SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:

GAY SUBCULTURAL HISTORIES AND PRACTICES

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B. Fergus Foley
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NAME: B. Fergus Foley

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

CHAIR: Dr. Pat Howard, Assistant Professor

Dr. Martin Laba
Associate Professor
Senior Supervisor

Dr. Alison Beale
Assistant Professor

Dr. Suzanne de Castell
Professor
Faculty of Education

DATE APPROVED: DECEMBER 3, 1992

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SIGNIFICANT OTHERS: GAY SUBCULTURAL HISTORIES AND PRACTICES

Author:

(signature)

B. FERGUS FOLEY

(name)

DECEMBER 15, 1992

(date)

ABSTRACT

Contemporary gay cultural practices affirm the identities of individual men and their communities which have evolved over the past twenty-five years in various metropolitan centres. Cultural critics and theorists, however, have not acknowledged, addressed or perhaps even recognized gay cultural activities of resistance and opposition. The failure to perceive this subculture limits contemporary criticism of film and music, for example, and perpetuates hegemonic oppression of gay men.

This thesis attempts to explain what is missing from the work of cultural studies and theory. The absence of analyses of gay cultural productions in cultural theory is first identified, the consequences of which are then suggested, and a framework for introducing discussion and analyses of gay cultural productions is drafted. This framework, of necessity, demands an historical overview of Western religious, medical and legal systems because, unlike other youth and subcultural groupings which are discussed in contemporary cultural studies, homosexual oppression and resistance is perhaps systemic.

After this theoretical analysis, the thesis then examines cultural productions in film and popular music, suggesting ways in which an understanding of gay subcultural practices enhances cultural theory in general and textual analysis of both film and music in particular.

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Chapter One

An Other History: Hegemonic Constructions and Gay Resistance

Introduction

References to homosexuality, the emergence and construction of a gay identity, and to gay cultural practices appear with irregular frequency in academic texts on postmodernism and sub/cultural theory, but there are few if any clarifications of just what it is that gay cultural practice does in and to contemporary cultural theory. It is assumed in all such citations that, like other subaltern groups, gay artists resist, critique, and subvert dominant culture. Despite this assumption, however, no theorist has adequately explained just which activities operate as this counter-cultural production, or oppose the hegemony of mainstream, non-gay culture.

Linda Hutcheon, for example, cites "women, ethnics, gays, blacks, postcolonials"--and even "the working class" as instances of "ex-centric" cultural production--at least nine times throughout A Poetics of Postmodernism, without ever examining any one specifically gay artist or artifact in her analysis of late twentieth century culture.[1] We read that these heterogeneous and peripheral cultures "constitute a multiplicity of responses to a commonly-perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity"[2] and that cultural productions by these groups "respond, critically and creatively, to the still predominantly white, heterosexual, male culture in which they find themselves."[3] Hutcheon is able to inscribe and illuminate much that

is done by her large group of subversives: feminism, African-American studies, and postcolonial discourse have opened mainstream cultural theory to many formerly ignored or excluded cultural practices and productions. But we never read what it is that gays do that is subversive or "ex-centric". This, however, is not to fault Hutcheon or her work: she is one of the few cultural theorists who actually mentions gays in her work.

This thesis attempts to explain what is missing from Hutcheon's work and that of other theorists, whose work will be reviewed immediately below. In this chapter, the absence of analyses of gay cultural productions in cultural theory is first identified, the consequences of which are then suggested, and a framework for introducing discussion and analyses of gay cultural productions is drafted. This framework, of necessity, demands an historic overview of Western religious, medical and legal systems because, unlike other youth and subcultural groupings which are discussed in contemporary cultural studies, homosexual oppression and resistance is perhaps systemic (homosexual oppression and resistance cannot be as accurately historicised as can, for example, the rise of the Mods or Rockers). After charting an historical overview, this chapter then explains the above-ground emergence of an identifiable gay subculture in the late twentieth century. There follows a brief summary of how that subculture has articulated its difference from the mainstream and affirmed its cultural identity.

Subcultural Theory

Dick Hebdige, one of the most notable analysts of subculture, and its main theoretician, states in his Subculture: The Meaning of Style that "a vast literature has grown up around subculture."[4] None of that literature in the mainstream of cultural studies deals with gays, however. Hebdige allows, in a chapter on rock music, that "at the more sophisticated end of the glitter spectrum, the subversive emphasis was shifted away from class and youth onto sexuality and gender typing."[5] But there is no exploration of what exactly the emphasis on subversive sexuality or gender typing means in terms of resistance or opposition, symbolic or otherwise, to the dominant order. And again there is no mention of where gays or the influence of gay subculture fit into this scenario. This seems particularly strange since Hebdige opens his book on style as subcultural resistance with an excerpt from The Thief's Journal, by Jean Genet--one of literature's most outspoken and radical homosexuals and one of the gay subculture's most celebrated filmmakers (whose works are discussed in Chapter Three)--of whom Hebdige writes..."he more than most has explored in both his life and his art the subversive implications of style."[6] Later, Hebdige writes that "Genet systematically contravenes civic, sexual and moral law..."[7] But again, there is no discussion of the place of homosexuality in contemporary subcultural theory in this book which leans so heavily on the inspiration of Genet, a fact that needs to be addressed in the mainstream of cultural studies.

Angela McRobbie has noted too, under a subheading *Homages to Masculinity*, that although Hebdige "does fleetingly mention sexual ambiguity in relation to style"[8], his emphasis is on the plundering of traditional male styles only. And considering the machismo of the various male subcultures, McRobbie claims that "...subcultural formations and the influence of their various 'movements' raise questions about sexual identity which Hebdige continuously avoids."[9] The Hebdige book has been singled out for mention here for the same reasons that McRobbie has chosen to discuss it:

> So there's no doubt that, apart from being one of the most important books to date on the question of youth culture, it is also likely to reach, if often indirectly, an unprecedentedly wide audience. That's why its lack of attention to gender politics matters: it could have opened up questions of style *and* sexual politics.[10]

Hebdige's theories on subcultural style, McRobbie explains, have had enormous influence in Britain, particularly on the writers and journalists in the rock music press, and consequently on its readership. And just as McRobbie argues for the inclusion of feminist readings in analyses of subcultures, this thesis argues for the inclusion of gay subcultural readings in cultural studies.

In the 1987 revision of Folk Devils and Moral Panics--another influential and much-quoted work on youth cultures--Stanley Cohen notes in his introduction that there are "...two sets of lives that have been hidden from cultural studies and delinquency theory, old and new, over these twenty-five years: girls and blacks."[11] Here also there is no mention of gays, or gay subculture, except to point out that in contemporary theory when we see "...Skinheads beating up

Pakistanis and gays, or football hooligans smashing up trains, [they] are all really (though they might not know it) reacting to other things, for example, threats to community homogeneity or traditional stereotypes of masculinity."[12] This is the one and only mention the word "gay" gets in the entire book, and it is only incidental, not central or important in any way other than being employed to explain and excuse aggressive masculinity. In other words, Cohen suggests that young white British males (Skins, in this instance) perform radical acts when they physically attack those placed beneath them in the patriarchal hierarchy. This begs the question of just what Cohen defines as "radical", and points to the failure of a cultural analysis which omits issues of sexual identity and politics.

In a co-authored essay, "Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration", Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber take contemporary subcultural theorists to task for their concentration on masculinity, and for writing girls out of their studies.[13] This extends the critique by McRobbie of Hebdige discussed above, and marks the beginning of the inclusion in subcultural theory of feminist rewritings and reclamations of the post-war past for young British women.

But so far, there has been no evidence of any recognition among mainstream subcultural theorists of the on-going subcultural struggles of gays against an ever-present and all-oppressive hegemony. There is, however, at least one acknowledgement of this fact in British Cultural Studies. Mike Brake writes that

> One effect of heterosexual male culture and the response by the feminists has been on the lives of gay people. Subcultural studies on youth never mention homosexuals, and this is hardly surprising given the masculist emphasis

> of practically all youthful subcultures. Young gay people are swamped by the heterosexist emphasis they find in peer groups and subcultures. As far as popular culture is concerned they are invisible.[14]

This thesis, then, attempts to open cultural theory further to include gays, by examining the historical processes of marginalization imposed upon homosexuals, and by analyzing contemporary gay texts for traces of this history and for strategies of resistance and opposition.

Gay work has not always been archivalized, being most often individual, unpublished and unpublicized. For that reason it is difficult to locate much cultural analysis by gays in our libraries. At other times, gay people have been denied access to the archives relating to their own culture for various reasons such as those explained by Judy Grahn in her landmark study, Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds.[15] "In 1961," she writes

> when I was twenty-one, I went to a library in Washington, D.C., to read about homosexuals and Lesbians, to investigate, explore, compare opinions, learn who I might be, what others thought of me, who my peers were and had been. The books on such a subject, I was told by indignant, terrified librarians unable to say aloud the word *homosexual*, were locked away. They showed me a wire cage where the "special" books were kept in a jail for books. Only professors, doctors, psychiatrists, and lawyers for the criminally insane could see them, check them out, hold them in their hands. The books I wanted to check out were by "experts" on the subject of homosexuality as it was understood at the time.[16]

Here, in anecdotal form, is a summary of much that follows in this chapter. Learned men, medical doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists and theologians have generated and controlled the discourses that have attempted to define homosexuals and homosexuality. As Grahn's list shows, it is these people who control knowledge, hence power, within

our society. And it is these controllers to whom homosexual peoples have had to prove themselves in order to gain some access to culture and society. The alternative has been to hide, or to deny the "stigma" of homosexuality.

Resistance Theory and Gays

This thesis does not claim special status for gay culture, but rather sees it as one of many subaltern or marginalized subcultures in contemporary society. Resistance theory explains that, for the marginalized, making sense out of one's oppression necessitates the constant and consistent disruption of dominant meaning. Since that meaning has been experienced by gays as an ideology of repression, whatever codings and decodings gay cultural practices have pursued should reveal a full application of resistance theory. Understanding how these codes operate for gay subcultures will also reveal how hegemonic containment and control are diffused across a spectrum of cultural practices. As James Baldwin explained in an interview about his fictions of African-American life and the repressions of gay men within that community:

> The form and content of repression are reflections of the fears and needs of the oppressor. In order to survive the oppressed must understand and use these.[17]

Contemporary theories of resistance in popular culture, however, are based on sociological studies both of delinquency and male gangs in America in the 1950's[18] and of post-war working-class youth subcultures in Britain. For instance, Resistance Through Rituals from

Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Studies is a seminal text in that it defines the criteria for the constitution of subcultures, and the parameters they inhabit:

> Subcultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focussed around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artifacts, territorial spaces, etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture.[19]

Gay subcultural activity fits into this description: since much of subcultural theory is built upon the notion of resistance to the dominant social order through some sort of deviant behaviour, it is very strange that gay men, who actually *live* deviantly, according to the state and social institutions, have been ignored by mainstream theorists. This thesis therefore takes those theorists to task for excluding gay men from their studies, thereby furthering the marginalization process of the hegemony.

Contemporary subcultural theory imbues the concept of resistance with a sense of the active, the political, and the radical. This activity can range from an "oppositional" reading or "decoding" (see Stuart Hall, below) of any form of cultural production or text to the highly visible public flaunting of--and thereby symbolic rejection of--bourgeois values. An example of the highly visible symbolic resistance would be young women who reject "proper" socialization by wearing chains, painted faces, startling hair-do's, and so on. David Morley explains the politics of resistance in terms of audience reading or decoding activity:

> The meaning of the text will be constructed differently according to the discourses (knowledges, prejudices, resistances etc.) brought to bear by the reader, and the

> crucial factor in the encounter of audience/subject and text will be the range of discourses at the disposal of the audience. The crucial point here is that individuals in different positions in the social formation defined according to structures of class, race or sex, for example, will tend to inhabit or have at their disposal different codes and subcultures. Thus social position sets parameters to the range of potential readings by structuring access to different codes.[20]

Sexual orientation can be added to the above "social formation" list, since these qualities of resistance are inherent to gay subculture, in its constant construction and reinvention of the persona. And, since all dominant cultural texts are heterosexual, gays can only make sense of them by reading them according to an "oppositional decoding".[21]

The subcultural activities of camp and drag, for instance, are parodies of heterosexual social conditioning, seen from the vantage point of the margin. This reading of drag is particularly evident in the 1991 documentary film, *Is Paris Burning?*, in which dispossessed black gay youth in Harlem, New York, imitate the poses and lifestyles of haute couture, glossy fashion magazine models, and give rise in turn to a disco-dancing fashion called "Vogueing", after the magazine. An industry defined by its idolatry of gender-exclusive social ideals and economic privilege is thus travestied. The dominant order is resisted through mockery, as suggested by Susan Sontag's essay, "Notes on 'Camp'".[22] One of her fifty-eight "notes" argues that mockery or "Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness."[23]

Camp activity is a subcultural decoding practice in which dominant cultural texts are read in an oppositional mode. This mode

of audience activity, as defined by Stuart Hall, makes it

> ...possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference."[24]

In the gay subculture, the resistance to dominant order ranges from this constant (necessary?) oppositional reading of its texts through to the more visible political lobbying and demonstrations of groups like the Mattachine Society, which founded the first gay and lesbian political organization in America in the late 1940's; the Daughters of Bilitis, formed by lesbians in 1955; CHE (the Campaign for Homosexual Equality) and the Gay Liberation Front in Britain during the early 1970's; and contemporary groups such as ACT UP, and Queer Nation.[25] Both oppositional critiques--oppositional readings and political activity--are present in the cultural productions analyzed in Chapters Two to Five below.

Gay cultural texts reveal a spectrum of responses to oppression and a variety of strategies for negotiating space within hegemonic discourses. To consent to the dominant rules, ideas and mores of a state or a nation is to share in the rewards, and to dissent is to pay a price. And for gays, throughout their history of oppression (legal, religious, medical, psychological)--until very recently--there has never been a forum, an arena, or an avenue for visible political dissent. There were no gay organizations of any kind until the early twentieth century, and few mainstream political organizations and manifestos have ever, until the impact of feminism (since the late

1960's), had a place for sexual politics. But the gradual liberalization of state law, in Britain first and later in America and Canada, along with subsequent changes in public and professional attitudes, led to the creation of communities and suggested new possibilities for dissent.

Contemporary groups in North America, for example, such as ACT UP and Queer Nation protest against the specific oppressions of people with AIDS, and the more general, systemic oppression of gays, respectively. The need to oppose and resist constantly--the oppressive socializing forces of the family and the education system; the discriminating forces of the church, the medical and psychiatric professions, and the armed forces; the misrepresentation and homophobia of the mainstream media; and the repressive legislative forces of the law--requires both political acumen and radical action.

Both demand "global" oppositional resistance, theoretically and in practice. And this range of oppositional critique is also recognizably present in the cultural productions analyzed in Chapters Two to Five below. Each work will reflect an impetus either to integrate/pass within the dominant order or to reject this order for a consequently marginalized existence.

As a means of understanding the processes of coding and decoding, semiotics is an analytical technique that Roland Barthes popularized in the 1960's:

> ...images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of

> ritual, convention, or public entertainment: these constitute, if not *languages*, at least systems of signification.[26]

Semiotics was used extensively by Hebdige and other cultural analysts in their work on subcultural theory. Semiotic analysis applied to the gay subculture, for example, in a study of gay communities in New York or San Francisco, would reveal codes of sexual practices and availability, cultural predilections for either high art (opera; the salon) or street culture (pop music and disco; the bar and the club) and parodies of prevalent notions of gender and respectability. This applied semiotics informs the analysis of some gay cultural productions in following chapters, most notably Chapter Four's discussion of a politics of style. These gay activities qualify for inclusion in what Hebdige calls "spectacular" subcultures.[27] Among such groups he includes Teds, Mods, Rockers, Hippies, Rudies, Rastas, Skins, and Punks. Many of these groups have come and gone, but gay resistance has been constant, changing and diversifying to incorporate new generations and new ideas, and to monitor and combat the hegemony (explained in the section on History below). The fact that these other groups change with relative frequency does not diminish their resistances. It rather suggests the obvious: societal conditions are constantly changing. That gay resistance is constant reveals how, despite social changes, the hegemonic denial of homosexuality is systemic.

The constancy of gay resistance also suggests that homosexual communities' cultural practices reveal not an essential gayness but rather a politics of gay identities which are contextual and

determined by the varieties of resistances themselves. Gay cultural identity is informed by oppression and affirmed and articulated by various social practices which themselves are constantly changing. This change is a barometer of the varying degrees of severity of hegemonic oppression. Resistances to that dominant culture's denial of homosexuality illuminate popular culture's theories about other oppositional groupings and their subcultural productions' meaning and identity.

Spectacular gay resistances have been so long and so well ignored, however, that Freddie Mercury (of British rock group Queen) for example, was able to parade a plethora of parodic gay images across the video screens of Britain and North America, and have these images unrecognized by a large proportion of his non-gay audience, except as daringly heavy metal or glam-rock iconography (Chapters Four and Five).

A further distinguishing phenomenon within gay subculture is that, unlike the subcultures mentioned above that have been studied over the post-war years, gay subculture cannot so easily be defined according to class, as most other subcultures are. Membership in the gay subculture transcends not only class lines, but also lines of colour and age, two more informing or defining factors of the more carefully-studied subcultures. In such a study, gay subculture offers a rich variety of human material, as Herbert Blau points out:

> Within the homosexual subculture there is, moreover, a whole series of minority genres and crossovers with other subcultures: transvestites and sado-masochists, for instance, are not exclusively homosexual, and there are affinities in dispossession with other halfway beings, drug addicts, winos, prostitutes, convicts, punk rockers,

> rappers, children, and women who are coming out of the kitchen as the gays are coming out of the closet.[28]

Gay subculture, along with all of the other subcultures, is part of a mosaic of response to oppression, and to deny the connections is to misunderstand the oppression. As Linda Hutcheon reminds us, "Blacks and feminists, ethnics and gays, native and Third World cultures, do not form monolithic movements, but constitute a multiplicity of responses to a commonly perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity."[29]

In order to position gay responses to this perceived marginality, however, it is first necessary to analyze and explain how dominant culture has viewed and constructed the homosexual as a social category, as its Other.

Historical Construction of Gay as Other

Historical perceptions by dominant culture of homosexuals constructed a models of gayness as evil, and therefore dangerous; as illegal, and therefore criminal; as sick, and therefore contagious (and combatible). These models have altered over the years, growing more and less severe in different places, but all three models survive, essentially, wherever they have existed.

The process of naming the gay as Other--illegal, criminal, sick--has effectively allowed dominant social discourses and institutions to marginalize and ignore homosexuality and homosexual culture. The state apparatuses of family, church, school, and media are then

legitimated in their forced socialization and oppression of gay and lesbian people. In Britain, the "legal naming" process first occurred in an act of parliament: the Labouchère Amendment of 1885 changed what was previously a sin into a crime.[30] From 1583 up until this point, sodomy was a statute law, and, up to 1861, carried the penalty of death by hanging.[31] The connection between this law and Christianity is clear: "sodomy" comes from the Biblical story of the city of Sodom in old Palestine, the city which God condemned because of its supposed wickedness. Its vice and corruption are commonly identified as homosexuality. The 1885 law, in defining sodomy, however, did not discriminate or differentiate between sexual practices with man, woman, or beast, but rather encoded a "taboo on all non-procreative sex".[32]

The context for this law was a new concern for the state of the nation. In the popular imagination national decay was strongly linked to homosexuality. The British Empire and the United Kingdom were seen by some to be showing the first signs of breaking up (defeat in Khartoum, Home Rule for Ireland), and there was great turmoil. The "scandal" of the Oscar Wilde lawsuit against the Marquess of Queensberry, and the subsequent trial of Wilde for sodomy in 1895, focussed public opinion on what was seen as a moral decline. The "national efficiency" ideologies of Sidney and Beatrice Webb were particularly influential in this regard. Writing about China, for instance, and the numerous "boys' homes" for male prostitutes that Beatrice visited, they theorized that "It is the rottenness of physical and moral character that makes one despair of China--their constitution seems

devastated by drugs and abnormal sexual indulgence. They are essentially an unclean race."[33]

In Britain, the ruling class's response to new problems brought about by the spread of industrialization and urbanization, and the rapid growth of a mass working class, was to tighten the grip of the law. Heterosexuality as a normative standard, with the family as its centre, was written into law with the Labouchère Amendment. In the process, the homosexual was named as outside the law and all male homosexual acts were declared illegal.

Scandals involving homosexuality recur throughout British history, and are still a form of severe public disgrace. For example, the political career of Jeremy Thorpe, the leader of the Liberal Party, was ruined in the 1970's as the result of a blackmailing episode involving a young gay man. And Anthony Blunt, the Queen's art adviser for 20 years, was also disgraced by a gay blackmailing scandal. The 1885 Labouchère Amendment was colloquially called "Blackmailers' Charter", since it set the stage for the ostracizing of homosexuals from all quarters of society. By declaring homosexual activity illegal, the law drove gay men and subculture underground. This made them vulnerable to threats of public exposure: "The direct application of the law itself ground down countless lives in the decades that followed."[34]

Homosexuality has long been an illegal activity in many other (mostly industrialized) countries in the world. In America, sodomy is still a crime in twenty-four states, and in the District of Columbia.[35] While prosecution for the non-public violation of these sodomy

statutes is rare, the editors of the Harvard Law Review make the important point that "...these statutes are frequently invoked to justify other types of discrimination against lesbians and gay men on the ground that they are presumed to violate these statutes."[36]

In Canada, homosexuality was condemned in the Criminal Code until 1969, at which time it was amended to allow as not illegal certain sexual acts between two consenting adults, in private, only.[37] But homosexuals in Canada are still, in 1992, without protection of the Charter of Human Rights. The ruling federal Progressive Conservatives, a 1992 news report states, "...have defeated a proposal that would have prohibited discrimination against homosexuals in the public sector." Apparently a group of backbenchers known as the "family caucus" have resolved to block all homosexual reform laws.[38] In the meantime, gays and lesbians can therefore be legally discriminated against in applications for jobs, apartments, immigration, religious positions, positions with the psychoanalysis profession or the armed forces, relationship recognition, tax benefits, and so on.

In America

Religious teachings shaped the early colonial settlers' views of sexual behaviour, and biblical condemnations of homosexuality suffuse American culture from its beginnings.[39] John D'Emilio points out that as recently as 1948 the Alfred Kinsey Report, taken from 10,000 interviews, concludes that "...nothing in American society had 'more influence upon present-day patterns of sexual behavior than the reli-

gious backgrounds of that culture...Ancient religious codes are still the prime source of the attitudes, the ideals, and the rationalizations by which most individuals pattern the sexual lives.'"[40]

Condemnations of homosexuality are still an everyday occurrence in America, coming from evangelists, punitive state laws, and public moral crusades. During the late 1970's, for example, there was a resurgence of indignation against gays from the American Moral Majority and the New Right. These groups, the editors of the Harvard Law Review write, "...seek to restore the heterosexual, patriarchal family, and view homosexuality as a threat to their vision of an ideal society."[41] The popular campaigns were led principally by Jerry Falwell and Anita Bryant. These American Christian Right anti-gay campaigns incited a series of homophobic slogans, among the most famous being "Kill a Queer for Christ". This later became a graffiti slogan throughout North America, and later still a bumper sticker.

Indeed, even in contemporary popular culture a rock'n'roller like Axl Rose, who has the reputation of being a "radical", can proclaim his homophobia and racism--he rails against "faggots" and "Pakis" in his song "One in a Million"--to general applause (see Chapter Four). Similarly, basketball star Michael "Magic" Johnson lets it be widely and generally known that his AIDS is clearly not the gay variety, again to cheers from the (Arsenio Hall Show) television audience.

The disavowal of gayness, and the denial of a gay culture is endemic, even in the national media. For example, the Names Project, more commonly known by its massive work of folk-art "The Quilt",

represents the largest coming together of gays and lesbians ever recorded, in a work of cultural production and political solidarity. However, when The Quilt was put on display on the lawn in front of the White House in Washington on October 11, 1987, an estimated 750,000 people arrived from all over North America and beyond. The national television networks, however, chose not to show the event on the evening news. What is regarded as the single biggest demonstration ever staged in America--the highly visible existence of a gay culture, in this instance involved in a confrontational and radical event--was denied by the mainstream media.[42]

Folk Belief of the Homosexual as Evil

Although the development of contemporary concepts of evil and homosexuality can be traced from Biblical times, there were civil laws in Greece, and throughout the Roman Empire, that condemned what can be called homosexual activity.[43] Socrates was condemned to death in 399 B.C. for corrupting young men, and in 169 B.C. the Senate of Rome outlawed sex between men of Roman citizenship.[44] As well, the Romans carried out a series of attacks and conquests of various European cultures, such as the Celts, the Cathers (also known as Albigensians, after the city of Albi), and the Manicheans, between 122 and 55 B.C., all of which had various kinds of magic and sexual practices that are generally thought to be the earliest records of homosexuality.[45]

Many of these cultures had women as leaders, allowed and encouraged the mixing of Catholics, Jews and pagans, and celebrated a variety of sexual activities. These cultures were either severely disrupted or destroyed by the Romans, and those that remained were later completely destroyed by the Christian Inquisitions that came twelve and thirteen hundred years later. The Albigensians, for instance, fought back the forces of Pope Innocent for twenty years, until 1229, but upon surrender were publicly burned en masse, because the Crusade Abbot could not distinguish between the Catholics and the heretics, since he assumed that everybody, when asked, would claim to be a Catholic; such was the depth of the paranoia of the Catholic Church concerning Otherness.[46]

Before there was an Other who could be ostracized, persecuted or executed, however, there had to be the concept of evil. In his study

of homosexuality and the construction of contemporary gay identities, Jonathan Dollimore traces the concept of evil in pre-Christian religions through to the gradual separation of God and the devil in more contemporary Christianity.[47] These two were once thought to be in such close relationship that God was said to have begot the devil, or produced him from his own essence. One of most important developments in the Hebrew-Christian tradition, Dollimore claims, is "...the shift from monism, wherein good and evil are seen to coexist within one being, or in an inextricable relationship with each other, to dualism, the extreme separation of good and evil."[48] Consequently, evil was displaced from God and onto man, and the concepts of perversion and deviation were facilitated by that displacement. Perversion and sexual deviation were, from the earliest times, associated with acts of sodomy. Sodomy, Dollimore explains, was the great evil: the sodomite was a construction associated with evil, rebellion, and insurrection. It was believed that to tolerate his sin "...was to court the possibility of divine revenge (as with Sodom and Gomorrah)."[49] Socially, sodomy was "...repeatedly equated with heresy and political treason..." and was associated with witches, demons, werewolves, and the like. Metaphysically, it was conceived as "'sexual confusion in whatever form', a 'force of anarchic disorder set against Divine creation...'"[50] But for most of our recent history the concept of sodomy has been synonymous in the mind of church and state with homosexuality.

Another point on the fear of sodomy, and of particular interest to this thesis, is the assumed relationship in early modern England

between cross-dressing and the theatre. It was believed that men who dressed as women on stage threatened to break down gender difference. But more generally, Dollimore writes, people feared that "...under the costume there is really nothing there or, alternatively, that what is there is something foreign, something terrifying and essentially other."[51]

This corroborates Evans' argument about Joan of Arc, who was condemned as much for wearing traditionally male garb, and for acting in a bold, self-assertive manner as much as for anything else she did.[52] Marjorie Garber, in Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety, explains that

> It was in fact for transvestism...that Joan was put on trial by the Inquisition. Not less than five charges against her detailed her transvestism as emblematic of her presumption...a special and unmistakable visibility.[53]

This "special and unmistakable visibility", of course, marks the drag queen in gay subculture (Chapters Two, Four and Five).

The Bible and homosexuality

Early Christian councils (such as the Council of Toledo in 693 AD) repeatedly condemned male homosexuality, and Inquisitions routinely sought out and destroyed homosexuals, along with the witches and the heretics. The first records of specific Christian torture and public burnings of both male and female homosexuals date from 1260 AD.[54]

The Catholic Church still maintains that homosexuality is a sin

against God, and quotes Biblical references to God's revenge on Sodom and Gomorrah as its rationale. In Canada in 1992 the Anglican Church, noted for its relatively liberal attitude towards homosexuality, quoted Leviticus in its case against Rev. Ferry, the gay minister who was asked to choose between his lover or his job within the church.[55] As one observer of that inquiry pointed out, the Bible is not quoted against the adulterer, or the erring child, both of whom are condemned to death in similar passages.[56]

Biblical condemnations of homosexuality have survived through the ages, influencing church-goers and lawmakers alike. Eventually, in Western European and North American nations, sodomy became associated exclusively with homosexuality, or sexual intercourse between two men, after being first coded in legal terms in Britain in the period leading to its enshrinement in the Labouchère Amendment of 1885. Following subsequent discourses of medicine, psychiatry, and psychology the "homosexual" was treated as sick, deviant, and socially undesirable.

In mid-century Germany, under a Nazi regime that was tacitly condoned by the Vatican for its Christianity, homosexuals were rounded up along with the Jews, political dissidents, gypsies, and others, and were either murdered or used as guinea pigs for hideous medical experimentation.[57] In the camps, the pink triangle worn on the left shoulder identified the more than 200,000 gay men who were murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Dachau.[58]

The Nazi German attempts to "purify" an Aryan nation by "exterminating" the "foreign" elements--Jews, homosexuals, gypsies,

and so on--are not isolated incidents during this century, however. In both Canada and America--and within twenty years, similar attempts were made to classify homosexuality as a pernicious, outside influence and, therefore, to "normalize" the rest of society by finding and casting out foreign, corrupt homosexuals.

In Canada, in the 1960's, new technology was developed and employed specifically in the attempt to identify homosexuals in the civil service and armed forces, so that they could be effectively removed from their posts and institutionalized. This machinery was known colloquially by the intelligence organizations and the RCMP, who used it in their campaign to rid society of homosexual danger, as the "Fruit Machine".[59]

Lee Edelman's essay, "Tearooms and Sympathy, or, the Epistemology of the Water Closet", investigates and analyzes a similar American frenzy to protect "normal" society from homosexuality in the 1960's.[60] The *New York Times* revealed a "scandal" at the White House in 1964 when the F.B.I. spied on Walter Jenkins, Lyndon Johnson's Chief of Staff, and arrested him, charging him with performing "indecent gestures" with another man. The "other man" was identified, significantly, only as "Hungarian born", a description that echoes the Nazi belief that "foreign" elements were polluting a "pure" race. Jenkins was further described as a married man with six children, preyed upon while in a weak, overworked, and stressed state. Here again, the "pathology" of homosexuality as predatory, sick, and dangerous was invoked to protect otherwise decent Americans.

Edelman charts how other national media immediately followed up these revelations with leading articles condemning homosexuality in the strongest terms. *Life* magazine, for example, traditionally a family-oriented periodical, ran "a photo essay offering a spectacular view of what it called the 'secret world' of 'Homosexuality in America.'" The photos were accompanied by more written text than usual, since the editors felt the need to "justify their devotion of so much attention to what they identified as a 'sad and sordid world.'"[61] They did this by declaring that "parents are especially concerned" about the "social disorder" that is "forcing itself into the public eye", and suggesting that everyone should be on guard, and that homosexuals should be sought out ("for every obvious homosexual there are probably nine nearly impossible to detect") so that society could "cope with" this problem. *Time* magazine, not to be outdone, printed an "explicit and sensational account of the Jenkins affair", detailing exactly how the F.B.I. agents staked out a public washroom near the White House.[62]

Edelman's essay, therefore, analyzes a founding moment of the American myth that there is an international, Communist-driven, Jewish, and homosexual conspiracy aimed at corrupting American society. He traces how this mythology derives from McCarthyism and details how various media collaborated with the F.B.I. in externaliz ing American homosexuals as Other.

Homosexual as sick

These words introduced a pop song in Britain in 1978:

> This song is dedicated to the World Health Organization. It's a medical song, and it concerns a disease whose classification, according to the International Classification of Diseases, is 302.0.

The singer is Tom Robinson, the song "(Sing if You're) Glad to be Gay", and the "disease" in question is homosexuality (Chapters Four and Five). This classification has since been changed by the WHO; but sickness, disease and sin have always been construed with concepts of homosexuality in the popular mind, especially now in the wake of the AIDS onslaught, the toll it has exacted from the gay community, and the fears it raises in the popular media.[63] Susan Sontag writes that "Like syphilis a disease of, or contracted from, dangerous others, AIDS is perceived as afflicting, in greater proportions than syphilis ever did, the already stigmatized."[64]

Jeffrey Weeks points out that "Images of disease and sin have always been inextricably linked in the popular imagination, and often in the legal mind."[65] As medicine began to replace the Church as a molder of public opinion by the late nineteenth century, the "medical model" of the homosexual as embodying madness, moral insanity, sickness and disease overlaid the model of sin against Creation.[66]

As recently as 1967 a British newspaper article used all of these popular notions from one hundred years ago when it described homosexuality as "...the most revolting human perversion ever known...a horrible sin...a disease more dangerous than diphtheria."[67]

Simon Watney carefully charts the systemic mistreatment of gays

in the realm of public health since the discovery of AIDS in Britain, and connects the denial, misrecognition and inappropriate treatment of the disease with the moral panics of old.[68] Analyzing what he describes as the dangerously misleading and highly inaccurate reporting in the mainstream press, Watney reveals the scientific/medical model which underlies this social mistreatment of gay men:

> It is nonsense such as this which makes up the greater part of Aids (sic) commentary in the West, with an ideological stethoscope stuffed firmly in its ears to block out any approach to Aids which does not conform in advance to the values and language of a homophobic science--a science, that is, which does not regard gay men as properly human.[69]

Hospital policies, he contends, have more to do with the fears of gay men by other patients than with any real concern for the health of the patients with AIDS.[70]

The Gay Quest for Self-Definition

Against this continuing repressive model of the homosexual as evil, illegal, immoral and sick, gay communities have struggled to affirm their naturalness, innocence, morality, responsibility and equality within mainstream cultures. Organizations like the Mattachine and CHE, street movements like the GLF and GAR, Queer Nation and ACT UP, have positioned themselves politically across a spectrum of agendas seeking the arenas and forums within which gay men might begin to discover, define and affirm their own naming and identity.

Popular literary works such as Randy Shilts' The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk[71] and Rosa von Praunheim's

Army of Lovers[72] became movies, both of them recording the celebration, new-found assertiveness, politics, and community of real gay men. John D'Emilio and Jeffrey Weeks, mentioned above, also record the history of the emerging gay culture in America and in Britain.

Given the extent of gay oppressions now being articulated and the increased demands for wider civil rights in general, the stage was set for events which began to unfold in gay communities across Western Europe and North America during the 1960's. Historically, the founding moment of a Gay Liberation movement is often set as the night of June 27th, 1970, in New York at a drag bar called the Stonewall Inn. A group of drag queens mourning the death of Judy Garland (see Chapter Two, for discussion of drag queens and stars like Garland) refused to comply with the police who raided the bar attempting to arrest these deviants. By midnight, Christopher Street was blockaded by overturned and burning vehicles, the police were driven back and the gay men and lesbians who had initiated this white riot had also founded Gay Liberation as a movement and rallying cry. This moment is celebrated and mythologized in such gay theatre productions as *The Dear Love of Comrades* and *As Time Goes By*, performed by London's The Gay Sweatshop to gay audiences in Europe and North America over the past 15 years.

The mythologies of an emergent culture, however, often neglect the groundwork and foundations-building which lead to more dramatic moments. In Canada, for example, 1964 saw the beginnings, above ground, of a distinctly gay culture. The first known homophile organization in the country, the Association for Social Knowledge (ASK) was formed in Vancouver; Jane Rule's first novel Desert of the Heart was

published; Canada's first gay magazines, Two and Gay, were published in Toronto; and Maclean's published "The Homosexual Next Door: A Sober Appraisal of a New Social Phenomenon", thought to be the first positive article on homosexuality in the popular media.[73]

Similar, earlier moves towards defining and nurturing a distinct gay culture are traceable in most western cultures. The Stonewall Riots are, therefore, symbolic: the Outsider has defied the law and claimed a geographic and cultural territory.

Whichever date or moment we choose to posit as the founding moment of Gay Liberation politics and culture, two facts are clear. First, the gay movement is an outgrowth of the 1960's counter-culture. Second, Gay Theory has attempted to affirm and to explain to emerging gay communities just what it is that makes us different, communal, and distinct. It also attempts to chart the history of persecution that has been our lot, to explain and understand the forces that oppress us, and to offer us a means to combat those forces. This has also been the work and agenda of much cultural production within and for gay consumption (Chapters Two-Five).

Gay theories of sexual politics, for example, teach that the dominant discourses of heterosexuality have created the homosexual as its own legitimating "other", and that the "normalcy" of the former depends on the "deviance" of the latter. These theories were formulated principally by Michel Foucault and Guy Hocquenghem in France, Jeffrey Weeks and Simon Watney in Britain, Dennis Altman in Australia, and Peter Fisher, Jonathan Katz and John D'Emilio in America.

Hocquenghem's book Homosexual Desire was the first to study sexual politics from an ex-centric or marginal position.[74] He recontextualizes a range of questions concerning, primarily, the nuclear family, psychiatry, and revolution, in the light cast by the emerging gay liberation movements in North America and Europe in the early 1970's. In his argument against traditional psychoanalysis, Hocquenghem explains that the gay movement has exposed the tyranny of the nuclear or "Oedipal" family. Unlike male heterosexuality, homosexuality is not a product of the Oedipus Complex, Hocquenghem explains, since it "...constitutes a totally different mode of social relations."[75] The family wherein the Complex operates, he theorizes, is a form of heterosexist imperialism, "...which sneaks its own neurotic meanings into homosexuality."[76] By this he means that patriarchy--heterosexist imperialism--allows sexuality to exist only as a relation between dominant and submissive, active and passive, male and female, and suppresses any alternative. Because homosexuality denies rivalry and power relations between males as the basis for desire, it has been labelled a "perversion" by the dominant order, and the mother, in one of psychiatry's strongest Oedipal arguments, is charged with the "responsibility" for creating that "perversion".[77]

Hocquenghem's call for "revolutionary desire" demands new social relations. It is unreconcilable with "official revolution"--that is, revolution that does not include sexual politics:

> We cannot force desire to identify with a revolution which is already so heavy with the past history of the 'workers' movement'. Revolutionary demands must be derived from the very movement of desire; it isn't only a new revolutionary model that is needed, but a new questioning of the content traditionally associated with the term "revolution", particularly the notion of the seizure of power.[78]

Hocquenghem claims that psychiatry has continued to treat homosexuality as an illness in order to maintain its dominance in a heterosexist system. His work has furthered a revival of interest in the reclamation of psychiatry in the interests of gay liberation.

Kenneth Lewes, for example, writes that, since psychoanalysis deals only with those who can be classified as "deviant" in terms of the "healthy norm", its professionals have an allegiance to their institution, and the institution has, in turn, an allegiance to the larger cultural patterns in which it is embedded.[79] In these terms, Lewes concludes, "psychoanalysis denied its function as a radical critic of cultural forms in order to become an ameliorative agent of a particular society."[80] Although the American Psychiatric Association officially removed homosexuality from its list of psychiatric disorders in 1973, the American Psychoanalysis Association still, in 1992, formally forbids entry to homosexual analysts, and continues to "treat" homosexuality as an illness.[81]

Combatting the Economic and Legal Systems

In Britain, capitalism was of much greater concern than psychiatry for the leading gay political theorists of the early seventies. A Gay Left Collective (founded by Jeffrey Weeks, among

others, in 1975) which included both gay men and lesbians, produced a journal, Gay Left, in which they wrote on capitalism and its organizing power over sex and sexual relations: articles from this journal have been anthologized as Homosexuality: Power and Politics.[82] Central to these theories is the notion that society does not "repress" sexuality any more than it "liberates" it.

For example, Jeffrey Weeks describes, from a gay liberationist perspective, how capitalist society's main tendency "...lies in organizing and inventing forms of sexual definition, categorization, and hence regulation."[83] Under modern capitalism the new "sex-positive" types (the "liberated" woman, the self-confident and affluent gay men of the glossy magazine) are seen to be as potentially limiting as the old stereotypes in that they allow only certain types of behaviour (monogamous, bourgeois, high consumption) and only in certain kinds of ways (discreet, careerist, "responsible"). However, it is vitally important to recognize, Weeks writes, that

> the actual process of definition [of the body politic by social institutions] also creates the possibilities of a resistance and transformation, as individually and collectively we define ourselves in and against these categories. First of all there is the possibility of struggles over definition: "where there is power, there is resistance" as Foucault has put it.[84]

The act of naming ourselves as "gay"--rather than as "homosexual", "queer", "bent", "faggot", and so on--is a radical gesture and a move towards autonomy: it refuses the labels imposed by dominant discourse. The history of the homosexual rights movement has been a struggle to affirm and define gayness, and this fact

> points to the significance of the struggle over definitions, which are actually struggles of power as to who should define. But there are limits to this resistance. The resistance is all the time going on within the terms as laid down by those who wield the power to define, and hence the power to control and oppress.[85]

Liberal reform in the law, then, while in many ways a good thing, is also nothing but a redefinition of those who are controlled by those in power. Legislation can decide that gay can be a "condition" instead of a "disease", for example: lawmakers, therefore, do not liberate gay men but merely re-define the terms of their oppression.

The agenda of the Gay Left Collective is, therefore, not for the recognition of the rights of a minority subculture within a dominant culture; the Collective argues instead for an end to the ideology of sex, and an abolition of its controlling categories.

Similarly, Simon Watney's concerns are with capitalism and the gay community. He has carefully charted the mounting oppression that British gay men are subjected to, particularly in the wake of AIDS. His Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media records the media misrepresentations, the moral panics, and the increase in anti-gay legislation in Britain in the late 1980's, and demonstrates the interconnectedness of these phenomena.[86] In his introduction he explains why a book that purports to analyze newspaper representations of gay men consists of written text only: "Originally this book was to be illustrated, but the newspapers involved ignored requests for permission to reproduce material."[87]

Dennis Altman, in contrast, recording contemporary gay cultural beginnings in Australia and later in America, grounds his analysis of

gay oppression in personal narrative.[88] This is not to say that he is unaware of the implications that his oppression or liberation have for other, non-gay people in society. But personal narratives and personal histories must also be told so that the pooling of our individual struggles and individual victories can build a strong community resource.

In America, Jonathan Katz has compiled a Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A., which reprints documents on homosexuality from 1528, when European explorers and missionaries first encountered homosexuality among the Native American Indians, to the late 1970's: 450 years of gay history.[89]

Similarly, John D'Emilio in his pioneering work, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970, analyzes the social and political conditions that gave rise to contemporary gay culture in America.[90]

Each of these researchers, archivists, analysts and activists has informed gay theory and gay cultural practices: the influence of these pioneering cultural workers is clearly visible in the cultural productions analyzed in Chapters Two to Five below. Gay theory of cultural production, textual analyses of gay cultural artifacts and phenomena, and the making of gay lives themselves, are all grounded in this first generation's affirmation of a cultural and political identity for gays.

Specifically cultural theories of gay productions are offered principally by Richard Dyer and Derek Cohen in Britain, and Vito Russo

and Edmund White in America.

Dyer, for example, has published four books of film criticism: Gays and Film (1984), Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society (1986), Stars (1986), and Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film (1990).[91] Dyer reports that in his study of the popular gay and lesbian stereotypes depicted in mainstream cinema, "The amount of hatred, fear, ridicule and disgust packed into those images is unmistakable."[92] He lists over 700 films that have a gay character, yet in only 20 of those films he finds that the gay character is not ridiculed, pathetic, murdered, or a suicide. None of those 20 films are from Hollywood.[93]

Similarly, Vito Russo, in The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, has written and revised an extensive historical study of the representation of gays in Hollywood film.[94] Russo notes that in a 16-year period up to 1978, out of the 28 Hollywood films that portray gay characters, in 22 of those films the gay character meets either a violent death or commits suicide.[95]

Edmund White's critical and theoretical work, in contrast, is not collected or anthologized. A professor at Cornell University and the Sorbonne, White writes occasional articles in journals and magazines such as Harper's, Christopher Street, or Mother Jones. White's theoretical output is predictably--like so much other criticism that is written or published by or about gay subcultures--fragmentary.[96]

His literary output--the novels Forgetting Elena (1973),[97] Nocturnes for the King of Naples (1978),[98] A Boy's Own Story (1982),[99] Caracolle (1985),[100] The Beautiful Room is Empty (1988),[101] and States

of Desire: Travels in America,[102] the socio-cultural analysis of gay communities across America in the early 1980's--is, by contrast, well-known and widely distributed. He is also co-author of Joy of Gay Sex.[103]

These fictions and White's exploration of gay communities and individuals across the States constitute an almost "generic" gay biography for a generation that came out during the heydays of Stonewall and the founding moments of the Gay Liberation Movement: they are filled with subcultural lore and information.

There are perhaps other gay critics and analysts of gay cultural productions, but it is an underlying principle of this thesis that such work is too often isolated, uncollected, ephemeral or generally inaccessible. This thesis, therefore, uses the historians, the analysts and chroniclers of oppression and liberation, and the gay theorists discussed above in constructing a methodology for reading and analyzing various gay cultural practices and texts. Passing mention is also made of individual news reports or critical comments, where these are deemed useful or constructive in explaining how gay culture has begun to represent itself.

Since the 1960's gay theory has emanated from the ghetto of gay publishing but has not yet been recognized by mainstream cultural studies. This thesis offers one possible bridge between the two discourses, and suggests a methodology for understanding what and how gay cultural productions mean.

Other Sources: Documentary Film

After Stonewall, gay underground film emerged aboveground: a transition which is the subject of Chapter Three. While this thesis examines "fiction" film, it is also indebted to non-fiction, documentary film through which communities of gay men began an international dialogue which continues at present. Alberto Manguel has recently argued that all gay cultural productions function, at least in part, as documentary because they

> ...chronicle a time and a place absent everywhere else. They are still in an informative or documentary stage...They are unsentimental, wisely observant, conscious of the events that inform the secret history of a minority. They are necessary.[104]

The importance of documentary as another medium for preserving and circulating oral histories of individual lives and communities' aspirations complements the impact of many of the gay historians and archivalists discussed above. The documentary is a way to show gay people to one another, and to speak to one another through our personal and collective histories.

Films such as *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (1978), *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984), and *Before Stonewall* (1986) provide a cultural forum where gays can compare situations and conditions, motivate and organize resistance, and politicize one another. They effect a more diffuse understanding of gay histories and communities through their repeated screenings on television and in community theatres.

Recent gay documentary film has continued this cultural work in films like *Is Paris Burning?* (1990) and *Tongues Untied* (1991), both of

which explore the lives of gay African-American men. *Common Threads: Stories From The Quilt* (1989) extends this concern with gay oral histories to connect with other communities equally threatened by AIDS.

Documentaries do not depend on encodings and cinematic conventions in the same way and to the same extent that "fiction" films do in the mainstream cinema, and are therefore frequently perceived as "speaking (more) directly" to the audience. They share lives, educate, inform, proselytize and even attempt to politicize their audiences.

In this, gay documentary films are like the written criticisms and published histories which inform this thesis's readings of gay cultural productions in other media such as film and music.

Notes to Chapter One

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6. Hebdige, page 2.

7. Hebdige, page 150.

8. Angela McRobbie, "Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique", On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 74.

9. McRobbie, page 74.

10. McRobbie, page 78.

11. Cohen, page xxi.

12. Cohen, page xi.

13. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures: An xploration". Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War ritain, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson. London: Hutchinson, 1976. ages 209-222.

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26. Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), . See also Roland Barthes, Mythologies (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

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28. Herbert Blau, "Disseminating Sodom", The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 110.

29. Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism. 62.

30. Jeffrey Weeks, Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1977), 14-20.

31. Weeks, 14-20.

32. Weeks, 12.

33. Quoted in Weeks, 19.

34. Weeks, 22.

35. The Editors of the Harvard Law Review, Sexual Orientation and the Law (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 9.

36. Editors of Harvard Law Review, 11.

37. "Victories and Defeats: A Gay and Lesbian Chronology 1964-1982", Flaunting It!: A decade of gay journalism from The Body Politic, eds. Ed Jackson and Stan Persky (Vancouver: New Star Books, and Toronto: Pink Triangle Press, 1982), 226.

38. Geoffrey York, "At Odds on Gay Rights", The Globe and Mail (April 18, 1992), A5.

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40. Quoted by John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 13.

41. Editors of the Harvard Law Review, 4 (footnote 21).

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54. Evans, 163.

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56. Alaton, D3.

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93. Dyer, Gays in Film, 69-88.

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Chapter Two

Straight Shooting:
Gay Images on Hollywood Screens

Introduction

Given the history and extent of oppression, it is clear that recent moves towards a politics of gay liberation should also signal the emergence of a film culture through which gay men can begin to have some control over their own visual representations.

Hollywood representations of gays have been overwhelmingly limited in scope and therefore destructive in terms of gay identification. In his study of Hollywood's hegemonic oppressions, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, Vito Russo explains how misrepresentations are destructive because these offer gay audiences only pathetic, depressive, and suicidal characters as public images of themselves, and also because non-gay audiences are offered a distorted view of a rather large and varied minority.[1]

It is to underground film that gay men have therefore looked historically and, more recently, to independent cinema for alternative versions of themselves and their fantasies. These images from the subculture are seldom if ever seen in the popular domain because, as representations of gay fantasies and desires, they constitute a disavowal of hegemony, a critique of the dominant order. Considerations of profit mean that distribution of such film is limited to metropolitan areas where a minority population can nonetheless support a limited run. It is assumed that the majority of film-goers and

video renters are not interested in minority film culture.

Although gays have been (mis)represented on the Hollywood screen since its beginnings, and there has been an underground gay film circuit since the late 1940's, what can be described as a (rather narrow) spectrum of gay representations has been evident only since the early 1970's when independent cinemas and television also began to screen gay-themed films.

This chapter suggests that gay film can be positioned across a spectrum determined in part by the politics described in Chapter One, and in part by a model derived from cultural theory of production and consumption. Each category will be explained in turn, and two or three films that reveal and explain that category's range and limitations will be textually analyzed. The spectrum can be described loosely as a model of the ways in which underground, mainstream, and independent cinema--and more recently, made-for-television films--represent gays to particular audiences, and the ways in which the particular audiences, in turn, respond to these representations.

Available images

For the non-metropolitan gay man who has no access to film archives, specialty video stores, or film clubs there remains only the popular cinema and television with their meagre and frequently oppressive offerings of mainstream representations of gay life.

This is not surprising as gays are generally not well-represented (according to their numbers percentage in society) across

the realm of popular culture. Not only are theorists blind to gay presence in subcultures (Chapter One), mass culture is produced in North America and Western Europe as if homosexuality were non-existent. One very seldom sees a gay character on television, for instance, and never in prime time, and pop musicians are pressured by the same corporate interests in profit to veil their homosexuality (Chapters Four and Five).

However, Simon Watney--in his critique of corporate mis-representations of gay men, "Hollywood's homosexual world"--argues that

> ...film was also understood by the state and moral puritans as an instrument for instruction, and a potentially dangerous "corrupting" influence. For this reason it has always been subject to intense moral scrutiny, especially from those who equate morality with sex. A profound anxiety about homosexuality is thus deeply inscribed within the entire history of motion pictures, an anxiety which compounds a fear of moral "contagion" with the loss of profits.[2]

Thus, before the impact of gay liberation ideologies was felt economically in North America--before the 1980's, mainstream film never presented gays favourably: never, that is, from a gay point of view. There was no mainstream self-presentation, only the oppressive (mis)representation of dominant notions of homosexuality.

What has been represented on the screen as "gay" has been as either a medical, mental, or psychopathic condition, and never a gay life, or gay as an ideological or political position. Images of gays have therefore been scarce in relation to the numbers of films that Hollywood produces and heavily stereotyped, and have changed hardly at all over the decades. This stasis has damaged gay men's self-respect

and self-image as much as it has distorted heterosexuals' images of homosexuality. Gay men have internalized negative images of themselves just as much as heterosexuals have consumed them unquestioningly.

In mainstream cinema, the means by which gay men can identify with screen images poses problems. Since there is no essential physical/visual gayness beyond what has now become, for most, an unwelcome stereotype, there remains the problem of a quick and easy identification (given the nature of mainstream film and its patterned structure) without recourse to the offensive, since it is important, from a leftist perspective, that gays be clearly "seen". As Dyer explains:

> In terms of the politics of representation, fighting oppression is particularly difficult for gays because we are "invisible". The problem of identification with others as a basis for action (to defend and transform sexual practices) is then particularly acute and leads to the troublesome conclusion...that some form of *recognizable* representational form is a political necessity for gay people."[3]

Breaking out

The creation of a gay imagery, however, presents difficulties because stereotypes must be confronted and new and varied images must replace them: a history of misrepresentation and oppression needs to be undone. Gay men need access to the means of self-representation so that oppressive notions can at least be countered by more liberating ones that will provide an accessible cultural forum for other gay men. Simon Watney, in Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media,

argues that "we can only ultimately conceive of ourselves and one another in relation to the circulation of available images in any given society". He further emphasizes the importance of self-representation for gay men by quoting Richard Dyer:

> A major legacy of the social political movements of the Sixties and Seventies has been the realization of the importance of representation. The political chances of different groups in society--powerful or weak, central or marginal--are crucially affected by how they are represented, whether in legal and parliamentary discourse, in educational practices, or in the arts. The mass media in particular have a crucial role to play, because they are a centralized source of definitions of what people are like in any given society. How a particular group is represented determines in a very real sense what it can do in society.[4]

As Kate Linker explains, representations construct what we know as reality:

> Since reality can be known only through the forms that articulate it, there can be no reality outside of representation. With its synonyms, truth and meaning, it is a fiction produced by its cultural representations, a construction discursively shaped and solidified through repetition. And this process by which reality is defined as an effect of signification has tremendous import for that necessary reader, or subject, implicated in its web.[5]

The correlate of this cultural reality is that "social relations and the available forms of subjectivity are produced in and by representation."[6]

For example, Tom Engelhardt describes how a group of Native American school children, caught up in the excitement of watching a traditional Hollywood western movie, roared their approval and excitement as the U.S. Cavalry appeared over the crest of a hill just in time to save the wagon-train of Europeans from the marauding "Red Indians".[7] When one sees oneself portrayed only ever in one way, it

can be difficult to imagine an alternative way to be. And, for young people especially, fitting in with peer groups is a social pressure: the lengths to which an "outsider" will go to be included are often manifest in being even more racist, sexist, or homophobic than one's peers--just to prove one's "normality". And just as Native schoolchildren will cheer their own extermination on the movie screen, so too will gay men "support" their own oppressions as long as those screens offer the only versions of themselves in town.

Protest

How gay men should be represented is therefore a particularly important and contentious issue, since in mainstream (Hollywood) film there are so few and such limited images of gay men that are taken as representative.

When there are so few representations of homosexuality, and when gay men do not yet properly represent themselves, it is extremely difficult *not* to take the part to represent the whole, much like the Black American rioters also did in Harlem in 1915 when the film *Birth of a Nation* opened. This was the first time that Black people had been portrayed as a social group in mainstream cinema, and what they saw so offended them that they took to the streets in loud protest.[8]

Public protest at the misrepresentation of gays on screen has occurred at the opening of Hollywood films sporadically over the past 20 years. For example, while *Cruising* was still being made in 1979 it was protested by gays who discovered that the implicit message of the

film was that contact with the homosexual underworld produces psychotic reactions that can lead to mass murder. Director William Friedkin agreed to change the ending that contained this message into an ambiguity, thereby admitting that the protesters were right, and added this disclaimer to all prints of the film: *This film is not an indictment of the homosexual world. It is set in one small segment of that world, which is not meant to be representative of the whole.*[9] The disclaimer, as Russo points out, admits Friedkin's guilt by publicly disavowing it. Protest leaflets outside of the film studio read "People will die because of this film." Friedkin had used real locations, real bars, and even real characters from the gay ghetto in his film. In November 1980, outside the Ramrod bar, which was the main film location, a man stepped out of a car with a submachine gun, opened fire, and shot six gay men, killing two.

More recently, gays have protested the 1992 film *Basic Instinct* for its representation of a lesbian as a serial killer of heterosexual men.

But a "positive" representation of gays does not mean a cleaned-up, sanitized version of gay humanity, such as *Longtime Companion*, for example, portrays. This particular film speaks in calming and consoling tones to bourgeois heterosexual society. The men are all clean-cut, professional, "straight"-looking, "responsible", serious, and so on. There is nothing to indicate that they pose any threat to, or offer any critique of, or are any different at all from heterosexuals, or--at the beginning of the film at least--that they are oppressed in any way. As the audience discovers, in concert with the cast, that

AIDS is decimating this population who in turn are denied access to health care benefits that their class suggests they are entitled to, the politics of this film become clear. The film motivated a wide, non-gay population to demand more government support for People With AIDS and medical research.

The message to gay men who are not urban-dwelling professionals is quite different, however: we must "pass" as heterosexual and upwardly mobile to earn approval and support. To portray gays in this "positive" light, therefore, denies variety and a gay context.

Encoding/decoding: Bricolage and Gay Meaning

It is here that cultural theory can help to explain gay cultural practices: what is needed is a theory of production and consumption with its models of coding and decoding. What will be discovered is that the concept of *bricolage* is a daily exercise in the lives of many gay men.

Cultural productions are encoded according to the social, political and ideological proclivities of all of the elements that constitute their making. And although meaning is ostensibly made in the process of production, there is no guarantee that intention will be honoured or even recognized. Instead, it is at the points and moments of decoding that the cultural product attains its most meaningful place in the social realm. Without the active participation of the audience, a cultural text is incomplete. As viewers,

readers, and consumers of popular cultural texts we are caught up in, formed by, and construct meaning.

We decode texts in three distinctly different modes--dominant, negotiable, or oppositional[10]--according to the "knowledges, prejudices, and resistances" that we as audiences bring to bear to our readings of cultural texts.[11] But we are also addressed as subjects, and this fact determines to some extent our responses. And since all dominant discourses and, as Linker writes, "indeed, the discourses of supposedly neutral institutions address spectators as gendered subjects", this gendering address is easily read therefore by the heterosexual audience, in any one of the three modes. The address by gender does not take into account affectional preference and is often, therefore, plainly heterosexual. Thus, since gay men hardly ever see themselves represented on screen, they are left to consume, mostly, images of heterosexuals in a discourse that does not "address" them, leaving them instead outside as heterosexuality's Other.

Gays therefore decode heterosexual images and messages generally in an oppositional mode, since audiences are positioned as heterosexual male or female, producing a distinctly different "meaning" from the text from the majority of the heterosexual audience.

While the gendered address of the cinema plays a large part in the day-to-day maintenance of a "gender exclusive" hegemony, the oppositional gay response to it is a part of gay subculture. The consumption of heterosexual images by gay men is obviously a daily event, but one that is done consciously and oppositionally. For example, the consumption of images of movie stars such as Judy Garland, Bette

Davis, Mae West, and Joan Crawford particularly, nurtures a subcultural activity of opposition and bricolage: the construction and innovation of drag as a parody of and as a symbolic resistance to an oppressive gendering system (below and Chapter Four).

The spectrum of representation in gay film

What follows, then, is a schematic attempt to create a model for reading films by and about gay men. Its structure is, incidentally, historical in that it traces gay imagery from mid-twentieth century underground films to contemporary, independently financed productions.

The analysis, however, is thematic, political, and contextualized by the analysis of hegemonic oppression in Chapter One. Attention is paid to who produces the imagery, how that imagery is distributed and displayed, who is addressed, and who is consuming. The "who" that is analyzed is gay.

This chapter is not a chapter of film theory. It is a discussion of films about and by gay men. It is about gay male audiences and how they consume these films. Like the theories and histories described at the end of Chapter One, this particular consumption of film is a very significant departure in contemporary gay subculture. In 1992, for the first time in history, there is a range of cinematic images explaining to gay men who we are. These films are variously informed about the histories which precede this moment and about the ways we live now. They also suggest ways that gay culture may interact with and change dominant social patternings in the future.

The range and politics of mainstream film since Stonewall

The history of the misrepresentation of gay people in Hollywood has been charted and discussed at great length by Richard Dyer[12] and Vito Russo.[13] This thesis will instead analyze two examples of more contemporary images and representations of gay men in Hollywood, or mainstream, film--since Stonewall and the spread of gay liberation consciousness (Chapter One).

For the most part, contemporary images and representations of gay men constitute a narrow range of encoded social types, or stereotypes, which allows for only a narrow spectrum of decodings, or social and political responses by the audience. In popular film, these images have historically inhabited what this thesis identifies as the corporate business end of the spectrum, which indicates the limitations of gay film workers trying to integrate gay imagery into mass culture. A gay filmmaker or scriptwriter, actor or director, must first prove that his project will earn money for the studios and their investors, who are not identified as homosexual and who do not wish to turn audiences away from their films.

In this position on the spectrum, therefore, gay men are represented conventionally as a problem to the heterosexual order. After Stonewall, however, they are more often represented as being similar to non-gay men and therefore not to represent any difference. This strategy--of erasing difference--is problematic. Filmmakers are caught between arguing against stereotypical, negative depictions of

homosexuality and yet must use this available repertoire of images to further political and social agendas. The audience and the studios, after all, frequently "know" only as much about homosexuality as previous films have revealed.

Both positions (gay men as problem, or gay men as just like everybody else) seem ideologically contradictory or opposed; but both inhabit a similar political or ideological space on the spectrum. In each case, there is no debate or engagement with the dominant discourse of heterosexuality. Social order is maintained either by exile and banishment, or by a full embrace and subsequent integration. In both, difference is erased and ignored.

The second position operates as an updated version of the first, and is assumed to be a new, less offensive attitude to gay men than the former. But both representations operate to contain a perceived threat to the family, and by extension to the social order.

Just as gay filmmakers working within the industry must therefore constrain their images and narratives in order to gain access to the mainstream screens across North America in the hope of raising audience consciousness, so too some gay political activity since Stonewall has mirrored these assimilationist strategies. Gay political organizations such as the Mattachine Society in America and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) in Britain maintain this position from which to bargain and lobby with parliamentary political parties for protection under the law and for equality with other citizens. In Canada, lobbying by groups and individuals such as Svend

Robinson, MP, has proven the effectiveness of this approach.

In order to reassure non-gay audiences that their epistemology is stable, mainstream and popular modes of representing homosexuality operate as discourses on heterosexuality. For instance, in the first position, where a gay man is presented as a problem or a threat to the stability of a heterosexual couple or family--as is the usual Hollywood plot scenario--he is invariably used as a reinforcement to the dominant heterosexual norm.[14] He represents the sexual Other: through him, heterosexuality is examined and ultimately reinforced, through his censure or his banishment. Historically, as Richard Dyer and Vito Russo have illustrated extensively, his banishment is brought about through murder or, more commonly, suicide.

Since Stonewall, however, this is no longer always the case. Gay men are still being "dealt" with, but in different, less condemnatory and more subtle ways. But more importantly, a gay post-Stonewall consciousness can and does read stereotyping in oppositional ways, against the grain of Hollywood's codes and conventions.

Mainstream film: strategies for textual analysis

In mainstream film, the mere presence of a gay character does not make the film gay. Only on rare occasions are gay men central to the narrative action, and on even rarer occasions is the context or address gay. That is to say, mainstream film rarely acknowledges the presence of gay men in the audience.

Torch Song Trilogy and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* are two films from the late 1980's that do, however, assume that gay men are watching. Both films are "gay" since the first is centered on the life of a gay man, and the second uses a gay man as pivot and motivating force in its plot. Moreover, both are screen adaptations of gay-authored texts form other media, and therefore carry "traces" of unmediated gay agendas.[15] These "traces" might be lost on an otherwise non-gay audience and therefore deserve to be examined.

Although both of these films are made according to the codes and conventions of Hollywood and are consequently easily "read" in a conventional, or "dominant" mode, they both also do not necessarily constitute such a facile translation. There is not a secure "fit": the subsequent space between the encoding and decoding activities can be claimed by gay subculture.

The degrees of mediation in the production of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* are more complex than in *Torch Song Trilogy*, but both also have much in common. The first was originally a novel, and both were produced as theatrical dramas before they were made into movies. Harvey Fierstein wrote, acted in both theatre and film as lead, and screen-scripted his film; but Manuel Puig, the gay Argentinian Marxist who wrote the novel on which *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is based, died before the film project was envisaged. As a result, he exercised far less control over the cinematic representation of his gay character and text than Fierstein did. Both films also attracted a major Hollywood actor (William Hurt, Matthew Broderick), thereby guaranteeing

marketability by way of appeal to a mainstream audience.

Torch Song Trilogy is a gay film, but again in a recognizably circumscribed way--in keeping with the market dictates and within the range of the permissible for Hollywood. Careful attention has been paid by the producers to ensure that its content is "acceptable" to the general movie-going audience. When the film was prescreened (test screenings in front of a "sample" audience operate in much the same way as product testing in that audiences sample and respond to the latest commercial offerings, and the appropriate adjustments are made accordingly before mass marketing begins), those parts of the film that made the test audiences uncomfortable were removed from the final version. For instance, concerning a reference to a sex scene in a gay bar back-room in the pre-screenings, Robert Shaye, head of New Line Cinema who financed the film, says: "The reaction at previews wasn't universally negative, but it stopped the general audience momentum--the heterosexual community, if you will. It became a little too gay burlesque. They stopped laughing and sat there."[16] Having removed this scene and others that made the "general audience" uncomfortable (note that this audience is referred to as the "heterosexual community": what the film has to say to gay people does not concern the financiers), the film investors then reduce the risk of losing profit percentages on their investment.

The attempt in the mainstream therefore is to insert gay narratives but only in accordance with the considerations of a general, heterosexual audience. The "general audience" thus consumes "laundered" versions of gay lives, and the "entertainment" factor is

maintained. But there is not an easy "fit" between these intentions and encodings at the point of production and the range of possible readings and decodings at the point of consumption. In that gap, between intention and reading, it is possible to understand how oppositional consciousness--gay consciousness--can subvert and use to its advantage the codes and conventions by which Hollywood, mainstream film has abused its homosexual subjects and audiences.

Kiss of the Spider Woman (1985)

Brazilian director Hector Babenco, who had a commercial success on the repertory circuit with his film *Pixote* (1981), represents, with *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* a cultural "crossover". This film features Raul Julia and Sonia Braga crossing over from film "stardom" in Brazil to "stardom" in Hollywood. And just as this director and these two actors are "translated" from Brazil to North America, and as Manuel Puig's novel (which was not scripted for the screen by him) "translated" into North American film discourse, so too is the gay character "translated" by the well-known "straight" Hollywood actor (William Hurt). In this "translation", Argentinian politics and the passion of Brazil are therefore modified--particularities are lost and the type emerges instead. For example, the generals' fascism is mythologized into metaphysically, unparticularized and therefore unstoppable, inconfrontable repression. As well, the gay man is removed from the ealm of the real.

Many of the Hollywood codes and conventions conspire to undermine the strength of the origin of the film--Puig's novel of the same name. For example, the first words of the film describe the romantic heroine (Sonia Braga) of a "B-movie" which a homosexual is retelling. This description, however, "fits" into a tradition of representations of gay men as "effeminate", "doomed" creatures. The exotic character played by William Hurt is depicted staring into a mirror as he explains, "She is different from other women. She's a little strange. She's lost". This might comfort an audience, initially aware that one of these characters is going to be a gay male, because it is--with a shift of pronoun from "she" to "he"--a summary of mainstream representations of such a man. That it describes Molina *and* the Spiderwoman is a puzzle, however.

The emphasis in the film, unlike that of the novel or the drama, is on love rather than politics. These are standard Hollywood conventions, to play down too much dialogue and to emphasize the "love interest". The novel, by contrast, uses popular culture "B-movies" to carry an almost Socratic dialogue about desire, power, economics, class, gender, and sexuality. This is not usual mainstream fare.

But the fit between production and consumption of the resulting film is not easily achieved or maintained. There are the straightforward, almost "literary" readings that allow for an appreciation of just what it is that a politicized gay consciousness has to offer "the revolution". Molina (William Hurt), the gay character, shows Valentin (Raul Julia, representing traditional Marxism) that "a revolution must occur in the personal realm as well as the political and must be con-

cerned with sex and gender as well as class."[17] Molina succeeds in getting Valentin not only to see his point of view but also to accept his otherness--his femininity, his homosexuality.

Molina uses the "strategies" that he has learnt from the consumption of popular radio shows and television soap operas, such as using "cliff-hangers" as the break in his latenight retelling of movie stories, to keep Valentin listening and interested. Molina succeeds also in showing Valentin that his own so-called "machismo" is in fact more passive (his willingness to give over his life to a cause, and his acceptance of torture) than Molina's so-called passivity (his consumption of popular film). As in *Torch Song Trilogy*, the "queen" displays a particular way of using heterosexual narratives and imagery to redefine his own confined circumstances.

The film's use of the stereotype in its representation of the gay man ushers in an oppositional reading. Although Molina is presented as a politically empty-headed "queen", a post-Stonewall consciousness recognizes the lie in this depiction. It is a fact of gay subculture that "queens" are the most political of gay activists. Indeed, this is precisely why Puig "writes" Molina in the so-called stereotype; it says to traditional revolutionaries that a queen is among the most radical of men, and that a heterosexual man who cannot understand or deal with that social reality cannot understand change or liberation. The argument from Puig remains within the film script despite its de-emphasizing of politics and ideas: liberation can come about only--as lesbians, gay men and feminists maintain--through fundamental personal change. Molina's message is that there can be no

revolution without first a revolution against socialization and gender-typing; no other revolution can include him. In this way, Puig--through Molina--inscribes Hocquenghem's call for a new kind of revolutionary politics "derived from the very movement of desire" within mainstream cinema (Chapter One).

What appears then as a Hollywood stereotype to many of the "general audience", at the same time challenges their notions since this "stereotype" has a bit more substance than his predecessors. To the gay audience, the stereotype is read as radical (as Puig wrote it); and, even though at the end of the film Molina lies dead on the street, it is not quite the typical Hollywood "banishment" of the gay man. Molina has decided to change his life and allies himself with Valentin's "revolution" by undertaking a heroic act. In the film, Molina sees that a trap has been laid, but chooses to die for passion rather than live in the humiliation and oppression of his social order as represented by the police who are chasing him. This self-sacrifice and nobility he has learnt from the romantic movies which feed Valentin his own last dream images as well.

Kiss of the Spider Woman is a debate on gender politics, class, and power, and how desire frequently contradicts politics. It is addressed primarily to a non-gay audience insofar as Molina proves to Valentin that gay men are radical and occupy oppositional arenas within mainstream culture by virtue of their deviance. Concerning the politics of gender, for example, the possibilities for change within the male are addressed. Valentin's rigid adherence to his dogmas of Marxism and traditional masculinity are shown to produce violence.

When Molina returns from a visit to the warden, Valentin asks him "How did he treat you, the warden?". "Like a faggot, as always", Molina replies. Valentin is quiet, hanging his head; he realizes that that is exactly how he, Valentin, also treats Molina. Thus, Valentin realizes what gay men have always feared: Marxist principles are "narrow and inflexible",[18] and intolerant of difference.

The revolutionary Valentin and the fascist warden are united in their scorn of faggots: both have a masculist and phallic concept of the ideal man, which must oppress non-men and subjugate women in order to function. And in response to Valentin's scorn and violence Molina says "There would be so much less violence if there were more men like me", indicating the torturers, the "fascist murderers" outside in the corridors of the prison, whom Valentin is riling against. Molina's "lessons" include educating Valentin about women, beauty, sexual attraction, and the desire for respect and mutuality in a relationship. In a final lesson, Molina shows Valentin that tenderness between two men is something to be achieved, not scorned.

The debate on class is addressed through Valentin's repressed desire for Marthe, an educated woman of the middle classes whom he loves, but who rejects his violent solutions to the oppressive conditions of Latin America under the generals. It is not incidental, again, that the film eschews Puig's social agenda--the enlistment of all peoples opposed to or victimized by tyranny in the struggle for continental liberation--in favour of a love story. Indeed, the film leaves much that needs explaining. For example, Valentin's politics tell him that his lover should be Lydia, the uneducated peasant woman

who has dedicated herself to the cause of resistance. Desire contradicts politics. The audience must understand this, another of Molina's lessons and therefore part of the gay consciousness in the film, before making sense of the dénouement.

Molina shows Valentin that, contrary to what Valentin believes, it is popular cultural texts such as movies which provide a means of escape and transcendence from the daily repression that faggots (and others) experience. As long as people continue to "think like that" (ignore the ideological dimension) Valentin argues, "nothing will change." Valentin's attitude to popular film is limited: "Is this porno or propaganda?" he asks Molina. But it is Valentin who is seen to miss the point; Molina replies that "It's only a movie, why must you have everything explained?". Molina, a queen of bricolage, reads and uses his movie texts to his own ends in this case, to transcend the squalor and indignity of the prison cell.

That it is a Hollywood film, however, makes *Kiss of the Spider Woman* much less of a forum for liberationist debate and more of a vehicle for the recirculation of clichés about personal worth, integrity and individual transformations. Here, in this more conventionally accessible reading, what is important is that Valentin "teaches" Molina self-respect, and "rescues" him from a "superficial" life of gay bars and casual acquaintances. The morals charge on which Molina was arrested remains unchallenged. Valentin's attempt to politicize the audience about Molina's "criminal" record is dismissed by Molina who simply explains, "You know what I did. It is on the eleven o'clock news any day of the week". And, more importantly for

the "general audience", the film offers closure for all the "disturbing" questions it has raised in those final images of Valentin, healed miraculously from his tortures, rowing Marthe out into a sunlit bay.

Once again, however, gay consciousness undermines Hollywood formula. This final release from pain and suffering is deserved, but now the original gay text--suffused with Molina's temperament and sensibilities--undermines the closure offered by conventional imagery of "sailing into the sunset". Valentin has asked "But where is Molina?" only to enter a Molina dream-movie, which is pastiche, travesty, and camp homage to other romantic mainstream films. Puig's queen, therefore, is transcendent at the movie's end: Molina controls the imagery and representations of heterosexual desire.

Torch Song Trilogy (1988)

There are several mitigating factors that prompt an oppositional reading of this film. This is a historic moment for gay men and for mainstream film production: *Torch Song Trilogy* is the first entirely gay-controlled and -scripted film from the Hollywood studios. The fact that it was filmed is an achievement--due in part to the financial success of the off-Broadway production of the original play--and given the contrast between it and the exploitative productions of "gay" images that had preceded it. An audience entirely protected by Hollywood film from representations of the reality of many gay lives see images that say, for the first time in this mass medium, that gay

men love, care, feel, are generous and compassionate, and are concerned for the welfare of those around them. These are all alien concepts to the traditional representations of gay men in mainstream film, and therefore strange and new to much of its heterosexual audience.

Like *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Torch Song Trilogy* adheres to Hollywood codes and conventions, and yet allows subversive readings of that tradition. Typically, both films present the much-derided and politically incorrect stereotype of a melodramatic, "limp-wristed nellie" drag queen, who is enamoured of movies and actresses who are either "tragic" or powerfully assertive. But each drag queen reveals--historically, for the first time on Hollywood screens--just how such a gay man can use movies to define himself and to alter the conditions of his life.

Memorable lines and situations, attitudes and responses, costumes and fantasies--all learned from a pantheon of actresses including Bette Davis, Mae West, Joan Crawford, Judy Garland, and Marilyn Monroe[19]--are strategically used to counter depression, paranoia, threats of physical violence, systemic homophobia, and a lack of personal worth. Screen fantasies are decoded and subsequently encoded as affirmations of integrity and strength. Both of these movies share a common gay subcultural practice, as explored by Esther Newton in her study, Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America.[20] For the first time on mainstream screens, non-gay audiences are shown how queens within the gay subculture use popular cultural texts

(movies, stars) to reinterpret and transcend the confinement they are subject to in heterosexual discourse.

Fierstein, the writer and lead actor in both theatre and film productions of *Torch Song Trilogy* has the larger armoury/repertoire: he has torch singers from Bessie Smith to Barbra Streisand, and can croon Billie Holiday's "Good Morning Heartache" against its conventional interpretations. In *Lady Sings the Blues*, the movie, and discographies of Holiday, this song signifies her nihilistic resumption of heroin and the subsequent iniquities leading to an early death. Thus, the song carries with it a diegesis which reads the singer as tragic, and doomed to an inescapable and sordid end. Arnold (Fierstein) sings it on first encountering Alan (Matthew Broderick), his lover, in the film. This is the mainstream code: as gay men they should be as doomed as the song superficially suggests. But we laugh because the sexual tension and audience expectations are high. The old formula derived from Doris Day and Rock Hudson movies (in itself a rich, camp recognition) of "boy-meets-girl" is being rewritten as "boy-meets-boy"; and this Mr. Right lends Fierstein the further potential to use and subvert other generic codes and conventions which gay audiences know and expect from Hollywood.

That the drag queen is alone and sad at the movie's finale is another inevitability. That he is not dead is remarkable, however, given Hollywood's iconography of the stereotype. Moreover, en route to this conclusion Fierstein uses dramatic crises, melodrama, and burlesque to insert a contradictory, and therefore historically radical, discourse into Hollywood film. Two gay men are shown successfully

living together. Domesticity "redeems" countless diatribes against homosexual men as unable to imagine, let alone sustain, relationships. The killing of Alan is not the fault of the gay men. Homophobia--another first in Hollywood--is revealed as brutal, mindless machismo. The "problem" this time is not the gay man but heterosexual masculinity and its traditional panic when confronted with the possibilities of homosexuality.

In the film's most electric confrontation, Arnold demands that his mother (Anne Bancroft)--and, through her, heterosexual America, the prescreening audience--recognize that his relationship with Alan was equal to that of her and her husband *and* that his "widowhood" and grief deserve the same respect as hers/theirs. Thus, in the mid-1980's when gay widowhood became a significant reality for many survivors of relationships with AIDS, Fierstein was able to use heterosexual tolerance for stereotypically gay clowns (Chapters Four and Five) to dramatize a particular political and civil rights agenda: equality within and protection by the law.

Despite the otherwise debilitating codes and conventions of Hollywood film, Fierstein proves that subversion is possible. But the reading of that subversion must be informed by the political and social histories of drag queens and America's gay communities, as well as an understanding of just how Hollywood's screens have mediated or erased those lived cultures. The old grids are still in place in *Torch Song Trilogy*: only some of the codes are visibly altered by gay cultural practices.

Again, as in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, we are confronted with ambiguous closure. Here, the spectacle of Ed--the film's "straight" centre and therefore site of identification for the general audience--unsure of his sexuality and problematically attracted to Arnold is unresolved. If homosexuality is indeed the problem in mainstream film, in *Torch Song Trilogy* it is the latent, the buried, and the repressed homosexuality of heterosexual America that is unreconciled.

Mainstream film as domestic drama

Torch Song Trilogy is, after all, a "domestic drama", one of Hollywood's most prevalent genres and, as Richard Dyer explains, a favourite of non-gay audiences--especially when gay characters are involved. For Dyer, the explanation for this transsexual phenomenon is that

> ...superficially, seen from the outside, gay relationships can be reduced to the forms of conflict of straight ones, while at the same time implying that there is a "tragic" impossibility of gays to actually be married straights that accounts for the conflicts. In this way, such domestic dramas of "gay" life are doubly reassuring for the straight audience--they allow it to view problems of heterosexuality (which psychologically they no doubt need to) without being shown these problems as rooted in the present structure of heterosexual relationships. The ideal of heterosexuality is preserved when we see how its problems work out so tragically for gays. All this is confirmed by the way straight critics, presented with a similar drama involving heterosexuals, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)*, promptly turned round and asserted, despite Albee's assurances to the contrary, that it was really a disguised homosexual play.[21]

It is no wonder, then, since it is Hollywood film that has fed us the most damning representations of homosexuality, that the misrepresenta-

tion of gay people continues in mainstream cinema.

For example, *Making Love* (1982) is a widely distributed mainstream movie. As with much of Hollywood production, however, it is difficult to gauge the public response (in this instance the response of gays, particularly). Only those who are most offended or outraged write to the studios or cinema chains to complain. *Making Love* is concerned primarily, as Vito Russo points out, with stressing that "gay men are basically just like straights". Russo, arguing from the perspective of ACT UP (see Chapter One), contends that

> ...this is a false premise that never works. You can't plead tolerance for gays by saying that they're just like everyone else. Tolerance is something we should extend to people who are not like everyone else. If gays weren't different, there wouldn't be a problem, and there certainly is a problem.[22]

But in this case the context is heterosexual in that heterosexual norms are brought to bear on ostensible gay behaviour, and closure is invoked in the conventional heterosexual manner. The gayness in *Making Love* is actually homosexuality: not a celebration of gay sexuality, or even the recognition or acknowledgement of a gay perspective, but a medically and legally defined, and therefore problematic version of gayness. Gay culture has been silenced and edited out: the two men act in a vacuum.

Hollywood films that do not represent gays in a heterosexual context are still the exceptions to the rule, but the number of exceptions is on the increase. For instance, the cameo spot as gay representation is a new feature of some productions. Although the gay man in this new "role" is still being represented in a heterosexual con-

text, but usually in a more favourable light than he was before--he provides a witty verbal aside, elicits a chuckle from the audience--he is still being enlisted to reinforce the normality and order of the narrative, and he is still being carefully contained. For example, in *Frankie and Johnny* (1991), Johnny (Al Pacino) calls on Frankie (Michelle Pfieffer) and, while waiting for her to prepare to go out on a date, talks with her gay-couple neighbours, one of whom has just been advising Frankie on the coordination of her outfit for her date:

> "We've just started dating too", offers one of the gay men.
> "You mean...one another??", Johnny asks, hesitantly, eyebrows raised.
> "Yes", they smile in easy response.
> "I have a friend who's gay", Johnny announces, at a loss.
> "That's nice", says one of the gays, "I'll look him up in the directory!".
> "He only realized he was gay just recently", Johnny explains.
> "In that case I'll look him up under 'new listings'", the gay wit responds. Johnny looks confused.

The exchange speaks to both gays and non-gays in the audience. The gay men will certainly get the joke; they are used to being thought of as so few in number as to all know one another. So pervasive and effective has the veiling of all signs of gayness in popular culture been that young gay men still often think that they are completely alone in their gayness; this is one of the first damaging myths that gay liberation organizations address, and it is the recurring theme in *Word is Out* (Chapter One).

In this brief cameo the gay couple are represented as "out" and assertive in their sexuality, which is a new departure for Hollywood representation of gay men; they are not ridiculed, or the butt of a

sexist joke. But in terms of the actual exchange, there is a mixed message. On the one hand, an acknowledgement and gentle admonishment of the unenlightened attitude of old, and this message is directed at the heterosexual audience. On the other hand, for the gay men in the audience, the movie's display of a new "liberal" attitude of condescension, censured or not, as opposed to the "old-fashioned macho" response of ridicule in earlier films, is but a very small step forward for the representation of gay men in mainstream film.

The limitations of representation in mainstream film

There is no indication, yet, that non-gay male characters know how to "deal" with gay men in the movies, let alone in the audience. Homosexuality is still a point of unease, contestation, or amusement. In much the same way that party hosts of old used to invite a token gay to their party because, as the gay song goes, "There's Nothing Like a Fairy to Make the Party Gay",[23] movies like *Frankie and Johnny* now invite--a little--gay wit in to brighten things up a bit.

Gay sexuality is therefore still represented as something that heterosexuals have trouble dealing with, and in this particular film, as in other films that employ a new "cameo" role, is used to just that end. More typically, perhaps, gay characters are used only in specific incidents to very particular ends.

Hollywood's prime motivation has always been the investment and the return of high profits. The main target audience is the one with the high disposable income for entertainment: young, white,

heterosexual, and middle class. Corporate investment in film, reaching as it does regularly now to $60 million and $70 million per picture, imposes the same kind of restrictions on Hollywood production as advertising by major companies does on prime-time television. The intended audience (and it always seems to be the same one) must not therefore be upset or offended, lest it fail to support the movies or to watch television programmes in great enough numbers to guarantee a profitable return on all investments. It is hardly surprising then, since they are not part of the intended audience, that gay men are not spoken to in regular and/or particularly favourable representations. Those representations that do appear on the mainstream screen are narrowly enough defined that they almost fit right in with the other, non-gay representations.

The constraints of Hollywood conventions and the demands made by studio heads that gay subjects not confront or confuse the non-gay general audiences have consequently fostered a widespread blindness about gay men and their culture. For example, an anecdote recounted by Vito Russo explains much of the misunderstanding and previous history of misrepresentations of gay men in mainstream cinema. While filming the independently financed *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), Buck Henry complained to director Nicolas Roeg that his character did not have to be gay (because he did not present a pathological type or problem). Roeg countered, "Why not? There are homosexuals."[24]

The "general audience" has eagerly consumed this misinformation, too, as illustrated in another anecdote which Russo tells. Having consumed an absence of images other than gay men as sick, pathologi-

cal, dangerous or doomed, that non-gay audience is frequently incapable of recognizing that gay men may actually be "none of the above".

At the end of a screening of *My Beautiful Launderette* (Chapter Three), a young woman was overheard speaking with her friend. "But I don't get it," she said. "Why were they gay?"[25] In that question is revealed the legacy of mainstream film's denial of gay culture.

Made-for-television film: Network range

The restrictions that apply to the representation of gay men in mainstream film are also brought to bear on the production of films for commercial television, with increased pressure due to the nature of the medium. Production for network or commercial television must consider not only the potential popularity and subsequent viewer ratings, but also the response of the major advertisers, whose revenue the networks depend on for survival. The advertisers, in turn, must consider the possible response of their millions of potential consumers to the television fare being offered.

Given the layers of mediation and levels of considerations that television productions must go through, controversial topics, imagery and narratives are avoided. Advertisers do not want to alienate potential consumers, and networks do not want to alienate potential advertisers.

The range of gay representations that emerges from out of this complex of restrictions is, as a result, even more limited than that found in mainstream cinema. Whenever representations of gay life

manage to appear, even in exceptionally "laundered" versions, censure is quick to follow. For example, in 1989 ABC's popular *thirtysomething* aired a scene of a gay male couple in bed together. As a direct result, major advertisers and sponsors withdrew their advertisements. The network responded by editing the couple from the series, and by removing the whole segment from the repeat series so that it can never be seen again.[26]

Gay topics, gay characters, and gay behaviour in made-for-television film are therefore carefully circumscribed, and are always, on commercial television, inserted and contained in heterosexual scenarios and contexts. Gay characters are most often used to examine and ultimately reinforce heterosexuality, as Derek Cohen points out:

> A lesbian or a gay character in a TV play (or even a soap opera series) does not constitute gay culture. We are presented there as objects to be consumed. In a paradoxical sense, as one of the essentials of our experience as gays is our alienation from society, any culture which attempts in some "liberal" way to include us fails to portray our experiences accurately. That very assimilation, as if we were the same as everyone else but different in one minor way, shows a preoccupation with the surfaces, with the physicality of our homosexuality, and not the dynamics of our interaction with the rest of society. For if it were to recognize that interaction for what it is, an oppressive one, it would also have to recognize its own role in that oppression.[27]

This containment operates so effectively that network television "erases" gay men from its representations of North American life. As a result, mainstream and gay subcultures suffer from this cultural blinding. Non-gay television viewers cannot see the presence of homosexuality in their communities and are helped by network programming to "demonize" gay men who, in turn, lack any sense of personal or

group identity.

Gay Films on Commercial Television

Two television films from the 1980's, *Consenting Adults* and *An Early Frost*, reveal the dilemma and social consequences of such representational practices.

In both films, gay men are represented as the "problems" which the non-gay people around them have. In *Consenting Adults*, for example, the "coming out" story of a handsome young "jock" is told in terms of the effect it has on his father, his mother, and his sister. The script is weighted so that incident, dialogue, and plot-development are carried by these and other "normal" characters. The television guide's listing warns the audience that an unusual subject matter will be raised, but comforts that audience by identifying the crisis in terms of the "normal" members of the family: "A college student's admission that he is homosexual leaves his self-possessed mother in a state of shock and his once-doting father devastated".[28] When the gay character finally tells his college roommate that he is gay, the roommate says, "I don't believe this is happening to me!" The film allows no consideration for the young gay man, nor for the hostility that suddenly confronts him on all sides.

Network studio chiefs and advertisers assume that general audiences are comfortable with representations of gayness like this. That assumed audience is not confronted by any deviant behaviour in the script or images that may challenge "family viewing" habits and

standards. The character being labelled "gay" is as far as the script allows representation to proceed. Homosexuality and gay culture are absent, but the hegemonic construction of the gay man as other (Chapter One) is used to comfort and thereby reinforce the norms of heterosexual America. By castigating and exiling the gay man, the networks guarantee that normality may resume by the end of the show.

The second film, *An Early Frost*, a film ostensibly about AIDS, treats its gay character in the same way. The concern in the film is for how the news of the young man's AIDS affects each member of his family, in turn, including even his grandmother. This preoccupation with the other characters suggests that it is they who have the disease, and not him.

Television films such as these two are restricted in their representations of gay men, and full consideration is always only given to other family members and the effects that gay characters and gay topics have on them.

Sit-coms and Soaps: a note

The television sitcom and soap opera are even more restrictive in their representations of gay men, probably because of the huge numbers of viewers at prime-time, and the subsequent revenues that these numbers are worth to the networks.

For example, the gay son on *Dynasty*--Steven Carrington--was represented as a confused and indulgent young man, tolerated by his

family only on condition that he sort himself out. Eventually, he married and was embraced back into the family.

And Jody Dallas, the gay son on the sitcom *Soap*, is also safely recouped back into the family through marriage, having both entertained and disgusted the various members of his family for a year or more on the show.

The range of gay representations on commercial or network television is therefore extremely limited, and every effort is made to not only contain homosexuality but to recoup it back into the heterosexual hegemony via marriage.

FOX Network 1992: an exception

The usual television network considerations and constraints are sometimes contravened and challenged by Fox, the newcomer network, in its bid for viewers and their sale to advertisers in a highly competitive market. While some of the network's representations of homosexuality, for example, are not much of a step forward for gay viewers, they are however a considerable advance for network television. Fox challenges other networks with its unconventional approach to programming, and in doing so it wittingly or unwittingly acknowledges that there are audiences that are not being addressed elsewhere. Fox is therefore prepared to broadcast topics and images that are, for commercial television, exceptions to the rule.

One such exception that treats its gay character in a way that network television has not done is the 1992 made-for-television film,

Doing Time on Maple Drive. This film is a project of director Ken Olin, actor in *thirtysomething* (Michael) and part of that show's directing roster. His film represents a plot and narrative that constitute a critique of the dominant order and which acknowledges that there is also a gay audience for television. It was he who introduced the gay characters to *thirtysomething*, which resulted in the series' demise.[29]

As the film opens on Maple Drive, a quiet suburban street, a middle-class family is trying hard to pretend that everything is well and calm between them despite much evidence to the contrary. Soon, we learn that one of the young sons is a secret alcoholic, the other is gay and tries to kill himself, the daughter has a secret abortion, and the mother refuses to believe that any of this could be happening to her family.

The real "problem", however, is *not* the gay son, or his alcoholic brother, or the terrified, neurotic daughter, or the blind, obsessive mother. The problem is the moral and virtuous straight-jacket of a militaristic, patriarchal authority, represented by the father figure. His unquestioning, all-consuming pursuit of bourgeois values is shown as the root cause of the family's dysfunction.

Here, Olin presents his audience with an image of the "multiplicity of responses to a commonly-perceived situation" by groups which "respond, critically and creatively, to the still predominantly white, heterosexual, male culture" to which they are subjected and which oppresses them: this is the exact range of cultural productions invoked by Linda Hutcheon (Chapter One). Here, the pun in the title--

with its allusion to prison--reveals the film's counter-hegemonic discourse.

Although *Doing Time on Maple Drive* is not a film by gays, its representation of gay life in contemporary America reveals that gay men are part of a community of grievance, interconnected with other groups that are abused within mainstream society and that, consequently, struggle for a means of self-representation. "They cannot represent themselves" on television, and so--thanks in this instance to Ken Olin--"they must be represented", as Marx reminds us in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.[30]

Olin's film breaks new ground for possible future representations of gay men in mainstream film and television production. It opens space between the dominant television encoding of gay representation and the contested, decoding terrain where gays in the television audience have to make their own meanings.

Television: Public Broadcasting

A separate set of restrictions, less severe than those on mainstream film and commercial television but nonetheless constraining, also apply on public television, which operates in many ways like an independent producer of film, television series, and news programming. Monies for the maintenance of the Public Broadcasting System of America (PBS) come from universities, arts foundations, federal funding grants, public donation, and private corporations. Oil companies, for example, like to sponsor "art" programming, and thereby foster a

responsible and "clean" image. They and their consumers are part of the broadcasters' considerations in program planning, and thus one of the restrictions.

For instance, Texaco withdrew its longtime funding of Great Performances on PBS just before the station screened *The Lost Language of Cranes*, a gay made-for-television film. A spokesperson for Texaco explained their withdrawal by saying that "We feel the series is moving away from the traditional classical works". A worker for PBS responded by calling Texaco "the Republican national committee".[31]

This response signifies the battle waged between PBS with its mandate to provide television access to all groups within society and the administration of George Bush which is responsive to pressures from the right wing of the Republican party. This faction includes Christian fundamentalists who object to PBS programs which they see as challenging "traditional values" and who therefore wish to stop federal funding of the stations involved. Gay programming is cited as an abuse of a federally-funded network, as are programs by feminists, African-Americans (which attempt economic rather than racialist analyses of unrest in America), and enthusiasts of multi-cultural relativism:

> Last summer, fierce protests, notably those of the Reverend Donald Wilmon's media watchdog group, The American Family Association, were directed at the U.S. public broadcaster for its decision to air *Tongues Untied*, a documentary by filmmaker Marlon Riggs, on its P.O.V. series. Riggs's film looked at the lives and attitudes of black men who are homosexual and their community's often dismissive and derisive treatment of them. Because of some of its content, including semi-naked males kissing, a large number of PBS member stations refused to run the

> documentary and others scheduled it in the late-night slot when viewership is substantially reduced.[32]

Tongues Untied (Chapter One) played an unwitting, but major, part in the Republican Party's 1992 spring primaries because of this controversy. Pat Buchanan, challenging George Bush for the presidential nomination from the right wing of the party, fed the media with out-of-context images from this pro-gay documentary through which he accused Bush's administration of supporting deviance and homosexual depravity. Bush's administration, ironically, had to prove to its party caucus that it is not pro-active in support of gay men or their culture--a truth which gay activists take to be self-evident.

The Lost Language of Cranes (1992)

The Lost Language of Cranes is a "domestic drama" based on the novel of the same name by gay writer David Leavitt.[33] It differs from the "domestic dramas" discussed above in that it teaches how to be gay rather than how not to be. Again, as with *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, the narrative/plot concerns an unhappy family that likes to pretend otherwise. This time, when the son (Angus Macfadyen) reveals his gayness to his parents, they are forced as a result to confront one another with their own secrets: "coming out" is treated as catalyst to further acts of honesty and moral integrity.

A motif that runs through the story is that of a small child who, left alone in a high-rise apartment all day, "speaks" a special "language" that he learns from the huge construction cranes that

slowly turn and turn below his window. This image opens the drama, and recurs throughout: its meaning is a mystery until the end.

Meanwhile, the father (Brian Cox) has had to reveal his own "secret" to his wife and son. He has hidden his own homosexuality for all of his life, trying to believe that marriage would "cure" him. The son's description of what living a closeted life would mean to him--lying about his gayness and "passing" as straight--forces the father's hand. He now, having observed his son, admits that this strategy is futile, and attempts to come to terms with and pursue an honest gay life. The mother (Eileen Atkins) is portrayed as a victim of the abuse which men in the closet visit upon unknowing women.[34]

The motif of the child looking through the window, learning by observation, is echoed in the final shot as the father at the window watches his son stroll down the street outside, arm around his boyfriend's shoulder. This image of the father is overlaid at the close of the credits with an image of the child "talking" to the cranes: a gay "language", or a way to "speak" oneself, is being rescued by the son, and learnt by the father, from a family history that has almost destroyed it.

Such revelations and conclusions are contrary to "domestic dramas" in mainstream film and television, where gayness is seen to devastate and destroy "the family". In fact, non-gay reading of this film foregrounds more conventionally "normative" interpretation, dwelling on the family rather than on the subject of gay men. Canada's national daily newspaper, for example, ran a column in which

it was suggested that "The child's bizarre experience is a metaphor for what has happened to the family that is the focus of the drama".[35]

Revelations of homosexuality in *The Lost Language of Cranes* are used to liberate lives from deceit and oppression, which are scripted as the cornerstones of heterosexual relationships. The gay relationships in the film, by contrast, are founded on companionship, openness, trust, and a moral commitment to honesty. There is--as in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and other gay texts--the admission that lust and desire can confuse and even derail a relationship; but even those are discussed openly by all parties concerned.

It is this aspect of *The Lost Language of Cranes* which reveals its affinities with underground and independent gay film (Chapter Three): the dominant codes and conventions of representing gays in limited and problematic ways are abandoned. Now, heterosexuality is the "problem" which is critiqued. Whereas marriage is employed in mainstream soap-opera and sit-com productions as the "cure" for homosexuality, here it is destructive to the gay lives it hides and oppresses. Marriage, furthermore, is represented as destroying the partners involved who must live with secrets and compromises to be successful in their relationship.

With the broadcasting of this film, then, public television broke new ground for gay and non-gay audiences. Like the repertory, arthouse and fringe cinemas which show independent films--PBS establishes with *The Lost Language of Cranes* a new, previously silenced space for gay audiences in which to represent and view their own

cultural productions.

Notes to Chapter Two

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2. Simon Watney, "Hollywood's homosexual world", Screen 23:3-4 (Sept/Oct, 1982), 117-118.

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4. Simon Watney, Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media,(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 8-9.

5. Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality", Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (Boston: David R. Godine), 392.

6. Linker, 392.

7. Story quoted by Tom Engelhardt in "Ambush at Kamikaze Pass", American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 480.

8. Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 238.

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11. David Morley, "Cultural Transformations: The Politics of Resistance", Language, Image, Media, eds. Howard Davis and Paul Walton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 104-117.

12. Richard Dyer (ed.), Gays and Film, revised edition (New York: New York Zoetrope, 1984).

13. Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, revised edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

14. See Dyer and Russo.

15. *Torch Song Trilogy* is adapted from Torch Song Trilogy: Three Plays by Harvey Fierstein (New York: The Gay Presses of New York, 1983); *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* is adapted from the novel Kiss of the Spider Woman by Manuel Puig, translated by Thomas Colchie (New York: Random House, 1980).

16. Quoted by Jay Scott in "The Gay Gaze I: Dignity in Drag: Torch Song's Great Balls of Fierstein", Film Comment 25:1 (Jan-Feb 1989),

17. Tania Modleski, "Femininity as mas(s)querade: a feminist approach to mass culture", High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film, ed. Colin MacCabe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 45.

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19. Richard Dyer, Stars (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1979).

20. Esther Newton, Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

21. Richard Dyer, "Rejecting Straight Ideals: Gays in Film", Jump Cut

22. Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 271-272.

23. Alex Harding, song from *As Time Goes By*, a Gay Sweatshop Theatre production: London, 1978.

24. Vito Russo, "A State of Being", Film Comment 22:2 (Mar-Apr 1986), 33.

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26. Hester Riches, "Progressive PBS takes a gamble with gay programming", The Vancouver Sun (June 24, 1992), C6.

27. Derek Cohen, and Richard Dyer, "The Politics of Gay Culture", Homosexuality: Power and Politics, eds. Gay Left Collective (London and New York: Allison and Busby, 1980), 180.

28. TV Times (July 31-August 7, 1992), 55.

29. Hester Riches, C6.

30. Karl Marx, "Excerpts from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1852: Second Edition, 1869), translation from editions published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House (Moscow), in Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, edited by Lewis B. Feuer (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1959), 339.

31. Hester Riches, C6.

32. John Fitzgerald, "Provocative portrait of a lesbian liaison a gamble for PBS", The Globe and Mail (July 4, 1992), C3.

33. David Leavitt, The Lost Language of Cranes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

34. Recent scholarship which analyzes the relationship between gay liberation and feminist theory includes Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick's Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Sedgewick extends this work to analysis of how closeted homosexuality affects gay men and nurtures misogyny in Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

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Chapter Three

Gay Film:
Representation, Theory, and Practice

Technological access and representational strategies

Post-war technological innovations in cameras allowed film students and enthusiasts access to equipment that had previously--because of cost, size, and complexity--been the privilege of film studios. For example, the marketing of the "cine" camera (a post-Second-World-War early forerunner of the contemporary "camcorder") allowed the most amateur enthusiast to be creative and inventive in an area that had previously been the domain only of professionals. The first "underground" films were made on these new "cheap" cameras, and were an opportunity for an artistic response to increasingly technologically sophisticated mainstream films. Critics of these early films have observed a "refusal of Hollywoodian qualities of finish and clarity"[1] which were thought to be antithetical to "art".

Again, the argument as to whether gay-made films should centre or de-centre gayness marks a major division in gay politics and the aesthetics of underground and, later, independent film. On the one side, there is an attempt to negotiate a social and cultural space between the dominant definitions of homosexuality and a self-definition that creates the least political friction. On the other side, there is a rejection of dominant definitions of homosexuality, an historical exploration of oppression, and conscious construction of a new, liberated gay identity. In fact, a flaunting of these defini-

tions is frequently represented as an act of defiance.

The first position--liberationist politics argue--involves a delusion of oneself and others that the similarities with bourgeois heterosexuality outweigh by far the differences. The second position celebrates difference, recognizing the potential power in "otherness" that gay men share with many other oppressed, marginalized and minority groups.

At this point on the spectrum the difference between a gay film and a film with gay characters, leading or otherwise, is the difference between expression and oppression, or between resistance and containment. This politicized position declares that--no matter how liberally or sympathetically a film treats its gay characters--as long as the context is bourgeois heterosexual (as is most often the case as liberals wrestle with feelings of guilt), then it is a film that speaks only or primarily to a non-gay audience. This is not to essentialize the filmmaker as gay, but to state that for a film to speak to gay men it must acknowledge the history and recognise the present situation of gay men, otherwise it merely maintains the hegemony by denying difference, in the same way that mainstream film continues to do.

Underground film variously acknowledges the history of gay oppression and resistance, and thereby insists that a gay perspective is distinct. It also recognises that gay oppression and resistance are historically inseparable from a broad range of other social and political oppressions under patriarchy. Gay underground film there-

fore, in its many forms, offers a critique of the dominant order.

There is, however, no unified body of work that constitutes "underground" films. The films were individual efforts ranging from "obscure symbolism, hectic cutting and vivid colours to others shot in grainy black and white with next to no cuts and not much going on beyond random, banal conversation."[2] During the 1960s, Andy Warhol--a gay artist and celebrity of the pop scene--made several films which borrow from and parody such low-tech, amateur-looking early "underground" ventures. One of his actors, Joe Delassandro, became a gay icon later celebrated by pop musicians, The Smiths (Chapter Five). The "underground" became the "avant-garde" when it emerged overground in centres like New York, London and Paris in the early 1960's during pop art's heyday. Not incidentally, pop art celebrates mass technology, communication and imagery.

Some of the techniques, codes and conventions developed by underground filmmakers were adopted decades later by the mainstream. For instance, the "hand-held" camera, a "natural" convention of the underground film (since it was often the only kind of camera available) became an aesthetic of mainstream film, initially through the French "new wave" cinema of the early 1960's and more recently of advertising and some music videos. As a mainstream convention it is used to signify "immediacy" and "reality" on film, and is now part of mainstream technology's progression towards verisimilitude. It is a particularly important component of the illusion of the "truth" of the modern documentary.

For the gay filmmaker and enthusiast alike, the space that the technology allowed for alternative film was a particularly important subcultural development. Used to seeing images only of heterosexuality on the mainstream screen, filmmakers discovered that it was now possible to create gay images, for gay consumption, on the "private" screen--in homes, clubs, and bars. By the late 1940's underground film was a subcultural phenomenon, and had a large gay following.[3] The first films were short, low budget productions, wide-ranging in their influence on later filmmaking. They were also always recognized as a very gay tradition:

> Many of the best known underground film-makers were gay and gay subject-matter suffused not only their work but that of many others who did not identify themselves as gay. Even forerunners of the underground indicated the possibility of a gay cinema, and it has had an extraordinary impact on a wide variety of subsequent films, including art cinema, midnight movies and pornography.[4]

Screenings of gay underground films were disrupted and raided regularly by the police, their makers and exhibitors were taken to trial and sentenced, and the films banned.

Because gay self-representations through the medium of independent, early underground film constitute a contested politico-cultural terrain, and because gay "communities" were necessarily secretive, gay underground films do not constitute "a unified, homogeneous body of work,"[5] but approach homosexual topics in various and different ways. For example, some of the earliest films began addressing and celebrating gay sexual fantasy and desire in the form of the representation of repressed dreams.

The first three of the five films analyzed below--*Fireworks* and *Scorpio Rising* by Kenneth Anger, *Un Chant d'Amour* by Jean Genet, *Le Sang d'un Poète* and *Orphée* by Jean Cocteau--were banned at one time or another. Gay underground film is known both for its filmic importance and for its legal history as resisting hegemonic attempts to "silence" or "erase" gay subcultural self-representations (see Chapter One and the section on "representation" in Chapter Two). These early, short underground films are the first, preserved cinematic treatments of gay sexual desire and among the first examples of films made by gay men for gay audiences. All are now screened regularly on the art-house and gay film festival circuit, and are now also available on video-cassette.

Fireworks (1947) and Scorpio Rising (1963)

In *Fireworks* Kenneth Anger "dared to film one of his own wet dreams"[6] in an attempt to create a cultural space for the beginnings of a gay consciousness, and in response to a film industry that said the whole world is heterosexual. In the dream-film, a sailor, the object of desire, sweeps up the gay dreamer in his arms, and fireworks, sticking out of trouser-flies, explode later in comic symbolism. The camp humour of scenes such as this appear in all of Anger's films: his treatment of sexual repression and desire in a hyperbolic manner is one of his trademarks. In *Fireworks*, the penis is replaced by a large, exploding roman candle, thus demolishing

through laughter the symbolism of phallic power by exaggeration, turning "serious" subject-matter into an object of fun.

In a similar vein, *Scorpio Rising* opens with a close-up shot of a gleaming motor-cycle being tenderly and erotically stroked by a male hand holding a huge pink powder-puff. Anger's use of camp here again defuses the "serious" symbols of phallic power (in sexual symbol, the erection; in mechanical, the motor-cycle) and elevates the silly (the fireworks, the powder-puff) as a way of undermining an oppressive discourse, and displacing it through laughter.

The homoerotic imagery in *Scorpio Rising* is accompanied by a counter-discursive soundtrack of pop music hits of the time. Their juxtaposition in the film redefines the object of desire: a girl in the man's song becomes a boy in the film, for example, and the addressed audience is thereby acknowledged as exclusively gay male. The song "Blue Velvet" accompanies a close-up shot of a biker slowly zipping up his blue jeans; "Fools Rush In" plays as he walks towards the camera, a close-up of his leather jacket open to reveal a shining, naked torso; and Elvis sings "Devil In Disguise" as the biker lies out on his bed, the camera panning slowly up and down the length of his body. He is attractive (the biker "looks like an angel") but he also awakens "forbidden" desires: he is a "devil in disguise".

Later, a scene of Christ and his disciples ministering, cut in and out with a biker strutting along the street, is accompanied by The Crystals singing "He's A Rebel"; and a scene of Christ entering Jerusalem on a donkey, cut in and out with pictures of Nazis is paired with Little Peggy March singing "I Will Follow Him". There are scenes

that suggest Christ is being fellated by a man who kneels in front of him (a close-up of an erect penis is cut in quickly), and Christ is also "seen" by the audience to be intently watching the bikers' orgiastic party, as though he wants to join in.

These juxtaposed images of the "serious"--the dominant discourses of church and military that have been responsible for gay oppression (Chapter One)--are undercut with humour, acknowledging a history of violence and denial but turning it round. The signified discourses of Church, State and masculinity are disrupted in an act of subcultural affirmation. This gay bricolage as subcultural aesthetic resurfaces frequently in popular music culture. For example, punks in Britain performed similar acts of refusal with images of the Queen and safety pins (Chapter Four).

In *Scorpio Rising* images of oppression are reduced to mere figures of fun--"I will follow him" the song announces, but we are given images of Christ and Hitler. These "leaders of the pack" suggest that Anger's audience equates heterosexual teenage infatuation with hegemeonic oppression which is then, through the biker, rejected in favour of camp, homoerotic imagery.

This film and others like it turn movie-going into an act of rebellion and refusal for the gay subculture. Anger appropriates dominant cultural productions by turning an ostensibly heterosexual selection of popular songs into a witty and erotic act of bricolage, inserting a gay reading into texts that have for the most part excluded gays, and juxtaposing them with references to hegemonic attempts to contain gay subcultures throughout history. He thus

creates various levels of meaning through "forbidden" fun. Early gay film in America, therefore, reveals a practice which explains Bakhtin's theories of carnival as potentially revolutionary activity.[7]

Anger's films are simultaneously erotic, serious, amusing, and rich with possible meanings. His use of camp defuses the discourses, historic and popular, that exclude gay men by parodying and re-reading them from a gay perspective. Gay camp humour, however, is sometimes obscure to the non-gay audience. Its rage at the containment which gay men have daily experience of, and the powerlessness visited upon gay cultures by the hegemony, seems deflected into mere laughter to such non-initiates. Susan Sontag, for example, stresses that camp is not an act of aggression:

> Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation--not judgement. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (or, if it is cynicism, it's not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism)...The man who insists on high and serious pleasures is depriving himself of pleasure; he continually restricts what he can enjoy;...Camp taste supervenes upon good taste as a daring and witty hedonism.[8]

Un Chant d'Amour (1950)

Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour*, in contrast to Anger's irreverence and humour, represents sexual desire in the form of cravings and fantasies of men locked in prison cells. Striking distinct cinematic contrasts (by use of light and shade) between the sordidness of the prison life and prison sex and the tenderness of the love fantasies, this film represents the gay dreamer imagining men mastur-

bating in all of the other cells; imagining himself running hand-in-hand with a lover, through the countryside, free not only of the prison warden but of all restrictions to make love in the open, under the sky; imagining, tenderly, an arm reaching out blind through the barred prison windows, swinging a small bunch of flowers over and back, inches from the grasp of another outstretched, reaching arm; imagining, through the act of sharing cigarette smoke by a straw stuck through the wall from one cell into the next, sexual contact.

Images of flowers appear throughout the film, passed between lovers mouths in a kiss, dangled on a string from a prison cell, worn as a garland, covering a crotch. Flowers take on obvious sexual signification in this gay context, and are used to represent the phallus as gentle, contrary to conventional descriptions of masculinity as hard, thrusting, and aggressive.

One can read the prison as Genet's personal history--he spent many years in prison, on charges of "vagrancy", "indecency" and theft--but also as a metaphor for the cage in which gay men have been forced to live. Containment is again the issue. Scenes of centaurs--naked bands of men on horseback roaming the countryside outside the prison walls, and represented at the climax to masturbatory fantasies--evoke a mythic, prehistoric identity for gay men and their fantasies. The "natural", animal insticts and repressed lust--denied by the discourses of history and represented by jailers and other systems of control in the movie--are unleashed in dream sequences.

Genet also writes of his secret sexual experiences and rituals, and his humiliations as an openly gay man in prisons. His celebrated

prison novel, Our Lady of the Flowers, is an anthology of the kinds of masturbatory fantasy sequences on which the film is constructed.[9] Its narrator, locked in solitary confinement, argues that gay dreams and open celebrations of masturbation are the only true existentialist rebellion against systems of God, family and human law.[10] One assumes that his film, like Anger's *Fireworks*, is therefore a "wet dream".

Genet's work celebrates deviance: he spent most of his life wandering through countries and homosexual encounters, stealing and living by his wits, all the time writing, and refusing to comply with social expectations and demands. His novels and films, like his plays--which are regularly performed by gay theatre troupes--are essential sites of gay subcultural resistance.

Moreover, it is probably because Genet himself is an icon of such resistance, that Hebdige opens his study of subcultural style with reference to this gay cultural production as quintessentially oppositional.[11] After initial mention of "Genet's 'unnatural' sexuality"[12], however, Hebdige does not develop the issue of Genet's homosexuality nor of his work as central to an understanding of gay subculture. This appropriation of a gay cultural text and the consequent unexplained silence within Hebdige's cultural theory has, in part, prompted this thesis (Chapter One).

Le Sang d'un Poète (1930) and Orphée (1950)

Gay underground films were produced mostly in America, but some were also produced in Europe, in France and Germany. Much of the work

of Jean Cocteau, for example, is regarded as examplary of its genre. Cocteau, like some of the Americans who made films after him, also uses dream and fantasy motif in his treatment of gay subject matter. His films *Le Sang d'un Poète* and *Orphée* both represent the magic of imagination and dream. Men gaze into mirrors (a symbol of gay men loving other men) and eventually step through the glass into another, wonderful "forbidden" world where they are free to pursue their desires. Again, as with all of these films about dreams and imagination, there is the suggestion that these are secret areas (dreams and mirrors) where a gay man is free to wander and explore the "forbidden" world of homosexual desire, and where he may not be colonized.

The emergence of independent film

After Stonewall--the foundational moment in the altered consciousness of contemporary gay subculture (Chapter One)--gay men began to make substantial gains in social and political power. Subsequent to this radicalization, underground film was no longer an isolated, inaccessible phenomenon. Repertory cinemas discovered large audiences who, in turn, could now justify the expense of full productions.

The concentration of high-profile gay male communities with economic presence in places such as the East Village in New York and the Castro Valley in San Francisco meant that a new market, or target audience, emerged in the consumer arena. Gay film festivals served this community and a trickle effect saw the opening to gay film of repertory cinemas, clubs and arthouses in most major cities. It was

now possible to support alternate screenings of gay-themed films because mainstream cinema did not adequately fulfill the political, social, and libidinous agendas of this newly-emerged subculture (Chapter Two).

Gay underground film, however--especially for audiences weaned on the mainstream--suffered from low production values and there was a limited number of films to view. Gay audiences were hungry for new representations that reflected more accurately their new situations and desires. Private funding for larger scale and more ambitious projects began to fill a perceived void. These "independent" films were marketable through repertory cinemas.

Independent film is screened in most major cities. Some cities, Vancouver included, have not only four or five repertory cinemas and clubs, but also a corner of the commercial circuit as in the Cineplex Odeon ten-theatre complex at the Royal Centre, that show gay film. The corporate distribution of fringe films--some of which are gay--to selected areas of the metropolises where a gay community has a high profile (such as San Francisco's Castro Valley, New York's East Village and Vancouver's West End) is a further commercial innovation that extends the possibilities of access for gay men to gay-made representations in film.

For example, filmmakers such as Rosa von Prauheim and Derek Jarman--gay men who have been making films for gay audiences from the sixties into the nineties, and whose works thus reveal this transition from underground to independent film--now have their work distributed

on this commercial fringe circuit.

Every independent film, as a direct consequence of this history, bears a "burden of representation" because each filmmaker is assumed to represent an entirety of gay cultural practices. This demand is made doubly on the filmmaker. Gay filmmakers--especially in America--are held accountable by mainstream media critics for their films' subject matter, especially when scripts and imagery depart from the usual Hollywood-mediated fare (Chapter Two). Gay audiences, in turn, complain about perceived "compromises" the filmmakers have made in representing their communities and their diverse subcultures.

Some gay filmmakers feel that to represent gays as perverse, for example, is more to the point than to represent them as "good", or "normal", since this could then include a variety of gayness while at the same time offering a critique of dominant culture. Such directors as Kenneth Anger, Jean Genet, Tom Kalin, Rosa von Praunheim, and Derek Jarman can be grouped in this political "camp". To do otherwise, this politicized position claims, is to be untrue to gay history, which is after all a document of brutality at the hands of the Nazis, social and political oppression under conservative governments everywhere, as well as a story of love, strength, and survival through the ages.

Consequently, film production by politicized gay people (individual directors or collectives) represents gay men in a wide variety of ways, perverse or otherwise. Gay director Rosa von Praunheim, for instance, insists on making deliberatley provocative films that incorporate all sorts of representations of perversity. In von Praunheim's 1970 film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die*

Situation in der er lebt (It is not the Homosexual Who is Perverse, but the Situation in Which He Finds Himself), these include every stereotype--"bitchiness, predatoriness, piss-elegance, and joyless promiscuity; the voice-over commentary is derisive, making liberal use of derogatory terms for gays".[13] While he has been attacked from all points along the political spectrum for showing the "perversity" of gay life and therefore representing gays in a "negative" light, Richard Dyer clarifies von Praunheim's position thus:

> How gay men live in society *is* perverse, this is what oppression reduces them to; society does not just restrict homosexuality, but prevents its expression to the very core. This is what society has to be indicted with, and hence what must be shown.[14]

The range of independent film

Independent filmmakers are free of many of the restrictions that inhibit gay representation in the Hollywood studios, and from dictates of commerce, profit, ideology, studio policies and politics, and the aesthetics, codes, and conventions that rule there (see Chapter Two). Independent film is mostly just that: film financed by independent, private individuals. Directors are relatively free, therefore, to air their own political beliefs, and to pursue their own vision.

That is not to say that there are no restrictions on the production of independent film. Funding is obviously more restricting here in many ways than it is elsewhere, since it is individual, and therefore limited. The social and political climate at any given time--as well as the interconnected vagaries of the censorship boards, film

categorization processes and distribution deals--constitute a further set of restrictions and obstacles to the production of independent film.

The films in this new, independent category are subject to more restraints than their underground predecessors, but less than those films in the mainstream. This shift allows filmmakers more political, ideological and artistic space to work within than is afforded their colleagues working for Hollywood studios.

In many cases, gay independent filmmakers continue the aesthetic practices of their underground predecessors, and some of the more recent films discussed below inherit and acknowledge that legacy. The range of gay representations and images available at this point on the spectrum is wide. Film narratives or plots do not need to "explain" gayness, nor do they need to treat gay lives as "problems" for society: the codes and generic formulas of Hollywood production can be abandoned.

Independent gay film, as with underground gay film, acknowledges and speaks to a gay audience. Plots and images of defiance, resistance and opposition are most frequently represented at this point on the spectrum. Watching gay films, a gay audience does not have to be as alert, for example, to imposed conventions: gay-made films can speak in a less mediated (seemingly more direct) way to gay audiences. Some independent films, however, jeopardize this potential in a bid for mainstream distribution, and wider commercial success.

Parting Glances (1986)

This film represents a pair of young, middle-class, well-educated gay men, typically urban, who are going through the same sort of relationship problems that many heterosexuals have to deal with: jealousy, demands on each others' time, degrees of committment, and so on. The film was boldly promoted as "a gay yuppie movie" originally, a move that in North America did not necessarily alienate many gay movie-goers[15] but which in Britain drew harsh reviews from some gay critics on the left, who saw both the marketing and the movie as an attempt to integrate gay men into a heterosexually-defined and controlled discourse, marking it as a "*we're* just like you" movie.[16]

Although it offers representations of gay lives as more diverse than does *Longtime Companion* (discussed above)--another American independent film with its eyes on the possibilities of cross-over marketing, *Parting Glances* suffers from attempts to move these representations into the mainstream. As a result, both the gay audience and the mainstream audience recognize that the film is not addressed to them, producing alienation on both sides.

Director Bill Sherwood observes mainstream codes in the film's treatment of homosexuality, keeping love scenes between the two men off-screen, for instance, and for perpetuating the hegemonic myth that a connection exists, automatically, between homosexuality and misogyny. In the film, the semi-closeted Robert (John Bolger) invites confession from his married employer of a secret gay life lived only while abroad, and positions Michael (Richard Ganoug) and through him the audience (us), as accomplices in this conspiracy against the wife,

who graciously holds the evening and their lives together. In a related moment, when Michael expresses surprise at the revelation by a long-time colleague of his lover that most of the people who work with them don't even know that he is gay, the colleague replies: "You'd be amazed what people blind themselves to!"

This misogyny is undeniably present and unsettling: the only justification for it is that it is represented, as in *The Lost Language of Cranes* (discussed below), as endemic to closeted existence. The supposed link between out gay behaviour and misogyny has been debunked in both gay politics and recent feminist theory as an ill-informed and dangerous myth.[17]

Because of this and other disputed concerns in the film, critics from both the gay left and from mainstream media have taken director Sherwood to task. He is condemned both for observing mainstream film conventions and for not doing so. This illustrates the difficulties gay filmmakers must face-- the "burden of representation"--when political integrity is seen to be in conflict with mainstream marketing of gay films.

For instance, although homosexuality is not a "problem" in this film--a fact that acknowledges a gay audience--it is precisely a charge levelled at it by the mainstream media, whom the film has been marketed towards, and who are also acknowledged as audience. Sherwood defends himself against the mainstream attack:

> There are people who don't understand why I didn't deal with "the problems" of homosexuality more and the point is, there is no problem. The problem is with heterosexual reaction. David Denby in New York said homosexuality is

not a valid topic for a film. What is?[18]

When one considers the plethora of mainstream films from the late 1980's that treat heterosexuality as problematic, the charges levelled at Sherwood and *Parting Glances* reveal a double standard which is possibly heterosexist: the same criterion is not equally applied to mainstream, non-gay film criticism.[19]

Moreover, the film responds to this criticism. Nick (Steve Buscami), a character who has contacted AIDS and who is also the most politicized character, offers a critique of the dilemma when he says to Michael who looks after his well-being: "Did you ever wonder how straights could be so narcissistic that 99% of everything you see is about them?". This remark reminds the audience (although it is directed to non-gays) of what is generally taken for granted: all popular love songs, all romantic movies, and all television shows are exclusively heterosexual. There is rarely any questioning of this phenomenon.

Gay left culture critic Mark Finch, in a discussion of contemporary gay film, points out that a determining factor in the decoding process is the nature of the address: "Who is being addressed is as important as who is being represented; in fact knowing how the audience is being defined helps us make sense of the images."[20]

Labelled for the market a "gay yuppie film", *Parting Glances* illustrates the limits and restrictions which gay cultural production encounters when it is targeted at the mainstream. *Parting Glances* reveals a very particular "burden of representation": the film, because of its ambitious attempt to portray a full range of gay lives

in New York, is criticized by gay audiences for failing to live up to an impossible promise.

This is not to say that *Parting Glances*--like *Longtime Companion*--does not advance the efforts of other filmmakers who seek to widen the range of gay representations within mass distributed film. For example, the party scene in *Parting Glances* presents images of a more diverse gay world than "general audiences" have had to consider before. There are young and old; both genders and three orientations are present (lesbian, gay male, heterosexual male and female); and Hispanics, Caucasians, African-Americans, Chinese- and Indo-Americans mingle. In this, Sherwood has represented the claim made in Chapter One that homosexuality and gay subculture transcend traditional cultural categories of race, age, and class.

Recent departures

Unlike the ambitions evident in both mainstream and independent films--to represent a totality of contemporary homosexual subcultural experience--the portrayal of gay men in some recent independent films indicate a new departure. In three films--*My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), and *Young Soul Rebels* (1990)--gay sexuality is represented no longer as a central theme but is nevertheless intregal to the plotline. In these films gayness is no longer a problem that needs justification (Chapter Two) nor is it a preoccupation: gay lives are represented as only part of a larger, more inclusive mosaic of society that both mainstream and independent cinemas

rarely envisage.

In this respect, therefore, these films are made by gay filmmakers or in collaboration with gay scriptwriters and feature gay characters but, unlike the other films discussed at greater length in this thesis, are not representations of gay subculture. These films suggest, instead, that if negatiave political and social attitudes towards gay men can be defused, gay culture may have its place in a reciprocal, future dialogue between several cultures.

My Own Private Idaho, directed by Gus Van Sant, examines the lives of street kids in present-day Oregon. Part of a "new wave" in American cinema, its gay director won several awards for this independent production which at least one critic has analyzed as an allegory for American politics through the 1980's.[21]

Young Soul Rebels, directed by Isaac Julien, plays with and subverts several mainstream codes concerning the representation of gay men. Its larger concern, however, is to represent the Jubilee year in Britain (1978) as a potential cultural and political renaissance for the formerly disenfranchised underclasses. These include immigrants from the Carribean and West Africa, punks, and gay men. Its gay relationships are symbolic of a future that is non-racist, non-homophobic, and multi-cultural. Power structures are negotiated in the film through popular music and liberated sexuality. Those who oppose either, among whom several immigrant groups are featured, are shown to be part of an inherited "English" problem. *Young Soul Rebels* optimistically foregrounds the integration of gay and popular subcul-

tures at a particular historic moment, which is discussed in Chapter Four.

My Beautiful Launderette, scripted by Hanif Kureishi, makes this new departure in the representation of gay subcultures explicit. Kureishi, an out gay writer, explains the atmosphere which paradoxically nurtured gay subculture and oppositional art:

> ...when Thatcher and the Tories were at their most invincible and triumphal, there were a number of attacks on writers. The *Sunday Times*, being the lair of a new, non-traditional, lower middle-class ideological right, especially fostered this hostility. So writers as diverse as Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter and Margaret Drabble, film-makers like Derek Jarman and Stephen Frears, and I, playwrights like David Hare and Caryl Churchill, found themselves being abused and lectured by a part of the media that normally would have ignored them.
>
> Interestingly, none of us could be said to be particularly radical, though Thatcherism tended to push people that way. The slurs resembled nothing so much as the right's desire to construct dreadful enemies against whom it could prove itself. And being concerned liberal artists wasn't really bad enough, though for some conservatives it was pretty bad...We were attacked for complaining, whinging, for the hypocrisy of being successful but wanting to defend the poor. And mostly for not celebrating Thatcher's achievements at a time of censorship, attacks on unions and the welfare state, increasing poverty, escalating redistribution of wealth from poor to rich, and the creation of thuggish yuppies...
>
> The row between us and them was also an argument about language and representation. These people wanted to control the freedom of the imagination. They were afraid of anyone who saw Britain as a racially mixed, run-down, painfully divided, class-ridden place. For their fantasy was a powerful, industrially strong country with a central, homogenous consensual culture. There necessarily would be hinterlands, marginals, freaks, perverts, beggars, one-parent families, and dissidents...
>
> These attacks were helpful. They enabled us to see the uses of writing and film-making as a challenge to the ruling world-view. Writing could undermine assumptions and undercut authoritarian descriptions. Writing mattered.[22]

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Kureishi's script for *My Beautiful Launderette* makes overt claims on the contested terrain of contemporary cinema. With Stephen Frears's direction, the film positions the entire audience as gay for one of the film's most radical scenes.

The love scene between Johnny (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Omar (Gordon Warnecke) at the launderette, towards the end of the film, is perhaps the first time that such a scene has been presented as "integrated" in film, rather than as an extraordinary or deviant element of it. There is no shock involved.

Instead, the film--through its own codes and script--represents gayness as simply a fact of some lives. There is no "reason" that Omar and Johnny are represented as gay: they simply are. Homosexuality is not an issue.

We as audience are positioned as "conspirators" for the important following-up scene of the "discovery". This scene provides the audience with a new perspective on gayness through the film's codes. For example, when Omar's uncle (Saeed Jaffrey) barges into the back room at the launderette and discovers the two young men making love, we are already privy to what he only now learns. We already "know" because we have "shared" in the gay love scene.

This knowledge produces a distinctive audience response. Since the cinematic codes that might more usually introduce and accompany the gay love scene, or indeed any love scene--a slow build-up of dynamic tension, seductive camera angles, romantic music, shots of the lovers bodies, lips, and so on--are absent here, the film has not

"told" us that this is an extraordinary part of the diegesis. Therefore, when Omar's uncle vents his outrage and disgust at the pair, we cannot share such indignation since we have been given no reason--through code, convention, or diegesis--to believe that anything extraordinary has happened. His anger, as a result, is seen to quickly dissipate since it does not get an "approprite" or supportive response, either from the two men or from the audience.

With this crisis overcome, *My Beautiful Launderette* circumvents the representational politics and dilemmas of other first-feature films like *Parting Glances* and *Longtime Companion*, both of which suffer under the burden of representing gay lives and histories.

Merchant/Ivory Productions: Maurice (1987)

Ismail Merchant (producer) and James Ivory (director)--one of the most successful independent teams in recent film history--create in *Maurice* a film that both shoulders that "burden of representation" and transcends the crisis in representing gay subculture that other films have revealed. It not only portrays gay lives in Britain in the early twentieth century, but successfully shows those lives embedded within the hegemonic discourses which continue to oppress gay men today.

What distinguishes this film, however, is that it marks the culmination of a long-term project which this independent filmmaking team did not embark upon until after they had already established a regular audience for their work. Ivory has admitted to wanting to make this

explicitly gay feature film for a long time. Merchant, however, carefully planned its completion and release dates. Even if the film were unpopular, their immediately preceding work--*Room With a View* (1986), which ran for an uninterrupted fifty-three weeks in Vancouver[23]--suggested that audiences would pay to see this "follow-up", another of their adaptations from the novels of E.M. Forster.[24] Merchant admitted this strategy when *Maurice* was premiered at Montreal's World Film Festival:

> I don't know what will happen when our audience sees *Maurice*...They'll be saying, 'Oh, it's those nice people who made *A Room With a View*'...I just don't know.[25]

It is interesting to speculate what the "general audience" does see as the film begins. From the opening credits which run across endpapers from an Edwardian novel, audience expectations of "high art", fine acting, and a directorial attention to details and business are fed. The list of mostly well-known British actors--many of them recognizably members of Ivory's ensemble--continues the seduction. Merchant/Ivory productions, therefore, are trading on their past achievements to subvert their audience's possible rejection of a gay film.

The story might read "straight". A rather ordinary young man, Maurice (James Wilby) grows up in a genteel, middle-class provincial family whose money buys him a private school education and then Cambridge. His mother (Billie Whitelaw) strives for upward mobility through her son, and his sisters are subordinate to this aspiration. That this conservative "nostalgia" about the place of women in a

patriarchal society is unchallenged by the director is the first puzzle facing the audience.

As Maurice prepares to leave school, the film's second puzzle occurs. The Anglican vicar (Simon Callow) explains to Maurice the principles of human reproduction but leaves his explicit diagrams in the sand only to have them discovered almost immediately by a "respectable" family. The moment is unmediated. The audience is left wondering if this is a horrendous gaffe on the part of the vicar, or a satirical comment by the director on stereotypical British repression.

At this point in the narrative, Ivory's "gay" hand as director is, however, apparent. Simon Callow, for example, is one of his regular ensemble actors, adopted by Ivory when other directors would not hire this "out" gay man. And British confusion at frank discussions of sexuality is a stock situation in other Ivory/Merchant productions. Repression and "decency" are again his target.

From here, conventional readings fall apart. Maurice is supposed to deny his initial awakenings to homosexual desire and marry. Marriage in Britain allows men much room for same-sex activities, and doesn't tie the husband into a nuclear, American-style relationship. The British family in this and other Ivory/Merchant films does little together. Men and women occupy separate realms. The men, however, and marriage itself are represented on screen as trammelled and unfulfilled.

Clive (Hugh Grant) does the "right" thing. Maurice's closest friend and first lover, Clive is especially reticent in returning affections. On realizing that Maurice is serious, he quickly

announces his engagement to marry, and drops Maurice from his close circle of friends. He advises Maurice to marry also, if he wishes to "find happiness". As with other films which a "general audience" might be familiar with, marriage is the "solution" to homosexuality. Maurice's subsequent "story" reveals that this solution is impossible, and that homosexuality is not an illness.

Furthermore, Ivory depicts the closeted existence that Clive's paranoias force upon Maurice as misogynistic, responsible for the repression of women. In this aspect, *Maurice* is consistent with *Parting Glances* and *The Lost Language of Cranes*. In a scene at the film's end, Clive's wife looks at him-- not directly, but through the mirror--as though secretly, to catch him off-guard. Whatever it is that she sees, her anxious and troubled face betrays that all is far from well within their marriage.

Gay scripting, gay directing and gay decoding among the audience changes everything.

In the film, the medical model of repression is represented by the family doctor (Denholm Elliot), who refuses even to consider Maurice's anxieties. He dismisses Maurice's questions and fears and eventually refers him to a psychiatrist (Ben Kingsley) who practices an "aversion" therapy, which denies and tries to erase homosexuality, treating it as an aberration and a sickness. Nonetheless, this psychiatrist is Maurice's agent of liberation because he refuses to treat him, suggesting that he leave England instead of taking a "cure". "England," he explains, "has always been disinclined to

accept human nature".

The legal model of homosexual repression is also represented through the depiction of entrapment. This operates by a police officer either "arranging" a rendezvous with a gay man or "approaching" him in the guise of another gay man and, upon having his (usually unspoken) "proposition" accepted, immediately arrests him. This method of containing gayness through prosecution is still practiced in Britain today. For example, an exactly similar scene appears in the 1990 film from Britain *Young Soul Rebels*.

In *Maurice*, Viscount Risely encounters a soldier in a pub who agrees to a sexual liaison (no words are spoken). Outside, police suddenly appear out of the shadows of the back alley and arrest the Viscount. At his subsequent trial on a morals charge, nobody comes to his aid. He is abandoned in "disgrace" by family, friends, and colleagues, taken to trial, "scandalized" in the tabloids, found guilty, and incarcerated for his "crime". He has done nothing incriminating, yet social pressure to maintain respectability at all costs prevents members of his own family from public appearance or indeed any involvement in their son's "disgrace".

For Maurice, sexual longings take on a physical shape in the homoerotic environment of the boxing club. Surrounded by sweating young men, Maurice clearly glows with pleasure from instructing them in the art of boxing. This was, until recently, a "safe" way for gay men of the upper classes to mingle in an environment where there was a certain ammount of sexual gratification to be gained, at least subliminally. The upper-class man "patronized" a particular sports club,

offering funding and coaching in his spare time as a way of "giving" to the less-well-off. This practice was in operation at the time that Forster wrote the novel on which the film is based, and continued until after World War II in England. For instance, the working-man's sports club is depicted in a contemporary English gay novel, The Swimming-Pool Library, as a continuing source of fascination for the upper-class gay man, who seeks the masculinity and security that the grateful members of the club offer.[26]

As Derek Jarman does in *Edward II* (below), Ivory identifies religious discourse as a primary oppressor of homosexuality (Chapter One). Maurice, however, rejects this oppression, the medical definition of sickness, and the social ignominy that Clive warns him against.

The respectability of Britain's ruling class is shown in the film to be a trap for homosexual men. Unable to be open about their sexuality for fear of "disgracing" the family name and social standing, the only option open to them is seen to be downward mobility. For example, it is within the working classes that upper-class Maurice finds the only honesty and loyalty. It is Alec Scudder (Rupert Graves), the game-keeper's assistant, who responds openly and honestly to Maurice's gayness immediately upon meeting him. Alec makes his way to Maurice, defying all rules of class behaviour. His actions--climbing into Maurice's bedroom window; boldly taking all initiative in love-making; challenging Maurice in front of respected members of his class--are all acts of "refusal" of the class system, and, by extension, of oppressive discourses.

Like Viscount Risely, Maurice gets no support from his friends when he encounters fear and anxiety that are connected with his homosexuality. The effect of Maurice's decision to respond openly to Alec and their love is clearly shown to benefit all concerned, however. All anxiety leaves him, and he immediately apologizes to his sister, whom he has injured with vicious words because of his fraught dealings with the "closeted" Clive. Maurice is now kind and considerate to all around him. Maurice shows us how an "out" existence liberates, and the film tells us that it is the only possible "solution" to a troubled life of lies and deceit.

Although this fiction is set in Britain in the early 1900's--only ten years after the sensational publicity of Oscar Wilde's trial and incarceration--and gives much indication of the great anxiety and fear that gay men experienced, Ivory argues that little has really changed:

> It is relevant to today's life, even though it is set in Edwardian England. People in the dilemma of "coming out", at least in English-speaking countries, today as then go through the same turmoil; it's really only the laws that have changed, and perhaps they'll change back again. Despite all the advances in psychiatric understanding about why we act as we do, all kinds of lib that came and are now perhaps going, I don't think we've changed at all, really. We still have to work the same things out.[27]

Like Jarman's *Edward II*, *Maurice* also reminds the gay audience just how important it is to reclaim, remember, and "out" gay history. Only one year after these remarks by Ivory, the Thatcher government introduced Clause 28 in Britain, one of the most repressive anti-gay laws in that country's history (Chapter One).

Ivory constructs a history of gay culture for Maurice--and, through him, for the gay audience--by "outing" gay cultural texts and productions from the distant and recent past. "Outing" is a neologism for a gay political activity involving the public voicing--through poster and street chanting--of the names of men who lead secret gay lives and who are, therefore, taken to task for collaborating in the continued silencing/oppression of gay realities. For example, as the students read Plato in their tutor's rooms at Cambridge, they approach a discussion of homosexual love in the text. Maurice is seen to be learning and realizing something about his own homosexuality: he realizes for the first time that it has a history. However, before the readers actually reach the "revealing" scene, the tutor brusquely instructs them to pass quickly over (without looking at or reading) "the abominable sin of the Greeks". The film "outs" gay history here, revealing what has always been concealed, even in the halls of academe.

The film also "outs" the past through its use of the musical soundtrack, which is comprised of a selection of Tchaikovsky's works, a composer whose career has moved uncertainly and uneasily between "high" and "low" culture through the decades, gaining and losing favour according to changing public tastes, echoing in many ways the "favour" and "disfavour" gay men themmselves have always experienced at the hands of lawmakers. Here Ivory employs intertextual cinematic reference: Tchaikovsky was "popularized" recently by filmmaker Ken Russell in *The Music Lovers* (1971) who represented the composer as a homosexual "trapped" in a conventional marriage. The soundtrack,

then, also "outs" the past and helps Maurice learn his own story as a gay man.

Maurice is introduced to the music of Tchaikovsky for the first time by Clive, in his rooms at Cambridge, and is immediately captivated by it. Clive reluctantly admits to liking it: "Such beauty from a poisoned well", he mumbles, suggesting that Tchaikovsky is a "diseased" creature. It is Clive, the "closetted" gay, who accepts and recirculates the dominant definition of homosexuality by using the historical medical "definition" of another gay man (Chapter One).

Maurice, in contrast, asserts his liking for the music without acknowledging Clive's references to the composer, thereby silently "refusing" the definition, just as he "refuses" the religious definition of homosexuality from the vicar. These refusals signal Maurice's rejection of a closetted life, and a willingness to explore and construct a gay identity.

Given its setting in the early 1900's, *Maurice* is profoundly optimistic for the future, and therefore challenges its audiences in contemporary cinemas who inhabit that future to construct Alec and Maurice's lives together. The "necessary mythology" of a happy ending that Ivory's direction provides is just what Forster wanted in his novel, Maurice:

> A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood.[28]

It is interesting to note that the possibly allegorical reading of the text--gamekeeper Alec Scudder's liberation through sex of the

upper class protagonist--predates D.H. Lawrence's use of the same motif in Lady Chatterley's Lover by fourteen years.[29] This metaphorical reading of class in England is an adjunct to a film which particularizes the persecution and repression of gay men in twentieth century Britain.

Derek Jarman: Edward II (1991)

Many of the films by independent makers still bear traces of the previous underground tradition. For example, films as diverse as Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976)--the homoerotic and sado-masochistic life of the saint, scripted in Latin, *Jubilee* (1978)--punk as apocalypse, and *Edward II* celebrate homosexual desire while at the same time identifying clearly the source of the historic attempts to repress and contain those desires. Film texture and set design comment upon and extend Jarman's representations of homosexual desire and its critique of heterosexual culture.

Jarman's films reveal the influence of Kenneth Anger's aesthetic, in particular. Like Anger, Jarman cinematically reveals a direct connection between gay fantasy and desire, dominant discourses of repression, and the politics of representation in explicit and discursive ways. Again, like Anger, Jarman approaches his subject matter with concern only for his gay audience and for the frustration he assumes that they share with him, especially concerning the non-representation of gay men in cinema:

> It is difficult enough to be queer, but to be queer in the cinema is almost impossible. Heterosexuals have fucked up

> the screen so completely that there's hardly room for us to kiss there.[30]

His films reveal an increasing urgency in Jarman's agenda: to break with the perceived regime of heterosexual imagery and narrative. His work articulates a finely honed fury at what he perceives to be the historic process of silencing gay culture.

As proof of the "erasing" of gay men from cultural and historical records, Jarman explains how, when he sought a book on Gaveston (the king's lover in *Edward II*), he "found nothing, only a great silence."[31] This film is--to date--Jarman's most fully engaged and developed testament of gay rage. It requires little decoding by Jarman's established gay audience, but may present some confusions to the "general audience".

Edward II represents gay men as rebellious but almost powerless in their opposition to the state and its values. Homosexuality in the film represents the crossing of gender boundaries, and thus is extended to signify a refusal to submit to dominant order. For example, the child (Jody Graber) is represented as embarked upon a personal journey of defiance and resistance, and figures as a symbol of refusal of male socialization. In the first scene he tries on his mother's hat; later, he dons her jewellry, then her make-up. In another scene he sips from a coke can, a humourous version of Jarman's refusal to conform to the cinematic "period". Both child and filmmaker transgress, stand outside, and invite their audiences to likewise defy convention.

The child witnesses the brutality around him, and survives it.

We can read his antics throughout the film as symbolic of personal gay histories of resistance and opposition. Jarman depicts him carefully but defiantly charting a course through dangerous terrain, looking for his own cultural space. He must live apart from the dominant order (represented by the Family, the Church and Army) which kills both his father and the gentler, gay culture which is brutally exterminated at the film's close.

As with many gay films, marriage again plays an important violent role in this film. But what some reviewers of the film perceived as misogyny in its treatment of marriage and the Queen Isabella (Tilda Swinton) reveals, on more careful attention to the dialogue, that such a conclusion is erroneous[32]. For example, it is revealed in the film that Edward (Steven Waddington) and Gaveston (Andrew Tiernan) were childhood friends, and enjoyed a teenage romance. Isabella (Tilda Swinton) says to Gaveston, "Villain, tis thou that robst me of my lord." Gaveston replies, "Madam, tis you who rob me of my lord," revealing in their linguistic difference the class struggle which informs the State's persecution of a classless gay culture based on libidinal fulfillment (Chapter One). Isabella has attempted to come between the two male lovers: her actions may therefore be read as the employment of marriage to contain and to "cure" Edward of his homosexuality.

Isabella conspires to destroy Gaveston, and then Edward. She is motivated by power and condoned by the apparatuses of State, Church and Family. She plots with Mortimer (Nigel Terry), not only to dispose of Gaveston but to murder Edward so that she may assume total

control. And it is Isabella who is alive at the film's close, having achieved her goal, sitting on the throne.

The film set creates a claustrophobic narrative mood, providing negligible contrast in light and decor between Edward's (Steven Waddington) dungeon and the inhabited spaces above it. All the film's locations are condensed into flat, grey, featureless spaces, providing no clue as to the supposed time and place of the action, thereby emphasising the unchanging, timeless nature of the violence visited upon "deviance". An old factory, tunnelled and chambered below ground, serves as the site for all scenes.

As well, the boundaries of the action are clearly drawn and literally contained within the narrow corridors, windowless rooms, and doorless walls of the film's universe. Also, it is a suspension of disbelief and a distancing device in movie-going terms since the site is obviously a film set: action takes place as in the contained space of a theatre, and all that is missing from the mise-en-scène is the film crew.

Past and present are conflated in time, a cinematic device that encapsulates historical continuity. In this way, Jarman represents gay lives as unchanged through time: sexual liberation and human rights are highly contested terrains. For example, the film represents the church and state of the present as brutal as in the past. The "holy" clergy that contrives with "decent" politicians and the army to banish Gaveston--a gauntlet of clergy spitting on him as he leaves, blood-spattered and beaten in his leather jacket and denim jeans--are represented as the same priests, politicians and "riot

squad" police that brutally oppose contemporary demands for sexual liberation. Jarman also sympathetically films a group of lesbians and gay men--homosexual protesters against the infamous Clause 28--carrying banners from ACT UP and Queer Nation (Chapter One). These are Edward and Gaveston's only supporters: an army of lovers against the Church and the State of the historical narrative. They are met by riot troops, a SWAT team, and charging mounted police who baton, gas, and pummel them. Gaveston's exile and assassination are effected by these same medieval forces in modern drag now battling the gay men and lesbians of contemporary Britain.

The corporate board-room is the centre for the film's twentieth century version of state violence. This time, the earls and aristocrats are the developers and landed money-class who scheme and vent their hate for Gaveston, offended as much by the "vulgarity" of his lower-class mien as by his homosexuality. Violence is shown as the overriding, distinctive characteristic of heterocentric social values. Significantly, Jarman dedicates Queer Edward II, his record of making the film, to "the repeal of all anti-gay laws, particularly Section 28."[33] This law is discussed in Chapter One and in relation to *Maurice* (above).

Like Ivory and Forster in that film, Jarman provides a "necessary mythology", rescuing Edward from the play's inevitable conclusions. In the film, Edward only dreams the horrendous murder which his wife plans for him and then contracts out: she will--according to Marlowe's script--have Edward killed by forcing a red-hot poker into his anus. Jarman rewrites Marlowe's ending, thereby creating an

"escape" from hegemonic violence. Edward wakes up screaming from history's nightmare and escapes. This gives new hope to an otherwise grisly and desolate history.

Jarman's use of the soundtrack introduces some humour into the film. With it he also collapses time and expands the gay historical content of the film by reference to other gay authors. Annie Lennox sings "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye", a song written in the 1920's by gay composer Cole Porter. The film thus amalgamates a gay text (Marlowe's play) with a gay-directed film and then inserts a gay soundtrack. Lennox recorded this song for the 1990 compact disc entitled *Red, Hot & Blue* (twenty Cole Porter songs by twenty-one performers and groups), the profits from which go to AIDS research and relief.[34] Jarman directed her video for this song which takes on an even deeper gay context by its inclusion in the film. Jarman himself is HIV positive (HIV is a viral disease which, available information suggests, leads to AIDS in 50% of cases).

This film is culturally specific in many ways that other independent films are not, and can be re-contextualized by reference to the time and place of production, and to the director himself. Anger among Britain's gay men at the inactivity on the part of the government in AIDS research and education was exacerbated in the late 1980's at the government's measures to "control" AIDS by introducing a repressive anti-gay law (Clause 28) that forbids the "promotion" of homosexuality.

Given the confrontations that Jarman faces as a gay man in a largely non-gay profession in a country where laws are written outlaw-

ing the "promotion" of homosexuality in schools and local communities--which is the gist of Clause 28, he answers his own question "How to make a film of a gay love affair and get it commissioned [?]" with "Find a dusty old play and violate it."[35] His anger--here revealed in an otherwise camp aside--fuels the film. This anger also marks the film's closing words with a particular darkness as Jarman speaks through Edward: "Come death, and with thy fingers close my eyes, Or if I live let me forget myself."

In an historical note, Jarman explains that Christopher Marlowe, who wrote the play on which the script is based, was a gay man whose death has never been fully explained. Colin MacCabe speculates that the reason Marlowe's death is still a mystery to this day is because, as a gay man,

> he was privy to too many sexual secrets. It has become wearingly obvious in our own century that political and sexual secrets make the most likely of bedfellows. In an age when sodomy was a capital offence, more than one Council member may have feared that Marlowe's testimony would not only reveal too much about his career as a spy, but would culminate in a fatal "outing".[36]

It may be, therefore, that Marlowe died because he threatened to "out" his persecutors and prosecutors. Jarman honours those efforts in his film, and seeks to avenge Marlowe's death: "Marlowe outs the past--why don't we out the present?"he asks.[37] The rest--how to continue resisting, how to fight the bloody repressions and censures of history--is left for the audience to imagine.

In *Edward II*, Jarman demands that his gay audience rise up and actively confront the culture which denies them a history and a future. The effect of his film is cathartic. There are no mainstream

cinematic conventions in Jarman's portrayals of gay desire; it is a chronicle of relentless aggression by the smugly correct forces of "decency" against gay lives which have yet to make and control their own representations. Although Clause 28 would make illegal the "promotion" of homosexuality, *Edward II* leaves a gay audience ready to take up arms.

Jarman speaks to that gay audience in a cinematic language that appears inaccessible to non-gay audiences who have been prevented from recognizing a gay/oppositional position by a systematic and exclusive diet of heterosexual imagery and narrative.

Some Canadian newspaper reviews of the film, however, suggest that "straight" audiences do not see this film's gay encodings. The suppression of gay subcultural activities has led to an inability by non-gays to recognize the oppositional critiques of hegemony which gay self-representations embody.

The systemic blindness to gay culture (Chapter One) leads the reviewer of The Vancouver Sun, for example, to betray homophobic attitudes when describing the film for a readership which must include a large population of gay men: the relationship between Edward and Gaveston is dismissed as "a urinal encounter". The film is condemned for what it does not do, its possible imputations against heterosexual culture are glossed over, and there is a libidinous confusion over the film's politics of desire.[38]

Notes to Chapter Three

1. Richard Dyer, Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 102.

2. Dyer, 102.

3. Richard Dyer examines the large number of gay filmmakers in this early underground scene in Chapter 3, "Underground and after", of Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 102-173.

4. Dyer, 102-103.

5. Richard Dyer, Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 103.

6. Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 98.

7. Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, translated by Michael Holquist (Cambridge: Massachussetts Institute of Technology Press, 1965).

8. Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation, (New York: Delta, 1981), 291.

9. Jean Genet, Our Lady of the Flowers (1943), translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

10. See Jean-Paul Sartre's "Introduction" to Our Lady of the Flowers, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 1-49. (This is excerpted from Sartre's longer study, Saint Genet).

11. Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London and New York: Methuen, 1979), 1.

12. Hebdige, 2.

13. Richard Dyer, Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 218.

14. Dyer, 218.

15. Darrell Yates Rist, "Fear and Loving and AIDS", Film Comment 22:2 (Mar-Apr 1986), 44-50.

16. Mark Finch, "Business as Usual: Substitution and Sex in *Prick Up Your Ears* and Other Recent Gay-Themed Movies", Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture, eds. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (London: Unwin

Hyman, 1989), 78.

17. Joseph Bristow, "Homophobia/misogyny: Sexual fears, sexual definitions", Coming On Strong: Gay Politics and Culture, eds. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 54-75. Edmund White assumes much of the same terrain in "When The Genders Got Confused: The Odd Woman, The New Woman and the Homosocial", Times Literary Supplement (April 12, 1991): 5-6. For a feminist defense of homosexual culture against charges of misogyny see Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) and Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

18. Quoted by Jay Scott in "A Sexual Journey", The Globe and Mail (April 18, 1986), A11.

19. *The War of the Roses; sex, lies and video tape; When Harry Met Sally; Fatal Attraction; Jagged Edge:* these and many other contemporary films suggest that the real but hidden "problem" of Hollywood film is the relationship between men and women.

20. Finch, 78.

21. Shirley Goldberg, "*My Own Private Idaho*: Narcolepsy in America", Canadian Dimension (September 1992), forthcoming.

22. Hanif Kureishi, "Introduction" to London Kills Me: Three Screenplays and Four Essays (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), ix-x.

23. This film which cost $3 million to produce, has grossed more than $68 million around the world, according to Bernard Weinraub, "A marriage made in Hollywood", The Globe and Mail (July 28, 1992), A10.

24. E.M. Forster, Maurice (1914). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

25. Quoted by Jay Scott in "Merchant and Ivory unveil another view of Forster", The Globe and Mail (August 25, 1987), A13.

26. Allan Hollinghurst, The Swimming-Pool Library (New York: Random House, 1988).

27. Quoted by Jay Scott in "Merchant and Ivory unveil another view of Forster", The Globe and Mail (August 25, 1987), A13.

28. E.M. Forster, "A Terminal Note" (1960), Maurice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 218.

29. Forster's novel was finished and locked away in 1914, whereas Lawrence's was first published in 1928.

30. Derek Jarman, "Introduction" to Queer Edward II (BFI Pub-

lishing, 1991).

31. Jarman, 6.

32. Elizabeth Aird, "Jarman as kingmaker makes right royal bore", The Vancouver Sun (June 19, 1992), C6.

33. Jarman, "Introduction" to Queer Edward II.

34. Various artists. *Red, Hot & Blue*. Chrysalis Records. CD: VKS 41799.

35. Jarman, "Introduction".

36. Colin MacCabe, "*Edward II*: Throne of Blood", Sight and Sound (Oct 1991), 12.

37. Jarman, "Introduction".

38. Elizabeth Aird, "Jarman as kingmaker makes right royal bore", The Vancouver Sun (June 19, 1992), C6. See also Jay Scott, "Historical tragedy set to Cole Porter", The Globe and Mail (June 19, 1992), A11.

Chapter Four

From Dharma Bums to Karma Chameleons: The Appropriation of Gay Subculture by Youth Cultures

Introduction

The low profile of overt homosexual expression in popular music as compared, for example, with the (apparently) proportionately higher profile of gay men in the visual and literary arts begs the question: why? If the arguments of Chapter One are correct, one reason could well be that cultural theorists of music and youth cultures do not know what it is they are observing. This chapter examines, briefly, the history of rock'n'roll and examines why the apparently favourable circumstances created by an "alternative" culture do not support, to any sustaining degree, openly gay expression.

There is, however, a dichotomy between this lack of support, for whatever reasons, and mainstream pop's continuing flirtations with bisexuality, homosexuality and androgyny in lyrical content, personal style and public spectacle. This chapter suggests that there is an almost unknown history of unacknowledged appropriations of style and aesthetics, which at various times during the history of rock'n'roll have been all-pervasive, from the gay subculture by popular music culture. To date, the only attempt to address this obscured history has been made by Jon Savage, who argues that the issue of sexuality is central to popular music and culture:

> This is patently not an area that has been officially acknowledged. Even in its inchoate beginnings, pop culture was forced to turn to the sexually divergent or avant garde, for it was only in the spaces that they inhabited that this new world could be recognised and could develop.

> Pop's relationship to different ideas of sexuality and gender is thus deep and intricate: although it frequently denies it, it is from the milieux and sensibilities of the sexually divergent that pop culture draws much of its sustenance.[1]

Rock, Folk and Pop through the Sixties

In the late 1950's, the advent of rock'n'roll brought about great and sudden social changes. The creation of a subculture by and for that new human breed, the "teenager", posed a threat and a challenge to the hegemonic culture.[2] Sexuality was celebrated and a new generation asserted itself as distinctively different from the old. The traditional sex-roles, however, far from being challenged, were still rigidly re-inforced. The only signs of sexual deviation in popular culture were Little Richard's concern for his make-up and hairstyle, and Liberace's obsession with traditional "good taste". The former had obvious great difficulty dealing with a hostile reality, while the latter went to great lengths to deny his true sexuality. Little Richard refused to accept simpler reasons offered for denying him access to the airwaves:

> Some of the television shows were refusing me because of my hair. *Ninth Street West* told me they didn't want the image I was building with the kids on television. They really couldn't explain it. I was very hurt. This was my style and my living. Everybody was wearing long hair. I just don't understand it.[3]

The political and subcultural atmosphere were unsupportive of any deviation from traditional, "normal" sex roles. Other rock'n'roll stars of the time--Elvis, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and so on--

signalled difference in their image and sound, but lyrically underwrote heterosexuality.

By the early sixties, there was a further change in the air. With The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, the image of the heterosexual male appeared less repressive. Although rock--by which I refer to the whole gamut of popular youth music--was still largely a heterosexual male phenomenon, allowing very little space for white females and gays in particular, the masculine/feminine dichotomy was softened, if not repudiated. Songs like "Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da" by The Beatles and "Lola" by The Kinks were both about transvestites. But, rather than making political statements about genders and role-playing, these songs were acceptable in the same way that the tradition of drag in Britain is: that is, they and drag are free of overt homosexuality.[4] These songs did contribute something, if not to the challenging of strict gender definitions, to the non-macho image of much of popular music and its performers.

Later in the sixties, psychedelic drugs and their attendant "new" consciousness nurtured a flirtation with androgyny and a blurring of sexual distinction: this created the appearance, much vaunted by the media, of sexual liberation. Nothing, in fact, could have been further from the truth.

There was never any doubt that Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Marc Bolan, or Alice Cooper--for all their make-up and posturing--were anything but heterosexual. Not one of these fashionable degenerates was overtly homosexual, hermaphroditic or even bisexual. Whispers of bisexuality were heard from and about Bowie, Jagger and Elton John:

but the climate and support for any more "dangerous" assertions of sexual deviation were still sadly lacking.

That so many rock stars of the time should flirt with androgyny, yet go to such lengths to assert traditional masculinity in their songs and through the press, is interesting. Jagger, for example, who plays an ageing pop star in the film *Performance* (1970), allowed Nicolas Roeg (the director) to create a persona of hazy sexual orientation and remarkable human androgyny to dominate his later pop image. From this film, Jagger formed a new identity but, at the same time, his public were never in doubt as to his true sexuality. Neither his songs nor his lifestyle suggested deviance from the norms of heterosexuality; some of his lyrics are aggressively heterosexist. Others like Bowie, Bolan, John and Rod Stewart followed Jagger's lead, toning their sexism down according to whatever their primary audience was.

In what appeared to be a challenge to the cultural hegemony and the creation of an alternative space for the expression of non-traditional sexuality, then, there was in actuality the continuation of sexual repression camouflaged in the guise of looser male roles. That performers and counter-cultural advocates could call for revolution from platforms and stages and yet still expect their female partners to prepare meals, raise children and run homes was not seen as contradictory or even problematic at the time. The archetype of the earth-mother, counter-culture's female ideal, was equally flawed as a revolutionary symbol, inscribing traditional feminine virtues of nurturance and domesticity. Given such a traditional, heterosexual

cast to the gender-roles celebrated by the communities in London and California, there was little room for any expression of sexual deviance, despite dominant culture's frequently expressed fears of immorality and unconventionality. Homosexual men remained outside the fold, silenced.

By the late 1970's, there still had not been one overtly homosexual performer, nor one overtly homosexual song.

Even within the folk music circuit, one of pop's prevalent modes during the 1960's and defined by its moral stand on political issues, there were no self-acknowledged gay male performers. There were several "gentle", anti-masculist male performers, however. Rumours abounded, but nothing was revealed.

For example, at a 1971 concert in London's Roundhouse--which was the centre of alternative music happenings and events during the mid-1960's and now the National Black Arts Centre--folksinger Donovan, when apportioning deep-voiced roles to men in the audience and high-voiced roles to women for a singalong version of his song, "Happiness Runs In A Circular Motion" (..."you can be anything you want to be"), realized that he had left out some of his audience. He timidly offered a third role in the chorus to those "in-betweenies" to sing along with him. Audience response was tepid at best, and the moment passed. There is no other record of Donovan countering his audience's silence.

In other words, despite its claims to be progressive or radical, the counter-culture did not support or foster the expression of homosexuality rooted in the experience of gay culture and performed by

a gay male, speaking and singing to other gay people. Its "revolutionary" wing in Britain, International Socialists (which later became the Socialist Workers' Party: both were regular participants in counter-cultural events), maintained that "although there were quite a lot of gay people involved in IS, the policy was the traditional Stalinist one: after the revolution, there won't be any problem because we'll all be heterosexual".[5]

While appearing to embrace and even celebrate sexual deviation, popular music youth culture--in all its guises--maintained traditional roles, celebrating that it could nevertheless confuse the established social order and thereby assert its own otherness through a new identity. This manifestation of the essential otherness of the subculture carried with it enormous shock-value: this shock-value extended the tension-line which ran between the parent culture and youth's popular music subculture. And even if the intention was absent, the effect--which is what matters as Simon Frith argues[6]--was to create a social climate into which gay subculture could claim some output. The gay subculture, however, remained marginalized within the larger youth subculture. Andrew Lumsden, a gay political activist at the time, explains

> Once GLF had started in October 1970 efforts were made to get the alternative press to run gay stories or columns or pages--and there was terrible resistance.[7]

It is not possible to make any direct connections between this new climate of apparent sexual freedom and the beginnings of a Gay Liberation Movement, except through an as-yet-uncommenced oral history research into that youth culture at the sites where gay men and hip-

pies shared common ground. Archival footage in the documentary film, *Word Is Out* (Chapter One), suggests that hippies were often gay and that gay men were often hippies in San Francisco, at least.

Similar arguments can be made about the counter-culture in London, where many of the alternative press pundits were out gay men with high profiles in the fledgling Gay Liberation Front. Jim Anderson, one of the three editors of Oz--London's leading underground magazine which successfully defended itself in a highly profiled obscenity trial, was an early member of the Gay Liberation Front (the GLF is discussed in Chapter One). Anderson regularly contributed articles with gay content and focus to that magazine which had a very large circulation across Britain and Western Europe. Anderson's clout as editor and the continued assault by GLF on the alternative presses's silence about the gay subculture gradually altered some of the "terrible resistance" which Lumsden had encountered.

Cultural records are otherwise silent about any possible overlaps and interconnections between the two subcultures. It would seem that nobody cared, at the time, to ask what was going on.

The mainstreamed film records of Woodstock's "gathering of the tribes", in contrast to the "alternative" and "underground" images glimpsed peripherally in non-mainstream films, reveal no deviance in the carnival which occurred offstage. Film footage carefully constructs heterosexuality for the viewer, assuring the production company and financiers that *Woodstock* can now show on any television channel at any time.

Its cultural message is neither oppositional nor revolutionary, both of which resistances are mediated, literally, by a "nostalgie de la boue" which the film inscribes.

Those stars who contributed, wittingly or unwittingly, to the creation of new spaces within the youth culture, rejected all advances by Gay Liberationists to act as spokesmen for the cause, or even to perform in public association with such activists. There were, and of course are, gay rock stars: their sexual preference is either zealously guarded and secret, or they lie about it.[8]

The Punk Interlude: Tom Robinson

In the late 1970's, another change occurred: popular music's first openly gay performer arrived on a crest of popularity and social upheaval coinciding with the punk music explosion in Britain. Punk music posed further threats to the hegemonic culture and, in the newer space again created by an extended tension-line between cultures, Tom Robinson took the stage with his band. Their first single, "2-4-6-8 Motorway" was a Top Ten hit, and was quickly followed with "Rising Free", an EP featuring "(Sing If You're) Glad To Be Gay" which became a gay anthem.

"(Sing If You're) Glad To Be Gay" is a rocking, embittered attack on homophobia, and its concomitant silent gay communities, complacent for what little economic terrain they had gained by "passing" (not outraging the non-gay world) or frightened of reprisals for any acts of self-affirmation. Robinson was suddenly celebrated as a pop

rebel. Openly gay, he sang songs with a political and social conscience, to both gay and non-gay audiences.

Within three years, however, he had disappeared from the pop scene. Reasons for his short span as the voice of gay subculture are several, the two most important being Britain's economic situation and--according to Robinson himself--the splintering of the Gay Liberation movement.[9] Economically, Britain was well into depression, and Robinson's political conscience nagged at a world that just wanted to go out and party. His second album, *TRB2*, generated more press (many critics were either concerned or enthusiastic about the listing of gay support groups across Britain and Western Europe in its liner notes and its call to arms for gay men to join with other disenfranchised groups within Britain) than it did record sales. The group disbanded despite its critically high reputation. Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, for example, conclude their autopsy of rock'n'roll culture by declaring that "Compared to the Tom Robinson Band, every other rock musician is wanking into the wind".[10]

Further attempts by Robinson in a solo career to inject political consciousness into disco music--a dominant musical form within gay subculture discussed below--were dismal failures. The Gay Liberation movement was in political disarray, as was the Left generally, against the forces of Thatcherism. This disunity lost much of the support which Robinson had previously enjoyed within youth culture.

Other reasons for Robinson's departure from the pop scene are speculation. Perhaps his political conscience, a major element in his lyrics, was a financial liability and marketing miscalculation.

Nobody likes to be preached at too often, even if the politics of the music are fashionable. The record companies and public consumers did support Robinson for a short while at least; and it seemed that a giant step for Gay Liberation within youth culture had been taken. A homosexual voice was heard singing and speaking, not only to the gay community but to a large number of clearly open-minded pop music fans.

Although Robinson's fame was short-lived, he did serve to underline two very important features of subculture. The BBC refused to play the ironically titled "(Sing If You're) Glad To Be Gay"; all over Britain, gay bookstores and bars were being raided, their customers harrassed, intimidated, and often entrapped by the police (see discussion of *Maurice* in Chapter Three). The climate was not supportive of a celebration of gay lifestyles, which no doubt affected record sales adversely. He noted, sardonically, that "the atmosphere is as acridly anti-homosexual as it has been for twenty years or more".[11]

It should be stressed, too, that Robinson's threat to the hegemony was greater than that presented by a performer known only as a gay man. Bridging the chasm between popular youth culture and gay subculture at a particularly auspicious moment in British cultural history, Robinson identified police repression and conservative economic policies in particular as the "enemies" of youth culture, heterosexual or gay. His lack of image or persona was a further, double-edged threat to social hegemony.

While Boy George or Liberace, in contrast, could be singled out and isolated as obviously eccentric and therefore gay (see Chapter

Five), Robinson presented himself as "an ordinary bloke". People who looked like him could also be gay. Gay people who were "passing" as heterosexuals, therefore, were threatened by his very presence, as was heterosexual society at large.

One did not necessarily have to wear make-up and sequins to be marked as gay: in fact, just about anybody might be gay. Safe categories and social stereotypes were shattered: society was no longer safe if someone like Robinson could express his homosexuality openly. An overt, ordinary gay man had a public arena from which he linked sexual and other kinds of politics, a terrain from which deviant culture had been barred by the mere fact of its stigmatized and demonized Otherness (Chapter One). The anger which Robinson evoked was, unfortunately, never adequately measured by Britain's cultural theorists and observers.

As If Punk Never Happened: Boys Keep Swinging

With the advent of the 1980's, public attention was once again fascinated by a new group of androgynes, most notably Boy George and Boy Marilyn. Although both performers admitted their homosexuality, neither celebrated it through his music. All of Boy George's songs, for example, are about heterosexual love, as are Marilyn's. Even if a song should be gender-less in its address, that song is "heard" as heterosexual by the majority of fans. To imagine Otherness is quite impossible in an arena deluged with "normal" conventions and narra-

tives (see discussion of *Parting Glances*, Chapter Three).

Boy George's early self-deprecation is revealing, too, of how far this lack of intention can be translated into meaninglessness. Interviewed by Rolling Stone, George explained, "I know what makes me successful: I'm funny."[12] George reveals an acute awareness of his position when he suggests that, during this part of his career, he was perceived less as a gay man than as some sort of Kabuki Doll. That mis-perception earned him a large public following (Chapter Five).

Marilyn, in contrast, exuded sexuality, but received major press coverage only as a heterosexual. Dominant culture, in this instance through the person of talk show hostess Joan Rivers, subverted Marilyn's true sexual identity and possible counter-discourse by "falling in love" with him during prime time and, thereby, denying him space to express other libidinous possibilities. Interviewers consequently filled tabloids with reports on what women liked about Marilyn, never men. Pictures of Marilyn with his boyfriend apppeared in various gay publications, revealing how audiences are targeted by the companies who handle public relations for the recording industry, but publications for the dominant culture showed Marilyn either alone or in company of women like Joan Rivers.

Cohen and Dyer, in their analysis of "The Politics of Gay Culture", argue that "However commercially motivated, arts do not present and endorse material that is critical of their own practice, including their contributions to gay oppression."[13] Presumably, Marilyn's appearance as a homosexual in a publication from the dominant culture which oppresses him for his homosexuality would endorse, by extension,

a criticism of that culture's practices. Marilyn's defensive response that gay lyrics "do not sell, even to gays" is both dubious and unverifiable.[14]

What is clear, however, is that--from the earliest days of rock'n'roll through to the late 1980's--neither dominant culture nor popular music youth cultures supported a viable gay subculture. Each presented gay youth with threats which silenced gay cultural expression. On the one hand, there was a fear of social ostracism and even violence and, on the other, a continuously nurtured implicit fear of hegemonic repression and its concomitant commercial failure functioned to contain and regulate gay subcultural affirmations in dominant culture's media.

Some of Camp's Many Uses: Malcolm McLaren

Despite the experience of rejection in alternative youth cultures and the evidence of repression in dominant culture, gay subculture has afforded style, symbols, and aesthetics which youth cultures have avidly appropriated. To detail and assess this largely ignored phenomenon is difficult: however, some instances of this continuous appropriation are clear and obvious.

In the 1950's, for example, in London during the early days of rock'n'roll, Carnaby Street was a gay strip. Malcolm McLaren, at the centre of much to come in pop culture's musical and sartorial adventures in the U.K., witnessed adventurous styles in clothing and a

proliferation of wild hair-styles in the clubs, bars and speakeasys of the area.[15]

British non-gay youth culture had previously dressed according to class: their manner of dress announced their class. Gay youth, in contrast, dressed differently--searching for a style which would allow them to step outside of their class, and out of the repressive class system altogether. To be really gay was to belong to a gay subculture, and not to the working, middle or upper classes--in all of which homophobia flourishes (Chapter One). Fear of working class youth, with their ritualized bashing of immigrant and gay minorities in Britain, for example, ensured that gay men eschewed any look connected with such oppression (Chapter One). Working class youth, in contrast, were eager to cross over and therefore gain access to the possibilities offered by this subculture's highly coded escapes in clothing and self-presentation. Rock'n'roll offered similar possibilities, especially membership in a new, classless élite.

The two phenomena fused. Early rock'n'rollers, Teddy Boys, took the gay, dandified and classless style of Carnaby Street's gay subculture into the music of the time, and offered a proletarian escape.[16] The offer of that escape remains. Throughout rock'n'roll's history, it has been the gay subculture which has offered an innovative, stylistic "exit".[17]

McLaren, never one to miss an opportunity, has proved a master entrepreneur in this particular appropriation. His early 1970's protégés, The New York Dolls, were the very essence of camp, as were the later Sex Pistols, Adam and The Ants, and Bow Wow Wow. His own

forays into pop, "Duck Rock" as he first named sampling and "popera" versions of Puccini with accompanying videos of mannequins in Turkish steam baths, further travesty mainstream conventions of authenticity and delineate an aesthetic of "high" camp.

McLaren has always displayed an acute sense of what camp is and its multiple possibilities as a stylistic definer of Otherness. Long used as a self-defence and weapon against hegemonic culture's intrusions by gay subculture, camp turns "normality" into frivolous counter-discourses, using mockery and irony to undermine and, it is hoped, refute those values and conventions of dominant culture as sham.[18] McLaren, most particularly, has exploited some of this potential in popular music culture. He has used it, and encouraged those groups whom he clothed and managed to use it, as an attack on convention, on the "normality" which castigates and condemns the deviant, in this case the members of popular music youth subcultures. He has exploited camp, most obviously, as a transcendent discourse in his "creation" of The Sex Pistols who initially appeared so real as anarchists, but who appear, in retrospect, as a supreme parody of law and order's worst fears.

Dressing Up

In the early 1960's, the gay subculture which was still visibly centred around Carnaby Street, provided the Mods with another identity through style. It was from this nexus, in fact, that the concept of "Swinging London" grew; and it was from this point that the appropria-

tion of gay style became so all-pervasive that sociologists have failed to recognize the "gay" input into defining subcultural "style".

To confuse things even further, as soon as a gay style was appropriated by another (non-gay) group, that style was abandoned almost immediately by the gay subculture. It no longer signified deviant or outlaw, but was read as conventional and straight: "our clothes and haircuts and records and dance steps and decor--our restlessly evolving style--soon enough became theirs".[19]

The act of appropriation renders the style meaningless as a gay identifier and passée as fashion. Style has always been a major element within the gay subculture's identity, in part because "homosexuality is so much more fluid an aspect of human beings than class, gender or race".[20]

More obviously, dressing and behaving in a marked manner makes recognition within the subculture that much easier, especially in societies like Britain or the United States both of which criminalized homosexual activities until the late 1960's, making contact risky. Specialized languages, manners, and sartorial habits--as many gay chronicles attest--therefore serve at least three functions within gay subculture: to announce and affirm outsider status, to dandify and thus to critique the dowdier conventions of "normal" people, and to acknowledge one's specific habits and inclinations. Quentin Crisp's autobiographies, for example, reveal that long before popular music became the unifying discourse for a youth subculture, gay men in London were codifying their resistances variously.[21]

Camp, in its refutations of cultural hegemony, is central to those codifying and constantly changing aesthetics of resistance. And camp, in part, explains mainstream subcultures' continuing fascination with looking to the gay milieu for stylistic inspiration and innovation. The gay subculture has frequently proclaimed its disregard for convention and conventional morality: "Living well is the best revenge" is how Oscar Wilde defined this stance. This disregard is crucial in defining the rebellion of other, more widespread and mediated youth cultures.

The new sexual freedom that many rock'n'roll songs championed in the 1960's, for example, was more an assertion of dissent and attitude than it was a reflection of everyday life in youth subculture. Within gay subculture, however, a flaunting of society's mores was, and remains, a part of daily life. This unconventional lifestyle, with the emphasis on "style", was viewed somewhat enviously by popular music's more stylish performers, who have consistently appropriated gay style and mediated that discourse of fashion for their fans.

Hebdige refers to the "extreme foppishness, incipient élitism, and morbid pretensions to art and intellect" of David Bowie, Lou Reed, and Roxy Music in particular.[22] From a gay perspective, however, this reveals the concern for outrageous style, the urge to a classless culture (which Hebdige mistakenly reads as privilege, and the use of camp as a weapon against conformity and dullness: in fact, it reads as if Hebdige is describing gay men).

It is well-known, of course, that Bowie, Reed, Iggy Pop and Bryan Ferry and Brian Eno (both of Roxy Music) were all regular

visitors to the most fashionable gay haunts on both sides of the Atlantic and that four of the five--Ferry is the exception--posed for years as bisexual and/or gay at different times. It is as though their highest aspirations towards art and classlessness leads to a desire to be perceived as stylishly gay, decidedly unconventional, and therefore "free" of dominant culture's controls.

Whatever the intentions of these popular musicians of the 1970's were does not matter. Nor do their frequent public declarations of conventional heterosexuality since. As Frith and others argue, it is the effect and not the intention which matters.[23] So much so, that it is difficult to discuss the early Velvet Underground and Lou Reed's music of the late 1980's and early 1990's--even that is, while he celebrates a joyous heterosexuality and the domesticities of conventional marriage--without continuing reference to camp and gay subculture as informing their styles and presentations.

More recent manifestations of this "cross-dressing" and appropriation include a pantheon of heavy metal stars as well as mainstream stars such as Axl Rose, whose "outlaw/junkie" self-presentation depends on headscarves, bangles, earrings, make-up, studded-leather jockstrap, and the torn jeans of a gay disco, circa 1980, where they were used to reveal and eroticize the body.[24] It is violently ironic, however, that such a "thief" should use his public forum to denounce the very population of faggots who have provided him with the only signifying Otherness Rose can claim.

As Rose's particular sartorial mix claims precedence in the media, it is disdained and discarded by the subculture. Accoutrements

which look "radical" are already dated, and those who sport them appear as "dinosaurs", their "political" message of non-conformity discredited. Mainstream fans may regard Rose's long hair and jewellery as rebellious, but outside observers will quickly discern that these are now widespread and conventional, as are the traditionally sexist and homophobic views of many such performers.

Theorist of the postmodern, Andrew Ross examines the sartorial excesses of heavy metal rockers and critiques the paradoxical position which these cultural "heroes" occupy:

> To look, today, for representations of the anti-social or threatening expressions of camp and drag, we must go to the outrageously spectacular heroes of the youth heavy metal scene. In popular rock culture today, the most "masculine" images are signified by miles of coiffured hair, layers of gaudy make-up, and a complete range of fetishistic body accessories, while it is the clean-cut, close-cropped, fifties-style Europop crooners who are seen as lacking masculine legitimacy...In mainstream rock, however, it is the feminized cock rockers who are supposedly identified with the most retarded--agressive, disrespectful, and homophobic--characteristics of working-class masculinity...(Heavy metal) speaks, likes Rambo's caricature of the he-man, to the legitmate powers of American masculinity in the world today.[25]

A gay reading of this aesthetic offers further insight into the violence perpetrated by dominant discourses against gay subculture. For example, a man dresses according to gay style in order to gain media prominence but then must declare his ordinariness, his "normality", against this signification. That which signifies his Otherness also condemns him to obscurity unless he denounces it. The self-loathing--"I am not totally what you perceive, despite this appearance, but only partially"--leads to the schizophrenia which is articulated as homophobic outrage and calls for violence.

Again, it is the surface which misleads: Rose's politics are no more radical than those of George Bush in his present campaign for the presidency. Traditional American values of family, clearly defined gender roles and masculist privilege are repeated in both camps. Neither dominant culture's would-be spokesman nor youth culture's would-be superstar can tolerate the values of a racially mixed, classless homosexual subculture. The only difference would appear to be that youth culture's advocates of anti-gay violence have, rather precipitously, been caught dressed in the enemy's drag.

Freddie Mercury's position within the rock mainstream is less opportunistic, more problematic. In retrospect, he appears to have been the outrageous queen who didn't dare admit that he was, or else "they" wouldn't allow him to be a Queen: he'd have to forfeit his commercial success. As Boy George's career with Culture Club and after reminds us, it's okay to dress the part as long as you don't actually admit what you're doing (Chapter Five).

The question, however, is purely rhetorical: if Freddie Mercury had come out at any time during his career as lead singer/songwriter for Queen, would he not have been allowed to continue in the business? What forces would have prevented him? Was the situation one where the company said the public won't like it, we'll lose money, and he won't be able to fulfill his contractual obligations? But the industry or company doesn't know what the reaction will be: are they therefore projecting a homophobia onto the mass market place, or nurturing it? What is clear in the retrospect of watching the 1992 Freddie Mercury Tribute/AIDS Benefit concert from London is that the reticence sup-

ported a somewhat negative environment for coming out and a low tolerance of gay men and their subculture.

It was clear--given the range of stars from semi-closetted Elton John, the once-homosexual-now-straight David Bowie, Annie Lennox in full high camp fashion as Pierrette, Lisa Stansfield as an impersonation of Freddie's impersonation of a working-class "tart" cleaning house and yearning to "break free", George Michael's impassioned speech to the audience about condoms (introduced, archly, by the deliberately sensational "There's something I've always wanted to say to you"), and the sudden entry of Liza Minnelli as if she were standing in for her mother, a favourite of drag queens and female impersonators--that Freddie Mercury was not "the enemy".

His videos which were broadcast on Wembley's overhead projectors and across MuchMusic's video network that day were also revelatory of Mercury's deep involvement in gay subculture. There was full working-class drag, high camp, leather fetishism, bondage, the San Francisco Castro Street clone look, the biker as hustler image and the Bruce Weber-inspired homoeroticism of male physical display. It was the first time many of these videos had been shown in North America, which marks a difference between music audiences in Britain and the U.K. (Chapter Five). It was also clear that, for the audience in Wembley Stadium, these were not strange or deviant images. This is the catalogue of heavy metal/glam rock. What is missing is the mass audience's understanding of just where such imagery is appropriated from.

It was also clear that many of his other musical cohorts were equally unaware of what Mercury had been doing. Axl Rose and Def Leppard, for example, did not escape the aggressive journalistic training

of MuchMusic's vee-jay, Erika Ehm. She demanded of these phallocrats of contemporary rock (associated in their public's and gay consciousness as anti-gay "real" men), "Isn't it a little strange, you're being on the ticket at an event like this?" None of them answered adequately, or admitted in their deflections of her questions that there was an issue not being addressed.

The audience, too, needed direction or clarification as to what it was that the event stood for. When Liz Taylor came to the podium to speak about young people, the spread of AIDS and how homophobia has damaged the future of all human communities by delaying research into what has been parlayed by American media and government officials as a "gay plague", she was booed and heckled but stood her ground, yelled back and demanded silence so that she could continue.

In the end, the event, like Freddie Mercury's presence in mainstream rock'n'roll, remains problematic. One is left wondering if Mercury had gauged it all and decided that the only way to be "gay" was to act out the fantasy but never actually tell anybody what it was, exactly, that he was doing. His legacy of video imagery and songwriting--lyric and musical style--suggests that mainstream rock'n'roll is a highly contested terrain.

What the Freddie Mercury Tribute/AIDS Benefit concert revealed about Mercury's presence within the industry is the inherent contradiction of the commodification of resistance and opposition. Mercury is read by one audience as a "radical" gay, representing subcultural codes and practices within the corporate rock world. The mass distribution of his records, however, demands that these codes

and practices be easily read as something else. They must be perceived as hegemonic and masculist, and are part of the heavy metal/glam rock encyclopedia of styles.

In their usual cycle of originating and then casting off styles as they "roll on" and become mainstreamed, gay men in Britain now eschew the flamboyant fashion of glam-rockers as a dated, 1970's look. By extension, they have judged its "politics" and revolutionary potential to be limited and limiting. In Britain particularly, gay subculture has more recently championed a revised, almost surrealist (if not oxymoronic) aesthetic of working class gay dandies (see Chapter Five).

Show Tunes and Torch Songs

Cohen and Dyer identify three distinct gay cultures according to how gay men individually and communally use music.[26] Traditional cultures are almost stereotypical and have been represented on stage, in film and on television. Harvey Fierstein's character, Arnold in *Torch Song Trilogy*, demonstrates the particular aesthetics of this subcultural manifestation (Chapter Two).

Singers as disparate as Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand and Ethel Merman are celebrated for their public personalities, private lives, stage presence and projection. Songs from *West Side Story*--"There's a Place For Us"--and *The Wizard of Oz*--"Somewhere Over The Rainbow"--are translated from their original contexts as ethnic determination to assimilate and overcome communal rivalries or as fantasies of prepubescent Dorothy to read instead as gay aspirations for a new social

order in which the persecutions and oppressions of homosexuality are ended.

Ethel Merman, towards the end of her life, actually recorded an LP of several such Broadway show tunes, updated and accompanied by The Village People (among others), as the *Non-Stop Ethel Merman Disco Record*. Here, the maudlin, self-dramatizing potential of the more-traditional uses of such music is itself deflated and mocked as kitsch, or bad taste that is so bad as to merit accolade: another turn of camp aesthetics.

In this particular use of music, what is important is what Molina in *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* and Arnold/Fierstein have revealed in their characterizations of such "queens" (Chapter Two). Like drag queens, traditional gay subculture's musical tastes are determined by the women who perform the song--frequently victims who overcome violence and oppression, men and drugs perhaps, through the medium of self-dramatization which such music allows--and the potential of the song itself to be adapted, shifted in its codes to represent a perceived gay experience. This type of music is rarely part of a musical subculture, however, and frequently denies any revolutionary potential to its fans.

Disco Culture

Disco culture, in contrast, is described by Cohen and Dyer as a musical departure with radical subcultural potential which "has established not only a form of social recreation, but an aesthetic that is

unthinkable apart from notions of gay culture". Drawing heavily on black music and dance among its precursors, Disco "is informed by the theatricalism, sensuality and fun of...male gay culture and something of the rethinking of sexuality occasioned by the sexual politics of the seventies."[27]

Discos have had an enormous political significance in establishing gay subcultural identity. As Robert Fripp observed, "disco music allows gay men to vote with their feet, as America's black communities have been doing for years".[28] The music of African-American culture, in other words, with its emphasis on suffering and transcendence through gospel, blues or soul and the celebration of the body which is the prevalent characteristic of gay disco (which borrows rhythms and forms from that previous dance tradition) both affirm an underclass's identity and celebrate the integrity of minority cultures.

Those who have been denied access to power through racism and homosexual oppression, in turn ignore that power and claim a territory for themselves from which the dominant culture is absent. Describing how Disco music can be both massively commercially successful and at the same time used subversively, Dyer explains that:

> ...it may well be the case that cultural products are most likely to be contradictory at just those points--such as disco--where they are most commercial and professional, where the urge to profit is at its strongest...this mode of cultural production has been taken up by gays in ways that may well not have been intended by its producers. The anarchy of capitalism throws up commodities that an oppressed group can take up and use to cobble together its own culture. In this respect, disco is very much like another profoundly ambiguous aspect of male gay culture, camp. It is a "contrary" use of what the dominant culture provides, it is important in forming a gay identity, and

> it has subversive potential as well as reactionary implications.[29]

What Dyer describes here is a subcultural act of bricolage, the appropriation of a musical form and its transformation into a cultural site where gay men socialize, cruise, and politically organize. And, since Disco music has a strong elemment of romanticism within it, Dyer continues, and since romanticism "asserts that the limits of work and domesticity are not the limits of experience",[30] the flight by gay men into Disco must be seen as a flight from the banalities of the lived, everyday experiences of the homophobia that gay men face.

Disco music offered gay subculture another transgressive aesthetic, a means to transcend poverty, misery, and repression. The music and the club scene celebrates life and survival in the face of gloom. This can be compared in some ways to the phenomenon of Soweto music, a vibrancy and a willingness to dance in the face of repression. Dyer further notes that disco is, compared to rock, an erotic and non-phallic musical form. Black music, the basis for disco, uses more percussive instruments than does rock, creating polyrhythmic potentials within the form. In turn, the whole body sways, as opposed to the thrusting pelvic motion demanded by rock's monorhythmic beat.[31]

It is, therefore, interesting to speculate here about the campaign mounted against dance music in the late 1970's which re-emerges in Vancouver's local radio scene twenty years later. Rock'n'roll--as broadcast by "The Fox"--denounces dance music--as broadcast by its newest rival, "Z95.3"--with the advertising slogan "Disco Sucks". This begs the question, what exactly is being

denounced: the music, the celebration, the roots of this music in African-American (non-white) experience, or the gay community who use this music almost to the exclusion of mainstream rock'n'roll?

At the beginning of the 1980's, discos were invaded and almost monopolized by heterosexual youth culture, hungry for new fashions, different music and innovative dance steps. In the late 1970's, for example, one such gay disco became the hang-out and then the home-base for the London punk scene. Chaguaramas, in Covent Garden's Neal Street, was exclusively gay up until approximately the period 1975-1976. New experiments in style were paraded nightly here: plastic sandals, wild hair-styles and unconventional make-up, fetish and bondage gear, and thrift store clothing were jumbled together creating a range of new and possible "looks".

One innovation with a distinctively camp connotation was the adoption of army combat "fatigues", trousers with pockets and zips galore which had beforehand been worn only by that most masculine of males, the American GI. Gay men discovered them on sale--very cheaply, which was important even during the early days of Britain's current recession--at street market stalls and surplus stores.[32] Wearing these, with peroxided hair and various bits and pieces of bricolaged jewellery and, later, the translated "neon" Australian surfer sunscreens as makeup done wildly in a revised "neo-tribal" look, gay men nightly travestied masculine ideals, marked their absolute difference from the daytime world of conventions and gender-roles, and defined a new aesthetic of alienation and aggressive non-conformity.

Heterosexual youth were attracted by this blatant refusal to submit to the depressions of James Callaghan's and then Margaret Thatcher's fiscal policies: from the perspective of youth and gay subcultures, massive unemployment seemed to be the government's aim. The more depressing monetarism made daily existence in London, the more exuberant became nightclub life and the outrages of Chaguaramas' clientèle. Unemployed youth all over Britain, of course, were experimenting with new looks to fill and suit their newly enforced leisure time; but in London, the focus was around the corner from Carnaby Street this time, on Chaguaramas.

This new look, which had the appeal of thrift shop chic and a do-it-yourself aesthetic, was quickly appropriated by the new, young, non-gay Punks as well, who brought with them to Chaguaramas their own brand of music. For a brief period, there was overlap and many early Punk performers--such as Bill of Generation X who later become the suitably named Billy Idol--were pin-ups and porn stars for the gay subculture, their fellow-travellers.

By 1979, however, the gay subculture had left for newer, different terrain: the shock and outrage of Punk were already conventional and passé. The now legendary Roxy Club--site of Punk's birth, according to media reports, and venue for the most important early gigs of that movement--was inaugurated on the premises. The new arrivals to London experimented with the plastics, hair-styles and dyes, fetish and leatherwear, cosmetics, drugs and--to a lesser extent--the music of the now departing gay subculture.[33]

SEX, the clothing outlet on Chelsea's King's Road run by Vivienne Westwood in collaboration with Malcolm McLaren, clothed and inspired a generation to experiment with outer- and underwear designed to highlight sexual fetishism, pornographic "Tom of Finland" T-shirts, and the ripped and therefore revealing combat trousers--now mass produced--which had characterized that earlier clientèle. "Tom of Finland" is a cartoon character staple of gay subcultural erotica, and is usually depicted "chatting up" another male, both of them wearing tight-fitting clothes which reveal apparently huge endowments. The sexual fetishism emerges later in pop's history with Prince's outfits from the mid 1980's and on Madonna's Blonde Ambition Tour.

Until the entrepreneurial McLaren became involved in main street couture, finding such outrageous costumery had previously been a matter of finding a discreet mail order firm, a side of the business which Westwood and McLaren maintained, adding to the "radical" frisson which their shop front sought to offer its new Punk customers. With the advent of Punk, however, this newly evolved fashion code, as with earlier appropriated styles, was gradually diffused throughout the fashion consumer market, an eventuality which defused its "revolutionary", or counter-discursive, potential.

The gay music of this transitional period surfaced much later, at the beginning of the 1980's, when the post-Punk, New Romantic subculture began to incorporate black and disco rhythms into their music.

The New Romantic look is a further evolution to this same originating gay subcultural style, too, another gay identity from

another subcultural dancing phenomenon which Frith describes:

> This "rolling club" movement overlapped physically and culturally with the gay disco scene--the same clubs, the same emphasis on stylistic invention, the same music, a parallel breaking of sexual rules, and from it emerged, at the end of a decade, the New Romantics, a new generation of fops and would-be pop stars.[34]

Frith further notes that, while these fops' response to Thatcherism did not make the left-wing sense that Punk in its revolt had, like gay subculture it was not simply "escapist" either.

Alternative Male Ideals

This regular stylistic appropriation embodies not just a particular style but rather an aesthetic which embraces non-traditional approaches to male sexuality. Since the early 1950's, for example, many rock'n'roll stars--from Buddy Holly through Billy Fury to "the early, sleazy Duran Duran"[35]--could all be classified as effeminate-looking men. Yet the role-models for this non-macho image and aesthetic are not found in the male-bonding and traditional approaches to masculist conditioning of dominant, heterosexual culture.

The source is, rather, the gay subculture where male-bonding has not occurred for an estimated seventy per cent of the population.[36] This seventy per cent of the subculture is categorized as radical, assertive, and as repudiating machismo for its oppressions of both gays and women, and even of heterosexual men. For such gay sensibility, as in popular music, the male image tends more often than not, in the words of Yoko Ono, to be "feminized" and prettified.[37] It

is this "alternative" male ideal, with attendant concerns for hair-style, soft looks, and seductive poses, which informs the first teen-dream idolatry of the fifties and which still attracts fans of both genders in the 1990's.

Any list of ambiguous pop idols--Bowie, Marc Bolan, Michael Jackson, Prince, Boy George, and so on--begs yet another question: to whom, then, does the macho man appeal?

James Stoltenberg suggests that the institutionalized masculist behaviour of the macho man "is how men learn from each other that they are entitled under patriarchy to power in the culture. Male bonding is how men get that power and male bonding is how it is kept".[38] This fundamental of masculine socialization, then, is threatened by the emulation of the non-macho male in rock'n'roll: the full antithesis of the conventional male is the liberated gay male whose ideal is the non-macho.

The appropriation of gay style by popular culture's macho man is an act which affirms a masculist dominance of youth subculture but which also carries this antithesis. The inherent sexual politic of rebellious male fashions in mainstream rock'n'roll must be read for these quite opposite significations, then--the garb both affirms dominance as rebel/outlaw and presents the ambiguous message of drag's critique of such dominance and patriarchy. This influence from gay subcultural practices and its doubled, contradictory message have gone largely unacknowledged, however, by culture theorists in their analyses of subcultural fashion and the politics of resistance.

While there is clearly no consistent support for expressions of overt homosexuality within popular culture, the gay subculture's contributions to rock'n'roll are widespread but unrecorded. Faced with systemic oppressions which ally dominant culture with its rebellious youth cultures, gay subculture has nonetheless continually offered threat to that dominant culture and various exits to its disenchanted youth. This pervasive relationship has not been observed, acknowledged or documented by mainstream cultural theory (Chapter One).

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Jon Savage, "Tainted Love: The influence of male homosexuality and sexual divergence on pop music and culture since the war", Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure, ed. Alan Tomlinson (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 155.

2. For a discussion of this period and its effect on youth in America, see Todd Gitlin, "Affluence and Undertow" in The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 11-35.

3. Quoted by Charles White in The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Quasar of Rock (London: Picador, 1984), 128.

4. Dennis Altman, Homosexual Oppression and Liberation (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971), 155.

5. David Widgery, quoted by Jonathan Green, Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971 (London: Heinemann/Minerva, 1989), 379.

6. Simon Frith, "Only Dancing", Mother Jones (August 1983), 16.

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8. Steve Chapple and Reebee Garafalo, Rock 'N' Roll Is Here To Pay (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), 286.

9. Interviewed by Nicholas de Jongh, "The Long Road Home For Rock 'N' Roll's First Openly Gay Artist", The Advocate (June 1984), 61.

10. Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, The Boy Looked At Johnny: The Obituary of Rock 'N' Roll (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 94.

11. Quoted by de Jongh, 63.

12. Quoted by Kurt Loder in "London Calling", Rolling Stone (November 10, 1983), 17.

13. Derek Cohen and Richard Dyer, "The Politics of Gay Culture", Homosexuality: Power and Politics, eds. Gay Left Collective (New York: Allison and Busby, 1980), 181.

14. Quoted in George Hadley-Garcia, "Who'll Be The Next In Line?", The Advocate (April 1984), 47.

15. Kurt Loder, 20.

16. Jon Savage, "Tainted love: The influence of male homosexuality and sexual divergence on pop music and culture since the war", Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure, ed. Alan Tomlinson (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 156.

17. See George Melly, Revolt Into Style (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

18. Susan Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'" are discussed in Chapter One. Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Delta Books, 1966), 275-292.

19. Edmund White, States of Desire (London: André Deutsch, 1980), 259.

20. Derek Cohen and Richard Dyer, "The Politics of Gay Culture", 178.

21. Quentin Crisp's two volumes of autobiography are particularly revealing about language and cosmetics: The Naked Civil Servant (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968); How to Become a Virgin (London: William Collins and Sons, 1981).

22. Hebdige, Subculture, 62.

23. Simon Frith, "Only Dancing", Mother Jones (August 1983), 16.

24. See Geoff Mains, "Urban Aboriginals and the Celebration of Leather Magic", in Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning, ed. Mark Thompson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 99-126.

25. Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 164-165.

26. Derek Cohen and Richard Dyer, "The Politics of Gay Culture", Homosexuality: Power and Politics, ed. Gay Left Collective (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 172.

27. Cohen and Dyer, "The Politics of Gay Culture", 185.

28. Robert Fripp, liner notes to God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners (1980).

29. Richard Dyer, "In Defence of Disco", On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 413.

30. Dyer, 417.

31. Dyer, 415.

32. For a parallel discussion of youth subcultures' women centring their own cultural activities around street market stalls and thrift shops, see Angela McRobbie, "Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Rag-market", Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music, ed. Angela McRobbie (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 23-49.

33. Alex Cox's 1986 film *Sid and Nancy* reveals much of this as background detail in its depiction of the early Sex Pistols in London.

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35. Simon Frith, "Frankie Said: but what did they mean?", Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure, ed. Alan Tomlinson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 173.

36. David McWhirter and Andrew Mattison, The Male Couple: How Relationships Develop (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 190-192.

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Chapter Five

Joining the Party:
Revolutionary Potential in Contemporary Gay Music

Introduction

Like the film industry, the music industry is organized on conservative principles of profit from generic product. And just as the independent film industry provides a cultural vanguard for mainstream cinema so, too, independent record companies provide insight and material for the major labels. What becomes a success on the "alternative" music scene (campus or pirate radio, clubs) reaches the attention of the major labels (recent examples are R.E.M. and The Cure) and provides new blood for an out-of-touch and often musically "tired" industry.

However, this "success" and its concomitant mass distribution do not necessarily apply to productions from the gay subculture. While it is true that most of the musical products that are a success (in terms of sales) within the gay subculture come from the mainstream industry, and are often "translated" or appropriated to gay uses (Chapter One: decoding), there are openly gay "successes" that do not "translate" back into mainstream "success". And also, there are openly gay people who, as performers, are accepted in the mainstream as non gay, and who are read as "straight" by the majority but "gay" by the minority, as was the case with Freddie Mercury (Chapter Four).

The amount and extent of openly gay expression that is allowed or produced on a mass scale is subject to similar restrictions in both the film and music industries. Only a certain amount and degree of

homosexuality is tolerated, and it must conform to certain values and standards set by those industries. Like the film industry which "cultivates" a set of generic, mainstream values, the music industry operates within similar "value" boundary-lines.

Obviously, while it is cheaper to produce a record, cassette, or even a compact disc than it is to produce even the most modest film, the problem of mass distribution is not easily overcome. There have always been gay performers at a local, communal level, and there has always been gay "underground" music on record, available, sporadically, through a local, word-of-mouth community, but never generally available at a mass level. The dearth of openly or explicitly gay expression in mainstream popular music is explained, for the most part, by these factors of conservatism, economics, and the structure of categorization and distribution within the music industry.

Placement and categorization of musical types or styles must first be determined before any "new" music can be distributed. Major record companies use their own distribution networks, making it difficult for "indie" labels/music to challenge established, monopolized patterns.

The Punk Renaissance and change

The shake-up of the British music industry in the late 1970's by Punk, and the subsequent proliferation of localized music renaissances, had an effect on the conservatism of the music industry there. The industry was forced to recognize that a significant proportion of young people were more interested in local home-grown, garage-band

musical activity than in the major record companies' generic musical product. Some established labels faced bankruptcy as do-it-yourself production values and alternative modes of distribution moved in to democratize the youth culture's musical revolution. Others, feeling pressure, merged.

Audiences were more fragmented and thus diversified. The established centres for popular music--London and Liverpool--gave way to new cities and communities that had previously been ignored by the major labels. Manchester, Glasgow, and--across the water--Dublin became the focus of attention in a race by record companies to keep up with the increased pace of musical innovation, all of them hoping to "discover" the next "big thing". Even suburbs within the cities supported local music scenes. Bromley in London, for example, was home to "The Bromley Contingent" from which emerged Siouxsie Sioux and The Banshees and The Cure. Dublin's "Lipton Village", a youth club in northside Artane, spawned The Radiators from Space (some of whom "evolved" into The Pogues), The Virgin Prunes, Hothouse Flowers, and U2.

This decentralization meant that local communities now looked to and championed their own local talent. Local music scenes brought their own local cultures and practices to their musical performances and began to produce and distribute their own records and cassettes (much as the early promoters of rock'n'roll in the mid-1950's did) by bus or from the back seat or the boot of the car. For a while, a certain amount of control--in some cases, total--was exercised by the people who made their music, and local record stores, in a twist on

their name, for a while actually sold local music.

The impact of this regional diversity remains a characteristic of the music industry in Britain, and is reflected only partially by the American alternative music scene with its focus on Akron, Ohio (Pere Ubu, The Pretenders) or Athens, Georgia (R.E.M., The B-52's). Retail costs being high in Britain, the market does not concentrate on the next "big thing", despite corporate aspirations, but supports and nurtures a prolific "singles" record market with a comparatively dizzying variety of increasingly innovative acts.

The lesson of Punk to the British music industry is that almost anything that cannot be formulated or codified for international distribution might find a large, insular audience. Threatened by memories of an earlier revolt against convention and internationally generic product, the British music industry is therefore very distinct from its American counterpart. It searches for and promotes the idiosyncratic and the unknown. It is in this environment--and not the formatted, defined and corporately controlled milieu of the American rock industry--that British gay performers have found an arena which to exploit. As Jon Savage observes, "English pop...has always been more about difference than community. In America, an audience might go: Look at us! We're the same! In England, the attitude would be: Look at me! I'm different!"[1]

Savage's audience analysis may explain why the terrain is more bleak, from a gay perspective, in America. There is no widespread support for the underground and gays must be closeted to survive. One recent American group almost able to achieve aboveground status, Sister Double Happiness, reveals the contest and the terrain.

Although founded by gay bassist, Jeff Palmer, with the hope of articulating Gay Liberation/Queer Nation ideas about how contemporary America is being run, the group's coverage in the mainstream rock press is silent about these intentions.[2] Mainstream rock'n'roll journal Spin named the group, described the music without the politics, and named everyone in the group photograph except Palmer, the gay idealist and group co-founder.[3]

In Britain, by contrast, gay subcultures and gay performers have had a high profile since the advent of Punk in the late 1970's.

The most successful of the local, independent record labels in Britain took as its name one of the phrases that describes the "dangerous" side of the gay underworld, Rough Trade. This expression describes the particular urban gay street-scene where young men "hustle" in the sex-trade, "rough" designating that some customers have a preference for hustlers who look tough, or working-class, or mean. As an expression, "rough trade" therefore implies "dangerous sex". It was fitting that Rough Trade--the record label--had as its biggest success The Smiths, whose singer and songwriter is (Stephen) Morrissey, himself gay and working-class from Manchester.

Rough Trade began as a back-door, black market record exchange and second hand music store in Notting Hill, London's equivalent of the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco. A hippie shop that changed hands completely when Punk happened, Rough Trade began "franchising" its own label in Birmingham and Manchester, emerging aboveground with "branch plants" in those cities by 1979. The same "underground" infrastructure was maintained, however.

In Manchester, the "label" produced its own stable of groups, all of whom achieved airplay on the BBC Radio's equivalent of Much-Music's "Indie Street", the John Peel Show. This show began in 1967 as "The Perfumed Garden" broadcast from the offshore pirate station called "Radio London". Peel's success in attracting an underground audience in the 1960's led to his being hired and given a free hand at the BBC to present late-night underground listening. When Punk happened, Peel actively recruited live performances which have now entered pop folklore as "The Peel Sessions", a discography of almost every Punk group who surfaced in Britain from 1978 onwards.[4]

Because daytime radio in Britain is more tightly controlled, Peel's nightly show generates national interest and audiences because it presents new music and musicians that are not playlisted for daytime broadcast. That audience guaranteed Rough Trade's financial success.

The Smiths and Morrissey: "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore"

One of Rough Trade's groups, The Smiths, were British pop's first independent label group to crossover into the mainstream pop charts. Morrissey, the group's founder, achieved notoriety in the rock press during the 1980's as a particularly witty and "eccentric" interviewee.

A gay man, Morrissey used his fame and position as the intellectual champion of "new" post-Punk music in Britain in a clearly oppositional way, creating confusion among critics and even other per-

formers as a ruse. Boy George, for example, once remarked that "I still don't know...if he really has something to say".[5]

Morrissey championed a certain style of interview. He has little tolerance for conventional or predictable questions such as what his favourite foods are, but would rather discuss national politics, the state of gay politics, and the increasingly homogenized state of international culture. He is an articulate critic of cultural politics and sexual oppression, having used his "enforced leisure time" under Thatcher's regime of massive unemployment to educate himself. He demands respect and intellectual depth from his interviewers. This demand has allowed Morrissey to confront homophobia in the rock press, discuss sexual politics where readers might expect to find fashion tips instead and to argue for specifically pro-active changes within the industry.

In interviews, then, Morrissey is witty, camp, and even Wildean; by contrast, in performance he is neither explicitly nor outrageously gay. In fact, like Tom Robinson before him, Morrissey is almost "an ordinary bloke" and revels in his working-class Mancunian background and dialect. He has translated the London-based metropolitan classless aspirations of a middle-class gay subculture into a proudly local, defiant working-class aesthetic. It is within this class confine, of course, where traditional anti-gay sentiments run high and are usually unchecked.[6] For example, where interviewers might expect a gay subcultural hero to speak of opera or camp fantasies, Morrissey insists on discussing *Coronation Street*, Britain's longest-running soap. The characters in "Corrie" are Morrissey's "neighbours" in a fictionalized Manchester working-class district.

There is a similar "camp" ambiguity about the name of the group itself. "Smiths" seems to convey the ultimate anonymity of an ubiquitous surname--the quintessence of humdrum Englishness read like a stereotype of self-deprecation. It is this dullness about provincial life which prompts much of Morrissey's confrontation with the mediocrity of contemporary England.

His lyrics reveal a deep and abiding affinity with specifically "provincial" and "northern" aspects of English drabness, which he expresses in lyrics that betray angst and affection. In "Everyday Is Like Sunday" from *Bona Drag* (solo 1991 compact disc), for example, Morrissey describes

> Trudging slowly over wet sand
> back to the bench where your clothes were stolen
> this is the coastal town
> that they forgot to close down...
> everyday is silent and grey
> hide on the promenade
> etch on a postcard:
> How I Dearly Wish I Was Not Here

Here are the staples of provincial life in a seaside town. The promenades, the garbage, the peculiar dust and the greasy tea all designate the contemporary state of the environment and the particularly depressed aspirations of working-class culture. Despite Tory efforts to instill pride in "Great" Britain through the Falklands War and other such neo-nationalist ventures, Morrissey inscribes a different recent history, a writing venture which marks an affinity with Kureishi's group of resistant writers in metropolitan London (Chapter Three).

This comparison with Kureishi reveals the "doubled" message of the group's name. As "smiths"--master craftsmen each--they turned

their skills to a kind of pop perfection and changed the sound and content of English pop after them. Johnny Marr's work, for example, is considered to be exemplary of a "new wave" in British rock guitar-playing. This aspect of the group's expertise afforded crossover potential when the group emerged from Britain's underground to make a concert tour of America.

Morrissey's lyrics, however and somewhat confusingly for his American audiences, demanded new powers of listening from his fans. Narratives were left deliberately (wide) open and ambiguous. Instead of detailing what was happening, Morrissey would sing dialogue from a crucial moment in that narrative and leave his fans to construct their own chronicles. This allows both gay and non-gay audience readings and decodings.

"Reel Around The Fountain", one of the first singles, reveals this writing technique. The singer intones, wistfully, "fifteen minutes with you--I wouldn't say no" but the addressee and the event are left unexplained. Young women fans--and they are legion--read their own erotic fantasies into such open-ended but undeniably passionate declarations, as do young gay men. The song jests at the hegemonic construction of gay men being unable to sustain relationships and therefore doomed to a series of failed sexual encounters which, in turn, lead to suicidal depressions. The delivery does not reveal the singer's intentions: there are no contexts, no framing devices and no irony to signal that it's all a joke. Morrissey's distinctive singing charges the air with possibility, delivering instead what one (female) vee-jay on MuchMusic calls "a pornography of prom-

ise".

Similarly, the song "Hand In Glove" has the singer passively declare that he "would go out tonight" except for the fact that he doesn't "have a single thing to wear". This melodramatic fashion sense and apparent self-indulgence--staples of gay humour--when matched with Morrissey's determinedly downbeat delivery is decoded by gay audiences as hilariously sending up a tradition of stereotypically effeminate homosexuals generated by the hegemony's claims to represent us. Young female audience members, however, are clearly attracted to the image of a male, obviously sexual, who is nonetheless not predatory and who shares with them the dilemma of being self-conscious about social self presentation (Chapter Four).

Morrissey's lyrics use self-abasement as a strategy for seduction in many of these undeclared narratives. "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now" laments getting a job, falling in and out of love, finding and losing friends, and eventually just existing in contemporary England. The effect, however, is ludicrously funny--an innovation in the use of "reverse" camp: Morrissey so denounces something that it is consequently cross-coded as perhaps worthwhile.

In songs titled "William It Was Really Nothing", "What Difference Does It Make?", "Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me", "Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want", "Never Had No One", and "Unloveable", Morrissey stretched the genre of the teenage lament into a non gendered chronicle of despair, hesitancy, and self-doubt that heterosexual adolescents greedily consumed. His mannerisms spoke to the gay men in the audience, however: the songs voice our lives and

fears, confronting the hegemonic destructions of gay culture with self-parody.

This camp effect is often achieved by phrasing or vibrato, and must be heard to be understood. The song "London" from the 1987 *Louder Than Bombs*, for example, details how a young northern male hitch-hikes to the metropolis and checks into the "Y", hoping for sexual encounters, only to discover that he's chosen the "Y (long pause of three beats in the song) WCA". In post-feminist gay liberation style, however, Morrissey's protagonist decides to stay, because the company of women is not threatening. Conversely, the women permit him to stay in the YWCA because, as a "feminized" man, he does not present a sexual threat to them (Chapter Four). The audience is left to construct the alternative and to imagine the damage that predatory masculist behaviour might wreak on the innocence of this young gay man. The protagonist's vulnerably low self-esteem is further signalled by his plea that "if you have a minute to spare, I'll tell you the story of my life". Here, the idiomatic cliché is literally employed.

The impact of The Smiths on youth subculture in Britain during the 1980's cannot be underestimated. Politically, for example, one of their titles is the slogan for the Animal Liberation Front, its lyrics an anthem for the rise of vegetarianism. "Meat Is Murder" was spray-painted in rail and underground stations, and on shopfronts and abbatoirs across the United Kingdom: the threat of violence moved the BBC to ban its airplay temporarily.

In musical terms, however, their influence remains foundational to an understanding of just what differentiates contemporary English from contemporary American popular music. The English concern with

voice, lyric and pop presentation is directly traceable to the partnership of Morrissey and Marr. More recently, major record companies have turned to Manchester looking for the "next big thing". James, Happy Mondays, The Mighty Lemon Drops, Inspiral Carpets, and The Stone Roses have been signed to international distribution contracts. All reveal musical influences of The Smiths, which is now being formatted and marketed in North America as "The Manchester Sound".

When the press began to "leak" stories about Morrissey's subversions of heterosexual angst through homosexual mockery, for example, a group of young (non-gay) men from another Northern town formed the alternative (non-gay) Smiths, calling themselves The Housemartins. Their popularity waned with The Smiths, but the group reformed and is now "breaking" in America as The Beautiful South--a group which uses male and female voices to address issues in heterosexual relationships in narratives with "idiosyncratic" musical stylings derived from close readings of The Smiths.

Similarly, Everything But The Girl--a group whose name sounds very like one of Morrissey's lyrics--borrow unashamedly from the range of open lyric stylings and rich musical arrangements introduced to British pop by The Smiths. Recently, Michael Stipe of R.E.M. has--in television interview admitted his own taste for Morrissey's writing, and professed great admiration for The Smiths in their crossing over from the underground to the mainstream as a model to his own group's similar passage.

The legacy to gay subculture within mainstream rock is perhaps Morrissey's most difficult achievement to assess, however. The diffi-

culty is compounded by the differences between industry practices in Britain and in America.

In Britain, The Smiths were a singles band. Rough Trade released compilation LPs of hits and B-sides when the backlist merited it. Joe Dellasandro, Jimmy Dean, Alain Delon, Jean Marais, and even a young Laurence Olivier in theatrical make-up: this pantheon of gay pin-ups graced the covers of these 12 inch singles, revealing how much control the gay singer exerted on the commercial product.

In America, WEA/Sire who picked up The Smiths, could not "place" their music in a quickly diminishing singles record market. Airplay was limited to college radio stations which do feature singles bands, but WEA's sales practices confused potential record-buyers with a series of compilation LPs and CDs which often repeated songs and versions.

The anthemic "How Soon Is Now?", which was their biggest hit in America, records the grandeur and the ambiguity of The Smiths, and reveals just what Morrissey had inserted into (non-gay) mainstream musical culture. As Marr's guitar soars into a wall of sound, Morrissey intones "I am the son and the heir of nothing". For a generation of young British fans of whatever affectional preference, this sense of dis-affiliation and alienation inscribed their situations. For homosexuals, the song records the blank page of history which gay subcultural practices confront.

Boy George: The Karma Chameleon

Amidst these local renaissances, gay performers began to find an opening of their own cultural space. The arrival of Boy George on the music scene, signed up by Virgin record company, signalled, to gay men, a small but significant change in the music industry's conservatism. While Boy George was, to his gay followers, a queen--an out gay man who rejects strict gender roles and experiments with alternatives to it--even while with Culture Club, it was not until after he was "excommunicated" for his drug abuse, and the group had disbanded, that his sexuality became widely known.

Like other performers, George's career reveals the contradictions of being gay in the mainstream, tolerated/contained there by not "voicing" difference. The consequences of that "voicing", however, concern this analysis. Now that he is outside of the "format", George sings openly about his personal life, his drugs, and his politics.

Like Liberace before him, Boy George was "contained" by both the mainstream media and the music industry through his self-presentation as an eccentric. While the traditional arts (literature, opera, ballet, painting, composing, and so on) have always been a relatively "safe" place for gay men, the same cannot be said for the popular arts. Boy George's "disguise" was one that, in Britain, could easily be connected (in the consciousness of a non-gay mainstream culture) to a tradition of music-hall drag: men dressing as women for general entertainment.'

For example, the recent past (1970's) has seen the Monty Python's Flying Circus actors carry on this tradition on mainstream television in Britain. Most of the team appeared in drag regularly,

but only one of them was gay (Graham Chapman). Drag presents no threat in this cultural context, and public manifestations of it are easily integrated into the mainstream:

> When Boy George says he'd prefer a nice cup of tea, the British can handle that. It makes the whole thing straight out of the dear departed music hall, that just-joshing transvestism.[8]

Just as mainstream film has a "place" for gay men who are defined in heterosexual terms so, too, does popular music. "Place" takes on a literal meaning here. The formatting of popular music, which is the strict categorization by genre and definition of style, is essential to its promotion, distribution and sale by the major labels in their present configuration. If a musical style cannot be easily categorized and "placed" in the spectrum of popular genres, it poses a problem for the highly organized music industry.

Thus, although music made by gay performers may vary and cross generic categorization, it is possible to consider going into a store and asking for help in finding work by gay performers. Other categories such as "World Beat Music" have achieved this much change in marketing within a relatively short time. At the 1988 New Music Seminar Michael Callen, a gay singer who struggled with the difficult issue of which pronoun to use--he chooses to use male--when he sings his love songs, identified the "problem" of placement:

> Why is it that rock'n'roll, which slathers on endlessly about sex, is so deafeningly silent about gay sex?...Many people have told me that I could have had a pop career if I had sung the wrong pronouns...The music industry needs a *bin to put your* records in...and we don't have a bin.[9]

The issue of product "placement" is not the only factor that inhibits the music industry's dealings with gay men and gay subcul-

ture. The industry is run for the most part by white, heterosexual men, who have thus far kept women out of controlling positions and gay men out of the party. As with mainstream film and television where corporate decisions are made concerning what we will watch, mainstream music culture is, to a great extent, also encouraged to share a very particular and narrowly circumscribed set of values.

It is only new, adventurous record companies--Virgin in this instance which, like Rough Trade, was not long ago an "indie" label--take chances with the unproven in an attempt to find a market not yet tapped or perhaps bypassed by larger labels.

Culture Club, along with their focal point Boy George, were "unproven" in that they were a departure from the "new wave" look, a factor that Virgin obviously saw as an advantage in getting press coverage and therefore the chance of a new audience. The eccentric-looking front-man was sure to be noticed, at least: publicity and promotion are the primary concerns of any company selling a product in a highly competitive market (Chapter Four). Boy George was noticed immediately and initially received only favourable publicity from the popular press which had what could almost be described as a love affair with him, his image and quips. And it was a bonus for both company and his devoted, rebellious young fans (mostly female) that he made authorities and officials uncomfortable in their dealings with him, and that he, in contrast, could deal with them with such panache.[10]

Culture Club were categorized as "new wave" pop, and thus were easily "placed" with the other "new wave" groups in the appropriate radio slot and record store bin. They broke in America, performing in

crossover venues like the Apollo Theatre with Smokey Robinson and Gladys Knight, both of whom George's vocals were compared favourably with. Gay pop music from Britain connected with its roots in the dance rhythms of African-American music (Chapter Four).

Boy George had said or done nothing yet to dissuade Culture Club's categorization as "new wave": by not being explicit about his gayness, he "fitted in" with part of what American corporate control imagined to be the mainstream of musical pop culture. Although most gays and many non-gays knew that he was gay--by seeing him in gay clubs and bars in London, or by "reading" his self-presentation as gay, or by reading about him in gay magazines--Boy George sang seemingly conventional, heterosexual love songs in a soulful pop mode.

Like his counterparts in gay film production (Chapter Three), George was attacked by many gays for not being more explicit about his homosexuality. He was singled out for not using the male pronoun in his love songs.

His songs, however, avoid personal pronouns altogether--a fact which led George to retort:

> OK, so in the past I didn't go around saying "I'm a homosexual", but surely I made it quite clear through all the visual statements. What else did I have to do for people to actually say, "There's a queen"? Hop, skip, and jump across Red Square in a fucking tutu?[11]

After the group's demise--following tabloid exposés of sex and drug "scandals"--and Thatcher's government introducing the notorious Clause 28, Boy George became outspoken about his homosexuality. It is at this point that the music industry and the mainstream media were no longer able to "contain" him, and, as a result, spurned him. Like

the gay characters in mainstream films who refuse to obey the rules (Chapter Two), he was "banished" from play.

Comparison can be drawn here between Boy George and Pee Wee Herman. Pee Wee's subversion was that he could appear not just on mainstream television in America but on children's television, wear obvious facial make-up and bright red lipstick, leer at the blond postman and other male characters, have a kissing scene with a man in one episode, and even "marry" him:

> Pee Wee is anti-Rambo...He argues against compulsory polarization of the sexes by summoning up a child's androgyny. Being a kid allows Pee Wee and his pals to play with gender codes unnoticed, and therefore all the more subversively.[12]

Boy George was also "allowed" to circulate obvious alternatives to strict gender coding, and in a subversive way. And his presence in the mainstream also extended the "ideal" man that young female fans have always swooned over--gentle, non-macho, and "feminized". Pop singers from the 1940's and 1950's, such as Frank Sinatra, Johnny Ray, Ricky Nelson, Frankie Avalon, Fabian, and Elvis, are the precursors of this phenomenon, and have, like Boy George, been idolized and idealized by young women, especially (Chapter Four). And although George was seen to push the barriers to gender specificity even further back than the mainstream had previously allowed, he did so from a "safe" position. As he himself confessed:

> When we first went to America they thought I was a cute oddity. That was before they knew that I was gay. Now they know. I think I'm suffering for it now.[13]

American culture critic Mary Harron comments on this public perception of Boy George as an oddity, describing him as "a kind of benign

extraterrestrial, a pop E.T."[14]

Boy George's comments refer to his now infamous statement on American network television on accepting his 1984 Grammy Award: "Thank you, America, you've got style and taste, and you know a good drag queen when you see one."[15] With this open admission of homosexuality, Boy George claimed a space for gay men now and in the past who have been an "invisible" part of the resistant and oppositional edge of rock'n'roll. It was an historical but brief moment.

So long as the "disguise" is maintained, then, the mainstream can be infiltrated and its values subtly subverted, but the "voicing" of difference--in George's case deviant sexuality--brings immediate censure. Difference is the enemy. As with mainstream film, gayness in mainstream, mass-distributed music must be controlled and contained according to dominant values and codes of behaviour (Chapter Two).

But Boy George, enraged by the Thatcher government's anti-gay legislation, and encouraged by his new boyfriend to be more open, honest and outspoken about his sexuality, recorded a pop single "Stop Clause 28". The song was an attack on the government anti-gay law, and an expression of defiance and resistance. It was ignored by pop radio programmers in Britain, and the BBC (funded by the government and therefore subject to the new "local authority" law Clause 28) was automatically "forbidden" to play it since it was seen to "promote homosexuality".[16] In Canada, the video for the song was never playlisted but did play twice on MuchMusic on its RSVP slot hosted by Erica Ehm.[17] It was never played on the SKY channel or on America's MTV.

The tabloids that adored him now condemned him. Even in Britain, radio no longer played him. However, Boy George's new "career" involves a much smaller audience, but more interesting music. His new songs are concerned with real issues: politics ("Stop Clause 28"), drugs ("You're My Heroin"), and personal integrity ("Living My Life").

And although Boy George's fall from grace also involved a heroin "scandal", it should also be remembered that publicity like that in the music world is more usually--for heterosexuals--employed for the building, not the breaking, of stars. Keith Richard, for example, owes much of his personal success and status as a "rebel" in the rock world to heroin "scandals". Again, rock'n'roll's rebellion can be contained and become part of the marketing of a rock "star", so long as it does not seriously challenge the phallocratic structure of the corporate or international music industry.

Pet Shop Boys: "Never Being Boring"

There are no open or explicit declarations of gayness in the lyrics of the Pet Shop Boys' music, but there is a gay coding that permeates their work--lyrics, music, performance, video, and interview. Although they are generally regarded as an out gay group, the Pet Shop Boys' concern is not for sexuality *per se* but for the associated oppressions of government policies of monetarism, poverty, unemployment, and so on. They write and sing therefore mostly of a depressing political and economic environment, but elevate a potential recipe for despair through various creative uses of camp, a history of which they inscribe in their song "(We were never) Being Boring".

Songs such as "Opportunities", "Shopping", and "West End Girls" are lyrically concerned with the sad state of Britain's economy and the lack of opportunity for advancement, but musically and performatively are high camp parodies of despair. Ostensibly "commenting" on the state of the nation--but not in a conventionally "concerned" way--the music of the Pet Shop Boys subverts the seriousness of the subject matter, and thereby rescues its listeners from the ordinary, everyday, oppressive world. Just as other subcultures in Britain resist oppressions of police harassment, unemployment, poor housing, and so on, so too the gay subculture responds to its oppressions through its own strategies of resistance. As with so much of gay cultural production, the music of the Pet Shop Boys acknowledges, yet resists.

This music of "mixed signals"--seemingly "concerned" in content, but presented in a contradictory, unconventional form--is often misunderstood by non-gay audiences, particularly in America, since it is a form of camp. Singer Neil Tennant (his partner is Chris Lowe) is

acutely aware of the confusion that many rock journalists and pop music fans experience as a result of the group's ambiguous messages, and the general inability to understand irony and camp:

> We give off very confusing signals. To be successful in a mass market you have to have to have one very simple idea. Bruce Springsteen basically is "I'm a man--an American man. And I *care*." That's it, the whole idea. George Michael is "I wear a black leather jacket. I'm kinda sexy, but I'm sensitive". Madonna is "I've got attitude, honey."...The Pet Shop Boys seem to everyone like a complicated joke. We give out "we care" signals; we also give out "we don't give a damn" signals. We also give out "we hate everybody" signals...That's why I think we've always appealed to the kids at the back of the class who sort of hate everybody. But then that used to be the audience for rock'n'roll.[18]

The Pet Shop Boys' status in the music world is that of outsider, and, as Tennant observes, they appeal to the rebel, or the loner, offering an alternative to the highly contained and marketed "rebelliousness" of the mainstream in America (Chapter Four). Tennant characterizes the American popular music scene as being built upon an enormous fantasy that everyone is happy, a fantasy which he identifies as macho, since it obviously does not allow for the realities of women, African Americans, or gay men:

> We're not a macho fantasy. We're not a heterosexual beach fantasy. Our music isn't macho. It's barely masculine, our music. I think to an American there's something rather creepy about us. We just can't be part of it.[19]

While they appear to much of the non-gay, American audience as simply mainstream pop--they don't "look" like rock stars; their music has no guitars; their music is largely synthesized, and set to a dance beat--the Pet Shop Boys thereby perform a subtle act of subversion.

Underneath the happy dance beat and their clean-cut good looks, they sing of, among other things, the brutality of Margaret Thatcher's

monetarist policies.

In what sounds initially like an innocuous song, "Shopping", they offer commentary on the harsh realities, but, at the same time, an exit through the exhilaration of the relentless dance beat. Disco aesthetics are applied to a political critique, inscribing Dyer's argument that disco itself is a potentially richly political musical style.[20] What first strikes the listener about this song is its apparent frenzy which sounds like an crazed embodiment of the "Born To Shop" bumper sticker first popularized in California's gay communities as a camp comment on high consumerist attitudes. What the lyric sheet and a closer listen reveals, however, is a critique of the Conservative policy to sell up, to privatize Britain's national industries. This forced divestment led to lower inflation rates and less government expenditures--its aim--but also to the massive unemployment of British youth who are hereby given an ironic voice.

To confuse their audience further, the Pet Shop Boys have Derek Jarman, Britain's foremost radical gay filmmaker (Chapter Three), design and film some of their live shows and videos. Appearing on stage in outfits such as inflatable, inflated suits, they confound the critics and delight their fans.[21] This again is an act of gay subcultural practice, the subversion of purist rock aesthetics through high camp: appearing in haute couture fashion, Japanese design, setting the scene for a celebration but instead singing "life stinks".

Dancing, the Pet Shop Boys offer, is the only politics that cannot defuse the audience's energy or idealism.

Many of their songs are, however, gay-coded. For example, "In Private", a song that Tennant and Lowe wrote for Dusty Springfield,

takes on a very particular meaning for gay men who know the art of preparing oneself for the heterosexual world, and the lies and deceit that must often be performed as part of everyday survival:

> Take your time and tell me/ Did you lie?
> I realise/ That we've been found out
> We should stand together/ If we can
> But what you've planned/ Proves there's a difference
> between...
> Chorus:
> What you're gonna say/ I private
> You still want my love/ We must stand together
> And what we're gonna do/ In public
> Say you were never in love/ That you can remember
> So discreet/ I never tried to meet
> Your friends or interfere/ I took a back seat between...
> (Chorus)

This song is read by gay men as the dichotomy that many face between career advancement, loyalty to a more closeted lover who might be afraid of public exposure, and the claims of a personal integrity. The song takes on even more significance for those gay men and women who understand the turbulent career of Dusty Springfield because of her mistreatment in the music business in Britain when it became publicly known (in the early 1970's) that she is a lesbian.

At that time, Springfield's career went suddenly, and inexplicably, silent. Part of the reason was because she was living with a black lesbian, pop singer Madeleine Bell of the group Blue Mink, and therefore refused to travel and perform in South Africa.

The pressure on gay pop stars to "come out" in the early days of Gay Liberation in Britain meant that singers would have to chose between having or not having a career, such was the "stigma" of homosexuality. At a London concert by Dusty Springfield in the mid-1970's, a contingent of young women in the front rows began to chant "Come out, Dusty, come out!" Dusty, annoyed and confused at the

assault from her "fans", replied "But I *am* out. I'm out here, singing to you!"[22] What her fans were asking her to do, in fact, was to choose between a political cause and a personal career: an unfair choice for anyone to have to make, particularly at a time before there were any kinds of support systems for gay people. For the Pet Shop Boys, by contrast, things have improved, and they share some of the benefit of those gains with Springfield, whose career they attempted to resuscitate by writing songs for and producing the 1991 album *Reputation.*

The Pet Shop Boys seem to have discovered a way to move into the mainstream and continue to "speak" to gay audiences--a subversive act, critiquing the dominant order from inside its mechanisms of control and containment. Songs like "Why Do We Try", "The Party", and "Rent" all reveal a gay-coding. They represent the realities of gay lives in London in the early 1990's, the bleakness overcome by camp voice-overs and large scale, "operatic" production values that overwhelm the oppression for at least the duration of the song. Non-gay fans have the example of spectacle, fantasy, and hard-driven dance music to appreciate and consume for themselves.

Bronski Beat: Smalltown Boys with Hi-NRG ambitions

Using the Nazi sign of the pink triangle[23] (which homosexuals were forced to wear as identifying markers in concentration camps--Chapter One) on all of their records, Bronski Beat were from their inception an openly gay group. By 1986, the group renamed itself the more radically signifying Communards. Within their music, the Disco music of the 1970's is re-coded, reclaimed, recirculated, and

redefined as a vital gay territory. The music that was sung by African-American women in the 1970's and which gay men translated to suit their own purposes ("I Need A Man", "It's Raining Men", and so on) is rescued by Bronski Beat, sung for the first time by men for men. Taking the act of Disco bricolage one step further, Bronski Beat allow gay men to enjoy, for the first time throughout disco culture, the thrill of singing to one another. Gay men need now no longer use the "second hand" music of the American music industry, but in a bold act of appropriation take control of it. This Disco for the 1990's is called Hi-NRG (high energy music) and is, like the 1970's Disco music, derived from the music found in the African American dance clubs of the major American cities.

Of particular significance to gay subculture is Bronski Beat's appropriation of the Donna Summer hit song from the mid-1970's "I Feel Love". Summer, who was "the period's biggest black female star", was a particular favourite of the gay disco clientele, and it is generally believed that it was the gay subcultural that "launched" her career.[24]

However, Summer achieved the height of her fame in the late 1970's and since then has been less successful. In the late 1980's she delivered an assault on the gay subculture that had supported her before her international fame. Publicly embracing her new-found evangelism, she announced on network television that AIDS was "God's punishment on homosexuals", who, she continued, were depraved and sick creatures. Bronski Beat's resurrection of her biggest hit "I Feel Love", which was such a favourite in gay discos fifteen years ago, is therefore a reclamation of a past that was turned against gay men when they were thought to be no longer necessary for Summer's career.

Since Summer did not write the song, she receives no royalties from Bronski Beat's British hit. The song has been wrested from the corporate oppressors of gay men, another example of Dyer's concept of a politicized disco aesthetic.

Bronski Beat's act of reclaiming this song, which meant so much to gay audiences but which ultimately involved their betrayal, illustrates one of the dangers of representation that face gay people. In allowing someone to "speak" for us, and in championing representation by non-gay people, gay men allow the proliferation of their misrepresentations. Bronski Beat, in recording the Donna Summer hit song, attempt to redress the balance and to reclaim a gay past.

Their single "Smalltown Boy", from 1987, was accompanied by an explicitly gay video. It tells the story of a young gay man physically assaulted by a gang of non-gay men for "looking" at one of them in a sexually interested way at the local swimming-pool. The group, punching and kicking the gay man, "prove" to one another--in traditional male-bonding fashion--that they are one hundred percent heterosexual. Such is the fragility of male heterosexuality that they must speak to and reassure one another through the violence they inflict on their sexual Other. As Stanley Cohen suggests in Folk Devils and Moral Panics, young white British males think they are performing radical acts when they physically attack ethnic minorities and homosexuals[25] who are placed beneath them in the patriarchal hierarchy (Chapter One).

Then, the police come to the young man's house not, as one might naively hope, to investigate the crime but to "report" the boy's "deviance" to his parents. The boy cowers under the glare of his

parents who have only just "discovered" that he is gay. Like many parents of gay men, they reject him. Early next morning he sets out by train for London, realizing that if he is to have any life at all he will have to leave the "small town" behind, and move to where he can meet other gay men, where he will have the "freedom" that the gay ghetto provides. The expression on his face tell us that he is obviously elated by his decision, and has indeed transcended his "small town" indignity.

In this video a gay history lesson has been taught in three short minutes: heterosexuality is a fragile and therefore viciously defended terrain; the law "controls" sexual deviance, and works to maintain the nuclear family which, in turn, when it cannot "successfully" socialize its children into compulsory heterosexuality, will banish its "failures". But the important lesson to be learned from the video is that there is a "happy ending". Like films by Jarman and Ivory which give us the "necessary mythology" of an openly gay, constructive future, this video is a defiant moment in the face of all that gay men have been denied by mainstream culture's representations of homosexuality (Chapter Three).

In this particular film, gayness perseveres, overcoming all obstacles that dominant culture imposes. In the process, it defines its enemies--the law, the family, the school (site of enforced heterosexual socialization), and the church--and discovers new affiliations (other gay exiles on the main streets of metropolitan Britain).

This message may have reached the gay communities of Europe and Canada, but it did not reach the huge American pop market. Bronski

Beat's record company instructed the director of their "Smalltown Boy" video to "make a promo clip that would be, simultaneously, obviously gay in Britain, obviously straight in the USA."[26] This marketing strategy reveals the much higher degree of formatting that pertains in the USA than does in Britain. The company obviously understands that Bronski Beat have a very large gay following in Britain, and the gay video feeds into that corner of the market. In the States, however, there is--in place of this market--a Christian Right and its attendant media watchdog organizations ready to denounce network or cable television programming for any perceived attempts to "corrupt" the young or promote "non-traditional" lifestyles (Chapter Two).

Another video, this time a solo effort by Bronski Beat's singer Jimmy Somerville, that has been broadcast in Europe and Canada but, again, not in the USA is his contribution to the *Red, Hot and Blue* compact disc and video collection to benefit AIDS research and education. The song is Cole Porter's "From This Moment On", a song that has traditionally been sung by a woman.

As Somerville ecstatically wails "you've got the skin that I love to touch", the video depicts two almost naked men kissing in an intensive, erotic manner quite unusual in television programming. This explicitly homoerotic video achieves two important things. First, it re-establishes Cole Porter's link to gay subculture and reclaims his lyrics as gay subcultural productions: they are among the finest examples of camp in American popular music. This has rarely been acknowledged, however, by the countless performers who have selectively mainstreamed his songbook. Second, the video imposed explicit gay male desire in a long format broadcast about AIDS and the

necessity for safe sex. The American networks refused to let the video run as part of the concert package.

Suzanne Moore describes this corporate censure of gay desire by explaining that, while all manner of heterosexuality can be shown on screen, homosexuality--particularly in music videos--even presented as a kiss between two men, is "problematical", and too "different" from more acceptable kinds of "otherness" to qualify as entertainment:

> Much of our enjoyment of music and films often seems to be bound up with experiencing something other to our daily lives. This "getting a bit of the other" seems also to depend on women as the gateway to the other world, but increasingly black people and black culture is used to signify something radically different. Some kinds of "otherness" remain just too threatening to be colonized in this manner--homosexuality for example seems to be seen as far too disturbing and difficult to offer this kind of escapism.[27]

Erasure: "Sexuality"

Dominant culture can also be critiqued in the packaging of popular gay music. Accompanying the Erasure compact disc *Chorus* (1991), for example, is the usual booklet of lyrics, credits, and so on. On the reverse side of each lyric's page is a colour photograph depicting white, middle-class people involved in very ordinary activities.

Architects hold briefcases and inspect a building-site with a foreman; a father, mother, and young child stroll along a tropical beach, on holiday; five professional-looking people sit around a table animatedly discussing plans--a blueprint is spread before them; and on the back page, a mother and young child cycle their bicycles through a parkway. All the scenes are happy, pleasant, innocuous; bright clean colours highlight the bright clean smiles in each picture.

There is no discord, no strife, no conflict. It looks like a

perfect world of "happy", "normal" families: it is a dream of the 1950's upheld by groups like contemporary Canada's coalition of Conservative MPs--"The Family Caucus"[28]-- and the United States' Jesse Helms as a social ideal by which to judge everyone else.

There is no written indication of what is intended, either. The first track, however, reveals a scathing irony. Against a crashing electronic background, foregrounded sputtering and crackling synthesizers and a wall of rising sound, singer/writer Andy Bell confronts the delusions of such moralists with his anthemic condemnation. "Go ahead with your dreaming for what it's worth" he chants before venting his full anger on those who "have covered up the sun" and corrupted his world.

Dancing audiences may well read these words and the song as the introduction to an ecologically motivated critique of big business, a reading which stretches the genre of protest music across generic boundaries of politically correct musical forms to include both electronic disco and syntho-pop. In this reading, the dance club is again situated as political forum and arena.

Gay dancers and listeners hear another aggression as well. This is the full attack on the hegemony of heterosexism which denounced Andy Bell for being outspokenly gay on his last American tour. The "happy families" of the hegemony are placed "naively", almost "innocently", in juxtaposition with lyrics which condemn straight-jacketing and celebrate gay men and their cultural practices.

Similar readings can be made of other, earlier Erasure songs like "Sexuality", "A Little Respect", and "It Doesn't Have To Be This Way". In fact, this "deconstructive" moment is announced explicitly

in the group's name. Putting something--a concept or a word--"under erasure" is French philosopher Jacques Derrida's linguistic strategy to reveal the errors and misperceptions generated when dominant culture silences its Others. He calls the patriarchal domination of language and representation "phallologocentrism".[29]

And this is the target of Gay Liberationist ideology which the group embraces: the masculist, heterosexual claim that other versions of representation, other affectional claims upon the world, are deviant and unreliable. Andy Bell and Vince Clark, in a gesture of gay subcultural defiance, have put this "straight" and "normal" world of "happy families" under erasure.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Jon Savage, "The Enemy Within: Sex, rock, and identity", Facing the Music: A Pantheon guide to popular culture, ed. Simon Frith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 136.

2. Palmer was interviewed on Vancouver Co-Op Radio's weekly gay and lesbian "The Coming Out Show" in early May, 1992.

3. Alec Foege, "Shiny Happiness People", Spin (Feb 1992), 22.

4. Significantly, John Peel has been voted Britain's "Number One Disco Jockey" in the Readers' Poll of the New Musical Express, the nation's most widely circulated pop music newspaper--every year since 1975 to the present.

5. Quoted by Kris Kirk, "Boy George: Coming Out on the Comeback Trail", The Advocate (December 20, 1988), 39.

6. Andrew Ross describes these sentiments as part of "the most retarded--agressive, disrespectful, and homophobic--characteristics of working-class masculinity", in No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 164.

7. See Peter Ackroyd, Dressing Up: Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979) and the unauthored Drag Show (Woollahra, New South Wales: Currency Press, 1977).

8. Julie Burchill, "The Shock of the Neutral". New Society (May 17, 1984), 264.

9. Quoted by Kiki Mason in "Using the Right Pronouns: Gays and the New Music Seminar", New York Native, volume 8, number 35 (issue 277), August 8, 1988, 27.

10. Dave Rimmer, Like Punk Never Happened: Culture Club and the New Pop, (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985).

11. Quoted by Kris Kirk in "Boy George: Coming Out on the Comeback Trail", The Advocate, issue 514, December 20, 1988, 36-39.

12. Vito Russo, quoting Barney Walters of the Village Voice, in The Celluloid Closet, 298.

13. Quoted by Ted Mico in "The Boy Bounces Back", Spin (5:3, June, 1989), 84.

14. Mary Harron, "McRock: Pop as a commodity", Facing The Music: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture, ed. Simon Frith. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 209.

15. Andrew Ross, for example, assumes that George's dropping of his

"disguise" is a landmark in popular music history in No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 164.

16. Kris Kirk, "Boy George: Coming Out on the Comeback Trail", 37.

17. Telephone interview with Erika Ehm: July 10, 1992.

18. Quoted by Chris Heath, Pet Shop Boys, *Literally* (London: Viking, 1990), 195-196. Note the gay shift away from fans of corporate rock'n'roll--conformist aesthetics--to the loner and outsider now declared to be rock's true rebel.

19. Quoted in Heath, 194.

20. Richard Dyer, "In Defence of Disco", On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 417.

21. Described by Chris Heath in The Pet Shop Boys, Literally (London: Viking, 1990).

22. These events are reconstructed from personal memory of the concert which was unrecorded in the popular music press.

23. Heinz Heger, The Men With The Pink Triangle (Boston: Alyson Press, 1980).

24. Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm and Blues (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 154.

25. Stanley Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), page xi.

26. Simon Frith, Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop (New York: Routledge, 1988), 166.

27. Suzanne Moore, "Getting a Bit of the Other: The Pimps of Postmodernism", Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, eds. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 186.

28. Geoffrey York, "Tory politicians form family compact: Family values dominate ideology", Globe and Mail (June 3, 1992), A1.

29. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

Chapter Six

Concluding Remarks

This thesis began by declaring that, despite repeated claims made on behalf of a gay subculture and gay subcultural practice(s) by cultural theorists, little exists that explains how that subculture defines itself and what those cultural practices might be, how they function, and what implications they have on "mainstream" theories of subcultures.

Following an analysis of hegemonic oppression, Chapter One suggests that cultural theory's model of resistance and subversion--usually applied to subcultures such as Teds, Rockers, Punks and so on--is more appropriately inclusive when applied as well to the daily lives and cultural practices of gay men. It suggests that an analysis of gay cultural practices within three specific media--film, television and popular music--will reveal how bricolage works, how oppositional strategies of coding and decoding operate, and how resistance functions to define subcultural "truths". It also suggests that "opening" cultural theory to the study of gay cultural practices might begin a broad--even reciprocal--dialogue between dissident, disaffiliated groups within mainstream culture.

Throughout this thesis, criticism is derived from an analysis of "literature", film, television, music video, music released as singles or album, Broadway show music, and critical texts from various media including record reviews, interviews on television, radio and

telephone, fanzines, record liner notes, photographs and record jackets or sleeves. Through all media and at every level of production in contemporary mass, popular culture the effects and actual input of gay subcultural theory and practice is identified and evaluated.

Chapter Two, for example, follows a brief discussion of representational theories--the politics of controlling representation and the effects of that control on human communities, gay and non-gay--with analyses of mainstream, or Hollywood, film, and television movies.

In Chapter Three, theories of representation, convention, coding and control are explored through analysis of a variety of cinematic practices which reveal a growing body of subcultural texts, again largely ignored by cultural theory. Audience response is read and contrasted--the addressed audience being either "gay" or "non-gay".

Chapter Four expands on this cultural analysis by examining how youth subcultures since the beginning of rock'n'roll have consciously but unacknowledgedly continued to borrow from gay subcultural styles of resistance in clothing, hairstyle, self-presentation, social and sexual habits, and even musical styles. Analyses of musical styles including heavy metal, teen-dream pop, rock'n'roll, folk, and contemporary dance suggests an aesthetics of heterosexual female desire, and a deconstruction of heterosexual male aggression against women and gay men.

Chapter Five then examines four specific music groups--three members of which have since emerged as solo gay male performers--for site-specific instances of cultural opposition. This ranges from sex-

ual ambiguity and "secret" coding in alternative mainstream rock, to music-hall style drag in mainstream pop and dance, through high camp refusal to participate in mainstream culture or politically directed reclamation of past cultural losses in disco music, to a final aggressive high theory denunciation of the hegemony in contemporary electro-synth pop.

A recent issue of *Rolling Stone* inadvertently points out the ommission that this thesis addresses--the absence of a profile of gay men in popular music (and film) culture--in its article on "Gay Studies".[1] The topic under discussion in this particular campus report is the placing under interrogation of gender issues. The texts being addressed are works by Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, and E.M. Forster. The cover of the same issue of the magazine has a photograph of Pee Wee Herman--now known as Paul Reubens since his fall from mainstream grace--whose sexual orientation is, amazingly, still not discussed, even here in the "liberal" rock press. Nor, which is more to the point--given the nature of its advertising and the mainstream rock'n'roll acts reviews for which have filled the pages of Rolling Stone since its inception as a "radical" and "street-based" magazine for alternative culture in the United States--is the sexuality of rock'n'roll performers or their audiences addressed.

Everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, except the students described in the article. Subcultures and musical cultures, by implication, inscribe heterosexual male privilege: they legitimate a phallocracy. That this privilege is purchased at the expense of women, people of colour, and gay men--who have supplied much of the

style and rhetoric of rebellion to these masculist icons--is never admitted. This is "capitalist realism", as Michael Schudson calls it, at its worst because it is so naturalized as to obscure its foundations, appropriations and oppressions.[2]

Until cultural theory can "own" an understanding of gay subcultural practices--a study which will break the ghetto confines described within the article in Rolling Stone--gay subcultural practices will not be seen for what they are: an all-pervasive discourse upon desire, commodification, fantasy, gender, representation, and power. Gay subcultural practices are, by definition, a critique of all other cultural practices and theories, both hegemonic and subcultural.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. Stacey D'Erasmo, "The Gay Nineties", Rolling Stone (October 3, 1991), 83-130.

2. Michael Schudson, Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

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