligns in English translation more closely to the general understanding of "homosexual" rather than the age-differentiated meaning of "pederastic;" for more discussion of the broader connotation of this French term as different from its more specific employment in English, see Kadji Amin's *Disturbing Attachments* (2017, 148).

to American and British horror fandom. Jane Drover argues that because of its marginality *Angelic Frankenstein*'s "contribution to the Frankenstein myth is for the most part minimal" (1990, 262). While surely true in comparison to more well-known films that queerly spoofed the source material, like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), the crossover interest in *Angelic Frankenstein* is significant because it demonstrates that pre-Stonewall queer culture was remarkably visible and could circulate beyond the seemingly isolated sector of queer counterpublics.

More broadly, Bob Mizer's muscle monster films are unique in their comprehensive implementation of a queer sensibility on all levels of the media communication spectrum. Queerness is present at the level of production in the sexual identity of the film's director, the intentional depiction of male same-gender desire in the films' narratives, and the origin of those depictions in Mizer's direct solicitation of narratives from his audience ("AMG Physique Movie Production Schedule" 1957). Queerness was also essential to distribution infrastructures in that Mizer's film mail order operation was based on social networks that constituted a burgeoning gay counterpublic sphere. Mizer's intentional distribution scheme was also reflected in the films' content that blatantly courted a gay male audience by infusing the films with both a conspicuous homoeroticism and a camp sensibility. Finally, queerness was indicative of the films' exhibition contexts because the mail order films were initially bought by male-desiring men who screened the films in private contexts, and later, films like *Psychedelic Monster* were screened at a public theater with an exclusively gay policy to an audience largely composed of queer men. In sum, Mizer solicited ideas for storylines directly from his customers, he produced and then distributed films to fit those treatments, and finally audiences accessed the short films either privately or at a gay theater. Thus, rather than having to implement negotiated or oppositional reading strategies (Hall 1980), audiences for Mizer's films participated in a complete circuit of counterpublic cultural production.

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- 2022 -

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