



**TURN OF THE GAZE: TOWARDS A (RE)VISION
OF READING MASCULINITY**

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ABSTRACT

Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity contends that how we read masculinity, within popular culture, is overdetermined.

Within the dominant discourse of patriarchy, masculinity is commonly read to be synonymous with both the male body and heterosexuality. When academic discussions on masculinity, namely, feminist reinscriptions of gender, continue to describe and identify individual men in equally essentialist terms, the problem is exacerbated. One such site where these configurations of masculinity converge is in that cultural practice of seeing and reading representation(s)—the male gaze.

This study examines such an acculturated site/sight. It argues that if masculinity is to be revised, we—those of us within the academic field of gender studies, and, more importantly, those of us who are male readers—must reconsider how masculinity can be alternatively read when textually represented. To a large extent, this is necessary because some contemporary texts represent the apparent masculinity of the male body to be nothing less than a spectacularized site of contradiction. We can begin to appreciate this need when such films as *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, and *Batman, the Movie* as well as such fiction as *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*, *Equal Affections*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *American Psycho*, and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* challenge our otherwise normative understanding of what masculinity presently is.

Our current postmodern focus on difference enables us to re-read masculinity through a politics of dis coherence. This is both the focus and aim of my study. I want to propose that how and what we understand masculinity to be is never solely, or singularly, a matter of representing the male body with the male gaze. Rather, the potential of this gaze to be a chiasm—a space stimulating dis coherence—inevitably results in a dislocation between the apparent masculine identification it is argued to

engender and the generic masculine subjectivity it inherently seems to guarantee a reader who deploys the male gaze.

If we can no longer read the representation of masculinity in these problematic sites with the certainty of what is now a dis-eased male gaze, our ability to locate, engender and identify our subjectivity as the reader/spectator of texts no longer corresponds with that subject position of the generic masculine reader/spectator in dominant culture. That this problem forces us to ask the question, “what is a masculine subject?” implicitly foregrounds a need to rethink how we can re-present subjectivity, and the masculine representation it engenders, within the postmodern condition. As such, this study ends by suggesting the possibility of a performatively “queer” identity for the reader/spectator today—in each act of reading gender, he or she can be, quite possibly, the cross-(ad)ressed masculine subject this study proposes in its conclusion.

STATEMENTS

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to this thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

Adrian Augustus Danker

23 December 1994

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Jack: Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

Lady Bracknell: I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not all together please you.

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

FOREWORD

This study, written prior to the publication of Judith Butler's new book, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's collection of essays, *Tendencies* and, in particular, Lee Edelman's eagerly anticipated anthology, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay, Literary, and Cultural Theory*,¹ can be seen to situate itself within similar trajectories as those posed by these recent works. Together they locate themselves within the emerging field of "queer" theory and politics. In doing so, they describe, contest, and, without doubt, stimulate how we can begin to rethink our present cultural representations of gender and sexuality.

My regret, however, is that I have been unable to engage fully with these in as critical a manner as I would have liked to because of their recent publication. Perhaps, one possible way to appreciate my study is to see it within a wider context: it is an attempt to realize what Butler, Sedgwick and Edelman tacitly see as the necessary revision of such dominant terms as "heterosexuality" and "masculinity."

¹A reading of these books will indicate the present trajectories emerging within the study of sexuality and gender today. See Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); and Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay, Literary, and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

INTRODUCTION

In so far as men live the dominant version of masculinity analysed here, they are themselves trapped in structures that fix and limit masculine identity. They do what they *have* to do.

Antony Easthope²

“We all see through the same pair of eyes, but we don’t all see the same thing.”

*You Only Live Once*³

When I look in the mirror ... I see a human being—a white middle-class male—gender is invisible to me because that is where *I* am privileged. I am the norm. I believe that most men do not know they have a gender.

Michael Kimmel⁴

I begin with an ending: in October 1985, Rock Hudson, Hollywood’s leading man in such domestic melodramas of the ’50s as *Giant* (1956), *Written Against the Wind* (1956), and *Pillow Talk* (1959), died. His demise should have been recorded by both Hollywood and the media in obituaries and eulogies praising his rags to riches story. Instead, the focus was on AIDS.

The reports and articles speculated about the circumstances by which Hudson contracted the disease as much as they purported to speak of the ravages his body suffered whilst hysterically posing the suggestion of his transmission of AIDS to his leading ladies

²Antony Easthope, *What a Man’s Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* (London: Paladin-Grafton Books, 1986) 7.

³*You Only Live Once*, dir. Fritz Lang, with Henry Fonda and Sylvia Sydney, United Artists, 1937.

⁴Quoted by Brenda Polan in her article, “The Gender Blender,” *Guardian* 29 September 1988: 20.

of recent years. What each of these promised was the titillation of feeding a hungry public appetite for Rock Hudson's body—once admired and exhorted to be what exemplified manly physique⁵—as it was emasculated by AIDS. His AIDS-related death focussed public attention at the segregated, if not marginalized, site of this “disease of the deviant” (Goldstein 1989: 84). In other words, it came to be located primarily within, and solely demonized as, the gay male body.

And this was precisely where both media and public converged in seeing Rock Hudson's sickness, and eventual death; the question on everyone's lips was, is he *one of those*? What his death foregrounded was more than AIDS and its tragic consequences; it was his homosexuality. In a '50s Hollywood, let alone an America caught up in McCarthyism's hysterical fear of the Other⁶ (a fear exemplified in that conflated pairing of communism and homosexuality), his sexuality had to be hidden. It was, in a manner of speaking, screened behind the public face of Rock Hudson, the Hollywood leading man. As in his films, his was the face epitomizing what a '50s American masculinity was meant to be.

In death, however, Rock Hudson's sexuality axiomatically surfaced to reinscribe his male body. Where his body used to signify an “ideal masculinity” (Meyer 1991: 278), Hudson's body became marked, in an '80s America panicked by the AIDS epidemic, as pathological. In seeing his body thus, what becomes spectacularly evident, I believe, is an

⁵In “Rock Hudson's Body,” Richard Meyer charts the various constructions of Hudson's body as emblematic of a masculine physique, if not the phallus itself. See his article in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) 259-288.

⁶For an in-depth discussion of McCarthyism and politics, and its consequences on constructions of sexuality in a '50s and '60s America, see Lee Edelman, “Tearooms and Sympathy, or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Abelove, Barale and Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993) 553-574. A revised version can also be found in Edelman's book, *Homographesis* 148-170.

erroneous and even hysterical overdetermination where homosexuality, now, equals death. In other words, Rock Hudson's masculine body undergoes, in death, an (over)exposure where his identity is now, first and foremost, that of the homosexual man.

In this particular spectacularization, Rock Hudson's masculine persona, or what spectators have come to identify in his films as the representation of masculinity itself, becomes problematic. If masculinity is articulated as that sex, male, it is also situated, within patriarchy, in the male-female sex act of intercourse. What then are we to make of a homosexual Rock Hudson? Is his "masculinity," really masculinity? Or, is his masculinity being *screened*, like a display, before us as Hudson chases and kisses Doris Day in *Pillow Talk*; in short, is it a pose?

This slippage in identifying masculinity—perhaps, more precisely an inability to locate it anywhere else but within heterosexuality—signals the very manner in which we are positioned to see and read gender and sexuality within popular culture. This is especially significant if the body is thought of in terms of a discursive site where representation is effected. Indeed, the case of Rock Hudson is a matter of how we come to view his male body.

As I see it, Hudson's death is less a graphic end to the prolonged sickness, AIDS, than it is the surfacing, or even the centering, of the Other within representations of masculinity that situate themselves at the male body. Hudson's body, notes Meyer, was constructed to signify "a particularly sanitized version of hetero-masculinity" within a '50s and '60s American culture (1991: 275). This construction, depicted in numerous pictorial representations in fan magazines as well as in his films where Hudson played the straight man, culminated in his arranged marriage to Phyllis Gates in November 1955. In each instance, Hudson's homosexuality was contained, sanitized, if not denaturalized, in a portrayal of masculinity privileging heterosexual prowess. Moreover, each representation carried the promise of heterosexual domestication; "Rock," Meyer goes on to observe, "is aligned with marriage, mothering, and [the] male identification ... of heterosexual

exchange" (1991: 262-263).

Nevertheless, in retrospect, such a representation of his body can only be doubly significant. As both his on-screen and media persona affirmed this particularly heterosexual representation of masculinity, what was screened, like a disguise, was his homosexuality. Hudson's affliction with AIDS, and his sudden and rapid decline, was a shock to both his fans and the general public. What is of greater significance, however, for a heterosexual audience who grew up on images of a masculine Rock Hudson, must be that his sexual identity is now, irrefutably, homosexual, and hence problematically unmasculine, at the site of his male body.

This is, most definitely, a bifurcation of sexuality within the same body. As Hudson was fabricated, in that form of a role model, to signify a public surface of heterosexual masculinity in order to sell the American Dream of what it meant to be a man in a '50s America, he was at the same time closeted as a man engaging in homosexual practices. Within the safety and anonymity of this necessary closet, Hudson's homosexual identity existed as a trace beneath his enacted face of the public and masculine Hollywood leading man. That is, his homosexuality is traced in that double sense of existing within and becoming a cause for Rock Hudson's enacted heterosexual masculinity.

What can this contradictory, and perhaps, convulsive, conjunction of Hudson's homosexuality and his perceived masculinity (which is heterosexually defined) suggest at this site of his body but an inability to fix and name "masculinity"? And is masculinity then not a matter of what is on display, what is being screened at a particular time and space?

This disjuncture between the public and the private Rock Hudson, or, between the on-scene and the ob-scene man, echoes that dichotomized opposition of man/non-man, heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine. If binarism is the mechanics by which patriarchy informs and regulates our understanding of gender, the return of the ob-scene into this same space where heterosexuality privileges itself must question what for a generation and a half of heterosexual spectators was nothing but *a* representation of

masculinity—Rock Hudson, Hollywood’s masculine model of the male man.

If sexuality is indeed the central issue in the definition of masculinity, these become—in view of an irruption of homosexuality onto the “heterosexually” coded (sur)face of Rock Hudson’s body—the necessary questions we must now ask ourselves: Has masculinity to be articulated only in heterosexual terms? Why are we unable to read Rock Hudson’s homosexual body in anything but its de-meaning antithesis to heterosexual masculinity? And are we not engaged, at the end of it all, in a question of how we envision the body?

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET; OR IS IT?

“Knowledge,” writes the historian, Joan W. Scott, “is gained through vision ...” (1993: 398). Vision is the privileged site in which we locate our understanding; it also comes to be that sight enabling our articulation, and hence representation, of the world around us. “Seeing,” she goes on to note, “is the origin of knowing” (1993: 398). In the process, our gendered and sexual subjectivity is inextricably intertwined with, and, more significantly, dependent upon, an epistemology which is grounded, primarily, in what has come to be seen as visuality.

But first, what has sight got to do with one’s sense of “personhood”? Jacques Lacan argues for a subjectivity dependent upon primary narcissism or, as it has come to be understood, as a matter of the mirror stage: one’s sense of self exists in the mirroring image of the Other.⁷ In the Lacanian model, the child comes to recognize itself in the mirror of an other, the mother. In this moment of recognition, which is also a tacit

⁷For a Lacanian discussion of the formation of subjectivity, see “The Mirror Stage” in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) 1-7.

acknowledgement of her difference, the child becomes a desiring subject empowered to articulate and represent itself for it has entered the realm of Lacan's Symbolic, that enabling language allowing subjectivity. This subject-mirror nexus intersects at the sight/site of feminine lack in order to narcissistically locate itself: the subject, then, "originally locates and recognizes desire," Lacan notes, "through the intermediary" (1988: 147) of a mirror image that is, in a manner of speaking, the representation of its own (un)likeness.⁸

Although the Lacanian subject finds itself in this signal moment of recognition that is the mirror stage (and also in its subsequent repetition in those other instances of self-recognition), there has been a tendency to devalue the significant role the Other can play in revising how the male subject is enabled to rethink his masculine identity as the seeing/reading subject of cultural representation. In her article, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," Kaja Silverman records this inextricable relationship between the male subject and the Other:

The mirror stage is *inconceivable* without the presence of an other (most classically the mother) to provide scopic as well as "orthopedic" support, and to "stand in" for the Other. Her look articulates the mirror stage, and facilitates the child's alignment with it. (1986: 142-143. Emphasis added)

What is imported into our understanding of masculine subjectivity, as it relates to the male subject, then, must be the necessary and determining function of the gaze when it is exercised to read the Other. Silverman's observation, specific in its reference to, and potentially subversive for, an identification of masculinity, is a point of departure I shall return to in this study. But I want to do this by way of what has been repeatedly enunciated, if not envisioned, within feminism as the male gaze.

⁸For a further discussion of Lacan's mirror stage see: Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: Illini Book-University of Illinois Press, 1987) 16-30; Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kenedy, *The Works of Jaques Lacan: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986) 47-62.

In her highly influential and much quoted article of 1975, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey articulates what we—those of us working within, as we are also politically reinscribing notions of gender in, a predominantly feminist-inflected field of gender studies—now reproduce as that paradigm of masculinity, the male gaze. If the seeing we are engaged in is always a matter of seeing the surface of an Other who is a “mirror” reflecting our own images, Mulvey demonstrates that the cinematic representations of women are patriarchal, oppressive, and man-made. That is to say, Woman is engendered by, for, and as masculine representation. Woman is therefore nothing less than a spectacle of (her) lack. In such representation, she is the “bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning” (Mulvey 1975: 7).

For Mulvey, a woman’s “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” (1975: 11) comes to signify more than the representation of gender; it is, she diagnoses, the confinement of “the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning” to a patriarchal world (1975: 6). Whereas vision intersects with knowledge to embody subjectivity, Mulvey triangulates this equation by introducing the notion of power. According to her, power is specifically that projection of a masculine subjectivity when an individual begins to see and read a film within existing culture. Such a reconfiguration emphasizes one’s individual vision, and its identity, to be a matter of gendered opposition, a matter of an active/passive polarization transposed upon the already divisive male/female binary. “The act of looking” becomes, Peter Middleton writes in his book, *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture*,

overdetermined as an act of knowing (epistemology has habitually used metaphors of vision), an act of scopophilia, and as the establishment of the boundary between subject and object. (1992: 7)

Indeed, this spatialization of gender, which Middleton describes as “the boundary between subject and object,” is integral to Mulvey’s feminist identification of the gaze as male. Woman exists only as space; she is that two-dimensional spatiality, “surface,” which is

signalled in her representation as image, as icon, and, more accurately, as spectacle. In stark contrast, there is “the active male figure”: he is three-dimensional and “free to command the stage ... in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (Mulvey 1975: 12-13). In looking upon the spectacle of femininity, either in voyeurism or fetishism, the female subject is subjected to the look of the male spectator: she is captured, confined, and contained within the male gaze.

Vision is, then, no longer just a moment of sensory embodiment. Rather, this is vision as (a) construction: men and women see according to the masculine subject positions of spectatorship and interpretation we inhabit. In short, seeing is political. Feminists have made us aware that gender and sexuality are neither naturally nor essentially a matter of body or sex. Gender and sexuality are, instead, representations, categories, and constructions of a patriarchal culture I shall identify, following Luce Irigaray, as “hom(m)o-sexuality” in this study.

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray employs this term to delineate the economic exchange of the feminine among men. I want to suggest, here, that “hom(m)o-sexuality” is itself cultural. I argue this because “hom(m)o-sexuality” has become a term describing, but, more importantly, homogenizing, not only patriarchal culture but also the gender identity of individual males when we discuss the relationship between cultural representation and gender within the academic field of gender studies. Within the parameters of hom(m)o-sexuality, *all* men are predominantly focussed upon whilst always revolving around the sign, Woman. Economically and semiotically, Woman is that cultural sign of hom(m)o-sexual representation. “This means,” Irigaray empathically postulates, “that the *very possibility of a sociocultural order*” is dependent upon hom(m)o-sexuality “as its organizing principle” (1985b: 192). Hom(m)o-sexuality, as appropriated by Irigaray, becomes a homogenized and generic label for representing masculine identity. Moreover, hom(m)o-sexuality is understood to be one and the same with masculinity.

I am therefore extending cinematic vision, Mulvey's definition of the male gaze, beyond the scopic field of the movie theater. In doing so, I seek to recontextualize this gaze as not only emblematic of a specifically male spectatorship when seeing films but as itself what seeing and reading is all about; we can only make sense of the cultural representation of gender with the male gaze. This is because, within hom(m)o-sexuality, the male gaze is a socialized vision: sight is engendered and articulated as masculine. In writing about popular culture, Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, in their introduction to *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, note:

In film, on television, in the press and in most popular narratives men are shown to be in control of the gaze, women are controlled by it. Men act; women are acted upon. This is patriarchy. (1989: 1)

The male gaze not only pervades to impregnate culture but it is understood to be synonymous with patriarchy. This equation is assumed to be, moreover, "a natural hierarchy of sight" (Foster 1988: ix) where what is eventually privileged is the masculine subject position of the generic spectator/reader when a man or a woman sees and reads texts.

There is, moreover, the appropriation of the male gaze as a privileged term, and a clearly demarcated site, for articulating what masculinity is within the predominantly feminist-inflected field of gender studies. Because feminism—and here I specifically refer to essentialist and anti-pornography feminisms—has come to be one of many influential discourses theorizing gender, it is seen to articulate what masculinity is and should not be. This way of looking at what it can mean to be masculine stems from an intrinsic belief that such a discourse can speak for as it can also rewrite *both* those hom(m)o-sexually gendered categories, "masculine" and "feminine." But no discourse is apolitical. Each discourse is engaged in its own censorship of some terms so as to validate others. Within its discursive representations, each and every act of inscription, or reinscription, is political in general whilst its manifestation as a particular cultural practice specifically foregrounds

its political exercise.

What is germane to both the cultural discourse of hom(m)o-sexuality and the discourses of anti-pornography and essentialist feminisms within gender studies is a model of sight where the gaze is seen to be primarily, if not hierarchically, male because of its masculine identification. In addition, each of these situates the attendant masculine subjectivity of the seeing/reading subject within the male gaze that is deployed to read gender. This takes place, Michel Foucault reminds us, in and through the exercise of “a technology of power” (1980: 148). The male gaze is such a technology: as it inscribes, maintains, and proscribes gendered subjectivity, vision finds itself “organised entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze” (Foucault 1980: 152). Foucault calls such a gaze a panopticon. It is hardly surprising that this panopticon gaze engenders a scopic regime, or field, in which “the whole problem of the visibility of bodies, individuals and things” is subjected to “a system of centralised observation” (Foucault 1980: 146) which I will insist is hom(m)o-sexually focussed.

For the individual subject, such a gaze is—as it necessarily must be—all seeing and all observing in that sense of surveillance. As a control of vision, the male gaze engenders the surfaces an individual sees and reads into the likeness of masculinity where likeness, as I understand this, is itself paradigmatic of hom(m)o-sexual representation. Such surveillance orientates the very sight through which this individual will come to see and read as inherently

An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. (Foucault 1980: 155)

In other words, at this locus where vision, knowledge, and power converge, the individual is not only externally inscribed and regulated, but he/she also internalizes this “inspecting gaze.” “The individual, with his identity and characteristics,” notes Foucault, “is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires,

forces" (1980: 74). That is, the subjectivity of the reader is produced when the male gaze is internalized as a characteristically masculine practice of reading gender. In addition, and, far more disturbingly, such subjectivity is argued to be representative of the male body within these essentialist and anti-pornography feminisms which animate gender studies.

The male gaze is hence not vision; it is, more correctly, *visuality*. In delineating vision as gendered, Mulvey together with Gamman, Marshment and other feminists do not import into our discussions on representation and gender the issue of seeing but of *how* and *why* we see and read as we do. And this is nothing short of betraying *visuality* as a politics that is grounded in those binarisms of active/passive, masculine/feminine, male/female, center(ed)/space(d). In turn, these are nothing less than variations of that predominant binarism within hom(m)o-sexuality, Self and Other.

But *visuality* is much more than constructed sight; it must involve the surface we encounter when we are the seeing/reading subject of a text. What we are constantly seeing and reading, as we attempt to locate and articulate our subjectivity, is text(s) as surface. And surface is exactly where representations are localized and read. For the art historian, Norman Bryson, this concept of surface has to be accounted for in terms of mediation and interaction. He writes:

Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up *visuality*, that cultural construct, and make *visuality* different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between retina and world is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena. (1988: 91-92)

Indeed, Bryson's observation of the screen echoes Lacan's mirror stage: they each argue for the primacy of (a) surface in engendering subjectivity. And if one's subjectivity is dependent upon a "mirror," a screen, in other words, a site/sight, we can begin to comprehend why spatiality, as Mulvey illustrates, must be fundamentally incorporated into any discussion of a gendered and engendering vision. Spatiality is hence both the

mediating sight between Self and Other as it also is a site enabling contest and revision.

In fact, we can better understand this dual aspect of spatiality in terms of that cultural screen we encounter, and which we represent when reading with the male gaze. In watching a film as in reading fiction or in viewing television, or even in addressing fashion, this gaze, and, by extrapolation, its masculine identity, is a matter of how surface is read. In this study, surface refers to that outward representation of corporeality, skin. It can also refer to that (sur)face of gender the individual subject effects when he/she addresses his/her identity in terms of clothes. In addition, I want spatiality to also refer to that (sur)face identity a reader repeats when reading with the male gaze—the face of the generic masculine subject, the male reader, he/she is said to engender when reading representation within dominant culture.

I return to the Lacanian subject by way of Silverman: if Lacan's understanding of subjectivity is fixated upon the "mirror" of feminine lack, his subject is dependent upon the gaze of this Other. As Silverman explicates, it is the gaze of this Other, the returning gaze from object to subject, which enables the Self to locate and express itself. In other words, "the subject sees itself being seen" (1986: 143) and is engendered. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan describes this thus:

What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter life and it is through the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which ... I am *photo-graphed*. (1986: 106)

Feminists who are critical of Lacanian psychoanalysis see this act of "photographing" as the containment of women into that bounded surface of the image, the spectacle, the screen; the gaze that is outside is male. But what are we—in our practice of reading the male body to be definitively masculine—to make of the gaze, let alone its masculine identification, if it cannot, at the particularly problematic site of contra-diction, locate itself in the Other's gaze? In other words, what can it mean for the individual subject when the

Other does not “photograph” the Self as that specifically masculine subject, the male reader?

IS THE GAZE ALWAYS MALE?

In seeing Rock Hudson’s once masculine and heterosexual body as homosexual, what we are confronted with is a moment of visual unease when we read his body today. When this male body is overcoded as pathological and diseased because of AIDS, the male sufferer must be proscribed as Other because he must be spectacularized, displayed and positioned as a surface of difference that can be read. For a spectator, the sight of Hudson’s AIDS-infected body highlights the prevailing condition of heterosexual masculinity: it is whole and healthy. Meyer is most correct to see that there is now a correlative reconfiguration of Hudson’s masculine identity: “Hudson’s illness ... must be produced as the very picture of his ‘fall’ from ideal masculinity” (1991: 278).

But if it is the gaze of the Other which the male, and masculine, subject necessarily depends upon to locate his masculinity, the sight of Rock Hudson, in its double threat of AIDS and homosexuality, refuses that simple correlation where the Other enables a spectator to engender a decidedly masculine self-representation. As a gay man inflicted with AIDS, he ought to embody what a man—that masculine identity of the male body—should never be. But, Hudson has become, in view of his gay but male body, an evidence of similitude *and* difference. He can be seen to be a re-presentation of what masculinity might also mean—the gay male body. In so far as this re-presentation suggests a (re)vision of how we look upon the body of Rock Hudson today, in so far as this reinscription of his male body as homosexual questions the screen that is his masculinity, the gaze that is returned cannot guarantee the individual’s “male gaze” because it foregrounds this problematic Other as equally the same, equally male.

Can this not mean that the male gaze is a also troubled term when it is deployed to act as that critical site of an inquiry into masculinity within gender studies? If so, can we continue to associate it with masculinity? And what then are we to make of masculinity as identifiably heterosexual, hierarchical, and hegemonic? This study attempts to address these issues and, in the process, re-examine the term “masculinity” in its present usage both within the academy and within the larger culture that it examines. I am critical of the term “masculinity” as it is produced by, practiced as, and recycled within the cultural milieu, hom(m)o-sexuality, and here I concur with feminism. Nevertheless, I want to recuperate the term “masculinity” as both a viable point of reference, and as a measure, for the purposes of this study. In no way do I want to foreground this as an act of remasculinization. Rather, I understand that what we come to call the “masculine” is itself a term riddled with contra-dictions, and that the definitive site of the male body is itself a space of interaction and revision between these differences.

I shall, throughout this study, focus on this paradox of masculinity, where in spite of such contra-dictions, masculinity is represented as that unitary convergence of sex, gender and sexuality. This identification, which is an erroneous elision of differences within masculinity, is symptomatic of a cultural practice which describes masculinity as that act of playing the active and dominant role in hierarchical heterosexual intercourse. This practice, moreover, engenders the male body as masculine because it is seen to be “naturally” heterosexual. Consequently, the identity of the male subject who deploys this cultural practice of the male gaze is seen to be fixed in, and homogenized as, if it is not also taken to be monolithically one with, heterosexuality.

Within the parameters of dominant culture, gender becomes synonymous, and interchangeable, with heterosexuality. In turn, they become mistaken as, if not reduced into, that paradigm of heterosexuality, the male-female sex act. Where debates revolving around visibility and gender are concerned, and as they relate to the male body, such interchangeability between these categories are paralleled in the identification of the gaze

as masculine and male.

The male gaze comes to reproduce itself as a socio-cultural dynamic in which not only is our expression of masculinity located; it is also where an individual's masculine subjectivity is enabled when occupying these subject positions of reading and seeing in culture. As Lynne Segal writes in her book examining contemporary perceptions of men, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*:

“masculinity” gains its meanings, its force and appeal, not just from internalised psychological components or roles, but from all the wider social relations in which men and women participate which simply take for granted men's authority and privileges in relation to women. Men inevitably see themselves and are seen in the light of this seeming “natural” authority.... (1990: 284)

Yet in delineating, displaying, and de(in)scribing masculinity as the male gaze, essentialist feminists like Mulvey and Irigaray repeat, in this act of reinscription, such a hom(m)o-sexual bind of gender relations: masculinity being as, and only as, femininity's Other. Moreover, masculinity is deemed to be one and the same with heterosexuality within the dominant representation of gender. And it is this heterosexual conflation which I find disturbing. What disturbs me, as a gay man, is the erasure of sexuality, in particular homosexuality, and its transgressive centrality, in our understanding of what it is can mean to be masculine in postmodernity.

Irigaray's punning “hom(m)o-sexuality” describes the dominant culture where to be man is to be heterosexual and masculine and to participate in the exchange of women. However, as the dominant expression of culture, hom(m)o-sexuality is unable to accommodate the male homosexual whose generic etymology it appropriates and parodies but who is, once again, denaturalized, demonized, and, eventually, elided in Irigaray's particular feminist homogenization of masculinity. This is exactly my problem with Mulvey's male gaze. As there has to be one singular scopic regime within hom(m)o-sexuality for her political reading of gendered vision to work, this point of view comes to see sexual differences within masculinity as axiomatically non-existent because masculinity

is inextricably located within heterosexuality. Of greater anxiety, in this essentialist discussion of the male gaze, must be its particular consequences for a gay—and as I will eventually conclude, in this postmodern moment, a “queer”—understanding of masculinity: there is none. Male homosexuals are, therefore, non-male and never man (enough), never masculine.

This “cultural fusion of gender with sexuality,” notes Gayle Rubin, “has given rise to the idea that a theory of sexuality may be derived directly out of a theory of gender” (1993: 32). Both Mulvey’s expression of the male gaze and Irigaray’s description of hom(m)o-sexuality as indicative of masculinity are paradigmatic of this confusion. Such assumptions are nevertheless limited for what they obscure—the differences *within* masculinity. In any definition or understanding of masculinity (itself an increasingly problematic consequence of postmodernism’s repudiation of any centered meta-narratives), the inextricable presence of the Other as homosexual must also be taken into account. Richard Dyer writes:

Gender roles are crucially defined in terms of heterosexuality—“men,” as a social category, are people who screw “women.” *By taking the signs of masculinity and eroticizing them in a blatantly homosexual context*, much mischief is done to the security with which “men” are defined in society, and by which their power is secured. If that bearded, muscular beer-drinker turns out to be a pansy, how ever [sic] are you going to know the “real” men anymore. (1981: 60-61. Emphasis added)

Dyer’s observation is remarkably insightful for the tacit recognition it makes of homosexuality’s centrality in understanding masculinity. What gay and lesbian studies do is to inject sexuality into the debate on gender. Integral to this particular revision of masculinity is sexuality as a means of addressing, in that dual sense of speaking about and rethinking the surface identity of, the male body.

Throughout this study, I seek to foreground this sexual difference, or what Jonathan Dollimore in *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* identifies as the Proximate Other, as that very sight enabling a revision of how we might then begin to

reconsider, and to reorientate, our present reading of masculinity. Perhaps, it is appropriate, at this juncture, to quote Dollimore in whose short and succinct summary of this hetero/homosexual bind I locate this study. He writes:

in our own time the negation of homosexuality has been in direct proportion to its symbolic centrality; its cultural marginality in direct proportion to its cultural significance; ... homosexuality is so strangely integral to the selfsame heterosexual cultures which obsessively denounce it.... (1991: 28)

Like Dollimore and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose book, *Epistemology of the Closet*, reclaims as it argues a critical re-evaluation of this bind, I propose a revision of masculinity as primarily stimulated by difference, and in particular sexual difference. If masculine identity is so much a matter of being heterosexually constructed within culture, it must also be a construction which relies upon what masculinity should never be, a homosexually-inflected gender.

We need to account for this latter construction if we are to successfully negotiate the complexity that is masculinity: this is a critical issue and one this particular study realizes as a necessary point of examination and comparison. Paying close attention to the (homo)sexuality of masculinity, I wish to postulate, for purposes of this study, that this hetero/homosexual bind is a site of in-between-ness. Following this realignment of space and sexuality, I want to move it beyond a mere play of opposites to an interplay between them. An interplay of this sort corresponds to Derrida's configuration of space as a chiasm, itself a postmodern space. As a distinct and, ultimately, homoerotic surface, this is where as well as why the gaze is already and actively an "inside-out structure" (Lacan 1986: 82) when representing gender. In short, what an individual is dealing with, to be precise, is an interface of reading gender. This will become a recurrent emphasis in my discussion of what I have come to understand as the feminist problematic of locating masculinity in the gaze.

ADDRESSING THE SPECTATOR, MAN

What is it that keeps [men] from speaking and writing of themselves, of their own positionality in the contemporary discursive field?

Alice Jardine⁹

This revision of masculinity emerges from my twin discomfort with the male gaze as it is currently employed in our present discourses—both cultural and academic—on gender.

Firstly, I refer to an inherent conjunction between the male gaze, the male body, and masculinity. As I will illustrate during the course of this study, to introduce the Proximate Other into this particular equation can only result in a problematization of each term. The problem is further compounded when, in the light of this sexual difference, masculinity cannot be conceived as anything else but a gender which is homogeneously heterosexual. This leads to my second point of disquiet: if masculinity is to be revised, it has to address and engage the male homosexual whose body is, at once, both male and gay. Because of his paradoxical nature to the heterosexual masculine man, because he is both similar to yet different from the latter, there is an urgent need to reconsider, if not rewrite, what masculinity can mean today.

For whom is this study then? In so far as any revision of heterosexual masculinity addresses women, lesbians and gay men, oppressed minorities in relation to the dominant, there can be no doubt that heterosexual men are themselves implicitly that foregrounded site of my redress. Indeed, this revision can only be effective if it begins with heterosexual men who, within hom(m)o-sexual culture, come to signify what is the generic masculine

⁹Alice Jardine is quoted in Paul Smith, "Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory," *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987) 36.

subject—the male reader/spectator. In addition, because the predominant and continuing emphasis within gender studies is to articulate “masculinity” as a term focussed upon the male body, and the heterosexual identification it alludes to, this study recognizes a parallel need to address those of us working within the academic field of gender studies.

We need to move beyond the problematic discourse of gender studies that tends to essentialize masculinity even as we seek new ways to talk about femininity, gendered roles, and hom(m)o-sexual culture. If we—especially those of us who record, teach, and write about men and women and their interactions, either in terms of gender or sexuality—are to make equal advances for the validity of the term “masculinity” today, how we read and represent gender, at the site of the body, must be the focus of such a study as this is. More importantly, we need to reconfigure who exactly is the male reader when it seems to encompass both heterosexual and homosexual men: is this collective label adequate in its description of all male readers as masculine subjects? Hence, it is not wrong to say that this study aims to address two groups of readers; both the male reader and the reader within gender studies, although seemingly at odds, must reconsider what they read masculinity as when each tends to describe it as a conjunction of heterosexuality, the male gaze, and the male body.

When men attempt to rewrite masculinity, we are not seen to be negotiating the dominant, natural, and universal subject called “Man” as we are, instead, reinstituting it. Alice Jardine’s question does not only raise a query but it also registers a tendency which highlights the inability of men to reconsider their reading position within culture. We can begin to rewrite masculinity, however, if we admit that what we are dealing with are the distinct yet overlapping signs of the feminine, the patriarchal, and the masculine in hom(m)o-sexual culture¹⁰

¹⁰This is strongly argued by Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland in their introduction to *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990)

In other words, masculinity should not be seen to be the same thing as patriarchal, or, as I shall term it, heterosexual, masculinity. Similarly, we should disengage it from that synonymous identification with the male gaze and hom(m)o-sexuality at the site of the male body. In his article, "Of Me(n) and Feminism," Joseph Boone writes: "maleness needn't be assumed to be coeval with patriarchy, with woman symmetrically positioned on the other side of the proposition" (1990: 17). If feminists of differing thought and political persuasions have complained, repeatedly and loudly, of men's obsession with the feminine, an obsession marked equally by an erasure of masculinities, and hardly any examination of their own sense as gendered and sexual males, I want to enter into a dialogue with them; I want to say that gay men have always spoken of, and continue to speak about, masculinity. In other words, I want to emphasize neither the separatism of being gay and marginal, nor its corresponding and seemingly divergent study of sexuality, but that undeniable sense of being a masculine subject "a-part." Let me clarify this by focusing on that shared site of "a-partness," the male body.

Heterosexuality cannot accommodate a homosexual identity that is masculine because it is located within the same corporeal space of the male body. More significantly, this heterosexual inability testifies, implicitly, to the transgressive threat a gay man poses: because this particular male body is a site of both difference and sameness, the boundary that divides heterosexuality and homosexuality collapses. "The other," Dollimore explains,

may be feared because structured within an economy of the same: the homophobic are disturbed by sameness within, or, as a defining feature of, the other, that is, homosexual congress between the *same* gender construed as the endangering *other* of heterosexuality. (1991: 229)

Although seemingly polarized along the tangent of sexuality (itself confused as a projection of gendered identity), both straight and gay men have the penis, that diacritic of

when they insist upon a much needed reconfiguration of these terms for gender studies. See pages 3-21.

maleness.¹¹

Can there not be in this interface between heterosexuality and homosexuality—as it pertains to the construction of masculinity—a problem of equating the body with maleness, and, in turn, this maleness with a masculine identity, if the penis belongs to a gay man for whom sex is a constant and fluid exchange of dominant and submissive roles, active and passive positions? Indeed, does this not collapse such a predominant heterosexual equation of body and gender when a gay man is fucked by another? The question we must necessarily ask ourselves, and which we repeatedly keep coming back to is, what is the masculine subject? And is it *one and the same* with the individual male subject?

In her recently published work on gender and cross-dressing, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber symptomatically and critically announces what I perceive as a dominant feminist attitude towards revising the masculinity of the male subject:

The concept of “male subjectivity” to many custodians of Western culture ... is in a sense redundant. To be a subject is to *be* a man—to be male literally or empowered “as” male in culture and society. In short, I suspect that any discussion of “male subjectivity” (as a counterpart to “female subjectivity”) is a recuperative cultural fantasy, a theoretical back formation *from* “female subjectivity,” where the latter evolved as a politically necessary critique of presumably *universal* subjectivity, the humanist concept of “man.” (1993: 94)

Garber echoes a distinct feminist displeasure with this inseparability of subjectivity and being male, but she also questions, problematizes, and highlights its much needed *separation* and revision. Otherwise, the tendency will always be to perceive and articulate subjectivity as nothing but male and masculine. There needs to be, I believe, a re-

¹¹In “Male Sexuality in the Media,” Richard Dyer writes: “Male sexuality is repeatedly equated with the penis; men’s sexual feelings are rendered as somehow being ‘in’ their penises” (1985: 29). For a further discussion of this, see his article in *The Sexuality of Men*, ed. Andy Mctcalf and Martin Humphries (Concord: Pluto Press, 1985) 28-43.

examination of this equation between subjectivity and gender at the site of the male body. One possible means of disrupting such an equation, according to Garber, is to move the present debate on gender away from those dominant binarisms of male/female, active/passive, and masculine/feminine that riddle how dominant culture represents identity. In her work on cross-dressing, Garber sees the disjuncture between body and surface as evidence of enacted gender and sexual identities that a subject can effect when representing him/herself. *Vested Interests* signals, in its focus on transvestism and transsexualism, what, I believe, is becoming increasingly evident in “queer” studies; I am referring of course to sexual identity, and specifically, to this identity as a spatialization of performance.

Rock Hudson, abetted by a public demanding, and an industry willing to assist in, the spectacularization of heterosexual masculinity, did what he had to do: he became, in that sense of posing, a heterosexual man. His pose was necessarily one of circumstance: Rock Hudson screened his homosexuality by performing, both on-screen and off-screen, what the public came to expect of Hollywood leading men—he became, for all intents and purposes, that embodiment of a '50s masculinity. But this is a masculine identity in and as performance, and a performance which enacts itself, first and foremost, at that ob-scene site of his homosexuality. In other words, Hudson's “heterosexuality” veils this performance in an elision of his homosexuality.

Instead of a body that can continue to be masculine and heterosexual, Rock Hudson's body exists presently as site of contradiction, a site where his seeming heterosexuality is confusingly a lived homosexual identity. Indeed, Rock Hudson's body becomes a site of contesting identities, contesting masculinities. Hence, as his sexuality problematizes the category “masculine,” it also contests the very basis of categorizing gender and sexuality. Yet, it is as much his homosexuality as it is, I contend, his performed heterosexual identity as the masculine man—or what is otherwise, following Judith Butler, the *performativity* of gender—that comes to question the prevailing

assumptions of masculinity which are deemed to be natural and unproblematic.

Inasmuch as Rock Hudson's identity as a man was a performance of heterosexuality, how are we then to look upon the male body within hom(m)o-sexual culture? Are gay men not wrong to perceive in heterosexuality a paranoia concerning performance even though so much of a man's masculinity is measured in his ability to play the active partner in the sex act? Is there not, then, a paradox in play when heterosexual masculinity locates its self-representation in the act of sexual performance but disavows its own performativity of a gendered identity? I will suggest this is very much the case in point with the male gaze: in reading the surface encountered, the individual spectator repeats the dominant gaze which is deemed to be heterosexual, masculine, and, by extension, male, only to situate, represent, and articulate its self-representation.

Yet this repetition is always performance, or, as Butler reminds us, this is "at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (1990a: 140). While these repetitions guarantee a masculine subjectivity when seeing and reading with the male gaze, what persistently comes to figure is its deconstructive nature: Rock Hudson's body, as that visualized sight of masculine identity, can no longer allow us to represent it as a site of masculinity. Rather, because his identity is performative, and hence merely effected, if not posed, what is foregrounded is the male gaze's inability to represent a reader's gender and sexuality in terms of his/her own body.

QUEERING THE CLOSET

For decades, Hudson had been among a handful of screen actors who personified wholesome American masculinity; now, in one stroke, he was

revealed as both gay and suffering from the affliction of pariahs.

Randy Shilts¹²

The closet is not a function of homosexuality in our culture, but of compulsory and presumptive hetero-sexuality. I may be publicly identified as gay, but in order for that identity to be acknowledged, I have to declare it on each new occasion.

Douglas Crimp¹³

In the chapters that follow, I explore these issues I have raised above. Germane to each chapter is the male gaze; it becomes that site of a possible revision in our ability to read the representation of masculinity even while it remains that definitive site of articulating the identity of the masculine subject. In other words, I employ such construction of the gaze to delineate those categories of sexuality and gender as predominantly both masculinist and heterosexist, and to then insist on its necessary revision. This revision begins, moreover, in a gaze that problematizes the feminist conflation of vision, power, and sex, and which is the identifiable male gaze within gender studies. Such a revision is possible because of the germane ability of the gaze, following Lacan, to exist as an “inside-out structure” when it is forced to read that representation of contra-diction, the Proximate Other.

When I reclaim a centrality of the Proximate Other in how masculinity is seen and read, what I want to do is to import the transgressive revision this sexual difference offers us in discussing the male gaze. Chapters 2 to 4 identify and describe individual and key aspects of this transgressive revision I am proposing for masculinity. Ultimately, I

¹²Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987) 578-579.

¹³Douglas Crimp, “Right On, Girlfriend!” *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 305.

envisage this homosexually-inflected revision to be a politics of dis coherence.

This study adopts the following structure for its own reader: *Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Masculinity* foregrounds itself as an exercise that takes the reader through this particular theory of reading which I am proposing as a politics of dis coherence. In chapter 1, I will argue how our present condition of postmodernity / affects cultural representations and, in turn, our ability to read them. One particular manifestation of this condition can be seen in the present crisis of reading the male body as the definitive site of masculine identity. Instead of the apparent alignment between body and gender identity, there is now, more often than not, a spectacularization of the male body in a state of contra-diction. This is evidently so when today's individuals must negotiate the gay male body as an alternative and viable representation of gender and sexuality within culture.

Beginning with the problem of categorizing the homosexually different but same male body that is represented in gay fiction, my reader will come to appreciate why this visual un-ease which I explore in my introduction and in chapter 1 becomes that signal example displaying the difficulty of affixing a masculine identity to that paradoxical space of the gay male body. More importantly, a further examination of this particular un-ease, which I conduct in chapter 2, highlights the problematic relation an individual reader/spectator finds him/herself in when seeing and reading this body of contra-dictions according to the dominant representation of masculinity.

Moving on from this specific problem, I proceed to illustrate how an individual's reading of the male body in contra-diction can be a reading that takes place within a chiasm. Within this postmodern space—where what is being read is simultaneously a representation of sameness and difference—the masculine subject position an individual reader/spectator finds him/herself in, when deploying the male gaze to read, is disturbed. In turn, this disturbance renders firstly, the reading of masculinity problematic and secondly, the masculine identity this subject position should engender, displaced. In other

words, these issues I will examine in chapter 3 propose that what is being read in the representation of masculinity, in *Batman, The Movie* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, is more probably that of male bodies in performance, and specifically, of bodies performing their masculine identities.

If what we are presented with is the spectacularization of the male body performing its identity—and such a performance manifesting itself as an interplay of differences at this selfsame site—what a reader of this study will come to realize is that the problem an individual reader/spectator faces is one of categorically describing and defining what masculinity really is. There is another problem: if masculinity is no longer an essence of gender nor a matter of an interiority of the body, can we not begin to appreciate that the apparently dominant masculine subject position of seeing and reading is itself a performance?

We can better appreciate the point I am making by examining the current debate anti-pornography feminism has generated with regard to the masculine identity of the male body. Within its discourse, the represented and lived male bodies of the male figure in pornography and the male reader/spectator are seen to be one and the same. Chapter 4 provides my reader with an opportunity to look at this alignment and to argue, on the contrary, that the reading of masculinity within pornography—at least in both *The Silence of the Lambs* and *American Psycho*—can be a matter of a performing an identity. Here, the identification of the male body as pornographic and masculine is challenged by its representation as contradiction in spite of a reader/spectator's insistence to read it according to the dominant expression of gender within pornography. In doing so, the practice of reading this male body is shown to engender the identity of the generic masculine reader/spectator. Such an identity is effected when a reader repeats the acculturated practice of reading with the male gaze. This identity is, however, problematic: the possibility that such an identity is itself performative disrupts the essentializing alignment between corporeality, the male gaze, and gender that is used to

categorize what masculinity is.

With these issues in mind—questions, considerations, and possible suggestions for a politics of dis coherence—chapter 5 postulates that the problem of reading masculinity can be reconsidered in terms of a performative reading that is effected when the individual spectator/reader is confronted not so much with the male body as the categorical location of masculinity but of a male body in contra-diction, and its potential to stimulate and animate a reading of masculinity in dis coherence. Conversely, the subject positions of reading and seeing with the male gaze no longer guarantee an essentialized masculine identity but offer in its place, the possibility of a performative identity. In short, the reader of this study, in traversing the contours of the politics of dis coherence I am outlining throughout *Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity*, will find him/herself in the role of the postmodern reading subject. More specifically, within this chapter's focus on threading together the issues raised previously, this particular reader will come to understand how his/her own reading identity is performative. In turn, this particular (re)vision of reading masculinity posits the possibility of such a performative identity being a distinctly "queer" realization of what gender identity can otherwise be. I want to conclude my study, therefore, at this moment of a "queer" (re)vision: the masculine reading subject is—at least, within the postmodern representation of contra-dictions—an identity that is "cross-(ad)dressed."

This particular study—in its stimulation of, adherence to, and eventual promotion of a politics of dis coherence—acknowledges its debt to, as it also recognizes its dependence upon, that postmodern concern with difference. More specifically, this study enunciates that postmodern characteristic of expression, the double bind of articulation and re-articulation, inscription and reinscription. In the end, *Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity* argues the politics I am proposing to be a manifestation of this double bind: this study describes our present condition of reading masculinity only to de(in)scribe it in an act which is always its own re-reading.

The constant and continuing play between, if not the unsettling effect produced by those slippages in, the differing terms and metaphors which permeate this study—terms such as “gaze,” “site,” “space,” “bodysuit,” “screen,” and “surface,” for example—record this double bind too. In particular, I want to demonstrate our inability to fix or categorize the differences we encounter, generate, and represent when talking about masculinity within postmodernity by adopting this self-conscious style in discussing the issues I raise throughout this study. Consequently, the constant shifts in the discourse this particular study deploys are a conscious effort to echo and replicate the larger cultural dis-ease where the present representation of masculinity is itself destabilized and dislocated.

I will argue the various issues I have raised above by looking at an array of contemporary fiction and film representing masculinity. One’s choice of texts, it can be argued, is always a matter of personal taste: my selection is motivated, however, by a need to illustrate the homogenizing effect of the male gaze as it reads masculinity. The selection is also motivated by the need to demonstrate how each of these texts, in turn, challenge our present practice of reading masculinity. Hence, I examine the representation of masculinity in a diverse selection of texts and the readings they alternatively allow.

In Woody Allen’s playfully self-reflexive film, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, we can begin to understand why representation in general and that of masculinity in particular might be a moment of visual unease. Recent gay writing such as Noel Bartlett’s *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* and David Leavitt’s *Equal Affections*, and gay-inflected texts like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* by the Argentine writer, Manuel Puig and *The Silence of the Lambs* which was directed by Jonathan Demme, foreground the possibility that what the male body should signify, a hom(m)o-sexually gendered masculinity, can be instead a spectacularization highlighting masculinity’s problematic representation. Moreover, Demme’s multi-layered film illustrates how the seemingly obvious evidence of one’s skin need not be representative of one’s gendered identity. Like Bret Easton Ellis’ controversial novel, *American Psycho*, this film flays the surface of its apparent

pornographic representation to expose this: the representation of pornography need not be the pornography of representation. In other words, both these texts intimate how the often aligned correlation between corporeality, pornography, and masculinity, as they converge in a reader's reading of the represented male body, could well be nothing less than the problem of stating that what the masculine subject encounters is not pornography per se, but pornography as a critique of representation.

In these instances, masculinity is shown to be a matter of performing the role, a matter of playing the part dominant culture ascribes this identity. Similarly, that subject position of reading masculinity is also a performative act of reading like a man, never reading as a man. This is evident in that postmodern text, Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, where I end this study by drawing together what each of the above texts makes clear about various aspects of a politics of dis coherence. Calvino's text, I would like to suggest, spectacularizes the possibility of a performative—and, more significantly, a cross-(ad)dressed—identity for a reading subject situated within the present postmodern condition.

Together, I locate these texts as individual moments when their respective representations of masculinity signal what Federic Jameson calls the postmodern "crisis of representation" (1984: viii). More significantly, they reflect, as a broad collective, our present inability to categorically fix or name what masculinity really is. In *American Psycho*, Ellis' protagonist, Patrick Bateman, decries that all representation is a matter of surface—"Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in" (Ellis 1991a: 375). In such a scenario, it is possible that "Man" might be what Bateman himself pronounces of his identity: "*I simply am not there.... Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being*" (Ellis 1991a: 377). If Bateman's identity as the masculine subject is a matter of surface, the question we must ask ourselves is, what can it mean to represent, and, more significantly, be, the masculine subject in the postmodern?

What follows therefore is an attempt to answer this question through a dis coherent

rewriting of the male gaze and its essentializing tendency to engender subjectivity masculine. This answer takes the form of a politics informed by, as it arises out of, and which eventually locates itself in, the diverse yet intersecting trajectories of film studies, feminism, gay studies, psychoanalysis, cultural as well as literary theory, and in the increasing explorations between architecture and both gendered and sexualized spaces. In the end, this study is a (re)vision of reading masculinity, I contend, finding itself at the exciting and emerging locus of “queer” theory as it enters to cut across, infiltrate, and enrich the already active intersection of trajectories in which our current reading of masculinity is situated. The politics of dis coherence I am proposing, and the revision of reading masculinity it enables, is neither a definitive answer to the present inability to articulate what masculinity is nor is it a singularly introspective approach advocating an exclusively homosexual point of view. Rather, I would like to situate this particular politics as one possible revision of how we might come to read masculinity alternatively. In short, this revision posits itself as a reading position of difference.

Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity is thus a title which reflects this politics of dis coherence. In effect, it postulates the possible displacement—that is an inversion or turn—the male gaze undergoes when it is dis coherently rewritten to offer a new perspective on, if not the very revision it engenders in, how we can revise our reading of masculinity especially with regard to the representation of the male body. More pertinently, it is a title suggesting how such a revision is inextricably entwined with one’s subjectivity: to see and read with the gaze is as much to engender a particular subject position for the individual reader/spectator within culture as it is, moreover, a possible displacement, differentiation, and dis coherence of one’s identity as the generic masculine subject when we begin to describe gender in terms of performativity. Finally, the title is, of course, a pun: if the politics of dis coherence begins within gay theory and ends with a “queer” identity for the individual reader/spectator, the very reading of masculinity within the postmodern might be a

strategy which has to be homosexually-inflected, after all.

I end by returning to Rock Hudson's body. As a re-presentation of his sexuality, Hudson's spectacularized death from AIDS becomes more than just a sight of sexual otherness; it is a site revising his masculine identity. In the space that is the movie theater, a representation of Rock Hudson's male body can be a screening of his public identity as the heterosexual and masculine man. However, this enclosed space—a paradox of darkness and display, of erasure and spectacularization—is also a closet which heterosexuality seeks so desperately to construct as a site of confinement and containment. But as the closet will always be a space of in-between-ness, an interface between the public and the private, the individual reader must engage with, and be positioned in relation to, these intertwined sites. Within this chiasm, his/her interaction with these sights of heterosexual regulation and homosexual rewriting effects a performativity of spectatorship through which masculinity can be revised. Rock Hudson's body comes to be then that paradigmatic paradox that can engender, and engender alternatively, a discoherent reading of masculinity. In conclusion, Rock Hudson's closet, therefore, will always be, simultaneously, the movie theater shared with a heterosexual audience who can no longer afford to ignore, in such screenings of masculinity, the problematic of masculine re-presentation, and the necessary re-reading it effects.



CHAPTER ONE

THE WORD, THE LIE, AND WOODY ALLEN'S SENSE OF DIS-EASE

[W]e have a crisis in masculinity precisely because we are more aware than ever before of these different options and of what we could become.

David Cohen¹⁴

As individual readers/spectators of texts, we are sited—or, more precisely, sighted in terms of how we perceive and are perceived—in a scopic field Frank Krutnik terms “the cultural machinery of patriarchy” (1991: 75). Within this cultural configuration, gender is premised on a binarized imbalance where the masculine dominates the feminine. “This involves not merely a power-based, and power-serving, cultural hierarchy of male and female,” observes Krutnik, “but also the establishment of normative ‘gender values’ which are internalised by both sexes” (1991: 75). For Krutnik, then, what we understand as masculinity and femininity are as much cultural representations as they also are, in turn, what we internalise the identity of the body to be when we describe corporeality in terms of gender. It would seem, therefore, that a fluid relationship characterises this private-public nexus within an individual subject: the social and public frames one’s personal outlook and the personal, in turn, perpetuates those frames. What occurs then is the presence of a repetitious and regulatory vision of gender and sexuality both within and without the individual subject.

¹⁴David Cohen, *Being a Man* (London: Routledge, 1990) 38.

A MODEL OF A MAN AND HOW HE SEES

I shall now focus upon Stanley Fish's concept of the "interpretive community" to help us understand how individuals come to express and identify themselves within this characteristically homo-sexual scopical field that I have already discussed in the introduction. This particular concept of community arises out of his theory of reading as it relates to the interaction between texts and readers; Fish is most concerned with the communal strategies within which reading can realize itself.¹⁵ I examine this, however, by offering a reading of Howard Jacobson's novel, *The Very Model of a Man*.

In this novel, which basically retells the story of Cain and Abel, Jacobson raises, I believe, fundamental questions about how we read. His questions are important because they concern how readers locate their own reading of the novel within the Judeo-Christian tradition of reading biblical fact. More significantly, Jacobson's novel demonstrates how such reading is analogous to our own context of reading texts within communal parameters.

In *The Very Model of a Man*, Cain perverts the Name of God the Father: he does this not in the act of killing Abel but in appropriating the Word, the discourse of the Father which Abel honoured and offered libations to, and naming this evil. Cain's sin is nothing other than assuming and transfiguring his Father's Word to fashion another discourse, one of difference rather than sameness, for and onto himself. Such transgression can bring nothing but the wrath of God and a punishment of silence. Cain's sentence is a submission into the Word:

Nomenclature had been at the heart of God's disagreement with his creatures from the start. He had foreseen evil as a problem, He had anticipated knowledge, pride, sex, snakes. But He was not prepared for names to come

¹⁵I refer to Fish's work in his seminal text, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980).

between them, forgetting how essential His idea of Himself was His Own. I AM WHAT I AM—Cain's refusal to offer sacrifice was nothing other than an unwillingness to accept the obligations of obeisance inherent in That Name. YOU ARE, Cain as good as told Him, WHAT YOU ARE NOT.

And what God will tolerate a mortal telling Him Who He Isn't?

Height was therefore purely incidental to what ensued; it was the tower's tongue that Y-H-W-H, the G-d who had forbidden vowels, went down and severed.

"Come, let us descend," He said, "and there confound the thing they speak with."

Th thng th spk wth. (1992: 341)¹⁶

Cain's Father accepts no other word, no other discourse but that which is His Word. Positioned as he is, Cain's thoughts, speech, and actions are embodied within a community centered on his Father's Word.

This community is not unlike Fish's interpretive community wherein the individual is located within shared interpretive strategies which allow both the production and reception of meaning. Fish describes the interpretation of meaning within this situation as follows: "meanings are not extracted but made and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being" (1980: 172-73). Within such communal boundaries, representation is possible when articulated within the discursive configurations that such a group shares, and which this group deploys to read texts. Although Fish's theory insists upon the primacy of reading as meaning-making experience(s) within communal parameters, it has no room for difference. Fish himself writes:

We are never not in a situation. Because we are never not in a situation, we are never not in the act of interpreting. Because we are never not in the act of interpreting, there is no possibility of reaching a level of meaning beyond or below interpretation. (1980: 276-77)

There exists, in short, a bind: we are in a situation of interpreting texts which determines our reading as our reading, in turn, interprets and repeats this situation. Only then can there be an articulation of a representation that is culturally acceptable.

¹⁶Subsequent quotations from this novel will be indicated by page numbers within parentheses.

Like Fish's reader in an interpretive community, we are, invariably, situated within a determined and determining subject position of reading when we attempt to read corporeality in terms of gender identity. In *Literary Meaning*, William Ray laments the plight of just such a reader:

Theoretically capable of persuading others, he can never outflank the beliefs of the institutions that define him; he can trigger no revolutions: the discipline will always have already understood, assimilated, indeed produced, any arguments for its realignment he might generate.... Fish's reader, finally, can never escape nor know himself. (1984: 169)

This is precisely the entrapment an individual reading subject faces when he/she is in the act of interpreting texts: within such a situation, seeing and reading texts is always an act of interpretation that is rooted to a position which is not unlike Cain's relationship to the Father's Word. Like Cain, a reader who does otherwise not only unnames what has been discursively constructed as hom(m)o-sexual but questions dominant discourse itself in such word-play.

In unnamng, not only does Cain play with words but he questions his Father's Word in order to, as Jacobson presents, lay bare its existence as a fallacy:

Long before Byron and Baudelaire adopted Cain as a hero of the romantic, anti-bourgeois *méchanceté*, giving him, as it were, a gammy leg and an inclination to opiates, others saw the cultic possibilities in a figure who, it could be argued, was the victim and not the initiator of the first act of violent irrationality between man and God, and who was therefore the murderer not so much of a brother as of a falsehood. (32)

This falsehood is grounded in a discourse obsessively fetishizing the sign, Woman. It is also a discourse insisting upon, as its epistemological basis, the transcendental and paternal signifier, the phallus. And these are, as I will argue in the next section, lies that corrupt how the body is read when we appropriate the dominant discourse, and its practice of reading the body with the male gaze.

A VIOLENT LIE

A word itself has no properties you need fear, I wanted to tell him. You're confusing the slave with the master. They become powerful only under your command.

Howard Jacobson¹⁷

This discourse, which the previous section discusses, is, following Foucault's remarks in his article, "The Order of Discourse,"¹⁸ one of violence: in gender terms, this violence translates itself into the representation of masculinity that can *only* exist in correspondence to the dominant signifier, the phallus. Or, as Teresa de Lauretis describes it, when writing about femininity's representation as primarily a masculine construct, such a discourse has "*the power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and 'implant' representations of gender*" (de Lauretis 1989: 18).

Gamman and Marshment note with little surprise the pervasive, if not endemic, "male perspective [which] is dominant in representation" (1989: 1): for them, how men and women see is always a masculine practice which is nothing less than the male gaze in action. Here, one sees the Other as always an object of, and from, the masculine subject position of readership and spectatorship. Such a gaze, correctly identified by feminists and film critics¹⁹ as oppressive, penetrating, and fixating, structures the way we see and

¹⁷Howard Jacobson, *The Very Model of a Man* (London: Viking, 1992) 58.

¹⁸Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," trans. Ian McLeod, *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 49-78.

¹⁹A good deal of work has been done in film studies by feminists and male film critics on the gaze. The film journals *Screen* and *Camera Obscura* offer a good introduction to gendered film criticism. For further discussion, see: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975) 6-18; Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23.3-4 (1982): 74-87; Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," *Screen* 24.6

perceive despite our varied genders and sexualities. Within this scopical field, our sight is but a reproduction of the dominant and panopticon gaze. Indeed, the sin of this gaze is that of the semiotic lie (Eco 1979: 7) where signs, which are representations, come to mean something other than what they actually are. Let me explain.

If femininity is seen to be the Other, the opposite of masculinity, it is because we are circumscribed by as we also continue to speak within the dominant cultural discourse of hom(m)o-sexuality. Within the boundaries of this culture, one's subjectivity as the reader/spectator is always a matter of being hom(m)o-sexually gendered when reading male and female bodies with the dominant male gaze. Such a situation must mean that these bodies, and the gender identities they engender, are located in definitive positions, if not ascribed roles, of gendered sexuality and sexual behaviour. Within our heterosexually biased culture, a body that is in the act of passive and/or submissive sexual behaviour denotes femininity while the dominant sex role in male-female sex is inextricably the privileged site of the male and masculine body. What is equally evident in this configuration of gender is that heterosexuality is deemed to signify masculinity.

Any deviation from such prescribed gendered sexual behaviour will disrupt an individual's subjectivity and lead to his/her sense of a lost identity. In other words, one's subjectivity as a man can only be hom(m)o-sexually defined as masculine and as a woman, feminine: there is no other variation permitted within its boundaries. However, what is more disturbing is the fact that one's identity as the reading subject is seen to be categorically masculine because it is an identity that is engendered within the male gaze. De Lauretis defines this discursive construction of identity—an identity that is realized in the practice of reading with the male gaze—as the violence of rhetoric (1989: 31-50):

(1983): 2-16; and Ian Green, "Malefunction," *Screen* 25.4-5 (1984) 36-48. A recent addition to this area is an anthology of essays edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark entitled, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993).

hom(m)o-sexual presentations of gender are inseparable from the violence of their discursive representation.

Nowhere is this violence more evident, and permissive, than in the problem of reading masculinity within our present postmodern context. Some of the myriad texts of popular culture reflect this problem: they foreground what is the postmodern crisis of representation when they represent gender in terms of contradictions, and not in terms of an essentialized difference. Where these texts employ the dominant categorizations of gender to articulate masculinity, they also problematize, by working from within it, such textual representation. More significantly, such a representation of contradiction(s) is also a site of revision. In other words, while masculinity is seen within hom(m)o-sexuality to be dominant, natural, and universal, it is, in effect, continually displaying itself to be something that it is not—a construction. In “‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism’ Revisited: The Progressive Text,” Barbara Klinger offers an Althusserian parallel that illuminates the point I am making here. “The text is,” she writes,

characterised as a site upon which the significant relations of representation and ideology are distilled, almost in bilateral configuration. The language of Althusser’s aesthetic epistemology used to describe the text/ideology relation—rupture, break, internal distanciation, deformation—foster this sense of the reflexive, formal geography of the text, which by critical extension, can be viewed as internally empowered to engineer an “auto-critique” of the ideology in which it is held. (1984: 32)

Patriarchy shapes the ideology here, and what some of these texts in popular culture intimate are their own ideological underpinnings.

These particular texts might then textualize gender and sexuality as predominantly masculine representations but they are also spaces where contest can take place. In the final instance, there could always be a subversion of the dominant representations of gender when reading these texts within popular culture. As Gamman and Marshment critically observe, “It is not enough to dismiss popular culture as merely serving the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy, peddling ‘false consciousness’ to the

duped masses. It can also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed” (1989: 1).

Generally, the theory of postmodernism questions the traditional epistemological and ontological assumptions that all representation is centered. When some texts within popular culture foreground a representation of corporeality in terms of contradictions, what there is, therefore, in each reading of such a representation, is the possibility of multiple readings, or what Jacques Derrida sees as *différance*. This *différance*, or, as I will anglicize it, difference, of reading signifies that condition of postmodernism, the crisis of representation. And it is this crisis that problematizes how we are supposed to read the dominant hom(m)o-sexual representation of gender.

Reading, and, in particular, men reading masculinity, is, Stephen Heath admits, nothing less than a practice that is centered in dominant discourse:

men have been trained simply to read, they have the acquired neutrality of domination, theirs is the security of indifference—it is women who are different, the special. (1987: 27)

Such is the fallacy of masculine readership, and, by extension, that of the generic masculine subject, the male reader/spectator. Within hom(m)o-sexual culture, this identification remains unproblematic for it is naturalized as, if not germane to, reading itself. This is the lie Jeff Hearn labels an agenda:²⁰ masculinity and heterosexuality are read as implicitly universal and natural. Not only has hom(m)o-sexual discourse enforced our individual understanding of gender to fit the dominant representations of femininity and masculinity, but it emasculates women, lesbians, and gay men who are also producers and

²⁰In *Men in the Public Eye: The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies* (London: Routledge, 1992), Hearn acknowledges the intricate and complex ties between a gender and agenda; both are politically gendered constructions because they privilege hom(m)o-sexually defined masculinity as the dominant term of gender representation. In particular, refer to Part 1 of his book.

consumers of texts.

Reading masculinity is, hence, reading within those dominant hom(m)o-sexual parameters: it means repeating masculinity to be hegemonic, hierarchical, and heterosexual. But there is a rupture to such simplified, and homogenized, readings of what masculinity is when some texts foreground such an identity in terms of contradictions.

Currently, our culture manifests this rupture in a number of ways. Where a boy was once expected to be a man's man, there is now a de-emphasis on such an identity. There is, instead, a reconsideration of what exactly masculine identity is. Ours is also a culture where gender-bender issues (those disturbing visual moments of a dislocation between sex as body and gendered or, more precisely, regendered surfaces) are marketable cultural commodities in anything from film—*The Crying Game*²¹ being a recent example—to music with its array of androgynous icons like Boy George, Annie Lennox, and the early David Bowie. This is also a culture where audiences, irrespective of their sex and gender, are forced to gaze longingly—and, more importantly, in defiance of the homoerotic repression exercised in the male gaze—on the eroticized male body of Richard Gere in *American Gigolo*.²²

In this world of the '80s and early '90s, moreover, there is a perceptible shift within dominant culture. I want to trace this fascination—fixation does, however, seem more to the point here—of heterosexual men and women with the always active but lately “out-of-the-closet” gay culture. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to point out that this present turn to, and, in some respects, appropriation of, gay cultural tastes and practices follows the already continuing process of heterosexuality's paradoxical relationship to

²¹*The Crying Game*, dir. Neil Jordan, with Forest Whitaker, Miranda Richardson, Stephen Rea and Jaye Davidson, Palace/Channel Four Films, 1992.

²²*American Gigolo*, dir. Paul Schrader, with Richard Gere and Lauren Hutton, CIC, 1980.

homosexuality. This relationship has been one of opposition to, and identification in, a sexual difference which persistently terrifies yet intrigues a culture that continues to articulate this relationship in terms of hom(m)o-sexuality.

Whereas those defining moments of gay identity in the recent past have been marked more by resistance (I am thinking of both the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York and the beginnings, in the late '70s, of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney), today's interaction between these cultures can be described in terms of a mutual interest in, and exchange of, their varied styles and opinions. Hence, while gay culture appropriates straight cultural manifestations such as operatic and filmic representations of the feminine to instantiate a camp identity, or the working attire of construction workers to effect a "butch" appearance, straight culture finds itself drawn to aspects of gay and lesbian culture. In his article, "The Straight Queer," for that august but popular men's magazine, *GQ*, David Kemp describes this as "gay chic." Gay chic is as much a heterosexual "aping" of "the gay sensibility as a kind of grand fashion" (1993: 95) as it also maps heterosexuality's attempts, in terms of acculturation, to accommodate an ever emerging and outward looking gay culture.

A spectacularized example is the swift embrace by heterosexuals of an established gay response to HIV/AIDS. The wearing of red ribbons is as much a statement of sympathy for sufferers of the virus as it has also become, within dominant culture, a fashionable gesture of appearing politically correct in spite of being, as the case may be, homophobic, or even worse, simply accessorizing one's social response to HIV/AIDS (Kemp 1993).²³ As James Waites records, "The difference now is that this gay

²³In the same article, Kemp labels this "a tug-of-war between conviction and fashion." He captures this tussle when he quotes Peter Staley, a member of the board of directors of the American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR) who remarks, "Usually, the larger, more glittery the ribbon, the less involved the person is" (1993: 97).

community's tastes are a significant influence on mass culture" (1991-92: 18).

In the '70s, heterosexuals embraced disco music, a popular musical genre which began to emerge within the gay community. As the music evolved, and its peculiar culture of fashion, behaviour, and attitude spilled over into straight culture, the early distinctions marking it as an exclusively gay "sound" became blurred. In a similar manner, straight men today appropriate not only a particularly "gay" attitude towards fashion, lifestyle, and AIDS awareness but also towards the male body. In the cult of the body beautiful, these sexually opposing groups of men spend endless hours building up that same corporeal site, the male body, in order to "sculpt in" its masculine contours. The result must be a confusion of the otherwise divisive lines between a man's man and he who is not. Both gay and straight men are increasingly concerned with looking the part of the masculine man. Furthermore, in conforming to a look, these men seem to border on, according to hom(m)o-sexual dictates, a feminine obsession with surface. What is foregrounded, in this spectacularized construction of the male body, whether straight or gay, is the problem of representing masculinity.

This challenge to our hom(m)o-sexually engendered practice of reading the male body with the male gaze has to foreground itself as a signal moment of visual un-ease. More significantly, this is that moment when what is categorically announced is an inability to represent masculinity as hegemonic and heterosexual. This moment also spectacularizes how our own readings of masculinity might be problematic. I want to privilege such moments to be characteristic of the postmodern condition, especially as they exemplify the problematic representation of masculinity today. I shall shortly elucidate this point when I examine Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and the visual un-ease a spectator encounters in this film. In addition, the issues I raise in this chapter are issues that are germane to that problematic interface between sexuality and gender at the site of the gay male body, and which I explore in greater detail in chapter 2.

A NECESSARY DIVIDE

Thus men and masculinities are seen not as unproblematic, but as social constructions which need to be explored, analysed, and indeed in certain respects, such as the use of violence, changed.

Jeff Hearn²⁴

Instead of simply equating individual males with hom(m)o-sexuality, and their male bodies with masculine identities, we are now increasingly confronted with a disjuncture when reading masculinity within postmodernity: this homogenizing equation is questioned, made visible, and problematized. A displacement takes place: instead of being natural and universal, masculinity is revealed to be a construction that is both ideologically and politically realized in the dominant practice of reading with the male gaze.

When such displacement occurs, what also takes place is a reconsideration of the prevailing categorization of masculinity. Conversely, this reconsideration posits itself as an alternative means of understanding what gender is. Such a reorientation of what gender can otherwise be is, as Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland note in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*, like “a line of thought” where

in conceptualizing the constructed nature of male as well as female experiences, [it] begins to free us from the binary thinking responsible for imprisoning both women and men.... (1990: 4-5)

It is this alternative trajectory of thinking about gender that enables us to see the male/female binary, and thence those corresponding active/passive, dominant/submissive, man/woman binds, as no longer fixed or divisively distinct.

Within dominant culture, it is the discourse of hom(m)o-sexuality that determines our categorization of gender and sexuality in accordance with that privileged signifier, the phallus. It is a discourse locked in binarism: when both the meaning and practice of

²⁴Hearn, *Public Eye* vii.

representation are engendered in terms of the phallus, masculine identity becomes a matter of having, and/or not having, access to this signifier. And, precisely, because gender is represented as such in this discourse, gender studies allows us to see its underlying basis which is, all too often, masked as natural and universal, if not as an essentialism in itself.

To argue, further, that the corporeality is sex, and, by extrapolation, gender, is to make a case for an essentialism of masculinity that can no longer support itself: the male body is as constructed, and as oppressed, as the female body is within hom(m)o-sexual representations of gendered corporeality. Anne Cranny-Francis, writing in *Engendered Fictions: Analysing Gender in the Production and Reception of Texts*, supports the point I am making when she observes that such a “discourse is as oppressive and limiting for men as it is for women, even if the oppression of women is more obvious and often more brutal” (1992: 19).

Nowhere is this critique more obviously inscribed, and spectacularly displayed, on the male body than at the site of a gay man. His existence within dominant culture is denied. If he is represented, however, it is in terms of marginality: a gay man is positioned both outside hom(m)o-sexual discourse as he is, moreover, contained in that feminine space of the Other.

Still considered a *lusus naturæ*—a likely consequence of the need to locate homosexuality when increased but polite social tolerance is more the norm these days—the gay man continues to be circumscribed by heterosexually masculine terms. Marginalized, or, to put it bluntly, elided, this homosexual identity is silenced in order to perpetuate the restrictive gendered identity, “masculine.” Significantly, the unspoken but implicit subtext is the regulatory maintenance of heterosexuality.

Although the feminist legal theorist Catherine MacKinnon writes of masculinity, pornography, and the female body, she offers, in the quotation below, what I see as heterosexuality’s dominant hold on how gender is commonly perceived, and which she herself so characteristically exemplifies when writing this:

If heterosexuality is the dominant gendered form of sexuality in a society where gender oppresses women through sex, sexuality and heterosexuality are essentially the same thing. This does not erase homosexuality, it merely means that sexuality in that form may be no less gendered. (1987: 60)

When homosexuality is “no less gendered” than heterosexuality, the masculine identity of a gay man is similarly hierarchical and hegemonic. MacKinnon’s observation, however, must signal the pervasive gynæcocratic perspective regarding how the category “masculine” is read while femininity is being reinscribed. In this light, MacKinnon’s feminism is a particular way of looking at our cultural representations of gender and sexuality, perhaps even its reinscriptions, but it also, in part, tends to foster and disseminate a particularly singular categorization that all men are seen to inhabit, and under which their actions towards women are described in terms of domination. In this particular discourse on gender, there is *one* masculinity.

However, anyone hoping to rewrite the term “masculinity” must pause to consider MacKinnon’s comments: is masculinity the same for straight and gay men let alone women? In appropriating this category, MacKinnon epitomizes what I see as a critical problem of mapping onto masculinity—as a means of revising it—these very limiting and confusing trajectories of sex, gender, and sexuality as they triangulate to represent “masculinity.”

TOWARDS REVISING MASCULINITY (1): SOME APPROACHES

That men and women—both within and without gender studies—need to ask themselves “what exactly does it mean to be masculine today?” is ample evidence of our inability to ground a specifically masculine subject position of reading in these postmodern times. As hom(m)o-sexuality can no longer be any more the fixed and centered meta-narrative of gender representation, new ways of representing femininity and masculinity,

for the individual subject, must be seriously considered.

In the rest of this section, I focus on three such approaches as each seeks to reinscribe “masculinity.” Namely, these are essentialist feminism, gay studies, and the men’s movement. Individually, and as a collective, they make visible the contingency of (a) masculine identity.

Feminism, that broad term encompassing varied feminist responses²⁵ to those dominant structures of cultural representation, has long sought to contest and bridge hom(m)o-sexuality. At the root of this vanguard is the issue of power, specifically as it is manifested in, and practised as, the masculine power to represent gender. Such a discourse, Jeffrey Weeks observes in *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, is produced by, if it does not also reproduce, difference at the sight of the phallus. This is

the mark of difference; it symbolises power differences within language and males become the symbolic bearers of power. The phallus represents the “law of the Father,” the controlling exigency within which sexual relations are lived. (1989: 143)

One such feminist resistance to this dominant discourse argues for the need to *invert* the oppressive active/passive and dominant/submissive binarisms as they suffuse an already divisive male/female binarism. The respective works of Mulvey, MacKinnon, and Andrea Dworkin exemplify this particular resistance when they argue against dominant expressions of gender. However, this inversion, whilst offering a reinterpretation of the feminine by repositioning the Other as masculine, does little more than further entrench it back into the binarism of hom(m)o-sexuality: femininity continues to be articulated as nothing but the void, the Other of masculinity. I will return to this point in subsequent

²⁵Beatrice Faust provides a wonderfully brief but insightful summary of these feminisms in her recent article, “Australian-Style Feminism: What a Gift to the World,” *The Weekend Australian* 22-23 January 1994: 24. She writes: “There are, of course, many feminisms: liberal, marxist, deconstructionist, lesbian, ethnic, existential, religious, cultural—and now, power and victim feminisms. All of these have many branches and subsets.”

chapters when I discuss how such feminist thinkers attempt to rewrite gender.

A similar problem exists with what French feminists call *l'écriture féminine*. Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, representative of this school, seek to rewrite femininity through a distinctly alternate, separate, and feminine discourse. Yet, this obvious need to become a body of feminine (self-)representation outside hom(m)o-sexual discourse hardly demonstrates an end to the divide separating femininity and masculinity. As Terry Threadgold, writing of the dominant discourse as phallogentric, illustrates: "this feminist strategy remains entangled in the phallogentric web with which it begins even as it struggles to make the web visible" (1990: 9). Such a relocation of the feminine—a necessary need "to start somewhere else, to speak, mean and write *outside* these limitations on what *can* (is possible/is allowed to) be spoken, meant and written" (Threadgold 1990: 2)—merely reinstates it back into this characteristically hom(m)o-sexual opposition of "either/or." Here, masculinity is conceived as nothing short of being what the feminine should not be: within this particular discourse, the masculine can only be a gender essentialized as homogeneously dominant, oppressive, and heterosexual.

Despite their varied responses towards masculinity, the predominant tendency of these feminists I have cited is to essentialize the descriptions of masculine identity. Such essentialism dominates the work of these feminists in spite of their immense contributions to the exploration of gender relations and to their development of the new ways in which we can rethink gender. Nevertheless, I want to negotiate, in the chapters that follow, the ideas these essentialist and anti-pornography feminists have contributed to the field of gender studies and to examine their effect upon a revision of reading masculinity that this study aims at.

Gay male studies, on the other hand, seek to challenge those prevailing categorizations of homosexuality in order to unveil their constructions within dominant culture. In turn, heterosexuality's privileged status as the predominant expression of male sexual identity, and its gendered representation as masculine, is questioned. In presenting

itself as a collective challenge to the latter, these studies actively problematize the contemporaneous dilemma of what it can mean to equate sex and gender with sexuality. An essentialist approach in the field speaks about homosexuality as necessarily a biological minority; the marginalization of gay men is, then, hardly a discrimination as it is an implicit recognition of a sexual difference in nature. Such thinking, however, reclaims much of the same orientations which argue homosexual difference is either natural or unnatural. In short, heterosexuality continues to be, in this biologically predisposed view of homosexuality, the very model of sexual and societal relations within culture.

In contrast, Weeks, like Foucault, argues for a “denied” sexuality.²⁶ In this instance, homosexuality is seen to be a product of social constructionism where it is the prevailing cultural discourses which *produce* the homosexual identity in order to bolster and safeguard the dominant. However, this understanding of homosexuality is just as limited in the long run for it is a logic arising out of dichotomized differences. Despite illuminating the oppression inherent in such a construction of the male homosexual, the possibility of a gay masculinity is often unaccounted for. At best, it continues to be identified with heterosexuality, forcing a categorization of absent masculinity where gay men are concerned.

Arguments centering on “a denied sexuality” are, in my opinion, damaging when it is hom(m)o-sexually spatialized in terms of a center-margin relationship. An already acknowledged divergence between these male sexual identities is further overdetermined: when masculinity is articulated, it is solely with regard to heterosexuality while homosexuality is troped, because it inhabits the margin, according to the dominant cultural

²⁶For a consideration of the points Foucault makes, refer to his book, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979). Also see Weeks’ books *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981) and *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1989) for a further discussion.

association of the feminine Other. Hence, attempts to engender homosexuality thus are, finally, but a continuing entrapment within the present culture which insists on the absence of masculine identity.

Heterosexual masculinity, and in particular, that of a white, middle-class, educated background in advanced capitalist nations, has since the '70s sought to recontextualize itself within what is popularly known as the men's movement where men can come to terms with the shifting parameters of gender relations in the wake of feminism. There are, as I see it, two basic responses.

Firstly, there are those within the movement who see a feminist-inflected re-examination of masculinity as an adequate, if not timely, move towards gender equality. In this response, men accept and admit their dominant position as oppressors as the first step towards revising those categories of femininity and masculinity, and without doubt, that too of equality. One positive manner in which this is achieved, besides the numerous consciousness-raising groups spawned by and for men, is the introduction of men's studies within the academy.

Even though Michael Kimmel's comments to Brenda Polan in "The Gender Blender" focus on the aims of men's studies, they analogously allow us to better understand this response adopted by the men's movement. "Men's studies," announces Kimmel, "doesn't seek to supplant women's studies. It seeks to buttress, to augment women's studies, to complete the radically redrawn portrait of gender that women's studies has begun" (1988: 20). The men's movement seeks to do exactly the same: it aims to complement the strides feminism has successfully made in achieving gender equality.

While focusing on men's rights and power, there is also, within this response, a disproportionate attention to the negative traits of masculinity. What is germane to such a focus is the overriding sense of masculine guilt. And guilt is precisely the basis for the more recent, and markedly reactionary, response within the men's movement. Nothing less than a counter-response, this other reconsideration of masculinity within the

movement seeks to recuperate the positivity of masculinity within a dominant culture that is increasingly challenged by feminism to rethink its representations of gender. A recent example is Robert Bly's book, *Iron John: A Book About Men*.²⁷

Refuting claims of reactionary chauvinism, Bly privileges, as I see it, the father-figure as an answer to David Cohen's lamentation of the hobbled, if not already lost, hero for today's males (1990). Seeking to toughen what is perceived as the feminization of males, Bly wants men to understand masculinity as an intersection of male-bonding, paternal spirituality, and patriarchal power.

In a recent book review, David Tacey argues against the insularity and short-sightedness of just such a reconfiguration. He writes:

The Bly-inspired writing simply ignores the challenge of feminism and wants to go back to a time when men were men and felt secure in their patriarchal masculinity. But it fails to see what is wrong with hegemonic masculinity, and why it should be under attack. Robert Bly wants men to feel better, to bond meaningfully with their fathers and with other men, to unite in a new brotherhood. He is concerned with so-called spiritual issues and pays little attention to society, politics, history or women's experience. (1992: 7)

Indeed, Tacey suggests, it "sometimes sounds like a form of fascism disguised as spirituality." His criticism of this sort of writing elucidates both the limitations and gaps this particular attempt entails when re-examining masculinity.

In fact, both strands of the men's movement, although promisingly different, come nevertheless to rest finally in (1) a remasculinization of men's identities as well as (2) a masculinity resolutely determined to police its own boundaries. Either way, each response within this movement highlights this: "A relationship with feminism is indeed crucial to any counter-sexist politics among heterosexual men," Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee note; "but a series of back somersaults is not a strong position from which to confront the patriarchal power structure" (1987: 163).

²⁷Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Longmead: Element, 1990).

Essentialist feminism, gay male studies, and the men's movement: each illuminates the limited and limiting representation that is the masculine identity of the male subject. What is missing in these acts of revision, however, is any re-presentation of masculinity which I understand to mean a rewriting of an alternative yet viable masculinity, not merely a critical exposition of what it is, or ought to be.

RECONSIDERING THE PARAMETERS FOR REVISION

The characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity in these constructed images are both the product of and part of a particular view of what it means to be female or male in society; that is, these images are determined by a particular view of sexuality and they simultaneously *(re)construct* that view.

Anne Cranny-Francis²⁸

To *(re)construct*: one possible meaning, as I understand it, is to repeat and recycle. In short, it means to reproduce more of the same. On the other hand, following Derrida, the same word carries with it the simultaneously charged potential for deconstruction in terms of change and revision. According to the *OED*, this word means "to construct anew." The significance of this, of making new, cannot be lost on any attempt to rethink how we can read masculinity in the light of our postmodern crisis of representation: this *(re)construction* is the very act of rewriting the term "masculinity." Conversely, its correlative consequence must be a re-examination of heterosexuality. On a larger scale, what is central to each of these must also be a reconsideration of representation itself.

Such a reorientation of reading signals the paradoxical processes of repetition and

²⁸Anne Cranny-Francis, *Engendered Fictions: Analysing Gender in the Production and Reception of Texts* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992) 1. Emphasis added.

alteration that take place when reading the representation of contradiction(s) that some texts display. Consequently, reading such a representation is always a moment of re-presentation. Redrawing the category "masculine" in a similar manner is indeed one possible alternative in addressing a postmodern concern with representation in general, and the dilemma of masculine self-representation, in part. Let me explain why.

Consider, as an extreme but graphic example, a husband's infidelity. In a manner of speaking, the act of marriage positions him within the domesticated scene of hom(m)o-sexuality where he is husband. Further, his participation in the exchange of Woman as a commodified sign (in this instance, as a wife) exhibits not only his heterosexual dominance but guarantees his socio-cultural identity as a man. In these defining acts, what is constructed is his masculine identity. That his infidelity is a violation of the marriage contract does not obscure the fact that it is a display of his gendered identity within dominant culture: repeating the sex act with another woman does nothing but reproduce his heterosexual prowess and authority. Yet, in doing so, he has altered, for some, his identity as the husband.

Consider, as a further development, this husband to be a closet homosexual. I do not mean to imply a man who hides his homosexuality behind the screen of marriage as I / want to propose, instead, a man whom in spite of his dominant heterosexuality engages occasionally in sex with other men. Infidelity can no longer be a simple issue of a man cheating on his wife with other women. What is injected into an otherwise straightforward case of marital infidelity are those questions of (hetero)sexuality and, ultimately, of his identity as a man's man within hom(m)o-sexual culture. More importantly, if his infidelity is homosexual, it problematically displaces the location of masculinity with the male body, and masculinity with heterosexuality. Is his marriage then nothing but the *enacted* repetition of hom(m)o-sexuality? Can we describe his homosexual infidelity as another display of masculinity? What can this mean, heterosexually speaking, for masculine sexual behaviour when he engages in male-

female/male sex? And are not his homosexual acts an alteration that confounds any attempt to fix masculine identity?

In choosing to redraw the parameters for what follows in this study of reading masculinity in the above example, I am insisting that there has to be much more than a mere social identification of masculinity in the body-gender alignment. What there must be, and in particular, as it relates to a postmodern identity, is this: in each of these sexual acts, there exists the element of reconstruction where that which is being reconstructed is the masculinity of the male body. Hence, what I am arguing for, and seeking to enunciate, both throughout and, especially, in concluding this study, is that any attempt to read the apparent masculine identity of the male body must take into account its (re)construction that a reader animates when he/she reads corporeality with the male gaze. Within the male gaze, such a body can be read in terms of repeating the dominant expression of masculinity as it can also be exposed to be that site of difference. Conversely, how we read masculinity, and, to a greater degree, how we come to engender our identity as the masculine reading subject, will always be dependent upon the interplay between the surface we read and the gaze we employ to mediate this site of hetero/homosexuality. As Cranny-Francis remarks, in her deconstructive reading of gender,

At every stage the making of meaning is never determined nor determining; it is active and contested. In that contestation and struggle is the possibility of new meanings, new engenderings, for texts and for individual subjects. (1992: 265)

This is not unlike a matter of dis coherence, and its effect on gender identity, as I now proceed to outline.

TOWARDS REVISING MASCULINITY (2): A CASE FOR DISCOHERENCE

In questioning the meaning of Woman, the discourse of essentialist feminism

problematizes as well as reinscribes the meaning of what a woman is. Gay male writing, in its theory and fiction, rewrites stereotypical notions of that “natural” bond between masculinity and heterosexuality. Both resist and rewrite the seemingly natural and transparent, the unquestionable and unproblematic; in short, both scrutinize the “agendered.” Whilst acknowledging their respective politics, history, and rhetoric in enabling this work, this study seeks to go further.

I will proffer more than a distinctly postmodernist, or, to be precise, a deconstructionist, re-examination of masculinity, and its inherent identification with the subject position of reading. I want to import into this study that suggestively “queer” notion of identity as *surface*, and, more specifically, of this particular surface as *performative*. I understand such a “queer” identity in two ways. Firstly, it refers to the masculine identity that the male body is supposed to possess but which it can also *enact* like a surface of gender. In addition, this particular identity alludes to the individual subject whose identity as the masculine reader might be a role that is adopted and enacted—in that disturbingly “queer” sense of cross-(ad)ressing—when reading with the male gaze.

In the wake of the lost patriarchal center, hom(m)o-sexual representation is no longer mimetic nor even guaranteed in that paternal signifier, the phallus. It is this absent, if not collapsed, ground for the production and legitimation of representation that Jameson diagnoses as the “crisis of representation.” Representation, he announces, can no longer be that

in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself. (1984: viii)

This crisis echoes the problem of how the individual reader/spectator represents itself in the face of a fragmented, floating center. This crisis is also that instance when how we

perceive and read the representation of masculinity is itself a moment when our ability to legitimate this reading is denied because all there is is the absence of a centered epistemology.

This is, then, a study, first of all, in *discoherence*. In *Sexual Dissidence*, Dollimore introduces discoherence as intrinsic to a reading of homosexuality, and to its centrality in dominant culture. His work reclaims much more than this centering of the margin; it implicitly traces the transgressive effect homosexuality poses for heterosexuality. Dollimore details, in this reinscription, what I see as a discoherence of meanings within, and arising out of, a continually competing sexual arena.

What is suggestively put forth but not fully articulated in his work, however, is the question of discoherence and masculinity. In my appropriation of Dollimore's work, what masculinity can mean is itself susceptible to revision:

In the process of being made to discohere, meanings are returned to circulation, thereby becoming the more vulnerable to appropriation, transformation, and reincorporation in new configurations. Such in part are the processes whereby the social is made and unmade, disarticulated and rearticulated. (1991: 87)

In other words, discoherence might reconstruct the seemingly fixed definition of "masculinity" as contingent and unstable but it also re-presents it. Furthermore, "discoherence ... seeks to reveal and maybe reactivate the contradictions which are effaced by ideology as an aspect of the control of meaning" (Dollimore 1991: 87); that is, it exposes our patriarchal considerations of sexuality as an ideology constructed in, and, more importantly, existing as, hom(m)o-sexuality.

Because discoherence works within those stable and fixed hom(m)o-sexual boundaries, it dangerously illuminates masculinity as caught between affirming itself and stimulating its own re-presentation. To arrive at the plurality that is indeed masculinity, this study reclaims a process of discoherence both at and from that which gender studies commonly describes as masculinity, a heterosexually defined and policed gender category.

But what has dis coherence to do with our identity as the seeing/reading subject when we continue to deploy the male gaze in order to read the representation of the male body despite its contradictory representation as (sexually) other? A whole lot, I suspect.

The male gaze is, in feminist investigations into hom(m)o-sexual culture, that dynamic which empowers our self-representation as a gendered subject. Here, one's subjectivity is a matter of adopting the dominant position of spectatorship; while women oscillate between being the image and functioning as a spectator, men simply fixate their subjectivity upon this sight. Where men possess subjectivity within this culture, women are denied it for they can only possess the dominant masculine subjectivity. Within the feminist-inflected discourse of gender studies, however, I come to understand this site to be where males are homogeneously engendered into as well as singularly identifiable as "Man." As a sign in this particular discourse, Man is defined heterosexually, and masculinity is argued to correspond with the male body.

For this latter configuration to work, the gaze must always be the same in each act of looking as it must also encompass all men uniformly: *all* men see women in the same heterosexual gaze. Within its scopic regime, all visuality is fixated at the sight of Woman and all spectators, whether male or female, see from this dominant heterosexual and masculine position.

This is hardly always the case: what the gaze suppresses, if it does not actively disavow, is equally important in constructing masculinity. I am referring, of course, to the sight of the gay male body which contests and undermines the practice of reading gender with this dominant gaze. For, contrary to an expected repression of homosexuality, this is also that confrontational sight where straight men come face to face with the sexual difference of corporeality at that selfsame site of the male body they themselves possess. Their masculine subjectivity then is not always a simple act of containing, and even eliding, the Other as it must be, rather, reconsidered as a matter of dis coherence: it is a matter of articulating and rearticulating sameness and difference.

If the gaze is necessarily masculine, and therefore male, a contrary, and perhaps an alternative, gaze proposes more than just another way of seeing and reading: it posits the very possibility of revising one's subjectivity. One such gaze is outlined in E. Ann Kaplan's article, "Is the Gaze Male?" For her, such a gaze is described as one engaged in an act of "mutual gazing" (1983: 324). Such gazing enables us to

move beyond long-held cultural and linguistic patterns of oppositions: male/female (as these terms currently signify); dominant/submissive; active/passive; nature/civilization; order/chaos; matriarchal/patriarchal. (1983: 325)

Undoubtedly, Kaplan's analysis suggests problematizing the male gaze; in doing so, she postulates an alternative approach in categorizing gender.

In sociology, Georg Simmel's work²⁹ on the glance offers a similar approach. He focuses on the reciprocity of the glance: here, it is the glance of the Self upon the Other which enables the former to be recognized by the latter. In other words, an element of participation is introduced into the processes of looking and recognition. For Simmel, looking is anything but a passive repetition of an ideologically determined vision.

Bryson echoes a similar argument in *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. Although writing specifically about realism and painting, he offers a viable reconsideration of looking as an active process. What he argues for is, in the final instance, nothing less than a revision of the gaze when its interactiveness takes precedence. He describes this thus:

Interaction between the image and the social formation cannot, therefore, be conceived as the convergence or the collision of two entities existing beforehand in mutual exteriority: sign and social formation are continuous and

²⁹See his article, "Sociology of the Senses: Visual Interaction," *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, ed. R.E. Parks and W.W. Burgess (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969) 356-361. For a discussion of Simmel's theory of vision and subjectivity, see Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein, "On the Visual Contribution of Society: The Contribution of Georg Simmel and Jean-Paul Sartre to a Sociology of the Senses," *History of European Ideas* 5.4 (1984) 349-362.

occupy the same “inside” of semiotic process. The sign cannot exist outside the social formation, for only in as much as it has achieved consensus regularity does it exist as sign. (1983: 51)

To put it simply, and in terms of this study, the representation of masculinity is, following Bryson, always and actively an interaction between reader and text at the locus of the male gaze.

Kaplan, Simmel, and Bryson, even though coming from seemingly incongruous perspectives and backgrounds, do insist that how we look at ourselves, and correspondingly, at gender and sexuality, can never be a unidirectional let alone fixed gaze. Each reclaims, in their respective manner, a necessary interaction between Self and Other as well as the exchange between reader and text when reading the representation of gender. A displacement of the male gaze into dis coherence animates this interaction too.

If each text reflects both the particular time and space in which it was produced, a text situated within postmodernity will engage the reader in, I contend, an alternative politics of reading masculinity, a politics of dis coherence. This is what I mean: because such texts represent the male body as a disrupting conjunction of contra-dictions, a reader is forced to engage in a self-reflexive reading which questions how he/she reads this representation of masculinity. Consequently, there takes place a dis coherence within the male gaze: what is seen is always caught in that double bind of repeating a gaze that is inherently, and actively, revising itself.

Throughout this study, I will foreground as well as illustrate this relationship between the production and reception of texts as a necessary interplay of sameness and difference that enables, on the one hand, the dominant practice of reading gender, and, on the other, its possible revision. In short, this is a politics of reading in which there can be a revision of a reader’s understanding of masculinity in the first instance, and his/her sense of being the masculine spectator/reader, in the other.

Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*³⁰ demonstrates just such an interaction. In this film, we can pursue a postmodern re-examination of the male gaze: while it figures, so often, as a synecdoche for masculinity within dominant culture, the male gaze, in this film, signifies, I believe, the symptomatic rupture it suffers when what is being read is the male body in contra-dictions.

GOING TO THE MOVIES

PRESS AGENT (*Gesturing*) The real ones want their lives fiction, and the fictional ones want their lives real.

*The Purple Rose of Cairo*³¹

When we view a film, we are acutely aware it is an illusion, a representation (of reality.) Nevertheless, and especially, during the course of watching a film, we perversely accept it as "real"; screened representations become viable, if not intoxicatingly attractive, alternatives to our reality. I am convinced we do so because, as much as we would like to deny it, films (like other texts predicated on our need to make-believe) figure significantly in how we come to understand the world around us. Allen, notes Sam B. Girgus, emphasizes a similar point in his films: Allen, Girgus writes, "places the issue of the formation of individual personality and character in the context of the perception and construction of reality through the media" (1993: 74).

³⁰*The Purple Rose of Cairo*, dir. Woody Allen, with Mia Farrow, Jeff Daniels, Danny Aiello, Rollins-Joffe/Orion, 1985.

³¹Quoted in Woody Allen, *Three Films of Woody Allen* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 395. Subsequent quotations will be taken from this book and their page numbers will be indicated in parentheses.

There is, then, a tense suspension of the spectator between the textual and the real in the course of watching *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. And this must be, for us, an example of the on-going debate on gender and visibility when such a debate is recast in terms of dis coherence. In this film, which employs and plays with a film within a film topology,³² Allen foregrounds for his spectator, male or female, a gaze that is always repeating yet actively revising the sight screened; his film demonstrates how we might begin to read representation within dis coherence. Paradigmatically, a film of this nature illustrates how a spectator's subject position of reading gender is tested.

Cecilia, the film's protagonist, is caught between her routine and loveless life with Monk, her husband, and the Jewel Theater where, in its dark surrounds (a fantasy world of make-believe reality), she finds happiness and security in the "filmic-real." Allen's spectator parallels Cecilia in both its relationship to and its nature of spectatorship at the movie screen. We are positioned to Cecilia as she is to the screen. For us, Cecilia is the very surface we gaze upon as she is herself entranced with the fictional Tom Baxter who inhabits the screen of "The Purple Rose of Cairo."

This is then that characteristically double bind of postmodern representation. The spectator is interacting with two surfaces which although parallel, in the sense of being fictional, are invariably conjoined in a disturbing mix of the real and the fictional. What I mean as that screen, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, is a spatialized divide and a gendered site that is disrupted when we now have to grapple with the collapse of those fixed distinctions between the real and the fictional. Hence, we have to engage these surfaces as they juxtapose, interact with, and contradict a spectator's gaze. In a manner of speaking, the

³²In the diegesis which is the film we are watching, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, we also watch Cecilia as she sees another film ("The Purple Rose of Cairo") bearing the same title. In juxtaposing these two similarly entitled films, Allen makes an ironic comment on the film-making industry. Furthermore, he sets this up as a parody where he critically examines reality and fiction.

spectator must confront this specifically double bind of distortion in order to understand the film.

What would otherwise be mere spectatorship for Cecilia is therefore problematized. When Tom, “explorer, adventurer,” and archaeologist, who is “in search of the purple rose of Cairo” (333) steps from his black and white world into the off-screen, technicolor but “reel/real” world of Cecilia not only has her filmic-real come alive, becoming three-dimensional in the process, but the very basis of representation is now threatened. Similarly, even though a spectator is removed from this intrusion, by virtue of his/her position as the objective, and panoptical, spectator, he/she is forced into a moment of visual unease because this scene foregrounds the fearful possibility of reality and fictionality merging together.

STEPPING OUT WITH TOM

Such discomfort arises from a slippage between what ought to be those identifiably separate, and self-contained, categories, “real” and “fictional.” The real and the fictional, or, in this instance, the filmic-real and reel/real, cannot coexist. No conflation of, or, more disturbingly, a fluid permeation and exchange between, both is permitted in our understanding of reality.

Girgus’ observation of the dilemma Tom’s crossing poses for the characters within “The Purple Rose of Cairo” is, I agree, a succinct diagnosis of the similar predicament Cecilia faces. This is what Girgus says:

When Tom steps out of the film and fulfills the potential of all art to enter directly into the lives of its audience, he disturbs and endangers the worlds on both sides of the screen. Naturally, everything in the film turns to chaos—narrative, dialogue, relationships. The characters are forced to deal with a new reality. They must reinvent themselves and find a purpose to their

existence. Of course, the situation is clearly impossible. A film is not real life.
(1993: 82)

That Tom's filmic-real is "not real life," and because the characters need to "reinvent" themselves in the light of his transgressive actions, the only possible ending to Allen's film must be Tom's eventual return into "The Purple Rose of Cairo." Similarly, it is Cecilia who must reinvent herself, and, in the process, re-examine her role, as a spectator positioned within the male gaze.

Yet there is more here than meets the eye. Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is, in the end, a postmodern text playing with our notions of sight and knowledge; what is emphasized in Allen's film, as I have come to understand what it is about, is the subtext of dis coherence, and how it affects the masculine subject position of spectatorship. And as with all subtexts, it is already traced into the surface that is screened. When Tom oversteps that dividing boundary between real and fiction, when the certainty of what a film is, and does, is ruptured, then there occurs, for spectators of this film, an (over)exposure of what the screen really is—a veil mimicking reality as it masks the very constructedness of its seemingly natural existence.

Perhaps it is all the more significant that both Cecilia's "reel" world and our reality inhabit two sides of the same screen: according to Allen's script directions, Tom "*actually walks off the black-and-white screen, turning into living color [sic] as he enters the theater*" (351). His actions, let us remember, are being screened before the individual spectator too. Like Cecilia, the individual male or female spectator finds him/herself in a moment of visual dis-ease; a need arises, therefore, to reinvent how we, as spectators, can see ourselves and what our reality might be in terms of watching this film.

In what follows, I want to transpose onto this film a reading in dis coherence when an individual's subjectivity as the masculine spectator is faced with the decidedly convulsive conjunction described above. In part, I want to consider how this Woody Allen film proposes an alternative reading of masculinity, and to then locate this within the

now shifting parameters of the ongoing debate concerning spectatorship and the male gaze.

In the course of the film, Tom comes to offer Cecilia love and security, emotions absent in her loveless marriage to Monk. By setting the scene where he offers her love in an amusement park, itself a space of play and inversion, the irony of Tom's proposal is, Allen illustrates, heightened because the filmic-real is now a viable option when juxtaposed to Cecilia's dreary and meaningless existence. She herself recognizes Tom as an alternative despite his inherent limitations: "I-I-I just met a wonderful new man. He's fictional, but you can't have everything" (434). Even though fiction should never be mistaken for reality when we watch a film, Tom becomes, for Cecilia, the more attractive choice over Monk. He offers her more than just love and romance; in the final instance, he offers Cecilia an existence, something which is missing in her "reel" life and which propels her repeatedly into the Jewel Theater.

Nonetheless, this is a topsy-turvy world where real and reel conjoin into a seemingly seamless yet actually confusing conflation of space and time. It is also where fact and fiction become interchangeable as they merge into a series of changing scenes. In short, Cecilia is thrust into what Girgus identifies as the "poststructuralist anxiety" underlying Allen's film (1993: 83). Throughout the film's diegesis, she is a spectator who oscillates between teetering on the brink of and falling into the confusion of what representation is, or seems to be.

Cecilia's predicament—this "poststructuralist anxiety"—symptomatically describes, at best, the condition of the spectatorial male gaze in postmodernity. Where the spectator is concerned, such an anxiety now displaces that masculine subjectivity the gaze engenders, and relocates it within dis coherence. An emblematic scene in the film spectacularizes this:

WOMAN (*To reporters*) I saw the movie just last week. This is not what happens!

NOTEPAD REPORTER Where is the Tom Baxter character?

THEATER MANAGER (*Overlapping, to the woman*) Wh— ah you'll get your money back.

WOMAN (*Gesturing*) I want what happened in the movie last week to happen this week, (*Shaking her head, looking at the men*) otherwise what's life all about anyway? (373)

In this remarkable exchange, we can begin to appreciate the paradox this particular woman spectator finds herself in: she wants to see the film which is at once a desire predicated on what her movie ticket promises her but which can only be fulfilled with more of the same—in wanting what happened “last week to happen this week.”

Such is Cecilia's dilemma; what is life *now*, if the promised guarantee of representation turns out to be nothing short of uncertainty? And what does this reveal about her if she can no longer locate herself in a gaze that is unable to represent? For the spectator, this surface (that is Cecilia) cannot remain unproblematic nor can it always be a site of masculine representation.

This claim I making might seem preposterous when it is only Cecilia's “reality” that is disrupted. Moreover, as the spectacle of *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, she continues to be the focus of our male gaze despite the conflation of reality and fiction we are watching Cecilia caught in. However, sited as the spectator is to Tom and the filmic-real in a gaze that is, primarily, Cecilia's, what is emphasized from the very first time we see him, and which is intimated repeatedly throughout the diegesis, is this: we come to see “The Purple Rose of Cairo” largely through her eyes—eyes which must now mediate the disturbing conjunction between reality and fictionality.

Without doubt, a feminist-inflection (and here, I am thinking of the works of Mulvey, de Lauretis, and Doane³³) would see Cecilia's spectatorship as another example

³³See Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 6-18; Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984); and Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (London: MacMillan, 1988). This quote from Doane's introduction to her book echoes

of the pervasive masculine hold on vision: she has, in other words, no sight other than the male gaze. Because Cecilia positions herself as Woman in relation to an idealized image of masculinity—Tom—she is, I contend, much more than a mere spectacle for Allen's spectator. Rather, she is, in the context of his film, that site where a spectacularized male gaze focuses on a male body.

As it fixes upon Tom to eroticize him, Cecilia's gaze becomes a problematic site; the male gaze is not supposed to fixate itself with the male body. Indeed, this body must intrinsically align itself with masculine dominance and become the spectator of Woman within the film, or be elided all together. Allen's spectator, however, cannot not ignore Tom's spectacularized status as display. Besides, Tom's fictionality mires itself in a parallel concern with reality as construction. In addressing these issues, as they relate to the male body, we can no longer ignore a postmodern problematization of gender and sexuality, vision and representation, identity and subjectivity.

When a spectator confronts this screening of "poststructuralist anxiety," his/her gaze finds itself in a state of dis coherence. Within dis coherence, the spectator is forced to mediate, like Cecilia, between what is real and what is fictional. While Cecilia must reconcile the contra-diction that is Tom, who is paradoxically fictional yet "reel," and choose between him and Gil Shepherd, the movie star who enacts the persona "Tom Baxter," Allen's spectator is similarly poised to choose between both these representations of masculinity. An otherwise logical and, indeed, straightforward decision is complicated in the anxiety spectacularized as a crisis of reading masculinity in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. As Cecilia grapples with this tension arising out, if not because, of her juxtaposition to and within these antithetical realities Tom and Gil represent, so it must be

the anxiety each of these theorists enunciates for the female spectator: "the woman is deprived of a gaze, deprived of subjectivity and repeatedly transformed into the object of a masculine scopophilic desire" (1988: 2).

for us spectators. We are reduced, as we watch Cecilia, into a false sense of security that our position as the masculine subject, the male voyeur, will be entertained by a feminine object that is the fetishized spectacle of the film.

Cecilia is Allen's titillating offer of Woman as spectacle in a film which proceeds to undercut this pose: he denies us any pleasure in such a spectacularization of Woman when he has Tom cross the divide, for this, in turn, displaces Cecilia from a mere object of our attention to a spectator whose dilemma is, ironically, shared by our postmodern concern with representation. She stands in for the spectator who now has to mediate the questions Allen himself raises about representations in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

Cecilia is the ostensible spectacle; there is no doubting that. But she is more a speculation of what the spectator—and hence, the male gaze—is supposed to engender. In doing so, Allen exposes, more than he recycles, the male gaze as a sight currently in a state of visual dis-ease. Indeed, when the fictional (Tom), the real (Gil), and the spectator (Cecilia) intersect, there is then, and rightly so, a disturbing conjunction as there is also a dis coherence of those very categories “real” and “fiction,” not to mention “representation” itself.

“B-BUT TOM’S PERFECT!”

Films ... often provide the terms and categories for seeing and understanding life.

Sam B. Girgus³⁴

³⁴Sam B. Girgus, *The Films of Woody Allen*, Cambridge Film Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 72.

Nowhere is the truth of this epigraph more obviously evident than when Allen moves the narrative of the film towards its resolution in which Cecilia chooses Gil over Tom. While her choice might be the correct decision within hom(m)o-sexual culture, it is based on the false promise of a man's word when it expresses who, or what, is precisely the "real" man. Let us look, bearing this in mind, at a crucial exchange between Tom, Cecilia, and Gil:

TOM (*Interrupting, gesturing*) I wanted to be with Cecilia. I'm in love with her.

Gil flings his arms up in the air and, turning, walks back to Cecilia.

GIL (*Pointing behind him, to the offscreen Tom*) Will you tell him to go back? Tell him you, tell him you don't love him. (*Gesturing, looking behind him, turning back and forth from Cecilia to the offscreen Tom*) Tell him you *can't* love him. He's (*Laughing*) fictional! You want to waste your time with a fictional character? I mean, you're a sweet girl. You deserve an actual human.

CECILIA B-but Tom's perfect!

GIL (*Gesturing*) Yeah, uh, but he's not real. What good "perfect" if the man's not real?! (404)

For Cecilia, there is the perfection of Tom, a masculinity idealized but fictional, and there is the lived masculinity of Gil, the actor. While Cecilia is the focus of their attention (although for absolutely different reasons), it is the representation of Man or, to be exact, what constitutes his masculine identity which is in question.

Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is at once a homage to and a parody of the Hollywood films of the '30s and '40s. In particular, it is Allen's celebration as well as his critique of the leading men of those films; this film foregrounds the issue of how a spectator will address both Tom and Gil who both come to signify the masculine identity of the Hollywood leading man. Indeed, what comes to be inextricably caught up within this paradoxical representation of the film industry is, as I see it, a re-presentation of the Hollywood leading man and the type of masculinity he connotes. In fact, Allen reworks the Hollywood male movie star of that era, so often epitomized in the figure of Clark

Gable, through Cecilia's problematic gaze. What makes this all the more disturbing is the fact that the spectator must now ask the question, what is the Hollywood leading man's masculine identity really like?

Faced as she is with a choice between a Hollywood representation of masculinity as strong, brave, and every inch the gentleman and the Hollywood movie star who is real flesh and blood, Cecilia's decision is dictated by, as it is logically arrived at within, the parameters of her reality: she chooses Gil because he is the real man. As she tells Tom:

You'll be fine. In your world things have a way of working out right. See *I'm a real person*. No matter how ... tempted I am, *I have to choose the real world*. (459. Emphasis added).

There is no other alternative: she has to choose what is real. In choosing Tom, in choosing fiction over reality, Cecilia would have compromised, even endangered, what we understand as reality. At one level, this resolution is expected of Cecilia; more particularly, it must be the accepted closure upon which we expect to end our spectatorship of this film. In other words, such a closure stems from the prevailing politics of representation: the ending is occasioned by, as it is necessarily germane to, that dominant epistemology of representation where reality supersedes fiction.

However, in choosing Gil, he who has promised her Hollywood and love, Cecilia receives nothing but the realized deception of his empty promises. In choosing Gil, Cecilia has, as Girgus points out, fallen for the "epitome of the unreal"; after all, Gil, the actor, signifies the make believe reality of Hollywood (1993: 83). In choosing the "Hollywood Gable" Gil *seems* to be, Allen highlights two endemic yet intertwined problems of representation the spectator confronts in this choice.

“I-IT’S-IT’S THE SAME TWO PEOPLE”

Firstly, we are dealing specifically with representation as masculine. Within dominant culture, the category “masculine” is seen to be a seamless, universal, and natural site. We need to reconsider this. If Gil is chosen over Tom, it is because he guarantees what we understand as the certainty, the legitimacy, and the authority of what constitutes that masculine identity, a man. To put it in another way, our knowledge of masculinity is secured in the choice of Gil. This is, however, questioned and contradicted by Allen.

Cecilia chooses Gil as much for the promises he makes as he is, in comparison to Tom, the “real” man. What Gil turns out to be, ironically, is a wolf in Shepherd’s garb. His manly promise is a lie which leads Cecilia astray; she continues to be denied her promised existence. She is, once again, oppressed. In the end, our need as spectators of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* to see Cecilia reimpose reality over fiction and, hence, affirm our guaranteed sight is but a moment when the fallacy of reality is laid bare.

This leads me to the second problem Allen fixes upon. It is, first and foremost, postmodern but its repercussions for how we read masculinity resonate throughout this study. I am referring, of course, to the convoluted interplay between differences, between fiction and reality. In the context of this film, Tom and Gil are two different identities as they also are one and the same male body. In addition, they each represent two distinct personae, on either side of the shared screen that is “The Purple Rose of Cairo.” There is then an incongruous existence of contra-dictions at the site of the same body:

CECILIA (*Gesturing*) Oh ... I ... last week I was unloved. (*Turning to Gil, her back to the camera briefly*) Now ... two people love me, and i-it’s-it’s the same two people. (455)

Cecilia’s comments suggest much more than a recognition that Tom and Gil are one and the same person: what there is, instead, Cecilia’s observation implies, is the issue of how we represent and read masculinity when what we encounter is a representation of the male

body in contra-diction.

Is masculinity, as this film spectacularizes it, nothing less than the always and already dominant representation of gender within culture? If it is, to what extent does a conjunction of the real and the fictional animate a gendered identity? More fundamentally, can we ever separate, describe, and authoritatively say what masculinity *really* is?

Because masculinity is bifurcated within the same space—both Tom and Gil are juxtaposed within the same body on-screen, and this is further complicated by having, in our reality, the actor Jeff Daniels enact both these personae of the Hollywood leading man—Cecilia’s understanding of what a man is is articulated in terms of an “either/or” proposition. But such a simple description of masculine identity is repudiated: for Allen, in his larger concern with representation, advances, I believe, a critique of how our current hom(m)o-sexual representation of masculinity is very much a matter of having/not having the male body, or, more specifically, the penis. In this film, he demonstrates how our socio-cultural perception of masculinity is false: it is hardly that one seamless, monolithic, and generic category of gender.

We can insist that Allen’s film repeatedly contests gender: as textual representations, Cecilia, Tom, and Gil resist those hom(m)o-sexual depictions of gender while challenging our preconceived understanding of what gendered identities and relations are. Suzanne Moore offers a similar perspective in her article, “Here’s Looking at You, Kid!” when she writes, “femininity and masculinity are processes in a state of constant negotiation, not static categories from which there is no escape” (1989: 45). And so it is with gender and Woody Allen in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Cecilia may have been duped by Gil but she dares, by the end of the film, to continue dreaming the filmic-real. She is, I will shortly explain, a reinvented spectator. In spite of his fictionality, Tom represents an alternative masculinity which although completely the antithesis of Gil’s lived experiences is a far more attractive representation of masculine identity. As for Gil, his actions can only debunk the mythic Hollywood leading man and the masculinity he

symbolizes: in his lie, Gil reinforces, more than ever, that the stereotype, as always, is a fake. Where the real is now a void and a lie, in the diegesis of this film, Monk's angry outburst as Cecilia walks out of their house to follow Gil has to be, in the light of Allen's interplay, ironic: "Go, see what it is out there.... It ain't the movies! It's real life! It's real life!, and you'll be back! You mark my words! You'll be back!" (464).

"A MATTER OF SEMANTICS"

CECILIA (*Looking at Tom, still touching the phone*) My whole life I've wondered what it would be like to be on this side of the screen.

The Purple Rose of Cairo

The Purple Rose of Cairo ends where it begins: back inside the Jewel to escape her harsh life, the world of the filmic-real is transformed into an alternative and meaningful reality for Cecilia. The final scenes of the film are of Cecilia watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dancing cheek to cheek. In this screening of *Top Hat*, she finds a space within which she can reinvent herself as the spectator. The last frame of the film that we see is one where Cecilia is "*totally engrossed, totally immersed*" (467), and continually smiling: as the technicolor world of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* fades into the black-and-white that is as much the credits as it is the filmic-real of Tom's "The Purple Rose of Cairo," she finds happiness, once again, even if it is momentary and fleeting.

For Girgus, however, this is an ending which continues to fix Cecilia as the victim-like woman spectator:

the end is designed to contain the film's humour by insisting upon the seriousness of her situation as the victim of Monk and the economic and social conditions of her times. Her inner life will continue to be at the movies, presumably in imitation of those millions who actually suffered such a fate during the Depression. (1993: 87)

I want to suggest otherwise. In the light of Allen's harsh critique of reality, Cecilia's fascination with the movie screen might not be, after all, a moment of loneliness nor an example of irrational behaviour, let alone an obsession with fantasy. Rather, as a spectator in a world already mired in confusion between reality and fiction, the only option for her survival lies in a dis coherent rewriting of those very categories which previously policed her reality but now constitute a revised sight.

A revision of this nature must, moreover, and especially for feminist film theory, begin to question the validity of the masculine identification the male gaze is said to engender. Mary Ann Doane begins *The Desire to Desire* with a reading of Cecilia's role as the woman spectator in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. She sees its ending as evidence of Cecilia being nothing but the spectacle of Woman:

there is a close-up of some duration of Mia Farrow [who plays Cecilia] in spectatorial ecstasy, enraptured by the image, face glowing (both figuratively and literally through its reflection of light from the movie screen). (1988: 1)

Moreover, Cecilia is a spectator who, as the subject of the gaze, in this film, possesses "a peculiarly ironic assumption of subjectivity" (1988: 2); her gaze is inevitably a masculine spectatorship imposed upon the female body. Only in this configuration, Doane analyses, can Cecilia come to inhabit the dual position of spectator/spectacle in Allen's film so as to make the seeming confusion and muddled juxtaposition that is *The Purple Rose of Cairo* work. As far as Doane is concerned, then, Cecilia must exist as that hermaphrodite configuration, the feminine spectacle/spectator. After all, Doane goes on to add,

The figure of the woman repeatedly viewing the same film ... is the condition of possibility of narratives based on her purportedly excessive collusion with the cinematic imaginary. (1988: 1)

Once again, it would seem, masculine creativity and representation is dependent upon the sign, Woman.

While I agree with Doane's aims, I must pause to ask: is there not an erasure, in her critique, of the fact that what is also spectacularized, and, more disturbingly, parodied, in

The Purple Rose of Cairo, is masculinity itself?

Cecilia may be positioned within the male gaze but as this is a film dependent upon, and emblematic of, a postmodern play between competing differences, there must be therefore, and because of dis coherence, a necessary revision of Cecilia as spectator/spectacle. At the end of the film, Cecilia's spectatorship can hardly be described as singularly masculine. Rather, she is a problematized spectator whose gaze is never going to be grounded in a meta-narrative of masculine representation but, more accurately, in its re-presentation as a possible site of contra-dictions.³⁵

For Allen's spectator, therefore, there can be no contentment of what ought to be seen as the logical ending to this film. Like Cecilia, turning our back on the fictional cannot be a return into the real and secured, the stable and comprehensible. Allen's representation of alternative realities offers us an opportunity to re-envision femininity and masculinity beyond the fixated, and hom(m)o-sexually aligned, trajectory of the male gaze. Instead of a hegemonic and hierarchical point of view, Allen structures spectatorship around these parallel, interdependent, but conflicting plots of Cecilia as spectator and of us as spectators of Cecilia. In other words, there is, in-built into how we see this film, a contest of differing gazes.

This reading of Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is perhaps best described as one of semantics:

HENRY (*Overlapping Delilah, getting everyone's attention*) What if all this is merely a matter of semantics?

³⁵This is that defining moment an individual subject will find him/herself in, I would like to suggest, when reading a representation of contra-diction. It is a point I shall return to throughout this study, and in particular in chapters 4 and 5. There I will argue that it is precisely because this subject position of seeing and reading is now a location of contra-dictions, the masculine identification it should engender is problematized. Such a scenario also points to the possibility that what is particularly in contra-diction in this instance is the differences of an essentialized versus a performative identity the individual reader/spectator may be effecting when he/she reads with the male gaze.

LARRY (*With annoyance*) How can it be semantics?

HENRY (*Gesturing*) Well, wait a minute. Let's, let's just readjust our definitions. Let's redefine ourselves as the real world (*Pointing towards the offscreen theater*) and them as the world of illusion and shadow. (*Gesturing*) You see, we're reality, they're a dream. (437)

If semantics, as Henry states, is crucial to an understanding of meaning and, in the context of Allen's film, meaning as it arises from a matrix of spectatorial positions within and without the film, how a spectator will read Allen's representations of reality and fictionality, of femininity and masculinity arise from that structured and structuring locus of spectatorship which is, I propose, the male gaze as it realizes itself within a politics of dis coherence.

As such, we can now reconstruct the male gaze from within this very same discourse which initiates, animates, and maintains this continuing hom(m)o-sexual practice of engendering culture. The way we see and speak, the way we write and act can no longer be guaranteed. Looking as we do at today's males and their masculinities, we cannot help but begin to see that our present cultural discourse is limited and inadequate when articulating masculinity. Moreover, each time masculinity is identified within gender studies, the problem is exacerbated. There is always the act of making visible masculinity's shortcomings. In contrast, there is little offered as alternatives to what this particular gender term can possibly mean today. To add to the complexity, and perhaps also to the already entangled quagmire, that is the gender debate, masculinity tends, ever so often, to be a dangerously interchangeable mix of corporeality, heterosexuality, and gender; there needs to be another trajectory along which the term "masculinity" can be revised. A continuing focus of this study will be how we can revise our reading men: this concept of "reading men" is best understood in that dual sense of reading masculinity and, more to the point, how men can re-read the masculine.

In chapter 2, I pick up the points I raise above and relate them to the visual unease of reading the gay male body. Like *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and the problematic

interface of difference it posits in having two different masculine identities at the selfsame site of the one male body of the actor, I proceed to examine in greater detail how the reading of masculinity, and especially, a masculine practice of reading, displaces, alters, and revises itself when negotiating the homosexual difference of the gay male body. In the process, these acts of reading undergo a process of dis coherence when our acculturated male gaze engages such a surface of difference. And this is where, I want to emphasize, the politics of dis coherence can paradigmatically manifest itself as an alternative practice of reading masculinity.

CHAPTER TWO

SPECTACLE OF THE OTHER (WO)MAN: A GAY (RE)VISION OF MASCULINITY

It is a common theory of social deviance that persecution of deviants is in part a ritual devised to maintain the boundaries of what is socially approved.

Dennis Altman³⁶

In chapter 1, I dealt with the crisis of representation, and how the representation of the male body, in particular, can no longer be read according to the dominant cultural representations of gender. These representations, which tend to be essentialized descriptions of masculinity, are especially problematic when they exist as that paradigmatic site of contra-dictions, the gay male body. I want to begin, this examination, however, by focusing upon the HIV/AIDS infected body, and its continued identification with firstly, a gay male identity and secondly, the implied effeminacy this identity is supposed engender.

In this chapter, then, I will argue that a reading of homosexuality is integral to our understanding of “masculinity.” Such an understanding is enabled, I want to suggest, within the visuality of the male gaze a reader adopts to read corporeality. That is, the sight of the gay male body—and the sexual otherness it signifies in its sexual intercourse with another male body—establishes as it differentiates what a reader assumes masculine identity to be. In short, I locate this particularly homosexual perspective of reading gender within the spectacle of the Proximate Other that a reader must negotiate, the gay male body.

³⁶Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971) 56.

Like the spectacle of HIV/AIDS, which I shall shortly discuss, this sight of sexual otherness can contest and revise a reader's understanding of masculinity because the gay male body represents that problematic site of sexual difference and corporeal similarity. What I wish to say in the course of this chapter is that the Proximate Other offers us a possible means of transgressively rethinking the masculine identity of the male body. Throughout, I shall repeatedly emphasize dis coherence, bearing in mind its realization when those trajectories of representation, homosexuality, and visuality converge.

Where my reading of masculinity in chapter 1 (as it relates to *The Purple Rose of Cairo*) converges with, generates, and enriches this homosexually-inflected reading of masculinity in chapter 2 is at the site of the Proximate Other. In other words, I am interested in how this paradox of identity—of the gay male body being simultaneously same and other to the heterosexual male body—results from a reading of masculinity that foregrounds dis coherence as a strategy of revising how a reader/spectator might alternatively read its representation within culture. Conversely, this oscillation a reader finds him/herself in—an oscillation between reading the masculinity of the male body and its re-presentation as the gay male body that disturbs such gender identification—disrupts the hom(m)o-sexual practice of reading with the male gaze. This disruption necessarily displaces the individual reader from a definitive alignment with the generic masculine subject of texts, the male reader/spectator.

AIDS AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Questions of identity involving who is infected and how HIV is

transmitted shape fundamental understandings of what AIDS is.

Paula A. Treichler³⁷

If masculinity is very much a product of hom(m)o-sexual representation, then, the representation of gay men, and of homosexuality, cannot be anything other than one fashioned in the already endemic likeness of what "Man" is not. The gay man is never masculine: he is often seen as effeminate, if not womanly. Such gendered stereotypification—one of many derogatory stereotypes of what gay men are—positions the gay man as the opposite, the Other of the heterosexual man. This is, first and foremost, a matter of sexual difference but one mired, however, in the problem of corporeal sameness. Even though his body is male, a gay man must be proscribed, contained, and displaced onto the margins of dominant culture because his body signifies sexual otherness. Such a displacement, moreover, locates a gay man at the margin, and within hom(m)o-sexual configurations of gendered spaces, this margin is associated with that sign of gender(ed) otherness, Woman. Not only is a gay man marginalized because of his sexuality, but he is marginalized in terms of the dominant masculine/feminine difference.

"Undoubtedly the perception of the homosexual as feminized," Dollimore records, "remains strangely disturbing—the supreme symbol, in the eyes of those like Norman Mailer, of a range of deep failures including the demise of masculinity, the abdication of masculine power, the desire for self-destruction, and, beyond that, the loss of difference" (1991: 263). Nowhere is this loss, in gendered terms, more evident than in the supposed imitation of women by, and in the intrinsic sexual passivity of, gay men: "*To be penetrated*," Leo Bersani observes of the dominant heterosexual configurations of

³⁷Paula A. Treichler, "Beyond *Cosmo*: AIDS, Identity, and Inscriptions of Gender," *Camera Obscura* 28 (1992): 24.

sexuality and gender, “*is to abdicate power*” (1987: 212). As I see it, Bersani succinctly sums up what dominant culture claims a gay male identity really is—it is penetrable, passive, and not unlike the feminine gender. Male homosexuality, which patriarchy has constructed so wilfully and so pervasively as a sexual otherness, is therefore invariably intertwined with the articulation and legitimization of heterosexuality as natural and universal, and, more importantly, as indicative of masculine identity too.

Masculinity is seen to be that triangulation of the male body, heterosexuality, and a hom(m)o-sexually engendered visuality that is the male gaze. Within this particular triangulation, the marginalization of gay men can be seen to be the demonization of a male body that is sexually different. This demonization, in turn, demonstrates the gaze’s inability to conceive of the gay male body in any other way—the gay male body is everything the male body *must not be*. Within this configuration of what the male body should signify, gay men are denied an identifiably masculine subjectivity because they are failed men who can only exist at the margins.

Such is the focus of homophobia. It is, in short, the regulatory means by which patriarchy privileges, enforces, and polices masculine identity within hom(m)o-sexual culture. Homophobia, then, is “often integral to a conventional kind of masculine identity” (Dollimore 1991: 235).³⁸ We can discern this in the present manifestation of homophobia, that erroneous equation of HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, and death:³⁹ this alignment might seek to delineate and contain, for heterosexuals, especially men, the fear of penetration and destruction as represented by the gay male body but it also implies an undeniable

³⁸For a discussion of homophobia and the regulation of “normal” masculine identity and behaviour, see Part 7 of Jonathan Dollimore’s book, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon-Oxford, 1991) 233-275.

³⁹For a broad overview of this homophobic alignment which the New Right movement (especially in the United States of America) has generated in response to the AIDS crisis, see Dennis Altman’s book, *AIDS and the New Puritanism* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

demonization of such a body as overwhelmingly infected and polluted.

This conflation of disease, sexuality, death—and, to a large extent, its persistent location at the bodies of gay men—reflects the confusion involved in accounting for homosexuality today. More telling must be the heterosexual obsession with, even a paranoia about, gay men as the carriers of death. HIV/AIDS still is, in some quarters of society, seen as a gay liability: after all, the primary source of transmission remains, for these conservative sections of society, the gay male body.

Treichler, in “Beyond *Cosmo*: AIDS, Identity, and Inscriptions of Gender,” observes that HIV/AIDS “represents a boundary transgression, a violation of natural difference.” In fact, “the body’s vulnerability to viral penetration is gendered, naturalized, and made to play out the various versions of the ‘Nature never intended’ scenario” (1992: 26). What is represented in this description Treichler details is homosexuality as that site of gendered otherness; homosexual sex is unnatural when compared to the otherwise “naturalized” heterosexual scene of male-female sex. Yet, this gendered difference remains precisely that Other who is always inscribed as, at best, non-man and, at worst, womanly. Because that which is transgressed is the denaturalized act of anal intercourse, a gay man is positioned, forcibly, as penetrable and, hence, as the receptacle and repository of HIV/AIDS.

This association between the gay male body and HIV/AIDS remains much ingrained within social thinking: AIDS may be a health problem affecting the general population but the prevailing assumption is that it is primarily a dilemma solely for gay men. “This image persists because,” observes Richard Goldstein, “the virus did initially appear to single out groups—and acts—regarded as contaminating. Many illnesses transform their victims into a stigmatized class, but AIDS is the first epidemic to take stigmatized classes and make them victims” (1989: 84). At this present time, however, asking the question who is the victim of HIV/AIDS is rhetorical when heterosexuals and homosexuals, women and men, lesbians and drug pushers, and people of colour are all equally exposed to and suffering

from this virus.

Nevertheless, there has to be a victim upon whose body this virus can be located. Conversely, this is the victim who must be spectacularized, be made accountable for the spread of this disease, and, in the final instance, be suitably proscribed by the larger social body politic. Within dominant culture this becomes, as I see it, a hysteria targeted at identifying the HIV/AIDS victim. Both the focus and the representation of this hysteria is, regrettably, homosexually-orientated: the infected body comes to be that which is repeatedly and persistently that of the gay man. His body is, once again, overdetermined within this cultural hysteria: it represents firstly, a source of pollution and secondly, death itself. He now becomes, in these intertwined inscriptions, the seemingly justified and necessary rationale for the proscription and containment of gay men. After all, does this irruption of AIDS onto, or, more precisely as, the face of a gay man not allude to homosexuality as the *frisson* of sexual otherness?

What we have here is a metaphor⁴⁰ to contain, and explain, as well as to blame homosexuality while distancing, protecting, if not also affirming, the self-righteousness of heterosexuality within culture. Consequently, that paradigmatic hom(m)o-sexual sex act of male-female sex is reinstated and affirmed as natural: in contrast to homosexual sex—which is itself perceived as the point of HIV/AIDS transmission—heterosexual sex is coded, significantly enough, as less susceptible to the virus. In and through this metaphor of HIV/AIDS, gay men are seen to fulfill the tacit promise of their self-destruction that is so often construed as part of a gay lifestyle.

If metaphor, by its very dynamic, does not explicitly say nor hide but rather intimates its meaning, this collocation—where HIV/AIDS equals disease equals homosexuality

⁴⁰Susan Sontag sketches a most interesting delineation of how HIV/AIDS becomes metaphorized within a socio-cultural context. For a discussion of Sontag's views, see her book, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

equals gay men—is but a means of articulating what is normally unmentionable. But this collocation is not only a heterosexual fear of homosexual contagion and corruption as it is, moreover, the very dissolution of heterosexuality as the *definitive* site for and of hom(m)o-sexual representation. This is how Sander Gilman describes it in terms of a general fear of diseases:

It is the fear of collapse, the sense of dissolution which contaminates the Western image of all diseases.... But the fear we have of our own collapse does not remain internalized. Rather, we project this fear onto the world in order to localize it, and, indeed, to domesticate it. For once we locate it, the fear of our own dissolution is removed. Then it is not we who totter on the brink of collapse, but rather the Other. And it is an-Other who has already shown his or her vulnerability by having collapsed. (1988: 1)

Yet, straight men and women who are inflicted with HIV/AIDS are just as implicated as gay men are in this pathological metaphor. They are coded as receptacles of the virus despite their heterosexual identities; their affliction marks them apart as it also marks them as diseased and as contaminated as gay men are. Both these divergent groups come to bear the mark of a *displaced* anxiety that is more than anything the fear of a lost master-narrative in representing gender within the HIV/AIDS discourse. What do I mean?

If heterosexuality is to remain immune from HIV/AIDS, it has to construct itself in terms of an opposition to an infected sexuality. Hence, where homosexuality is deemed diseased, polluted, and, ultimately, moribund, heterosexuality sees itself as healthy and sanitized. Instead of displacing this fear of dissolution, however, the emergence of HIV/AIDS within the heterosexual social body cannot maintain let alone justify this master-narrative on HIV/AIDS when it localizes the gay male body to be that expressed site of disease. Conversely, the present discourse on HIV/AIDS, as it concerns the male body, and, by extension, its gendered identity as masculine, needs to be urgently re-examined.

Where masculine identity is currently positioned outside the boundaries of HIV/AIDS infection—because straight men do not engage in anal intercourse—the

overwhelming evidence of heterosexual HIV/AIDS cases suggests a disturbing consequence for the term "masculinity": are infected straight men not only troped like but also seen in terms of gay men who inhabit that space of sexual passivity and deviancy? What can it then mean for a heterosexual definition of masculinity?

I want to suggest that gay men, particularly as they have come to be overdetermined with HIV/AIDS, are neither alien to nor foreign from, but inherently intrinsic and integral to engendering a masculine identity when it is intersected by the HIV/AIDS discourse. Straight men are seemingly less susceptible to HIV and AIDS because they engage in vaginal intercourse: their masculine identity remains intact in this heterosexual sex act. But precisely because straight men are as susceptible to the virus as gay men are, the issue of which gendered identities are susceptible to the virus must be considered: to be in possession of a masculine identity, as I understand it, is no guarantee of non-infection. Indeed, to argue the absence of a masculine identity amongst gay men entrenches them in that imaged receptacle of the virus, and ignores the issue of masculinity and HIV/AIDS when these intersect to delineate what the gay male body is, a location of otherness imaged in terms of disease and pollution.

This representation of the HIV/AIDS infected body is a strategy of suggestion and inscription, or perhaps, more discriminatory, one of accusation: by juxtaposing disease with homosexuality and, in turn, with a gendered identity as non-man, this alignment will prove carcinogenic to heterosexual men in the long term. For heterosexual men, their masculine identity, it would seem, sets them apart from, and protects them against the infection that is, the sexual otherness of gay men. For these men, such thinking, while simultaneously demarcating those who will remain within the dominant hom(m)o-sexual culture and those excluded by it, is ironically also a self-destructive strategy.

CLOSING ONE'S EYES: AIDS AND THE BLINDNESS OF FACT

If heterosexual men remain blind to the possible infection of HIV/AIDS that they themselves are susceptible to, it is because they subscribe to the dominant male gaze which reads the gay male body as diseased in order to privilege the identity of male bodies as singularly heterosexual and masculine. This blindness tends to see the male body, as opposed to the gay male body, in terms of an immunity from the virus because it is depicted as a healthy and sanitized corporeality.

In this instance, the male gaze seeks to envision and illuminate the gay male body by offering its spectacularization, even perhaps, the speculation of what it must really be: this is that body contaminated by the HIV/AIDS virus, never the male and masculine body it could also be. In the wake of HIV/AIDS, and particularly the discourse it engenders, such a gaze merely refracts and reflects gay men as *the* spectacle of pathology. This sight is, at best, maligned: for as much as it is all seeing, it is also all vigilant. And in its vigilance, this gaze is as blinding as it is insightful.⁴¹

In seeing gay men through this particular spectacle of HIV/AIDS, dominant culture is paradoxically repressing and disavowing homosexuality whilst simultaneously centering its presence within the very manner we have come to understand HIV/AIDS. More importantly, it affects the understanding of HIV/AIDS by heterosexual men in two ways. Firstly, this thinking addresses the virus as primarily gay-related and secondly, it complacently locates heterosexual masculinity beyond any infection, or possible vulnerability. In other words, the straight man is deemed to be immuned from HIV/AIDS: he is beyond HIV/AIDS infection because of he is the masculine subject.

⁴¹Luce Irigaray takes a similar approach in her feminist-psychoanalytic deconstruction of a hegemonic male gaze. She discusses this in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

In particular, these acts profess a cultural politics where it has become necessary “to establish the idea,” Simon Watney notes with dismay, “that homosexuality is an intrinsic wrong” rather than meet the challenge the virus poses by “communicat[ing] the relatively simple information that explains how and why different people are at different degrees of risk from HIV” (1989a: 19). Rather than addressing the larger problem Watney singles out, this politics of proscription manipulates such a pathological state of affairs to affirm the natural and universal propriety of procreative sex: “the real complex tragedy of AIDS has been grotesquely exploited in order to bolster an ideologically powerful, cruelly narrow and punitive fantasy of family life” (Watney 1989a: 26).

Of greater significance is the displacement of the above mentioned dissolution onto the threat gay men are said to pose for heterosexual masculinity. Because gay men are interested in as they also desire the sight of another male body, they exemplify what Andrew Britton records as “a contagion theory of *desire*”: a gay man is believed to “‘recruit’ young straight men, and young straight men can be recruited, because homosexuality is itself conceived of as a virus that can be transmitted” (Britton 1985: 24). Gay men are, therefore, also a source of corruption for heterosexual men. Britton goes on to succinctly capture this attitude when he writes: “male homosexuality *is* the death of heterosexuals” (1985: 24).

This homosexual threat Britton details must be contained; what a gay man is expected to do is to shoulder that dissolution, if not the collapse, of heterosexual masculinity when it is faced by the HIV/AIDS virus. But to demand that gay men bear the burden of dissolution is to position them into the margins of cultural representation, and that is where gay men continue to be found. However, such marginality assumes, as much in ocularcentric as in spatial terms, the proportions of a spectacle. As a spectacle of Otherness, a gay man is framed equally for public prescription and proscription. Needless to say, these constructions are seen as natural and germane even though this male gaze engendering such spectacularization is, in reality, nothing less than an example of

Foucault's panopticon in practice. As a policing gaze, it disseminates and reinforces hom(m)o-sexual standards of masculinity and heterosexuality at the expense of a sexual difference that is peripheralized. The spectacle of AIDS becomes a display in which gay men are, as Dennis Altman articulates, objects of "voyeurism and fear" (1986: 20).

Yet, in the very act of spectacularizing homosexuality as such, the speculative premise of this cultural gaze is exposed: what else can this be when heterosexuality comes to be (1) as vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as homosexuality is and (2) also a site of its location and transmission? I come to understand both these facts as the inadmissible evidence which claims an individual's masculine identity to be a prophylactic against HIV/AIDS. If heterosexual masculinity is an excuse for, as it is also a confirmation of, this virus being classified as solely a gay plague, the emergence of HIV/AIDS cases amongst straight men asks this question: is masculinity not directly, and problematically, contested when HIV/AIDS intersects with heterosexuality to become that spectacle of the AIDS-infected heterosexual male body which is now seen to be—in terms of one's engendered (ef)face(ment)—like the gay male body?

RECONSIDERING THE SPECTACLE

The spectacle of HIV/AIDS is specifically helpful in enabling a reconsideration of how the gendered identity of a male body infected with the virus is "normally" read: it highlights the limitations of equating HIV/AIDS exclusively with the bodies of gay men. Further, this particular spectacle is uniquely useful because it lays bare the problem of an elided masculinity in gendered representations of HIV/AIDS. This notion of the spectacle as both a site of spectacularization and revision offers this study a possible space in which to re-examine the issues of "masculinity," "corporeality," and "homosexuality."

The spectacle, as dominant culture relates it to male homosexuality, has always

positioned and spatialized male homosexuals as effeminate, if not feminine. I am referring of course to the spectacle of the male homosexual as a queen. Even though its origins are historically specific, as has been its usage, such a spectacle continues to trope gay men today despite the emerging divergence within gay culture itself. Presently, the spectrum of manifest gay cultural identities ranges from camp effeminacy to the Castro look to S&M uniforms of chains and leather. In "The New Masculinity of Gay Men, and Beyond," Seymour Kleinberg records such a considerable shift, within the gay male community:

As a matter of fact, young gay men seem to have abjured effeminacy with universal success. Muscular bodies laboriously cultivated all year round are standard; youthful athletic agility is everyone's style. The volleyball game is no longer a camp classic; now it takes itself as seriously as the San Francisco gay softball team. Hardness is in. (1987: 122)

The "hardness" Kleinberg speaks about is, in my opinion, not so much a "fashion" statement, in the sense of a new look, but rather a strategy to "de-camp" the stereotype that gay men are effeminate. Unfortunately, there is little, and perhaps hardly any, comparable shift within present representations of gay men within the heterosexual community; more often than not, gay men are continually conceived of, and spoken about, as effeminized. And this is where I locate a possible revision of "masculinity"—within that selfsame corporeal body of seemingly absent masculinity.

Where we predominantly perceive gay men today with the brush of HIV/AIDS, the male homosexual was constructed in the last decades of the nineteenth century under the sign of the sexual invert. He was seen to be the woman within the male body. Although the theory of sexual inversion was advanced by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs⁴² to diagnose deviant

⁴²I am indebted to Havelock Ellis for my understanding of Ulrichs' ideas. They have been summarized by Ellis in Appendix B to his work, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion, Volume 2* (1901. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1908) 225-39. For current discussions on Ulrichs' work, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivities at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 339-88.

gender behaviour—that is to say, either an overt female “masculinity,” or a male “femininity”—he accounted for, if he did not also fix, the male homosexual in terms of a visual metaphor. Ulrichs’ metaphor, it can be argued, is an example of spectacularized “femininity.”

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, her engaging and insightful study into the centrality of the homo/heterosexual definition in social thinking, Sedgwick identifies as one of two dominating tropes which have marked homosexual definition and identification that of this sexual invert. Ulrichs’ diagnosis of the male homosexual identity as that of the presence of “a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body” signals the paradoxical nature of this identity: the male homosexual is at once both same and other.

Within this sight of difference for heterosexual masculinity, a sexual invert is understood to “naturally” play the feminine role in sexual intercourse. He is presumably, and always, passive as well as submissive; his identity characterizes the homogenized receptivity he is otherwise seen to possess. Pictured thus, this sexual invert is more a man in feminine drag no matter how “masculine” he is.

And because Ulrichs’ categorization is premised upon a paradox between gender identity and sexual behaviour within the space of the body, “spectacle” is a term I want to reconfigure as nothing less than a space of differences and contradictions when it is applied to the male homosexual or, more specifically, the gay male body. Summarizing Dana B. Polan’s observations in “‘Above All Else to Make You See’: Cinema and the Ideology of Spectacle,” a spectacle is, in ocularcentric terms, both affirmative and subversive (1986: 55-69), and this is exactly that paradoxical space of the gay male body a reader encounters in representations of the male body within gay culture.

Hom(m)o-sexuality sees in such spectacularization a sight denoting what masculinity should not be; the spectacle of homosexual sex affirms what a masculine man never is. Masculine identity becomes grounded in heterosexuality: such an identity is natural because its object choice is the opposite sex. In other words, masculine identity enforces

itself in the mandatory male-female sex act. However, this selfsame spectacle of sexual otherness is also subversive. Where masculinity is synonymous with sex (in its dual meaning of body and act), what is now being contested in this spectacle must be the categories "male" and "heterosexual" as they merge into the configuration "masculinity." What is also central to this theory of sexual inversion Ulrichs describes is the element of a liminal space. Paradoxically same yet different, the gay male body is an elided but significant site of *in-between-ness*, a space of contra-diction(s) where meanings are expressed, contested, and rearticulated.

Within dominant culture, there exists a distinctly masculine privilege which schools and sanctions men above women. There exists, in tandem, a heterosexist privilege; what it insists upon is that singularly defining act of masculinity, hegemonic heterosexual sex, as it marginalizes any sexual deviation that threatens the gender binarism of masculine/feminine.

Gary Kinsman sums this up as follows:

In our society heterosexuality as an institutionalized norm has become an important means of social regulation, enforced by laws, police practices, family and social policies, schools, and the mass media. In its historical development heterosexuality is tied up with the institution of masculinity, which gives social and cultural meaning to biological male anatomy, associating it with masculinity, aggressiveness, and an "active" sexuality. "Real" men are intrinsically heterosexual; gay men, therefore, are not real men. (1987: 104)

Inasmuch as heterosexuality defines a man's masculinity,⁴³ homosexuality, it seems, denies a gay man a similar identity of gender. Inasmuch as his sexual object choice is another man, gay men are said to possess a non-existent, or, at the very least, confused, gender identity. At best, homosexuality refers to a perverted masculinity; at worst, it occupies the

⁴³In his introduction to *The Sexuality of Men*, Andy Metcalf describes this thus: "Gender identity is that sense at the core of one's self of being either female or male. It has been strongly argued that sexuality is a crucial factor in the maintenance of masculine gender identity, but not necessarily that of female gender identity" (1990: 6). For a further discussion of the points raised, see his article in Metcalf and Humphries, *Sexuality* 1-14.

feminine site of lack. In both instances, gay men, in spite of possessing the male anatomy, are nevertheless not masculine for they are not heterosexual. Gay men, however, never consider themselves as anything other than male and masculine: as Mike Broker puts it, "I may be a queer, but at least I am a man" (qtd in Connell 1987: 285). Broker's insistence on his masculine identity despite, or, more probably, in the light of, his homosexuality forces a disturbing conjunction: it punctures claims of an individual male's masculine subjectivity as necessarily tied to heterosexuality.

The gay man, it would seem obvious by now, must be contained. A classic example, and a traditional space where homosexual proscription is enforced, has been the family, and in particular, the father-son dyad. In this familial arrangement, the father functions as the role model of masculinity for the boy. Nicholas Ray's 1955 film, *Rebel Without a Cause*⁴⁴ has this as its subtext. In what follows, I want to explore just such a construction of heterosexual masculinity as it is spectacularized in Ray's film. In doing so, I wish to set up the following reading such that, in concluding this chapter, and in the light of a preceding gay-inflection of the male gaze, I will be able to "remake" the movie: in other words, I will attempt to re-present Ray's heterosexual representation of masculinity in *Rebel Without a Cause*, or, as Christopher Castiglia has retitled it, "Rebel Without a Closet."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Rebel Without a Cause*, dir. Nicholas Ray, with James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo and Jim Backus, Warner, 1955.

⁴⁵ Castiglia argues for a contradictory, and distinctly homosexual, reading of Ray's film. He illustrates how this film can signify the elision of homosexual identity (in the figure of Plato) in order to preserve the heterosexual bias of gender representation this film points towards. See his article, "Rebel Without a Closet," *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. Joseph Boone and Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990) 207-221.

“STAND UP AND I’LL STAND UP WITH YOU”

Towards the end of Ray’s film, Frank Stark tells his son, Jim, “Stand up and I’ll stand up with you.” This act of bonding and affirmation that Frank Stark seeks to have with Jim is significant if a spectator chooses to read Ray’s film as embodying and spectacularizing the socio-cultural values of heterosexual masculinity, fatherhood and the family. One reading has been to see, in its diegesis, a progression from the disorder which begins the film to a reintegration and a transformation of its rebellious teenagers into the family unit Ray closes his film upon at the end.⁴⁶ What might seem to be an unexplainable teenage disaffection is symptomatic, George Wilson insists, of a deeper rupture in the family unit: Jim, Judy, and Plato suffer from “psychological maladjustments within the family” (1988: 168).

Judy is seen by her father to have outgrown the mould of his child-daughter: he fears a loss of control and authority when she begins to assert her independence away from home, a space privileging masculine domestication over the feminine. Judy’s dressing and make-up, signifiers of womanhood, are misinterpreted and, most definitely, disavowed by her father: all he wants is his daughter, the child rather than the woman. As she tells Detective Ray, dressed in her red coat with her red lipstick on, she is, in her father’s eyes, a tramp. Indeed, her father’s problem is characteristic of the father-figure who is unable to face his daughter’s independence.

While Judy’s remarks presage a problem with father-figures, the very fact Ray begins his film in a police station (itself filled with father-figures) alerts the spectator to the presence and relevance of a larger and more potent authority, the Law—or, more exactly, the communal law of hom(m)o-sexuality—that will eventually contain and make

⁴⁶For a detailed discussion and textual analysis of this film, see George M. Wilson’s study in *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 166-190.

responsible citizens out of these teenagers.

Jim, on the other hand, is deprived of a father-figure at home. In this scene, however, he is positioned into a father-son dyad with Detective Ray. In the context of the film, Ray (and here, one begins to understand the subtle intratextual resonance of "Ray" who is both detective and director) becomes Jim's surrogate father. Ray is the father-figure Frank Stark is not. As Jim laments, his father is an emasculated man: Frank is subservient to his wife and his mother-in-law. "They," Jim says, "make mush out of him." In spite of his heterosexuality, Frank's manhood, if not his masculine prowess, is ineffectual within the family structure.

Plato is similarly located: shooting a litter of puppies, as he is charged with in the police station, echoes the absent, even lost, family ties in his life. Plato is devoid of a family, and although he is cared for by his nanny, his life is marked by the absence of both mother and father.

In this initial yet highly significant scene, Ray prepares the ground for what follows. The conjunction of these teenagers is as much an intersection of teenage identity and familial crisis as it is, I want to suggest, primarily, the subtext of a lost yet recuperated heterosexual masculine identity at the heart of Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*. Germane to the maintenance of this particular masculinity is the family unit as it is legally and socially privileged within society at large. I want now to trace Jim's masculinity as it moves from his dysfunctional familial background in the Stark household to his assumption, as the film ends, of the father/husband role in his relationship with Judy.

Jim's aimless rebellion can be seen as two separate yet interconnected problems: Jim's inability to attain his own sense of personhood, his own masculine identity, when the film begins, is entrenched in the absence of a father-figure in his life. The challenge of the car race thrown down by Buzz, and his anxiety in accepting it, reflects Jim's dilemma. From the beginning of his encounter with Buzz and his gang at Dawson High, Jim is taunted by calls of "chicken": he is seen to lack masculine attributes by his peers. This

only reinforces (what in the opening scene is) Jim's paranoid obsession: he does not want to be like his father, an emasculated man.

Throughout the film, Frank Stark's emasculated status is repeatedly emphasized. Consider among other scenes, that which takes place on the morning Jim heads off for his first day at school. In this kitchen scene, there is a sharp contrast between a powerless Frank and his wife who commands both the action and conversation. Ray's camera echoes this. Frank is, metaphorically and cinematically, hemmed in by shots suggesting his containment while Mrs Stark tends to be centered, and aligned with control and power. There is an inversion of gender roles: while Mrs Stark assumes a masculine role of dominance, Frank is relegated, even restricted, to the margins of this scene. Jim's familial background is characteristically crippled by an absence of the masculine male.

It is hardly surprising that when challenged to the chickie race (as the duel of the cars is termed by Buzz) Jim is thrust into a dilemma of not only courage but, more pertinently, of whether he is "man enough" to accept this challenge. For Jim, this crisis of masculine self-representation realizes itself as an anxious moment when he must confront what his masculine identity really is.

Uncertain, he turns to his father. Frank, however, fails to be the role model of masculinity. Instead of direction, he can only offer his son the reality of emasculation. He is the hen-pecked husband Jim finds on bended knees, wearing an apron, and doing the housework. Jim's misrecognition of his father for his mother in this scene—he literally does so when he first encounters this crouched figure—attests to the ruptured representation of masculinity in his family. A further exasperation, and, in terms of recognition, a greater disillusionment, occurs when Frank answers his son's queries. Jim's questions concerning honour, the chickie race, and, if I am correct, an implied urgency to be directed along a masculine course of action is met by Frank's domestic-like response: he tells his son, "Let's make a list." But if his solution is to make a list and to sieve through it for the right answer, Frank Stark's understanding of masculinity resembles a

recipe for masculinity.

Nevertheless, Jim enters the duel and attains a masculine identity which is eventually characterized by familial responsibility. Ray's film tells the story of Jim's realized masculine identity through his changing relationship with Judy. In the first half of *Rebel Without a Cause*, Jim and Judy are positioned in an alignment of subject-object, spectator-spectacle, male-female; after Buzz's accidental death, this alignment is reconfigured when Jim embraces her as they stand at the edge of the bluff watching the cars burn. More significantly, this act recuperates Jim into the hom(m)o-sexual paradigm of male-female sex where his heterosexual masculine identity is more than guaranteed: it is realized in his assumption of the husband (to be) role in his union with Judy.

A FAMILY OF SORTS

In the course of a day, which is exactly the diegesis of Ray's film, Judy, Jim and Plato do become a "family"—in fact, they become a family of sorts that is premised on both a realignment with and a repudiation of what exactly constitutes the cultural definition of the term "family."

In coming together, these dysfunctional individuals subvert as they replay and reclaim the very family structure that, in the first place, caused the ruptures a spectator witnesses as the film is being screened. As parody, what Jim, Judy and Plato insist on in their acting out of family roles is the redemptive and hegemonic power of the family unit. What is elided yet evident in their play is, as I will finally locate it in Plato, the correlative erasure of the unmasculine within the family unit.

In *Rebel Without a Cause*, these teenagers spent a night, after the car accident at "Plato's mansion." From the initial moment Plato points it out to Jim during their school excursion to the observatory, earlier in the day, the mansion takes on connotations of a

space apart, a site of otherness. According to Wilson, it is “a place of fantasy and nighttime [*sic*] desire” (1988: 182). As such, playing family in this mansion is, for each of them, an enactment of what a family might possibly mean when their make-believe family is compared to the familial structures they are each deprived of.

They begin this charade with the prospect of finding a home, that domesticated hom(m)o-sexual space, within which Jim and Judy will, in a manner of speaking, fulfill both the social function of husband and wife as well as reproduce this space in an act of reproducing the family unit. Further, as Plato acts the estate agent showing them the house, he also begins to position himself, with respect to this couple, as their child. Pretending to be a couple, Jim and Judy, as Wilson perceptively notes, begin to imitate their parents: they parody the obviously absent parental attitude towards children (1988: 182). Here, an otherwise failed family representation is, through this parody, altered, and made to appear as a more successful representation of what a family is.

Such an alteration is clearly seen when, after playfully cavorting around the empty swimming pool, they settle down to rest. Here, Jim lies in Judy’s lap, and Plato lies, child-like, at their feet. This is the picture of the happy family. Significantly, Jim is positioned as husband to Judy and as father to Plato: he is coded, therefore, as the responsible family man.

This *mise-en-scène* prepares us for the fatherly role Jim will perform in his attempt to save Plato at the observatory later on. More to the point, Jim is now adequately positioned as the masculine male who, in introducing Judy to his parents, at the close of the film, assumes the heterosexual privilege this identity enables. Interestingly, Jim’s identity as the masculine male is possible only when he enters into a sexual union with the opposite sex: it is only in this union that he realizes his position within that dominant arrangement of gender relations, the heterosexual bond.

As Wilson records, at the center of this scene is the fact that Jim and Judy are “defining themselves as a pair eligible for marriage,” and this pairing is “potentially,” and

undeniably, "the nucleus of a family" (1988: 183). In addition, I want to suggest, that this act is that defining moment when his heterosexual masculine identity is realized. This moment signals not only Jim's control over Judy but it also positions him as the (re)producer of the family unit. In short, Jim is able to fulfill his sexual, and hence masculine, role as the generic producer within culture.

Jim is poised to be the husband and father that Frank Stark is not in the context of the film. Judy finds her father-figure in Jim who recognizes her as a woman. And Plato is, at least within these initial moments of playing the happy family, a lost child reunited with his new found "parents."

Yet, within a distinctly hom(m)o-sexual configuration of the family, Plato must lie outside this parental pairing: he cannot be allowed to exist as their "child" for he is hardly a product of Jim and Judy's impending heterosexual intercourse. His existence as their "child" would be a travesty of what a family should be, let alone what it ought to produce. But there is a deeper reason why he must be seen as a threat to, and hence removed from, a parent-child relationship with Jim and Judy. There is in Plato's character nothing markedly masculine; instead, there is a decidedly homosexual nature to his identity. Wilson writes, "the film hints, as clearly as a fifties Hollywood production could, that Plato's sexual orientation is gay" (1988: 186). Plato is feared for he realizes the possible homosexual corruption of Jim's newly acquired masculine identity in his relationship with Judy.

His necessary death, at the hands of the police (read father-figures), signals the much needed maintenance of heterosexuality which the Law regulates. Wilson is most correct, therefore, to observe that "The mechanisms that assimilate Jim and Judy reject Plato and toss him aside" (1988: 187).

With Plato's death, Jim turns to his father whose embrace points to Jim's recuperation of, and a reintegration into, the family unit hom(m)o-sexual culture privileges. For Frank Stark, this is a moment when his son enacts and fulfills the

masculine identity heterosexual intercourse promises. Jim stands up and away from not only Plato's homosexual body but also from his father's emasculation. In standing up, he ironically enables Frank to stand up too: when Mrs Stark attempts to say something, in the closing shots of *Rebel Without a Cause*, she is silenced by her husband.

RETHINKING THE "LOCUS OF MEDIATION"

What this particular reading—namely, a reading following Wilson's analysis—of *Rebel Without a Cause* exhibits is this: our acculturated practice of reading masculinity with the male gaze can only exist when there is a distinct elision of the gay male body. In watching this film, the transgressive role Plato's otherness can play in reconstructing how we read Ray's representation of masculinity must be repudiated if masculine identity is to conform to its dominant categorization. Indeed, this problem is exacerbated by Ray's overtly hom(m)o-sexual point of view as it is realized in his use of the camera and the shots it frames. That we are supposed to read the film the way it was meant by Ray to be read is an issue I shall consider when I conclude this chapter. In what follows, I want to examine how a disturbing representation of the gay male body, like Plato's is within Ray's film, allows a reader to reconsider how the male gaze can be revised. In mapping out such a revision of the gaze, I am seeking to elucidate, moreover, how and why the individual subject who negotiates this paradoxical site of the gay male body can no longer fix his/her self-representation as the generic masculine subject, the male spectator/reader.

When a gay man is seen as a refracted Other—in short, as a queen—who is being screened before us, what emerges is the transgressive effect such a sight poses for that alignment between heterosexuality and masculinity. Represented as neither masculine nor feminine but as both at once, and existing within the same space of the male body, this Other is integral and intrinsic to an understanding of masculinity in terms of

heterosexuality: one knows one is man, and hence, masculine, for one abhors this Other, this man who sexually desires as well as sexually engages with other men. Within dominant culture, men and women are positioned to read a gay man as everything that is negative of a hom(m)o-sexually defined masculine subject: he is a retarded version of what we come to understand as “Man.”

A reader/spectator comes to perceive a gay man thus, I contend, because he is seen at and through what Lacan delineates as the image/screen,⁴⁷ that is to say, the “locus of mediation” (Lacan 1986: 107) for the gaze. For Silverman, writing in *Male Subjectivities at the Margins*, this locus is precisely where “that culturally generated image or repertoire of images” becomes the screen “through which subjects are not only constituted, but are differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age, and nationality” (1992: 150). When such a locus is the spectacle of a gay man as queen, a heterosexual man—who is predicated as generic spectator and reader—defines not only himself as Man but emphatically foregrounds his sexual difference from his homosexual (br)other.

It would seem that this constructed image/screen enables hom(m)o-sexual culture to represent gay men: for the individual reader/spectator, the gay male body is already imaged according to that dominant representation that marks it effeminate. Silverman is therefore correct to note that “the viewer cannot see the object without the intervention of the image/screen, [nor] does he or she have a direct visual access to the gaze. In both cases the relationship is mediated by a ‘mask, a double [or] envelope’ and in both instances ‘misrecognition’ would seem to be the inevitable outcome” (1992: 152). Consequently, the individual’s gaze is always already and actively engendered to read the

⁴⁷For a further discussion of this point, see Lacan’s writings on vision, the gaze, and subjectivity in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Peregrine, 1986). Also see Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986) for her feminist interpretation of Lacan, and Silverman, *Subjectivities*, for a reconsideration of the gaze and constructions of masculine identity.

body in question within this particularly fixed description of masculinity; the gay male body is antithetically unmanly, and its gendered identity, unmasculine.

Irigaray's re-examination of specularity, knowledge, and gender, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, recognizes the concept of the male gaze as integral to discussing how the feminine is represented. Where specularity and knowledge intersect, they engender Woman as nothing but a distortion and a refraction of what femininity is. She writes: "*Seeing remains the special prerogative of the Father*. It is in his gaze that everything comes into being" (1985a: 323). If Irigaray signals how this gaze functions as that definitive sight of knowledge, and of subjectivity, within hom(m)o-sexual culture, she resolutely insists both gender and sexuality are envisioned in terms of the masculine. Following Irigaray's contention, an individual male and female's subjectivity is always masculine because it is, inevitably, grounded in that space, Woman.

For gay men, as for women, then, there is no other gendered subjectivity other than this masculine identification Irigaray writes about. More disturbingly, Irigaray's work implies that gay and straight men possess one and the same subjectivity: all males possess that generic heterosexual and masculine subjectivity because of the shared male body. But inasmuch as heterosexual men are forced to see homosexuality as that spectacularized vision of what masculinity-is-not-supposed-to-be, gay men, it would seem, cannot help but articulate themselves within that prevailing representation which sees their bodies as effeminate. Through this spectacle of the queen, they are expected, ultimately, to possess a sight that is heterosexually grounded. In spite of the common male body gay and straight men share, this homosexual divide must be strictly regulated within a heterosexually biased culture. However, to insist that this culture is homogeneous, which is exactly what Irigaray identifies it to be, implies a refusal to reconsider those categories "masculine" and "male" as they purport to define what a man really is.



DIFFERENT YET SAME

[T]he defining feature of the gay man is that he narcissistically loves the phallic attributes of other male bodies. Unfortunately, those are precisely the attributes through which traditional masculinity is consolidated.

Kaja Silverman⁴⁸

In the last quarter of 1992, an advertisement appeared on South Australian television which was to provoke strident calls for its censorship by enraged women. At the center of this protest was the depiction of women, in this advertisement for Eagle Bitter Beer, as sexual objects. In particular, it was the sight of a dog attempting to drag an embarrassed woman's jeans from her legs whilst a pair of pot-bellied men (presumably the dog's owner and his mate) laughed at, and reveled in, this sight of her helplessness. Charges of sexism towards, and a degradation of, women were leveled against John Singleton Advertising which had devised the commercial.

On the other hand, there was virtually no discussion in this debate about the depiction of gay men in the advertisement. In what I consider an exemplary homophobic commercial, the hairdresser is depicted in the Eagle Bitter commercial as limp wisted and flamboyant; he not only personifies but repeats the stereotypical image of gay men as effeminate. Singleton's advertisement employs this, presumably, to entice its male drinkers into an identification with the predominant image of Australian masculinity. In this commercial, only real men drive utes, only real men chase girls (with or without their dogs), only real men are at the pub downing their Eagle Bitter. Gay men do not drink beer preferring instead, as the commercial enunciates, the otherwise elegant (read feminine) drink of white wine.

The unspoken and subliminal text of Singleton's Eagle Bitter advertisement is the

⁴⁸Silverman, *Subjectivities* 350.

need to police and maintain what heterosexual masculinity has to be.⁴⁹ This stereotypical representation of a gay man is not an attempt to exploit the issues of consumerism and economic gain by appealing to a predominantly heterosexual audience of male beer drinkers as it must be, I believe, the continuing containment of gay men whose paradoxical similarity to and difference from heterosexual men posit the possible dissolution of masculine identity.

In refusing to be “Man,” a gay man is seen to relinquish his privileged position within dominant culture. This translates itself into his subordination where the pervasive binarism of hom(m)o-sexuality is concerned. He can only be identified as the negative, if not the other, in such dichotomies as same/different, hetero/homosexual, man/woman, active/passive, natural/unnatural, speakable/unspeakable, wholeness/decadence, health/illness, sight/blindness.⁵⁰

Yet all men are anatomically similar: they each possess the penis. And this is that diacritic defining the male body as “masculine.” Conversely, this is what Robert Stoller terms the “absolute insignia of maleness” (1968: 186). This insignia has become overcoded as that qualifying mark of masculine identity: it separates the masculine subject from the Other, they who lack the penis but possess the void, they who are women, or seen to be womanly. In other words, within hom(m)o-sexual culture, there is a penis-phallus equation which orders how we come to read and understand its representations of gender and sexuality. But where the penis signifies masculinity within culture, it is equally, and undeniably, that site of gay men’s sexual desires, and their sexual subjectivities.

⁴⁹Jennifer McAsey discusses this political manoeuvre in the advertisement of men in her article, “Marketing Men,” *The Weekend Australian Focus* 2-3 January 1993: 16.

⁵⁰Sedgwick argues the homo/heterosexual binarism as a “presiding master term” in socio-cultural rhetoric. More importantly, it formulates itself as the definitive site in discussions on sexuality. For a further insight into her argument, see her introduction to *Epistemology* 1-63.

This reconfiguration of the penis—and, in turn, of what the male body can be—in homosexual terms displaces how masculinity is read. Instead of articulating masculinity in terms of its distinct otherness from homosexuality, it is possible to express masculinity in terms of the Proximate Other who is an encountered (sexual) difference of the same body. And it is this sense of a proximate difference, of an otherness that exists within the same body, that allows us to understand why a gay man is inherently positioned to deconstruct the male gaze, and its representations of gender according to the normative standard of heterosexual masculinity.

WHEN THE CLOSET BECOMES A SPECTACLE, WHAT THEN?

“Understanding the marginal or deviant term,” Jonathan Culler writes in *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*, “becomes a condition of understanding the supposedly prior term” (1982: 160). We have only to map this onto homosexuality’s necessary construction by dominant culture, as it privileges heterosexuality, to acknowledge the veracity of Culler’s observation. Moreover, when masculinity is inextricably tied to heterosexuality, and its existence is the condition of not being homosexual, the term “masculinity” must be seen to be a regulated gender category. We can trace this regulation of “masculinity” if we substitute the closet of homosexuality for the spectacle of the queen. The closet of homosexuality is, as I understand it to be, a necessary space that has been constructed by the dominant discourse of gender representation to fix, and, in most cases, hide, gay identity.⁵¹ The closet is, I also want to

⁵¹In his book, *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power*, Michelangelo Signorile describes the closet thus: “The definition of the closet is [that it] is a place where gay men and lesbians are forced to live—under the penalty of ostracism and, in some cases, even death—since their earliest realization of their sexuality. The anguish and torment that the closet imposes upon its victim is equally

suggest, not only a space of containment or elision but also a spectacle of dis coherence.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick proposes that there exists, for individual readers/spectators, the possibility of differing subjectivities when reading this site of the closet. They are those for whom this marginalized space is “the closet viewed,” and they are others who, by virtue of their purported sexual difference, see it as “the closet inhabited” (1990: 213-251). Although each perception offers contrary articulations of a shared space, and especially of the gay male body that is situated there, they are, together, evidence of the inherent contra-diction this space of the closet enables when articulating homosexuality. Where the discourse of “the closet viewed” seeks to spectacularize, indeed speculate about, gay men, it is also a discourse of marginalization. Here, gay men are displaced in view of a presupposed effeminate identity in spite of their male bodies. In short, there is no such thing as a masculine gay male body. Those who inhabit this space however acknowledge not only a gay identity, but employ this closet of otherness to describe, and, far more importantly, to re-present such identity beyond the limiting boundaries that circumscribe the gay male body. I explore this inhabitation of the closet as a means of re-presenting gay identity when I discuss Noel Bartlett’s *Ready To Catch Him Should He Fall* and David Leavitt’s *Equal Affections* in the sections below.

It is this interplay between proximate, rather than distinct or alternate, differences that I want to reclaim: in what follows, I want to delineate how the potential reading of a male body in contra-diction can engender a reader’s re-presentation of masculinity within dis coherence. More than simply articulating sexuality, this spectacle of the closet is an exercise in how an individual sees and reads the gay male body: what is disavowed yet demands a necessary spectacularization is homosexual difference as it is proscribed to regulate a heterosexual masculine identity. Garber describes our cultural need to see,

universal, transcending cultures and countries” (1994: xi). For an in-depth discussion of how the closet structures gay identity, see his book, *Queer in America* (London: Abacus, 1994).

identify, and differentiate sexuality as follows:

It is as though the hegemonic cultural imaginary is saying to itself: if there is a difference (between gay and straight), we want to be able to *see* it, and if we see a difference (a man in women's clothes), we want to be able to *interpret* it. In both cases, the conflation is fueled by a desire to *tell the difference*, to guard against a difference that might otherwise put the identity of one's own position in question. (1993: 130)

The closet of homosexuality that dominant culture repeatedly deploys to talk about homosexual men and women enables us to envision and to articulate gay identity because it is described in distanced, containable, and disavowed terms. To spectacularize it, however, is to put on an exhibition of homosexuality and to display what closed doors otherwise hide, the constructed identity—be it effeminate, diseased, or other—of the gay male body.

What is urgently required is a revision of this spectacle of the closet which spectacularizes gay men as queens. Such a need is all the more urgent when gay male identity continues to be expressed in terms of effeminacy, and its attendant associations of penetrability, passivity, and lack, and not in alternative terms that suggest a possible representation of this identity. A possibility arises if we recast our understanding of masculinity in terms of that potentially disturbing conjunction of visibility, perversion, and sexuality, the Proximate Other.

Because the Proximate Other locates itself not outside but always already *within* cultural representations of (hetero)sexuality, this can only mean one thing: gay men do not occupy the margins of cultural discourse as they do its center. Gay men occupy the center because their homosexuality is inherently part of the cultural articulations of gender, and sexuality. This centered space they occupy, then, is not so much the center as it is, more accurately, the centered space of in-between-ness. And such a site is hardly, or determinately, a matter of an "either/or" location. Rather, the space of in-between-ness is one of contra-dictions that I have already described; it is that space where similarity and dissimilarity are in interplay. This is not unlike the paradoxical significance the

closet—which is itself a space of in-between-ness—can effect, that of marking out and re-marking, or even of display and interplay.

It is exactly this paradox where the bodies of gay men are corporeally male yet sexually other which problematizes any attempt a reader might initiate to read the male body as recognizably, and distinctly, heterosexual. Admittedly, this reveals why a reading of such corporeality is susceptible to the “perverse dynamic” homosexuality instantiates when its “masculinity” is foregrounded. Dollimore describes this dynamic as follows:

this concept of the perverse dynamic denotes certain instabilities and contradictions within dominant structures which exist by virtue of exactly what those structures simultaneously contain and exclude. The displacements which constitute certain repressive discriminations are partly enabled via proximity which, though disavowed, remains to enable a perverse return, an undoing, a transformation. (1991: 33)

Visually speaking, we can chart such “a perverse return, an undoing, a transformation” when we map the male gaze onto the gay male body in terms of dis coherence. In seeing this male body as homosexually different only to engender it as an Other troped in terms of effeminacy, if not the feminine, what takes place is its transvestism. I understand this to mean an overdetermination of gay men in terms of a transvestized, and hence, a visualized sexual, difference. As another instance of heterosexual demonization, this confusion of homosexuality and transvestism ignores the element of proximity between gay and straight men to foreground instead the necessary separation, and containment, of one group of men from the other.

When proximity is configured, however, in terms of a spatial in-between-ness, in terms of a male body that is sexually different yet corporeally similar, how the male gaze functions as that acculturated practice of reading masculinity has to be re-examined. There must be a re-examination because there is “a *turning back* upon something and a perverting of it typically if not exclusively through inversion and displacement” (Dollimore 1991: 323) when an individual’s male gaze is disrupted by the evidence of sexual difference at that familiar site of the male body. A visual dis coherence is stimulated, and

the spectacle of the gay man as a queen refuses that reading guaranteeing his marginalized identity. Instead, an individual reader should begin to read this spectacle as a transgressive site foregrounding the very “maleness” of this gay body.

If the gay male body is a perversion disrupting the dominant cultural representation of masculinity, this disruption—a deconstruction of the originary identity that describes the gay male identity as Other as well as a rewriting of the latter in its apparently marginal site—animates the perverse dynamic affecting how the male body, and, more urgently, masculinity, is read within dominant culture. Significantly, this dynamic stimulates a discoherent reading of masculinity: reading the gay male body allows a reader to realize that the particular representation of the male body as a site of contra-dictions can function as a perverse dynamic always challenging, stimulating, and re-presenting masculinity alternatively. Here is Dollimore writing about this:

If culture’s repeated disavowal of the centrality of perversion is expressed in and through the endless demonizing of the manifest pervert, it is also true that the perverse dynamic both reveals and undermines the double process of disavowal and displacement which demonizing entails. Perversion, in the form of the perverse dynamic, destroys the binary structure of which it is initially an effect. (1991: 183)

In effect, perverting this gaze’s capacity to engender a reading of masculinity along a body-gender alignment enables a reader to question, and transgressively rewrite, the term “masculinity” when his/her reading situates itself in relation to this body of, on the one hand, sexual difference and, on the other, corporeal similarity. In terms of how reading takes place, such a perversion (re)constructs the very practice of reading with the male gaze: there is no guarantee that this gaze can always read corporeality according to the dominant representations of gender, especially when some texts choose to depict corporeality as a space of contra-dictions.

CRACKING THE SPECTACLE

One possible form this rewriting takes is that of cross-dressing or drag.⁵² This appropriation of the feminine—especially the appropriation of a feminine (ad)dress and behaviour—by gay men seeks to consciously, and playfully, rewrite that stereotype in which they have been cast, the gay man as a (drag) queen. In doing so, a visual disjuncture is initiated: if anything, the spectacle of the queen can be reconsidered in terms of a performance, rather than the essence, of gendered identity. More importantly, when a gay man is transvestized, there is a rupture between his body of sexual otherness and the heterosexual masculine identity it should engender. In addition, there is the corresponding dislocation between the identity he is supposed to be—the drag queen—and the identity he really is.

Cross-dressing enables a subversion from within this very spectacle of the gay man as queen: feathers, bras and stockings, make-up and wigs may represent the gloss of femininity but they cannot eradicate the presence of the penis. Butler's description of drag enhances the point I am making: "part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the [drag] performance," she writes, "is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary" (1990b: 338). This disjunction between

⁵²Cross-dressing is not practiced by all homosexuals. Although there exists a strong identification of a gay man in woman's clothes, this is stereotypical of patriarchal representations of homosexuals. In addition, it is necessary to delineate between cross-dressers who may wear women's clothes as a fetish or as performance and transvestites for whom these clothes are integral to their sexual identity as "women" whilst retaining their male bodies. Transsexuals, on the other hand, dress themselves in clothes of the opposite sex for they see themselves as essentially that sex they dress as whilst being trapped in the wrong body. A useful guide to the points I raise here can be found in Margaret Garber's book, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1993).

sexuality and gender, when reading the male body in contradiction, results in rewriting the gay male body that is overdetermined in transvestism: here, as Dollimore puts it, “change, contest, and struggle are in part made possible by contradiction” (1991: 88). Or, as Garber sees it, “Both the energies of conflation and the energies of clarification and differentiation between transvestism and homosexuality thus mobilize and problematize, under the twin anxieties of *visibility* and *difference*, all of the culture’s assumptions about normative sex and gender roles” (1993: 130).

Noel Bartlett’s novel, *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*, employs just such a spectacle to revise what constitutes masculine identity within homosexuality. In doing so, he exposes the hom(m)o-sexually engendered reading of gay men as queens to be fraudulent. And this, Bartlett emphasizes, eventuates in a query into the very manner in which the male body has come to be “naturally” non-homosexual. More urgently, he dislocates the seemingly unproblematic nexus between reading this body and a reader’s subjectivity as it is characteristically aligned with the identity of the generic masculine subject, the male reader of texts who always reads gender in terms of heterosexuality.

The novel concerns itself with its central protagonist, Boy, and his acceptance of his homosexuality. It also traces his acculturation into gay culture, and, more significantly, his increasing ability to read the gay body alternatively. Around these narrative trajectories, Bartlett examines those cultural questions of identity, lifestyle, and relationship as they intersect to foreground, primarily, what he sees as a gay, and masculine, identity. Significantly, Boy exemplifies, as he comes to contest, those stereotypical depictions of gay men as an expressed or, more accurately, a transvestized difference.

At the beginning of this novel, we are invited by the nameless, but recognizably gay, narrator to picture Boy as an idealized image of strength and beauty. Where the gay male body is normally transvestized despite, if not because of, the absent feminine dress, Boy’s gay body is refused this address in the first half of the novel. “This is a picture,” the

narrator informs us, "I took of him myself. He was so beautiful in those days" (Bartlett 1992: 11).⁵³ The beauty he casts Boy in is not in terms of femininity as it is, like those classical Greek statues, of masculine strength:

It's just that at the time it all seemed so beautiful and important, it was like some kind of historical event. *History on legs*, we used to say; a significant pair of legs, an important stomach, legendary ... *a classic of the genre. Historic*. Well it was true, all of it. (11)

In a text littered with gay men who are positioned to demonstrate that stereotypical identity of the spectacle of the queen (note the feminine address of and amongst the other gay characters by such names as Stella, Miss Public House, Greta, Missy-Missy), Boy is significantly set apart.

He is deliberately identified with masculine strength. For Bartlett, Boy has to be represented thus and only then is it possible to complicate what a masculine identity is as well as to rewrite the assumed effeminacy of gay men. Boy becomes a site contesting the dominant representation of a gay man: his gendered identity in spite of his sexuality is, as the narrator reminds the reader, remarkably masculine for he "looked something like, or had something like the feel of, Paul Newman when he's playing the character christened Chance Wayne in that Tennessee Williams film" (12). In short, Boy is intertextually seen, on one hand, to possess the (Hollywood) masculinity of Paul Newman, and, on the other, this is a particular depiction of masculinity which is tempered by an alignment with the homosexual playwright, Williams.

Inasmuch as "masculinity" corresponds with strength and power, Boy is displaced from an effeminate to a masculine identity. Indeed, when the narrator asks us to re-envision Boy, he pleads for an image, above all else, of strength: "And I would ask you, whatever changes you make, please keep him strong, as strong as he was" (14-15). In transposing masculinity onto the gay body, Bartlett dislocates our preconceived placement

⁵³Subsequent quotations from this novel will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

of Boy with the spectacle of the queen; he also displaces the alignment of a heterosexually defined masculine identity with the male body. As a result, the dominant male gaze is subverted while reading this gay body. Where there is to be a body whose sexuality pronounces itself as Other, there is now an insistence upon its masculinity despite, and even perhaps, I will suggest, because of, its otherness. If a reader is to see Boy as masculine as well as homosexual, he/she must begin to question what straight men share with gay men; I am of course seeking to problematize that sex “male” which is all too often regarded as a matter of possessing the male body, and which heterosexuality privileges as that definitive location of masculine identity.

When we read masculinity within an interpretive community based upon hom(m)o-sexuality, we are, as a general supposition, reading within strategies decidedly masculine. An intrinsic assumption, in this case, must be that all male readers will see and read the gay male body as both sexually Other and unmasculine. Bartlett shows the possibility of reading otherwise: the reader comes to read Boy’s body not only through the male gaze but, in the context of this gay narration, through the distinctly gay eyes of Bartlett’s narrator. Invariably, the reader is positioned into an-other site of reading. That is to say, for the male reader in particular, being male might allude to one’s masculine identity but it does not, in any way, fully guarantee this identity when reading the Proximate Other. Moreover, and because Boy is repeatedly pictured as masculine, *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* fails to “mirror” heterosexual masculinity: the sight of a masculine gay man—where sex, homosexuality, and gender convulsively conjoin—introduces dis coherence into the male gaze a reader is expected to deploy when reading this gay body of writing.

Through this dis coherence, then, that heterosexual image of gay men as effeminate can be revised. Whereas Boy ought to be representative of homosexual perversion, contagion, and passivity, Bartlett transforms Boy into

an allegorical figure of Strength. He is naked like a statue, with one knee bent

and the other leg straight. He has strong, agile and indeed superb hands.... It is ... him who will be strong when we are not. (15-16)

Recast to represent classical masculine strength and beauty, Boy is less the gay man who is the effeminate drag queen; he re-presents what a gay man can alternatively mean. Where a gay man is overdetermined as powerless because he can be entered, Bartlett's insistence that Boy is undeniably masculine complicates this identification.

Why is a re-presented Boy seen to be dangerously intertwined with a reader's subjectivity? After all, is he not mere fiction, a representation and nothing else? He is, on the contrary, I believe, inextricably a part of the way we come to understand ourselves as gendered and sexual subjects when we employ the male gaze to read. Because the hetero/homosexual bind of identity is itself a transposition onto the predominant and hegemonic binarism of Self/Other as it informs (according to psychoanalysis) subjectivity, what Bartlett foregrounds are these: (1) a visual destabilization of this Self/Other binarism when the gaze can no longer locate itself, and (2) a dis coherence where not only meanings of gender and sexuality are disrupted but a reader's subjectivity is in doubt. Can an individual truly fix his/her own subjectivity as the reader while reading Bartlett's representation of the gay male body? And is it always to be found where knowledge and vision intersect as that powerful male gaze? Are we correct to identify subjectivity as generically masculine, and therefore homogeneously male?

(AD)DRESSING BARTLETT'S BOY: AN-OTHER SPECTACULARIZATION

Approximately half-way through the novel, Bartlett has Boy dress up in women's clothes. Critics will no doubt argue his inversion of the protagonist into the spectacle he seeks to displace as evidence of Bartlett's inability to transcend the prevailing categorization of gay men in terms of effeminacy. Within the context of his novel, such an

argument is, I contest, too superficial and simplistic a complaint. Instead, Bartlett's strategic return to the spectacle allows him to revise the reader's male gaze that must contend with Boy's gay male body.

In forcing Boy into drag, Bartlett is simultaneously forcing his reader into a position of dis coherence while reading Boy's changing surfaces. What is foregrounded in this instance is a further slippage within that re-alignment of the gay male body, masculinity, and homosexuality that is the controlling point of view throughout the first half of the novel; Bartlett recognizes this spectacle as that necessary site enabling how we might alternatively see Boy's identity in the course of reading. In other words, if his homosexuality is described in terms of a masculine spectacularization before this particular representation, Bartlett's description of Boy in womanly garb—an attempt at readdressing Boy's male body—does nothing more than acknowledge his identity as equally homosexual.

In spectacularizing Boy as a homosexual queen, the novel insists we see Boy's body as a site of contrasting identities: his body can be read in terms of either a masculine or a homosexual identity, or even both at once. If there is a dislocation between identity and sex, there is a far greater dislocation of gender when the reader encounters these changing perceptions of Boy's body. Although he is biologically male, Boy's dressing up in women's clothes confuses, for a reader secured in his/her understanding of the relationship between dress and identity, the once distinct and definite categories of gender and sexuality as they now address his homosexual status. And because we can address Boy in either the garb of masculinity or femininity, and perhaps, as simultaneously both, there is then no fixed nor generic identity we can attach to or label the gay man with.

For a reader, Bartlett's appropriation of the spectacle most appropriately raises the question, can there be a specifically gay representation? The very first time Boy dons a woman's clothes, the (ad)dress of the spectacle, his questions for Madame attest the query posed above:

Boy looked at himself in the oval mirror and said, "But Madame, how can I choose? How can I choose my costume when I don't know what role I'm playing?"

And at this Madame just had to laugh, she laughed, she looked straight at Boy and she said to him:

"Ah! How indeed!" (159)

For Madame knowingly sees in his dilemma—that which we as readers stereotypically see in hom(m)o-sexually engendered terms—the inevitable representation of a gendered male homosexual identity as one situated in effeminacy. Boy's confusion, indeed his indecision, over the correct costume echoes, resoundingly, I will add, the problems facing gay representation within culture: how do gay men represent themselves? and if they can, is there any space for an authentic gay self-representation?

Bartlett's answer is at once affirmative and transgressive: in prescribing gay men as queens, this scene of Boy's uncertainty shows how Bartlett's representation of sexual difference can enable gay men to rewrite this stereotypical identity as equally, and dangerously, masculine. A reader of Bartlett's novel will come to appreciate that beneath its apparent homosexual display is a spectacularized crisis of representing the male body as definitively masculine, and the gay male body as categorically Other.

Significantly, this crisis affects how we ground our subjectivity as readers of Bartlett's novel when deploying the male gaze; in truth, there is now our location "in a number of difficult tensions and contradictions" (Hearn 1992: 211) arising, I suspect, from the paradoxical sight of the Boy's male but gay body. In other words, there is more than simply a slippage in seeing gay men as queens, more than just an ontological displacement of a masculine visibility attempting to account for this body. We need to ask of ourselves, both straight and gay, men and women, these questions: what is homosexuality when it is no longer an instance of an "either/or" binarism? Is gender synonymous with sex, always a matter of exchange and substitution between them? Can a straight identity exist if its representation is denied, if its assumed authority, naturalness, and universality are repudiated? And how is subjectivity to be engendered when vision is itself a construct?

Rather than a closed narrative predicated upon a policing and dividing male gaze, Bartlett proposes that the reader sees this gaze as contingent upon the textual representation of the male body it encounters and the interaction it occasions between reader and text. That is, we might begin to discern—in a particularly gay but always present and always active repetition, if not also its alteration, of the male body—a dis coherence of reading the gendered/sexual identity within the text as it effects how we, in turn, understand our “personhood” or subjectivity.

COPYING MADONNA: IS THE VIRGIN REALLY GAY?

Playing as he does with what I shall hereafter refer to as a dis coherent gaze, Bartlett re-engenders not only our appreciation of homosexuality and masculinity in *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* but also that postmodern paranoia about representation. We can see Bartlett’s revision of how representation can be alternatively read in the tableau he presents his reader with towards the end of the novel.

As representation, it is a scene criss-crossed by tangents of gender, sexuality, and visuality. This is the picture he presents us with:

In the centre of the hallway floor, the naked bulb shining directly above his head, was a young man, holding a body in his arms. At first sight, the body looked small enough to have been the body of a child, though it was in fact the body of an old man. And the young man, because of the body cradled in his lap, and because someone had thrown a blanket over his shoulder which looked like a blue robe, and because his face was cast down in the traditional posture, looked like the Virgin. (285)

Drawing upon medieval and renaissance Christian art, or, more accurately, the genres of both the nativity scene and the pietà, Bartlett’s tableau copies these art forms. To copy is to imitate; yet in this imitation, Bartlett is conscious of its very approximation to and difference from the originals.

Employing such religious art to re-present Boy, Bartlett compounds further the equation of gay men as queens by juxtaposing this stereotype with Christian, and specifically, Marian, iconography. In the frieze described above, Boy is imaged as the Virgin Mary on whose lap lies the dead father, flanked by St. Joseph (O) and St. Anne (Madame). Instead of the homosexual who signifies sexual inversion, itself a sin against nature and God, we are confronted with Boy's transformation into Queen Mary, Virgin and Mother. "The Virgin is conventionally portrayed as being unrealistically young and beautiful" (286); in *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*, the Virgin is Boy, a masculine gay man. If the spectacle of the queen reflects our gaze upon a gay man so that we come to represent him as the other of a heterosexually masculine man, inverting, and indeed displacing, this derogatory reference with a Christian epitome of womanhood and transcendence (recall the Virgin Mary's titles within the Catholic Church of "born without sin" and "raised body and soul to heaven")⁵⁴ must suggest more.

What this reconfiguration suggests is this: Bartlett problematizes the reader's perception of the spectacle in question by highlighting its inadequacy in describing what constitutes a gay male identity. By refracting this image of the Virgin and mapping it onto Boy's body, this reader is drawn into the tense ambiguity associated with these differing, and contradictory, opinions of what Boy's seeming identity as the effeminate man can stand for.

Madame closes this fresco playing the role of the donor in the figure of St. Anne: "The donor both intervenes and intercedes between the holy figures and you, the spectator" (286). What is completed in this tableau but never mentioned, only intimated

⁵⁴Marina Warner's discussion of Marian iconography and culture provides an invaluable source of information and insight into my discussion of Bartlett's use of the Marian figure. For further reading, see her book, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976).

by Madame's intervention, is a rewriting of the spectacle of the queen that Bartlett engenders for his readers. Madame "indicates the tableau on the hall floor with a small movement of the hand" (287); she directs the reader's gaze onto this nativity scene, itself that promised nuclear unit of hom(m)o-sexual relations, the family—"The Holy Family. Virgin and Child with St. Joseph and Donor" (287)—and to Boy who is the Virgin. When a gay man is spectacularized as a queen, Boy's gaze upon himself and the reader's gaze on him should coalesce to engender what a gay identity is supposed to be. This simplistic conclusion is deceptive: Boy's re-presentation is more than an address into this heterosexual metaphor. Rather, it necessarily, and paradoxically, uses the spectacle to rearticulate his homosexual identity.

Like the lowly Virgin elevated to a position of adoration and veneration, Boy is suggestively centered rather than maligned as the periphery. No longer condemned, Boy's identity as the Proximate Other, declares Bartlett in this otherwise transgressive, and perverted, appropriation of Marian iconography, is fundamentally intrinsic to rewriting gay male identity beyond transvestism. We can extrapolate from this a parallel consequence for any study seeking to revise how we read masculinity: male homosexuality must be accounted for when understanding what "male" and "masculine" mean when what we are reading is the male body as a representation of both sameness and difference. Masculinity is, as *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* represents, not singularly a consequence of power or strength but also a recognition of sensitivity and passivity: it is a continuum embracing, for want of a better terminology, the hom(m)o-sexually demarcated masculine and feminine traits along which men, both gay and straight, can locate their male bodies according to various occasions and needs.

In subverting the spectacle of the gay man as a queen, Bartlett critiques heterosexual masculinity for the fallacy it is: as an identity, heterosexual masculinity screens its contingent nature under the guise of the male body's centered position in hom(m)o-sexual culture. In particular, the tableau focuses on the failure of dominant culture to conceive

homosexual difference, as I have shown thus far, in anything apart from its seemingly feminine make-up.

“WHICH OF US IS THE MAN?”

Whereas Bartlett’s appropriation of the spectacle is as overtly spectacular as it is also critical of this heterosexual elision of homosexuality, there is another manner in which the Proximate Other may be revised. This second approach emphasizes neither an overt display of nor an interplay with this sight of transvestism. Rather, it foregrounds, empathically and repeatedly, the Proximate Other’s identity as equally male and masculine. A far more subversive, and deconstructive, approach this rewriting takes is to select as its focus that inherent site of sameness *within* those parameters of a hom(m)o-sexual culture seeking to differentiate, if not elide, gay identity.

David Leavitt explores these issues, generally as subtext, in his two first two novels, *The Lost Language of Cranes* and *Equal Affections*. But it is in the latter, where masculinity, homosexuality, and heterosexuality intersect as competing, and often totally opposing, tangents in the familial conjunction (or, more accurately, the dysfunction) that is the Cooper family, that Leavitt’s reader can appreciate such a revision when he/she comes to read the novel’s particular representation of masculinity in terms of the gay male body.

Nowhere is the above mentioned intersection as obviously evident and, as I see it, dangerously transgressive for hom(m)o-sexual culture than in Danny’s relationship with Walter. Here, Leavitt appropriates the dominant gender roles in heterosexual marriages to parody heterosexuality when he describes the relationship the Cooper’s son, Danny shares with his lover. This remarkable scene from the novel says it all—ironically and humorously:

“Which of us is the man?” Walter asks casually.

Danny looks across the sofa at him. "Well," he says, "I suppose you're the man because you go to work every morning in the city."

"But you go to the city every morning too!" Walter says. "And you put in those three-pronged outlets. With your screwdrivers and wrenches and drills." He looks satisfied.

"I also do the dishes, wash the sheets, and make the beds. You take care of the garden."

"Yes. With a big hoe."

"You like boys with hairless chests and tight buttocks," Danny says, "and I like big hairy men with low swinging balls. Besides, I cook."

"You fuck *me*," Walter says.

Danny is quiet for a moment, trying to think of a retort to that seemingly definitive fact. "I stayed home all day last Monday and talked to your mother about Debbie Klinger's divorce," he says finally.

"Well, then I guess you are the woman," Walter says. (Leavitt, 1989: 25-6)⁵⁵

What Leavitt's reader comes to observe in this dialogue is an exchange of, even a slippage between, gay men as preconceived queens and, in opposition, their own definition of what it is to be a gay man. Both Danny and Walter inhabit as they also adopt, in the sense of performing, a continuum of sex roles and positions: Walter is seen to be a man because he works yet he is the partner who is sexually penetrated while Danny, in spite of his active sex role, continues to be articulated as womanly.

Danny and Walter are struggling, as they attempt to identify themselves, with a discourse where homosexuality cannot be articulated in anything other than in those essentializing terms of male-female sex that hom(m)o-sexual culture affirms. Conversely, this discourse they employ is, declares Leavitt, severely limited and limiting when the identity of the gay male body has to be enunciated: this discourse continues to trope Danny and Walter as passive, penetrable, and domesticated. A man's man, it is hinted at in the above dialogue, is never to be found in these feminine-inflected spaces; Danny and Walter come to occupy these spaces, however, because they are a pair of gay male lovers, if not "effeminate" men. In the end, Walter's question which begins their conversation is,

⁵⁵Subsequent quotations from this novel will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

at best, rhetorical: in answering his question, both Danny and Walter must use the very discourse which whilst enabling them to identify themselves also limits how they can see themselves according to the dominant paradigm of gender, masculine/feminine. There is, however, a means of contesting this particular representation of gay men: can we not import into this heterosexualization of gay men as queens the notion of a discoherent gaze? And will dis coherence itself not effect a revision of what we understand masculinity to be?

I return to the conversation between Danny and Walter. More to the point, I want to focus on the exchange effected when a reader's male gaze reads this represented gay male body. If we must see and read the masculinity of the male body through the spectacle of the queen, it can be argued, however—not despite but *because* this body foregrounds itself as a space of contra-dictions—that Danny and Walter's inability to fix their identities signals the spectacle's limitation to function as that discursive site allowing the gay body to be inscribed solely in terms of sexual difference. Even though Danny is aligned with(in) domesticity, his active sex role repudiates any attempt to transpose the spectacle onto his body. He cooks and washes and plays Aunt Agony to his lover's mother, but, to put it bluntly, he also fucks. He is the queen who in spite, and even more because, of the "seemingly definitive fact" of being, like Walter, that gay receptacle is quite possibly, in terms of an active and dominant sex role within hom(m)o-sexual culture, the masculine man. In short, Danny comes to signify that paradox, the gay male body.

Inasmuch as the act of penetration is argued to be that defining act of a gay identity within hom(m)o-sexual culture, Walter's declaration that Danny enters him confusingly, if not conclusively, blurs the separation of active from passive, male from female, masculine from feminine. And it is especially this blurring of the hetero/homosexual divide which disrupts the otherwise distinct categorization of a masculine identity that the male gaze is argued to engender when it reads the male body.

In this instance, Leavitt emphasizes Danny's homosexuality not to ratify the gay man

as a queen, much less to affirm heterosexual masculinity, as he does, I am convinced, to signal the dis coherence the Proximate Other effects as a paradox of masculinity: Danny does possess the penis and he does, despite seeming to be effeminized, fuck.

MARRIAGE AND THE PROMISE OF GENDERED PARENTHOOD

[W]hat we should be attacking in stereotypes is the attempt of heterosexual society to define us for ourselves, in terms that inevitably fall short of the “ideal” heterosexuality.

Richard Dyer⁵⁶

Nothing less than a disjuncture between the speculation of homosexuality (that is this spectacle of the gay man as a queen) and the reality of what gay men actually are, Leavitt forces his reader, in the scene I examine above, into an interaction with his text where reading the gay male body with the male gaze results in a visual dis-ease: can a reader truly speak for let alone represent the identity of such corporeality as categorically unmasculine?

Walter and Danny’s failure to categorize their identity symptomatically exhibits the difficulty in mapping fixed and rigid boundaries—grounded as they are in the penis-phallus equation of hom(m)o-sexual culture—onto homosexual relations, and the gay bodies which animate these relations. Any attempt, moreover, to heterosexually fix masculinity in that penetrative male-female sex act privileging the penis is now questionable, especially when homosexual male sex centers itself upon and inevitably privileges, for its object of sexual desire, the penis. Unlike Bartlett who positions Boy both within and without the spectacle in order to subvert the acculturized reading of the gay male body, Leavitt re-

⁵⁶Richard Dyer, ed. *Gays and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1977) 31.

envisions our gaze beyond the womanly, the passive, and the penetrable Other that gay men are said to be. By denying these as solely characteristic of gay male identity, *Equal Affections* revises the male gaze for Leavitt's representation of the gay male body redesignates the penis-phallus equation as that determining locus which engenders a reader's alignment of masculinity with heterosexuality.

More importantly, Leavitt revises a reader's identity as that masculine subject, the male reader, by playing off, as a series of juxtapositions, the gay male body with its heterosexual counterpart. In each of the unions (heterosexual and homosexual) that I shall shortly examine, what continues to be germane is how gay men are troped to be non-male, unmasculine, and, potentially, by extension, sterile. However, what is repeated and altered in each of the following partnerships is a dis coherence originating in as it revises the gaze employed to read the gay body.

Paralleling this partnership of Danny and Walter is the marriage of Danny's parents, Nat and Louise. Theirs is a union emptied of love and sex; it is hardly surprising that the latter's absence is indicative of, and probably a factor in, Nat's marital discomfort. It is sex, and particularly, his need to assert his sexual identity with other women, that endangers Nat's marriage to Louise when he enters into an extra marital affair with Lilian. In bedding another woman, Nat's sexuality, and, more importantly, his masculine identity, is assured. Where marriage initially defines as it locates his masculinity in a hom(m)o-sexual exchange of women, his infidelity implies much more than a guarantee of his sexual prowess.

Nat's infidelity calls into question the wedding vow. I want to focus on this because within, and especially as, hom(m)o-sexual culture, the premise of a masculine identity can be seen to ground itself in the promise of a man's word. In short, we can consider this promise as an instance of a man's ability to name, possess, and therefore identify himself. Consequently, gay men are left out of this configuration; as a collective body, gay men, it is suggested, have no access to a man's word.

Leavitt insists, throughout the novel, in both Nat's marriage to Louise and Danny's partnership with Walter, on the importance of fidelity as promised in the word of a man. In fact, he brings to the forefront of such a discussion on fidelity the problem of keeping faith and remaining true—issues which gay relationships are ostensibly assumed to ridicule and negate.

Walter's attempts to cheat on Danny by soliciting other partners are, in comparison to Nat's illicit affairs, comic and fruitless. Engaged in an interface with impersonal computer exchanges and phone sex, his infidelity is as devoid of sex as it comes to be, in turn, unrealized. Walter's infidelity, unlike Nat's, is propelled not so much by a need to either affirm sexual identity or to displace his "marital" problems as it is by a need to reinvent his life: "What the computer ... offered was the safety of isolation, the safety of control. Voices, words, telephone numbers came through the circuits, but you could always hang up, you could always log off" (241).

Walter's actions lead him not into infidelity but, ironically, return him to Danny and the family unit they form. More importantly, this act reiterates Leavitt's belief that the category "family," that hom(m)o-sexual space of masculine domestication and reproduction, need not be definitively heterosexual. For as Leavitt himself explains, Walter "was inextricably bound with the people who had mattered to him and who mattered to him now, the people whose loves defined him, whose deaths would devastate him" (241).

In this contrast between parallel yet divergent unions, Leavitt shatters that crippling myth which sees all gay relationships as temporary and meaningless affairs based on gratuitous sex. By drawing his reader into a context suggesting, as it eventually subverts, this stereotype of homosexual behaviour, Leavitt problematizes this reader's male gaze as it seeks to position Danny and Walter into the exemplary model of transvestized gay identity. Moreover, this reader can no longer see their gay male bodies as spectacularized instances of disease and death or even one night stands.

We need only to juxtapose these divergent instances of infidelity as they relate to the promise of a man's word, and the masculine identity it ought to engender, to see Leavitt's point. If masculinity is to be a site of hom(m)o-sexual power, dominance, and authority, it is equally a site privileging a man's word. Nat is unable to keep the promise of his wedding vow nor even name his infidelity. He cannot articulate the latter except as a problem originating with Louise: "She's crazy, Lil. No, no, she's not crazy. She's just so unhappy she does crazy things" (102). Unlike Walter, Nat's masculine identity is less a matter of naming it and much more a consequence of sex. Walter's masculinity, if we pursue this line of argument, is centered in his ability to acknowledge his faults—"I'm back,' Walter said, 'I'm back'" (242)—and to name his commitment and support for Danny as Louise lies dying:

"If you want me," Walter said, "I'll be on the first plane. You know that, right?"

"The first plane," Danny said. "Okay." (172)

More importantly, Walter's promise forces Leavitt's reader to re-evaluate homosexual relationships: what Walter and Danny share demonstrates, at least within the context of this novel, that gay relationships can be more resilient than the marriage Nat and Louise are caught in.

The word of a gay man is here foregrounded as equal to the promise made by heterosexual men in the marriage vow. For Leavitt, this exposes the skewed depiction of what gay identity must be. At the end of *Equal Affections*, all that remains of the hom(m)o-sexual parameters of human relations, Leavitt claims, are these: a dead Louise; Nat and Lilian pursue their affair; April, their lesbian daughter, is pregnant; and Danny and Walter are still together. What will survive of the Coopers will be their children, and the promised future of their happiness—love and stability for their son, a child for their daughter. What is more significant, however, is that it is the survival of their gay children, and the families they create, that disturbs the otherwise dominant depictions of gay men

and women as sterile.

Walter and Danny share a stable, fulfilling, and an otherwise normal partnership; they are “Just two ordinary suburban husbands, on their way to work, not particularly distinguishable from the hundreds of others who share the train with them” (77-78). It is this particular representation of their relationship that problematizes, I feel, the equation between homosexuality and abnormality that dominant culture exploits when describing “family” in heterosexual terms. April’s pregnancy goes even further in Leavitt’s critical examination of “normal” sex and lifestyles.

Her pregnancy deconstructs totally those heterosexual stereotypes of the childless lesbian and the impotent gay man. April and Tom Neibur, the gay man whose sperm is involved in this pregnancy, seek to rewrite what constitutes the biological family and its engendered parenthood. More importantly, both April and Tom want to contest the alignment between procreation, parenthood, and gender which hom(m)o-sexual culture privileges. As she explains to Danny, Tom

“wanted to prove that homophobic notion that homosexuals can’t procreate was bullshit, he wanted to prove that we could have children too, and be an example, a role model for other gay men and women.” (126)

It is the manner, however, in which Leavitt frames this pregnancy that brutally severs the accepted and naturalized nexus between heterosexuality and procreation.

Instead of a sexual copulation, a repetition of the male-female intercourse, this child is conceived through the introduction of Tom’s sperm laden turkey baster into April’s vagina (127-128). This crude and somewhat primitive manner of insemination echoes present day advances in gynæcology, and its promises of procreation in such technological developments as artificial insemination. Such a juxtaposition of technology and nature highlights the problems of who procreates, how procreation takes place, and what responsibilities are involved as a result of these advances. Simply put, these issues contest the hom(m)o-sexual paradigm which grants men the privileged and dominant say in

matters concerning reproduction.

As laughable as this parody of intercourse is, it can only be, ironically, charged with pain too. Behind the humour lies the pervasive heterosexual contention that lesbians and gay men possess a sexuality which is unnatural and which denies them a procreative role; according to this contention, gay men and lesbians cannot engender a family unit. Leavitt outlines this when he juxtaposes April's pregnancy with the early scene of Aunt Eleanor's offerings of newspaper clippings to Louise in the hope of comforting a woman who tragically has given birth to not one, but two homosexual children:

She chose to ignore the articles Eleanor sent her, clipped from Sid's obscure psychology journals, knowing that it was only jealousy which made Eleanor pass them on: "The Recurrence of Homosexuality in Siblings: Nature or Nurture?" "Families with Multiple Homosexual Children: A Survey," "The Sissy-Boy and Tomboy-Girl Syndrome: New Evidence Links Childhood Behaviour to Homosexual Life-styles" [sic]. Always neat photocopies, with a note ... prefaced by a picture of a happy cook stirring a pot and the words GOOD NEWS FROM ELEANOR FRIEDMAN'S KITCHEN. (34-35)

Aunt Eleanor's clippings foreground the abnormality that is homosexuality, and the seemingly scientific evidence of this sexuality's failure to coexist within the family structure. Yet Leavitt's novel closes with the promised birth and accompanying parenthood which bind the surviving characters after Louise's death.

The entire scene of Tom and April's successful attempt at procreation forces us to readdress how we come to firstly, see homosexuality as always sterile and secondly, revise Tom as that figure of sexual impotence. Where there ought to be the purported infertility which engenders lesbians and gay men as unnatural and sinful, Leavitt foregrounds, instead, an impending gay/lesbian parenthood. In fact, his parody cannot be read as anything but a rebuttal to those arguments cited above. In particular, Tom is positioned into the defining role of masculine identity, the father, not only because he has, in a manner of speaking, entered April (the turkey baster standing in for his penis) but because he will become the father gay men are not permitted to be.

Where *Rebel Without a Cause* ends with a promised heterosexual marriage and the

birth of Jim's family, *Equal Affections* fractures that heterosexual nexus of marriage, procreation, fatherhood, and masculinity within dominant culture. In this novel, Leavitt takes what we come to understand as "family" only to problematize the term. For Leavitt, a family need not be defined as *specifically* heterosexual nor universally a product *only* of heterosexually defined male-female sex. More significantly, Leavitt illustrates how this *natural* site—in other words, that domestic space, where masculinity is reproduced, guaranteed, and, finally, identifiable in the the act of procreative sex—need not be heterosexual. If fatherhood defines what a man is within the domestic arena, if it ensures a man's masculinity in his sexual prowess of bedding the woman and reproducing children, Tom's impending fatherhood as a gay man must subvert this equation of heterosexuality, masculinity, and family: his child bears an imprint of Tom as it simultaneously, and continually, marks him "father" and pronounces him masculine.

READING MEN: MAKING VISIBLE MASCULINITIES

Now, given the dual position of gay men in society, it would seem that male homosexuals pose the truly subversive category in a heterosexual culture for they collapse the hierarchy of self and other by fulfilling both roles simultaneously; this transgression of boundaries throws into question the essentialist view of men as always and everywhere dominating and women as always and everywhere dominated.

Diana Fuss⁵⁷

Where, and most possibly because, homosexuality intersects with heterosexuality, the overdetermined description of the male body as definitively masculine, which the

⁵⁷Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 46.

reader tends to engender when he/she “normally” reads this corporeality, is disturbed. This disturbance implies that what we understand as masculinity—in reading such texts as *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* and *Equal Affections* with the male gaze—is effectively repeated and altered, articulated and rearticulated when what is being read is the male body in contra-diction.

For readers of these two texts, what is deemed to be masculine identity is, therefore, never an essentialized or biological nor even a natural entity as it is rather a conjunction of intersecting points of view. When these differing points of view are hom(m)o-sexually engendered and refuted at the site of the represented male body, a reader’s understanding of masculinity undergoes dis coherence. Such a contest of the term “masculinity” becomes evident in the contrasting gay and straight appropriation of the male body, and specifically, the role of the penis, to describe masculine identity. For a gay man who comes to imprint his masculinity onto the predetermined spectacle of the transvestized gay male body, there is, in this instance, a repudiation of that commonly ascribed identity of the gay man as one who lacks the penis. Consequently, a straight man can no longer situate masculine identity solely in, and as it is perceived to be naturally at, the site of the penis-phallus equation.

These opposing versions of masculinity, one gay and the other straight, suggest a characteristic dialectic revolving around right/wrong, moral/perverse, natural/unnatural, them/us. However, a mere inversion of the subordinate term does not, and indeed cannot hope to, effectively rewrite masculinity. What it does, on the contrary, is to “re-right” masculinity. Or, as Ann Bergren, writing on architecture and gender, makes categorically clear, to re-right is nothing less than to re-(up)right:

To make right, to make whole and like new again, obliterating all trace of suture, leaving no scar. To put the castrated phallus back up right—and thereby to re-build an opposition between the absence and presence of: phallus, (w)holeness, substance, materiality. (1991: 108).

In other words, a substitution takes place. When one form of gender or sexuality replaces the other, there is then nothing but a replication of the very hegemonic and hierarchical

oppression instituted by, and against which the subordinate contests, the dominant term.

Yet, to rewrite (as opposed to re-right) is hardly only, as Bergren observes, a repetition of the same. Rather, to rewrite, and, as its consequence, to re-present, is dis coherence itself. And this has been my intention in using this particular term throughout the preceding pages: rewriting the male body is an act that acknowledges and re-presents that corporeality in terms of alternative identities. That is, within this categorization which dominant culture represents as the masculine, and that which academic debate focuses upon to discuss the representation of gender, this generic identification of masculinity with the male body can be, on the contrary, one of differences within itself.

Instead of marginalization, a gay male body poses the possibility of difference (here, it is sexual as much as it is cultural) within the dominant representation of masculinity. Where there is supposed to be a fixed, definable, and, ultimately, containable space for homosexuality, its very proximity within heterosexual configurations of the male body makes problematic the accepted spatialization of sexuality and gender according to the masculine/feminine, center(ed)/space(d) binarisms. Indeed, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate (chapters 3 and 5 in particular), such a spectacularized space of difference might locate the Other at the periphery but it also situates the reader within a dis coherent gaze which begins at the margins but returns him/her to the centered and now disrupted hom(m)o-sexual cultural practice of reading the male body as categorically masculine. Or, as Bersani himself notes, "Given the public discourse around the center of sexuality ... the margins may be the only place where the center becomes visible" (1987: 215), and, as I come to appreciate it, just an-other site/sight.

It is at the site of the margin/center, or, more accurately, that liminal space between these differences, that a reader finds him/herself reading the gay male body. This site of in-between-ness—that is, this space where margin and center are in an interface—is what the Proximate Other offers a revision of reading of masculinity. Conversely, this is also

where difference and similarity converge into, and confuse, those lines that delineate the individual reader's identity as the masculine reader when reading a representation of contradiction. This is where the male gaze, in its mediation between contradictions, is caught within the chiasm, that postmodern space of representation and re-presentation. I want to recuperate the chiasmatic potential of the male gaze as an integral part of the politics of dis coherence I am proposing by examining it in chapter 3.

SEEING THROUGH THE SPECTACLE: REWRITING MASCULINITY IN *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*

Such a revision of space between text and reader animates how we might dis coherence present descriptions of "masculinity." In short, this space where reading takes place is interactive. I take this to mean, in terms of reading, and specifically, reading within dis coherence, the necessary interaction between homosexuality (as the represented gay male body) and heterosexuality (the basis of reading this particular representation) as they each intersect, contest, and revise the seemingly unproblematic categorization of masculinity when we see and read the male body.

A succinct, and gay-inflected, analogy of reading as interaction can be seen in Bartlett's *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*. As Boy sits in his high-rise room negotiating the terrain beneath him, he constantly revises his gaze upon the city. He looks at the city to find the familiar landmarks and sites which he knows; his maps laid out before him either confirm or correct his attempts at cartography. Similarly, Bartlett's novel acts like a map allowing its reader to chart and rechart the body of a gay man, and, by extension, this body of gay writing. A reader might bring to this novel the dominant male gaze but it dis coherence when this text is constantly spectacularizing and revising the identity of Boy's gay male body as equally masculine, rather than diseased or effeminate.

Boy must mediate between the indeterminacy of the city's terrain and the culturally coded map before him. Likewise, readers of Bartlett's novel are forced to read the gay male body between the spectacle it is supposed to be and the site it actually is. Both instances are then in a continuous act of reflection and refraction:

Boy would sometimes sit staring at this view with a guide to the city open on his lap. He'd use it to identify and locate all the landmarks which he had stared up at during his exhausting explorations, now seen from a very different perspective.... He worked out where The Bar was on his maps, and then checked this perspective against the actual view—from where he saw the city it looked like The Bar was right in the middle of it, not hidden away at all like it was on the map. (1992: 43)

Although The Bar is unmarked on his map, Boy learns to read and to find it “in the middle” of this topography. But even though this is a topography where homosexual identity (The Bar) is already traced into the terrain, it cannot be read or interpreted openly as that authentic presence of difference; at best, it can only be expressed as a metaphoric, and distorted, spectacularization. And so it is with a reader who appropriates dis coherence in his/her reading of the spectacularized gay male body—there is the evidence of homosexuality's constructedness when reading the representation of the gay male body in both Bartlett and Leavitt's texts.

In concluding this chapter, I want to return to *Rebel Without a Cause*, and to read it through the gay-inflection of masculinity I have outlined above. Here, I want to foreground how this inflection effects a transgression of masculinity; more precisely, I seek to locate this primarily within a dis coherence of the spectatorial male gaze.

I will examine how dis coherence affects a reading of masculinity by mapping Jim's digression away from his father to the point of a dangerously close alignment with Plato. It is precisely this alignment between heterosexual and homosexual male bodies that is the point of anxiety and contention for heterosexual spectators: for a '50s America, this alignment is riddled with fears of communism and homosexuality while for today's audiences, Plato's close relationship with Jim approximates the present misreading of gay

men to be decidedly that particular HIV/AIDS contagion within society.

Germane to both audiences, however, is the suggestion of Plato's homosexual corruption of Jim's heterosexual masculine identity. These readings insist upon the homosexual subtext in order to re-establish heterosexual masculinity at the expense of an elided Other. In Ray's film, this is graphically displayed when an unarmed Plato is shot to death by the police (read father-figures). Plato is, in this film, constructed to exist outside the familial structures of heterosexually gendered identities. And because he is outside its controlling structures, outside any possible reclamation back into society, he is seen to be deviant and abnormal. "Homosexuality, through the character of Plato," observes Castiglia in his entertaining and lucid reinterpretation of this film, "is associated not only with insanity, then, but with complete alienation from the family ..." (1990: 210).

Of greater consequence, however, is the fear and incomprehension that materializes, for the spectator, when Plato's potentially subversive presence as the Proximate Other is highlighted. Plato's homosexuality is implied in Alan Ladd's photograph as it graces what should otherwise be that reverent site in a boy's locker—the space where the idolized Hollywood female star is pinned up. This fear is exacerbated by Plato's rather forward attachment to Jim from their very first meeting. Before Jim leaves for school, Frank tells his son to be selective in choosing his friends: "Be careful about choosing your pals; don't let them choose you." But it is Plato who chooses Jim. "In a film that defines manhood in terms of active choice ... Jim is," Castiglia emphatically announces, "strikingly passive, functioning more as the object of Plato's desire than as the subject of his own" (1990: 210). As the film progresses, Jim is shown to be increasingly passive: not only does he not object to Plato's advances (for want of a better word), he is unable to initiate any course of action that allows him to assert his masculine identity. In fact, his apparent masculinity is realized only when he is forced to react to the others around him; Buzz's challenge of the "chickie race" is just one example.

At the heart of this problem is an exchange of Jim's heterosexual, and hence,

masculine, identity. He has exchanged this identity in spite of his relationship with Judy. In exchanging his heterosexual masculinity, Jim outwardly addresses his identity in a series of clothes. Where Jim is initially seen in a jacket and tie, in clothes not unlike his father, he progressively sheds these for a red jacket. Instead of simply signalling his feminization, this red jacket, in the context of Ray's film, alludes to Judy's red lips and coat. Whereas those red lips incur the anger of, and, initiate the subsequent alienation from, her father, Jim's red jacket tropes him as defiantly outside his father's grasp.

Red, moreover, comes to resonate in, as it finally localizes itself as, the homosexual Plato. That Plato wears mismatched socks—half a red pair and the other, a dark navy blue—might amuse Judy and Jim as they play “family” at the mansion, but it must also (in keeping with the embedded intratextuality of Ray's film) signify his paradoxical status. For Judy and Jim, as well as Ray's spectators, Plato's body might be male but it is also sexually other. In his reading of this film, Wilson argues that the sign of these mismatched socks “symbolizes the schizophrenia of Plato's existence” (1988: 187). They also, and more damagingly, I would like to suggest, cite him as the Proximate Other. With his odd pair of socks, Plato is indeed the seemingly mismatched gender and sexuality that is the gay male body.

Although Plato refuses Jim's dress jacket at the beginning of the film, he is, in death, finally and ironically zipped up in Jim's red jacket. Addressed as he is in this red jacket, at the film's end, Plato's identity is publicly recognized as homosexual. More importantly, his sexuality is visually presented, in this cloaking, as a sight of defiance and denial: transposing Jim's jacket onto Plato's homosexual body codes the latter as a synecdoche of a masculinity “whose defining desires and identifications are ‘perverse’ with respect not so much to a moral as to a phallic standard” (Silverman 1992: 1).

In zipping up Plato in his jacket, Jim repudiates his own proximity to Plato and returns into his father's arms. The jacket Frank places on his son's shoulders is, at once, a redress into that hom(m)o-sexual space of the family as it is also the enabling space

allowing Jim's masculine identity to situate itself. "In the final exchange of jackets, Jim is," I concur with Castiglia, "re-covered [sic] by the patriarchal power to name and to transmit 'manhood'" (1990: 211).

CIRCUMSCRIBING THE PROMISED DAWN

But does Jim's return into his father's arms *totally* and *undeniably* situate his masculine identity as distinguishably heterosexual? Can it continue legitimating, for Ray's spectator, a reading of Jim's male body as resolutely masculine because he is reclaimed into a heterosexual contract with Judy? I think not.

Jim's return into his father's straightjacket is not unproblematic and neither is it a perfect fit: the size is wrong as is the cut. His promised masculine identity is, and here I part company with Castiglia, hardly heterosexual. At best, what Jim understands masculinity to be is itself tempered by Plato's homosexual presence. A spectator watching the film's construction of masculinity from a heterosexual point of view might be, according to Dollimore, "a bearer of a social process" in whose male gaze Plato is identifiably Other. Yet precisely because Plato's male but homosexual body is "*written back into the social order*" (Dollimore 1991: 221), a refraction of this spectator's gaze takes place; a dis coherence occurs in how he/she sees and reads Ray's representation of masculine identity when it is exemplified in this spectacularized exchange of jackets.

Refracted thus, the masculinity offered by Frank's jacket will be as confining and as containing even while Jim wears it to address his masculine identity. A spectator is given a hint of this when Jim, in the course of the film, mimics the voice of Mr Magoo, a cartoon character whose voice the actor playing Frank Stark, Jim Backus provides. This is hilarious for its intertextual resonance: inasmuch as Backus' voice lends Mr Magoo his cartoon identity, and his enactment of Frank Stark provides the spectator with a filmic

identity, Jim's conflation of both identities in his mimicry reduces Frank's masculinity to the level of the comic. And this is, at a deeper level, disturbing for, as Castiglia points out, Jim emasculates Frank's authority as a father-figure by reducing him to his cartoon alter-ego (1990: 210). I think there is more to this. What is ironically foregrounded in this scene is Jim's inability to articulate a masculine identity in any other voice but that of his father. This articulation is however one of mimicry—in other words, an enactment of a voice—and such action is both a performance of and an admission that the voice of Frank Stark as the masculine father-figure is nothing less than a construction that is potentially comic.

In the observatory, prior to being killed, Plato asks, "Jim, do you think that the end of the world will come at nighttime [*sic*]?" Jim answers, "No, at dawn." In effect, this encapsulates, as *Rebel Without a Cause* ends, what I am now able to re-present as an ironic ending to Ray's seemingly straightforward telling of the parable of the prodigal son. In the film, dawn brings with it Plato's death; however, his necessary erasure cannot bring with it the promised beginning for Judy and Jim nor can it affirm Jim's masculine identity in the very act of standing up and becoming his own man. As Ray's camera pulls back to focus from on high, in a shot resembling both a godlike and a panoptical point of view, they are seen to be driven away, together with Jim's parents, in those black police cars. But these cars suggest much more than a return to law and order: they fix, in their confining space, Jim's masculine identity as necessarily heterosexual. But they also, more significantly, foreground the problematized nature of just such a dominant identity.

CHAPTER THREE

CHIASM, OR WHERE THE GAZE (RE)TURNS

Ways of looking are inevitably linked to ways of speculating, of theorizing ... and, ultimately, to ways of representing oneself.

Mary Ann Doane⁵⁸

In *Men in the Public Eye: The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies*, Hearn convincingly argues for “the public eye” which is that “structural arrangement, the social structuring of visibility and invisibility, to which all may be subject” (1992: 3). His description of the “public eye” is not unlike the male gaze: for Hearn, men as well as women are arranged to inhabit that fixed subject position of reading, the position of the male reader. Men are, however, seen to be naturally predisposed to this position of masculine prowess: more than anything, being biologically male engenders this inherently germane association between body, the male gaze, and gender. Conversely, this association is assumed to be the dominant representation of masculine subjectivity.

In so far as the gaze is deemed masculine, and, potentially, indicative of the subject position individual readers deploy to read gender, dominant culture tends to appropriate and recycle it in the construction of gendered textual images within the economy of exchange it supports. In its narrative appeal, in its spectacular dazzlement, in its seeming, and unproblematic, naturalness, dominant culture puts forth these apparently truthful facts: women are sexual objects of pleasure and exploitation, gay men are never man enough,

⁵⁸Doane, *Desire* 37.

and men are to be defined by that long held dictum, “a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.” These representations, although mired within a fragmented postmodern reality, continue to mime hom(m)o-sexual depictions of gender and sexuality. Within this discourse, then, how a reader represents the gendered identity of corporeality is already predetermined. I agree with Martin Jay who writes, in his article, “In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought,” that

what is in fact “seen” is not a given, objective reality open to an innocent eye. Rather, it is an epistemic field constructed as much linguistically as visually.... (1986: 182)

As seeing/reading subjects within hom(m)o-sexual culture, we are, it must be clear by now, caught within a contained and, indeed, constricting visuality.

Caught in the middle of all this, yet oblivious to his inevitable misprision, is the heterosexual male subject. He sees himself as the paradigmatic spectator or reader because his acculturated practice of the male gaze is centered in the prevailing hom(m)o-sexual discourse on gender that is itself assumed to be natural, universal, and ideal. In writing “about their subjectivity and power,” notes a critical Peter Middleton, such men “have constantly universalized it at the same time, and assumed that the rationality of their approach was the sum total of rationality.” In turn, these assumptions Middleton critiques immunize the term “masculinity” from any “disturbing self-examination by men” (1992: 3), or, as the title of his book sums it all up, from an inward gaze.

In this chapter, I seek to follow Middleton’s question: what happens when masculinity, as we presently understand it to be, is scrutinized? More importantly, if the male gaze turns inwards upon itself to examine its own reading practice, will the present discourse on masculinity, as practised within gender studies, be severely affected? In terms of visuality, who or what exactly is being spectacularized? To what extent can a seeing/reading subject depend upon dis coherence to effect a revision of reading masculinity? And how does dis coherence, in turn, affect a reader’s self-identification as

the masculine reading subject?

In this chapter, I want to expand upon the points raised in chapter 2. In particular, I want to develop the transgressive centrality the Proximate Other—that male body in contra-diction—plays in a reader’s rewriting of “masculinity” by highlighting its reorientation of the reader’s male gaze as a chiasmatic space. Deploying Derrida’s understanding of the chiasm as a space where iterability (that simultaneous act of repetition and alteration) takes place, I map this onto the problematic instance of reading the male body when it is represented as a site of contra-diction. Such a representation, I will argue, locates the individual within a chiasm of reading that situates, effects, and animates a discoherent practice of representing the supposed masculinity of the male body. Mapping such an alternative practice of reading gender onto Lacan’s work on subjectivity, I then turn to his understanding of the gaze and reconsider the problematic interplay between the spectator, the gaze, and the screen in the formation of an individual’s subjectivity as the masculine reading subject. In what follows, I will seek to develop further the politics of dis coherence: by focusing upon the chiasmatic potential of the male gaze when it is forced to read a male body in contra-diction, I wish to illustrate how we can rewrite “masculinity” beyond the hom(m)o-sexual parameters of spectacularizing Otherness only in terms of presence and absence, and “masculinity” in terms of its binarized opposite, femininity.

BATMAN AND THE ERASURE OF VICKI VALE

In *Engendering Fictions*, Cranny-Francis engagingly describes the influential role fairy-tales and comics play in the construction of normative, and, undoubtedly, stereotypical representations of gender within culture. One of the examples she uses to

illustrate her arguments is *Batman, The Movie*.⁵⁹ “The movie *Batman*, a fairytale for both children and adults judging by its enormous box-office success, is,” she writes, “a powerful reconstruction of this discourse of patriarchal sexuality” (1992: 84). I agree with Cranny-Francis: what is upheld throughout, and especially, at the end of, this film is the hom(m)o-sexual exchange of Vicki Vale between Batman/Bruce Wayne and The Joker. Ostensibly, this is portrayed as a struggle, if not a duel, over Vale as the damsel in distress. In the final instance, however, this film can be seen to concern itself with the heterosexual conquest of Woman as sign. This is reproduced in paradigmatic hom(m)o-sexual terms which summarize Burton’s film: man in control, woman as spectacle; woman in distress, man as hero.

Whereas Cranny-Francis objects to the film’s continued suppression of the feminine other through a hom(m)o-sexual commodification of Woman, I choose to examine, instead, in terms of spectacularization, the inherent male gaze which the producers of this cultural text appropriate to reproduce and ensure the dominant discourse of gender representation.

Where the comic superhero is concerned, as Middleton remarks, his/her gender is represented through its physical and/or attired address. Male superheroes like Batman embody masculinity because they possess hypermasculine physiques and strength. In contrast, the villains who are

the foolish or the bad have bodies which don’t conform to this stereotype. Roundness and fatness or any sign of effeminacy are all clear indications of weakness. (Middleton 1992: 31)

In these examples which Middleton details, what is evident in the stereotypification of superheroes and villains is the construction of engendered identities that must adhere to

⁵⁹*Batman, The Movie*, dir. Tim Burton, with Michael Keaton, Kim Basinger and Jack Nicholson, Warner, 1989.

the existing cultural representations of what masculine identity should be. Such adherence, however, must take the form of spectacularized displays of masculine identity; within the comic genre, the disproportionate emphasis on the superhero's hypermasculinized strength and physique highlights the point I am making.

Within this particular typification of the male superhero, then, *Batman, The Movie* intersects with the spectatorial male gaze to foreground the cultural construction of masculinity which affirms, by the film's end, that hom(m)o-sexual promise of Batman as hero and man. Not only has he saved Vale and placed her in his care (she is literally brought to the safe confines of his limousine after her rescue) but Batman stands erect, his hypermasculinity spectacularly displayed like a phallus upon which the film closes.

What Batman achieves is, however, more insidious: he upholds (and it is this which I believe is the underlying and crucial subtext of Burton's film) the dominant spectatorial male gaze. In doing so, this film replays the dominant hom(m)o-sexual gender relations between male and female spectators. By examining the construction of a spectator's understanding of gender in *Batman, The Movie* through the male gaze, I wish to argue that the real threat lurking beneath the surface of Gotham City is not The Joker; it is Batman's need to police and maintain such a gaze.

The struggle between Batman and The Joker is, in visual terms, a contest of alternative gazes at and on the sight of Vicki Vale. For Batman, she is the sexual prize promised with the success of his efforts; for The Joker, Vale becomes the bait which he uses to lure Batman into the trap he sets. In each instance, she is the gap, that spatialized difference, between these two men as they increasingly come to identify their masculinity in her.

More significantly, Vale becomes for the spectator a surface where this contest is played out: she is, metaphorically speaking, that screen which occasions the male gaze to fixate itself and, in turn, enable a masculine self-representation. It is thus easy to understand why Vale is seen to inhabit the position of the spectacle in Burton's film: she

fulfills Mulvey's observation that the position of femininity in the film is best described in terms of a woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness."

Yet Vale signifies more than a contest for Woman. Vicki Vale is a photographer who captures through her camera, through her photographic lenses, images. These images mime fact: they are photographs reproducing and representing, as the film's discursive construction suggests, a culture centered in the figure of the male and hypermasculine superhero who signifies, without doubt, the phallus. In spite of being a woman photographer (read spectator), Vale's photographic focus comes to signify, within the context of the film, that larger spectatorial gaze within which the film is positioned. She is, like Burton's spectators, in possession of a gaze that is enabled only through the mediated lenses of the camera as they are trained squarely upon this figure of the superhero, Batman.

But photography is more than reproduction. Photography might capture the scene, freeze the frame, and fix the object, but to photograph is also to repeat the same scene, to replay that frame, and, as a result, to recover the object's constructedness. To photograph, therefore, is to reveal the ob-sceneness of both this action and its product. In short, it is to re-present.

The Joker recognizes this. For him, Vale can potentially disrupt the seamless and fixed world of the superhero because she is not just reproducing but re-presenting cultural representations through her photography. She cannot fall into his hands for she poses, in terms of her photography, a possible exposure of gender as construction, and, by extension, masculinity as less than natural. Batman cannot allow this to happen: he has to maintain the dominant, hegemonic male gaze. Because Vale is increasingly seen to be more a photograph than a photographer, she is appropriately "positioned" by The Joker as a prized image, and this is played out when he locates her in that scene within the art gallery where she is but just another prized image. Yet Batman must disavow this; he cannot allow Vale to be revealed as a construction of gender. She must appear to be

natural, to be Woman, to be the desired object of his gaze. Only then is his identity as the masculine superhero secured.

For a spectator of Burton's film, the ending is a resolution that is hom(m)o-sexually expected. Vale's body, and the femininity it articulates, is seen, and, more pertinently, believed, to signify helplessness, and her rescue by Batman completes that representation of gender which closes the film, masculinity over femininity. This is, according to the film, the natural course of gendered relations. But Vale's photography is, in the context of the film, a synecdoche for what the gaze is, a constructed point of view. If this is exactly what the gaze, and, by extension, what its supposedly masculine representation, can be, why is there an endemic unwillingness, on the part of most spectators, to understand Batman as anything other than the heroic masculine man?

THE DARK KNIGHT: BATMAN'S OTHER SIDE

VICKI VALE: Could you tell me which one of these guys is Bruce Wayne?

BATMAN/BRUCE WAYNE: Well, I'm not sure.

Batman, The Movie

In their first meeting at Wayne Mansion, Batman/Bruce Wayne refuses to answer Vale's question. At best, his refusal can be construed as a touch of the comic in this film. There is, on the contrary, a deeper suggestion: as the film unfolds, this scene (in retrospect) reverberates with the persistent uncertainty of who Bruce Wayne really is. This suggestion translates itself into that particular question a spectator must ask of the represented male body in this film: who or what is Batman? The question looms large when Vale, The Joker, and the people of Gotham City attempt to articulate both Bruce Wayne and his alter-ego. For Burton's spectators, this has to be a question about

gendered identity: is Bruce Wayne identifiably masculine because he is Batman, the hero?

Let me explain why. *Batman, The Movie* reproduces the paradigm of hom(m)o-sexual gender and sexual relations in which women are superseded by men. Monique Wittig, whose writings express one strand of feminist thought, essentialist feminism, scrutinizes this categorization as “the heterosexual contract.” Within it, gendered relations are localized in and spatialized as a discursive contract. She describes this contract thus:

Indeed the conventions and the language show on the dotted line the bulk of the social contract—which consists in living in heterosexuality. For to live is to live heterosexuality. In fact, in my mind social contract and heterosexuality are two superimposable notions. The social contract I am talking about is heterosexuality. (1992: 40)

A contractual arrangement of this nature articulates how individual readings of femininity and masculinity tend ever so often to be articulated in terms of heterosexuality. Being the basis of hom(m)o-sexual culture, heterosexuality engenders itself as the privileged representation which constitutes how a spectator understands Bruce Wayne’s masculine identity. Whether the spectator is male or female, the act of looking upon Bruce Wayne/Batman’s male body cannot not embody it as masculine. To put it another way, this cultural bias implies that a spectator watching this film will, first and foremost, always bring to bear an understanding of the male body as characteristically gendered in hom(m)o-sexual terms. A spectator, it would seem, is never a “subject of” but rather a “subject to” (Silverman 1983: 173) the hierarchical and hegemonic depiction of the male body as resolutely masculine within culture.

Males watching *Batman, The Movie* will come to locate their subjectivity in the sight of Vicki Vale as the space where Batman and The Joker move the narrative of this film. They come to realize what takes place in such a contract between men and women: subjectivity is intrinsically masculine while femininity is nothing but the surface which grounds its representation. Or, as de Lauretis writes in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema*, “each reader—male or female—is constrained and defined within

the two positions of a sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other" (1984: 121).

The boundaries within which the male gaze operate cannot envision the identity of Bruce Wayne's male body in terms of spatiality. The male gaze can, on the contrary, envision his masculine identity only in terms of his domination and colonization of space. As spatiality suggestively links the feminine and surface as void, gap, hole—in short, with absence and lack—a spectator reads masculinity only in terms of what the Other (notably, always Woman) does not have. This then is a matter of locating the gaze at that sign of difference, the penis/phallus.

Burton's film screens such a difference in its representation of Vicki Vale. Yet, what is also on display is Batman/Bruce Wayne. His male body is as much a spectacularized site of hypermasculinity in this film as Vale's body is its feminine spectacle. His fights with The Joker are spectacles in every sense of the word: a spectator only has to refer to the scale and scene of their final duel, high above Gotham City, with its countless moments of frenzied anxiety and excitement, to realize that what we are watching is the spectacle of good versus evil, of Batman's hypermasculinity versus the deformed masculinity of The Joker (his deformed male body being the result of his fall, at the beginning of the film, into a bath of industrial acid). Besides, all this is spectacularized on that larger than life screen, *Batman, The Movie*, which is presented for the spectatorial pleasure of the movie audience.

More significantly, what is screened in this spectacle is an anxiety pertaining to Bruce Wayne's identity. If he is masculine, he is identifiably so because he is Batman; remove his cape and mask, and Bruce Wayne's masculinity is hardly germane to, let alone essentialized in, his male body. When Wayne and Vale share a night together, the expected scene of masculine representation, the male-female sex act, is displaced by the comical yet telling scene which Cranny-Francis summarizes thus:

Wayne eschews emotional involvement in favour of keeping himself tough and

independent for his encounters with his enemy: hence the scene to which Vale wakes in Wayne Manor (her new lover is not asleep but exercising on a hanging frame—at 3am!). (1992: 86)

However, his physical workout ensures that it is the identity “Batman” who is in shape, not Bruce Wayne. More urgently, this scene exposes his masculine identity to be a disguise. Bruce Wayne is never a hero till he is Batman, and only then is he ever man enough.

When individual spectators see and articulate Burton’s film, they do so with an image of masculinity represented as “natural” and “real” despite its very fictionality, and which is, in this case, the unattainable masculinity of the superhero. However, behind the surface of this seemingly innocent, comic-like coloured fantasia of good versus evil, and fixed gendered roles, lies a dark, sinister side. It is a side revealing how the ideologically dominant intertextuates itself in the otherwise seemingly unproblematic texts of popular culture. In this instance, it is the heterosexual instantiation of the male body as masculine and unproblematic.

The mechanics of the male gaze is one such instance within dominant culture. For consumers of a popular text such as *Batman, The Movie*, to employ the male gaze as the practice of reading the male body is to find ourselves in a situation where the masculine identity it supposedly engenders for the spectator is not what it possibly can be but what this identity is *imaged to be* within hom(m)o-sexuality’s fascination with the body of the male superhero.

READING: SEDUCTION AND THE INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY

When we are seduced, are we not seduced into conforming ourselves with an

image: the simulacrum of one whom we believe can be loved?

Ross Chambers⁶⁰

As I come to understand it, the male gaze is a reproducer of, even as it is initially a product arising from, the cultural boundaries within which we are situated to interpret both texts and its representations of gender. In this dual sense of reproduction and representation, the male gaze might best be described as a privileged hom(m)o-sexual cultural practice of reading.

In a manner of speaking, this practice illustrates how this gaze, as it reads textual representations of corporeality, is itself bound to and animated by those circumscribing boundaries of dominant culture. That is to say, the meaning of masculinity in this film is dependent upon the interpretive community which enables a reading of this text, and, more accurately, its depiction of the male body. Stanley Fish has argued “that meanings come already calculated, not because of norms embedded in the language but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms” (1980: 318).

Within such a structure, the representation of corporeality is never supposed free-play; rather, it is specifically predetermined by, as it is homogenized in, an aggregation of hom(m)o-sexually shared interpretive strategies. Fish writes: “communication occurs only *within* such a system (or context, or situation, or interpretive community) and that ... understanding achieved ... is specific to that system and determinate only within its confines” (1980: 304). Within this community, each encounter with a textual representation of the male or female body realizes itself as a totality of representation,⁶¹ a

⁶⁰Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, Theory and History of Literature 12 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 15.

⁶¹Linda Hutcheon delineates this concept of a totality of representation in narrative in her book, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1989). She writes: “The function of the

totality in which masculinity and femininity conform and confirm their respective hom(m)o-sexual configuration in spite of a violence of representation. Within a community that is centered on hom(m)o-sexuality, these preconceived meanings that Fish is concerned with locate themselves within the penis-phallus equation.

In his explication of seduction as a politics of textual reading, Ross Chambers, in his book, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, re-positions the reader. The reader is no longer aligned with the author because of their shared subject position of representation; he is, instead, situated in relation to the context of reading. Chambers, if I read him correctly, is referring to the engendered situationality within the interaction between text and reader. Because the text is that site of shared interpretive strategies, the reader is seduced into reading as “a means of achieving mastery in the absence of such means of control” (Chambers 1984: 212). Whereas Chambers argues this reversal of authorial power as an “instrument available to the situationally weak against the situationally strong” (1984: 212), I cannot help but note this problem: if the dominant cultural discourse is hom(m)o-sexuality are we not to infer that despite the specific situationality of the text, a reader is seduced, primarily, into reading its representations of corporeality hom(m)o-sexually? Such is the case, I am convinced, when we appropriate the male gaze to read the represented male body in a text such as Manuel Puig’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

Puig’s novel offers itself as an excellent text where we can examine the issues I raise above. Puig’s use of the narration motif—in particular, Molina’s narration of movies for Valentin, “the spectator”—approximates the subject position a reader adopts to read his

term totalizing ... is to point to the *process* ... by which writers of history, fiction, or even theory render their materials coherent, continuous, unified—but always with an eye to the control and mastery of those materials, even at the risk of doing violence to them. It is this link to power, as well as process, that the adjective ‘totalizing’ is meant to suggest ...” (62).

own novel. Here, the reader is not unlike the spectator watching Puig's "screening" of masculinity in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. In what follows, I want to argue that even though this novel seems to demand a reading working towards the elision of that problematic representation of the male body in contradiction (Molina's male body, in particular), it is an ending that disturbs a reader's otherwise hom(m)o-sexually engendered reading of the text. Furthermore, I want to posit how Molina's seduction of Valentin serves to potentially discohere a reader's identification of the male body with heterosexuality and masculinity (this is a point I shall only intimate initially and develop much later in the chapter). In the course of these examinations, I want to foreground how a reader's male gaze might fail to effectively engender his/her masculine subjectivity as the male reader of texts.

"YOU-WILL-BE-STRAIGHT-OR-YOU-WILL-NOT-BE"

Despite "its fundamental air of ambiguity," as Pamela Bacarisse notes in *The Necessary Dream: A Study of Manuel Puig* (1988: 88), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* tends to foster an interpretation which argues it to be a homosexual text. A reading of this nature alludes to the novel's underlying and unabashedly implied homosexual plot as well as to the substantial sociological and psychoanalytical footnotes on homosexuality that complement Puig's narrative. This novel, it would seem, is both a course in and a discourse of politicized homosexuality.

There is, on the other hand, something much deeper, and more important, and this has to do with—because of the novel's tendency to center homosexuality—how Molina is seen and read through the male gaze. In so far as objections against Puig's novel revolve around Molina's sexual seduction of Valentin, these arise, in part, because this particular seduction invariably suggests the larger corruption of hom(m)o-sexual visuality, and as its

possible consequence, the reader's inability to situate representation.

The novel ends with Molina's death: not only is this a necessary end, it is, according to the dictates of the dominant manner of reading the gendered identification of the male body, demanded. In hom(m)o-sexual terms, his death is justified for Molina threatens heterosexual masculinity, and, more importantly, a reader's description of the male body as recognizably masculine. He is a threat which transcends the individual male body of Valentin for he represents a site of masculine contra-diction and incomprehension for the reader.

Although he is anatomically male, Molina engenders himself a woman: "But as for my friends and myself, we're a hundred percent female.... We're normal women; we sleep with men" (Puig 1991: 203).⁶² His aberrant nature is made visible and, moreover, demonized by the evidence of his imprisonment for the corruption of minors. Such moral transgression marks him as a social deviant whilst confirming his pathological status; his homosexual condition is contagious as it is diseased. Imprisoned in Cell Seven, he shares this space with Valentin. But Valentin is all that Molina is not; he is more than a revolutionary agitating change, he is a heterosexual man.

Both are, significantly, confined and contained within a carceral system determined to dictate their behaviour within this prison space. In turn, this incarceration alludes to Molina's inability to express the "woman" that is entrapped within his male body in any other discourse but that which positions him as a transvestized Other. Analogously, both these instances recall the fixed boundaries which police a reader's gendered representation of corporeality within hom(m)o-sexual culture. As such, Molina must be for Valentin the Other. But Molina does not exist as a distanced or displaced other as he is, instead, a representation of contra-dictions: his body is, at once, both a site of sexual difference and corporeal sameness. And in this particular configuration of corporeality, Molina is the

⁶²Subsequent quotations from the novel will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Proximate Other in this novel.

Molina, like Valentin, is under dictation; they are subjected to the panoptical gaze of the prison regime that codes them criminal. Their repression is reflected in the footnotes Puig employs to complement the already constricted space Molina and Valentin are forced into. Bordering the narrative itself, these footnotes act as boundaries that frame our reading of the novel: this juxtaposition illustrates that reading is more than a mere engagement with the text; it is a process already centered within the repressive male gaze as it frames how we come to understand the text.

When Puig quotes Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and Denis Altman, as well as other theorists concerned with repression (151-152), he demonstrates, in these psychoanalytic and sociological footnotes, how repression is both culturally and individually overdetermined. In terms of understanding masculinity, this repression manifests itself in a strict adherence to heterosexual configurations of sexuality and gender as they relate to corporeality. Even though Molina is denied a masculine identification because of his sexual otherness, Valentin cannot help but confront his need to definitively locate masculinity at the site of the male body, one which Molina exhibits, on the contrary, to be a location of similitude and dissimilitude. Like Valentin's limited and limiting male gaze as he attempts to understand Molina, a reader employing the male gaze comes to read masculinity according to that dictum Wittig describes, in "The Straight Mind," as "you-will-be-straight-or-will-not-be" (1992: 28). Their imprisonment, it would seem, is nothing short of a hom(m)o-sexual dictation in which the male body is automatically coded masculine because of its corporeality. Or, is it?

"IT'S ALL IN CODE"

What we have at the center of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is Valentin's problematic

reading of Molina's male body. For the reader, this translates itself into a crisis of representing masculinity at this corporeal site. What is this body? How can we represent it? And is it always masculine because it is corporeally male?

For Molina, this crisis manifests itself in his refusal to continue reading those overdetermined hom(m)o-sexual codes engendering him an Other, or, more specifically, an effeminized Other. In turn, Molina forces Valentin's acculturated male gaze into a moment of visual discomfort: he can no longer read Molina according to, and solely because of, his male body. Theirs is, more correctly, a crisis of the male gaze as the dominant practice of reading gender.

Whereas Valentin is able to read subversively as seen when he deciphers Mari's coded letter—"It's all in code," to which Molina rebukes, "Well, it's not very clear, that much I could tell" (134)—he cannot see nor read Molina as anything other than a spectacle. Valentin's need to make sense of Molina's male body because of his determination to identify himself as a "woman" spells out the feminine transvestism Molina's body undergoes. Conversely, such transvestism transforms this body into a homosexual space, and records Molina as an example of the gay man as a (drag) queen. In the context of Puig's novel, Molina represents the male body in contradiction. Valentin's point of view, therefore, compounds Molina's affixed gendered site in the novel: in narrating films to assuage their misery, depression, and pain, Molina himself becomes the spectacularized image⁶³ of the confused masculine identity the Proximate Other is deemed to be. When asked whom he identifies with in the movie *Cat People* he

⁶³In the movie version of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the spectacularization of Molina iterates itself in clothes. Throughout most of the film, Valentin is dressed in conventional and dowdy pants and singlet. In contrast, Molina is continually (ad)dressed in an array of dressing-gowns, turbans, soft and exotic wear: in short, Molina is always represented in costume. See the film, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, dir. Hector Babenco, with William Hurt, Raul Julia and Sonia Braga, Palace, 1986.

narrates, Molina answers Valentin, "With Irena, what do you think? She's the heroine, dummy. Always the heroine" (25).

But Molina's identification with the heroine, coupled with Valentin's determination to locate him in that space of the spectacularized heroine, is fatal. Irena is a *femme fatale*: her kiss may be desired by the male characters of the film but each kiss ends in death. In Puig's novel, Molina is similarly positioned. Like Irena who metamorphoses from human into animal, Molina becomes, quite literally, "the spider woman, that traps men in her web" (260). He seduces Valentin who has to rely upon Molina's own gaze to "see," as it were, these films Molina narrates. Molina's dictation henceforth becomes for Valentin both a seductive and an alternative sight. Increasingly dependent upon this Other in order to envision the films, Valentin's acculturated male gaze is slowly eroded and revised as it is mediated in, even inflected by, Molina's dictation. In "watching" Molina's movies, they both come to share a similar gaze. Valentin's gaze is, in other words, disturbed. As a result, it is displaced from its masculine subject position of reading representation.

This threat to Valentin's male gaze is all the more urgent when we learn, mid-way through the novel, that Molina's tales and acts of kindness are an overt display designed to solicit from Valentin information regarding the revolution. In turn, Molina's solicitation enables him to "purchase" his freedom from the prison authorities. In taking into his own hands a course of action leading to his freedom, Molina destabilizes the ascribed gender positions both Valentin and himself seem to occupy in the novel. Instead of being the transvestized, if not feminine, spectacle of a male body that is Other, a reader finds Molina usurping that traditional site of masculinity where it is the masculine subject who directs the narrative of the text.

Indeed, Molina shapes and directs the course of events which lead eventually to Valentin's seduction and his eventual release from prison. In other words, where Valentin should characteristically be "the [masculine] spectator as subject of vision, the 'figure for,' and the term of reference of, its constructed 'narrative space'" (de Lauretis 1984:

74)—with regard to the narrated films—he is instead under Molina’s dictation where he comes to be displaced both visually and spatially. When Valentin’s gaze is inflected by Molina’s narration, by his excess “femininity,” his identity as the masculine spectator cannot locate itself in this gaze, let alone in his male body. As a result, where there is supposed to be the exercise of masculine power by Valentin, there is, in its place, a dependency, and perhaps, even an emasculation, of the masculine subject who is reading this contradictory representation of masculinity, Molina.

IT IS (A) GENDER FUCK

A man must be male and masculine and nothing else.

Antony Easthope⁶⁴

To some extent, and as it is represented in Puig’s novel, seduction suggests the humanizing effect Molina has upon Valentin. As the novel progresses, Valentin begins to understand Molina, arriving at the point where he himself admits this: “I learned a lot from you, Molina” for “you’ve made me think about so many things, of that you can be sure” (261).

There is, however, another way in which a reader of Puig’s novel might appreciate how seduction functions within the context of the novel. Seduction can be, in addition, dangerous and subversive: to seduce a person is to lead him/her astray as it also suggests a possible entrapment into either a position or action that is contrary to one’s normal behaviour. Molina’s seduction of Valentin produces just such an effect.

Valentin is seduced into a sexual act which contradicts the dominant configuration

⁶⁴Easthope, *Gotta Do* 167.

of masculine identity; his male body engages in homosexual sex, and hence transgresses the heterosexual paradigm of sex acts—male-female sex—that guarantees its gendered identity within culture. Even though he enacts the active, dominant, and masculine role of the male-female paradigm when he and Molina finally engage in sex, Valentin's actions cannot mark him as anything less than one who is like Molina, for most readers of this novel. This sexual seduction spectacularizes Valentin's male body as one which is not only like Molina's but it overdetermines his body, in a hom(m)o-sexual reading of corporeality, as that sexual other, the gay male body.

In the context of Puig's novel, Molina sees himself as a "woman": he wants to be penetrated by a man. But Valentin's penetration of Molina cannot embody him as a real woman despite his perceived lack, nor can it disavow Molina's male body. Like Molina's failure to engender himself a "woman," Valentin's sexual seduction suggests more than his emasculation, and the accompanying feminization of his male body. What a reader of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* must confront and grapple with, in each of these instances, is the dislocation between reading the body and representing it according to the penis-phallus equation that determines gender representation within dominant culture. Such a dislocation must begin to question the ability of the male gaze to firstly, read corporeality when it is represented as a possible site of difference and secondly, engender the individual reader in terms of that generic masculine subject, the male reader.

For the reader, Valentin's seduction is an instance of that problematic representation, the gender fuck. In its broadest context, the term "gender fuck" postulates a possible exchange of gender identities which aims to complicate the existing hom(m)o-sexual paradigm of gendered and sexual relations by forcing a conjunction of opposing sexualities within the same corporeal space. We can appreciate how this concept of "gender fuck" (which has its origins within the present "queer" politics that advocate gay and lesbian rights in the United Kingdom and the United States of America) works in this novel.

Let us examine this concept of “gender fuck” by returning to the final chapters of Puig’s novel. Molina leaves the prison, and begins to replicate Valentin’s role as the revolutionary. As far as the authorities are concerned, he is, for all intents and purposes, not unlike Valentin, the revolutionary. This comparison to Valentin, moreover, repositions Molina’s gendered identity; he is now coded as masculine. On the other hand, a tortured Valentin ends the novel by becoming a reproducer of Molina’s gaze when he narrates a filmic-fantasy (which is exactly what Valentin’s dream sequence is) that recalls Molina’s dictation. Valentin’s actions recall an earlier scene. While in prison, Molina narrates the film of a diva who enchants a journalist; he points out to Valentin that the lyrics of the bolero the journalist sings as he remembers the diva suggest a coalescing of identities: “I live in you ... you live in me ...” (240). Ironically, this realizes itself in that final scene of Valentin’s dream sequence. Here, he echoes these lyrics, indeed Molina’s style of narrating films, when he says, “if the two of us think the same then we’re together” (281). Valentin is, Puig seems to intimate, a version of Molina himself by the novel’s end.

This exchange of identities—a gender fuck, in short—arises out of an inter(dis)course between the protagonists. The verbal and visual exchanges between Molina and Valentin, which generate such a disengagement between body and identity, allude to the exchanges issuing from as well as permeating through the orifices of their mouths and eyes. These orifices, in turn, recall the space where homosexual sex takes place, the anus. Within the dominant discourse of (hetero)sexual relations, this unnatural act of anal intercourse violates the prevailing categorization of masculinity for it violates the otherwise heterosexual identification of the male body. In other words, there is a continual inter(dis)course between Valentin and Molina, and the contrasting sexual identities they represent, at the site of the male body.

What does gender fuck—these differing, and interchangeable, representations of the male body—mean for a reader who should identify this particular corporeality as

irrefutably heterosexual and masculine? One possible implication is a necessary reconsideration of how we read the male body, and its apparent masculine identity, both within and without the field of gender studies. A far more important, and urgent, need demands that we rethink the seemingly unproblematic alignment between sexual intercourse and the gendered identities it sets in place. Within culture, one's sex is argued to exist *as* one's gender. Consequently, the desire for the other sex intextuates one's desire as heterosexual whilst affirming one's gendered subjectivity as it is hom(m)o-sexually identifiable. Within this matrix, heterosexual masculinity sanctions reproductive intercourse; it prohibits, if not disavows, other forms of sexual and gendered relations that do not correspond with its economy of hom(m)o-sexuality. Molina's seduction of Valentin problematizes these apparently logical equations which order the reading of gender within dominant culture.

As the novel unfolds, Molina is less the spider woman as he is the panther woman of *Cat People*; his kiss is the kiss of death. When Valentin kisses Molina, he kisses a male body that is unmasculine, and if heterosexuality characterizes one's identity as a man, one is—at least within the dominant cultural expression of gender—as good as dead when kissing the homosexual Other. In kissing Molina, Valentin does not only confront a body that is sexually different and threatening but the undeniable evidence of a body that is similar to, and recognizably like, his own male body. Conversely, Valentin's body is marked unmasculine, and its corporeal alignment with gendered identity ruptured by kissing, which is, in the context of the novel, representative of homosexual inter(dis)course. In kissing each other, Molina and Valentin foreground the destabilizing effect their homosexual act alludes to, the necessary separation of the divergent sexualities.

The problems I raise above translate themselves into a reader's difficulty to correlate gender and sex (and in using this word, "sex," I want to emphasize its reference to the body and the act of intercourse). When a reader reads the interdiscourse between both

men, he/she faces nothing less than a denaturalization of the alignment in question. But this denaturalization is, more correctly, a defamiliarization of how we read with the male gaze: Valentin fucking Molina violently severs the supposed mimesis of sex and gender that hom(m)o-sexual culture privileges. To gender fuck, then, is to rewrite the categories sex and gender as well as sexuality too.

VOICES, BODIES, AND THE DREADED SIGHT

In the course of Puig's survey of the changing relationship between these men, one form this rewriting of sex and gender takes is dictation. Unlike Valentin, whose incarceration is dictated by the prison authorities, Molina appropriates the confining dictation of the prison and transforms it into an alternative discourse.

Molina deploys dictation to displace heterosexuality as the basis in which sex and gender are bound in an indivisible bind; he achieves this by dictating those films which seduce Valentin into an-other subject position of reading representation, into an-Other gaze. Interestingly, it is Molina's voice, in its replay of the films he narrates, that highlights the possibility of an-other (in)sight challenging the existing practice of reading. This insight threatens the otherwise rigid alignment of corporeality and gender that both Valentin and the reader bring to a description, and an identification, of Molina's male body. His voice—that expression of the “woman” within—repudiates the general dictum Silverman distinguishes for sexual difference, “female voices should proceed from female bodies, and male voices from male bodies” (1988: 47). More importantly, his voice transforms itself into a gaze that seduces Valentin (as well as Puig's reader). Within such a gaze, Valentin's attempt to situate his masculine identity in difference only results in his displacement into the proximity of a corporeal similarity. In short, Puig repositions the masculine subject within a dis-eased visuality.

Like Valentin, Puig's readers are displaced into a state of dis coherence while reading the representation of masculinity his novel problematically poses. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* animates this particular reading in dis coherence by highlighting the subversive potential of Molina's narration to effect the seduction of the reader into an alternative reading position. This animation foregrounds a possible reconfiguration of how a reader might see and read the male body, so as to cut across, problematize, and lay bare, the construction that is its masculine identity. An attendant consequence of this reconfiguration involves the reader's subjectivity; his/her inability to read the male body as definitively masculine calls into question the alignment between the individual reading subject and his/her masculine identification with that generic reading identity, the male reader.

However, in an ironic closure to the novel which suggestively recuperates a hom(m)o-sexual reading, Molina dies. Or, to be precise, he is killed by the authorities. This ending seems to uphold a reader's subjectivity as masculine because, in this moment of closure, what is invariably returned is a sense of a reader's understanding of masculinity where it ought to have been displaced by Molina's transgressive actions. Is Puig bowing to the existing cultural demands of reading the male body as exclusively heterosexual and masculine? It would seem so. As Bacarisse has observed of the many anti-homosexual readings critical of Puig's novel, "Molina has to die" (1988: 97). His death becomes the *raison d'être* for insisting that beneath Puig's otherwise disturbing narrative is his inability to transcend the hom(m)o-sexual dictates of reading in the final instance.

Or, does Molina's death imply something deeper, something which we tend to pass over when reading *Kiss of the Spider Woman* according to the dominant representations of gender within culture? As much as Puig is accused of failing to move beyond a narrative closure that reinstates the dominant, his self-conscious appropriation of this ending has to point to much more. What he points to, in a reading that sanctions Molina's death, is the reader's failure to engage with his/her constructed identity as the heterosexual

masculine reader. Presumably, the sight of the Other is understood to return a reader's male gaze and affirm his/her subjectivity. But, in the course of reading Puig's novel, Molina is the Proximate Other who potentially returns a gaze to Valentin, and significantly to the reader, that subversively troubles the mechanics of reading gender.

A reader of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* has to negotiate, like Valentin, that paradoxical problem Molina poses for a description, and definition, of masculinity when it is the sexually other but corporeally same male body that is represented. Moreover, this reader must account for the increasingly problematic representation that is Valentin's heterosexual male body. Hence, although Molina and Valentin are in opposition to each other, they are locked into a site of contra-diction, the male body, that is, undeniably and unavoidably, that crisis of addressing its identification as masculine.

For a reader, this predicament generates the following questions: is the male body defined only through the dominant hom(m)o-sexual practice of reading with the male gaze? Moreover, is not the practised male gaze—which those of us working within gender studies identify to be indicative of a reader's masculine (self-)representation—also guilty of homogenizing the term "masculinity" in discussions concerning the representation of gendered corporeality?

The answers can be found, I believe, when both the cultural and academic descriptions of the male gaze are reconsidered in terms of space. More accurately, I want to reconsider the male gaze as a respatialization that is never only a convergence of or an interaction between reader and text. Instead, I propose we understand this space as a *chiasm* where the reader is engaged in a continuous act of representing and re-presenting the text. The chiasm offers, therefore, the possibility of reconsidering how a seeing/reading subject might begin to rethink the representations of the male body, heterosexuality, and masculinity within firstly, hom(m)o-sexual culture and secondly, the debates generated within gender studies. One possible consequence of such rethinking must be the effect it generates for a reader's subjectivity when he/she attempts to engender

his/her reading identity according to the masculine subject position of interpretation.

“WHAT CAN LOOK AT ITSELF IS NOT ONE”

Philosophy has always insisted upon this: thinking its other. Its other: that which limits it, and from which it derives its essence, its definition, its production. To think its other

Jacques Derrida⁶⁵

Within dominant culture, one learns to see according to the restrictive codes of hom(m)o-sexual culture in order to make sense of self, other, and the context which both circumscribes and intextuates one's subjectivity when identifying representation. Hence, one's sense of being male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual is presumably a matter of recognizing sameness and/or difference(s) when reading a text.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this recognition corresponds to the mirror stage: this encountered moment with the text transforms itself into a repetition of that signal moment of self-identification and, hence, subjectification. In addition, Lacanian psychoanalysis has, as its basis, reflection as an organizing mechanics. That is, a subject's sense of who he/she is is dependent upon what is reflected in, or returned as, the gaze of the Other. In this particular instance, reflection is not wholly mimetic nor does it imply a correlation between what is and what is seen. Rather, reflection functions, in my reading of Lacan, as a trope in which the “mirror stage must ... be understood as a metaphor for the vision of harmony of a subject essentially in discord” (Ragland-Sullivan 1987: 27). But the reflection of this “mirror,” and the sense of harmony it confers onto the subject who looks into it, is ensured

⁶⁵Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982a)

only when the Other continues to return the originating gaze in terms which affirm the dominant. Any disruption to this process of subjectification—of which one's gaze onto that contradictory representation of the male body is the instance this study examines—stimulates a critical destabilization of how a reader reads with the male gaze, and hence the subjectivity, he/she is supposed to engender when reading texts.

Reconfiguring the male gaze in terms of Derrida's chiasm illustrates this: it is never a reading of gender that is totally or actively grounded in, and arising out of, those fixed and definitive binarisms of space/center, absence/presence, female/male, passive/active, feminine/masculine. The reader's identity as the masculine subject is, therefore, a matter of how he/she reads the representation of difference in general and, where this study is concerned, the contradictory representation of corporeality in particular. When difference corresponds to a hom(m)o-sexual definition of polarized or dichotomized opposites, the male gaze will continue to represent and read the male body and its masculine identity in terms of an "either/or" dialectic. If we reconceptualize difference in terms of contradictions—of differences within the selfsame site that engenders both similarity and dissimilarity simultaneously—then what we foreground is the necessary reorientation of how we can alternatively read masculinity with the male gaze when the represented male body exists as a space of contra-dictions.

In this particular reconfiguration, the male gaze cannot locate itself only at the site of sameness or difference as it must also recognize its location within that liminal space of in-between-ness. Such a location repositions the individual male gaze in a tensed oscillation between—or, more precisely, as an interplay of—these contra-dictions. More importantly, in the act of oscillating between representing the male body as masculine and re-presenting this particular reading, what takes place is a respatialization of the male gaze as a chiasm, and its potential to stimulate, animate, and realize dis coherence when reading such representation.

This is the trajectory I wish to chart in what follows: because the male gaze can

effectively be chiasmatic—repeating and altering, reiterating and differentiating—the gender identity it engenders is never determinately masculine as it is a re-presentation of that identity. I will demonstrate this by inflecting it onto my earlier readings of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Batman, The Movie*. For now, let us return to the male gaze, and the consequences such a spatialization posits for the reader.

When I repeat the male gaze in order to see, I am therefore only splitting it: the sight returned to me is never the sight I expect to possess in the act of looking. Instead, following Derrida, there can only be this in each act of looking with the male gaze: “For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one ...” (1976: 36). In believing one comes to recognize oneself in this reflection, the reader cannot help acknowledging that there is always the Other to contend with. Invariably, the trace of the absent Other is always present within each repetition of the male gaze that a reader effects to read masculinity.

PROBLEMATIZING THE MALE GAZE: DIFFERENCE, DERRIDA, AND MASCULINITY

In view of the preceding reconsideration of the male gaze, a dis-coherent reading of the term “difference” can be seen as, and argued to be, the simultaneity of presence and absence, of masculine and feminine, of active and passive, of heterosexuality and homosexuality within a shared space. In other words, I understand difference to mean that where and when contra-dictions conjoin, a play within and between, but never in violent antagonism of, these opposites is occasioned.

According to Derridean philosophy, then, this tacitly means that as my male gaze

comes to read what I see as a sight of self-representation, it also re-turns me into a sight of difference where a sense of my masculine identity, as the reader, is best described as its representation, its reiterated but altered identity. Within gender studies, the individual subject is seen to be always in the masculine position of either readership or spectatorship when interpreting the representation of gender. Conversely, this subject position is assumed to be *coequal* with individual males. But a representation of masculinity as a site of contra-dictions, a site where differences are in (inter)play, problematizes the certainty a reader expects when he/she reads the gender identity of the represented male body. Significantly, the subject position this reader inhabits collapses into confusion, and that definitive sense of being the masculine subject, the generic (male) reader of texts, is fragmented. In both instances, the contra-dictions which riddle this representation of corporeality disturb a reader's description of gender; even though the male gaze is argued to enable a homogeneous, and, more importantly, a generic, masculine identity, the instabilities that reading such representation stimulates must be accounted for.

Within the deconstructive space of the chiasm, our reading of any representation of masculinity as hierarchical, hegemonic, and heterosexual is never anything more than a process of revising and rewriting: masculinity cannot be singularly identified as, or determinately fixed in, the male body. Consequently, the cultural practice of reading with the male gaze should be appreciated, within these postmodern times, as always contingent upon its context of, if not because it realizes itself in, reading contra-dictions.

If the male body is represented as equally a corporeal space of difference and of sameness, how we now read its masculine identity demonstrates the chiasmatic potential of the male gaze. Because the chiasm stimulates, and, more probably, animates differences in play, it is the space where dis coherence locates itself as a mediated reading that takes place between text and reader. As such, this male gaze engages in that double gesture of representation and re-representation. Even as the reader is positioned to see and read gender in terms of its dominant cultural expression within—and perhaps, because it is—a

chiasm, his/her male gaze is susceptible, in that moment of reflection, to a re-presentation of gender.

In reading masculinity within this chiasm, the male body is re-turned into a space of sameness; this is also where this same male body is inextricably intertwined with, if it does not already embody the trace of, its differentiated Other. What we therefore have, but which tends to get ignored, is that double gesture, particularly chiasmatic, of the male gaze when it is effected to read the masculinity of the male body. In such a reading, it is also the chiasmatic potential of the gaze that inevitably stimulates a re-presentation of a reader's identity as the masculine reading subject.

WHEN LACAN'S GAZE IS CHIASMATIC: RECONSIDERING HIS MIRROR

The specular dispossession which at the same time institutes and deconstitutes me is also a law of language. It operates as a power of death in the heart of living speech: a power all the more redoubtable because it opens as much as it threatens the possibility of the spoken word.

Jacques Derrida⁶⁶

What can it possibly mean to import Derrida's chiasmatic configuration of difference into Lacan's work on the gaze as it relates to subject formation? And how does this affect visuality when it is deemed to be a singularly masculine and male construction?

When the individual's gaze is displaced from grounding his/her reading of masculinity in the lack without to a lack within itself, this reader comes to recover his/her representation of selfhood to be neither totally or particularly dependent upon the notion

⁶⁶Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 141.

of an externalized Other. Rather, the chiasmatic nature of the male gaze is recuperated; this implies a spatial difference in, as well as a temporal shift when, articulating masculinity. In the course of this exposition, I want to re-center and reclaim the intrinsic dis coherence that the chiasmatic nature of the gaze animates. In turn, I wish to examine such dis coherence as it relates to the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity. Rodolphe Gasché, in *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, summarizes these spatial and temporal transformations I map onto the male gaze as follows:

the two gestures, the two phases of deconstruction participate in one another in a crosswise manner, thus emphasizing their sameness despite their difference. But sameness, since it does not mean identity, is precisely the opening for difference between the two gestures. (1986: 173)⁶⁷

This “crosswise manner” in which the gestures of sameness and of difference interact animates a politics of dis coherence which we can transpose onto Lacan’s alignment of individual subjectivity and the gaze.

A similar situation is evident, then, in how Lacan’s conception of the gaze operates. It is, according to Lacan, an “interlacing, intersection, chiasma” (1986: 95) where vision and subjectivity interact at the screen, itself the focus of the gaze. If the gaze of the Other is, insists Lacan, equally important as our reflections in the mirror are, then, in seeing ourselves see, we need to be culturally “seen” (Silverman 1986: 142-143). In other words, “in the scopic field, the gaze is outside,” situated at the site of the Other, and “I am looked at,” writes Lacan: “that is to say, I am a picture” (1986: 106).

⁶⁷Gasché goes on to write that “The chiasmatic relation of the two heterogeneous gestures of deconstruction is characterized by a structural asymmetry that defies all reflection; it is the matrix of both the possibility and impossibility, the ground and unground, of reflection” (1986: 173). It is precisely this “structural asymmetry” of the gaze within a chiasmatic space (when considered in deconstructionist terms) that I am seeking to foreground as enabling, if not germane to, the very mechanics of the male gaze when employed in the masculine subject position to understand the representation of masculinity, itself a paradoxical re-presentation.

Translating this in terms of the individual reader results in the following reconfiguration of the male gaze. As I am seen seeing, I see myself; within the scopic field where I site myself as masculine, I see myself as a man only to have that identity deconstructed when the returned gaze of the Other signals this moment of recognition to be also a moment of misrecognition. Whereas Lacanian interpretations of the mirror stage emphasize the disavowal of a subject's *méconnaissance* in order to engender self-recognition, I want to suggest that within my distinctly Derridean interpretation of Lacan's gaze as a chiasm, it is precisely this misrecognition which is spectacularized as that entwined moment of subjectification *and* dis coherence when the "mirror" in question is that of a body in contra-diction. If Lacan persists, throughout *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, to elucidate how we see and read as always an interdiscourse between text and reader, screen and spectator, he does so because he realizes the gaze is, primarily, chiasmatic. And as this space, within which one's male gaze reads this particularly contradictory representation of the male body, is never only and always a site of difference but also of sameness, the individual's recognition of self will be modulated, if not tempered, by its misrecognition.

There is, therefore, in what we identify as the acculturated practice of reading the male body with the male gaze, this: "The gaze turns us inside/out." As much as we look, "we are *always* looked at ... always detotalized" (Ragland-Sullivan 1991: 73-74). What is reclaimed within this chiasmatic gesture of the gaze then is the constant, even conflicting, interdiscourse between surface and sight, text and subject, recognition and misrecognition, sameness and difference. As a result, that alignment linking the gaze, individual men, and masculinity at that represented site of the male body must be revised beyond its ascribed masculine and heterosexual identification within hom(m)o-sexual culture. Correspondingly, there must be a reconsideration of the male gaze, as it is currently used within gender studies, to be that singular site where an essentialized masculine identity is realized.

WITHIN A CHIASM: RETHINKING HOM(M)O-SEXUALITY

I return to the issue of identifying masculinity within the predominantly feminist-inflected discourse of gender studies. I do so because there is, to a large extent, a possibility that the differing feminist discourses that influence gender studies—especially when their representations of masculinity subscribe, at least in essence, to an identification of gendered identity according to the hom(m)o-sexual exchange of women—repeat those very fixed, homogenized, and essentialized categories of “male,” “masculine,” and “heterosexual” when reinscribing femininity.

Yet, an inherent fallacy tends to be ignored within this discourse, I suspect, for necessarily political reasons. What becomes obvious when re-examining this particular academic discourse, in its articulations of masculinity, is an elision of masculinities. Such a discourse, especially when it is influenced by radical, essentialist, and anti-pornography feminisms, tends to conglomerate the differences within masculinity such that it continues to be seen, and articulated, as a single, monolithic, and undifferentiated gender category that is representative of, and for, all men, and the bodies they inhabit.

Although I applaud the aim of gender studies in making visible the oppression women face in hom(m)o-sexual culture, I worry about this gendered categorization of men. I worry because within academic theorizations that ought to open up new spaces for revising hom(m)o-sexual constructs of gender and sexuality, femininity is rewritten while masculinity's flaws and limitations are only made visible. Masculinity is, then, never revised as the alternative expression of what it might also be. Significantly, masculine identity is seen, within such theorizations, to be a homogenized totality that ironically finds itself in that continuing, and restricting, representation as the male oppressor. Further, I worry because there is the tendency, once again, to articulate masculinity as heterosexual without accounting for gay men who in spite of their sexual difference do not deny a masculine individuality.

To insist that the predominantly feminist-inflected discourse of gender studies can articulate what masculine identity is is to confuse the masculinities of individual men with the homogeneous category, "masculine." It would seem that men as individuals are identified only in terms of a generic masculinity while the debate on gender works, nevertheless, towards revising the categories of gender and sexuality. In terms of visuality, this conflates individual men with the subject position of reading with the male gaze.

But this identification is less than fluid when a reader encounters a paradoxical representation of the male body as a site of proximate differences. In a gaze which should engender a representation of the reader's masculine subjectivity, there is also nothing more than its actual re-presentation. "Everything," notes Derrida, "begins with a reproduction. Always already ..." (1978: 211): this is a reproduction that can never be the same, never be the original in duplication. Within the chiasmatic nature of the gaze, each representation is paradigmatic of a process Derrida identifies as "iterability." An individual spectator might site him/herself in the male gaze as it focuses on the Other but what is re-turned however is never only the Other's difference as it is also its similarity. "Iterability is," Gasché observes, "a duplication or reduplication which redoubles the first time, or the real identity, through its repetition as an identical *and* at the same time different moment or entity. It is a reduplication in which the repeated is already separated from itself, double in itself" (1986: 216).

Does this not echo dis coherence? I think so. In terms of visuality, iterability describes the very particular and unique manifestation of dis coherence as it plays itself out across the represented male body that one reads within that chiasmatic space between text and the spectator. In short, each act of looking and reading repeats its heterosexist and masculine basis. But each of these acts is simultaneously contested, altered, and, finally, dis coherence when they take place within chiasmatic space. This is exactly the point I want to stress in refuting those claims that connect the represented male body to an individual

male reader/spectator in the subjectification of an identity that is seemingly generic, homogeneous, and heterosexual when the male gaze is that acculturated site of reading. I develop this in the second half of this chapter, but examine it in greater detail in chapter 4 where I reconsider the debate between pornography and masculinity.

WHEN HERO IDENTIFICATION FAILS: AN ENTRAPPED SPECTATOR?

If Puig's novel highlights a clash of masculinities, it does so at this privileged site of masculine self-representation, the male gaze. While Valentin concerns himself with the idea of revolution, with its ideals and philosophy, indeed with his own master-narrative, Molina's insistence upon the kitsch, the boleros and films and the tangos of popular culture, if not upon the *petite-récits* of everyday life, sets up a confrontation between opposing values, opposing outlooks on how an individual subject should or can see.

Valentin can "see" Molina's narrated movies for he identifies himself "with the psychoanalyst in the panther-woman movie," and with "the son in the motor-racing movie" (Chambers 1991: 229). In other words, he positions himself with the male characters of Molina's narration. Accordingly, he adopts a spectatorship Mulvey describes as that traditional masculine position of agency and power. Molina, in contrast, identifies himself with the heroine. Each locates himself therefore in hom(m)o-sexually gendered positions in relation to "watching" Molina's "movies": the masculine subject possesses a narrative vision aimed at a closure guaranteeing masculine representation while the feminine subject is, insists a dismayed de Lauretis, always a "now" and "nowhere" (1984: 99) in terms of time and space.

Valentin's identification with these male characters does not, unfortunately, ensure his male gaze. Unlike Molina, for whom these narrations offer a respite from prison life, they mire Valentin in a visual anxiety—the men in these movies are disabled and cannot

dominate the screen. According to Mulvey, it is “The male protagonist [who] is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (1975: 13). Molina’s heroes are, in contrast, failed expressions of masculinity: the psychoanalyst is killed trying to kiss the panther-woman, the husband in the zombie movie dies, Werner, the hero of the Nazi propaganda movie, loses Leni, his converted ally. (And in Puig’s own representation of masculinity, Valentin is seduced, emasculated, and rendered impotent by Molina.) Mapping Mulvey’s theorizations of the male gaze onto Valentin, who is the male spectator of Molina’s movies, calls attention to the postmodern problem of representation when that gaze begins to (dis)simulate, and repudiate, itself as a particular cultural practice of reading gender.

Because Molina inhabits the now and nowhere of feminine desire, in comparison to Valentin, his borderline gaze (borderline in terms of his sexuality and his imprisonment) “mark[s] difference itself; a difference that is not just in one or in the other, but between them and in both” (de Lauretis 1984: 99). As “woman,” an identity located in terms of location and spatiality rather than essence or interiority, Molina disfigures Valentin’s identity as a man: his gaze upon Molina’s male but effeminized body denies the necessary distance which divides spectator from image, man from woman. That is, it denies him the necessary gulf in which he can locate his masculinity at the expense of a feminine site. Hence, a man’s relation to this body of the Other must be measured, regulated, and read in terms of space and distance. The male subject maintains this in voyeurism where his masculine identity remains an expression of distance from, opposition to, and containment of the Other body, never his own.

But in Puig’s novel, Valentin is unable to maintain this distance. He falls into Molina’s gaze, into this space of the spectacle which is, of course, where heterosexual masculinity fix(at)es the feminine—and, by extension, effeminate—Other in order to engender its identity within hom(m)o-sexual culture. This problematizes his voyeurism by locating him, in this particular instance, not into difference but into an encountered

similarity at this very site of the Proximate Other. Ostensibly, Molina and Valentin's sex act collapses and confuses the dominant hetero/homosexual divide. Further, Valentin's identity is, if we continue along this Derridean line, "ruined, made into an abyss, in its own representation ... which infinitely reflects itself and which develops as a painful questioning of its own possibility" (Derrida 1978: 65) of being solely heterosexually masculine. Valentin's seduction disrupts his ability to represent himself for he is lured into a simultaneous reflection and refraction of the male body that he must now read as a site of contra-dictions. In other words, according to Derrida, "in its representation of itself the subject is shattered and opened" (1978: 65); what is laid bare, as a result, is the overdetermined codification of Valentin's own male body as the very essence of an identity that is both heterosexual and masculine.

RETHINKING OPPOSITIONALITY

Oppositionality is characteristically understood in terms of "either/or"; that is to say, what is privileged is a matter of what is suppressed, denied, or even erased in comparison.

In *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*, his follow up to *Story and Situation*, Chambers argues against this "either/or" polemic. Rather, this particular binarism is, for him, better appreciated as a shared space of differences where change and revision can take place. "Oppositionality," he writes,

seeks ... to shift desire from forms that enslave to forms that liberate, that is from modes of desire that are produced by and in the interest of the structures of power to forms that represent a degree of release from that repression, which is simultaneously a political oppression. (1991: xvii)

Chambers argues a politics of oppositionality for the marginalized which is contrary to resistance, that politics of power he considers a result of differences arising outside established power structures. As a politics of and for change, Chambers' delineation of

“room to maneuver” and a “space of ‘play’” “within the ‘given’ situation of power” (xi) is more than a local and contingent dynamic. He writes: “it is necessary to change the reality that has been constructed in this way, but starting—because there is no alternative—from the way things are now, that is, from within the ‘given’ situation of power” (1991: xi).

His politics of oppositionality echoes Derrida who states that “*Differance* produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible” (1976: 143). For Chambers, Puig’s representation of how prison dictation enables Molina to revise Valentin’s understanding of masculinity illustrates how oppositionality can effect a difference in reading. More significantly, it spells out a possible reconsideration of the gaze so as to rewrite the term “masculinity.” Perhaps, masculinity is better thought of as a matter of “an iterability that can only be what it is,” according to Derrida, “in the *impurity* of its self-identity (repetition altering and alteration identifying) ...” (1977: 203). In short, we return once again to a politics of dis coherence.

What is urgently suggested in the above is a reconfiguration of what we understand as the binarized structure of hom(m)o-sexual culture in general. In addition, this reconfiguration will enable us to rethink the academy’s dependence upon binarisms when debates on gender and sexuality take place within the academy. (These are issues I shall return to in chapter 5 when I examine how mapping an essentialist discourse—de Lauretis’ feminist reading of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*—onto a paradigmatic postmodernist text might not illuminate masculinity, but instead obscure those differences within it.) In what follows, I focus on a dis coherence of reading masculinity in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. In particular, I am interested in its exemplification in the form of Molina’s dictation of movies which transforms itself into that alternative gaze at work in the novel.

When we insist that Valentin’s impotence results from Molina’s seduction, we read this text through the dominant gaze where masculinity is threatened and Molina’s death is demanded. In doing so, we are presumably ignoring the role dictation plays in rewriting masculinity: as Molina appropriates it, dictation differs from the prison subjugation and

interrogation Valentin faces. Alternatively, it teaches Valentin another way of surviving, another way of looking. In a manner of speaking, Molina's voice becomes the "acoustic mirror"⁶⁸ that resonates Valentin's masculinity as it reflects his denied proximity with this Other. In prison, in an enclosure reverberating with Molina's kitsch of movies and songs, Valentin is positioned as child to mother, as subject to object, and as Self to Other. Molina's voice is, hence, not unlike a text to be read by Valentin, especially when it materializes as those "movies" he watches. More importantly, Molina mothers: his "mother's voice initially functions as the acoustic mirror in which the child discovers its identity and voice," and in which Valentin "hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble" (Silverman 1988: 81). In Molina's voice, in this hole of sound and space, heterosexual masculinity confronts only to unpack its own lack, its own otherness. It does this because Molina's voice, as Silverman records, "is capable of being internalized at the same time as it is externalized ... spill[ing] over from subject to object and object to subject, violating the bodily limits upon which ... subjectivity depends ..." (1988: 80).

We can rewrite the much criticized sexual seduction, alternatively, in terms of a chiasmatic site. These visual and verbal exchanges in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* expand the politics of gender by rewriting the identification of masculinity the text engenders for the reader. In these exchanges, masculinity is not presented in terms of an "either/or" proposition; more correctly, what is shown to be masculine in the novel is an interdiscourse between the contra-diction(s) which is not only Molina's male body but Valentin's as well. Valentin may be the revolutionary, the man who seeks to change, to invert the oppressive master-narrative which both he and Molina suffer but his failure to

⁶⁸ This term was first introduced by Guy Rosolato in his 1974 article, "La voix: entre corps et langage," and subsequently appropriated by Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988). In particular, see her explication of Rosolato's work in chapter 3 of this book.

bring about revolution (a word etymologically inscribed with cycle, change, transformation, indeed with difference) results from his position outside the master-narrative he opposes. Molina, on the other hand, successfully works within it.

DICTION AND OPPOSITIONALITY: THE MALE GAZE DISCOHERED

Molina's dictation may echo the dominant hom(m)o-sexual discourse within which readers of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* are similarly positioned to read representation. The crucial difference however is his transgression of this discourse from a position within. In other words, Molina exploits his present situation to reclaim for himself the power to exchange (where visibility is concerned) a masculine panopticonism for its dispersion. He revises the prevailing male gaze as it spectacularizes his difference in terms of a spectacle so as to rewrite his (de)gendered identity. For Valentin, Molina's actions complicate the corresponding nexus between site and sight, between the engendered Other and the engendering male gaze.

Valentin's inability to map his male gaze onto Molina's movies (itself a body of dictation) is symptomatic of a larger heterosexual masculine malaise that is intimated but never fully developed in the novel. I am of course referring to the crisis of representation as it pertains to Valentin's revolution, and, by extension, to a revision of hom(m)o-sexual culture. It is significant that even though Valentin introduces "Molina to the feminist critique of gender roles," as Chambers rightly points out, it will not be Valentin but "Molina [who] will carry out in Valentin the feminist liberation that the [foot]notes refer to as being most urgent ..." (1991: 228). Valentin's failure as a revolutionary is hence the failure of heterosexual masculinity, as instituted in the male gaze, to engage itself in a revision of how it represents and reads corporeality in terms of the existing categorization of hom(m)o-sexual gender and sexuality. If Valentin fails as a revolutionary against the

larger master-narrative which circumscribes him, it is because he seeks to rewrite it from a position that is both outside of and divorced from any engagement with the Other within himself. What Valentin needs, but sorely lacks, and which he finally comes to understand through Molina's dictation, is the necessity of an alternative gaze if he is to revolutionize, in a manner of speaking, how and what masculinity can mean for a male subject such as himself today.

In transposing the space of Molina's movies onto the space of Puig's narrative, what a reader faces in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is a screen (read text) which locates us readers—or, as Chambers proposes, “readers-as-movie-goers” (1991: 214)—not into a masculine position of reading but, in opposition, into its spectacularization as that problematic reading position of the masculine subject reading that dominant representation of masculinity, the male body.

This screening, which should affirm a masculine subject position with Molina's disavowal at its moment of closure, refuses to guarantee Valentin's gaze. Similarly, readers, and especially readers who narcissistically identify with Valentin, can no longer focus upon the “phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery, and control” (Neale 1983: 5) which dictate the mechanics of the male gaze within hom(m)o-sexual culture. On the contrary, the focus must now rest upon its dis-eased state.

In effect, what Puig has done is to deploy his novel as a screen upon which he re-maps the male gaze by isolating the function of the screen—at once, both *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and Molina's retelling of the movies—and playing with it. In specifically Lacanian terms, Puig comes to reconfigure this screen/text (that is a convergence of Molina's male body, Molina's dictation, and Molina's seduction of Valentin) as a mask. And as a mask, a site of enactment and performance when reading with the male gaze, the reader is effectively sited to engage and interact with the text (Lacan 1986: 107). The reader is therefore able to mediate this interaction, or, to be exact, this chiasm, where dis coherence is animated and a revision of masculinity enabled, when his/her reading

identity is reconfigured as an enactment, as a mask.

The movies Molina narrates together with those footnotes, which echo subtitles running below a film, illuminate the visual aspects of his dictation and serve to relocate the reader of this larger “film” into an approximation of Molina’s seduction. But seduction is, here, more a visual dislocation than it is a physical (gender) fuck, and because a reader, like Valentin, can no longer engender Molina according to the male gaze, there is a need to question what the masculine subject position of reading and seeing representation cannot mean.

Although Chambers is most correct to claim that this “novel specifically transforms the metaphor of reading as movie viewing into the metaphor of reading as social surveillance” (1991: 230) (and which implicates the reader within a panopticon of hom(m)o-sexual representation), his thesis falls remarkably short of proposing what, or how, masculinity can be after it is made visible.⁶⁹ His is a vision of the prison-house of reading men. Specifically, it is a vision of male readers reading their masculinity at the site of the male body:

It leads us, like Valentin, to an act of self-recognition, a recognition of *what we knew* but could not acknowledge. In that recognition we see that we are ourselves—again like Valentin—*both* victims of the carceral systems *and* its administrators. (Chambers 1991: 231-32)

But if oppositionality is to mediate and change how masculinity comes to be identified, and, more importantly, how it affects the subjectivity of readers, it must move beyond this strategy of *only making visible*. Consequently, the accompaniment to making masculinity

⁶⁹Chambers’s analysis of the novel can, however, be argued as an attempt to re-center homosexuality: “We can note straightaway ... an evolution both on the part of the ‘gay’ partner (Molina in his feminine role must learn to expect and require social respect) and on the part of the heterosexual partner (Valentin must break free of the inhibitions and repressions of *machismo*, and in the first instance of his homophobia). There can, in short, be no gay liberation without a concurrent liberation of heterosexual men” (1991: 216).

visible must necessarily be making it *mean* in an-Other way.

As a movie screen conflates real and fictional time, as it coalesces distance and proximity in a space of now and nowhere, this *mise-en-scène* of masculine representation is, undeniably, also its *mise-en-différance*. That is, this is where masculinity—as Molina, and more urgently Valentin, signify what the male body might otherwise mean—is discohered and re-presented. Or, as Ian Green writing about masculinity and films in “Malefunction” notes, the individual subject now faces this representation of masculinity where “the *contradictions* about the active/passive axes within the male characters” (1984: 45) are brought to the forefront. It is fair to say, then, following Green, that in reading this *mise-en-différance*, “Any male identification (implication and complicity) presumably involves a phantasy about the economy of activity and passivity as it is worked out in the central male character and the refusal of [this novel] to exclude passivity from the male image” (1984: 45). In other words, a description of masculinity, as a result of dis coherence, must necessarily accommodate both its difference and its sameness.

PUTTING VALENTIN’S MASCULINITY ON DISPLAY

But what is a stage which presents nothing to the sight? It is the place where the spectator, presenting himself as spectacle, will no longer be either seer [*voyant*] or voyeur, will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator, the represented and the representor, the object seen and the seeing subject.

Jacques Derrida⁷⁰

In the context of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Valentin is as much the spectacle of

⁷⁰Derrida, *Grammatology* 306.

Molina's gaze as his masculinity is (in my reading of the novel) a focus of Puig's representation of the male body. Here, masculinity is spectacularized in Molina's eroticization of men—initially, of Gabriel, and, finally, of Valentin. This eroticization of the male body is doubly subversive for the gaze caressing these male anatomies emanates from an-other male despite Molina's protestations of his "femininity."

Such a homosexual gaze must be disavowed: he who sexually looks upon and desires the male body has to be destroyed. If ever he is re-embraced back within hom(m)o-sexual culture, he is bound to suffer mutilation and brutality before a reader's eyes. Molina's death seems to subscribe to the dictates of the male gaze while it regulates the cultural representation of masculinity.

Yet, his death cannot repudiate Valentin's displacement into that problematic space of the spectacle for Puig's reader. Neither will it erase this respatialization—which is itself a denaturalization—of Valentin's masculine identity. Valentin's stomach cramps resulting in his soiled body, his confession of anguish and loneliness to Molina in place of a dictated letter to Marta, his brutalized and tortured body at the novel's end: these moments of pain fracture what should otherwise be the wholesome male body when juxtaposed to the Other body that is overdetermined as a site of absence, disease, and dissolution. Moreover, we come to realize Valentin's continual signification, under a reader's watchful repetitive male gaze, as an object of reading which climaxes in the spectacularization of his heterosexual male body as a sexual object when Molina successfully seduces Valentin to penetrate him.

Both these instances are moments of display in general, and where masculinity is spatially envisioned in Mulvey's theory as three-dimensional, it is "flattened" in part. In other words, what Valentin's spectacularization does is to return that paradoxical difference of similarity, the Proximate Other, back into the hierarchical, hegemonic, and heterosexist cultural practice of the male gaze, and disengaging, in the process, that conflation of this particular gaze with the masculinity of the male body it is said to situate

itself at. Or, as Derrida observes, “With that difference, an entire series of oppositions will deconstitute themselves one by one” (1976: 306). When the hom(m)o-sexual entity “Man” is on exhibition—in this instance, Valentin’s disembodied masculine self—the reader must now negotiate the possible castration such a sight poses for his/her own subjectivity as the masculine reader.

As illuminating as her work is, Mulvey ignores any other position for gendered identities except these fixated sites, Woman as spectacle and Man as spectator. Lacan’s insistence, however, on the screen/image to order subjectivity in the chiasmatic nature of the gaze calls into question Mulvey’s thesis. It is reasonable, therefore, that Silverman should point out, in *Male Subjectivities at the Margins*, that the gaze “has no power to constitute subjectivity except by projecting the screen on to the object.” In other words, “the gaze can ‘photograph’ the object only through the grid of the screen” (1992: 150). When this screen spectacularizes masculinity, the object is *none other* than the male body displaced and repositioned. In this circumstance, such a body, especially as it signifies the masculine subject, “Man,” no longer inhabits that fixed, and seemingly germane, position of spectatorship in Mulvey’s specification. In turn, a man’s to-be-looked-at-ness, in this particular spectacle where man is seen as image and display, proves problematic for us as it must now be for Mulvey.

Although Middleton observes “Mulvey’s image of men’s power turn[ing] the gaze back onto itself, making it visible and, at that moment, disturbing it” (1992: 7), his is precisely, in an ironic sense, only an inward, or, more exactly, an introspective gaze. Both Mulvey and Middleton look into the male gaze, making visible its invisibility so as to destabilize it. Both, however, do not suggest any effective re-presentation of what its masculine identity can possibly mean—if not, more pertinently, be, or become—in postmodernity besides its mere reinscription as a visible construction. More importantly, their work employs the prevailing “either/or” binarism to discuss femininity and masculinity even as they reinscribe these categories.

If masculinity is to be recontextualized within this postmodern moment, it will only be acceptable, as a viable alternative to the present dichotomization of gender, when a deconstructive approach such as a politics of dis coherence is adopted. More specifically, this politics allows a reader to see his/her subjectivity “not as an object which is *present* to be seen, to give itself to intuition as an empirical unit or as an *eidos* holding itself *in front of or up against*,” but “it will be full as the intimacy of a self-presence, as the consciousness or sentiment of self-proximity, of self-sameness” (Derrida 1976: 306), and self-difference.

In spectacularizing the male body, and in particular that of Valentin’s, Puig seduces his reader—particularly, his male reader—into, or, more accurately, into *being*, a spectacle of reading masculinity. Perhaps, it is more appropriate to clarify the spectacle in question as that of a subject reading the very masculine identity it itself engenders when reading this representation of the body in that privileged locus of subjectivity, the male gaze.

In identifying with Valentin so as to read Molina’s male body, a reader is him/herself transformed into a spectacularized body of the masculine reader. Like Valentin, however, he/she comes to be both the subject and object of the male gaze in the course of reading Puig’s novel. This particular reconfiguration of the reader arises because the male gaze is effectively unpacked, in the course of Puig’s examination of how the male body is read, to be a chiasm. Within this space of iterability, the reader repeats his/her identity as the masculine reader only to find him/herself displaced into those very rituals of screening a masculine representation, where screening refers to both a reading and a performance of its gendered identification.

If this is exactly the situation of reading that results from the chiasmatic potential of the male gaze, this particular spectacle of reading masculinity I outline above resists as it insists the difference a reader faces when he/she must represent, mediate, and read a representation of corporeality in contra-diction. Derrida would phrase this, as he himself suggests in “Sending: On Representation,” in the following manner: the subject—that

individual reader who interacts with the text in a chiasmatic gesture of repetition and alteration—"is displaced or folded into [him]self... Putting himself forward or putting himself on stage, man poses, represents himself *as* the scene of representation" (1982b: 317).

Tacitly, this "scene of representation" is also a moment of anxiety for the masculine subject within postmodernity. In particular, such a spectacle of reading masculinity surfaces to rewrite itself as, if it has not already displaced the centered dominance of, a description, an identification, and a location of masculinity at that problematic site, the male body as contra-diction. Moreover, this scene exhibits a categorical unpacking of masculine subjectivity "if only in order to represent," as Lee Edelman writes in the preface of his book, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay, Literary, and Cultural Theory*, with regard to homosexual identity, "that which cannot be *permitted* representation, or that which must be represented as occasioning a crisis in and for the logic of representation itself" (1994: xiv).

Doubtlessly, when masculinity is spectacularized, the various feminist discourses which investigate, locate, and discuss the male gaze—through the critical lens of gender studies—as the site of a masculine identity become a theme haunting any possible revision of "masculinity." This theme restricts a reading of the term "masculinity" to that hom(m)o-sexual equation of the male body, the male gaze, and masculinity. What can this mean for the ground-breaking work essentialist feminists, like Wittig and Irigaray, have done in identifying this dominant cultural practice whilst reinscribing femininity beyond its circumscribed boundaries of hom(m)o-sexuality?

WITTIG, IRIGARAY, AND THE FALLACY OF HOM(M)O-SEXUALITY

In my discussion on visuality, gender, and corporeality, I begin with Mulvey. Her

basic distrust of, and disagreement with, the constructions of femininity within the dominant practice of the male gaze alerts us to the delimiting representation of femininity within culture. Mulvey's theme is echoed in the works of Wittig and Irigaray; they too voice their disquiet with women being imaged, marketed, and recycled to satisfy a predominantly masculine and heterosexual culture. In this section, I want to re-examine how their respective works whilst repudiating the oppressive strictures of a masculinized interpretation of gender are nevertheless trapped into an essentializing repetition of much of the same, into recycling hom(m)o-sexually gendered spatiality once again.

The paradigm of gender relations Wittig criticizes is what she terms the heterosexual contract. She is critical of its artificial construction of sexes which bear the political extrapolation of "the term *gender* from grammar" and which is then superimposed onto "the notion of sex" (1992: 77). In other words, as Wittig succinctly argues in "The Mark of Gender," "gender, as a concept, is instrumental in the political discourse of the social contract as heterosexual" (1992: 77).

Oppression is therefore manifest in, and repeated as, those categories of gendered sex. And because the contract which enables, sanctions, and legitimates this categorization is heterosexual, it is undeniably masculine for both heterosexuality and masculinity are grounded, first and foremost, in the male body, or, more significantly, in that privileged sign of hom(m)o-sexuality, the phallus. What she seeks is to disengage and free the association between sex and gender such that there is a clearly demarcated space in which women, lesbians, and gay men can begin to speak and express themselves.

Yet her general thesis is, I feel, crippled. Because she needs to rewrite femininity, she dichotomizes femininity and masculinity in order to repeat the location, rather than its much needed dislocation, of gender into only one of two categories—women as the marked gender, and men as the universal, the general. She writes: "there are the general and the feminine, or rather, the general and the mark of the feminine" (1992: 60). In her sight, masculinity as that term addressing, describing, and identifying one's subjectivity is a

singularly fixed and generic term which alludes to, if it does not homogenize, all men whilst eliding, and perhaps, denying, gay men a masculine identification.

Even though Wittig does account for gay men, and the accompanying sexual oppression which stigmatizes this group, she nevertheless conceives gay identity to be, at best, transvestized into the same spectacle of the oppressed Other as women and lesbians are, and, at worst, never masculine because of its sexual variation. Either way, gay men cannot claim let alone reclaim, in Wittig's political agenda, a masculine gender because its identification is synonymous with, and only evident in, the male body that must be heterosexual.

This corresponds with Wittig's concept of gender. In "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" she writes: "Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the 'masculine' not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general" (1992: 60). When gay men are seen to be oppressed in Wittig's scheme of gendered relations, even if this oppression is sexual, they are seen to be gendered, if they are not already overdetermined as, feminine for their gay male bodies do not conform to the universal identification of what is supposedly masculine. For Diana Fuss, who examines Wittig's work in her book, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, Wittig engages "in essentialist thinking [while] in the very act of trying to discredit it" (1989: 43). Her focus on women, in particular lesbian women, finds her inextricably mired in a politics of essentialism where the term "masculinity" is represented as the identity of the male body.

Wittig might attempt to accommodate gay men in her early work, but as her work shifts from a general frustration with the heterosexual contract to its particular disappointment with the elision of lesbians, the specificity of the gay male body tends to become submerged under a general distrust of the shared hom(m)o-sexual oppression all men are said to exercise. In other words, gay men become homogenized, in terms of the dominant understanding of masculinity, when Wittig displaces male homosexuality into

heterosexuality to account for the relationship between the “universal” male body and its inscription of femininity. In this displacement, gay men are similarly identified as generic oppressors of women and lesbians because they share that selfsame corporeality as straight men, the male body.

In her book, Fuss points to the difficulty Wittig’s politics of gender identity poses for rewriting “masculinity” within gender studies. Like Fuss, I believe that to appropriate Wittig’s essentialist understanding of femininity and masculinity—as each relates to corporeality—is to embrace a politics within which the gay male body is ignored, and its potential to challenge how we can rethink “masculinity,” elided. Wittig’s critical appreciation of the place gay men have within the heterosexual contract is marred, moreover, by her political need to invert the masculine/feminine binarism: she may account for the sexual oppression of gay men yet this necessarily, and paradoxically, entails their gendered transvestism in particular and an identification of a shared masculinity between straight and gay men as the dominant and universal in general.

A similar subscription to an essentialist politics of gendered identity is visible in Irigaray’s work. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, she examines how the sign “Woman” “is always specularized and specula(riza)ble” (1985a: 72). Her work focuses on the construction of Woman within a hom(m)o-sexual culture of exchange, no less visual than economic, as it circulates, trades in, and recycles this sign. Primarily, this construction of what a woman is is localized in the initial moment the male gaze comes into being; for Irigaray, that moment occurs when a subject recognizes the visible sexual difference of the Other. Men come to see, in this moment of disparity and lack at the site of the Other, their masculine self-representation while women, because they exist outside this representation, are denied any existence except as a negative reflection of the male subject.

That is, within a hom(m)o-sexual culture premised predominantly in the visual, Woman—that collective entity/identity—is, Irigaray writes in *This Sex Which is Not One*, “Reigning everywhere,” and it is here that “hom(m)o-sexuality is played out through the

bodies of women, matter, or sign, and heterosexuality has been up to now just an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men" (1985b: 172). But it is precisely this very configuration of gender within an exploitative economy that complicates her otherwise brilliant examination into gendered relations. When she insists hom(m)o-sexuality is the culture enabling a particularly masculine conception of femininity, she simultaneously insists on the engendering male gaze as the common denominator linking all male subjects together.

Like Wittig, Irigaray recognizes the paradoxical position gay men inhabit within hom(m)o-sexual culture where their male bodies exist as that site of contra-diction that is, at once, same and other, subject and object, oppressor and oppressed (Fuss 1989: 46). She chooses, nevertheless, to elide this corporeality of similarity and difference so as to facilitate a political reinscription of femininity. Her reinscription must necessarily situate itself at, and begin from, the oppressive practice of the male gaze. Because such a gaze is seen to be representative of masculine identity, the axiomatic conclusion it generates takes the form of an alignment between visibility, corporeality, and gender: men locate, define, and practise a masculine identity in the very act of seeing and reading with this gaze.

Irigaray's feminist politics, then, manifests itself as an essentialism: there is the gaze all men see with as there is none for women. Her essentialist description of the gaze, in turn, suggests that there is one, and only one, category which individual men, straight and gay, can ascribe to when articulating masculinity. Hers is a politics in which all men are bundled into that category "hom(m)o-sexuality." Unfortunately, even though this category provides those of us who deploy it in gender studies with recognizable descriptions to enunciate gender, it tends to essentialize masculinity whilst allowing a rewriting of femininity. Irigaray's essentialism means that all male subjects are engendered heterosexual, that all these subjects can be identified as oppressors, and that all of them subscribe to the dominant gaze, in order to represent their masculine subjectivity, when they participate in the hom(m)o-sexual exchange of women.

What must be germane to Irigaray's politics, and singularly so, if her configuration of "hom(m)o-sexuality" as a category identifying masculinity is to succeed, is the absence of any other competing economies. The presence of a gay economy has to be recognized as competing with, and, to a significant extent, destabilizing and displacing the economic basis of Irigaray's hom(m)o-sexual culture. Because the gay economy is a market where the object valued and desired, the commodity traded in, and the produce developed for exchange, is the male body that is both eroticized and sexualized, I would like to suggest its viability as an alternative location where that gendered identification, "masculine" can be re-presented. Within this alternative space of exchange, the male body functions as a currency which produces, contests, and recycles the prevailing categorization of gender by refocussing a reader's description of masculine identity in terms of a hetero/homosexual binarism. Once again, I return to Fuss who critically observes that

What [Irigaray's] theory of a phallically organized economy does not recognize is that there is more than one market, that there are as many systems of commodification and exchange as there are sets of social relations. A subject can be located in several economies, in competing and perhaps even incompatible social orders, at the same time. There seems to be little reason to assume that a theory of hom(m)o-sexuality must be predicated on a single market of exchange, a separate and universal system of commerce. (1989: 49)

Irigaray's *speculum* seeks to illuminate the oppressive construction of what femininity is; its subtext, however, must be the elision, if not the denial, of differences within what the term "masculinity" can otherwise mean for an individual subject who must interpret a paradoxical representation of the male body.

As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out in his article, "Significant Others," "Irigaray's conception of the amazing fixity of patriarchy" belies her "own patterns of blindness," those patterns of "perilous universalizations scripted upon the tain of her *speculum*" (1988: 621, 609). In the Irigarayan scheme of things, gay men, and the potential their sexual difference can animate for a discoherent reading of masculinity, are displaced. She displaces the possible transgression they pose by homogenizing their male bodies into an

identification with the heterosexually defined masculinity of straight men. Politically, this remasculinization (for want of a better description) arises because the paradoxical nature of gay men, being different yet same, must not be allowed to threaten her “tidy opposition between men’s sexuality and women’s sexuality” (Gates 1988: 613).

The moment Irigaray frees femininity from the dark, oppressive, and confining space of hom(m)o-sexuality’s cave is at once that selfsame moment she, like Wittig, returns any possible variation of masculinity—at the site of a male body in contra-diction—back into nothing but its hierarchical, hegemonic, and heterosexual identification. These two examples of what constitutes masculine identity are, in their respective feminist theorizations within the discourse of gender studies, instances illustrating the limitations of an essentialist politics of gender identity.

BATMAN AND THE RE-TURN OF MASCULINITY

“I don’t believe in this macho bullshit.”

*Commando*⁷¹

How does the above reconsideration of an essentialist feminist discourse, as practised by Wittig and Irigaray, affect the reading of *Batman, The Movie* that began this chapter? If there is a reinterpretation of Burton’s film, what does this, in turn, say about reading masculinity within a chiasm? More urgently, what does reading within a chiasm mean for gender studies, and the reading of corporeality this academic field animates, when the textual representation of gender in question is one of contra-diction?

The limitations of both Irigaray and Wittig’s essentialist discourses are clearly visible

⁷¹*Commando*, dir. Mark L. Lester, with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Rae Dawn Chong, Fox, 1985.

when they are transposed onto *Batman, The Movie* in order to read its particular representation of gender. When Bruce Wayne/Batman's male body is reconfigured as a space of contra-diction—of contrasting identities that represent and re-present the masculine superhero—this film's representation of masculinity is nowhere near, if it ever is, the seamless and generic category of gender these two essentialist feminists have made gender out to be. Because the film spectacularizes Bruce Wayne's masculine identity to be an inextricable alignment with yet a decided differentiation from the hypermasculinized identity of his alter-ego, Batman, Burton's film represents the act of reading masculinity as an instance when a spectator is simultaneously doubling and splitting the dominant categorization of gender. Burton's spectator, therefore, faces a surface of liminality; he/she must make sense of this bifurcated representation of the male body. Where the spectator finds him/herself, then, is within that chiasmatic space between representing this body as definitively masculine and re-presenting it as an enactment, as an-other identity of masculinity: the spectator's position is, in reading this particular male body, what I would like to consider as a tensed oscillation between reading sameness and difference. To read within this space intimates that one's male gaze is potentially iterable, and the reading of masculinity it engenders—both as a representation of text (read male body) and the subjectification of one's identity—is effectively discoherent.

Batman (like those other comic superheroes who influence our cultural appreciation of ideal masculinity, Superman and Spiderman) is a hypermasculinized version of the male body. His body displays masculine prowess, if not supremacy: his taut, well defined musculature in skin tight costume spectacularizes the male body while his physical strength coupled with agility in numerous amazing feats display an idealized representation of masculine prowess. "Linking the questions of the male hero's effectivity at work, the embodiment of an excessive physical performance and an anxious narrative of male sexuality is," however, Yvonne Tasker writes, "the crisis of the paternal signifier" (1993: 233). More than just a reading of this particular crisis—one Jameson diagnoses as that

postmodern condition, the “crisis of representation”—what a spectator effects, in the course of seeing and reading within the chiasm of the male gaze, is a spectacularization of his/her inability to delineate and categorically say, “this is what masculinity really is.” In the figure of the superhero, our own reading of masculinity is on display, and in crisis.

I return to the scene of Bruce Wayne’s early morning workout while Vicki Vale lies in his bed. Working-out may tone his muscles while it prepares him for his contest with The Joker (where he will recover Vale) but what it inevitably emphasizes too is an identity in action, if not in performance. The spectacle of an identity in performance fractures those claims which essentialize the connection between the male gaze, the male body, and heterosexuality into that singular category, “masculine.” A spectator who looks into this spectacle to see “the accoutrements of phallic power, [and] the finery of authority” will recognize, as Tasker explains further, that it “belie[s] the very lack that they display” (1993: 242). Spectators watching *Batman, The Movie*, then, cannot refute that what they are looking at is Bruce Wayne’s spectacularized body performing those acts of masculinity.

What there is, in place of its assured masculine identification, is a body split into, if it is not also caught between, two identities, two (sur)faces. Here, a spectator’s male gaze continually oscillates between these differences that, in turn, animate a reading in dis coherence. In reiterating this practice of reading with the male gaze, the spectator will engender his/her subject position as masculine. This repetition is, however, merely a copy, a performance of a reading position that, invariably, foregrounds itself as a pose, or, more precisely, as the surface one enacts when reading.

READING AS SPECTACLE: THE READER IN (RE)ACTION

This failure of the subject’s visual and spatial orientation, a loss of the

parameters of direction, must be taken as ... [a] point of view which cannot be located ... to generate an account of the world or its whereabouts within it.

Tony Wilson⁷²

Reading is not unlike assuming the role of Bruce Wayne playing Batman: in order to read, to interpret, and to make sense of the text before him/her, a reader must abide by the interpretive strategies of the hom(m)o-sexual community. This means that an individual reader adopts that generic subject position of the masculine reader/spectator in order to read, describe, and express the representations of gender and sexuality within dominant culture. Like Bruce Wayne, whose masculine identity is secured in the enacted masculinity of Batman, a reader's gendered subjectivity is guaranteed only if he/she assumes, and enacts, this dominant position of masculine readership (or spectatorship as the case might be).

Such a position is enabled only if the text encountered works to affirm those dominant representations of gender and sexuality; if a text does otherwise, it complicates, dislocates, and makes visible the inability of a reader to subscribe to the male gaze when representing his/her identity as the masculine reading subject. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* illustrates this inability. Here, the representation of masculinity is simultaneously its representation: instead of a narrative closure, there is always a startling disclosure that what a reader understands, defines, and articulates as "masculinity" is at once something (a)like, and also something apart from, that hom(m)o-sexually determined identity he/she ascribes to firstly, the male body and secondly, the subject position of reading.

If this dis coherence of the term "masculinity" is suggestively produced by as it is a product of, and, by extension, potentially germane to and commensurate with, a postmodern understanding of the category "identity," then, the lesson learnt from Puig's

⁷²Tony Wilson, "Reading the Postmodernist Image: A 'Cognitive Mapping,'" *Screen* 31.4 (1990): 397.

novel must transcend the specificity of such a text to embrace the very mechanics of the male gaze, that cultural practice of reading. That is, it teaches us that the male gaze is quite possibly already a site of dis coherence each time it is deployed by a reader or spectator when he/she is in a chiasmatic interaction with a display of the male body as contra-diction.

Hence, to see is, at once, to see into this spectacle of masculinity where its difference is re-centered as its similarity is repeated and revised. In each instance, we come to recognize the subject position of seeing and reading as never the stable, fixed, nor homogeneous entity it is supposed to be. On the contrary, each instance of the male gaze is an enactment of a subjectivity specific to, and contingent upon, the text the individual subject interacts with.

Perhaps, then, reading in these postmodern times is not unlike a reading where, as Jameson remarks of Jean-Francois Lyotard's work to destabilize the totalizing effects of meta-narratives, the individual reader is "search[ing], not for consensus, but very precisely for the 'instabilities' ... in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous [hom(m)o-sexual readings have] been conducted" (1984: xix). It is in searching for these "instabilities," these differences and contra-dictions riddling the otherwise seamless and homogeneous surface of representation that we can begin to chart alternative readings, and as its consequence, different realizations of oneself. The male body on exhibition; the masculine identity displayed; the male and masculine subjectivity hom(m)o-sexually profaned: in short, masculinity is made ec-centric because of dis coherence. Reading masculinity, therefore, and reading masculinity as men specifically, must now engage the dis coherence of gender.

The meaning of such a term as "masculinity" today can have relevance only if it concerns itself with seeing and reading not merely as an engagement with its textual representation but beyond it, and particularly within a chiasm, in those destabilizing acts of enacting and performing the masculine subject position of reading. Each description and

categorization of the masculine identity we encounter when we enact the male gaze within firstly, the dominant hom(m)o-sexual culture and secondly, the academic theorizations on gender will initiate revisions, and re-readings, and rewritings of masculinity as both subject and object of the male gaze we are said to possess, never process.

As I produce this spectacle, therefore I am, and, to some extent, I am also the very spectacle I produce. This sums up the points I raise in this chapter as it also alerts a reader of this study to the politics I am plotting for a revision of reading masculinity. Within this revision of reading masculinity, the reader will eventually realize that his/her own identity as that generic reading subject, the male reader, is inextricably entwined with the politics of dis coherence I am proposing. Transpose the spectacle of an identity in performance onto the chiasmatic potential of the male gaze and what takes place is a dis coherence of reading masculinity arising out of a reader's inability to represent him/herself as the masculine seeing/reading subject.

These ideas of reading within a chiasm and reading as performance are points I want to draw our attention to; they are necessarily fundamental to how a politics of dis coherence works when reading masculinity within postmodernity. In chapter 4, I employ these ideas—especially those of an identity in performance, the male body as a site of contra-diction, and a reading oscillating between differences—to examine the masculine subject position of seeing and reading as it relates to how pornography is represented. In particular, I want to detail how and why the expected alignment between represented and lived masculinities, as anti-pornography feminism postulates, might be a matter of dis coherence rather than it is an essentialist equation that associates the body, sex(uality), power, violence, and the male gaze under the homogenizing rubric “pornographic.”

CHAPTER FOUR

“SENATOR, ONE MORE THING: LOVE YOUR SUIT!”: A LESSON IN READING ONE’S (SUR)FACE

[W]hat pornography is and what it does have been seen to lie in the eye of the beholder, to be a matter of what one is thinking about when one looks at it, to be a question of point of view.

Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon⁷³

The debate on gender and pornography, which anti-pornography feminism has generated, is an adequate site to explore further the points I raise in previous chapters. The alignment of masculinity with pornography, which this debate foregrounds, must be of particular interest to this study; what must be of utmost concern, I believe, is the essentializing tendency of anti-pornography feminism to conflate these identifications of the masculine and the pornographic with the male body both within and without the representation of pornography. In this chapter, I want to question and examine this conflation by introducing the earlier points I have made into this debate: namely, (1) an identity in performance, (2) the male body as contradiction, and (3) a reading in dis coherence. Together, these act as focal sites enabling me to investigate this debate as it relates to two recent texts within popular culture.

The controversy surrounding Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs* and Brett Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*, and the branding of these texts as pornographic, make them suitable texts to reconsider the relationship between pornography and gender.

⁷³Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women’s Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988) 24.

In addition, these texts enable the individual subject to rethink that alignment of masculinity, the male gaze, and the individual male body that this debate seeks to make visible. In other words, introducing these points into the anti-pornography debate, and in particular, how it determines a reading of both these texts, I shall develop further the discoherent reading of masculinity I aim to demonstrate in this study. Moreover, I am concerned with the transgression such reading can effect for the subjectivity of the seeing/reading subject who locates him/herself in that generic masculine subject position of the male reader. Conversely, essentializing the categorization of masculinity by identifying it with the male body—which is what anti-pornography feminism argues—becomes problematic if the subject's understanding of the body in question is inflected by dis coherence in general, and a realization that the identity this body effects can also be performative in part.

PORNOGRAPHY: THE LOGIC OF IDENTIFICATION

In his article, "Vas," Paul Smith observes that "Pornography is often understood, as much in recent feminist theory as in the juridical arena, to be in some sense a generalizable instance of masculine sexuality at work through cultural representations" (1988: 103).⁷⁴ When this particular feminist-inflected collusion of masculine sexuality and visuality takes place, when what is made visible is the figure of the male pornographer who engenders,

⁷⁴A signal example of this approach, Smith notes, is the anti-pornography stance of Dworkin and MacKinnon. Theirs is a bifurcated approach of challenging the oppressive cultural representation of women and the necessary struggle to guarantee women's civil rights. For an elaboration of this approach see Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988) and Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1987).

markets, and consumes such representation, “pornography,” Smith adds, “often seems to act as the analogue from which the very structures and modes of masculinity can be read off; *masculinity is at its most visible there*” (Smith 1988: 103. Emphasis added).

Although pornography “is a complex issue,” it is, for both MacKinnon and Dworkin—and the anti-pornography feminism they expound—described in terms which are, MacKinnon, summarizes, “really very simple.” This is exactly the point that comes across when this particular feminism examines the issue of gendered identity, and, more specifically, that of the masculine identity a male body is said to possess within pornography. In each of these representations, MacKinnon elaborates, “if you are a woman, that could have been you, it is you; if you are a man, it is for you, in your name” (1987: 12). In other words, pornography privileges men’s power over women as sexual objects whilst denying the latter any other existence than that which Dworkin repeatedly generalizes as fucking commodities—they are possessible, exchangeable, exploitable. Dworkin writes: “In practice, fucking is an act of possession—simultaneously an act of ownership, taking, force; it is conquering....” That is, “The conquering of the woman acted out in fucking, her possession, her use as a thing, is a scenario endlessly repeated, with or without direct reference to fucking, throughout the culture. In fucking, he is enlarged” (1981: 23).

Where Dworkin's politics of gender identity is concerned, “he”—the represented male body that is coded as a sign of masculine dominance, violence, and prowess in pornography—is conflated with the individual male spectator/reader because both share the same corporeality, the male body. What is foregrounded in her politics is a convergence of the terms “the male body,” “sexuality,” and “masculinity” under the rubric “pornographic.” Consequently, this convergence is used by anti-pornography feminists to describe how a male spectator of pornography is, in the act of deploying the male gaze, recognizably masculine. According to Dworkin and MacKinnon, when a man sees a woman, stripped naked or bound, when she is positioned as subservient or slave, when she

is a sex toy, or even when she is nothing more than the female body itself, he sees this particular body through the acculturated site of the male gaze. This body is an exploitable lack upon whose surface he grounds and exercises his masculine prowess and sexual supremacy; and pornography is where these acts of masculine self-representation locate themselves in a perverted representation of femininity.

“Pornography,” MacKinnon writes, “defines women by how we look according to how we can be sexually used.” “Pornography,” she goes on to add, “codes how to look at women, so you know what you can do with one when you see one” (1987: 173). Such representation is, following MacKinnon, read according to the dominant hom(m)o-sexual practice of naming and categorizing gender. More importantly, it institutes itself in the paradigm of pornographic representation, the exploitative male-female sex act. “In other words,” Dworkin records, men dominate, control, and

possess women when men fuck women because both experience the man being male. This is the stunning logic of male supremacy. In this view, which is the predominant one, maleness is aggressive and violent; and so fucking ... the man and the woman experience *maleness* ... [and] thus, in being fucked, she is possessed: ceases to exist as a discrete individual: is taken over. (1987: 64)

It would seem therefore that in seeing the male figure, who is sexually oppressing and/or exploiting women, in pornography, a male spectator will identify with—if he himself is not already—that man represented. And this, I might add, is the crux of the anti-pornography debate in its attempts to delineate what masculine identity and subjectivity are: “Man the action-subject is,” Susanne Kappeler summarizes, “identical with man the viewing subject” (1986: 58).

The debate anti-pornography feminism generates—and which Dworkin and MacKinnon promulgate in particular—revolves around the notion of masculine power. These anti-pornography feminists make the assumption that the masculine power to represent *is always* the misuse of power in cultural representations of gender. They argue, moreover, that this power is exercised by individual males whose masculine identities are

always indicative of, and already germane to, the generic pornographic producer and consumer, the male body/subject. In short, gender is seen in these debates along essentialist lines which are similar to, and parallel with, the description of that cultural alignment between the male gaze, the male body, and the individual male subject when “femininity” is articulated within hom(m)o-sexual culture.

Where individual women are aligned in a trajectory that links them to exploitation, sexual oppression, and an overwhelmingly gross misrepresentation in pornography, individual men are seen to be pornographic and, hence, masculine. What there is in the politics of gender identity that anti-pornography feminism puts forth is a facile categorization of “masculinity” as an entity “approximating [...] something like ‘the collective male ego’” (Stearn 1982: 39). There tends to be, a reader can surmise, a calculated proposition that masculinity and hom(m)o-sexuality are interchangeable with, and perhaps, even exist as, pornography itself. According to Andrew Ross in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, such thinking symptomatically represents “the pornographic itself as a ‘dominant’ culture” (1989: 175). We are, for all the politically correct pronouncements and protestations anti-pornography feminism makes, caught within a critique of culture that is but one (il)logical step away from seeing *all* representation—because of its masculine basis and bias—as pornographic.

POWER AND PORNOGRAPHY: DISENGAGING THE MAZE GAZE FROM ITS PORNOGRAPHIC FOCUS

“Pornography is about power—men’s power over women” (Coward and WAVAW 1987: 179); when the British feminist group, Women Against Violence Against Women makes this point, it tends to envisage a particular exercise of such power to be, I would like to suggest, an instance of the male gaze as that prevailing cultural practice of reading

gender.

These pornographic representations, according to the anti-pornography feminists, solicit the male gaze so as to realize the supposed sexual pleasure male audiences expect when presented with the female body. Pornography, it would seem, repeats and recycles the hom(m)o-sexual economy of exchange. It becomes obvious therefore that the male gaze is where, following MacKinnon,

Gender is an assignment made visually, both originally and in everyday life. A sex object is defined on the basis of its looks, in terms of its usability for sexual pleasure, such that both the looking—the quality of *the gaze*, including its *point of view*—and the definition according to use become eroticized as part of the sex itself. (MacKinnon 1987: 173. Emphasis added)

MacKinnon's quote illustrates how anti-pornography feminism emphasizes the male gaze in terms of "the principle that patriarchal oppression is," Ross points out, "*systematic* and *all-inclusive*, and that it is exercised universally and transhistorically" (Ross 1989: 186). Or, as Carl F. Stychin notes of this particular feminist politics, "If sex is the objectification of women, then pornography, because it necessarily objectifies, fractures, and dehumanizes, creates the appearance of a sexuality reflected in the daily sexual encounters of men and women" (1992: 861), the daily encounters mediated, more often than not, in the scopic field of the male gaze.

This is my problem with anti-pornography feminism when it attempts to entwine pornography (the text), the male gaze (how we read this text), and masculinity (that gendered identity of the seeing/reading subject) with the individual male body (the male subject). In her book, *The Pornography of Representation*, Kappeler seeks to shift the focus of present debates on pornography away from what pornography is to how pornography affects. What she is arguing for, I want to suggest, is a reconsideration of this inextricable entwining of pornography and masculinity. What her observation intimates, moreover, is a necessary rethinking of the practised male gaze, and the reading of masculinity it engenders. She writes: "The fact of representation needs to be

foregrounded: we are not just dealing with ‘contents.’” Rather, we need to consider pornography, she explains further, as “a dialectical relationship between representational practices which construct sexuality, and actual sexual practices, each informing the other” (1986: 2).

Perhaps, the question she implicitly asks in her critique is this: to what extent is a masculine identity truly pornographic? As far as Dworkin is concerned, “the power of the pornographer is the power of the rapist/batterer is the power of the man” (1981: 100). Dworkin’s comments, not unlike MacKinnon’s observations, bear the signature of essentialism:⁷⁵ both women emphasize masculine identity in those generic terms of a pornographic domination, possession, and abuse of women. Yet, if this anti-pornography feminism both Dworkin and MacKinnon practise tends towards essentializing the represented male body, and, by extension, the identity of a spectator reading this body with the male gaze, Ross is correct to argue that we need to rethink how we see and read corporeality and gender within pornography. He writes (following Kappeler) that “what is needed is the reform of the very structure of looking and gazing that organizes visual representation” (1993: 185). Correspondingly, it is the question of looking at the male body, both within and without pornographic representation, that must be addressed.

⁷⁵De Lauretis argues that essentialist feminism is a project of revision concerned more with recovering a feminine past while simultaneously claiming its future. Her use of the term “essentialist” is germane to “what is constitutive of feminist thinking and thus of feminism” (1993: 75). Yet as insightful as her understanding of “essentialist” is, the essentialism of anti-pornography feminism, in my opinion, goes much deeper: it is one that sees gender as inherently binarized, divided, and irreconcilable along lines of power/helplessness, them/us, dominance/submission, male/female, sex/rape, etc. For a discussion of de Lauretis’s point, see her article, “Upping the Anti [sic] in Feminist Theory,” *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993): 74-89.

**JONATHAN DEMME, *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, AND THE CASE OF
FLAYED FEMALE BODIES**

In what follows, I contest these broad and simplistic alignments of the male body, the male gaze, and the individual male subject; I argue against these alignments for they tend to homogenize masculine identity both within and without pornography. I want to disrupt these alignments by examining Demme's film, *The Silence of the Lambs*,⁷⁶ where the represented male body of Buffalo Bill, a body that is contradictory same and other, displaces and attenuates any attempt to categorically read it according to the dominant representation of masculinity as engendered by the male gaze.

This dislocation, however, takes place within a chiasm. Here, the individual subject finds him/herself reading a representation of similarity that is equally a re-presentation of its dissimilarity, and never the certainty of what the male body should signify, masculine identity.

I want to also examine this dislocation in terms of individual subjectivity. When it is argued, especially within anti-pornography feminism, that the male gaze engenders a pornographic subjectivity for the reading/seeing subject—and hence, its masculine identification—a reading that takes place within a chiasm, however, questions this particular alignment of identity. The sense of “personhood,” of who or what one is in the act of interpreting pornography, is problematized by the difficulty of accounting for the represented male body in contra-diction. This is precisely the crisis of representation when critics attempt to label Demme's depiction of masculinity pornographic. In addition, there is the possibility that a spectator who negotiates the representation of corporeality as contra-diction will invariably engender him/herself as the cross-(ad)dressed masculine

⁷⁶*The Silence of the Lambs*, dir. Jonathan Demme, with Jodie Foster, Anthony Hopkins, Scott Glen and Ted Levine, Orion 1991.

subject that my study aims to posit in its conclusion. (This concept of the cross-(ad)dressed masculine subject is one I shall postulate here, but investigate and “flesh out” further in chapter 5.)

A recurrent focus of this chapter, moreover, will be whether the particular anti-pornography feminism that is exemplified by Dworkin and MacKinnon can effectively articulate what masculinity is as it seeks to examine and rewrite the representation of gender within pornography. Demme’s film can be read as an exemplification of what Dworkin and MacKinnon label as pornography. After all, what else is a spectator to make of this film, Elizabeth Young pointedly remarks, when he/she confronts those “naked, mutilated, and murdered female bodies” (1991: 8) littering its surface? Nevertheless, this film has been recuperated by the film critic, Amy Taubin, to be “a profoundly feminist film” where Clarice Starling disrupts the stereotypical gendered positions of spectator and spectacle (1991a: 18). Demme’s film, she goes on to write, “takes a familiar narrative and shakes up the gender and sexuality stuff. It’s a slasher film in which the woman is hero rather than victim, the pursuer rather than the pursued” (1991a: 18).⁷⁷ I would like to suggest, however, that her analysis of this film is valid only when it is read through, and, more probably, inflected by, that alignment of masculine power, sexual violence, and female suppression. Within hom(m)o-sexual culture, this alignment is, more often than not, realized as the practice of reading with the male gaze.

When *The Silence of the Lambs* “situates its naked and dead female bodies on a continuum of violence against women ...” (Young 1991: 9), it would seem that the primary aim of the film is to gratify the spectatorial pleasure of an audience accustomed to

⁷⁷ In “Writers on the *Lamb*: Sorting out the Sexual Politics of a Controversial Film,” Taubin writes: “*The Silence of the Lambs* preserves the formalities of the exploitation film, only to upend their meaning. It’s a slasher film in which the woman is hero rather than victim. Moreover, she is never placed in sexual peril” (1991b: 56). See her discussion of the film in *Village Voice* 5 March 1991b: 49+.

seeing such representations of the feminine. Demme, it has been argued, cultivates this continuous and pervasive display within a spectator's male gaze, working it as an interrelated, and unabashedly overlapping, dynamic between Buffalo Bill, Hannibal Lecter, and, finally, the spectator him/herself. This tripartite nexus embodies a masculine identification for the spectator with firstly, the violating and murderous gaze of Buffalo Bill on his victims and secondly, those searing, probing, and psychoanalytic eyes of Lecter on Starling. In both instances, each man is pathological and criminal. Moreover, because each has perpetrated acts of violence against women, they are, in both Taubin and Young's respective readings of Demme's film, pornographic, and, by extension, masculine.

As a spectator confronts photographs of those corpses Buffalo Bill skins, photographs of Frederika posing in her underwear, photographs of Catherine Martin flashed across television screens, what we have is the genre of the photograph and its ubiquitous subject, the female body. Nowhere is this more graphically depicted than when the dead body of one of Buffalo Bill's victims is examined and photographed in the funeral home in Potter, West Virginia. Not only are these actions analogous to the flayings inflicted on the female body but they are a further penetration and dissection of this body when it is photographed for a routine police examination as well as a coroner's inquest.

Inscribed as the *mise-en-scène* of the feminine condition, the sign, Woman, becomes a pornographic spectacle within the film; she is violently exploited, brutalized, and continually identified as a penetrable lack. Although this sign is situated at the engendered space of femininity, the image, within Mulvey's critique of film and gender, she is, more significantly, that surface where a violence of masculine representation is played out, a slasher movie materialized on the body female. Within the parameters of anti-pornography feminism, these representations fulfill the expectations of an audience that sees the film with the male gaze; in particular, they also gratify the apparent pornographic desires of a male spectator of *The Silence of the Lambs*.

This film fulfills these expectations, on one level, in the promised spectacularization of Clarice Starling.⁷⁸ She is the film's spectacle. In that scene with the dead female body in Potter, Starling's "to-be-looked-at-ness" is realized when she is positioned, like this flayed surface of femininity, under the scrutiny of men. Starling is the object not only of the local policemen's collective male gaze when she enters the home but, subsequently, of a convergence of the undertakers' gaze, of Crawford and Akin's, of the camera's focus, and, ultimately, of the spectatorial male gaze a spectator brings to the film. Her spectacularization is reinforced by Starling's juxtaposition to the corpse which graphically details the feminine condition in the film, skinned and violated, dissected and photographed. Demme uses the camera to frame Starling, from a low angled shot, with the corpse in a frame suggesting, more than proximity, correlation. Here, the mutilated and mangled merges with the healthy; two distinct female bodies collapse into one dominant hom(m)o-sexual depiction of femininity, that of the powerless and penetrable Woman.

If "the cultural position of the male gender *vis-à-vis* the female gender is," Kappeler observes, "ultimately one revolving around the sadistic act of sex/violence" (1986:104), we can surmise that under the political vanguard of anti-pornography feminism all women and all men are subsumed into *either* one of two categories which Dworkin summarizes thus: "Be the mother-be fucked or be the father-do the fucking" (1981: 49). Women in this film are positioned as, and only as, objects to be flayed, either physically or psychoanalytically.

Hannibal Lecter's gaze on Starling is sexually desirous; he "gazes" upon Starling's

⁷⁸The value of images to our hom(m)o-sexual culture is inestimable in the production and maintenance of an economy of exchange. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag describes this thus; "A capitalist society requires a culture of images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex" (1977; London: Penguin, 1978) 178.

face, and in the course of the film, he sketches a portrait of her. Such portraiture, however, denotes Lecter's ability to satisfy his sexual desire by reproducing Starling as an image, a painted spectacle. That is, the portrait of Starling is his own (pro)creation. But his gaze suggests much more: it is a methodological unpeeling of the face she presents to him. For Lecter, Starling is as much a trainee detective as she is a sexual object to be examined, diagnosed, and laid bare as that condition of lack allowing a masculine representation in terms of psychoanalysis. According to Young, "his questions and comments localize the misogynist potential of psychoanalysis itself, since like Freud interrogating Dora, Lecter sexualizes all discussions with Clarice in the guise of exposing her emotional interior ..." (1991: 9). In this particular flaying that Demme presents, Starling's disempowerment, if not her continued entrapment, signifies the condition of women within dominant culture. Such representation, then, allows us to understand why Demme's film stands accused of portraying women in a pornographic manner.

His film, it must seem, solicits a spectatorial male gaze that concurs with this violence is inflicted upon the female body. This is literalized, almost to the point of obvious spectacularization, when Buffalo Bill dons his night-vision goggles. When he dons these goggles, he is able to see his female victims in the dark; in other words, while he is empowered to see, his female victims are rendered helpless and blind. In the course of the film, he does this twice: he uses the goggles to survey Catherine Martin before he kidnaps her, and he employs them—like an instrument of warfare, if not a hunting tool—when he entraps Starling in his darkened basement. Both these moments are, in addition, instances exhibiting how a spectator is positioned to see and read. The spectator's point of view, as it looks upon the female body, is not unlike Buffalo Bill's gaze: they are *one and the same*. As these now fuse together with the camera's point of view, masculinity and violence converge with the mechanical and the commercial. This is that conflated gaze deemed germane to *all* males, that excites *all* males to violence, and which proceeds to sanction the pornographic identity of the male gaze.

A scene displaying this feminine condition of helplessness and blindness I outline above takes place when Starling enters Buffalo Bill's labyrinthine basement. She is caught in a darkened enclosure that is literally Buffalo Bill's gender trap. More than a hiding place, this space—or, more appropriately, a cocoon in a film playing with those images of butterflies, metamorphosis, and skins—is where he contemplates, and threads together, the skin he sews out of women's flesh. Conversely, this space allows him to finally enact, if not address, his feminine identity by becoming the “woman” he desires to be.

In addition, this space echoes that enclosed arena, the movie theater, in which Demme's spectators are thrust into a state of (re)vision. As masculine spectators, we are eventually rendered helpless when Starling turns around and fires into that dominant line of sight we are said to share with Buffalo Bill. Any attempt to link the identity of the spectator with that of this serial killer is fragmented in her signal act of firing back. Her actions intimate how a spectator might also be a possible victim of the fallacy this male gaze hides when it enforces a reading of Buffalo Bill's body as masculine and pornographic in spite of its contradictory representation in Demme's film.

Indeed, we should recognize that the spectator is constantly, and continually, throughout the diegesis of this film, vacillating between possessing this dominant gaze and being deprived of it. This fluctuating placement and displacement of the masculine identity a spectator is said to possess is exactly my point of contention as to why any attempt to classify this film as pornographic, in the first instance, and to then transpose such an identification onto its spectator, must be highly suspect.

Hence, where Starling is previously unable to see because of a moment of blindness in the basement, her act of self-preservation illuminates her darkness. In turning around, facing Buffalo Bill's gaze squarely, firing directly into it, and into the camera as well as our line of sight, Starling obliterates the oppressive male gaze and substitutes the darkness that envelopes her with natural light streaming through a blown-out window. In this metaphoric exchange of darkness for light, oppression for liberation, Starling (as well as

the spectator) can see again; undoubtedly, this is a moment of sight. In turn, this moment is indicative of the feminine subject's triumph over a violent and pornographic masculinity which oppresses. Starling's moment of (re)vision—her defiant fragmentation of the male gaze—parallels her progression from the female trainee who must be guided by a paternal Crawford to her independent status as an FBI agent who “nails” the criminal herself and, in the process, graduates from the Academy.

Starling's actions resonate with a particularly feminist rendering that aims to display how the practice of reading gender with the male gaze repeats the prevailing acculturation of women as exploitative lack. Her actions demonstrate a need to reconsider how femininity is realized within a dominant culture that is identifiably pornographic in its representation of women. If anti-pornography feminism is to justifiably accuse *The Silence of the Lambs* of being pornographic, and hence the very ground or surface where the individual male subject locates his masculine representation, it needs to assume that this convergence of the male gaze, masculinity, and pornography is situated in the representation of Buffalo Bill's male body, and far more importantly, in the body of the individual male spectator who reads Buffalo Bill's body. Within the politics of gender identity this particular feminism explicates, the masculine identities of both Buffalo Bill and the male spectator are, therefore, generic, homogeneous, and interchangeable.

Just as Starling must read those flayed female bodies to piece together Buffalo Bill's identity, *The Silence of the Lambs* is also a surface—which is, in effect, the movie screen itself—waiting to be pulled back so as to reveal its secret. For its male and female spectators, what this secret is, I want to suggest, is not only an agenda displaying the oppression women face under the dominant acculturated practice of reading gender but also a realization that the underlying theme of Demme's film is a questioning of the problematic identification of masculinity with the male body, and, more urgently, of this already uneasy alignment with pornography, in turn.

Let us reconsider this query Demme poses by returning to the text. In a scene

bringing together good and evil, motherly love and pornographic perversity, Senator Martin, Catherine's anguished mother, confronts Lecter. In return for Lecter's information on Catherine's kidnapper, a text of biographical data, she will grant him a room with a view, a new (con)text. This exchange premises itself, however, on the ability to read each text sought and obtained only to progress forward: for Martin, it is the (false) lead of who the kidnapper is that is crucial to the investigation; for Lecter, it is the recognition that this offer is itself a step closer to freedom. Indeed, each text functions as a surface where the subject locates, reads, and realizes the other's representation. Martin's willingness to solicit Lecter's help recognizes the psychoanalyst that lurks beneath his identity as a serial killer; after all, it is his case files that appear to offer the necessary clues leading to the eventual recovery of her daughter. Lecter, on the other hand, reads Martin's offer—or, more precisely, her senatorial and masculine-like power—in terms of a possible bargain for just not any room with a view but a room with a view to an escape.

In this light, Lecter's seemingly jocular quip—"Senator, one more thing: love your suit!"—is immensely revealing: it suggests itself as a lesson in reading surface, or, more exactly, in reading the surface of gender identity. It is this superficially frivolous remark concerning her masculine-styled suit, the dress she wears and the (sur)face she effects, then, that is central to re-reading masculinity in *The Silence of the Lambs*. For Lecter, Martin's suit, a surface covering her body, is the "skin" that effects the apparent masculine identity of a senator she is culturally coded with despite the specificity of her female body. In other words, Martin's effected surface is, for Lecter, that screen (both in terms of a disguise and a display) where an individual's understanding of gender is, ultimately, a matter of reading—or, in terms of surface, addressing—the bodysuit, the surface represented and not the body itself. What Lecter points to in this scene, and which Demme's spectators must pay attention to, is a reading of these surfaces of gender in terms of an enacted, rather than an essentialized, difference.

A MATTER OF SKIN: READING THE BODYSUIT

“What does he want her for, Dr Lecter?”
 “He wants a vest with tits on it,” Dr Lecter said.

Thomas Harris⁷⁹

“Skin,” Judith Halberstam points out in her article, “Skinflick: Posthuman Gender in Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs*,”

becomes a metaphor for surface, for the external; it is the place of pleasure and the site of pain, it is the thin sheet that masks bloody horror. But skin is also the movie screen, the destination of the gaze, the place that glows in the dark, the violated site of visual pleasure. (1991: 39-40)

Skin is, I hasten to add, the bodysuit one “wears”: it is that projected surface where the individual subject enacts or effects an identity that plays out the expected gendered roles within hom(m)o-sexual culture. The bodysuit, moreover, can also be a surface of contest and revision. In the context of this study, therefore, the bodysuit of engendered surfaces I refer to foregrounds the possibility that the act of effecting, or representing, one’s identity as this particular (sur)face of masculinity, or femininity, is equally the act of re-presenting it. What I wish to demonstrate in deploying this concept of the bodysuit, and its specific relation to gendered identities, is the possibility of surface as “a recuperative structure for the social control of social behaviour.” More importantly, I want to also illustrate how my understanding of surface can also function as, following Garber, “a critique of the possibility of ‘representation’ itself” (1993: 353).

Buffalo Bill’s attention to surface points towards a similar reconfiguration of corporeal surface as—or perhaps, more exactly, to the respatialization of this surface in terms of a bodysuit that is—a reading text. In effect, Demme’s spectator reads a specifically rethreaded bodysuit Buffalo Bill desires and which he fleshes out of female

⁷⁹Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1989; London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1991) 146.

skin. Buffalo Bill's ability to (re)embody his masculine identity, and, more importantly, re-engage his individual subjectivity as the "woman" he wants to be despite his bodily configuration as male must reorientate how we read the body/surface, or body/skin, binarism.

Starling must investigate this particular bodysuit of skin if she is to understand Buffalo Bill; but she is only enabled to do so if she knows the technique required to demarcate, delineate, and describe the suit he is making. Lecter's ability to read Senator Martin's suit—in terms of the surface she effects—has to now serve as Starling's necessary lesson. "Read Marcus Aurelius," Lecter informs Starling. Why? For as Marcus Aurelius is the author of *Meditations* he is also a tactician of war. He is the strategist who must read his maps and battle plans. In other words, he must read surfaces. Likewise, Starling is the behavioural scientist who must read Buffalo Bill's texts, those female skins which though flayed and disfigured are surfaces bearing his finger-prints. As long as she charts from these a profile of Jame Gumb, the bodily form to match the media produced surface of who or what exactly is Buffalo Bill, detective Starling will snare her man.

Our first introduction to this character is a newspaper cutting entitled, "Bill Skins Fifth," as it is mounted on Crawford's board surrounded by those photographs of his victims. Demme repeats this tableau in the climatic scene which takes place in Buffalo Bill's basement: the same cutting is pinned to his board. In both instances, juxtaposing photographs of victims and the newspaper "picture" of the victimizer serves to present Buffalo Bill as part of the overall montage: he is just another newspaper item, just another image for public consumption. In other words, as the practitioner of the male gaze, a role which Demme's spectator is accused of replicating, Buffalo Bill is undercut from the very beginning of the film: he is hardly an identity of essentialized masculinity as he is, instead, a surface produced by the media to account for the "faceless" serial killer.

If anti-pornography feminism demonstrates the axiomatic relationship between the male body, masculine identity, and pornographic violence against women, it also describes

the masculinity of Buffalo Bill as a gendered essence that real life male spectators identify with, and whose violence they then replicate. But when Buffalo Bill is himself a surface product of the media (as much as he is a product of Demme's film), that masculine identification of the male spectator with Buffalo Bill is questionable. We might now begin to see, instead, that Demme's film concerns itself with a spectacularized and problematic representation of masculinity.

This is to say that even though Buffalo Bill may be the serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs*, it is his problematic masculine identity which is central to a spectator's understanding of this film. In the course of watching it, a spectator will realize that Buffalo Bill's identity as a gender dysphoric displaces, takes over, and eventually becomes the focus of a film that begins with sexual violence against women but moves increasingly towards an examination of representation—specifically, that problem of fixing Buffalo Bill's identity to be either pornographic or masculine, or even both.

As such, the spectator must move beyond the surface "Buffalo Bill" if he/she is to recognize and appreciate the flaws of describing his male body as particularly representative of a masculine identity that is pornographically engendered. A possible solution might be this point Lecter makes: "Of each particular thing," he tells Starling whilst quoting Aurelius, "ask what is it in itself." Although his male body can be seen to be masculine because of the dominant body/skin binarism in general, and because of his pornographic violence against women in this film, Buffalo Bill is also, and disturbingly so, a media generated (sur)face of masculine violence. More importantly, he is a male body suffering a condition of dis-eased masculinity. Halberstam records his particular condition as that of gender dysphoria: uncomfortable with his gender identity, Buffalo Bill is unable to represent himself as anything but a confusing tangle of contradictory identities (1991: 41). A spectacularized example of this lies in those acts of skinning and sewing, de-gendering and re-engendering his identity. Indeed, his is a case of the mismatched bodysuit, and it is this condition which is the "particular thing" about Buffalo Bill.

When Buffalo Bill's killings are argued as symptomatic of an aggressive, sadistic, and, without doubt, oppressive masculinity, they are seen as expressions of an inherent violence of masculine (hetero)sexuality. Yet a problem exists: Buffalo Bill's actions are not sexually orientated. He kills women not because he sexually desires their bodies but because he wants their skins. "We covet," Lecter informs Starling, "what we see everyday": Buffalo Bill sees the skin of femininity everyday and desires to wear this suit, this surface. For him, its existence points to the possibility of an-other bodysuit, an-other identity. His flaying, and rethreading, of female female skins allows him to engender a bodysuit that is always a matter of effecting the "woman's" face he desires and not the surface his body should guarantee. Buffalo Bill's masculine identification is, however, seen to be a consequence of his skin, if it is not also a result of his actions in acquiring a new bodysuit made out of female skins. When a conflation of skin and body takes place, when one's "outward appearance" is argued to be the evidence of one's gendered identity, this is that defining instance in which Buffalo Bill's male body, and its supposedly masculine surface, becomes the "fetishized signifier of gender for a heterosexist culture" (Halberstam 1991: 42). This particular conflation, therefore, mistakes corporeality with surface; in turn, this surface is mistaken to signify gender identity.

This is how anti-pornography feminism echoes such an equation: masculinity is presumably tied to the (sur)face of the pornographer who is always understood as the male subject. When this specific equation is translated onto Demme's film, the act of skinning the female body is synonymous with the rape act. In short, this translation fits Dworkin's generalization that any violence to women is the fuck act itself. In flaying female bodies to appropriate their skins, Buffalo Bill does not commit either a murder or a flaying as he "fucks" women and fleshes out his pornographic identity. Dworkin's categorization, when mapped onto Buffalo Bill's flayings, highlights the literal metaphorization which her anti-pornography feminism employs to describe and define what masculine identity really is within pornography.

If this is precisely what Dworkin's politics of gender identity involves, there must be a necessary reconsideration of her tendency to account for the lived masculine identity of the individual male body in terms of metaphoric violence or the "fucking act." When advocates of anti-pornography feminism, following Dworkin, argue the irrefutable fact of Buffalo Bill's fabrication of the "vest with tits on it" serving, and becoming, in the final instance, the individual (in this case, always male) spectator's lived experience, they postulate a description of masculine identity that is articulated in essentialist terms. This conflation of masculine identity occurs because the collective male gaze is seen to engender a pornographic representation of the feminine both within and without this film.

However, what is symptomatically inscribed on Buffalo Bill's skin, and, more urgently, in his attempt to re-skin, is the specter of the ruptured male body. How does this possibly affect those equations made between the spectator and the spectacle of pornography in Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*? I would like to suggest that a slippage occurs when an attempt is made to link a spectator's identity with Buffalo Bill's apparent masculinity even though they seem to share the male gaze when reading gender. If Demme's film disturbs the homogenizing equation between gender and identity, between body and surface, between masculinity and violence, a spectator needs to rethink the male serial killer whose body denotes not so much masculine violence as it does masculine dysphoria. In turn, the prevailing accusation anti-pornography feminism makes—that of a masculine identification between a male spectator and Buffalo Bill—becomes incongruous; instead of the shared male gaze each deploys to read, and the similar corporeality which locates this gaze, all there is, in Demme's representation of masculinity in the film, is a male body in contradiction, and the contradictory reading of masculinity it engenders.

DEMONIZING BUFFALO BILL AS THE OTHER MAN

The director chose to make the symptoms obvious through what the general audience accepts as typical gay male effect: nipple rings, swishing scarves, crude makeup, etc.

Jewelle Gomez⁸⁰

Such a contra-diction is characteristically displayed in the homosexual identity Buffalo Bill is depicted as while the film moves towards its end. He can be, and has indeed been, misread in a confused entanglement of sexual deviancy: he is seen to be a homosexual as he is simultaneously addressed in terms of transvestism. In addition, the film strongly suggests his desire to see himself as a transsexual when it pursues the line of his rejected applications for a sex change operation as one possible motive for his crimes. When his skin takes on those signifying marks of the effeminate drag queen, his body is overdetermined as the pathological body of the male homosexual. This confusion of sexual identity must disturb any claim of the pornographic to be categorically masculine in the figure of Buffalo Bill.

A spectator who accepts this particular representation of Buffalo Bill as a male homosexual, or, more disturbingly, as the misogynistic male homosexual, glosses over Lecter's diagnosis. As he informs Starling, Buffalo Bill is neither a transsexual nor a homosexual but "Billy tries to be a lot of things ... he thinks he is, he tries to be ... he wasn't born a criminal, but was made one through years of systematic abuse." The form this "systematic abuse" takes is the heterosexual regulation of gendered identity. Buffalo Bill's body cannot address him as the "woman" he wants to be; it only can if his body is transvestized as the effeminate drag queen, as the homosexual Other. Within the dominant

⁸⁰Jewelle Gomez, "Writers on the *Lamb*: Sorting out the Sexual Politics of a Controversial Film," *Village Voice* 5 March 1991: 58.

representation of gender, Buffalo Bill's problematic representation as the male subject who understands his body to signify "woman" makes sense only if it can be accounted for as a homosexual deviation.

But Lecter's diagnosis points to much more. In trying "to be a lot of things," Buffalo Bill is engaged in an experiment which dominant culture aggressively proscribes, if not disavows. I am, of course, referring to his reorientation of the body/surface binarism. Instead of locating identity within this binarism, his fabrication of "a vest with tits on it" implies how a subject's gendered identity can be simply a matter of enacting the culturally ascribed role he/she is deemed to effect when identifying him/herself. For Buffalo Bill, he is as much the serial killer who flays female bodies as he is the male homosexual who (ad)dresses himself in female skin. But each instance of Buffalo Bill's identification locates him within a space where sameness and difference—the similarity and dissimilarity of his gay male body to that dominant representation of masculinity—are now in interplay; Buffalo Bill's male body is, within the context of this film, nothing less than a space of contra-dictions.

More importantly, Lecter's observations also allude to how Buffalo Bill is systematically read, within anti-pornography feminism, to be the masculine serial killer. When this particular feminism labels Buffalo Bill "pornographic," it implicitly sees in his corporeality the fleshing out of an identity that is definitively masculine in spite of the transvestism of his male body as (homo)sexually other. There is no attempt to differentiate the specificities of Buffalo Bill's dysphoric identity. In order to account for the violence against women, both the homosexual and the heterosexual identities that Buffalo Bill seems to effect are collapsed into one generic identity called "pornographic." This collapse takes place because, within the essentializing tendency of anti-pornography feminism to rewrite gender, these sexually opposing identities are deemed to share the same male body, and, more importantly, that same masculine identity it enables. What is more disturbing is the fact that this particular representation is appropriated by anti-

pornography feminists to account for the lived masculinity of the spectator despite the apparent homosexual difference Buffalo Bill's body spectacularly alludes to in the closing scenes of the film.

That this complication is avoided in favour of a political agenda seeking to reinscribe the pornographic oppression women face enunciates how anti-pornography feminism, following Ross, "proposes to redefine cultural conflict along gender ... lines," and in doing so, it "reproduces the same languages of mass manipulation, systematic domination, and victimization ..." (1989: 176). The politics of gender identity that anti-pornography feminism expounds is concerned with broad, and homogenizing, descriptions of identity rather than accounting for the specific differences each individual body foregrounds. A case in point is the identification of masculinity this particular feminism engenders. As Stychin notes:

By shifting the focus of attention from the patriarchal culture to the oppression of individual women by individual men through sexuality, the necessary, categorical conclusion is that *all men due to their gender*, are oppressive. (1992: 872. Emphasis added)

If this equation is, according to Stychin's analysis, fraught with a tendency to overdetermine, and, more often than not, to overgeneralize, what constitutes masculine identity within pornography, there has to be a corresponding reconsideration of the male gaze as the prevailing cultural practice of reading—and its potential to engender masculine subjectivity—when what has to be accounted for now is the male body in contra-diction.

If Buffalo Bill's need for this feminine bodysuit is nothing more than a desire for an identity located on surfaces, the crux of the problem is that Buffalo Bill's skin is "an incorrect casing" (Halberstam 1991: 42). It is this "incorrect casing" that does not allow him to enact the identifiably gendered subjectivity, "woman." To have a matching suit, a perfect outfit in which skin and body coalesce as one surface, or perhaps, even as an interface, Buffalo Bill must efface his present, and limiting, skin, and replace it with the appropriate bodysuit.

When Buffalo Bill sews that suit to effect his new identity, he is able to “wear” the skin of a seeming transvestite as he also seems to be the male homosexual whose sexual difference must be spectacularized and accounted for. The basement scene where he shifts from being a heavy metal rocker to the transsexual he is enacting but never can be in the absence of surgery is a scene in point. In this telling instance, his identity is truly a matter of seeming the part. “Seems” is precisely the issue here: *seems* as an effect of inhabiting the skin and *seams* as those suturing lines in one’s engendered bodysuit. Buffalo Bill is more than the seamstress that he is; he is a seam that hinges and unhinges a spectator’s problematic identification with as it stimulates a critical re-evaluation of how he/she can read Demme’s representation of masculinity in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

ENACTING THE MALE SPECTATOR: A PERFORMATIVE ACT

But what has all this got to do with one’s male gaze when, as a spectator, one deploys it to see and read the male body? Demme’s film is, I contend, a text denying the spectator a reading of gender corresponding to the dominant representations of masculinity and femininity: the gaze of a hom(m)o-sexually defined spectator is contested for this film attenuates the seemingly masculine spectatorial pleasure and narrative control the gaze should engender.

The Silence of the Lambs should function as a surface that is, repeating Halberstam, “the destination of the gaze” where a spectator can locate otherness and represent him/herself as that masculine subject, the male spectator. But Demme’s film is hardly a “mirror” (following Lacan) where this spectator can situate an understanding of masculinity in Buffalo Bill’s homosexual otherness. Such a dislocation of the gaze disturbs the spectator’s ability to fix Buffalo Bill as the pornographic serial killer. In turn, this spectator must reconsider whether Buffalo Bill’s masculinity is not an example of an

“overcoated” identification that locates gender in terms of corporeality despite the evidence of sexual difference. Instead of locating his/her self-representation within the otherness that is Buffalo Bill, the spectator is presented with a male body that problematizes that prevailing practice of reading gender, and the descriptions of “masculinity,” “pornography,” and “the male body” the male gaze would otherwise engender.

Whereas “Skin becomes the material which can be transformed by the right pattern into a seamless suit” (Halberstam 1991: 42) for Buffalo Bill, its problematic reconfiguration as an interface of differences affects a spectator’s reading of masculinity in terms of those body/surface, hetero/homosexuality, masculine/feminine binarisms. Where there ought to be the distinct possibility of differentiating, and separating, one from the other, the fact that there is an interface, an interplay, or, more exactly, an interdiscourse, between these terms signals the chiasmatic reconfiguration of a reading identity who must negotiate this site of contra-diction. According to the architectural theorist, Mark Wigley, “The inside is at most a construction of the surface” (1992a: 370), and if that sense of who we are as spectators of Demme’s film is reflected in our reading of Buffalo Bill’s seemingly homosexual body as pornographic and masculine, what we are effecting, in reading with the male gaze, is that culturally recognizable (sur)face of that generic masculine subject, the male spectator. What a masculine subject demonstrates, in the reading I have just outlined, is that such a subject position, and the identity it engenders, can be primarily a matter of gender performativity.

“That the gendered body is performative,” Butler claims in her article, “Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse,”

suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality, and if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that interiority is a function of a decidedly public and social discourse ... through the surface politics of the body. (1990b: 336)

In other words, that recognizably masculine identity of the spectator, and particularly the

male subject, “*produces* [itself] on the skin ... [where] it is always a surface sign, a signification on and with the public body that produces this illusion” (1993a: 317) of an essentialized gender identity. And, if one’s identity as a man or a woman is argued to be an effect of one’s skin, of one’s surface as the spectator who sees and reads corporeality with the male gaze, then one’s sense of who or what one is as a gendered subject is a matter of gender performativity. “In this sense,” Butler is correct that, “gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express” (1993a: 314).

Yet, the very performativity of gender identity Butler talks about, the very reiteration of the engendered role a subject enacts within culture, is itself the very basis for its alteration. In her most recent book, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* she emphasizes the underlying Derridean ideas in her notion of performativity. She writes: “Performativity is thus not a singular ‘act,’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms....” But it is precisely in this reiteration that performativity “acquires an act-like status in the present [where] it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of [that] which it is a repetition” (1993b: 12). Butler’s notion of performativity lends itself to the politics of dis coherence I am delineating thus far. In particular, the performativity of the male gaze—of one’s simulation and dissimulation of the masculine subject position of seeing and reading—explains how the chiasmatic effects of reading realizes itself in terms of dis coherence.

This is how I envisage a performativity of the masculine subject to work within the politics of dis coherence: each repetition of the masculine subject position to read the represented corporeality (in this instance, the male body) in contra-diction is equally an alteration of its gendered identity. In other words, the seeing/reading subject who simultaneously reads and re-reads this representation of similarity and dissimilarity will *effect* an identity that is like that of the generic masculine subject, the male reader. But if “to effect” denotes what is both, at once, a resemblance to and a re-presentation of that

masculine subject position of reading, the individual's subject identity as the reader/spectator is an instance of *reading like* rather than *reading as* the masculine subject. This difference in reading identities—between an enacted and an essentialized identity—recognizes the potential of reading with the male gaze that is not only chiasmatic but performative too. More significantly, this suggestion situates the reader/spectator within a chiasmatic realization of his/her identity as the cross-(ad)dressed masculine subject. (I shall return to this idea in greater detail in chapter 5 where I embark on an analysis of its relation to a postmodern text.)

Because Buffalo Bill's sexual otherness stimulates an indeterminate reading of his male body, and the identity it ought to engender, he comes to be, within the context of Demme's film, that paradigmatic paradox of sameness and difference a spectator must make sense of. There would appear to be two seemingly contradictory but nevertheless homogenizing trajectories of gender identification that a spectator can deploy to read Buffalo Bill. On the one hand, there is the view which must fix him dominant and masculine because of his sexual violence against women and, on the other, there is that view which sees Buffalo Bill's masculinity to be questionable in the light of his gender dysphoria, if not his seemingly homosexual identity. It is this latter description that comes to dominate how Buffalo Bill's body is repeatedly read by most audiences: he is that disturbing representation of a body in contra-diction onto whose surface dominant culture is able to displace the violence outside, and safeguard the integrity of, a body which must remain heterosexual and masculine because it is male.

That we can read Buffalo Bill according to either of—or even both—these apparently opposing points of views testifies to a spectator's inability to categorically name what his male body really signifies. Is he the serial killer? Is he the male pornographer personified? Or, is he the male homosexual who is the transvestite desiring to be, more accurately, a transsexual? This convergence of differing, and conflicting, perspectives harbours something much darker even as this conjunction provides the

spectator with the prevailing categories of gender and sexuality to identify the contradiction Buffalo Bill is. What this convergence highlights, in the course of watching the film, is the attendant anxiety of the spectator's male gaze. This anxiety is symptomatic of the postmodern crisis of representation, and where the representation of gender is concerned, this anxiety defines that moment when a spectator's alignment of the male body with the dominant representation of masculinity is dislocated.

The basement scene where Buffalo Bill threads together these differing identities spectacularizes the point I am making. Cavorting to music and performing the "woman" he wants to be before a video-camera which is tellingly placed before his body, Buffalo Bill seems to confirm our sense of his otherness when it is screened before Demme's audience as a moment of his own self-entertainment. Here, the bodysuit of female skins he wishes to wear is metaphorically realized in the feminine accoutrements he has donned and painted on in order to effect the identity of a woman. Nevertheless, the "woman" he creates in this instance is an identity realized only with the transvestism of his male body; within dominant culture, such transvestism recalls the identity of the male homosexual.

This parodic scene resembles a shot through his own video camera: it is a medium take framing his upper torso. This brief but significant moment echoes the film within a film effect this basement scene alludes to; in addition, it distances as it emphasizes our reading of Buffalo Bill as a containable other. The very next shot, however, collapses any distinction between him and the spectator. The camera pulls back to spectacularize him, in a shot conjoining Buffalo Bill's video camera, Demme's lens, and the spectatorial male gaze, as a body which is as confused as it is equally confusing for a spectator looking at it through this collective focus. This spectacle of Buffalo Bill, a man who has been refused gender reassignment procedures, foregrounds his male body whilst exposing its (surface) lack: "he has pulled his penis back between his legs to simulate the appearance of a vagina" (Young 1991: 18). If one's identity as a man, and significantly, as that germane masculine subject one apparently is, depends upon the possession of such genitalia,

Buffalo Bill's penis which has not been so much surgically removed, merely tucked away, folded in between skin to create its seeming sexual difference, must render that suture between body and identity, skin and gender, as a tear, a dislocation in other words.

A male spectator's assured pornographic, and, by extrapolation, masculine, identification with Buffalo Bill produces, in the final instance, a disruption to that body/surface alignment a spectator is expected to employ when reading gender in this film. Moreover, this alignment that anti-pornography feminism claims is no longer valid; within its particular politics of gender identity where body and surface tend to be conflated into a homogeneous categorization of gender, such a disengagement must initiate a reconsideration of the very politics it subscribes to. In both these instances, there is, according to Halberstam, "the image of a fragmented and fragile masculinity" for what is spectacularized in this scene is "a male body disowning the penis" (1991: 41).

For the spectator, this is as much a moment of confusion as it is of fear and horror. Buffalo Bill's pose, a pose highlighting the ease with which the penis can be removed and obscured, signals the possible mutilation, if not castration, taking place in this scene. This castration foregrounds Buffalo Bill's ability to effect a surface identity. In enacting the part of the male homosexual, and, more specifically, the part of the male-female transsexual, Buffalo Bill effects—in the surface he projects—contrasting (sur)faces that animate differing identities. To a large extent, these identities he effects sever the masculine identity his body should engender. In the process, what we understand as gender identity moves beyond those claims of essence, interiority, or biology; gender identity is better appreciated, I feel, in terms of Butler's concept of performativity.

IN PERFORMANCE: SEEING AND READING WITHIN THE MALE GAZE

If gender identity is traceable to its effect—to its surface as re-presentation—we can

begin to rethink the spectatorship and readership that individual men and women undertake with the male gaze as itself a performative act.

Reading like the masculine subject—or, as this study aims to conclude (and which chapter 5 will delineate further), reading like the cross-(ad)dressed masculine subject—is continually stressed when an individual spectator comes to read *The Silence of the Lambs*. Like Starling who stitches together a text on Buffalo Bill, like Hannibal Lecter who must remember his psychoanalytical case file on Jame Gumb, and not unlike Demme who has to string together his cinematic shots into the screening of this film, a spectator finds him/herself trying to make sense of these varied yet parallel acts. Each of these instances is an act of reading the serial killer: Starling reads those flayed surfaces of his victims, Lecter must remember his case notes, Demme must read Harris' novel only to re-read it in terms of the genre, film. And a spectator must read the narrative of this film, like a serial, where each of the above is an installment demanding a reading of a surface promising a pattern of narrative pleasure, control, and, finally, closure. In other words, each of these readings I describe above is a reading that arises out of, works with, and animates a reading practice which fixes itself in the effected surface encountered.

Because how we read Buffalo Bill is, finally, an engagement with those faces of the serial killer and the gender dysphoric he enacts, with the face of the masculine consumer/spectator of female skins and the face of that transvestized subject, the male homosexual, the masculine identity he is argued to be can be an enactment in itself. If the latter is exactly the situation Demme's film points towards, the essentializing claim put forth by anti-pornography feminists that represented and lived masculine identities—at the shared site of the male gaze, and, more disturbingly, at the male body—are one and the same must be questioned. Conversely, the masculine subject position a spectator is assumed to inhabit when deploying the male gaze undergoes a revision. Each time the male gaze is appropriated to read representation, there is a chiasmatic reconfiguration of this gaze as performative; the essentialized identification of masculinity with corporeality is

dislocated. For the individual male spectator, there is now the possibility that his masculine identity can be revised: when he effects the expected cultural role of the male reader, he also animates a dissimulation of this gendered identity.

I want to examine this dissimulation, and inevitably, its revision, of the male gaze by returning to the scene of the corpse examined, and the role Starling plays in reading that flayed feminine surface. Starling exemplifies the points I wish to make in what follows because she offers, in her presence as the female spectator, an instance of how the male gaze can be deployed performatively. Framed together with the dead corpse, Starling appears to fulfill the bargain of the cinematic transaction, and, to a larger extent, the hom(m)o-sexual economy: in exchange for cash, a woman is traded as a spectacle of Dworkin's fuck. Yet her status as the spectacle is undercut in Demme's film. From the moment we encounter Starling, we are confronted with a woman refusing to be the spectacle of the male gaze. She breaks the feminine stereotype—its “flatness” of representation—ever so often by assuming and initiating the narrative (recall her bogus offer to Lecter) and thus moves into that masculine space of three-dimensionality.⁸¹ Within the narrative structure of the film, she refuses to play the ascribed role of the submissive, silent, and subject-less woman.

Starling's sight can be described as a “denaturalized” appropriation of the male gaze. In the process, she becomes like any other male spectator of the corpse. Like this spectator, her point of view is paralleled by Demme's camera. His camera shifts from that low angled shot framing the corpse and Starling within one seamless representation of the

⁸¹As image, the feminine is believed to inhabit a space of two-dimensionality: it is “a fragmented body ... of flatness” with “the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than the verisimilitude to the screen” (Mulvey 1975: 12). In contrast, the male spectator is argued to “demands [*sic*] a three-dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror-recognition ... in which he articulates the look and creates the action (Mulvey 1975: 12-13). Masculinity is therefore, in the practice of the male gaze, positioned to order and occupy space.

feminine condition to pan across the body from a point of view that is Starling's. What this is is a gaze from above, an objectifying gaze Starling is implied to possess, and which displaces her, in turn, beyond the spectacle, Woman. Significantly, this gaze that Starling deploys is not unlike the gaze a spectator exercises to read gender. In the course of the film, Starling becomes a spectator; more precisely, her identity is like the individual spectator who situates his/her reading within the subject position of the male gaze in order to make sense of Buffalo Bill's flaying of female bodies.

Starling "surveys the undignified flesh and speaking into the tape recorder, she begins," notes Halberstam, "to piece the body together, rebuild the mutilated body, and learn what the body has to tell" (1991: 43). I will suggest that in piecing together a body-print of the corpse, in lifting off its surface those revealing finger-prints of Buffalo Bill, she repositions herself along the masculine/feminine alignment of visibility. In becoming like the male spectator, she effects a sight that enables, but no less importantly, a spectatorship looking at, masculine identity. In effecting such an identity, she complicates those dominant representations of what spectatorship and spectacle are meant to imply. Her investigation into, and her quest to understand, who Buffalo Bill is problematizes the rigid polarization of gendered identities that Mulvey attributes to the operation of the gaze within the filmic narrative.

In this moment of performing a masculine spectatorship, however, Starling's gaze repudiates that supposedly hermaphrodite identity, the female spectator, she should be. In *The Desire to Desire*, Doane contends that such a spectator oscillates between two irreconcilable positions: she is expected to see and read from a position of masculine spectatorship as she is also expected to continually identify with, if not become, the spectacle of this male gaze. In going against what Doane calls "a narcissistic identification with the female figure as spectacle and a 'transvestite' identification with the active male hero in his mastery" (1988: 19), Starling's ability to see with the male gaze is, I believe, more than merely an exchange of one skin for another, or one gaze for the other.

Rather, in the figure of Clarice Starling, there is a demonstration of how the male gaze is potentially predisposed towards a dis coherence of reading masculinity, but, more importantly, towards a dis coherence of the masculine subject position of reading. When Starling simulates the identity of the spectator to read Buffalo Bill's problematic representation, she is, inevitably, reading within a chiasm. Reading within this space of iterability, within this space where repetition and alteration is animated, she is forced to reconsider the apparent masculinity of his male body: he is hardly the serial killer who flays female bodies as he is a gender dysphoric whose attempts to rethread his gendered bodysuit dislocates the body/surface binarism. When a dis coherence of reading masculinity takes place, the equation anti-pornography feminism makes between "subject," "male body," and "masculinity" when talking about pornography needs to be re-examined: Starling's identity as the effected masculine spectator contests the essentialist gender categories this specific feminism's politics of gender identity bases itself on.

On the contrary, her identity as the masculine spectator foregrounds itself as an *act(ion)* of reading with the male gaze. In reiterating this practice of reading like the male reader, the masculine identity Starling's spectatorship alludes to suggests that such an identity can be, in all probability, that of the cross-(ad)dressed masculine subject which a politics of dis coherence engenders. In effect, then, Starling's identity as the critical and investigative spectator who is distanced from and never only the spectacle itself, or the hermaphrodite female spectator she should appear to be, displaces the cultural practice of reading gender with the male gaze from an essentializing identification with the male body to an understanding that this particular body is capable of animating a performativity of gender.

Starling reads these feminine surfaces—the flayed bodies, the photographs, Frederika's dresses—along seams of gender disruptions, lines of rupture that open up the body/surface bind and allow her to stitch a profile of that (sur)face "Buffalo Bill." Looking at these surfaces, and realizing that Buffalo Bill's desire for female skins is the

desire for effected surfaces, Starling's gaze refuses that rubric "male" for she does not exercise it in terms of an essentialized masculine identity. Rather, she exercises it in terms of performativity. The performativity of her male gaze offers those of us working within gender studies an alternative means to rethink how we should conduct future debates on gender and visibility. Perhaps, we should also rethink these issues, as they pertain to the representation of masculinity within pornography, in these alternative terms of performativity, not in terms of an essentialism of the body, and/or sexuality, and definitively not solely because of its pornographic realization.

In Demme's particularly contradictory representation of Buffalo Bill's male body, a spectator's understanding of this space is (re)orientated; he/she comes to recognize this as an interface between one's specularly and the object spectacularized. This interface of similarity and dissimilarity comes to be where spectator and spectacle interact, differentiate, and recognize each other. Or, as the case might be—and as I have sought to illustrate in the preceding pages—this is where the spectator realizes an identity of similarity in a moment of differentiation, if not difference itself. But this recognition occurs at two distinct yet interdependent levels: firstly, it occurs at the level of reading a body in contra-diction and secondly, it situates itself in the reading identity an individual reader effects in order to represent this paradoxical display of the body.

Each instance that we read a representation of contra-diction—especially with regard to corporeality—can also be therefore that moment when we, particularly as masculine spectators, find ourselves within that postmodern moment of iterability. Within this postmodern moment, a spectator finds him/herself in that simultaneously defining and differentiating moment of recognition and misrecognition, of representation and re-presentation. A reading grounded in iterability, and arising out of the chiasmatic tension between reader and text, foregrounds why each reading with the male gaze might be a reading in dis coherence—a reading effecting, finally, the identity of the cross-(ad)dressed masculine subject. Or, as I come to see, there is for the spectator what Christopher Craft,

when writing of Oscar Wilde and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, describes as “not the earnest disclosure of a single and singular identity ... but rather something less and something more: the vertigo of substitution and repetition” (1990: 22).

BODYSUITS, PHYSIQUES, AND IDENTIFIABLE SURFACES: THE CASE OF ELLIS' *AMERICAN PSYCHO*

This particular disclosure of one's identity as the performative reading subject is laid bare when an individual subject comes to read the representation of gender in Bret Easton Ellis' splatterpunk⁸² novel, *American Psycho*. Ellis' representation of gender in the form of the bodysuit of surfaces—or, in the context of this novel, the clothing—one wears to effect an identity becomes the focus where an individual reader's male gaze begins to engender, even re-engender, his/her own subjectivity as the reading subject.

What is central to Ellis' controversial novel is that interface of not only body and surface, in terms of what is being represented, but also identity and subjectivity as they relate to how an individual subject reads the novel's particular representation of masculinity, masculinity as the interface of differences at the site of the male body. In what follows, I want to illustrate how reading a description of masculine identity, especially when it is rethreaded as this interface, can affect what we understand

⁸²Splatterpunk fiction, according to Ken Tucker, whilst owing much to the tradition of the horror story is in fact a development of this genre. Though it appropriates the element of our fear of the unscen, it privileges the visibility of horror. “Most of this new horror fiction,” he writes, “trades in the scariness of the seen, the notion that the reader will be frightened—and entertained?—by the explicit depiction of horrific acts, including murder and every sort of mutilation of the body” (1991: 13). For further discussion, see his article, “The Splatterpunk Trend, And Welcome to It,” *New York Times Book Review* 24 March 1991: 13-14.

masculinity to be. In turn, disrupting such an understanding necessitates a change in the very nature of how we read our own identity as the reading subject. In making this claim, I want to illustrate how the performativity of the reading subject can move beyond Butler's firm insistence that performativity is only a repetition of a set of norms leading to its eventual disruption. Rather, this performativity can also be an enactment that masks, poses, and maybe even fakes an identity that is, or is not apparently so.

More importantly, I will suggest that in reading the surfaces of gender in *American Psycho*, a reader can begin to rethink the masculinity-pornography debate: by rereading the seemingly masculine bodysuit of Bateman, a reader comes to see it as neither masculine nor pornographic but, like Buffalo Bill's bodysuit, as a problematic site. In the process of explicating this point, I will question the critical assumption, at least within the dominant hom(m)o-sexual culture where surfaces are privileged sites of femininity, that seeing enables us to read gender unproblematically.

"Dress," Silverman notes, "is one of the most important cultural implements for articulating and territorializing human corporeality—for mapping its erotogenic zones and for affixing a sexual identity' (1986: 146). In short, the surface one elects to display, as one's identity, is very much an effect of the gender one is expected to enact as one's subjectivity. In *American Psycho*, the gender and/or sexual identities of its characters are dictated by the fashion designers each patronizes as much as their respective social identities are acknowledged in the restaurants they pick to dine at from the ubiquitous but indispensable *Zagat*, or the music they admire, be it Whitney Houston, Genesis, or Huey Lewis and the News. Theirs is a culture mesmerized by, obsessed with, and hopelessly dependent upon the Image. Because this image is envisioned in, and specifically, produced according to, a consumerist America in the '80s, Ellis answers the question "who is she/he?" or "who am I?" in terms of dress and surfaces.

This is how Bateman, the self-reflexive narrator of the novel, describes his secretary: "Jean is wearing a red stretch-silk jacket, a crocheted rayon-ribbon skirt, red suede pumps

with satin bows by Susan Bennis Warren Edwards and gold plated earrings by Robert Lee Morris” (Ellis 1991a: 105-106).⁸³ If one recognizes the Other in terms of opposition, in terms of differences which can be contained, Bateman’s articulation of Jean’s wardrobe signals his inability to know the Other except in terms of labels and categories which dominant culture ascribes to the representation of gender.

Similarly, the clothes addressing men, in *American Psycho*, are dictated according to *GQ*, a men’s fashion magazine. Inasmuch as it details and records contemporary trends in men’s clothes, *GQ* delineates a distinctly modern, white, middle-class, and, largely, affluent American masculinity. It comes as no surprise then that the male characters in this novel adjudicate masculinity according to the fashion statements espoused in the pages of *GQ*. Bateman’s description of the actor Tom Cruise illustrates this:

It’s the actor Tom Cruise, who lives in the penthouse ... He is much shorter in person and he’s wearing the same pair of Wayfarers that I have on. He’s dressed in blue jeans, a white T-shirt, an Armani Jacket. (71)

Although Cruise portrays overtly coded masculine roles in such movies as *Days of Thunder* and *Top Gun*, and is hence representative of a Hollywood masculinity personified, he is lionized, in this telling instance, according to the clothes he wears. Here, Ellis illustrates the on-going correlation between surface (read dress) and gender within culture.

There is, however, more than this in his description of Cruise. In reducing this larger than life representation of the Hollywood movie star, Bateman’s description erases the celebrity status of Tom Cruise as he also trivializes the supposed masculinity that Cruise stands for. Tom Cruise, today’s depiction of the masculine man in Hollywood movies, is nothing more than a walking fashion catalogue. Like his description of Jean, this record of Cruise’s attire is an instance of a nomenclature where gender and dress

⁸³Subsequent quotations from this novel will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

coalesce to facilitate the dominant representation of gendered identity. But, as his list of Jean's labels suggests, such nomenclature does not always originate with Bateman nor is it part of his vocabulary when representing the Other.

Instead, these labels are distinctively part of Jean's life, they are labels which appeal to, and represent, her feminine identity. When Bateman uses these labels to read Jean, he may be the masculine reader of feminine surfaces but what actually takes place is his entrapment within a discourse that belongs, undeniably, to the Other. If this situation of reading the Other's surface records Bateman's troubled position to name and categorize, what happens when the representation of masculinity is trivialized as, reduced to, and made visible in terms of an (ad)dressed identity? What happens is this: such a representation engenders a reading in dis coherence because the represented male body does not signify an essentialized masculine identity; this particular representation, then, spectacularizes the body's seeming masculinity.

PROTESTATIONS OF PORNOGRAPHY: ELLIS AND THE FEMINIST RESPONSE

I reread *Body Double* because I want to watch it again tonight even though I know I won't have enough time to masturbate over the scene where the woman is getting drilled to death by a power drill since I have a date with Courtney at seven-thirty at Café Luxembourg.

Bret Easton Ellis⁸⁴

Criticized extensively since its publication,⁸⁵ *American Psycho* has been "argued

⁸⁴Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Picador-Pan Books, 1991a) 69.

⁸⁵The publication of *American Psycho* has generated more criticisms than it has garnered praise, or critical plaudits. Critiques have tended to center around two foci; one of politics oscillating between

endlessly” around “issues of violence, sexism and censorship” (Wyndham 1991a: 4). Lorrie Moore, writing in *New York Times*, expresses this view for she sees the novel as a “violence against women that is estheticized [*sic*], playfully prolonged, eroticized, made to serve as the dramatic engine of the story” (1990: A27). And this can only be, according to Andrew Motion, “Not interesting-disgusting but disgusting-disgusting: sickening, cheaply sensationalist, pointless ...” (1991: 61).

As spectacle, the women characters in *American Psycho* fulfill the promise of the male gaze as it is argued to work within pornography: “The only reason chicks exist,” Hamlin informs Bateman, “is to get us turned on” (91). Hamlin’s sexual desire is further appeased and gratified when this feminine image transcends its two-dimensionality and becomes a “hardbody” (91). In Ellis’ novel, women are nothing but commodities for sexual pleasure and phantasy as their corporeality conflates with those images produced to feed the voracious appetites of male consumers. Here is a quote from Bateman illustrating this point: “I masturbate, thinking about first Evelyn, then Courtney, then Vanden and then Evelyn again, but right before I come—a weak orgasm—about a near-naked model in a halter top I saw today in a Calvin Klein advertisement” (24).

More disturbingly, women are transformed into spectacles of pornography: they move beyond mere objects of scopophilia to become that space of masculine perversion and sadism. Women, in Bateman’s gaze, are nothing more than surfaces where his masculine prowess incises itself: “The things I could do to this girl’s body with a hammer, the words I could carve into her with an ice pick” (112). Nowhere is this more explicit

pornography and censorship, and the other around issues of literary worth. As it is to be expected, the former has dominated debate. For further discussion, see: Caryn James, *New York Times* 10 March 1991: H1+; Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, *New York Times* 11 March 1991: C18; James Bowman, *Times Literary Supplement* 15 March 1991: 12; Hugh Barnacle, *The Independent* 27 April 1991: 29; Mim Udovitch, *Village Voice* 19 March 1991: 65-66; Naomi Wolf, *New Statesman and Society* 12 April 1991: 33-34; and Andrew Motion, *Observer* 21 April 1991: 61.

and graphic than when Bateman releases a starving rat into the disgorged vagina of a semi-conscious woman:

I'm trying to ease one of the hollow plastic tubes from the dismantled Habitrail system up her vagina.... The rat doesn't need any prodding ... and ... moves effortlessly ... racing up the tube until half its body disappears, and then after a minute—its rat body shaking while it feeds—all of it vanishes, except the tail, and I yank the Habitrail tube out of the girl, trapping the rodent. Soon even the tail disappears. The noises the girl is making are, for the most part, incomprehensible.

I can already tell that it's going to be a characteristically useless, senseless death, but then I'm used to horror.... The rat emerges headfirst—somehow it turned itself around inside the cavity—and it's stained with purple blood ... and I feed it extra Brie until I feel I have to stomp it to death, which I do. (328-329)

In this passage, man, animal, and machinery intersect to penetrate and dismember the female body. This conflation is further emphasized when Bateman's actions are deemed to be representative of the individual's male gaze as it is argued to manifest itself when he/she deploys it to read gender in real life.

Indeed, there seems to be a convergence, for the spectator, of the male gaze and pornography: as his critics have charged, *American Psycho* is a novel which is characteristically man-induced, man-produced, and consumed primarily by men. In this respect, Ellis stands accused of being the male hunter who tells the story of his prey: although he writes about men bashing women, and hence works merely at the level of representation, he is seen to repeat and reinforce the violence and misogyny women face in everyday life. Perhaps a far more serious complaint must be the profits Ellis makes from a reading market always obsessed, and in lust/love, with the image(d) Woman.⁸⁶ He is, it

⁸⁶Naomi Wolf sees the debate revolving around this novel as “a struggle over the proper gender of literary authority. The issue raised by [this book's] critical reception is this: who gets to tell the story of sexual violence against women, the hunter or the prey?” (1991: 33). Her article is also critical of Ellis' claim that *American Psycho* is a social critique. See “The Animals Speak,” rev. of *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis and *Dirty Weekend* by Helen Zahavi, *New Statesman and Society* 12 April 1991: 33-34.

can be said, exploiting this sign for masculine creativity and self-representation as he is, in addition, cashing in on its on-going commodification of Woman within the publishing and literary establishments. James Bowman is hardly surprised that one feminist response to Ellis' novel is that which "has roundly condemned and threatened to boycott both publisher and book" for what is seen to be, according to the American National Organization of Women, "a how-to novel on the torture and dismemberment of women" (1991: 12).

BENEATH ITS SURFACE PORNOGRAPHY: *AMERICAN PSYCHO* AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Every line, paragraph, chapter, and train of thought proceeds ineluctably on parallel tracks, past the same scenery, to a single destination of social indictment.

Mim Udovitch⁸⁷

Udovitch's commentary on *American Psycho* provides us, I believe, with an alternative to reading Ellis' seemingly pornographic novel: beyond, or, more correctly, beneath its surface littered with sexually violent and pornographic representations of women can there *not* be a splatterpunk novel detailing life in a world paranoid with imagery?

According to Ken Tucker, the splatterpunk novel dramatizes, "most effectively," "a kind of all-purpose amorality and affectlessness" that permeates our everyday life. In his description of this particular condition, Tucker points out how such fiction serves to detail and record the disaffected identities who populate such a reality. Within the general

⁸⁷Mim Udovitch, "Intentional Phalluses," *Village Voice* 19 March 1991: 65.

description Tucker alludes to, *American Psycho* can be seen to be, in its address of Bateman's particularly pornographic response to his reality, nothing more than an example of "fiction as sociopathology" (1991: 14).

Tucker's broad outline of what the splatterpunk genre suggests in general is borne out in Udovitch's detailed analysis of Ellis' novel. Her critique looks at the malaise germane to an '80s America hysterically obsessed with, but unable to differentiate reality from, images. Indeed, it can be said (and this is the rebuttal I am making against claims that Ellis revels in as he promotes pornography in this novel) that *American Psycho* screens, displays, and spectacularizes contemporary American society, and the culture it promotes, as symptomatically in crisis. In particular, this is a novel focussed upon, just as *The Silence of the Lambs* exemplifies, a crisis of the dis-eased masculine identity: the ordinary boy-next-door might just turn out to be the serial killer.

This is exactly the case with Bateman. He is seen by the other characters as one of them—a normal, ambitious professional whose impeccable taste in clothes and, more importantly, in women categorically identifies him as heterosexual and masculine. What they fail to realize, or, more to the point, cannot begin to recognize, is his sadistic and murderous personality. "The serial killer—who is invariably a man preying on women," as Robert Winder reminds us, "addresses a murky area of modern sexual politics" (1991: 27). To be exact, what this "murky area" is, and that which Ellis foregrounds in the novel, is the crisis of reading masculinity when there is an attempt to describe or define Bateman's male body according to the prevailing categorization of gender within pornography. In particular, the crisis Ellis' novel alerts its readers to is not so much the represented psychopathology of the serial killer that is Bateman as it is the problem of reading his masculine bodysuit.

Let us return to a reading of this text where we can observe this. Bateman's attempts to confess his dark side are ignored by those around him for they subscribe to only what is seen/scene. Perhaps their frequent misreadings of Bateman's identity signal a

general inability to read the surface he truly is. His confession to Carnes on the latter's answering machine is, at best, misconstrued as a joke: it was "hilarious," Carnes quips, adding, "Oh that's bloody marvelous [*sic*]. Really key, as they say at the Groucho Club. Really key" (387). But this assessment of Bateman's admission is more than a misreading. It illustrates Carnes's refusal to consider anything but the validity and veracity of the visible:

"Wait. Stop," I shout, looking up into Carnes' face, making sure he's listening. "You don't seem to understand. You're not really comprehending any of this. I killed him. I did it, Carnes. I chopped Owen's fucking head off. I tortured dozens of girls. That whole message I left on your machine was *true*." I'm drained, not appearing calm, wondering why this doesn't feel like a blessing to me....

"But that's simply not possible," he says, brushing me off. "And I'm not finding this amusing anymore."

"It never was supposed to be!" I bellow, and then, "Why isn't it possible?"

"It's just not," he says, eyeing me worriedly.

"Why not?" I shout again over the music, though there's really no need to, adding, "You stupid bastard."

He stares at me as if we are both underwater and shouts back, very clearly over the din of the club, "Because ... I had ... dinner ... with Paul Owen ... twice ... in London ... *just ten days ago*." (388)

Axiomatically, it must seem that Owen's statements affirm this: what one sees is readily recognizable, understood, and articulated as fact and truth. Hence, Bateman's admission is ignored because Carnes cannot see the body (or bodies as the case might be) of evidence. This scene is undercut, however, for Carnes misrecognizes Bateman as Donaldson when he bids him good-bye as he has initially mistaken him as Davies. Can we then accept Carnes's claim of *actually* having had dinner with Owen? I am afraid the answer must be no: Carnes did have dinner in London, "just ten days ago," but it was with someone who *seemed* to be, for Carnes, Paul Owen.

Carnes' problem analogizes, I am convinced, Ellis' deeper, and far more subtle, message in *American Psycho*. Invariably, this example paradigmatically signifies a symptomatic crisis within our present culture: to what extent can we disengage ourselves

from our reality of Image(s), images that are largely masculine representations? In consuming such images, we are maligned with, may be even jaundiced by, a mistaken belief that how we see and read these imaged representations is unmediated and unproblematic. In short, it is to believe that somewhat overgeneralized but intoxicating fallacy, “what you see is what you get.” These mistaken identities, as each character names and defines others, must signal a confusion of, but significantly too, an elision and a disavowal of this confusion in, seeing surface as a singular and seamless—not to mention, a mimetic—representation of one’s body. Presumably, this surface “appears” to be what the body is.

“Appearances,” Bateman surmises, “*can* be deceiving.” He understands the inscrutable fact that “the lines separating appearance—what you see—and reality—what you don’t—become, well, blurred” (378). Owen mistakes Bateman for Halberstam as Halberstam becomes Bateman’s alter-ego; Trent Moore is mistaken for Madison who is further mistaken for Dibble; Armstrong is having lunch with Taylor who is really Bateman: each of these instances emphatically confirms, if they do not alarmingly emphasize, Bateman’s prognosis of the body/surface binarism to be, ultimately, a blurring of sameness and difference. In this novel, bodysuits function, for the individual reader as they do for the characters, as those very seams where masculinity is rendered siteless, troubled and malaised, anxious. Otherwise, such a condition is more than a crisis of reading masculinity for the individual subject—it is the diaspora that the masculine subject, faces when he/she is now caught in the chiasmic tension of reading contra-diction.

ELLIS, THE BODYSUIT, AND THE ON-LOOKER

“What do you think I [Bateman] do?” And frisky too.
 “A model?” She shrugs. “An actor?”

“No,” I say. “Flattering, but no.”

“Well?”

“I’m into, oh, murders and executions mostly. It depends.” I shrug.

“Do you like it?” she asks, unfazed.

“Um ... It depends. Why?” I take a bite of sorbet.

“Well, most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don’t really like it,” she says.

Bret Easton Ellis⁸⁸

“To lump together *American Psycho* and hard-core porn videos is,” as Rosemary Sorensen forcefully rebuts, “obfuscatory and dishonest” (1991: 27). Feminists who insist Ellis’ novel is more a text of pornography⁸⁹ than a social critique have chosen to contextualize its representation of gender in terms of the rape act. When feminists such as Wolf and Moore contextualize this novel in terms of rape, they engender a categorization of masculinity which is situated naturally and truly in, if not definitively as, this violent sex act.

In choosing to categorize *American Psycho* as a “how-to” manual of sexual violence in the first instance, and in ascribing its textual representations of sex and violence as emblematic of, but far more significantly for, lived experiences, these feminists and their supporters have blurred, I contend, the lines between sex, text, and context. They have adopted a political stance that is not unlike the representation of gender that is enunciated by such anti-pornography feminists as Dworkin and MacKinnon. For them, this novel is held up as an example where the textual representation of masculinity becomes that instance stimulating and animating the masculine identity of male readers whose supposed

⁸⁸Ellis, *Psycho* 206.

⁸⁹See Susan Wyndham’s cursory but sweeping evaluations of this novel in *The Weekend Australian Review* 23-24 February 1991a: 4 and 13-14 April 1991b: 4 for a summary of the responses this novel has received. For further discussion of these issues as they characterize the anti-pornography debate concerning Ellis’s novel, see Robert Manne, “The Psyche of Pornography ...” *The Weekend Australian Focus* 8-9 June 1991: 26-27.

identification with Bateman replicates his sexual violence in real life relations between men and women.

But sex, let alone sexual violence, is hardly learnt from novels which function as manuals providing an A to Z guide to sex. When these particular feminists insist that sexual violence is learnt in this manner, in a mere reading of Ellis' novel, they charge individual male readers with a natural predisposition towards sexual violence each time they read. They argue, moreover, how a man's sight is empowered by this pornographic text to realize itself, according to Linda Williams, as that "perverse sadistic-voyeuristic-fetishizing 'male gaze'" (1992: 235). Such an argument ignores Ellis' use of pornography to condemn its depicted violence.

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt sees Ellis' pornographic representations of sexual violence as abstractions in a novel which is satiric and critical of social relations within a culture hung-up on the image. He writes:

Since the people involved are unreal and the physiology of what is done to them is impossible, it is not so difficult to conceive of their scenes as a Tom and Jerry cartoon with human body parts.... What Mr Ellis is evidently trying to say is that Patrick Bateman lives in a morally flat world in which clothes have more value than skin, objects are worth more than bones, and the human soul is something to be sought with knives and hatchets and drills. (1991: C18)

Opinions like Lehmann-Haupt's are few and far between: for many, *American Psycho* remains a quintessentially late-capitalist pornographic text as well as a manual for the practice of misogyny in everyday life. It is the essentializing alignment between representation and lived experience that is particularly significant in the latter understanding of Ellis' work. In other words, there exists the problem of confusing reality for appearance and vice-versa. And, as Udovitch critically states, such a premise for reading Ellis novel is "demonstrably false" for it itself is a "misguided" conclusion and "a pure lucid syllogism" (1991: 65).

Anti-pornography feminists who demonstrate their displeasure with *American*

Psycho by identifying the represented pornography of the text with a reader's own reading of the text exemplify the points I am making above. When they contend that the violence Bateman inflicts on his female victims is representative of, and potentially realized in, a male reader's lived experiences with women, they tend to ignore the role appearances play in how we read, and, more specifically, in how we read the representation of masculinity within pornography. Although Ellis makes the point that appearances are indeed deceiving, these particular feminists continue to claim, especially, that the male body represents masculinity in pornography. Their assertions are grounded in an essentialist politics of gender identity: for them, the pornographer is always male and masculine, and the pornographic victim is always the sexually violated female.

Indeed, the harsh criticisms and generally unfavourable reviews, tainted more by extraneous debate than detailed textual analyses,⁹⁰ alert us to the general failure on the part of most readers to couch a social response to this novel. This inability is translated, within the contours of Ellis' novel, into the problematic representation of masculinity that is best addressed in terms of obscenity and perversion, sexual violence, and the objectification of women. Conversely, these critiques alert a reader to the politics of gender identity anti-pornography feminists subscribe to when describing Bateman's masculinity; theirs is a politics where his gendered identity repeats the oppressive stereotyping of masculinity and femininity that anti-pornography feminism works towards rewriting. "In fact," Sorensen goes on to argue, "the response of blind outrage justifies the book's underlying thesis—late-capitalist society is not equipped to judge itself" (27) in any other terms but those limiting binarisms of hom(m)o-sexual culture. Indeed, in the eyes of both moral and feminist crusaders, *American Psycho* is "an example of the very disease it purports to diagnose" (Iannone 1991: 54) and nothing else: it is a pornographic representation of, and

⁹⁰For a further discussion on this, see Carol Iannone, "PC and the Ellis Affair," *Commentary* 92.1 (1991): 52-54.

a representation of the pornography that is, the masculine exploitation of the feminine.

Commentaries such as Sorensen and Udovitch's invite us to rethink what these oppositions might otherwise mean. "The campaigns launched against the book by its numerous opponents are," Udovitch illustrates, "barely disguised manipulations and distortions of morality for subjective amoral reasons, including, but not limited to: power, ego, money, attention" (1991: 65). Udovitch's observation illuminates how anti-pornography feminism has coupled with the Right to curtail, if not cripple, any reinscription of masculinity beyond the mask of the eternal victimizer of women, the pornographic male consumer.

"Ironically enough, *American Psycho* is," adds Sorensen, "a rude and vulgar challenge to a society stuck in its own fear ..." (1991: 27). We fear what we do not know behind appearances: after all, it is the visible which guarantees a certainty of reality, and which in turn grounds our subjectivity. This accounts for our obsession with appearances as they become manifest surfaces of identity which we perceive as tangible and coherent, if not real too. We therefore need to see and to believe this: surfaces around us mirror, as they relate to gender and sexuality, the asymmetrical hom(m)o-sexual equation. Reading such representations in this manner foregrounds our dependence upon previous surfaces we recognize, know, and mimetically re-engender within a culture obsessed with hom(m)o-sexual images.

Ellis subverts this: the surface is, as *American Psycho* aggressively reiterates, the sight of contra-diction. "Surface, surface, surface," Bateman ponders, "was all that anyone found meaning in ..." (375). Yet in his world of designer fashion and *nouveau cuisine*, of designer accoutrements and yuppie mineral water, of women as "hardbodies" and men hard on these bodies, Bateman's flirtation with surfaces marks Ellis' considerable achievement in writing a *seemingly* degenerate text whose basic premise, I believe, is to disturbingly question our supposed ability to read the masculine bodysuit within pornography. As Bateman himself rhetorically cries out to Bethany:

“I mean, does anyone really *see* anyone? Does anyone really *see* anyone else? Did *you* ever see *me*? *See*? What does that mean? Ha! *See*? Ha! I just don’t get it. Ha!” (238)

Bateman’s questions echo a point Norman K. Denzin makes in his study of Woody Allen’s film, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Writing about the reality of the characters in this film, Denzin notes that their imaged existence is dependent upon the manufacture of images and appearances: “They produce it, live in it, value it, know the world through it. It is more real than reality, and contains the truths they value” (1991: 102). This is precisely Ellis’ point of contention, as I come to understand his novel: present day culture no longer knows *how to read* the image for what it can alternatively mean as it has, instead, become, even instituted as, the predominant means by which we know ourselves, other(s), and our reality. In short, it is the Image which determines yet undermines how and what we really see as the representation of gender when we read texts.

Hence, although Denzin is most correct to examine and name this postmodern moment as “a looking culture, organized in terms of a variety of gazes, or looks” (1991: 9), we are not, according to Ellis, a society of lookers. What we are is a society of *on-lookers*: we look around the scene of the latest “look” (read image), read it only to effect that surface of the masculine reading subject who is mesmerized by the appearance and appeal of such a gendered bodysuit. And we mistake the identification of this reading position with an essentialism of the male body, and not the effect it can alternatively mean.

RETHINKING PORNOGRAPHY: *AMERICAN PSYCHO* AND THE ARTIFICE OF VIOLENCE

“This is a book about noticing and not noticing things which has,” as Bowman correctly points out, “managed to get itself noticed” (1991: 12). It is noticeable precisely for what it has chosen as a vehicle of expression, pornography. Ellis writes about

pornographic representation, and he does this by representing it in terms of a pornographic text. He does so, however, to satirically set up a critique of how sex, violence, and pornography are commonly read and understood to engender corporeality within hom(m)o-sexual culture.

Undoubtedly, this has generated the confusion which sees *American Psycho* as a “how-to” manual of violence against women. This confusion points towards the misleading conflation of text and reality that anti-pornography feminism generates as it also illustrates its mistake of seeing Bateman as Ellis. Such a claim focuses upon the representation of one, and only one, model of masculine identity. Within the gender politics this specific feminism foregrounds, individual male readers despite their differences of sexuality, race, and class must be identified as another Bateman if the novel is to maintain its pornographic status: all male readers must share the same gaze, all male readers must possess the same identity. Yet, the scenes of dismemberment and penetration in Ellis’ novel are hardly pleasurable for many of us, men and women alike, and if it does excite a few male subjects, it is surely an emotion which is itself not “normally” masculine. These scenes cannot sexually excite the “normal” heterosexual male reader as they tend to, more probably, repel him. They repel him because the female body is spectacularized as a site of mutilation, sexual violence, and death. This scattering of female body parts across an excessively sadistic surface that is Bateman’s own narration attests to something much deeper than the masculine gratification pornography should satisfy.

What Bateman’s actions suggest, on the contrary, is that his primary motivation for killing is psychotic. He kills because he is neither sexually deprived nor is he motivated to realize his masculine identity in pornographic violence. Rather, his need to kill testifies to the perverted attitude he possesses towards those around him—they are merely disposable. This is evident when he discusses, with his male friends, a serial killer’s opinion of what women are:

After a deliberate pause I say, "Do you know what Ed Gein said about women?" "Ed Gein?" one of them asks. "Maître d" at Canal Bar?"

"No," I say. "Serial killer, Wisconsin in the fifties. He was an interesting guy."

"You've always been interested in stuff like that, Bateman," Reeves says, and then to Hamlin, "Bateman reads those biographies all the time: Ted Bundy and Son of Sam and *Fatal Vision* and Charlie Manson. All of them."

"So what did Ed say?" Hamlin asks, interested.

"He said," I begin, "When I see a pretty girl walking down the street I think two things. One part of me wants to take her out and talk to her and be real nice and sweet and treat her right." I stop, finish my J&B in one swallow.

"What does the other part of him think?" Hamlin asks tentatively.

"What her head would look like on a stick," I say. (92)

Bateman's predilection for biographies of serial killers echoes the psychotic point of view he adopts in relation to the world around him. His own violent, sadistic, and brutal maiming and killing of not just women but also a male beggar, his colleague, Price Owen, a gay man and his dog, and even a child, demonstrate further that his actions are motivated by a distinct aversion to the human bodies he comes into contact with. More importantly, Bateman's killings dislocate that blanket categorization critics of this novel have employed to charge that his violence is sexually motivated by, sexually grounded in, and, most pertinently, sexually affirmative of a masculine identity within pornographic representations of the feminine.

Even though the novel focuses, to a large extent, on the perverted representation of Woman, it is, simultaneously, an examination of how a deviant and abnormal individual, like Bateman, is read. It is the novel's representation of the latter that is, I believe, the primary focus of a reader's engagement with *American Psycho*. If a reader begins to re-read Ellis' novel along this line, he/she can see the futility of identifying it solely in terms of what the pornographic text is; in this novel, the pornography it displays functions, on the contrary, as a facade. As an artifice of sexual violence, *American Psycho* disrupts the supposed masculine identification between Bateman and his male body. This disruption realizes itself at the level of his masculine (sur)face: where there should be an alignment

between gender and corporeality within pornography, a reader encounters the signal problem of imputing fixed categories and labels like “pornographic” and “masculine” onto firstly, Bateman’s male body and secondly, the reader’s masculine identity of being like the male reader when reading these sites of Bateman’s psychotic behaviour.

That there is a telling dislocation between how Bateman wants to be seen and how he is read, between his subjectivity as a “psycho” and his social identity as “one of us,” implies that at the root of this novel is that problem of reading the appearance or surface of identity as it seems to be and surface as it should be read. The inability exhibited by the others to read Bateman’s body(suit) for what it is—they read him in their capacity as never anything other than on-lookers—is analogous, if not symptomatically true, of how *American Psycho* is engendered and read within anti-pornography feminism: it is seen *as* pornography itself.

When a reader deploys his/her male gaze to read the representation of femininity in this text, the assumed scopophilia of this gaze is guaranteed and gratified. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that “Sex is mathematics” (375), and a ledger of “hardbodies” is scored and used up, in the narrative of the text. But Ellis’ particular pornographic representation of dismembered female bodies refuses the reader any masculine self-representation in Bateman’s actions. If the predominant criticism against Ellis’ novel rests in an identification between Bateman and the male reader under a homogenized categorization of masculinity, what these anti-pornography critics fail to realize is that the male gaze cannot *always* engender a distinctly masculine identity when the male body that is presented is itself a site of contra-dictions.

In contrast to the spectatorship of pornography, these scenes of rape, sexual exploitation, and senseless violence disengage any individual gratification of male sexual pleasure from the violence of these representations when the male gaze is deployed to read Ellis’ novel. According to the anti-pornography debate, pornography privileges the “money shot.” Within pornographic films, this moment of sexual climax marks the

synonymous identification between represented and lived masculinities that the male reading/seeing subject subscribes to when representing the pornographic text within hom(m)o-sexual culture. "While the money shot was usually positioned as the climax of most heterosexual pornography," Williams reminds us, "it was a paradoxical confession of the 'ultimate truth' of sexual pleasure" (1992: 242).

Within *American Psycho*, this moment of the "money shot" is intimated each time Bateman looks at women (recall his masturbation fantasies cited above), each time he conceptualizes them as "hardbodies," and especially in each moment that he engages with his female victims in the sexual foreplay presaging the murders he commits. If the pornographic industry aims to sexually satisfy its predominantly heterosexual male audience, Ellis works towards deconstructing the apparent pornographic text his novel projects itself to be for the reader by displacing the focus on Bateman's "money shot," and replacing it with the sheer brutality of his multiple dissections of both male and female bodies. In other words, any sexual identification between represented and lived masculinities is dislocated by this representation of violence.

Presumably, this "ultimate truth" that Williams points out indicates the male gaze's promise of pleasure, dominance, and ecstasy when watching or reading pornography. In doing so, such a gaze guarantees the masculine identification the reading/seeing subject is engendered with within the larger hom(m)o-sexual culture. Nowhere is this truth more pertinent than when it is considered in terms of the male body. But while the represented male body in pornography should affirm the male reader/spectator's sense of being male, heterosexual, and masculine, *American Psycho* highlights the continuing as well as misguided, and misinformed, practice of reading with a gaze preoccupied with hom(m)o-sexually overdetermined images of gender.

Ellis' appropriation of pornography to transgressively rewrite "pornography," "masculinity," and "the male body" animates more than a revision of these foci of identification for the reader; his novel demands that its readers reconsider the

essentializing politics of gender identity anti-pornography feminism situates itself in when reading representations of masculinity. Reading Bateman's male body in action alerts such readers not so much to the sexual pleasure derived in a step-by-step dismemberment of the female body as this particular reading is, instead, and far more significantly, a scene-by-scene critique of this representation of sexual violence, and, more significantly, the very violence of such pornographic representation.

Besides being a narration of the violence Bateman commits, the novel is also a narration strewn with detail after detail of the seemingly banal and mundane—here one recalls the endless list of lotions and applications, gels and moisturizers Bateman uses in his morning shave (24-30). For the individual reader, Bateman's juxtaposition—indeed his conjunction—of these accounts of violence together with everyday mediocrity demonstrate how the larger issues, of identity and pornography for example, pass unnoticed in a culture saturated by the frenzied obsession with details, surfaces, and images. “By creating a world in which the unimportant things are obsessively noticed and important ones not noticed at all, Ellis forces us,” Bowman notes, “to adjust our moral perspective ...” (1991: 12). He employs, I contend, the (sur)face of pornography to stimulate a critical re-examination of that problematic alignment of the male body, masculinity, and pornography.

GOING BEHIND THE SURFACE: BATEMAN'S MASCULINE FACE

I was writing about a society in which the surface became the only thing. Everything was surface—food, clothing—that is what defined people. So I wrote a book that is all surface action: no narrative, no characters to latch

onto, flat, endlessly repetitive. I used comedy to get at the absolute banality of the violence of a perverse decade. Look, it's a very *annoying* book. But that is how as I writer I took in those years.

Bret Easton Ellis⁹¹

There is in this novel a graphic representation of Bateman's sexual acts with women; there are the numerous scenes of brutality and violence; and there is the very fact that it is Bateman who regales the reader with his actions while describing, as he also engages in, these sordid instances of sexual violence. Each instance demonstrates how Ellis' novel is constructed out of whilst playing with, and finally satisfying, the voyeuristic, maybe even sadistic, tendencies of its audience. Each instance is moreover, and tellingly so, an example of how this seemingly pornographic text satisfies the captivated and perverse desire, or prurience, of its audience.

By going behind the surface of masculinity, Ellis problematizes the characteristically masculine-inflected prurience a reader expects Bateman's unfolding narration to deliver. When the novel repeatedly returns to appearances, and, in particular, to pornographic appearances that are performatively engendered, what a reader finds, on the contrary, is a disturbing disjunction of identifying masculinity solely in terms of the male body.

A case in point is Bateman's masculine face: he is read thus because the other characters fix his masculine identity in both his male body and the clothes, those masculine suits, he wears. Yet, Bateman's identity is an enacted surface; he consciously, and calculatingly, "performs" his masculinity even if the theatricality of these acts is a repetition of the already established and normative contours of what a masculine identity is expected to be like.

An initial section of *American Psycho*, "Morning," exemplifies this. The procedural

⁹¹Bret Easton Ellis, "Bret Easton Ellis Answers Critics of '*American Psycho*,'" by Roger Cohen, *New York Times* 6 March 1991b: C13.

(in fact, routine) display of a man's morning toilet—in particular, shaving—takes on such theatricality in the performed monologue Bateman enacts for the reader. Consider Bateman:

Afterwards I stand in front of a chrome and acrylic Washmobile bathroom sink ... and stare at my reflection with the ice pack still on. I pour some Plax antiplaque formula into a stainless-steel tumbler and swish it around my mouth for thirty seconds. Then I squeeze Rembrandt onto a faux-tortoise-shell toothbrush and start brushing my teeth.... Then I inspect my hands and use a nail-brush. I take the ice-pack mask off and use a deep-pore cleanser lotion, then a herb-mint facial masque which I leave on for ten minutes while I check my toenails.... Once out of the shower and towelled dry I put the Ralph Lauren boxers back on and before applying the Mousse A Raiser, a shaving cream by Pour Hommes, I press a hot towel against my face for two minutes to soften abrasive beard hair. Then I always slather on a moisturizer (to my taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute. You can rinse it off or keep it on and apply a shaving cream over it—preferably with a brush, which softens the beard as it leaves the whiskers—which I've found makes removing the hair easier.... Always wet the razor with warm water before shaving and shave in the direction the beard grows.... Rinse the razor and shake off any excess water.... Afterwards splash cool water on the face to remove any trace of lather. You should use an after-shave lotion with little or no alcohol. (26-27)

I have quoted this somewhat extended passage because it is remarkable for what it leaves out whilst blatantly spectacularizing what a reader begins to observe when reading Bateman's enacted monologue. His masculine face is not unlike the act of putting on, or removing, a surface; all the time, however, these acts remain fixed to, and exist as, the apparently masculine identity of his male body. Indeed, his identity is seen to be a matter of surface; like Buffalo Bill, his skin is identifiably masculine because it functions as the dominant signifier of his male body.

More disturbingly, there is in this scene—in what I suspect is the postmodern anxiety about representations, images, and surfaces—the undeniable evidence that Bateman's identity could be, more precisely, one of gender performativity. Ellis' reader cannot help but appreciate, in this shaving ritual Bateman describes, like a meticulously detailed advertisement of branded toiletries, the on-going enactment of the acculturated face of masculinity. Such a construction, and reconstruction, of his face each morning

graphically demonstrates the iterability of the shave, and the masculinity this act alludes to. In “putting on” his mask each morning, Bateman is simultaneously simulating and dissimulating his masculine identity. His stylized repetition of stereotypical gendered behaviour (here, I refer as much to his morning shave as I do to his subsequent actions in the novel) cannot only effect that violent nor oppressive identity his male body is argued to engender within pornography—instead, his reiteration points to the on-going constructivity of his identity. Such constructivity, moreover, recalls the act-like, or enacted, status of gender identity that Butler’s theory of gender performativity suggests.

When anti-pornography feminists come to see the image of masculinity only in terms of pornographic violence and sexual oppression, they read *American Psycho* as on-lookers; for them, its spectacularized representation of gender conforms to, and confirms, the pornographic identity men are said to possess within dominant culture. However, within the parameters of reading Ellis’ novel, such an on-looker is forced to *look-on(to)* this surface of gendered sociopathology. It is here, I want to suggest, that a reader who reads with the male gaze so often misreads the surface for what it seems to be. If seeing is always a reiteration of a lived experience, and, potentially, by extension, of a living practice, what else can the reading of gender entail but a repetition of the already gendered male gaze. Seeing *American Psycho* not for what it is, a disturbing critique of how the (sur)face of gender is read, but for what it appears to be, these anti-pornography feminists look through the novel’s artifice of pornography to see, presumably, and rather determinedly, the identity of Bateman’s male body as only, and characteristically, masculine because it is pornographic. If this is not enough, they go on to extrapolate, in somewhat facile terms, that an individual male reader reading this novel will become the potentialized, and perhaps, now empowered and real, serial killer about to leave his copy of *American Psycho* behind as he goes out to sexually assault and kill the women he meets everyday.

By bringing his reader back to the problematic surface of gender, and to the

representation of masculinity as surface in particular, Ellis raises concerns that echo the points I am making in my study. Like Ellis, I am concerned with how we read the male body as a confused site of masculinity within pornography. This confusion is especially acute when the surface of this body seems to signify—or, more exactly, when it is argued (within some quarters of society) to distinctly realize—the dominant identification of masculinity. Like Ellis too, I am particularly anxious that we, as readers, do not misread or mistake the male body as always generic and representative of masculine identity because of the dominant body/surface bind orientating how we read gender. Indeed, the very difficulty of reading Bateman, and reading his masculinity, according to the dominant representations of pornography and gender testify to the disturbing effects a reader must now contend with.

A significant effect arising out of this chiasmatic reading of Bateman's body that I put forth in this chapter must be that of a reader who can now re-read gender within dis coherence. While a reading of *American Psycho* would appear to position the masculine, and male, reader into the dominant position of reading gender, there can be no correlation with Bateman. While enacting this dominant reading position might intimate his/her masculine identity to be one like Bateman, it also points to the necessary act-like status of such identity; in other words, the masculinity of this position is performative. The performativity of a reader, then, suggests the real possibility that a postmodern identity of masculinity might situate itself in terms of the cross-(ad)dressed masculine subject that I am working towards. Within the politics of dis coherence I am outlining for a reading of gender in general, and of masculinity in particular, the notion of a cross-(ad)dressed subject releases descriptions of masculine identity from its essentializing bind within cultural definitions of gender as well as the essentializing politics of gender identity within anti-pornography and essentialist feminisms.

The reader who reads *American Psycho* might repeat the dominant and panoptical male gaze but he/she is not that pornographically masculine identity Ellis' reader is made

out to be. Such an identity, on the contrary, should not, and never can, be mistaken to represent, signify, or, in the final instance, become, the masculine subject who is characteristically pornographic. Rather, it is more correct to understand and appreciate it as a posture, as an act of “being like,” and re-presenting an address of gender that allows a contest and revision of hom(m)o-sexually defined masculinity.

Conversely, we cannot claim a male reader’s subjectivity to be determinately masculine when he deploys the male gaze to read this disturbing text: there is no gratification of heterosexual male desire as there can be no synonymous association between the masculinity represented and real life masculinity. What we can claim, instead, is a dis coherence of reading masculinity which foregrounds itself as always already and actively an act of performativity. In doing so, we can diagnose a problematic of seeing and reading to be symptomatically the crisis of masculine representation. This then is Ellis’ lesson: we must read carefully, and critically, those surfaces of the male body if we are to revise what a masculine identity is, or can possibly be, if not alternatively become. Chapter 5 works towards delineating one possible alternative of what this reading subject itself can be when masculinity is reconsidered within a politics of dis coherence to be a matter of cross-(ad) dressing one’s identity

CHAPTER FIVE

QUEERING THE READER: CAN WE ADDRESS MASCULINITY IN DRAG?

It is a fiction about fictions, a novel about novels, a book about books. Its chief protagonists are its author and his reader. Its progress traces the reading of a novel and the consummation of a love affair.

Blurb, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*⁹²

Who reads? Who writes? What is the reader reading? How does the text, in turn, read this reader as he/she reads it? These are questions Italo Calvino asks, and explores, in his novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. According to Alan Carter, Calvino's novel "is a demonstration of how fiction works, how we read it, how the world is treated, and (to a lesser extent) how authors write" (1987: 126).

Carter's analysis alerts a reader of this postmodern text to the acute self-reflexiveness this novel asks of any reader. This is a text that demands the reader's self-examination of his/her own practice of reading with the male gaze. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, James Phelan observes, "teaches something about the power of our own desires for the mimetic illusion" (1989: 156). Consequently, this is "a critical text: by inducing so much reflexiveness into the activity of reading, it investigates—or better, puts under a metafictional microscope—the concepts of character, progression, and audience" (Phelan 1989: 133).

Phelan's examination of "character, progression, and audience," I would like to

⁹²Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, trans. William Weaver (1981; London: Picador-Pan, 1982).

suggest, falls within the larger focus of my study: I want to examine how the text, the practice of reading, and the reader converge to engender the representation of masculinity within dominant culture, and, in some instances, how this specific convergence destabilizes masculinity's stereotypical representation. In addition, when the text being read demands that a reader reconsider the very practice of reading with the male gaze itself, what is also being asked of such a reader is a re-examination of his/her identity as the masculine reading subject.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller is, I believe, such a text. As a postmodern interplay of differences, Calvino's novel enables a reader of this study to understand how the various strands of the politics of dis coherence I am proposing can be re(th)readed together in order to revise how we can re-read this novel's particular representation of masculinity. Perhaps, what is far more important in the dis coherent reading of Calvino's novel that I am about to demonstrate is a re-examination of that seemingly homogenized alignment of masculine identity between the reading subject and the reading practice, between the individual reader and the generic reader.

CAN READING BE PERFORMATIVE? A CASE OF READING LIKE A MAN⁹³

In this chapter, I will describe the politics of dis coherence I am proposing thus far by

⁹³ A distinction between reading as and reading like a man has been made by Robert Scholes in his arresting, and perhaps, seminal article, "Reading Like a Man." While he does make mention of, even appropriates, these distinctions to align himself with feminist readings of gender, he fails to account for nor does he adequately exploit the potential these significant differences offer a revision of masculinity. This is my complaint about, and also my point of departure from, Scholes's thesis. See his article in *Men in Feminism*, eds. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987): 204-218.

drawing together the various issues that I have already raised in previous chapters. I do so because I want to demonstrate how they intersect to animate, if they do not also enable the possibility of, a distinctly “queer”⁹⁴ re-reading of Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*. In insisting on the idea of a “queer” reading, I want to emphasize the possibility of reading gender from that postmodern subject position of the cross-(ad)dressed masculine reader whose very act of reading with the male gaze is, I want to conclude, both transgressive and performative.

In what follows, I will demonstrate how Calvino’s novel foregrounds the problematic representation of masculinity with the male gaze when a reader is forced to read the otherwise essentialized space of the male body as a site of contra-diction. If this is indeed what Calvino’s novel intimates beneath its seeming self-reflexivity, then what it also asks of its readers is how they (most significantly, they as heterosexual men) read masculinity, as masculinity in turn informs their reading of the represented male body. The issue that *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* focuses on is the differences between *reading as a man* and *reading like a man*. I will examine this difference in reading gender throughout this chapter by inflecting my examination onto Teresa de Lauretis’ reading of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* in her book, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (1989: 70-83). I have chosen this course of action because I want to illustrate how an essentialist reading of masculinity such as de Lauretis’ article,

⁹⁴The theory of “queer,” arising as it does from postmodern articulations of lesbian and gay male identities, re-centers the marginality of these sexualities, as socio-cultural discourses, into current debates on gender and sexuality. In doing so, the notion of “queer” imports an-other understanding of what it means to be female or male, feminine or masculine, heterosexual or homosexual, lesbian or gay by insisting on the fluidity rather than fixity of identity, on the performativity of rather than the essentialism of Self, on an interrelatedness within rather than distinct categorizations between binaries. A useful introduction to queer theory can be found in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991). An equally useful piece of writing outlining the broad aspects of this theory is Sedgwick’s article, “Queer and Now,” *Tendencies* 1-20.

“Calvino and the Amazons: Reading the (Post)modern Text,” elides the possibility that masculine identity can be reconsidered in terms of gender performativity, let alone its possible existence as a cross-(ad)dressed identity.

“To read *as*,” Heath observes, “is to make the move of the construction of an identity in which the diverse, heterogeneous relations of experience are gathered up in a certain way, a certain form” (1987: 27). Within hom(m)o-sexual culture, to read as a man recalls, stimulates, and reinstates the dominant identity of that generic reading subject, the male reader. Such a reader would engender the dominant identification of masculinity in each act of reading with the male gaze. This particular understanding of reading that Heath puts forth, however, falls back into “positions, places, terms of identification” (1987: 28). In other words, these sites are fixed and fix(at)ing: “men and women exist in radical separation, in difference that is produced as the ground of oppression” (Heath 1987: 28).

But the male gaze that the individual reader deploys to read Calvino’s representation of the male body is itself a repetition—which is not unlike a performance—of masculine spectatorship and readership. Although this repetition seems to engender the reader masculine, it disrupts this generic identification because of its act-like status. The supposed masculine identity of this fixed reading position “ought not to be,” following Butler,

construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (1990a: 140)

In other words, inasmuch as gender is constituted in these repetitive acts, it becomes a site of posturing, of being (*a*)like something, or someone, else—it is invariably a matter of seeming the part, to put it bluntly. Seeming the part will, undoubtedly, suggest a sense of gender as neither epistemologically nor ontologically grounded in the body, or sexuality. Rather, the very notion of seeming suggests that gender can be an effect of performativity:

“Just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* the natural,” Butler goes on to remind us, “so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself” (1990a: 146).

Reading can alternatively—at least, in its manifestation as a “queer” practice—be like this: to read is to enact, or, more accurately, to effect, that position of masculine readership. It is therefore not unlike performance; it is to be reading *like a man*, to be reading that textual surface in order to register the reader’s identity as masculine only to unravel and to make visible its effect of being like that generic reading subject, the male reader. However, what is returned to this reader is hardly that recognizable identity, the male reader; rather, it is its “seeming” masculine identity that is returned. In short, this is an instance when the individual reader, male or female, is performatively enacting him/herself to be an-other who is (a)like the masculine subject. It is in this pose as the subject who is like the other, I believe, that this reader can be seen to effect that cross-(ad)dressed identity of the postmodern reader.

In order to better understand this notion of the cross-(ad)dressed subject I am proposing, let me return to that space where a reader is forced to read the representation of the male body, and its supposed masculinity, in terms of contra-diction. This chiasm, or what I consider a homoerotic space, foregrounds the paradoxical visual sensation a reader must negotiate in recognizing the same male body whilst acknowledging, and coming to terms with, its (sexual) difference. Here, a reader, male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, is thrust into what I call the chiasmatic tension; this is where the reader is, following Sedgwick, displaced into that “vertiginous oscillation of ‘same’ and ‘different,’” and where he/she comes to realize that the alternative representation of gender, “most stably valued by this reading,” is that which is “most identifiable with homosexual” difference (1993: 54).

Within such a homoerotic space, the reader (especially, the heterosexual male reader) must relate to what is seemingly different from yet similar to the dominant

representation of gender in terms of a body in contra-diction. Moreover, within this space, the binarism of reading as and reading like a man realizes itself in that paradigmatic bind of Self/(Proximate) Other that takes the form of an interdiscourse, an interplay, and even an interface of differences. In this particular reconfiguration of difference, each representation of the masculine reader is therefore its re-presentation as the Other, as the subject whose identity is, inevitably, cross-(ad)dressed.

For the reader, such a “queer” re-reading of masculinity within the space of contra-diction effects—visualizes, centers, advocates—differences as necessarily germane to how the male gaze can animate its own potential for interplay within a politics of dis coherence: the male gaze might engender a reading of the body along those lines of what gender ought to be within dominant culture but it also produces a re-reading of this body’s difference. Conversely, the identity of the reader is now, in the politics I am outlining, as much a result of the simulated masculine practice of reading gender with the male gaze as it can also be a dissimulation of the reader’s apparently essentialized masculine identity when reading the male body in contra-diction.

For de Lauretis, however, such a revision of reading masculinity is unthinkable. In Calvino’s novel, she sees this—a paradox: the problem of reading as a man is both an issue and a non-issue. It is an issue because it demands that both women and men rethink our present practice of reading the feminine. Yet, men, unlike women, can never truly read beyond a masculine position. Men are, she pointedly reminds us, always and everywhere engendering a reading which privileges a characteristically masculine, if not heterosexual, self-representation (1989: 82). In this sense, any attempt to revise how men read femininity, and, more importantly, masculinity, within the practice of the male gaze will always be a non-issue because such an attempt is already caught within a practice of reading that privileges the dominant representation of masculine identity where it is hierarchical, hegemonic, and heterosexual. What is evident in her reading, however, and which I shall critically examine in due course, is her political need to essentialize a

description of masculinity in order to rewrite femininity.

Despite her succinct rewriting of how femininity is represented in Calvino's postmodern novel, her need to show that it is ultimately trapped within a continuing model of the love story (the heterosexual contract resurrected) plays into the fallacy of reading gender within those restrictive, and even essentializing, hom(m)o-sexual parameters she herself condemns. That is to say, when gender is represented in this novel, de Lauretis understands it to be conceived of in terms of the masculine practices of authorship and readership; these practices are, moreover, deemed to be germane to the male subject for whom gender can only exist in terms of that "either/or" binarism as it structures hom(m)o-sexual representations of masculinity and femininity.

To read as a feminist, which is what she aims to do, is to read against the grain of hom(m)o-sexual inscription, and to open up a space for feminine revision and rearticulation of the body female. To read as a feminist, de Lauretis is occasioned by—even perhaps, necessarily positioned into—a politics continuing, however, to read masculine identity as mimetically the male body, and, in particular, as this gender identity realizes itself within the heterosexual contract of gender relations. This mimetic alignment between gender and corporeality, and between gender and heterosexuality, does not only relate to its textual representation of masculinity for de Lauretis; it extends to the male reader for whom such a representation serves as that essentialized model of masculine identity, the reader who reads as a man. Her configuration of this gender identity simply, and disturbingly, repeats the semiotic lie which believes that the phallus can account for all gendered and sexual representations as they relate to a reading of the body within the male gaze.

Reading *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* like a man, on the other hand, challenges the reader to revise the term "masculinity" as it is presently configured within firstly, gender studies—of which de Lauretis' analysis is just one example—and secondly, the larger hom(m)o-sexual culture the former endeavours to theorize and write about, if not

rewrite. This aspect of reading Calvino's novel like a man is what de Lauretis elides from her critique. I want to consider her blind-spots as a means of re-examining the category "masculine," and hence, reclaim the transgressive potential of cross-(ad)dressing the masculine reading subject so as to revise how we can alternatively read—through a politics of dis coherence—the representation of gender this novel produces in terms of gender performativity. Finally, I want to stress that who, or what, we are as readers can be, in the end, an effect of reading masculinity through the dis coherence animated when we are forced to read a contradictory representation of corporeality with the male gaze. We begin therefore at the very beginning; what we begin with is always the text itself, or, to be precise, with what is traced upon the surface of the text.

"A FAIRLY UNRECOGNIZABLE TANGLE UNDER THE RUMPLED SHEET"

This is a text about fiction, about fictional characters and fictional realities; it is about writing and reading fiction. "It is," for de Lauretis, "a novel [about] ... storytelling, a book about the reading and the writing of books, whose characters are only readers and writers" (1989: 74). But this is also a text about ruptures: one begins to read a new book⁹⁵ only to arrive at a break which cannot be continued for what is being read is neither in coherence with its supposed title nor is it the book that is apparently written by the author whose name graces its cover.

⁹⁵This deliberate juxtaposition of "book," "novel," and "text" that I have chosen to use in this chapter arises because Calvino's novel is structured to playfully take advantage of these embedded layers as they come to illustrate the problematic of simplified reading. In what follows, I shall elucidate these as: "book," that which refers to the Reader's reading of text(s); "novel," these various layers which we come to read as Calvino's fiction; and "text" is what we enact in reading, or, to be exact, what we effect as a performativity of a masculine readership.

Yet, these ruptures which frustrate the characters' reading in the novel become problematic moments in our own reading of Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*: "Watch out, Reader; here everything is different from what it seems, everything is two-faced ..." (173). Here, "Reader" refers as much to the character, the Reader, within as it also refers to the individual readers without Calvino's text. These two identities of the reading subject are constantly conflated as one seamless, homogenized, and generic masculine representation within the practice of reading with the male gaze.

This is therefore a text of slippages; as we move from one book to another, from one discussion of reading, publishing and writing, or plagiarizing, to the other, we are continually slipping in and out of reading positions. We might be readers of Calvino's novel but we are also asked to identify with the Reader, the "You" character who from the beginning reads a similarly titled text: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller* [sic]. Relax. Concentrate" (9). As Carter notes, "Through the second-person point of view, [Calvino] continuously explores the interactions of text and reader, whether it be you the 'Reader' or you 'we readers' ..." (1987: 125).

And as we end our own reading of Calvino's novel, this Reader arrives at that point of closure, a moment when his quest for the interrupted and missing books he pursues coalesces equally in his act of marriage to the Other Reader: "Now you are man and wife, Reader and Reader. A great double bed receives your parallel readings" (205). And what else can this possibly imply but the expected ending those incipits threaded together point towards—the promised sexual/textual ecstasy of reading as it arrives at its point of closure.

This is, in the end, also a love story. Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* tells the tale of the Reader searching for those elusive books he constantly encounters yet cannot find as it also narrates the story of his quest for the Other Reader. As text, these books are collectively displaced onto that feminine space, the body. It becomes, in turn, a

sexual/textual locus which is a site of inscription, a site of writing and reading. In other words, this is that surface where a reader can localize, describe, contain, and even circulate, difference itself.

As surface, text and body are therefore coextensive; they are bound by as they come to be realized only within parameters fixed by the heterosexual contract:

Your attention, as reader, is now completely concentrated on the woman, already for several pages you have been circling around her, I have—no, the author has—been circling around the feminine presence, for several pages you have been expecting this female shadow to take shape the way female shadows take shape on the written page, and it is your expectation, reader, that drives the author toward [*sic*] her.... (21)

Surface is already engendered feminine because it is where sexuality and textuality intersect to enable a representation of heterosexual masculinity.

If Wigley correctly sees space in terms of power—space being for him “a scene of exploitation”—we must begin to reconsider the above intersection. We must concern ourselves with more than just space in terms of boundaries, contours, and, in a manner of speaking, the lie of the land. We have to reconsider space as a political arena, and, potentially, by extension, the politics of space itself. I understand this particular politic in terms of the constructed “space of the other as ‘territory,’ a potential extension of the dominant space, something that can be mapped and, therefore, *entered*” (Wigley 1992b: 89. Emphasis added).

Chapter Seven of the novel brings together these acts of reading text and body—as they are envisioned by readers and the Reader—together. Reader, you walk around this Other Reader; you observe her kitchen, that sexed space; you meander through her house and delineate those markers of her existence; and you peruse her books which are as much surfaces bearing her identity as her body imprints her image upon your book. You are constantly gazing at her: she becomes your spectacularization, your imaged happiness and guarantee of masculinity. Similarly, you—who are Calvino’s reader—see this text as that space of otherness, that feminine surface you wish to naturally colonize for, describe as, if

not map onto it, your own gendered reading. Yet what has been read so far, in book after book, and chapter after chapter, is a series of ruptures, a string of readings begun but never satisfactorily concluded. Both you readers need to ground yourselves; you need to read again and to read as a man. Maybe if you, the Reader, brought her to bed while you, the reader of Calvino, sits propped up in bed, frantically perusing *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, there will be the promised masculine ending each of you seeks. Like the Reader's ending, an individual reader ends by domesticating the text: finally in bed with the Other, each reading subject finds itself to be not "a fairly unrecognizable tangle under the rumpled sheet" (122) but rather the essentialized masculine identity this sexual/textual act engenders. And here is where, de Lauretis reminds us, "the equation of reading and lovemaking is played out through the topos of the body as text" (1989: 79).

Ludmilla, the Other Reader, is therefore imaged equally for the Reader and, significantly, for us readers as follows: "Your body is being subjected to a systematic reading, through channels of tactile information, visual, olfactory, and not without some intervention of the taste buds. Hearing also has its role, alert to your gasps and your trills" (123). She is not just a spectacle; she is to be read as an experience of the senses. More often than not, this manifests itself as either—perhaps, always as both—consumption or sex. Once again, this eroticization of surface implicitly recognizes reading as the penetration, exploitation and, in its last instance, domestication of the feminine.

MAKING SENSE OUT OF FLUX: ENGENDERING SURFACES

Man is a cultural construction which emerges from the control of the feminine.

Mark Wigley⁹⁶

⁹⁶Mark Wigley, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina,

These descriptions of what reading might be can be appreciated as three facets of a distinctly masculine practice of reading gender de Lauretis identifies to condemn as they are foregrounded in, and operating as, Calvino's text. Regardless of its self-reflexivity, reading gender is, in this novel, according to her, nothing less than the dominant practice of reading as a man. Both reading and writing are, she notes critically, metonymically the male sexual act (1989: 76).

Reading can be seen as the act of penetration: it is as much an assault on as it is a violent invasion of the text. De Lauretis sees this trope as representative of the reading practice that Calvino's novel solicits from its reader. An example from the novel demonstrates this:

Progress in reading is preceded by an act that traverses the material solidity of the book to allow you access to its incorporeal substance. Penetrating among the pages from below, the blade vehemently moves upward, opening a vertical cut in a flowing succession of slashes.... Opening a path for yourself, with a sword's blade, in the barrier of pages becomes linked with the thought of how much the word contains and conceals: you cut your way through your reading as if through a dense forest. (38)

In this paragraph, the association between reading text and reading Woman is spectacularized in terms of dominating and penetrating virginal space.

We return to Wigley's phrase, "the scene of exploitation." What is "scene" here is actually a surface empowering, according to de Lauretis, the continuing representation of dominant masculinity as both the text and Woman are likened to "a void ready to be filled with meanings, or elsewhere a blank page awaiting insemination," by the subject who reads with the male gaze (de Lauretis 1989: 75). Even though Calvino's postmodern novel is, according to her, "a textual practice whose strategy is to 'rewrite,'" (1989: 73), it inadvertently reinscribes itself back into the hom(m)o-sexual binarisms of representing gender. In spite of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller's* disposition to engender a

postmodern alterity in understanding, if not animate a self-reflexivity of reading, representation, de Lauretis sees it as a failed attempt: the novel fails to move beyond the parameters of hom(m)o-sexual culture when representing gender. She writes:

This duality of stability/subversion—like the other familiar dichotomies of subject and object, self and other—is what contemporary critical thought (poststructuralism) challenges with notions of heterogeneity, difference, deconstruction, contradiction. But it remains an enduring cognitive paradigm; and even as postmodern writers would wish to do away with it, this binary structure in one way or another informs their very theorizations. (1989: 73)

Where de Lauretis' anger is directed at, I gather, is in the kind of reading Calvino's novel engenders: despite all its playfulness, trickery, and reflexivity, an individual reader finds himself, and, more importantly, herself, affixed to the dominant and oppressive masculine desire to read femininity only in terms of what masculinity lacks.

According to de Lauretis, we—especially male readers—are not unlike the Reader: he, Carter sums up, “solidly wants a complete book, definitive within itself, to be read from start to finish ...” (1987: 134). But from beginning to end, the Reader is caught in “randomness, flux, and chaos” (Carter 1987: 136); he is trapped within spaces which he overcomes and transforms into feminine fetishes. “The fetish,” Wigley observes, “is always understood as a surface effect that makes an object available for consumption and the seduction of such a surface economy is always opposed to the substantial structural and structuring properties of objects” (1992b: 93). In other words, the Reader reimposes his control over the Other in the form of text and body. Consequently, this fetishization, de Lauretis notes, highlights the reality of Woman in postmodern fiction: she is “still the ground of representation, even in postmodern times” (1989: 82). A spectacularized display of such fetishization, in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, is the story of Lotaria.

Lotaria, Ludmilla's sister, is “the critical feminist reader” (de Lauretis 1989: 77). She “wants to know the author's position with regard to Trends of Contemporary Thought and Problems That [*sic*] Demand a Solution.” In other words, she reads “books ... according to all Codes, Conscious and Unconscious, in which all Taboos are eliminated,

the ones imposed by the *dominant Sex, Class, and Culture*" (40. Emphasis added). In short, Lotaria reads against the grain. She is what her sister is not: she is the self-reflexive feminist reader. Even though she is, as de Lauretis points out, "ipso facto non-feminine (that is, masculine or, in harsher words, castrating)" (1989: 77), Lotaria—especially in the multiple (sur)faces she projects as Sheila-Alfonsina-Gertrude-Alexandra-et cetera-et cetera—serves as that fetishized space the Reader continues to pursue, to contain, and, finally, to penetrate.

More importantly, Lotaria is Sheila who "will insert the program" (172) into the body of the Reader as he is caught in the intersection of reality and fictionality that is Ataguitania which serves as both a textual site for the Reader as well as that ontological ground which allows him to fix his identity. "Indeed she does" insert the program, "and as the printout of yet another novel begins to unfurl, this Sheila-Lotaria, the Feminist Revolutionary/Counterrevolutionary, actually attempts," according to the reading de Lauretis puts forth, "to rape him" (1989: 77).

This male rape, or castration, is however contained. The Reader retains his superiority for the Author intervenes, and the threat of castration is negated by transforming Woman into a fetish. Consider this evidence: in the midst of this possible castration, there is "The flash of a bulb and the repeated click of a camera" (173). And even though it is the Reader's "superimposed nudity," his "whiteness," that comes to dominate the photograph that is taken, it is Sheila-Lotaria's body that is also photographed. Her body is subject, once again, to a masculine representation of corporeality: in this particular representation, her body affirms that "natural" relationship between the photograph and the feminine. A reader of Calvino's text enacts a similar strategy of mapping, or, more accurately, proscribing, the Other's surface.

Sheila-Lotaria's identity is, therefore, better imaged as neither corporeality nor textuality but, more revealingly, as the parade of gendered surfaces she seems to be:

It is she herself who tears off the clothes that remain on her. A pair of breasts

appear, firm, melon-shaped, a slightly concave stomach, the full hips of a *fausse maigre*, a proud pubes, two long and solid thighs. "And this? Is this a uniform?" Sheila exclaims. You have remained upset. "No, this, no ..." you murmur. "Yes, it is!" Sheila cries. "The body is a uniform! ..." (172-173)

Significantly, it is this description of her body in terms of gendered spatiality that signals the condition of Woman as fetish. As a fetish, Sheila-Lotaria comes to represent, in de Lauretis' analysis of the novel, "the female reader [who] is finally re-contained within the frame of the book as merely a character in a man's fiction" for she is "reduced to a portrait, an image ..." of what femininity is supposed to be (1989: 82).

Inasmuch as *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* ends in a closure bringing together the disparate incipits the Reader continually begins but never finishes reading, it also closes with a portrait of his marriage. The Other Reader, all along a fetish, is now transformed into a wife; she takes his name becoming simply Reader. In short, this act is a scene of domestication. More significantly, a transfiguration results: here, the Other Reader shares the same space as the Reader, and reads in tandem, reads "parallel readings." Both Readers realize the ironic promise of marriage:

Already, in the confused improvisation of the first encounter, the possible future of a cohabitation is read. Today each of you is the object of the other's reading, each reads in the other the unwritten story. Tomorrow, Reader and Other Reader, if you are together, if you lie down in the same bed like a settled couple, each will turn on the lamp at the side of the bed and sink into his or her book; two parallel readings will accompany the approach of sleep; first you, then you will turn out the light; returning from separate universes, you will find each other fleetingly in the darkness, where all separations are erased, before divergent dreams draw you again, one to one side, and one to the other. But do not wax ironic on this prospect of conjugal harmony: what happier image of a couple could you set against it? (125)

"Ludmilla, the Woman Reader desired and pursued by Reader and Writer alike," is, de Lauretis writes, "in the end attained, captured, and safely married off to the hero. *Because there is an ending to this story, after all*" (1989: 78. Emphasis added). Only because this is necessarily the logical conclusion to the Reader's quest, because a love story has to end with marriage, because those varied and separate incipits must come together as the text

itself, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*—for all its postmodern play and alterity—returns the individual reader (so it is argued) into the safety of that domesticated space, the heterosexual contract. Or, as Craft has detailed of the matrimonial finale in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the masculine reader's engagement to this feminine surface, as Calvino's novel intimates, must climax with "the presumptive closure of marital bliss" (1990: 23).

If the novel ends with the rethreading of these truncated incipits into the gratifying experience of arriving at a textual closure, Calvino's novel must suggest much more than the "happily ever after" scenario its ending seems to point towards. In a novel soliciting our reading as the very measure of "our situation as readers reading about readers reading" (Phelan 1989: 157), this celebration of man and wife coupled in sexual/textual display is, however, and problematically so, only a "presumptive closure."

This moment of pleasure locates itself in that primordial paradigm of rapture, the male-female sex act, or the heterosexual contract.⁹⁷ But this location is, I believed, offered by Calvino to metaphorically mark the closure of reading texts. Thus when Calvino concludes his novel with "And you say, 'Just a moment, I've almost finished *If on a winter's night a traveler* [sic] by Italo Calvino'" (205), "you" is here the Reader who, in marital bliss, arrives at the end of his quest for the book he began. He finishes the book by rethreading together those incipits that previously disrupted his reading. In the end, the Reader's masculine subject position is assured; his colonization of as well as his control over these entwined yet individual surfaces of those incipits and Ludmilla's body is enabled, and fulfilled. He identifies himself as husband and man, and, most significantly, as

⁹⁷ In Easthope's critique of the masculine myth, *What a Man's Gotta Do*, he writes: "Masculinity, however, is constructed on all sides as above all an insatiable appetite, something that seeks satisfaction everywhere—in posters, magazines, advertizing, soft-and-hard-core pornography—in images of women or bits of women" (1986: 135).

the reader for whom reading this “presumptive closure” is privileged as the natural ending to a text when reading as a man.

But “you” must also address us readers. In finishing this novel, our reading closes upon not only a marriage and a text realized but, more specifically, upon a surface we read, a surface where Woman is to be read as text, and, in turn, this text that we read is one written on her body. When we arrive at this closure in our reading, we reinstate, we emphasize, if we do not also reclaim, surface as a feminine space.

What do all these mean for the reading subject? For women, these moments of closure affirm the conclusion at which de Lauretis arrives at the end of her article: “it is the absent Woman, the one pursued in dreams and found only in memory or in fiction, that serves as the guarantee of masculinity, anchoring male identity and supporting man’s creativity and self-representation” (1989: 82). For men, on the other hand, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, as she pointedly demonstrates, serves as nothing less than the (de)naturalized surface, Woman, where sex (meaning both the male body and the male-female sex act) intersects with heterosexuality to engender a characteristically masculine practice of reading. Of greater significance to this study is her insistence on Calvino’s inability to rid his novel of those prevailing binarisms of Self/Other, subject/object, male/female, masculine/feminine, and depth/surface despite the novel’s emphasis on postmodern alterity. In spite of her conclusions, I believe, one has to pause, however.

Is it correct, for de Lauretis, to indict Calvino, and the masculine identity he is supposed to represent, as the generic male subject who fails to move beyond binarism within postmodernity? Might it also not be a case that when men discuss either their identity or subjectivity, they find it difficult to dissimulate themselves as anything other than “Man”? Or are men unwilling to take up a postmodern politics, recognizing beneath its facade of alterity and play, the inevitable dissolution of representation, and with it, the loss of what is meant by the term “masculinity”?

In other words, might not the correct questions to ask of “masculinity” in

postmodernity, questions I think de Lauretis fails to address in her otherwise insightful and entertaining critique, be these: is there a postmodern masculinity? and what is it? indeed, can we begin to even re-present it beyond, that generic masculine sign, "Man"? if so, how do we go about doing it? to what extent is there an attempt to redraw those parameters of gender representation such that we can recognize and differentiate it from heterosexual masculinity?

A POINT OF DEPARTURE: READING TO BE LIKE AN-OTHER

The central problem remains: how do you theorise a dominant term such as masculinity, one which (like heterosexuality or whiteness) is rendered invisible by its very pervasiveness?

Paul Julian Smith⁹⁸

I will address these questions through the politics of dis coherence as they relate to a possible variation of the gendered category of "identity" and the gendered subject position of "the masculine reader" within the postmodern crisis of representation. In particular, I wish to address a postmodern masculinity, and in doing so, attend to Smith's concern about articulating such "a dominant term" by specifically re-reading the apparent masculinity of the heterosexual male reader of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*.

De Lauretis's analysis of masculinity in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is askew: her insistence that masculinity is fixed in, and realized as, the male gaze is just as problematic as any hom(m)o-sexual subscription which wants to see Woman as a spectacle, or a surface. This is acutely evident in the very site de Lauretis chooses to

⁹⁸Paul Julian Smith, "The Buddy Politic," rev. of *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohen and Ina Rae Hark, *Sight and Sound* 3.7 (1993): 33.

focus her feminist critique of Calvino's novel—the male subject. I am referring of course to the conflation of the gaze, masculinity, and the male body in the figure of the Reader who is, moreover, according to de Lauretis, representative of individual male readers who situate themselves in the subject position of reading as man. What is of greater worry, moreover, is the extension she makes of this homogenized identification by aligning the individual reader with the generic reading subject, the male reader.

That there is, to put it simply, a confusion of identities is spectacularly evident in de Lauretis's commentary: this occurs because de Lauretis comes to see this text as an apparently seamless, unitary, and singular site of masculine self-representation for both the Reader and the individual reader who appreciate this surface as a feminine space. That is to say, while *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, a novel written by Italo Calvino, is as much the text we *effectively* read, it is also *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, that very book which becomes itself while the Reader reads its seemingly disparate but conjoined parts.

This confusion deepens. In perceiving “the Reader as the eternal double of the Author, *son semblance, son frère*, or in Calvino's phrase, the ‘absolute protagonist’” (1989: 72), de Lauretis articulates the Reader, the “you” addressed in the text, as equalling the Author. Unfortunately, as a result of this, there is no distinction between Reader and Author as there is none to demarcate reading and writing. Each pair collapses into a single entity; such is this enterprise seeking to re-mark that commonwealth, masculinity, when it is localized as a representation of the male gaze. The situation is compounded further when she conflates the “you” of the book, the Reader, with the individual male reader of Calvino's novel. What we have in de Lauretis's account of masculinity is a disturbing predilection to read mimetically: conflating separate subjectivities under one homogenized identity inscribed “masculine” allows her to rearticulate femininity at the expense of describing what masculinity can alternatively become.

Between her tendency to essentialize masculine identity and her need to rewrite

femininity, that political stance she adopts as a feminist reading Calvino does not allow her to recognize what the postmodern subject position of reading in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* alludes to: in reading the Reader's progress towards the promised sexual/textual ecstasy of closure, what we are actually reading—as we also simulate, and eventually dissimulate, a reading identity that is (a)like that of the Reader—is the effected masculinity this character engenders when he reads these surfaces of body and text. In this postmodern novel of reading as an interplay of differences and contra-dictions, then, there is the possibility that the identity of this subject position of reading, as characterized by the Reader, is performative.

When de Lauretis elides this possibility of a performative masculine identity, her politics of gender exposes itself as a politics of erasure in play: while femininity is rewritten, masculinity is transformed into an ahistorical, or, more accurately, a stereotypical identity. I contend that de Lauretis's broad—and somewhat overgeneralized—understanding of Calvino's novel, and the reading it specifically engenders, prevents her from appreciating the interaction between reader and text as the chiasmatic tension arising out of respatializing the text (read represented male body) as a homoerotic surface. If she begins to see this, she will understand that reading such a surface of contra-diction(s) has the potential to stimulate, contest, and produce a variation of reading, and of reading masculinity in particular.

What is sorely needed as a balance, if not as an alternative that is juxtaposed, to de Lauretis's study is a non-heterosexual reading of Calvino's novel by a gay man. This chapter, in itself a summation of what this larger study is all about, offers the reader of *Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity* one such possibility in revising and rewriting what Calvino's novel might mean for the practice of reading masculinity within the politics of dis coherence.

The Reader is the Reader of books; in the process of effecting the surfaces he engenders feminine, he becomes the masculine Reader, or, more accurately, the very

spectacle of reading as a man. Because such a spectacle is, as the above chapters lay bare, problematic, the association between heterosexual masculinity and reading must be questioned: do the repetitions of reading as man not locate the Reader in a chiasmatic tension with that other form of reading, reading like a man, when his identity as the masculine reader is revealed to be but the ob-scene of what masculinity is supposed to be? What he reads may be the feminine surface, but what he effects, however, is a masculine identity arising out of gender performativity, and what is also re-read at this site is the trace of an-other reading into masculinity. Significantly, this is then that variation in reading masculinity. Further, this difference re-presents reading as a man into reading like a man—always chiasmatic, always in dis coherence, always a surface effect(ed).

If the Reader is argued to represent what lived masculinity is, his identification as a reading subject who is nothing more than one who is like the reader, Man, must contest the individual reader's supposedly masculine identity. For a start, to position masculinity as a surface that is effected because of gender performativity calls attention to the depth/surface binarism as it continues to center itself in debates of gender such as de Lauretis' reading of this novel. When masculinity is understood as primarily a matter of surface, this particular binarism is destabilized; there is now a reconfiguration of gender along the depth/surface alignment. What is confusingly foregrounded in this instance is the necessary distinction between a masculine practice of reading surface and the necessary re-reading of masculinity as surface itself. As much as de Lauretis' reading points to the masculine practice of reading surface as emblematic of an inability to transcend the hom(m)o-sexual binarism of depth/surface in representing gender, the respatialization of masculinity as surface offers the potential for a critique, and a rewriting, of masculine identity in terms of effected surfaces. In other words, surface is where the individual reader can begin to revise his/her understanding of masculine identity: instead of a gender identity that is synonymously situated in corporeality, there is the possibility that the masculine identity represented is but a surface that is an effect of gender

performativity.

Reading this surface that, on the one hand, posits the dominant representation of masculinity, and, on the other, disrupts it by foregrounding the very performativity of its gendered identification, the individual reader is positioned into that homoerotic space I have described at the beginning of this chapter. Once again, the represented male body is revealed to be a site of similarity and dissimilarity; the significant difference in this instance is that masculinity can now be appreciated as a performative surface rather than as a realization of the body-gender alignment. This spectacle of an effected (sur)face of masculinity displaces any attempt to essentialize gender identity in terms of corporeality. For the reader, this displacement goes even further; the seemingly homogenized identification between represented and lived masculinities that de Lauretis argues for is now subject to a discoherent reading of masculinity. Because of the chiasmatic tension a reader finds him/herself in when reading this spectacle of a male body in contra-diction, the homoerotic space—where difference and sameness are in interplay—can potentially effect a cross-(ad)dressed gender identity for the postmodern reading subject.

Within this homoerotic space, the practice of reading as a man relocates the reader as simultaneously the subject and the object of the gaze. For the male reader, this relocation disturbs his seemingly fixed position as the subject of the gaze as well as that essentialized alignment of body and gender to describe his identity. The homoerotic space is, therefore, where the male reader can realize the potential of the male gaze to effect, simultaneously, an identity of sameness and difference when he is caught within the chiasmatic tension of reading the male body as contra-diction. This space functions as, and here I want to pick up on an idea Sedgwick proposes in her article, “Queer and Now,”

the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically. (1993: 8)

Such a homoerotic space spectacularizes, more than anything else, the identity of the

reader to be that of the cross-(ad)dressed subject: while deploying the male gaze to read as a man, this reader is effectively enacting the dominant identity of the masculine reading subject. And enacting the role of this male reader, moreover, translates itself as an act of reading like a man. In this instance, then, reading the homoerotic space of a male body that is equally similar to yet different from what its dominant gender identity should be stimulates a politics of reading that foregrounds itself as that disturbingly “queer” practice of reading like an-Other.

In her article, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Butler’s comments regarding the destabilizing effects of such repetition augment the argument I am making. She writes:

paradoxically, it is precisely the *repetition* of that play that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category that it constitutes. For if the “I” is a site of repetition, that is, if the “I” only achieves the semblance of identity through a certain repetition of itself, then the I is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it. (1993a: 311)

My sense is that these instances of repetition—play, display, interplay—are enabled and animated, if only because it is made possible, when what is being engaged is the other *within* itself. Butler’s observations demonstrate how the very reiteration of identity enables its very alteration within the originary subject who animates the initial repetition of that subject position of reading. The point remains that in order for such a performativity of gender identity to take place, the homoerotic space must serve as that interface between the dominant and its Proximate Other, between gender as culturally coded and gender as culturally elided, and where textuality is concerned, between reading as man and reading like a man.

As an interface, these differences are in a chiasmatic tension that is always revising, and therefore rewriting, each other. The “spectacle as social practice,” according to Polan, displays the “breakdown of coherence, a disordering of orders (political, diegetic, whatever) for the sake of visual show” (1986: 58-59). But the spectacle, he reminds us, is a self-reflexive space for the individual subject who finds him/herself within it, and this

echoes the point I am making about homoerotic space, and the revision of re-reading masculinity it engenders. I agree with Polan when he writes that “Spectacle jettisons a need for narrative myths and opts for an attitude in which the *only tenable position* seems to be the reveling [*sic*] in the fictiveness of one’s own fictive acts” (1986: 59. Emphasis added). Just what is effected besides the surface of a seemingly masculine identity is the fictive—constructional, contingent, contentious—basis which is proscribed and, more often than not, veiled because it embodies a sense of “being” the masculine reader.

But de Lauretis sees this reader repeating those oppressive acts of domestication, exploitation, and penetration which real women face when reading *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*. Together these acts of lived and represented masculinities realized themselves, according to her, in a body she identifies as that of the heterosexual male reader. When an equation of such significance is foregrounded, when the categories “male” and “heterosexual” conjoin into, if not with, an articulation of the “masculine,” what is presumably understood, as an axiom, is an intersection between the corporeal and the sexual in that act of naming gender.

This strategy de Lauretis adopts is, therefore, paradoxical: while it enables her to articulate and make visible what masculinity is in the process of rewriting femininity, it is a strategy that mires, indeed fixes, at the same time, her identification of masculinity into the seemingly definitive site of the male body, a body that she repeatedly writes about as always heterosexual, and hence, always masculine.

ALWAYS IN FRONT: ENACTING A MASCULINE SURFACE

Identification is, of course, identification with an other, which means that identity is never identical to itself. This alienation of identity from the self it constructs, which is a constant replay of a primary psychic self-alienation, does not mean simply that any proclamation of identity will be only partial, that it

will be exceeded by other *aspects* of identity, but rather that identity is always a relation, never simply a positivity.

Douglas Crimp⁹⁹

In arguing how Calvino's novel solicits that privileged practice of reading enabling a characteristically heterosexual and masculine self-representation, de Lauretis demonstrates her difficulty in visualizing the chiasmatic tension a reader finds him or herself in when reading a paradoxical representation of the male body. Within this bind, the reader will invariably be, I contend, reading a spectacularization of what I have already termed a reading masculinity (and I want to emphatically stress its double significance in terms of a reading body, or subject that is, and the reading of this body as, identifiably masculine).

Even though *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* presents the Reader's quest for the feminine as a natural part of reading itself, it is also a text spectacularizing the crisis of reading masculinity. This crisis is, especially, foregrounded in the spectacle of marriage that closes the novel. What this spectacle is is a *deus ex machina*; the conjugal ending that is apparently a naturally heterosexual and masculine ending to the narrative, a closure in sexual/textual ecstasy, or an ending securely positioning Woman as that spectacle of desire, pleasure, and domination, is otherwise nothing more than a constructed ending. This enforced closure emphasizes the fictive nature of such a reading. By extension, any attempt to associate the Reader's masculine identity with the individual reader at this moment of sexual/textual rapture can only result in an equally fictive position for the latter to find him or herself in.

The Reader arrives at the end of his pursuit of the Other in a moment of heterosexual domestication: he marries Ludmilla at the very moment his reading of disjointed books becomes, in his final reading, the promised book, *If on a Winter's Night a*

⁹⁹Crimp, "Right On" 313.

Traveller. In this sense, the Reader fulfills his desire to read, and, in particular, to read as a man:

in books I like to read only what is written, and to connect the details with the whole, and to consider certain readings as definitive; and I like to keep one book distinctive from the other, each for what it has that is different and new; and I especially like books *to be read from the beginning to end*. (203. Emphasis added)

One might well want to point out that the ending of Calvino's novel is doubly significant: the novel ends with the Reader's attainment of the surfaces he pursues as its ending also marks the promised closure of a text we began as individual readers. In turn, both these instances affirm what the end of the reading process should realize—the promised sexual/textual ecstasy of reading.

Each of these endings is, however, also performative: it conforms to the practice of reading within hom(m)o-sexual culture by effecting that masculine identity the male gaze guarantees when a reader deploys it to read text(s). In these readings, the textual surface is considered feminine and bounded; its description is always articulated in lineal terms—"beginning to end"—so as to situate the reader, who is, especially, male, as the locus of inscription. Accordingly, this reader must be heterosexual; the textual climax of arriving at the moment of closure is itself a reproduction of male-female sex. The final portrait of the Reader as the husband of this text is also a portrait of the Other who is transformed into an image of likeness because the identity "husband" must tellingly refer to the domestication of the Other who is now enjoined to the Reader in that emblematic heterosexual contract called marriage.

And likeness is exactly the issue my study focuses on. If surface implies the possibility of a reader's location, and his/her colonization of that space as the masculine reader, it can also mean a performative surface of gendered identity that he/she effects when reading. That is, the individual reader approximates the Reader who, in reproducing his masculinity in reading this feminine surface, comes to occupy this space only to realize

it as an enacted surface that tacitly intimates a masculine identity in play. Wigley's conclusion that "the viewer's position is itself a surface effect" (1992a: 386) is an opinion I share; the masculinity a reader is said to engender when reading with the male gaze is only an effect of the gender identity he/she simulates.

Those arguments which put forth that masculinity is intrinsically engendered in the occupation of what is characteristically feminine space become problematic. If "Space," as Wigley suggests, "is itself closeted" (1992a: 389), what is closeted (and here I go beyond Wigley's concern with space being, primarily, a feminine site) is a reconfiguration of the surface of gender as neither essentialized nor biological but performative. In other words, the Reader's masculine identity can be re-read as a surface of (a)likeness even while he is supposed to be that representative site of masculinity within the text: in other words, the Reader functions as a seam/seem within the text that unravels the category "masculine" to be nothing but a construction. In turn, while reading such a seam, the individual reader can come to reorientate his/her identity to be one that is only simulating that vertiginous sense of "being," perhaps, even (dis)simulating, the Reader's masculine identity.

But the very act of simulation is itself a reminder of what a male reader is said to share with the Reader; they share a representation of corporeality that should affirm that homogenized identity, "masculine." However, to simulate is also to suggest that recognizable and indisputable fact of such an identification being but a facade, a mask; in other words, a surface effected to be like a posture.

Reconfiguring a reader's masculine identity, both at and, more deliberately, as surface, must result in a relocation of those analyses, claims, and accusations of a fixed, definitive, and categorical masculinity which allows us to "spot" the man who is always the generic masculine subject, the male reader. How can we then possibly claim that the masculine identity represented—the Reader in this instance—is indeed what constitutes the masculine identity of an individual reading subject for whom reading this homoerotic

surface, then, becomes a moment of effecting a pose? I agree with Wigley: “the illusion produced by the representational surface appears *in front* rather than behind it” (1992a: 386. Emphasis added). Masculinity then cannot be anything more than this: when masculinity is a performative surface, its corporeality is not to be found in heterosexuality nor in a bodily essence. On the contrary, masculinity can be an identity that is embodied in its ability to seem the part. And if seeming the part recalls those associated images of postures and poses, are readers who effect the masculine identity also not caught within a distinctly postmodern obsession with surfaces?

In what follows, I want to vigorously suggest that as individual readers, we inevitably position ourselves within a chiasmatic bind each time we read that homoerotic spectacle of corporeality in contra-diction, and what we effectively engender in each reading of such a site is our own “masculinity” in interdiscourse and in interplay. More significantly, what each of these readings also foregrounds is the possibility that the masculine identity of the reader can be that of the cross-(ad)dressed reading subject.

CROSS-(AD)DRESSING THE READER

Exploitation. As much as *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* ends by inscribing its closure back into the heterosexual contract of marital bliss, sexual union, and domesticity, it also employs such an ending to exploit those inherent flaws of representing gender along that alignment of represented and lived experiences.

Take, as a point of departure, the scene in Chapter Seven. Here the Reader and the Other Reader coalesce as “a single subject”: they are two reading identities that converge into a space of interdiscourse:

now, since your bodies are trying to find, skin to skin, the adhesion most generous in sensations, to transmit and receive vibrations and waves, to

compenetrate the fullnesses and the voids, since in mental activity you have also agreed on the maximum agreement, you can be addressed with an articulated speech that includes you both in a sole, two-headed person. (123)

Beneath its obvious representation of sex, both as a heterosexual act and as the male body in action, is a subtext of dis coherence. Where skin and skin intermingle, where “to compenetrate the fullnesses and voids” is to return Calvino’s reader into an act of reading as itself a sexual/textual ecstasy, it imports such a reader into the chiasmatic tension capable of animating a dis coherent reading of masculinity. In seeing the surface of masculinity as a site of gender performativity, we may come to conceive of it as more than the mere surface sign of a bodily essence or a sexual expression; it is a surface identity that is effected in order to be, at once, that gendered and/or sexual identity the postmodern subject simulates when reiterating the role of the masculine reader.

I seek to politicize masculinity in terms of cross-(ad)dressing because I want to deliberately interpenetrate the notion of “queer” that Butler’s theory of gender performativity intimates into our understanding of what masculinity can otherwise become when it is represented in forms that are apart from its dominant identification as hierachical, hegemonic, and heterosexual.¹⁰⁰ Derived from “queer” theory, where “queer” is itself a notion of what a postmodern homosexual identity can alternatively, and possibly, be, what comes to be inflected upon this particular description of masculinity, as a result of gender performativity, is its repudiation of gender as essentially biological, or, within

¹⁰⁰For a discussion of “queer” and its theoretical implications, see *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991). Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender Ser. (New York: Routledge, 1990), where her theory of performativity lends itself to its subversive act of denaturalizing gender and sexuality as natural, should also be considered. For a discussion of queer politics, see Lisa Duggan, “Making It Perfectly Queer,” *Socialist Review* 22. 1 (1992): 11-31; Anna Marie Smith, “Resisting the Erasure of Lesbian Sexuality: A Challenge for Queer Activism,” *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience*, ed. Ken Plummer (London: Routledge, 1992): 200-213; and Vicki Carter, “Abseil Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Lesbian and Gay Campaigning Tactics and Section 28,” Plummer 217-226.

the heterosexual contract of dominant culture, grounded in the male-female sex act.

“In place of the law of heterosexual coherence,” Butler notes, “we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (1990b: 338). This sense of “queer,” and here I stress its potential to parody and subvert, problematizes the very act of reading as a man, and the heterosexually masculine identity it supposedly engenders. To read like a man, on the contrary, foregrounds masculine identity as a form of dressing up, of putting on a skin and posturing, of effecting a surface. In a manner of speaking, it is to drag. And if to drag is to call attention to one’s identity as a possible site of otherness, and here we need only recall cross-dressing’s playful disjuncture between surface and body in the act of performance, it signals, moreover, that heterosexual masculinity can be cross-(ad)dressed as, if not into, the Proximate Other within.

That is, in addressing masculinity within this postmodern space of chiasm—within that homoerotic spectacle of similarity and dissimilarity, of sameness and difference—one is invariably engaging this Proximate Other as central to any postmodern interpretation of masculinity. After all, is one not doing so when the identity of one’s subjectivity as the masculine reader is turned inside out only to become the very surface of otherness, of a difference in reading masculinity?

I am pleased to see this sense of a cross-(ad)dressed masculinity resonating, to a significant though varied extent, in Lee Edelman’s recently published book, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay, Literary, and Cultural Theory*. In a chapter entitled “Homographesis,” Edelman discusses the contradictory but highly subversive potential the gay male body offers for heterosexuality when it is inflected by, read through, and written under the inscription of homographesis which makes visible, accounts for, and identifies the male homosexual. He writes:

Like writing, then, homographesis would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on

codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively *inscribed*. That these two operations, pointing as they do in opposite directions, should inhabit a single signifier, must make for a degree of confusion, but the confusion that results when difference collapses into identity and identity unfolds into *différance* is ... central to the problematic of homographesis. (1994: 10)¹⁰¹

But what interests me is that double gesture which posits the paradox of the same and other within a shared corporeality, or, as I have sought to delineate for readers in general, and male readers in part, the homoerotic spectacle as it relates to a rewriting of the dominant. While Edelman concerns himself with homographesis, I am concerned with this sense of a cross-(ad)dressed masculine identity a reader can, in all probability, simultaneously engender when enacting the dominant cultural practice of the male gaze.

In citing Edelman, I want to illustrate the problematic this cross-(ad)dressed masculinity poses for the heterosexual male subject by juxtaposing it to the problematic of homographesis. Where homographesis destabilizes the very writing about, if not the textuality of, homosexuality within the very same discourse which engenders its difference, that of a cross-(ad)dressed masculine identity, as I see it, emphasizes this. Such a performative identity illustrates how the overdetermined identity of the Other can be displaced onto, and hence, deconstruct, in the Derridean sense of iterability, the originary identity that sought to describe, privilege, and maintain itself by metaphorizing the latter in order to essentialize its masculine identity as the male reader.

The notion of drag—its space, its artifice, its humorous inversion of norms as well as its transgressive potential to rewrite—does not always import into the heterosexual contract (and here I refer specifically to that economy of hom(m)o-sexuality in which

¹⁰¹In his recent book, Edelman's article, "Homographesis," is a revision of a much shorter and somewhat different version of another article bearing the same title which appeared in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1 (1989): 189-207.

Woman as sign is exchanged) what Garber sees as one possible implication of drag, the affirmative construction of masculinity. She writes: "To cross-dress on the stage in an all-male context ... is a way of asserting the common privilege of maleness" (1993: 60). To drag is, I believe, to take up the address of the Other as well as to breach those inherent male/female, masculine/feminine, and off-stage/on-stage divisions Garber employs to recuperate cross-dressing as an act of remasculinization. These enable her to conclude that in spite of its transgressive nature what drag does for heterosexual masculinity is an externalization, and acting out, of "crises and conflicts displaced from, but closely adjacent to, the construction of a certain kind of 'manhood' or 'maleness' crucial to the maintenance of [a] ... social hegemony ..." (1993: 61).

Nevertheless, what is elided in this "maintenance" of hom(m)o-sexual "social harmony" is the problematic of gender performativity, and that particularly "queer" challenge it offers us to re-read the dominant representation of masculinity: man, cross-dressed as the feminine other on-stage, performs more than a mere parody of gender; he puts the masculine identity of his male body on display by drawing attention to the possible effacement, if not the interchangeability, of gendered surfaces at this corporeal site. Conversely, this interplay of opposing surfaces—perhaps, a condition of surfaces that are (s)exchanged—foreground, once again, the crisis of representing masculinity within such a homoerotic space. In addition, if to drag means to pose like an-other, what Garber implicitly points to yet never fully articulates is, I believe, this spectacle of gender parody as itself the fleshing out of the Proximate Other. No longer a distanced and contained difference, this proscribed Other must be appreciated as already traced into the surface effected. In turning inside out this surface of identity, what we are effectively enacting in our reading of masculinity is always its re-reading as an-other performative (sur)face of the masculine. If the Reader is, according to de Lauretis, representative of the individual male reader, the contentious possibility, I am proposing in this study, that his identifiably masculine (sur)face is merely performative questions the essentialized alignment she

postulates between represented and lived masculinities.

In identifying Lotaria as a contained feminist, de Lauretis categorically sees her body as that surface which a reading subject domesticates in order to realize its identity as the masculine reader. However, what is also traced into this surface of femininity that Calvino presents is that problematic alignment of corporeality and surface to represent masculinity. Calvino intimates his unease with this alignment in that scene where corporeality and surface conflate to re-present gender identity as an effected, rather than an essentialized, surface.

If the photograph captures and contains Sheila-Lotaria's castrating threat, it also spectacularizes the Reader in his exposed nudity as pure skin. In this scene, the Reader stands before us in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* as the face of masculinity that he effects in reading, and not the apparently natural and masculine identity he is supposed to possess. The Reader is therefore reading like a man. The photograph which captures and contains Lotaria is also the very space which displaces the Reader from his fixed position as the reader of text into the text he is, and that which we are reading as the story of the Reader in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Where Lotaria is fixed into that containing frame of hom(m)o-sexual femininity, the snapshot, the Reader is reproduced as that surface of "whiteness" and "convulsed, superimposed nudity" we are reading when we follow his masculine pursuit of texts and body.

An example from the novel: "You [the Reader] start to get up, too, and you find you are wrapped in the rolls of the printout" (174). In so far as the Reader is wrapped in rolls of a story being printed out, he is literally represented as that surface effected when reading like a man. More exactly, this surface is the text whose story we are actively pursuing as we move towards the promised closure of reading. As a text, the Reader is altered, mediated, and transformed into the performative (sur)face of the masculine reader we are, finally, representing. In other words, as much as Lotaria is presented as a surface of addresses—

With a frantic hand you unbutton the white smock of Sheila the programmer and you discover the police uniform of Alfonsina; you rip Alfonsina's gold buttons away and you find Corinna's anorak; you pull the zipper of Corinna and you see the chevrons of Ingrid.... (172)

—the Reader is a similar surface. He is addressed according to the surfaces he effects. Within a politics of dis coherence, the male body is turned inside out, and where inside is but always the surface it is, that which is skin is really nothing more than its ob-scene, its performativity. As a result, we must turn our attention to—in an attempt to rethink these issues of inside/outside, either/or, body/surface as they pertain to a postmodern gender identity—the homoerotic spectacle of representing engendered corporeality because this is where a reader effecting a masculine subject position of reading with the male gaze cross-(ad)dresses him/herself within that interface of same and other.

FALLING INTO HOMOEROTIC SPACE AND QUEERING A READER'S MASCULINE (SUR)FACE

What is vertigo? Fear of falling? Then why do we feel it even when the observation tower comes equipped with a sturdy handrail? No, vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.

Milan Kundera¹⁰²

What we see before us, in reading Calvino's representation of the Reader's masculine identity, is the collapse of the male body, and its apparent masculinity, into that space which is normally distanced, and contained, by naming it Other. This particular

¹⁰² Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 59-60.

collapse is, I believe, a displacement of the reader's self-representation as the masculine subject when reading a contradictory representation of corporeality. Instead, what takes place is this reader's (dis)simulation of reading as a performative effect, and his/her cross-(ad)dressed identity; elsewhere, I have recorded this displacement as a shift from reading as to reading like a man. And because the latter intimates that such a reading identity is not unlike the act of enacting, or cross-(ad)dressing, that identity of generic masculine subject, the male reader, it should come as no surprise that reading like a man can be an instance of a particularly "queer" rewriting in appearance.

Such a reading of masculinity—as this discoherent practice of cross-(ad)dressing the reader's gender identity demonstrates—problematizes those polarized structures of male/female, masculine/feminine, Self/(Proximate) Other and subject/object as fixed, separate, and distinct dichotomies for the individual reader. "The construction of stable bodily contours," Butler emphasizes, "relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability" (1990a: 132). Central to, if not centered into, such a collapse of these boundaries of reading as a man, these definite lines of separate identities and affixed gendered positions of subjectivity, is an interdiscourse with the likeness of the other.

These "fixed sites," which are, according to Butler, necessarily part of the continuing regulation of gender identity, dissolve and coalesce when a reader is forced to represent the engendered identity of the body in dominant terms that can no longer enable its definite description because of its re-presentation as that problematic space of sameness and difference. Within this chiasm, the definite distinctions that are built into the very structure of the "either/or" binarism become blurred; difference and sameness are in interplay. This re-reading of binarized differences is itself a re-presentation of the obscene that is all too often veiled by what is on-scene, and privileged, and even though expected, still demanded by a hom(m)o-sexual audience—I refer to the evidence of similarity between representation and lived experience, or, more accurately, to the reiterated identity of gender that dominant culture sanctions.

I want to insist, therefore, that if masculine identity is, first and foremost, already constructed in terms of *performing a role or a pose*, then the possibility that this identity is (a)like the Other can be considered as one valid means of alternatively reading the supposed masculine identity of the male body in general, and its postmodern representation in part. Similarly, there must also be a reconsideration of the identity of the reader for whom enacting the subject position of reading might be, after all, just an enacted role. If each act of masculinity is therefore a performative moment which puts forward the very essence it appears to be only to foreground the very "theatricality," even the fictive nature, of its identity, the performative connotations of a reiterated gender identity recall the destabilizing effect of a "queer" politics of representing gender. Conversely, each time a reader is asked to enact this particular reading of likeness, what he/she is also effecting is an identity that is, quite possibly, "queer" and Other.

In reconsidering our prevailing reading practice of the male gaze, and, more accurately, of how it constitutes and engenders the subjectivity, and the identity, of the individual reader, I would like to think this too: this particularly "queer" reconfiguration of the masculinity of the male body that is read, as well as the gendered identity of the reading subject, redraws the way we can rethink and re-present "masculinity" today. This is because such a "queer" re-presentation of identity animates nothing less than a blurring, if not a convulsion, or perhaps, even a collapse, of fixed parameters and proscribed margins as well those resolutely "either/or" dichotomies of binarism that enables us to re-read what masculinity might effectively, and alternatively, mean today. This particular collapse of the generic, and masculine, subject position of reading relocates the reader into a position approximating homosexual interdiscourse. These sexual/textual acts do not affirm the represented male body as a definitive site of representing masculinity. Instead, they re-engage this corporeality in terms of its differentiated identity because the dissolution of fixed boundaries renders the male body as a space where contradictions are in interplay. In doing so, this re-presentation of gendered identity "effectively reinscribe[s]

the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines” (Butler 1990a: 132). Within the politics of dis coherence I describe, this reinscription enables the reader to resituate his/her identity in terms of performative surfaces, and, far more importantly, in terms of that postmodern, and “queer,” identity, the cross-(ad)dressed subject.

A corollary of the above reconsideration of masculinity must be a re-examination of the continuing, and essentializing, alignment between corporeality and surface within the continuing debate on gender. In her article about Calvino’s novel—which I have used as a model of how one feminist reading of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* echoes the larger tendency within some feminist thinkers to describe gender in terms of an “either/or” binarism—de Lauretis’ politics of gender identity demonstrates itself to be essentialist. To an extent, her understanding of gender in Calvino’s novel parallels the works of Mulvey, Wittig, Irigaray, Dworkin and MacKinnon that I have examined in the chapters above; they each argue that masculinity is best described in terms of those essentialized binarisms of male/female, active/passive, dominant/submissive, violent/violated, and depth/surface. Most importantly, they conceive of masculinity as categorically the diametric opposite of femininity.

Through this particularly “queer” politics of rewriting gender identity that I aim to introduce into our discussions of masculinity within gender studies, I hope to unpick this predisposition towards an essentialism of gender within the feminists I examine even as they develop new ways to rethink the body and its gendered identification. In the course of unpicking these individual instances of an essentialized feminist categorization of gender—and I want “unpicking” to mean as much a form of constructive criticism as it does suggest an act of rendering visible those fissures and gaps that riddle such thinking—we might, I contend, begin to re-evaluate the political undercurrents of these differing feminisms when they attempt to speak about masculinity. Perhaps, we might even initiate the possibility that one conceivable, and maybe valid, response to an articulation of gender within postmodernity is in understanding gender identity to be a re-

presentation animated by dis coherence as its politics, stimulated by performativity as its manifestation, and engendered by cross-(ad) dressing as its effect.

As I have argued above, de Lauretis conceives that this novel stimulates a reading of gender that is already trapped within the dominant hom(m)o-sexual binarism of the hegemonic and hierarchical heterosexual contract. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her equation of reading to the act of penetration. For her, the metaphoric resonance of reading as penetration is itself a valid reason to reject the continuing oppression and exploitation of Woman in Calvino's postmodern novel. Inasmuch as her feminist reading of Calvino's representation of gender empowers her to articulate a much needed reinscription and revision of the dominant practice of reading femininity, it is nevertheless a formulaic configuration of reading that is caught within the polarizing binarism she seeks to transcend—masculinity only exists in opposition to femininity.

In discussing Calvino's postmodern writing, de Lauretis elucidates her reading of the novel by subscribing to a feminist understanding of gender. But because this particular understanding she subscribes to has a tendency to essentialize gender according to that prevailing binarism of "either/or," her own reading is, inevitably, caught within the "enduring cognitive paradigm" of "this binary structure" which "in one way or another informs ... theorizations" (1989: 73) of gender, sexuality, and subjectivity that she herself seeks to critique and rewrite. She is trapped within that very paradigm she criticizes: she reads against the grain yet she reinscribes herself back into those fixating gendered positions of Self or Other, male or female, masculine or feminine.

Does de Lauretis' ironic fixation in (and here I want to stress her failure to transcend as well as her preoccupation with) binarism testify to our own inability to articulate and even rewrite both a postmodern femininity and masculinity in anything other than these pre-established binarisms of hom(m)o-sexual culture? Can gender be thought of beyond its depth/surface nexus? And must sex, as it is doubly used to connote practice and body, be conceived only within those hom(m)o-sexual boundaries that circumscribe, situate, and

manifest identity as a gendered essence? At the end of it all, are we not questioning our current, and available, discourses on gender within the academy—especially as they are manifested in the discourses of the essentialist and anti-pornographic feminists I examine in the preceding chapters—and without the academy, in the larger cultural context these discourses seek to rewrite. Finally, then, are we not questioning that prevailing, and continuing, desire for closure that we tend to expect when we read texts—the desire to situate and express an identity of reading with the male gaze that is, because of its location within parameters of identifiable, if not binarized, difference, already and always masculine?

PERFORMATIVITY VERSUS EXPRESSION: RETHINKING THE IDENTITY OF THE READING SUBJECT

Representation, then, can only be representation if it is always already misrepresentation.... It is more accurate to suggest that ... it is in the moment of producing this “alterity” of representation, this difference from a correspondent object, that it attains the status of representation as such and not as “the thing itself.”

Thomas Docherty¹⁰³

In her book, *Slow Motion*, Segal notes that male sexual identity, and, its engendered masculinity, is primarily informed by the sex act: “The ubiquity of the discourses and imagery of ‘conquest/submission’, ‘activity/passivity’, ‘masculinity/femininity’ constructing heterosexual intercourse as *the* spectacular moment of male domination and female submission is inescapable ...” (1990: 209). Whilst identities that are hom(m)o-

¹⁰³Thomas Docherty, *After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism* (London: Routledge, 1990) 100.

sexually engendered may be the ostensible result of these binarisms Segal studies, what is also present in her discussion of masculine identity, more accurately, and especially, for the representation of the male body, is the performativity of masculine identity that the male subject effects in the very act of “heterosexual intercourse.”

In terms of reading with the male gaze, such a performativity of gender identity is equally evident when reading is itself seen to approximate “heterosexual intercourse.” For the heterosexual male reader especially, this displacement relocates his understanding of the masculine subject position of reading masculinity within a performative difference. In short, such a reader finds himself in a chiasmatic address with, if he is not also reconfigured finally into, an-other (sur)face of reading masculinity. This particular (sur)face, I suggest, is the performatively other, and, in the context of the politics of dis coherence, the disturbingly “queer,” surface of gender that is effected when a reader reiterates the practice of reading with the male gaze. Now, when I argue difference as performative rather than as expressive, I want to emphasize a further reconsideration of binarism as it informs—and indeed, as it is inflected by—a “queer” understanding of gender and sexual differences.

At the beginning of this study, I noted Sedgwick’s suggestion that binarisms are, as she records in *Epistemology of the Closet*, “sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition or, more succinctly, the double bind” (1990: 10). It is my belief in the “irresolvable instability” (1990: 10) of these “double bind[s]”—sites best described in terms of an interface, a chiasm, if not the homoerotic space itself—that I see in Sedgwick’s work a corresponding means of rethinking the representation of gender beyond its binarized structure. However, I want to move beyond her understanding of these sites because, in this bind where to double is, at once, to effect the potential for iterability, while repeating itself, the very structure of binarism reveals itself as that closeted space harbouring the always already deconstructive potential to stimulate a dis coherence of the

male gaze, and to encourage a re-reading of gender and sexuality in general, and of masculinity in particular. Moreover, such an understanding of binarism offers a reorientation of how we can move beyond its characteristic dialectic, and its limited polemic of an “either/or” argument.

What must take place, if the full potential of binarism is to be fulfilled within a discoherent reading of gender, is an interdiscourse, or, more exactly, an interface, of differences in play. When this interplay takes place, the possibility of dis coherence can be rewritten into the dominant practice of reading with the male gaze: in becoming a locus of the male gaze that is chiasmatic, this homoerotic space of reading the male body in contradiction reorientates how this practice can become a conjunction, perhaps, more of an intersection, of competing and conflicting differences that stimulate, challenge, and rewrite the dominant representation of masculinity by positing its simultaneous re-presentation as same and other.

In delineating performativity from expression, Butler, I contend, sums up not only this “queer” and hence dis coherent difference but equally the disengaging implications of a performative surface that reading within a homoerotic space potentializes. The individual reading subject is therefore released from its essentialized alignment with the identity of the generic male reader; his/her identity is that of the cross-(ad)dressed, rather than the biologically predetermined or generically homogenized, masculine reading subject. Butler writes:

The distinction between expression and performative-ness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (1990a: 141)

Her remarks illustrate how, in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, the Reader's reading seems to guarantee, on one level, nothing but the regulatory hom(m)o-sexual parameters which condition his reading as a man. Even though such reading postulates itself as

natural, and is, in the context of Calvino's novel, preferred to Lotaria's reading with its applied codes, structures and systems, the Reader's pursuit is also, and irrefutably, a surface that displays reading as a performance, and his supposedly masculine identity as a performatively engendered (sur)face.

Similarly, the tendency of the feminist discourses I examined above to essentialize what masculinity is demonstrates a need to rethink how we can alternatively represent gender. We need to undertake this re-examination because these discourses have influenced, and, to a large extent, institutionalized, how we conduct debates on gender within the academy. Perhaps, masculine identity needs to be seen in terms of gender performativity where the simulation and dissimulation of the dominant categories of gender, and of sexuality, now fragment and open up the debate by introducing, and highlighting, the chiasmatic potential of re-reading corporeality and gender within the politics of dis coherence.

More to the point, reading within the politics of dis coherence maps a "queer" orientation onto the apparently fixed and dominant identity of the reader within culture. This particularly "queer" inflection, I believe, allows the reader to re-evaluate his identity when deploying the male gaze; there is, then, an ob-scene recognition that the hom(m)o-sexual discourse he/she uses to read corporeality does not only enable such a reading but it also (re)constructs his/her identity as that masculine subject, the male reader.

In turn, this recognition manifests itself as the uneasy realization that his/her identity as the masculine reader might be, after all, that of the cross-(ad)dressed subject. Hence, if the various discourses of anti-pornography and essentialist feminisms are to effectively rewrite masculinity, they should, I feel, revise our cultural preoccupation with binarism as only specifically a matter of "either/or." We need to see it as neither a pre-existing structure nor an inevitable product of a hom(m)o-sexual articulation of gender but, rather, as a contingent interface arising out of a chiasmatic tension where differences are in interplay when a performative dis coherence takes place.

For the individual reader of Calvino's novel, the self-reflexivity of this text is particularly significant in revising how we can read its representation of gendered identity. This is examined in Chapter Eight of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. This chapter revolves around The Reader's reading of Silas Flannery's diary in order to make sense of Flannery who, as the author of thrillers, is himself a producer of texts. Here is Flannery as the Reader reads his diary:

I have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels. The protagonist could be a Reader who is continually interrupted. The Reader buys the new novel A by the author Z. But this is a defective copy, he can't go beyond the beginning.... He returns to the bookshop to have the volume exchanged....

I could write in the second person: you, Reader ... I could also introduce a young lady, the Other Reader, and a counterfeiter-translator, and an old writer who keeps a diary like this diary....

But I wouldn't want the young lady Reader, in escaping the Counterfeiter, to end up in the arms of the Reader. I will see to it that the Reader sets out on the trail of the Counterfeiter, hiding in some very distant country, so the Writer can remain alone with the young lady, the Other Reader.

To be sure, without a female character, the Reader's journey would lose liveliness: he must encounter some other woman on his way. Perhaps the Other Reader could have a sister ... (156)

Outlining his possible novel as one that is "composed out of only beginnings of novels," of a Reader who encounters the Other Reader, and of the "diary like this diary" in his novel, Flannery seems to be the alter-ego of Calvino, the lived author whose novel we ourselves are reading. Presumably, this apparent relationship between Calvino and Flannery suggests the inevitable conflation of reality and fiction, self and other, author and author-as-character.

This quotation, however, provides more than just an insight into the self-reflexivity Calvino's novel poses for the reader. It signals the possible articulation of gender—to be exact, the supposedly masculine identity of authorship—in terms of performative surfaces. In what follows, I want to examine this with specific reference to this Calvino-Flannery alignment as a means of rethinking the conflated identity of individual and generic male

subjects.

We return once again to the scene of the Reader reading. In reading Flannery's diary, the Reader identifies what masculinity is because he reads Flannery and Calvino to be one and the same male author; in other words, the Reader aligns them in a homogenized gendered identification that grounds itself in the corporeality they share, the male body. In turn, this situation is exactly de Lauretis' claim: represented and lived masculinities that read *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, both within and without the novel, are emblematically played out in the Reader's identification of Calvino and Flannery. What each of these seemingly natural correlations between opposing masculinities point to is the discoherent reading practice a reader—in particular, the heterosexual male reader—(dis)simulates when reading, or “writing,” in the Barthesian sense, a paradoxical representation of corporeality. The reader might read *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* as a man yet, as this text is self-reflexive because of the chiasmatic tension it places the reader in, what he/she actually does is to rewrite masculine identity in terms of its effected otherness. In this instance, it is the difference of a performative, rather than an expressive, masculine identity.

In a postmodern sense, the above reading of a performative difference tacitly reclaims the interface between Reader and Flannery, between individual reader and the Reader as equally that very site of a dis coherence resulting in, and a homoerotic space animating what, a “queer” revision of masculinity can most probably mean—the cross-(ad)dressed identity of a reading subject. In other words, reading the Reader read Flannery's diary postulates how writing, and its supposedly masculine identification, is itself performative. As such, and because the essentializing discourses of essentialist and anti-pornography feminisms pronounce an association between represented and lived masculinities, can Flannery really be for a reader Calvino? Or is he the Nameless Author addressing the Reader at the beginning and the end of the text he writes into existence? What then are we to make of “Italo Calvino,” a name guaranteeing the status of the author

of the novel we read as it is also the Author read by the Reader? Can it be that what is before us, even as we write about it, are simply enacted surfaces of a postmodern masculine subject?

“Who or what is the Author?” is a question which sums up, to a significant extent, what this chapter has attempted to examine. Conversely, I have attempted both here and in the previous chapters to delineate how the gendered identity of a postmodern masculine subject might be—in the act of representing gender, and/or gender relations—best described in that “queer” sense of cross-(ad)ressing that a reading in dis coherence aims at.

In *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, the Author, writes de Lauretis, “is only and always male” (1989: 74). For her, writing is an act of desire, one of penetrating and incising a feminine surface in order to ground a hom(m)o-sexually defined masculine creativity and, in turn, its self-representation. According to de Lauretis, writing is, therefore, identifiably masculine in its practice. But when it is seen through a “queerly” defined politics of dis coherence, writing is equally an act of posturing. Writing can be seen to be, keeping in mind what I have previously suggested, a matter of drag. Like reading, writing is the act of effecting a preconceived identity because authorship is already engendered in terms of the dominant practice of masculine representation. Flannery’s, and, by extension, “Italo Calvino’s,” masculine identities, as represented in the text we read, could well be performatively engendered. This recognition of gender performativity severs the claim of an essentialized masculinity that de Lauretis makes in her article.

In other words, the notion of writing, for a reader of Calvino’s novel, need not be a writing into existence of masculine identity; quite possibly, and significantly, it comes to be the writing of a dis coherent reading the subject can effect. As an example of gender performativity, this writing, like drag, is dependent upon binarism where it is, spatially, and in a particularly “queer” respect, a homoerotic spectacle where difference is in a

performative interplay with similarity; so much so that this identity of authorship is best considered in terms of cross-(ad)dressing.

If Calvino writes femininity back into those spatial confines—be it body or text, it is always spectacle—he also writes, I contend, masculinity as an inherently traced contradiction, one that is increasingly evident when the representation of the male body takes place within a homoerotic space. Because there exists not one generic Author but a multitude of masculine authors in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*; because the Author Flannery posits the Reader's desire for "the young lady," the Other Reader as equally germane to his diary entry and hence, establishes a parallel, if not similar plot, to the story of the Reader we read; and because in the copyist, the fake Author, Ernes Marana, we encounter "a trickster figure, the devious-devising mouthpiece of stories translated, stolen, or otherwise plagiarized" (Carter 1987: 131), what is problematically represented before us is the Author who can no longer be a fixed and homogenized representation of masculinity.

Once again, we return to the differences between an expression and a performance of identity, and to the deconstructive results the latter holds for the masculine subject position of reading. The quotation below, from Butler, validates the point I am making about a performativity of masculinity:

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (1990a: 141)

What stands before us in Calvino's novel is not the Author as the generic masculine representation, Man, nor even writing as a distinctly masculine act. Rather, this identity, and this act, should be appreciated according to the face it performatively effects. If we come to understand reading as a man for the pose it merely is, reading like a man, in other words, exposes the masculinist constructions of gender. In its place, there is a possible

displacement of masculinity beyond its hierarchical, hegemonic, and heterosexual identity, and the reconfiguration of masculine identity in terms of the cross-(ad)dressed subject.

By reconfiguring binarism into an interface of Self and Proximate Other, in the Derridean sense of the chiasmatic, what I introduce into and enrich Butler's work on performativity with, and which de Lauretis's work sorely lacks, is this "queer" notion of homoerotic space, and the discoherent reading it animates. Within this specific space, the performativity of gender comes to be not so much the conscious act of performance as it is the always already effect of being like an-other when the reader deploys the male gaze.

By re-turning this act of masculinity into the posture that it is—seeing and reading through a discoherent, rather than that acculturated, male gaze—we come to see heterosexuality as more than just its regulatory repetition of engendered acts. We can begin to delineate, and describe, its inevitable articulation within homosexuality: for, in the act of being queer, "masculinity" is but a cross-(ad)dressed identity that is engendered within, but, more specifically, towards, a postmodern understanding of masculinity for the reading subject.

In the end, this novel is truly an apocryphal text. If Flannery describes apocrypha in his diary as a form of "writing always ... hiding something in such a way that it then is discovered" (152), the very surface of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* is itself illustrative of Flannery's observation: it is a surface of masculine inscription hidden behind Woman who continues to serve as the ground for hom(m)o-sexual representation in this postmodern text. But hidden behind this Woman too, and especially as it relates to revision of reading masculinity, is a textual surface where the masculine subject is seen to exercise the act of reading as hardly the natural and unproblematic practice it is made out to be.

There is no doubt that, on one level, the Reader is representative of what dominant masculinity is. Yet in this particular representation of masculine identity lies its undeniable paradox: what is also illuminated is the spectacularization of the Reader whose identity is

nothing less than the (sur)face of masculinity he effects when reading text and body with the male gaze. The surface of the represented male body in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* must now exist, for postmodern readers, as a site that is potentially, or, more accurately, recognizably, homoerotic. Here, such readers are always in chiasmatic tension with difference: where we expect to find heterosexual masculinity as fixating and powerful, hegemonic and hierarchical, monolithic and monologic, we have to instead re-read this male body as a contra-diction of masculinity. Caught between reading this corporeality along lines of similarity to the dominant categorizations of gender and along lines which deliberately dissimulate such categorizations, the individual reader's own identity relocates him/herself within a postmodern, and specifically "queer," (sur)face of masculinity. This reader's identity is, in short, what masculinity can alternatively mean today—its dis-coherent re-presentation, and its cross-(ad)dressed possibility.

CONCLUSION

Once sexuality may be read and interpreted in the light of homosexuality, all sexuality is subject to a hermeneutics of suspicion.

Lee Edelman¹⁰⁴

My purpose in writing this study, *Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity* is to demonstrate how our present acculturated practice of reading the male body, and its supposed masculinity, is itself symptomatic of that postmodern dilemma, the crisis of representation. Such a crisis is paradigmatically realized, I believe, when a reader is forced to negotiate the contra-diction of sameness and difference within a representation of corporeality, and to represent the gender identity of this body within a discourse no longer able to sustain its articulation in terms of the dominant “either/or” binarism.

This crisis of representing masculinity can be traced, I contend, to an inability of the dominant male gaze to always conceive of—and, more importantly, to alternatively read—masculine identity in any other representation apart from its generic and homogenized identification as hierarchical, hegemonic, and heterosexual. This problematic condition is all the more significant when masculinity continues to be categorically described in these essentialist terms despite the destabilizing representations of gender and sexuality that popular culture produces, circulates, and challenges its readers with. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the continuing adherence to such a dominant representation of masculinity is, to a significant extent, the prevailing reaction of most readers to the

¹⁰⁴Edelman, *Homographesis* 7.

postmodern effect of alterity and difference that some texts in popular culture can stimulate.

One instance where such a problem of representing masculinity becomes visible is within the discourses of some essentialist and anti-pornography feminisms. In examining each of these discourses in the preceding chapters, I identified a predominant tendency—which is, I am convinced, a result of the need to rewrite femininity—that describes and defines the category “masculine” in generic and homogenized terms. These terms take the form of an alignment between corporeality and gender as well as a synonymous identification between represented and lived masculinities. Both these manifestations engender an essentialized definition of what masculine identity is. Significantly, such an identity is realized when the reader deploys the dominant male gaze to represent the male body in terms that repeat its cultural stereotype—the male body as masculine identity. I chose to examine these varied but essentializing feminist discourses because, in making visible how masculinity oppresses the representation of both the female body and its feminine identification, these discourses exhibit that symptomatic crisis of reading masculinity within a postmodern condition in spite of the need each predicates itself upon to rewrite gender.

In other words, I am worried about how masculinity, especially when it is argued to be synonymous with the male body, will be denied any alternative readings when these discourses inevitably subscribe to, and replicate—in those similarly essentialist terms they themselves condemn—the prevailing binarisms that dominate cultural representations of femininity and masculinity. Within the discourses of anti-pornography and essentialist feminisms, masculine identity is identifiably aligned with the male body: it is categorically active and oppressive, and it is undeniably realized in those sexual/textual acts that reiterate the dominant heterosexual contract of gender relations.

If masculinity is identifiable because it is the privileged term within the prevailing binarisms that enable a hom(m)o-sexual representation of gender, a representation of the

male body as a site of contra-diction severs that “natural” alignment between corporeality and gender. I am thinking, therefore, of this body’s paradigmatic representation in the form of the gay male body that is simultaneously similar to yet apart from the heterosexual male body. Here, the hetero/homosexual difference plays out its problematic inter(dis)course of gender fuck upon the same corporeal surface, the male body, that, on the one hand, simulates a masculine identity, and, on the other, seems to repudiate this gendered identification all together. Yet, it is this seemingly paradoxical, and irresolvable, opposition we call the hetero/homosexual binarism that offers us, I believe, one possible strategy to revise how we can read masculinity within our postmodern condition of competing differences. Throughout this study, I have sought to outline one such difference that begins within this particular binarism and which realizes itself in an alternative practice of how we can re-read masculinity.

My purpose in writing this study is, therefore, also to delineate, describe, and define a new politics of reading masculinity. I turn to a postmodern understanding of—and, far more significantly, to the potentially deconstructive consequences a “queer” politics can offer readers in rethinking—how the male gaze might not always read the male body according to the dominant representation of masculinity. Instead, this particular reading will come to recognize masculinity in those alternative, and competing, terms of gender performativity and cross-(ad)dressed identities. I call this politics of reading the politics of dis coherence.

Reading within this politics of dis coherence enables an individual reader to animate a distinctively deconstructionist method of reading gender in general, and masculinity in part. It is a reading practice that begins with reading the contradictory representation of corporeality within dominant culture. Such a reading demands that this reader engages, and interacts, with this simultaneous representation of similarity and dissimilarity within a shared corporeal space only to effect a re-reading of the dominant identification of gender such a body is supposed to effect. And it is in the very possibility that such a gendered

identity is merely an effect, a pose, even an instance of being (a)like an-other, that masculinity can be reconsidered in terms of gender performativity. In turn, the engendered identity of the reader must be reconsidered, especially when one prevailing assertion made by the individual discourses of anti-pornography and essentialist feminisms is that represented and lived masculinities are one and the same.

The more serious argument these discourses make—that the subject position of reading is always identifiably masculine, and hence, synonymous with the generic reading subject, the male reader—must therefore be re-examined. The homoerotic space of differences a reader finds him/herself in when reading such a representation of contradictions fixates his/her reading, and the attendant reading identity it engenders, within that chiasmatic tension where the iterability of sameness and difference, of repetition and alteration, reorientates masculine identity. Instead of an essentialized alignment between body and gender, and between individual and generic readers, there is masculinity's alternative re-presentation in terms of cross-(ad)ressing gender. This sense of cross-(ad)ressing, or of reading like, rather than reading as, a man, recalls the distinguishing difference between the heterosexual and gay male bodies: the latter is always accounted for in terms of its transvestism, in its apparent transformation into, if not in its presupposed tendency to become like, the Other who must be demonized, contained, and finally elided.

But when that generically masculine subject position of reading is traced with, and exposed to be another instance of, being (a)like the male reader, is it itself not adopting a pose? In a manner of speaking, is such a reader not cross-(ad)ressing his/herself to become like an-other masculine reader who deploys the male gaze to represent gender? I suspect this is exactly the case arising out of a reading of texts in which there is firstly, a re-presentation of corporeality as an embodied contra-diction of gender identity and secondly, a revision of what masculinity can alternatively be for a reader who can no longer read the male body's supposedly masculine identity. As a result, the essentialized identification of masculinity undergoes a revision: the practice of reading with the male

gaze might be, after all, merely an effect of performing, or, more exactly, cross-(ad)dressing, one's identity as a reading subject within postmodernity.

Masculinity cannot be solely, and definitively, I conclude, an "either/or" address repeating those essentializing binarisms of gender representation within dominant culture. We can no longer, as this study repeatedly delineates through the now dis-eased but dis-coherent male gaze, describe, categorize, or, even define masculinity, in the singular, as if it is a generic essentiality let alone a homogeneously natural interiority located in either corporeality or heterosexuality. Rather we must begin to appreciate and revise masculinity, and, by extension, the very discourse those of us working within the academy choose to debate masculinity in, as both a convergence between, and as it has always been, an aggregation of differences at the site of the male body. What we have to concern ourselves with in postmodernism is masculinities.

As and when we are able to step beyond—and indeed rewrite—the boundaries within which the male gaze operates, we can begin to see and read the present configuration of the masculine reading subject as itself paradoxically illuminating and blinding. In so far as men are seen to oppress and elide women when they deploy the male gaze, this argument is also an overgeneralization which groups all men into a homogeneity where the possibility of masculinities is erased.

In coming to the end of this study, nothing can be more encouraging than to see a similar attitude towards masculinity discussed in recent writing on critical theory and identity. A summary case in point is Edelman's article, "The Part for the (W)hole: Baldwin, Homophobia, and the Fantasmatics of 'Race.'" In it, he considers the very enactment of the gaze as an exhibition, or, more correctly, a performance, of masculine power:

If the fantasy of masculinity (and I would want that genitive to be read with the full force of its double meaning) is the fantasy of a non-self-conscious selfhood endowed with absolute control of a gaze whose directionality is irreversible, the enacted—or "self-conscious"—"manhood," ... is itself a

performance *for the gaze of the Other* [and] it is destined therefore to be always the paradoxical *display* of a masculinity that defines itself through its capacity to put *others* on display while resisting the bodily captation involved in being put on display itself. (1994: 50-51)

Although I agree with Edelman in general, and concur with his insistence upon a performativity of masculinity when envisioned as the male gaze, I remain circumspect, if not cautious in fully embracing his thesis. I do so because I suspect his theorizations fall short of envisioning—perhaps, embodying—the chiasmatic gesture of the male gaze when practiced by the individual male to effect his own performativeness, his own spectacularization, and more urgently, his own recognition of the masculine subject position of reading that is, quite probably, in a moment of dis coherence within the postmodern condition. What is the relevance of this politics of dis coherence when we seek to both ask, and answer, the question, “what does it mean to be a masculine and postmodern subject?”

Postmodern masculinity, as a performative (sur)face, is not an essence or a depth. Neither, is it that hom(m)o-sexual basis Irigaray ascribes to the masculine identity. Further, we cannot locate masculinity within heterosexual spatiality which sees space as a site of the feminine, and effeminized, Other. Where masculinity can find itself today is, I emphasize, on the surface, and perhaps, especially when it comes to manifest itself as that identity found in a self-representation of cross-(ad)ressing. In other words, the engendering of masculinity, within the male gaze, can now possibly, and alternatively, mean its proximity *within* the Other that is *like* itself.

What I have come to re-present, then, in this study, as a postmodern masculinity, or, more correctly, a cross-(ad)dressed masculinity, is an urgent rewriting of a gender whose (hetero)sexuality, if not its sex, predetermines how we come to identify, continually and narrowly, the expression of masculinity in terms of that essentializing alignment between corporeality and gender. In her introduction to *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices*, E. Ann Kaplan suggests that “The results” of the on-going and myriad

work(s) currently produced within gender debates “are complex and contradictory”; they are always “posing further questions, rather than presenting determinate solutions” (1988: 7). Similarly, this has been both the objective and the underlying premise of *Turn of the Gaze: Towards a (Re)vision of Reading Masculinity*: I seek to ask those questions about, pose possible, if not alternative, trajectories for—and finally postulate, as one plausible theorization, and hopefully, a politics—a revision of masculinity within dis coherence.

Here, then, I conclude that our practice of reading with the male gaze, that practice of reading as a man, is pointedly significant for it must now be seen to be always, and transgressively so, an enactment of reading like a man. In other words, the engendered identification of masculinity is, in this postmodern turn of the gaze, made perfectly “queer.”

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156	22	destablizing	destabilizing
168	26	they take	it takes
167	10	<i>petite-recits</i>	<i>petits-recits</i>
183	27	Wüitig	Wittig
190	11	spectatorhip	spectatorship
191	14	concensus	consensus
193	20	<i>Pyscho</i>	<i>Psycho</i>
204	15	is inflicted	inflicted
205	26	envelopes	envelops
206	9	exploitative	exploited
209	10	Aurelis	Aurelius
211	21	skinning	skinning
222	13	installment	instalment
223	9	fulfill	fulfil
225	6 9	is animating dislocates	are animating dislocate
230	2	Batemen	Bateman
262	5	sits	sit
277	1	fulfills	fulfils
285	3	Corinna'a	Corinna's
290	5	rewrite.	rewrite ?
295	20	animating what,	anmating, what
296	2	are	is
304	7	is	were
308	12	Noel	Neil
312	17	St Leonards	Sydney
316	8	Mephem	Mepham

317	1	Commet	Comet
318	19	<i>Oppresion</i>	<i>Oppression</i>
321	7	Krammer	Kramer
332	1	Weinfeld	Weidenfeld
	22	Mackinnon	MacKinnon
325	11	Complusory	Compulsory

INSERT:

325 Ross, Andrew. 1993. "The Popularity of Pornography" During 221-242.

ERRATA SHEET



<u>PAGE NO.</u>	<u>LINE</u>	<u>ORIGINAL FORM</u>	<u>AMENDED FORM</u>
ii	12	cross-(ad)ressed	cross- (ad)dressed
iv	22	collegue	colleague
	30	acknowldge	acknowledge
	40	confirm	confirmed
v	5	the Chris	Chris
	20	priviledged	privileged
5	3	persona	personae
6	9	historian,	historian
12	17	historian,	historian
15	1	is a also	is also
	7	practiced	practised
	27	are	is
19	2	their own	their own
27	19	a performing	performing
	21	to read	on reading
29	15	challenge	challenges
	19	Noel	Neil
30	8	ascribes	ascribes to
33	14	frames	frame
	15	frames	frame
36	11	is always an act	are always acts
	12	that is rooted to	rooted in
37	8	to	with
38	2	panopticon	panoptic
	10	genderd	gendered
50	1	of	with
54	24	DISCHOHERENCE	DISCOHERENCE
57	25	and even eliding	nor even of eliding

6	9	historian,	historian
12	17	historian,	historian
15	1 7 27	is a also practiced are	is also practised is
19	2	their own	their own
27	19 21	a performing to read	performing on reading
29	15 19	challenge Noel	challenges Neil
30	8	ascribes	ascribes to
33	14 15	frames frames	frame frame
36	11 12	is always an act that is rooted to	are always acts rooted in
37	8	to	with
38	2 10	panopticon gendered	panoptic gendered
50	1	of	with
54	24	DISCOHERENCE	DISCOHERENCE
57	25	and even eliding	nor even of eliding
96	6 13	fulfill successful	fulfil successful
100	11	male	male's
101	10	reveled	revelled
102	17	or	or are
104	16	Noel	Neil
105	16	effeminancy	effeminacy
108	18 24	practiced Margaret	practised Marjorie
109	8	Noel	Neil
113	11 23	readdressing nor	readdressing or
118	21	Cooper's	Coopers'
121	15	Walter	Walter's
124	22	a dead Louise	Louise is dead
126	26	to	of
147		conform	conform to
150	7	Denis	Dennis

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