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THE GENDER OF GAY MEN: IDENTIFICATION, SEXUAL CULTURES, AND THE AFTERLIVES OF THE INVERSION MODEL

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GABRIEL OJEDA-SAGUE

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“Gender is the extent we go to in order to be loved.”

— *Robert Glück,* Margery Kempe

“There’s a woman inside of me

there’s one inside of you too

and she don’t always do pretty things”

— *Adrianne Lenker, “Pretty Things”*

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Abstract

This dissertation traces how male gayness, while conceived of primarily as a sexuality, has provoked a variety of gendered positions, identifications, allegiances, and conflicts through the 20th and 21st centuries. Overall, I find that the evolution of gay identity in the Western Hemisphere has been generated by a rotation of arguments staking a claim on gay men's gender—that they are true or imitation men, that they are true or imitation women, that they betray both categories altogether, etc. Analyzing a series of cultural discourses and aesthetic lineages, I argue that our sense of gay maleness today is still dominated by the conceptual architecture of the inversion model of 19th-century sexology—one of the first medical and cultural models for describing congenital homosexuality, which explained gayness as a psychic, spiritual, or otherwise internal femininity in a male body. While one of the oft-told stories of gay cultural progress in the 20th century tells of the collapse of this model and the conceptual division of sexuality from gender and of gayness from transness, my analysis shows just how imbricated these fields and identifications remain in our contemporary. I employ a method of careful historicism and rigorous close reading of literature, activism, and film to track how the enfolding of gender and sexuality in cultural discourses by and about gay men. Because this dissertation highlights so many moments of polemical claims about what the gender of gay men "really" is, my approach is decidedly anti-polemical, aiming to place seemingly conflicting discourses into conversation with each other to see what arises from their frictional embrace. Doing so, this dissertation bridges conceptual gaps between gay studies and trans studies, between gay studies and feminist studies, and between gay studies and the representation of masculinity.

Introduction: The Gender of Gay Men

On the Title

If the title, "The Gender of Gay Men," seems redundant, let's look briefly at three competing theories of homosexuality and gender, all stemming from a relatively narrow period of about 30 years in France. First, in the fourth volume of *In Search of Lost Time,* Marcel Proust writes of the troubled desires of the race of "inverts," a term he takes from the 19th century sexological theory that described same-sex desire as the product of an internal femininity. For Proust, the invert is a hybrid creature, literally like a "centaur," combining a masculine appearance and feminine temperament.[1] The invert, "too closely akin to woman to be capable of having any effective relations with her," is "enamoured of precisely the type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return." In these conditions, the invert is doomed to two options for his desire: to pay for sex with "real men" or to settle for other inverts, who their "imagination" can "take for real men."[2] Second, in his rejoinder to the inversion model, Marc-André Raffalovich describes instead the "unisexual." The unisexual is the masculine and morally upright man—indeed "the more [he] has moral values the less he is effeminate"—who desires those like himself.[3] Unlike "the degenerate invert," Raffalovich's unisexual "feels like a man vis-à-vis a man."[4] His interest is in sameness, Raffalovich affirms, saying that "if they were women…they would love a woman." But the male unisexuals, in his love for the same masculinity, "despise[s] women too much to be effeminate."[5]

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[1] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Volume IV: Sodom & Gomorrah,* translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D.J. Enright (New York: The Modern Library, 1993 [1921]), 19.
[2] Proust, 21.
[3] Marc-André Raffalovich, *Uranism and Unisexuality: A Study of Different Manifestations of the Sexual Instinct,* translated by Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston, edited by Philip Healy with Frederick S. Roden (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016 [1896]), 48.
[4] Raffalovich, 53.
[5] Raffalovich, 48.

Third, André Gide also speaks of an alternative to the invert: in his case, the pederast. For Gide, the pederast is the proud and un-sick homosexual, a different "shade" from the "pathetic inverts."[6] As a man, the pederast desires the youth, who is not only different from the pederast in age (and in some of Gide's other works, in race),[7] but also in that the youth's sexuality is not final. "More desirable and desired than desiring," the youth may age into heterosexuality rather than himself aging into pederasty.[8] Though the pederast is essentially masculine, his desires grant him a particular "respect for women;"[9] his youth at times exhibits effeminacy, "the natural expression of his feelings."[10]

The types at the heart of these three theories—the invert, the unisexual, the pederast—do not only describe what we would contemporarily call "gayness," nor is that contemporary term limited to the meanings attached to these three types. But all three of these theories and the types they account for have come to signify, at various points in history, in the representational category of Western gayness, of homosexuality, of queer desire in men. The phenomena they describe (effeminacy, same-gender desire, "Greek love") are all symbolically, if not directly taxonomically, attached to the figure of the gay man. But, notably, each theory characterizes gayness with a vastly different sense of gender and desire. Gayness in Raffalovich's unisexual is essentially about a masculine gender and a desire for the same, a rather literal rendering of "homo-sexual." Untainted by the "frivolous and reprehensible" qualities of women,[11] and with a deeply felt respect for mutual male friendship, Raffalovich's unisexual achieves moral

[6] André Gide, *Corydon*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2015 [1925]), 19.
[7] For the interest of Gide's work in relations between white men and Arab boys, see Keith Cohen, "Confessing and Withholding Secrets: Masculine Anxieties in Gide and Proust," *L'Esprit Créateur* 43, no. 3 (2003), 70.
[8] Gide, 120.
[9] Gide, 112.
[10] Gide, 16.
[11] Raffalovich, 68.

perfection. On the other hand, Proust's doomed invert does a strange dance around sexual difference and sexual sameness. Presuming a kind of universality of heterosexuality, Proust's invert desires men because somewhere inside he is truly feminine—his desire for what seems to be, at first, the same is in fact a reflection of his essential gender difference. His object of desire, too authentically masculine, could never desire him back, and so he must settle for those like himself. But as Didier Eribon has pointed out, this has circled us right back to sameness, as "what [else] should one call a member of the 'third sex' who sleeps with another member of the 'third sex,'…if not, precisely, 'homosexual'?"[12] In Gide, homosexuality is premised precisely on forms of difference, just not gender/sexual difference. He rather fiercely opposed Proust's model of inversion, which he saw as too universally effeminizing,[13] but he is also rather distant from the moralist and rather de-sexualized valences of Raffalovich's unisexual. These three theories all stake claims on gay men's gender, and through these claims make further claims on gay men's desires, relationships to each other, relationships to heterosexual men, and relationships to women and femininity. Proper to their time, Raffalovich and Gide's claims are also the foundations for their defenses of homosexuality to the general world, their pleas for its social acceptance.

These theories all originate from the period just beyond what Foucault called the 19th-century "invention" of the homosexual, where the rhetoric around sex acts "contrary to nature" transformed into the identification of a particular "type of life," a social actor consubstantial with his sex acts but who also was associated with a particular childhood, psychology, physiology, sensibility, physiognomy, etc. In this period, the kind of contested theorization we see between

[12] Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self,* translated by Michael Lucey (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 86.
[13] Laurence LeSage, "Proust and Gide, Lifelong Antagonists," *The Modern Language Journal* 36, no. 4 (1952), 164.

Proust, Gide, and Raffalovich is exceedingly common in both medical and cultural accounts of homosexuality. According to one of the "oft-told progressivist stories of the late twentieth century," as David Valentine has put it, this is something like a bygone dark age of defining gayness.[14] Now, according to this story, in the long durée of the 20th century and the innovations of the 21st century, we have popularly solidified the conceptualization of gayness as gender normative and have assigned all forms of gender deviation to the category transgender, categories now neatly separated from their initial, regrettable overlaps in the rhetoric of inversion. We have supposedly learned, in activist rhetoric as much as in the language of queer theory as much as in the language of personal identification, to think of sexuality and gender as separate, uncorrelated domains. To speak of gayness has supposedly been to speak primarily in the domain of sexuality, only adjectival to gender, race, pathology, etc. We have supposedly been able to see the gay man as exactly that—the gay (adjective, sexuality) man (noun, gender).

But the truth, as this dissertation shows, is much messier than this, messier even than the range shown by the three theories I have outlined above. And so the phrase of my title, "The Gender of Gay Men," will continue to reveal itself to be quite the opposite of redundant. Indeed, we will see that hotly contested intellectual, artistic, medical, and activist debates surrounding gay men's gender, as well as affectively complex personal and erotic negotiations of gay men's gender, compose a vast portion of the history and culture of gayness in the West. As exemplified in our century by the Human Rights Campaign's endorsement in 2007 of a "gay only" version of the Employee Non-Discrimination Act that excluded protections for trans people, this history of the claims staked on gay men's gender is a history with surprisingly high stakes, integrally

[14] David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2007), 15.

manifesting and defining sociopolitical allegiances, allocations of community resources, feelings of belonging, erotic desires, and cultural productions.

The Argument and the Chapters

This dissertation traces scenes across the Western 20th and 21st centuries in which gay men's sexuality has provoked gendered positions, identifications, allegiances, and conflicts. In spite of late 20th century innovations in feminism and queer theory that separate gender and sexuality, I insist on gender and sexuality's imbrication in these cultural discourses about gay maleness. In my analysis, I pay particular attention to moments in literature, film, and activism in which varied actors stake (often conflicting) claims on gay men's gendered identification, desire, and belonging. Here I am asking, why is it that different actors can look at the figure of "the gay man" and where one can see the most pure version of the male, the other can see the most distant possibility from the purified male—that is, an imitation or failed woman? This binaristic example is clearly not the only direction of such an operation, but what I aim to show here is just how much the figure of the gay man has been made, in the Western 20th and 21st centuries, into a problem of and for gender. What is it about "the gay man," as a concept both socially and personally identified for typifying human eroticism, that encodes such gendered discordance and intervention? In seeking the answer to this question, my analysis revises our understanding of the unsteady ties between feminist and gay studies, between gay and trans studies, and between the activist endeavors that found these academic fields.

Though I speak throughout this dissertation of the gay "man" and gay "maleness," I do so only provisionally, as the very basis of my work here is to destabilize and historicize our conceptualization of the maleness, masculinity, manhood of gayness. In the course of my study,

the "cis gay man" arrives as a historically late construction. I use terms like "gay men" and "gay maleness" particularly as a reflection of the vocabulary my own time period gives me, in which sexuality is adjectival to gender, where sexuality is an erotic directionality exhibited by a body otherwise (uncorrelatedly, nonsynonymously) gendered and sexed. But in the objects and figures this dissertation traces, these terms, and indeed this conceptualization of the relationship between sexuality and gender, will be radically disrupted and historicized. Thus, along with the gay man, this dissertation is about his (her, their) other gendered appearances in Western terms that were or are associated with his domain: the nellie, the butch, the leather daddy, the drag queen, the fruit, the Uranian, the clone, the sissy, the *travesti*, the invert, the pervert, the uni-sexual, the similisexual, the femme, the sodomite, the molly, the aesthete, the dandy, the bodybuilder, the freak, the *marica*, the crossdresser, the *joto,* the cocksucker, the faggot, the trans fag, the "gay n—,"[15] the two-spirit person, the street queen, the adhesive, the snap queen, the dyke daddy, the pig, the diva, the diva worshipper, the queer. If any of these categories call to mind other queer identities that would contemporaneously divide themselves from the gay man (such as any associations with trans identities or culturally specific ones), this is a feature and not a bug in this dissertation. The goal here is to trace the great mass of gender discordance revolving around the nexus of the figure of the gay man, including those identifiers that may have been associated with this figure at one historical junction but which, for one reason or another, have subsequently been divided.

In the course of my analysis, I make two overarching arguments. First, I find that the question of the gender of gay men has been an incredibly productive one, insofar as much of the

[15] On the specific violence of this slur and the ontological negativity surrounding gay Black life, see Calvin Warren, "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, ~~Gay~~ Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence," *GLQ* 23, no. 3 (2017): 391-418.

hydraulics of what we generally call innovations in "gay culture," "gay studies," and "gay rights," in the Western Hemisphere have generated in the rotation of arguments about gay men's gender—that gay men are basically men, that gay men are basically women, that gay men represent a third gender, or that gay men betray and undo these categories all together. In my chapters, I zoom in on particular flashpoints in the 20th- and 21st-century history of Western gayness to find how conflicting discourses about gay men's gender found particular activist, cultural, and intellectual developments. Though the scenes I zoom in on are nowhere near comprehensive of all the ways the question of gay men's gender has catalyzed changes in the culture, politics, and scholarship around gayness, they model a style of reading for the imbrication of gender and sexuality that can be applied more generally.

This leads to my dissertation's second major argument, which is key to the style of reading modeled in these chapters. I argue that the inversion model of 19th-century sexology, which Foucault credited with the "invention" of homosexuality itself, defined a metalanguage for sexuality and gender in general that is still dominant today, far beyond the inversion model's supposed debunking. Primarily in my first chapter, but reverberating throughout my dissertation's chapters, I argue that inversion—the medical and cultural theory which explained gay maleness as an internal femininity in a male body, rooted particularly in the activist writing of Karl Heinrich-Ulrichs—fundamentally established gender and sexuality as properties of both one's essential self and one's human type, as aspects felt "within" particular individuals that also place them in a social grouping in a kind of racial logic. That is to say, inversion invented a systemic view of gender and sexuality as indexes of what one both *has* and *is*—a systemic view that, even as inversion has fallen out of purchase with both medical and lay understanding of homosexuality, defines our language for gender and sexuality today. Though in many streams of

queer and feminist theory and activism, we have seemed to learn to separate sexuality and gender as non-synonymous and uncorrelated, we have not been able to shear them from this shared framing. This is most visible in what, in my first chapter, I call inversion's "afterlives." Thus, I am arguing that gayness's moment of "invention" in sexology, and its particular deployment in the rhetoric of the inversion model, establishes an adhesion of sexuality and gender in the figure of the gay man that continues to structure not just our understanding of gay men, but our understanding of gender and sexuality in general.

In both of these arguments, I am not claiming that gender and sexuality are indeed synonymous or correlated, but rather that 1) gayness works as a gender, not despite its being a sexuality but precisely because it is a sexuality, and 2) that particular cultural discourses originating in the 19th century and extending through to the contemporary have posed the gay man as a primary figure for gender and sexuality's appearances as forms of each other. When I say gayness "works as a gender," what I mean is that, since cultural developments of the 19th century typified the homosexual, "gayness" as an identifier divides the human with regards to sexuality, sociality, corporeality, and aesthetics by assignment of an image of one's "inner" essence and habituation. In this configuration, sexuality is nearly parallel to the structure of gender. Importantly, I am not saying that this is particular to gayness nor to specifically gay men. One could also thus say that heterosexuality operates as a gender, but this operation is much more commonly experienced as primary and normative social conditions. The gay man, whose gendered identifications and allegiances are so often understood as anti-social and non-normative, is a figure that puts into relief this parallel operation of gender and sexuality.

The lesbian as a figure similarly puts this into relief, but if there is a particular reason this dissertation is focused on gay men and is not called *The Gender of Gay People* or something

similar, it is because lesbian studies has been significantly more honest and insightful about the complications to gender and the category "woman" presented by lesbianism. From Aimee Duc's aptly titled novel *Are They Women?* (1901) to Monique Wittig's 1992 statement that "Lesbians are not women," from the insights of sexual difference feminism to fiery debates about butch-femme, lesbian studies and literature—particularly in its entanglements with feminist theory and activism—has actively considered and debated how lesbian culture, history, erotics, and activism problematize gender and femininity. I am indebted to much of this literature in my own study, but it is also important to emphasize that I try to avoid assuming here that lesbianism and gay maleness are necessarily analogous. In my first chapter's section on inversion in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), I argue that the conceptualization of lesbianism and gay maleness as analogous but inverse forms of being is a historical effect of the inversion model and its afterlife; in my fourth chapter, on the feminist sex wars, I show some of the activist and theoretical frictions that come from that very analogization. Our sense that lesbianism and gay maleness are related types of life is thus a historically contingent one. But furthermore, I am interested in the findings of lesbian and feminist studies that lesbianism's relationship to gender is different to gay men's relationship to gender because lesbianism is positioned as (in Rosi Braidotti's words) the "other of the other,"[16] a sexual and gendered divergence from an already subjugated gender position in womanhood. Though I question thinking analogously of gay men as an other of the subject "man," showing as I do that the conceptualization of gay men as a type of "man" is deeply culturally and historically

[16] Rosi Braidotti, "Revisiting Male Thanatica. *Response,*" in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory,* eds. Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 218.

contingent, I do interpret this phrase from Braidotti as an instructive one for the social, affective, erotic, and institutional nonequivalence of lesbianism and gay maleness.

Thus, what I am interested in here is how the conceptualization of gay maleness in the West, since its 19th century emergence as a popular division of human sexual type and experience, has worked as the field on which cultural representations of gender have been worked out (often combatively). Being that this dissertation involves reading through many polemical claims on what the gender of gay men "really" is, or "really" should be, my approach is decidedly anti-polemical, aiming to place seeming mutually antagonistic or conflicting discourses into conversation with each other to see what arises from their frictional embrace. I am interested in what Eve Sedgwick calls for in her coda to *Between Men*: "a view of homosexuality that is not only fully historical, but plural," that accounts for the wide "always-applicable reservoir of contradictory intuitions" about gayness and gender.[17] My dissertation attends to the plurality of discourses around gay gender, asking at every step of the way what the conditions of possibility of this plurality are, how the figure of the gay man came to carry such representational weight in the conceptualization of gender.

The scenes that populate this dissertation's chapters, all flashpoints in the conflicted history of the gender of gay men, are not arranged chronologically, nor do they explicitly cross-reference each other. In light of the anti-polemical and pluralist approach of this dissertation, they may even conflict with each other in their understanding not just of gay men's gender, but of gender and sexuality in general. They all hold very different, often mutually incompatible, theories and politics of the objects of gayness, sexuality, and gender. But what these scenes share

[17] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,* 30th anniversary edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 215.

is that they exhibit moments in which the question of the gender of gay men is being put under particular cultural, political, aesthetic, or erotic pressures. In each of them, there are high-stakes investments in representing or even "deciding" the gender of gay men. Thus, my movement between them is an attempt to exhibit and analyze some of the rotations that the question of the gender of gay men has done in its 20th and 21st century life.

One brief, admittedly reductive, but useful way of summarizing the course of the chapters is that they test the cultural, political, aesthetic, and erotic consequences and limits of thinking of gay men as "internally" women (Chapter 1), as aesthetically transfeminine (Chapter 2), as erotically transmasculine (Chapter 3), and, lastly, as political, patriarchal men (Chapter 4). In all of these chapters, I track both the particular language of these claims and the actors or institutions they generate from, as well as the debates and rebukes that these claims come under. But these brief labels are useful for understanding some of the patterns of repeated claims and developments around gay men's gender.

In my first chapter, I establish what I call the "afterlives of the inversion model." "'If You Could Have Punctured His Soul': Ulrichs, Interiority, and the Literary Afterlives of the Inversion Model," begins with an investigation of the reception of the activist writing of German jurist Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs, a self-described "Urning" who wrote twelve highly influential pamphlets explaining his theory of congenital homosexuality. His typology of what he called "Uranism" was characterized by a maxim: *anima muliebris virile corpore inclusa*, most commonly translated as "a woman's soul enclosed in a man's body." Though from the moment of his publication he was as decried as he was applauded, Ulrichs's formulation holds a notable influence over both his historical moment and ours. I argue that Ulrichs's formulation foundationally, albeit amateurishly, solidified the theories of contemporary criminologists,

biologists, and psychiatrists into a systematic view of sexuality and gender as indexes of both one's *personality* and *personhood,* of what one both *has* and *is*. Though I trace how various medical and activist discourses sought to debunk Ulrichs's theories, I argue that the conceptual architecture of his model is still the dominant metalanguage of both gender and sexuality today. This is especially true at the aesthetic level, where the conceptual architecture of inversion consistently determines the representation of gayness.

When we look closely at gay literary cultures, we particularly see the persistence of inversion across the 20th century and into the 21st. Primarily, I identify two major effects of the inversion model that are reflected in gay literary texts: 1) the establishment of a generic parallelism between lesbian women and gay men, and 2) a metaphorical external/internal divide reified by racial science. In the first half, I analyze the intertextual dialogue between Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006). I show that both works narrativize inversion in the development of an invert daughter after the deaths of their well-read invert fathers. In this surprising narrative parallel across the century, we see a critical example of how inversion determines narratives of sexual development in and after the 20th century. In these two works, the uneasy parallels between gay men and lesbian women are subtended by the rhetoric of inversion. In the second half of the chapter, I home in further onto the racial logics of inversion by tracing its influence on a 21st century trope in which a gay man self-describes as having an "inner Black woman." Grounding this discussion especially in the fiction of Joon Oluchi Lee and Hilton Als's memoir *The Women* (1996), I read this trope as indexical of how the conceptual architecture of inversion cross-pollinates with racial discourses in and after the 19th century. This requires a close reading of what may at first seem paradoxical, the metaphorical interiorization of something seemingly external (racial Blackness). The way

these texts navigate this metaphoric operation becomes the ground for their intertextual discussion with the literature of sexology and their sense of gayness as a phenomenon of gender.

Continuing my interest in the novel as a site for thinking about the gender of gay men, but expanding to other areas of the Western Hemisphere, the second chapter of this dissertation, "The Literary Travesti: Transfeminine Aesthetics and the Latin American Gay Novel," investigates a series of novels by Latin American gay male writers that feature transfeminine protagonists. Close reading three novels, Jose Donoso's *El lugar sin límites* (1966), Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), and Mario Bellatin's *Salon de belleza* (1994), I argue that the birth of the Latin American gay novel in the late 20th century depended on a concatenation of gay and trans meanings in the form of a literary operation that took transfemininity as a sign for male homosexuality. This operation is centered in this period's literary treatment of the *travesti*, a distinctly Latin American identification that sits somewhere between what we might term in the North American context as "gay man" and "trans woman." This chapter's method, influenced by the field of hemispheric studies,[18] shows that a turn to the fields of Latin American literature and queer theory can expand United States gay and trans studies in transformative ways. Indeed, I use the research of this chapter to read comparatively back into recent arguments by Grace Lavery and Emma Heaney about the work of Eve Sedgwick and the divisions between trans and cis gay literary cultures. This kind of hemispheric analysis has helped me undo any essentialist reading of gayness as unifying, social category, while allowing me to conceive of cross-cultural continuities in conversations around how sexuality and gender crystallize around gay men.

[18] Ralph Bauer, "Hemispheric Studies," *PMLA* 124, no. 1 (2009): 234-250.

The third chapter, “Lou’s Men: Sameness, Leo Bersani, and the Legacy of Lou Sullivan,” attempts to gain new conceptual purchase on the question of what is meant by “same-sex” or “same-gender” sexuality. Turning from two chapters that directly treat gayness as connected to femininity, this chapter begins to eye more closely the conceptual structure of gay men’s identifications with masculinity. I begin with discussion of a few instances in the late 19th century and early 20th century in which the appeal to “sameness” as a model for understanding gayness worked as masculinist counter to the inversion model’s adhesion of gayness to gender deviance. Then I turn in particular to an analysis of the diaries of Lou Sullivan, a gay trans man activist and writer who lived in San Francisco in the 1970s and 1980s. I analyze Sullivan’s personal writing through the lens of one of the most developed conceptualizations of gay sameness in the late 20th century, Leo Bersani’s “homo-ness,” his term for the ability of gayness to undo the symbolic power of sexual difference and create a sexual ethic based in forms of sameness. I argue that Sullivan’s work represents a trans instantiation of Bersanian homo-ness, one that helps us revisit Bersani’s writing and the connection between gay and trans erotics. Approaching gay masculinity and the desire for sameness through transmasculine erotics, my analysis resists many of the transphobic and masculinist bases of the conceptual appeal to sameness in gay writing and avoids essentializing gay masculinity as normative, natural, or cis.

Extending further my analysis of gay men’s relationship to masculinity, the final chapter of the dissertation, “The Possession of Men: Anti-porn Feminism and Gay Pornography,” visits the fiery debates of the feminist sex wars. There, I analyze the place of gay men’s pornography in and against the anti-porn debates, reading it for how such debates encode arguments about gay men’s relationship to patriarchal power. Because the feminist anti-porn argument of the time put forward that porn was characterized by the subordination and degradation of women, all-male

gay porn often stood as a kind of problem case in the rhetoric of the movement—an exception for some, an apotheosis for others. In this same period, however, many gay men were theorizing for the first time how gay porn was integral to the catalyzing of gay subjectivity, activism, and community. I read through activist and scholarly clashes around the idea of gay porn to ask a historicopolitical question: what conflicts and allegiances have arisen between a populace that repeatedly claims porn has been key to their objectification with a populace that repeatedly claims porn has been key to their subjectification? In this, I am also asking what role porn and thinking with porn play in the conception of gay men as men*,* in relation to patriarchy and the subjugation of women. In readings of the writing of Andrea Dworkin and John Stoltenberg, the early gay porn studies of Richard Dyer and Tom Waugh, and various debates in the pages of *Gay Community News,* I argue that this moment should be considered a cornerstone in the development of allegiances and oppositions between feminist and gay men's activism and feminist and gay studies.

It is my hope that moving between these scenes opens up an expansive sense of how gay sexuality has been culturally, politically, aesthetically, and erotically entangled with various senses of their gender.

Gender & Sexuality After Rubin

In the academic fields at the core of this dissertation's work—queer theory, lesbian and gay studies, feminist theory, trans studies—the conceptual division or adhesion of gender and sexuality has had a troubled and multivalent path. It is one of the goals of this dissertation to give to these fields language and history to think with each other through the tense history of the rotation of gender and sexuality. In the second half of this introduction, I aim to situate my

analysis within and across these fields, while also historicizing some of the theoretical conflicts and allegiances of these fields and the specific pressure the figure of the gay man has put on them. To do so, I first want to take up some of the complications of the conceptual interrelation of gender and sexuality in a particular intellectual moment, the moment of the American institutionalization of lesbian and gay studies in the 80s and early 90s, especially in and after Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality."

Rubin's "Thinking Sex" is explicitly a response to the fiery debates of the sex wars and specifically the increase in a feminist interpretation of sexual liberalization and sexual diversification as "mere extensions of male privilege."[19] Rubin writes particularly against the conceptual moves of Catharine MacKinnon, who wrote that "sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism" and that "the molding, direction, and expression of sexuality organizes society into two sexes, women and men."[20] For Rubin, MacKinnon's work attempted to make feminism the "privileged site for analyzing sexuality and to subordinate sexual politics not only to feminism, but to a particular type of feminism."[21] Rubin protests that this creates a conceptual hierarchization in which sexuality is derivative of gender,[22] making it possible, in fact politically natural, to demonize particular sexual practices and deviations under the rubric of feminist readings of gendered power. In attempting to block this conceptualization, Rubin insists on a distinction of feminism as a theory of gender oppression rather than a theory of sexuality, on a distinction of gender and erotic desire, and on an analytical separation of gender and sexuality.

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[19] Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 172.
[20] Quoted in Rubin, 179.
[21] Gayle Rubin, "Sexual Traffic: Interview with Gayle Rubin by Judith Butler," in *Deviations*, 284.
[22] Notably, MacKinnon (in the quote above) and her intellectual partner Andrea Dworkin say quite the opposite—that gender derives from sexuality. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for an extended discussion of this distinction in Dworkin's work.

For her, what is politically expedient about this conceptual division is that it disarms an increasingly erotophobic feminism and empowers a school of thought to make intellectual and activist developments on the social life of sexual minoritization and diversity without requisite recourse to the discourse of gendered power in feminism. This school of thought, as Judith Butler has argued, is not for Rubin explicitly "lesbian & gay studies," but rather one that "account[s] for the regulation of a wide range of sexual minorities."[23]

But "Thinking Sex" would be taken up as a founding moment for the institutionally solidifying field of lesbian and gay studies. It is no wonder that the 1993 *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* which includes "Thinking Sex" as its first chapter, introduces itself by saying that "lesbian/gay studies does for sex and sexuality approximately what women's studies does for gender."[24] This kind of distinction, presenting lesbian and gay studies work on sexuality as analogical to feminism's work on gender, has persisted to this day, as displayed in Tim Dean and Oliver Davis's recent *Hatred of Sex*, where Rubin's text is presented as foundational for their work's interest in pleasure in "relative autonomy from feminism."[25] To feminisms of various stripes, both Rubin's argument and its subsequent uptake as a rallying cry for a lesbian and gay studies separate from feminism, seemed to put forward a feminism "reduced almost to caricature,"[26] ignoring feminism's many contributions to the study of sexuality. For Butler (a staunch ally of Rubin's) this appropriation of Rubin's essay denies the fundamental ambiguity of "sex": the reduction of feminism to the domain of gender implicitly conflates gender with "sex," and lays out the domain of lesbian and gay studies as sex's other meaning, construed as

[23] Judith Butler, "Against Proper Objects," *Differences* 6, nos. 2-3 (1994), 8.
[24] Quoted in Butler, "Against Proper Objects," 1.
[25] Tim Dean and Oliver Davis, *Hatred of Sex* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 49.
[26] Elizabeth Weed, "Introduction," in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory,* xi.

"sexuality."[27] Such a distinction leads to an analytical mess of proper objects: is transgender identity within the domain of feminism as an experience of gender, or in the domain of lesbian and gay studies as an experience of sexual minoritization? Is heterosexuality now the proper domain of lesbian and gay studies and no longer the object of feminism?[28] What happens to the various innovations of feminism that exceed gender and sexuality altogether, such as those on race or class?[29]

Butler also tells another story of this reduction of feminism, one that reveals more of the antagonisms between this field and specifically gay men's studies at this moment after Rubin's "Thinking Sex." In this division of feminism from lesbian and gay studies, Butler writes, the feminist concept of "sexual difference" and its distinction from the concept of "gender" is obscured. Feminists working from a "sexual difference" model (in its post-Lacanian, post-Irigarayan sense) had positioned themselves against the turn by (often queer) strands of feminism to a model of gender because of what they saw as gender's presupposition of a neutral subject modified by acculturation in gender. They opposed gender because they found, through the sexual difference model, that the feminine is excluded from subject formation in the first place.[30] In an interview between Butler and Rosi Braidotti, Braidotti remarks that this conceptual move towards gender was also the grounds of an institutional one, a move towards placing feminist scholarship within a departmental category of "gender studies," opening professional space for male scholars and for scholarship of masculinity. Braidotti rather explicitly places the blame:

[27] Butler, "Against Proper Objects," 6.
[28] Butler, "Against Proper Objects," 11.
[29] Butler, "Against Proper Objects," 15-16.
[30] Butler, "Against Proper Objects," 16. For some of the lesbian feminist positions against sexual difference in favor of gender, see Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind, and Other Essays,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1992; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* New York: Routledge, 1990.

"some of the competitive takeover has to do with gay studies….[T]he mainstream publisher Routledge…is responsible for promoting gender as a way of de-radicalizing the feminist agenda, remarketing masculinity and gay male identity instead."[31] Braidotti and the sexual difference feminists are not alone in their sense that the emergence of gay men's studies modified the institutional and conceptual make-up of feminism into the institutional category of gender studies, as writing by Robyn Wiegman, Tania Modleski, Elaine Showalter, Leora Auslander, and Janet Halley all attest to (with varying approval or disapproval of such a move).[32] The outpouring of anthologies on "men in feminism" or "men in gender studies" in the late 80s and 90s, and their undeniable adhesion to the moves of gay men's studies after Rubin's critical intervention in the sex wars, is also testament to the frictions between these supposedly sibling fields.[33] This is to say, the emergence of gay men's studies has been seen from the perspective of feminism as performing an odd operation on feminism: it both worked to move feminism into an umbrella category of gender studies and restrict it to that category, but also positioned itself in contrast to feminism as a study of sexuality, though continuing to house itself under the (institutional and conceptual) framework of gender studies.

So, the gay man as a figure and the scholars representing gay men's studies are, in this particular historical juncture, shifting the grounds for feminism as a field on various levels.

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[31] Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler, "Feminism by Any Other Name. *Interview*," in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory,* 44-45.

[32] Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2012; Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age,* New York: Routledge, 1991; Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Rise of Gender," in *Speaking of Gender,* ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Routledge, 1989): 1-13; Leora Auslander "Do Women's + Feminist + Men's + Lesbian and Gay + Queer Studies = Gender Studies?," *differences* 9, no. 3 (1997): 1-30; Janet Halley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

[33] See: Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds. *Men in Feminism,* New York: Routledge, 1987; Joseph A Boone and Michael Cadden, eds., *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism,* New York: Routledge, 1990; Tom Digby, ed. *Men Doing Feminism,* New York: Routledge, 1998. On the relationship between these anthologies and the rise of gay men's studies, see Joseph Boone, "Of Me(n) and Feminism: Who(se) is the Sex That Writes?," in *Engendering Men*, 23.

Scholarship from this moment on gay men's gender from feminist-identified scholars tested the bounds of applicability of feminist and gendered frameworks and methods to the study of gay maleness. These thinkers were not, for the most part, working from the division of gender and sexuality so forcefully argued by Rubin, but their work's engagement with the interrelation of these terms was integral to the seismic field shifts occurring after Rubin's intervention in the sex wars. Exemplary of and conceptually guiding for these thinkers is Eve Sedgwick's career between *Between Men, The Epistemology of the Closet,* and *Tendencies,* wherein even though she repeatedly states that she desires to work from a paradigm in which gender and sexuality experience "analytic distance" (citing Rubin), her work integrally reveals the interlacing of these very fields.[34] Particularly influential to the intellectual moment I am tracing here is Sedgwick's argument in *Between Men* that homophobia was misogynistic, meaning "not only that it is oppressive of the so-called feminine in men, but that it is oppressive of women," in that it requires male homosociality to be mediated by women.[35] This argument enabled foundational essays on gay men and feminism/the feminine, including Craig Owens's "Outlaws: Gay Men in Feminism," D.A. Miller's "*Cage aux folles:* Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White,*" and Lee Edelman's "Redeeming the Phallus: Wallace Stevens, Frank Lentricchia, and the Politics of (Hetero)Sexuality." Edelman builds off of Sedgwick to argue that "the awareness of homosexual possibilities and the insistence of homophobia as a mode of social control both complicate and reorient 'social engenderment' in Western cultures."[36] Further, he writes, sexuality and gender experience a "historically specific overlaying," that "requires that

[34] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 30.
[35] Sedgwick, *Between Men,* 20.
[36] Edelman, "Redeeming the Phallus: Wallace Stevens, Frank Lentricchia, and the Politics of (Hetero)Sexuality," in *Engendering Men*, 40.

the image of a 'womanly' or 'feminine' man be interpreted within the field of associations that radiate from the culturally endorsed interpretation of male homosexuality."[37]

The Gay Man in Trans Studies

In the intellectual moment I have traced above, gay maleness, in its cultural adhesions to femininity, presents a distinct methodological rewiring for any conceptualization of the interrelation (or nonrelation) of gender and sexuality and thus the relationship between feminism and lesbian and gay studies. Though these fields have made enormous scholarly advancements surrounding these questions and are rather different now from the fields they were at the moment of these debates, it would not be accurate to say that these debates have settled, nor that the intellectual relationship between these fields has left the status of an uneasy alliance. I would argue that the same could be said of the relationship between trans studies and lesbian and gay studies. In the beginning of trans studies's institutionalization as an academic field, it particularly sought to provide a reading of gendered eroticism that divided itself from the received wisdom of both feminism and the trans medical complex. This is clear in Sandy Stone's "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," which not only took on Janice Raymond's argument that trans womanhood represented a form of patriarchal domination, but also contrasted itself from Harry Benjamin's sense that trans women did not experience penile pleasure.[38] In contrast, Stone's article emphasizes the role of the erotic in trans life, but (in a similar gesture to Rubin) blocks the feminist reading that interprets transfeminine eroticism as an expression of patriarchal positionality. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I interpret the writings of the trans activist Lou

[37] Edelman, "Redeeming the Phallus," 294 n10.
[38] Sandy Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" [1987], in *The Transgender Studies Reader,* eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 228.

Sullivan from the same period as performing a similar theorization of the erotic in specifically gay transmasculine life. But in the ensuing years from these early writings, certain voices within lesbian and gay studies and within trans studies itself have designated trans studies as working primarily on the domain of gender, essentially separating it from any conceptual relation to gay identity and critique.[39] An early example of this is evident in the work of Jay Prosser, who critiqued early lesbian and gay studies for a dependence on the absorption of transgender meanings to legitimize its own study of sexuality. "Transgender *gender,*" Prosser writes, "appears as the most crucial sign of queer *sexuality's* aptly skewed point of entry into the academy."[40] In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I dive deeper into this issue—in which trans works as a sign for gay, aesthetically and conceptually—by reviewing some of contemporary versions of this critique (in Emma Heaney and Grace Lavery) in light of the developments of the Latin American gay novel in the 20th century. But I bring up Prosser in particular here because of the particular ends to which he deploys this critique. In an evaluation primarily of Butler's *Gender Trouble* for its pivotal role in "the appropriation of transgender by queer," Prosser states the nature of his "concerns": "in the first instance, transgendered subjectivity is not inevitably queer. That is, by no means are all transgendered subjects homosexual….*Gender Trouble*'s queer transgender illustrates a certain collapsing of gender back into sexuality that, in the particular process of *Gender Trouble*'s canonization, has become a tendency of queer studies."[41] Prosser's work on Butler reveals many important truths about trans embodiment and narrative, but in my reading seems to reveal an anxiety about trans homosexuality that must be relieved by repeatedly

[39] Susan Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin." *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004), 214.
[40] Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 23, emphasis in original.
[41] Prosser, *Second Skins*, 31.

insisting that trans people are capable of heterosexuality, that gender and sexuality are not correlated. This is an anxiety I think is also behind Prosser's writing on inversion, where he takes justified umbrage at the wholesale appropriation of inversion into histories of gayness, both simplifying the merging of gay and trans meanings in inversion and making trans identity an "appurtenance to homosexuality." But Prosser's writing simply inverts the gesture he critiques in favor of transness: "[S]exual inversion *was* transgender….Even when [desire was] ostensibly directed towards the 'same' sex, given the profound degree of identification with the 'other' sex embraced and lived by many inverts, it is questionable to what extent we may accurately classify this desire as '*same*-sex.'"[42] Now, inversion tells a story of trans identity, with homosexuality as an "appurtenance," an expression of desire that may not even merit trusting as identity because of the primary status of trans identification. There is, in Prosser's work, what I see as territorial claims that distance trans and gay studies and, in the insistence on distinction, cleave gender from sexuality.

Critical gestures like Prosser's are still common in our contemporary. A notable example of this separation arrives in Gayle Salamon's recent analysis of the murder of Latisha King/Larry King, a young, effeminate, and biracial child who was shot and killed by a straight white classmate. The plaintiff's case in the murder trial was that King was murdered specifically for being a gay boy. The defense's case, as Salamon reports, attempted to downgrade the murder charge from the first degree by arguing that King's effeminate expression (including make-up, high heels, and flamboyant personality) acted as provocation and harassment of King's

[42] Jay Prosser, "Transexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity," in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and* Desires, eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 117, emphasis in original.

murderer.[43] However, and on these facts Salamon's argument depends, King had recently chosen the name Latisha and had expressed to close friends a transfeminine identification. Salamon writes that these facts destabilize the terms of both sides of the trial, because they reveal how much the trial works off a "muddle" of gender and sexuality. Salamon writes that the harassment defense used this "muddle" to argue that King's gender expression was in and of itself a set of sexual acts, indeed a "sexual aggression."[44] Salamon puts forward that a conceptual separation of gender and sexuality is necessary, first, to validate Latisha King as a straight trans girl rather than as cis gay boy and, second, to affirm that gender and gender expression are not sexual, not relational, not aggressive, that gender is "an element of my personhood that expresses itself" rather than "*something that I do to someone else*."[45]

But there are several issues here. In Salamon's insistence that the trial is misreading King's expression as gay and sexual rather than as trans and gendered, there is no room for an analysis of what a specifically gay expression that is not a direct sex act would be. It seems that gay sexuality in Salamon's account can only manifest as expression (in a way that is definitively not trans, to follow her division) in the terms of the literally sexual. But we know that there are myriad ways in which gay identity and sexuality express themselves that are not sex acts, an array of which do include shared signs of (trans)femininity. Make-up, high heels, and a flamboyant personality are signs which do fall into the cultural image of male homosexuality. In other words, Salamon's analysis contains less understanding of gay style than the homophobes and transphobes she is arguing against. Insisting that these people involved in the trial are wrong

[43] Gayle Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 5.
[44] Salamon, 6.
[45] Salamon, 116, emphasis in original.

in their estimation of King misses the point that an integral element of both homophobia and transphobia—in fact, one of their thickest points of overlap—already includes reading differently-gendered style as an act of sexual aggression. When one of the administrators at King's school says "we have a student expressing his sexuality through makeup," he is not wrong as Salamon would have it, but is rather evidencing how much gender, sexual identity, sexuality, and sex acts are taken as forms of each other in the realm of aesthetics. When Salamon writes that "conceiving of gender expression and sexual identity as fungible encourages people to look at gender expression as an act, and often *as an aggressive act*, akin to a sexual advance or even a sexual assault"[46] it is in fact her terms that muddle sexual identity and sexual aggression. This is displayed quite directly when she rewrites this to say "non-normative gender expression is conflated with sexual aggression,"[47] revealing how much her argument has taken gay identity and sexual aggression as synonymous.

Salamon's thick separation of gay and trans meanings, posed justifiably to rescue Latisha King from the mess of legal formations of identity represented in her murder, might be said to present a vision of gayness (to quote the feminist distaste for Rubin) reduced almost to caricature. Though both her and Prosser find understandable political expediency in their territorial claims against gay studies, I am interested in the frictions and remainders that are generated by such claims, how they seem to abandon forms of transness and gayness that integrally overlap. In this section and the last, I have been providing these very abridged accounts of how various thinkers in feminist theory, lesbian and gay studies, and trans studies have positioned themselves and their field formations with regards to the conceptual separation

[46] Salamon, 29-30, emphasis in original.
[47] Salamon, 168.

of gender and sexuality. I have wanted to account for why these fields struggle to speak to each other. In this dissertation, I am interested in repairing some of these fraught histories of field distinction and creating new avenues for crosstalk between these fields. Throughout my chapters, I employ thinking across feminism, trans studies, and gay and lesbian studies and take on an in-depth model for the imbrication of gender and sexuality. Doing so, I offer that gayness cannot be thought without trans and feminist theory, but also insist that trans and feminist theory must confront how gayness has been a primary site for the theorization of gender.

The Erotics of Gender

One major way this dissertation attempts to bring these fields together is in speaking of the erotics of gender—how gender is built on a foundation of erotic attachments and how gender itself becomes an object of eroticism. In this, I am generally influenced by the writing of Talia Mae Bettcher on how gender (both of self and of the object of one's desire) informs the scene of sexuality.[48] But in the specific discussion of the erotics of gender in gay men, I am particularly interested in Stephen Valocchi's writing that a definition of gayness that is limited to object choice (*the gay man is the man who is erotically drawn to men*) masks the complex operations of gender in both gay identification and desire, tacitly establishing an "uninterrogated erotics of normative masculinity—the attraction of masculine men to masculine men."[49] This represents not only a denigration of the erotic value of gay femininity for gay men, but a conceptual foreclosure on theorizing the relationship between erotics and gender outside of the simplified

[48] Talia Mae Bettcher, "When Selves Have Sex: What the Phenomenology of Trans Sexuality Can Teach About Sexual Orientation," *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no. 5: 605-620.
[49] Stephen Valocchi, "'Where Did Gender Go?': Same-Sex Desire and the Persistence of Gender in Gay Male Historiography," *GLQ* 18, no.4 (2022): 454.

equation of more masculinity, more eroticism. This uninterrogated sense of masculinity's erotic value for gay men (and thus femininity's non-eroticism) is rather common in gay studies, as well as in its sibling fields. It persists even in contemporary criticism. For example, though I am very much aligned to Kadji Amin's sense that typological separations between cis and trans, and gay and straight, counterproductively deny gendered and sexual variance, Amin leaves rather unquestioned his sense that "feminine men have become erotic nonentities, desired, more often than not, *despite* rather than for their femininity."[50] Any sustained look at the history (and contemporary) of sissy erotics would render this statement a rather loose generalization.

Valocchi's proposal for correcting this kind of assumption is in paying historiographic and ethnographic attention to various gay subcultures in which gender is an active erotic modifier.[51] While I am interested in this work, here I lean more towards thinking about the relationship between the erotics of gender and the aesthetic. This is because, as I argue particularly in my first two chapters, the complexities of gender for gay men occur primarily on the stage of the aesthetic. In Chapter 1, I argue that this is primarily an effect of the afterlives of the inversion model, which set gay gender deviance into an aesthetic frame of an interior/exterior divide. In Chapter 2, I build off of this to argue that the aesthetics of femininity (from personal style to popular culture) have been employed as the fundamental medium of gay subject formation and cultural legibility. Both of these phenomena, in my reading, are effects of what Lee Edelman has described as "homographesis," the overdetermination of gayness in the West by

[50] Kadji Amin, "We Are All Nonbinary: A Brief History of Accidents." *Representations* 158 (2022): 112.
[51] As examples, he mentions the pansies and wolves of George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, the jockers and punks of Peter Boag's *Same-Sex Affairs*, and the faeries and belles of David K. Johnson's "The Kids of Fairytown." Valocchi, 461.

a relationship to signification and inscription.[52] In my own arguments about the gay employment of the aesthetics of femininity, I bring to bear Edelman's account on David Halperin's sense that "femininity functions…as a kind of *proxy identity* for gay men," arguing that gay men's relationship to the aesthetics of femininity represents an attempt to rewire and renaturalize the cultural situation of homographesis.[53]

But the problem with Halperin's account is the very problem I mention above through Valocchi, that femininity in gay men is treated by Halperin as separate from the erotic while masculinity is framed as eroticism's very essence. In Halperin's *How to Be Gay*, he investigates the cultural fascinations and style obsessions of gay maleness in the United States, providing an account of the "sensibility" that separates gayness as a particular form of life from the incidental practices of same-sex sexuality. In this, he anatomizes how what is understood as "gay style" relies rather heavily on the aesthetics of femininity. However, in doing this work, Halperin strongly separates this domain from the sexual. Take for example, his larger conceptual deployment of an observation from Esther Newton that "at any given homosexual party" there are two binaristic roles around which all revelry swirls—the beauty and the camp. The beauty is the humorless butch: masculine, sexy, but boring and uncultured. The camp is the humorous femme: adept in conversation and armed with a massive repertoire of feminine cultural references, but inspiring no erotic interest. A party with all camps "declines into a tea party…lacking in sexual excitement"; a party with all beauties becomes "an exercise in mutual one-upmanship…[with] relentless posturing and suffocating seriousness."[54] Halperin does not

[52] Lee Edelman, "Homographesis," in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.
[53] David M. Halperin, *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 211, emphasis in original.
[54] Halperin, 203.

question Newton's binary. Rather, he adopts it, using it as the basis for his larger conceptual project, insisting that the cultural associations of gayness with femininity are separate from the erotic and that masculinity is a "key erotic value for gay men" on which their "sexual dignity depends."[55] For Halperin, then, the camp is gay culture and the beauty is gay sexuality. What this risks, more than wholly omitting the erotic life of the sissy, is gendering "gender" and "sexuality" themselves. That is to say, in Halperin and in other projects that think in similar terms, "gender" itself is adhered to cultural aesthetics and tagged as feminine, while "sexuality" itself is adhered to erotic aesthetics and tagged as masculine. This risks the loss, at the very least, of any sophisticated crosstalk between gay studies and other forms of sexuality studies written and thought by women and trans people of all genders. At worst, it risks renaturalizing (by never questioning) masculinity as the proper domain of all sexual formations.

What I want to do differently in this dissertation is two-fold. At one level, I aim to take seriously the sexual cultures and aesthetics of sissiness, attempting to unbuild the steady denial of gay eroticism's connections to effeminacy in gay studies. At the higher level, I aim to approach the issue of gay men's gender always through the lens of the erotic. This dissertation will therefore not divide its discussion of gender identification from scenes of the erotic and cultures of the sexual, it will fully immerse it within them.

My hope is that, in the course of this dissertation's trajectory through the moment and afterlives of inversion through to various field debates in gender and sexuality in the contemporary, we end with a richer sense not only of the complex ways that gay sexuality has provoked gendered positions, identifications, allegiances, and conflicts through the 20th and 21st

[55] Halperin, 306.

centuries, but with a more sophisticated vocabulary for thinking through the imbrication of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 1:

'If You Could Have Punctured His Soul': Ulrichs, Interiority, and the Literary Afterlives of the Inversion Model

Marlon Riggs: "When you think of yourself, is there a woman within you?"
Bill T Jones: "Oh, yeah, yeah. Many, many."
Riggs: "Describe the women within."
Jones: "Mmm. They're Black. She is Black."

- Black is, Black Ain't, *dir. Marlon Riggs (1995)*

In likely the most famous account of the genesis of homosexuality as a category of human sexuality, Foucault writes that "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul."[1] Foucault is referring to the 19th century discourse of inversion, which he foundationally attributes to an 1869 article by German psychiatrist Karl Westphal.[2] In inversion, gender, sex, and sexuality were treated as synonymous properties that manifested along an interior/exterior divide: for one to qualify as an invert, their internal sexual drive had to connote (in heterosexist logic) a physical sexed and gendered body inverse to the one they appeared to have. For Foucault, Westphal's article represented the foundation of a conceptual move from thinking about sexuality as a practice of acts to sexuality as a property defining an increasingly regulated, increasingly documented, essential self. From Westphal's article on, Foucault writes, "the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history,

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction,* translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.
[2] In a lecture at the Collège de France during the writing of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault instead grants this title to the work of Heinrich von Kaan, who conceives of "imagination" as the site of sexuality. Benjamin Kahan, "The First Sexology? Heinrich Kaan's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1844)" in *Heinrich Kaan's "Psychopathia Sexualis" (1844): A Classic Text in the History of Sexuality,* ed. Benjamin Kahan, translated by Melissa Haynes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 1-2.

and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology." But there is at least one problem with Foucault's account worth noting, which is that the language of "hermaphroditism of the soul" is not in Westphal's article. Indeed, Westphal does not even treat the sexual act of sodomy or sex acts between men, focusing instead on two people of ambiguous gender who express sexual attraction to women.[3] Instead, "hermaphroditism of the soul," and its connection to men having sex with men, sounds much more like the diction of one of Westphal's most important sources, the German jurist and activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. Westphal cites at length from one of a series of activist pamphlets by Ulrichs, written in the mid-19th century, to show that the phenomenon Westphal calls "contrary sexual feeling" appears innate and parallel across sexes. What Ulrichs accomplishes for him is evidencing that there is an analogic relationship between the inversion of different sexes and different manifestations—that the masculine woman and the feminine man fall under a shared pathology. His citation from Ulrichs begins: "Our character, the way in which we feel, our entire mood, is not masculine; it is decidedly feminine. This inner feminine trait may be observed in us by the obvious way in which we appear feminine."[4]

In this chapter, I argue that Ulrichs represents the foundation of a particular conceptual architecture that treats gender and sexuality as synonymous properties foundationally tied to a divide of interiority and exteriority. As we will see, this architecture will take the particular name of "inversion" as it coheres in the medical complex from the influence of Westphal and others. But my purpose in this chapter is to show that even as medical, activist, and cultural sources moved away from the discourse and theory of inversion, its conceptual architecture has remained

[3] Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal, "Die conträre Sexualempfindung, Symptom eines neuropathischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes," *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 2, no. 1 (1869): 73-108.
[4] Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of 'Man-Manly' Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality,* translated by Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994): 58.

the dominant metalanguage of gender and sexuality. One of the oft-told stories of the progress of gay rights in the 20th and 21st centuries is the collapse of the inversion model, the taxonomic division of gay and trans identifications, the symbolic division of gay maleness from women's femininity, and the emancipation of gayness from the psychiatric complex.[5] But my contention in this chapter is that the inversion model has an afterlife; I argue that the conceptual architecture of inversion, as founded in the work of Ulrichs, still defines how we talk about sexuality and gender in general and homosexuality in specific. To contrast with a phrase from George Chauncey, we have not quite gone "from inversion to homosexuality;" instead, inversion still integrally structures our understanding of homosexuality.[6]

As I follow the history of the rise and fall of inversion from the good graces of the medical complex and the vernacular language of gayness, we will see again and again the shadow of Ulrichs. Ulrichs's formulation of the inversion model—in his idiosyncratic term, "Uranism"—foundationally, albeit amateurishly, solidified the theories of contemporary criminologists, biologists, and psychiatrists into a systematic view of sexuality and gender as indexes of what one both *has* and *is*. This is to say, Ulrichs defined sexuality and gender as indexes of both one's individual, essential self and one's type among other humans, both one's personality and personhood. "Uranism" names a way of thinking about sexuality and gender as simultaneously individual, held within the stage of the human interior, and a marker of one's type, a kind of racial logic marking their exterior. The particulars of his theories seemed immediately debunkable or contestable to many, based on misunderstandings of human biology obvious to any specialist and making politically challenging claims on the ethics of

[5] For a useful contextualization of this narrative, see David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
[6] George Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance." *Salmagundi* 58/59 (1982-1983): 114-146.

homosexuality. Nevertheless, his work became a kind of inescapable reference point for sexology through time, only just beginning with Westphal's citation.

As I trace in this chapter, Ulrichs appears and reappears in the institutions of sexology and in non-specialist cultural manifestations of sexological ideas from the date of his initial publication to hundreds of years on, even when he is cited disparagingly or as an example of outdated thinking.[7] What is it about Ulrichs's work that commissions so much cyclical return, even beyond the supposed debunking of inversion in the medical complex? I argue that as much as particular discourses have learned how to think of gender and sexuality as properties that cannot be ascertained from the other, as non-synonymous and non-causal, they have run up against the fact that these properties still share the same metalanguage of the interior and exterior, of the essence and type. Surprisingly stable through medical and activist innovations away from inversion is inversion's core gambit: your sexuality and gender are both within and without you, they score both your individuality and your group. Ulrichs's voice continually returns in the friction of sexuality and gender's conceptual reshuffling within this metalanguage.

Before proceeding to the history and afterlife of inversion, it is important to define what is undefinable about interiority. Interiority, more so than exteriority which can at least be attached to sensory information, is an incredibly slippery concept to track: it is a metonymy of the human body that, in English, goes under names like "soul," "mind," "personality," "personage," "self," "essence," "psyche," "thoughts," "secrets," "subjectivity," "imagination," as well as under names of the more or less literal internal structures of the body, like "brain,"

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[7] Ross Brooks, "Transforming Sexuality: The Medical Sources of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95) and the Origins of the Theory of Bisexuality," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67, no. 2 (2012): 179 n9 contains a detailed record of Ulrichs's citations by sexologists. Other authors who make a similar claim to Ulrichs's influence include Hubert Kennedy, "The 'Third Sex' Theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs," *Journal of Homosexuality* 6, no. 1-2 (1981): 103-111 and Gert Hekma, "'A Female Soul in a Male Body': Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology," in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 213-239.

"heart," "gut," "blood," and so on.[8] I describe interiority as a metonymy because (at least in secular terms) what it refers to is an effect of the physical body and its relationship to social actors and institutions, a physiological sense of a non-physiological instantiation. In the discourses this chapter traces, what is meant by "interiority" will range widely from Ulrichs's discourse of the "soul" (*anima*) to Magnus Hirschfeld's discussion of the glands, Eugene Gley's discussion of the brain, or Freud's discussion of the unconscious. Indeed, the relationship between this shifting sense of interiority and what is meant by exteriority will also shift. In some instances, as I will show in readings of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, the exterior will mean both the physical body and the adornments put upon it, with this exterior acting as a signifying surface of an interior, a text to be read to access what is within. In other instances, such as I will show in readings of Joon Oluchi Lee's novels and the memoir of Hilton Als, the exterior will refute the interior, will signify but improperly.

What will continually be important to the sense of interiority in this chapter, even as it shifts in definitional precision, is its adhesion to femininity. Essential to the discourse of inversion is an association of gay men with a feminine, feminized, or literally female interiority. In Ulrichs's foundational texts, this will take the form of a maxim: *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*, translated as "a female soul enclosed in a man's body." This maxim represents in a metaphor the conceptual architecture of sexuality and gender that I argue is still with us today. By tracing the afterlife of Ulrichs's texts and the discourse of inversion I will venture that any expression of gender/sexual identification, to say one has a sexuality or to say that one has a gender, is itself a kind of *dead metaphor*, in the way the "leg of a chair" is a dead metaphor because its initial metaphoricity has been so normalized by continued use that it no longer

[8] This is to only include interiority's connections to the human, temporarily excluding its other provenances as a name for inner spaces of buildings or other constructions.

appears upon first read as metaphorical. To say one is a gay man is to implicitly work in reflection of the metaphor of the interior and exterior, of the woman's soul within the man's body. The association of gender/sexual difference with a confessional phrase like "*I always felt there was something different about me inside*" is but one vernacular version of this dead metaphor. The texts that I read in this chapter as afterlives for the inversion model, which come long after Ulrichs's writing, expose this dead metaphorical operation. They revive gender and sexuality's original metaphoricity, zombie-like, as they invoke discourses thought long gone, obsolete. Reading them in the way I do here will expose the way the metalanguage of sexuality and gender has remained adhered to this metaphorical division of the human self founded in Ulrichs's writing.

In the first section of this chapter I trace the rise and fall of the inversion model with special attention to the influence of Ulrichs's formative pamphlets. Then, I turn to literary objects to trace the afterlives of this model. In this, I am influenced by recent scholarship on sexology's "present tense," as Benjamin Kahan and Greta LaFleur have put it.[9] Joan Lubin and Jeanne Vaccaro write that sexology's "discreditation is precisely the condition of possibility for its perdurance," as its loss of force as a science has subtended its reconstitution in "policy, aesthetics, infrastructure, architecture, institutions, cultural production, and ideology."[10] I turn to literature as a site for sexology's reconstitution because of the essential metaphoricity with which inversion discourse comes into the world and because of literature's prominent and well-documented relationship to the conception of interiority.[11] As well, this turn to literature pays

[9] Benjamin Kahan and Greta LaFleur, "How to Do the History of Sexual Science," *GLQ* 29, no. 1 (2023): 6.
[10] Joan Lubin and Jeanne Vaccaro, "After Sexology," *Social Text* 38, no. 3 (2021): 1.
[11] Though the concept of interiority has taken various forms across time periods, literary critics and historians have accounted for the concept's life in the Western 18th century and onwards as an increasingly detailed, circulated, medicalized, and racialized concept for describing the human. Denise Ferreira da Silva writes that the "science of man" in and after the 18th-century "rewrites the manifoldness of human bodies into signifiers (exteriorizations) of the mind (intellectual and moral attributes)" (116). As an effect of literary culture, this process is most often

heed to sexology's entanglements with literary culture in its most important periods.[12] My readings show that literature is the essential cultural site for understanding the way sexological ideas have persisted in the construction of sexuality and gender in the present. Specifically, the middle section of this chapter treats Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Bechdel's *Fun Home* as texts in dialogue across the 20th century, which show how inversion discourse has both persisted in narrative and how inversion itself structures narrative possibility. In these books, inversion's relationship to narrative will be captured by literary treatments of the sexual development of inverted daughters in relation to the deaths of their inverted fathers. Through this, these books evidence not only that inversion discourse structures our narratives of sexual coming of age, but even further structures our sense of the analogic relationship between gay men and lesbian women. In the last section of this chapter, I use the lens of inversion to analyze a trope of inner Black womanhood in gay American literature of the 21st century, namely in the work of Joon Oluchi Lee and in Hilton Als's memoir *The Women*. There, I use this trope to highlight the entanglement of inversion discourse's claim on the invert as a type of life with the legacies and discourses of 19th century race science. Throughout, my goal is to show that inversion has

associated with an increasingly psychologized novel in the 18th and 19th centuries, as Ian Watt's historical account tracks and as further detailed by more contemporary scholars such as David Kurnick and Deidre Shauna Lynch. Lauren Berlant has also written about a 20th century effect of the entanglement of the study of sexuality and the medicalization of interiority that she calls "therapy culture," an obsessive drive to understand, repair, and regulate the inner self found in media forms that popularize the findings of psychoanalysis, like the advice column, self-help literature, and the expansion of the rhetoric of "personal trauma." See: Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel,* updated edition, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012; Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love*, New York: punctum books, 2012.

[12] I refer especially to the influence of prominent literary figures like Ulrichs, Edward Carpenter, and John Addington Symonds, as well as Emile Zola's role in the publication of writings from an unnamed Italian invert (Michael Rosenfeld and William A. Peniston, eds. *The Italian Invert: A Gay Man's Intimate Confessions to Émile Zola,* translated by Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston, New York: Columbia University Press, 2022). For more on literary culture and sexology, see Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

remained a formative concept for gay literary culture in particular and the discourse of sexuality and gender in general.

The Rise and Fall of the Inversion Model

The historian Arnold I. Davidson has written that the centrality of sex and sexuality to psychiatry and psychology after the 19th century was a result of the fall of the pathological anatomy model of disease.[13] In this model, diseases (which included "the perversions") were explained as the result of functional deviations of particular organs. Davidson argues that pathological anatomy declined in three stages. In the first, sexual perversion was described as a disfunction of the reproductive organs. This stage is reflected in the mid-century in the work of psychiatrist Claude-François Michéa, who hypothesized that same-sex desire and male effeminacy may be caused by a developmental issue in the *uterus masculinus* (the recently discovered prostatic utricle).[14] In the second phase, influenced by the failure of anatomical evidence to cohere the picture proposed by the first, pathological anatomy turned to describe the perversions as disfunctions of neuroanatomy. The brain, Davidson writes, was a place of retreat for pathological anatomy. While phrenological discourses had brought brain anatomy into new focus, it was also relatively easy for physicians to explain away the lack of evidence for the pathological lesions they supposed would be present in autopsy by claiming that technology had just not yet risen to the level of advancement required to discover them.[15] In the third stage, pathological anatomy retreats from the brain to the unlocated concepts of the sexual instinct, the mind, and psychology. On this final stage, Davidson writes that "nineteenth-century psychiatry

[13] Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.
[14] Davidson, 6.
[15] Davidson, 7, 10.

took sexuality to be the way in which the mind is best represented. To know a person's sexuality is to know that person. Sexuality is the expression of the individual shape of the personality."[16]

This argument is a useful, influential, and succinct way of understanding the turns of the 19th century towards the psychological model of sexuality with which the West moves through the 20th century. But the history is all just a bit messier than that. These three stages are often overlapping, are often influenced by each other, and none ever quite dies out as another takes center stage. What I take to be the core of Davidson's argument—that an anatomo-clinical gaze on the organs as the site of disease declined and transformed into a psycho-pathological gaze that associated sexuality with the essential selves of particular humans—is right and essential to the association of "sexuality" with "identity" that leads into the 21st century; but I am also interested in the often anachronistic, often conflicting return of episodes in this decline in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, especially around gay men and the idea of gender. A good example is Heinrich von Kaan's 1844 *Psychopathia Sexualis*, often called the first text of sexology proper. Benjamin Kahan has described this work as the first example of Davidson's third stage because Kaan relies on a conception of "imagination" as the site of sexuality, even though Michéa's aforementioned first-stage approach trailed Kaan by a half-decade.[17] Simultaneously, however, Kaan's commitment to the anti-onanist efforts of the 18th and early 19th century leads him to write of masturbation as an ur-perversion, a causal linkage to homosexuality that predates Davidson's history entirely.[18] Therefore, someone like Kaan—and this is the case for many of the sexologists and advocates I will be describing in this section—could be described as both "ahead of their time" and "behind their time," as vast networks of theories on the etiology and physiology of

[16] Davidson, 21.
[17] Kahan (2016), 11.
[18] See Thomas W. Laquer, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, New York: Zone Books, 2003.

homosexuality overlap and recur. This insight will clarify and contextualize why, even as one theory of homosexuality's etiology seems to rise to dominance, others, even those supposedly debunked, seem to persist.

The most influential constellation of scientific discourses of sexuality, and the most formative version of the inversion model, comes not from a sexologist proper, but from a writer well-versed in sexological literature. From 1864 to 1879, the Hanoverian jurist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs published a series of booklets anatomizing and defending what he called "man-manly love." As a Hanoverian in the mid-nineteenth century, he was under the jurisdiction of the Napoleonic Code, which did not contain provisions against homosexuality. However, the rapidly expanding Prussian state and the unification of Germany in 1871 portended a major legal threat in the form of paragraph 143 of the Prussian Penal Code, which proscribed sexual acts between men as contrary to nature.[19] Ulrichs's primary task, as he saw it, was to evidence that sexual acts between men were not against nature and therefore should not be legally punishable without evidence of further crime, such as coercion or violence. Before working on the booklets that make up his *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love*, Ulrichs had attempted to explain homosexuality in terms of animal magnetism, a then-already-fading vitalist theory that dominated much of 18th century thought.[20] But in this series of writings, Ulrichs drew on two scientific fields booming in his historical moment: the advancements and obsessions of intersex medicine (especially as published in Johann Ludwig Casper's *Quarterly for Forensic Medicine*) and the theories of perversion and criminal pathology in forensic science (which sought to explain criminal behavior via physiological and atavistic defects). He combined these scientific fields with a wide readership in the homoerotic writing of Ancient Greece, especially the text of Plato's *Symposium*.

[19] Ulrichs, 22-23.
[20] Ulrichs, 22.

In reference to that text's speech from Pausanius, Ulrichs distinguished between Uranian love (the "man-manly love" of his title) and Dioning love (what we would now call heterosexuality). An *Urning* (or Uranian) was, in Ulrichs's theory, an intersex person, a variation of the same natural processes that created Gottlieb Göttlich, an intersex man whose story became popular and scandalous after he was physically examined in 1832.[21] Guided by recent innovations in embryonic anatomy,[22] Ulrichs supposed that in the embryonic state humans were both female and male, composed of four sexual "germs" [*Keime*] which in the common developmental process would form in the direction of either female or male. Three of these germs he described as "physical," including the germs of "complete male components of the genitals," "complete female components," and what he called the "primitive testicle," which would form either the testicles or ovaries. Variations in the development of these germs would create the intersex condition of Göttlich. The fourth germ, however, he called the "nonphysical germ of the sexual drive" [*Liebestribes*], which began unsexed and then developed in accordance with the direction of the other three germs.[23] A variation in the development of this "nonphysical germ" created the Urning. Ulrichs's formulation characterized the sex drive as akin to a secondary sex organ; however, because this drive is "nonphysical" and unlocated, his rhetoric around it often took on the language of the "soul," "mind," or "inner essence." Ulrichs described the Urning idiomatically as "*anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*," translated as "a female soul enclosed in a man's body," because his sex drive was that of a female—which is to say, it was directed towards men. Though in his writing this idiom is not as clean a division as it rhetorically

[21] Though I am using the term "intersex," Ulrichs's typical term is the German "*Zwitter*," and many English translations of his work, such as that of Lombardi-Nash, use the term "hermaphrodite." Ulrichs, 54.
[22] Brooks, 199-202.
[23] Ulrichs, 302-303.

appears (being that he supposes a purely male body is a physical impossibility),[24] we will continue to see just how much this phrasing persists as a motif in writing about gayness beyond Ulrichs's moment.

Ulrichs's sense of the Urning, in establishing a congenital etiology, fused meanings we would now separately associate with trans, gay, and intersex people. In his model, femininity and the interior are adhered to each other, even though the meaning of both terms is often unstable. Indeed, Ulrichs's anatomy is simultaneously very loose and very overdetermined: by the twelfth booklet of his work, his terminology has gotten increasingly complicated and quite often redundant; the "interior" seems deployed to mean the Christian "soul" as often as a kind of invisible embryonic atavism; and the non-physical "femininity" of temperament, spirit, and drive so heartily described in the early booklets seems to become more and more described as a physical marking, in everything from "delicate hands" to an inability to whistle.[25] It is worth noting as well that Ulrichs's model suffers from an inability to think about desire as anything but heterosexually directed, which is to say that, for him, to desire a man is always to be conceived as feminine. This is one reason for resisting an urge to read Ulrichs's descriptions from a 21st century corrective lens as *really* about straight trans people and only erroneously about gay people, as Jay Prosser does in his writing on inversion.[26] For Ulrichs and many thinkers of his time, sexuality and gender are already assumed to be adhered in heterosexuality such that desire for men was inherently a characteristic of women and a characteristic of womanhood was

[24] Ulrichs, 363.
[25] Ulrichs, 152.
[26] Jay Prosser, "Transexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity," in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires,* eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 117.

inherently a desire for men. This rigidity around heterosexuality enchanted any representation of gender or sex with an implicit rendering of sexuality (and vice versa).

Ulrichs had plentiful opponents, from other Urnings who proclaimed to him an insulted "we are men!,"[27] to the sexologists who found his model less than scientific.[28] His own Uranism was also the primary factor in both his qualification and disqualification, as sexologists of his time were more or less willing to trust, to use American physician James G. Kiernan's words, "a sufferer of the disease."[29] His taxonomy was thus a testimony, which troubled its acceptability to both the medical complex and other Urnings who felt they did not share his experience. But his model's influence cannot be understated. His feminization of the sexual drive in Urnings brought the then-transforming concept into new relief for sexology and for the writing of homosexual activism. Feminizing the sexual drive made it discursively available in a new way. As well, his fervent self-documenting furthered the increasingly biographical form of discourse around homosexuality, which had already begun in the rise of the case study in sexual criminology and psychiatry, and which would later become integrally associated with the work of sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing.[30] In the German context, Ulrichs was the most direct influence for psychiatrist Karl Westphal's 1869 article on "contrary sexual feeling," and his correspondence with sexologists like Krafft-Ebing and gay activists like Karl Maria Kertbeny (who coined the terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual") sharpened the thinking of both physicians and fellow

[27] Ulrichs, 162.
[28] Ulrichs was also critiqued by Uranians who believed that the only moral option for themselves was chastity, such as in Alois Geigel's 1869 critique "Das Paradoxon der Venus Urania," in *Der Unterdrückte Sexus: Historische Texte und Kommentare zur Homosexualität*, ed. Joachim S. Hohmann (Lollar, Germany: Achenbach, 1977), 2-34.
[29] Kiernan quoted in Bret Hansen, "American Physicians' Earliest Writings About Homosexuals, 1880-1900," *The Milbank Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1989): 94.
[30] Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 219-229. On the rise of a biographical sense of homosexuality, see also Matt T. Reed, "Historicizing Inversion: or How To Make a Homosexual," *History of the Human Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2001): 1-29.

activists. Beyond Germany, he was a major resource for physicians Valentin Magnan and Eugene Gley's work in the 1880s in France; his influence on the writers Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds (the latter of which who would go on to co-author the first edition of *Sexual Inversion* with Havelock Ellis) spread his model to English-speaking readers in Britain; and his work garnered citations in the United States as early as 1882, though his own pamphlets attest to American readership as early as 1868.[31]

It is worth noting that Ulrichs's formulation is somewhat presaged in the German context when the poet Wolfgang Menzel looked to the rabbinical doctrine of soul transmigration as an explanation for same-sex desire: "female souls in male bodies repel women, and male souls in female bodies, men, as homonymous poles do; and, despite [having] the same physical sex, on the contrary, attract one another due to the differing sexes of their souls."[32] Though a minor point in Menzel's oeuvre, this comment was responded to in one of the first modern literary defenses of homosexuality, that of Swiss writer Heinrich Hössli's *Eros* (1836). Hössli, who was interested in a more masculinized version of the same Greek homoerotic tradition that Ulrichs was well-versed in, rejected Menzel's comment, citing the ill-fit of such a feminized description for certain historical figures, like King Friedrich I of Württemberg.[33] Hössli's reading of Menzel appears prophetic of Ulrichs's work and his detractors, though neither Hössli nor Menzel's work had the level of influence nor conceptual architecture that we would see in Ulrichs. But this analogy to rabbinical doctrine also presages what Robert Deam Tobin describes as a Jewish analogy inscribed in the inversion model. Tobin shows how gay activism in the German late 19th century and early 20th century was binarized around a "Greek model" (a universalizing and

[31] Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 159.
[32] Quoted in Brooks, 197-198.
[33] Brooks, 199.

masculinizing model of male-male desire that was associated mostly with rightist thinkers like Adolf Brand and Hans Blüher) and a "Jewish model" (a minoritizing and feminizing model of homosexuality associated with liberal and leftist thinkers like Magnus Hirschfeld).[34] Ulrichs, though also citing much Greek thought, often analogized inversion to Judaism in his pamphlets, a product of Judaism's transforming racialization in 19th century Germany.[35] Judaism in this period provides a racial analogy for arguments attempting to consider homosexuality as congenital and minoritarian. Judaism was a key reference for Ulrichs's sense that the Urnings were a "*Geschlecht,*" a grouping term contemporaneously used to mean "gender/sex" but which in his period was used as an equivalent to "species," "race," or "kind."[36] Though Tobin's binary does not really stand outside of the German context,[37] I mention this analogy to Judaism here because it helps frame how the American uptake of inversion will encode a different racial analogy, which I will return to in the final section of this chapter.

Sexology in Germany at the end of the 19th century was dominated by the influence of Krafft-Ebing and Albert Schrenck-Notzing, both of whom were (at first) aligned in their suspicion of congenital models, interested instead in suggestion, hypnotism, and degeneracy. Krafft-Ebing, however, would become more and more convinced of congenital models and of benign sexual variation as his work progressed, becoming in fact one of its most popular

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[34] Robert Deam Tobin, *Peripheral Desires: The German Discovery of Sex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 83-84.
[35] Tobin, 92, 233.
[36] This comes from an early working title for *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love,* mentioned in Ulrichs's letter to family dated November 28, 1862: "*Das Geschlecht der uranischen Hermaphroditen, d. i. der männerliebenden Halbmänner."* As a sign of the ambiguity of *Geschlecht*, Douglas Ogilvy Pretsell (with Michael Lombardi-Nash) has translated this title as "*The Uranier hermaphrodite sex, i.e., male-loving half-men,*" while Hubert Kennedy has translated it as "*The Race of Uranian Hermaphrodites, i.e the Man-Loving Half-Men.*" Douglas Ogilvy Pretsell, ed. *The Correspondence of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, 1846-1894* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 130; Hubert Kennedy, *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1988), 51.
[37] For example, in the English context, Greek references often supported liberal (rather than rightist) arguments for gay rights, such as in the work of Edward Carpenter and the Oxford Hellenists. See Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, translated by Michael Lucey (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 190.

proponents.[38] His *Psychopathia Sexualis* combined much of the techniques and thinking of Ulrichs with the social degeneration and atavism model popularized by thinkers like Bénédicte Morel. Though he denounced degeneration theory by the beginning of the 20th-century, the most influential version of his model described inversion as a sign of hereditary degeneration, which would manifest one's "natural bisexuality" and transform their mental state and sensibility away from typical heterosexual development.[39] Krafft-Ebing, by his own admission, was deeply indebted to Ulrichs, who was his correspondent and (briefly) his patient. In an 1879 letter to Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing writes, "it was the knowledge of your writings alone which led to my studies in this highly important field."[40] The two corresponded for some time, sharing works of sexology and Uranism, though Ulrichs eventually came to sour in his opinion of Krafft-Ebing.[41] The rapid translation of *Psychopathia Sexualis* into English in 1892 gave it significantly more readership and influence than the works of Ulrichs (which were not translated into English until the late 20th century) or those of his contemporaries.[42] For the scholar Harry Oosterhuis, what made Krafft-Ebing such an important figure in this moment was his crystallization of a "psychiatric form of reasoning" (akin to Davidson's third stage in the fall of pathological anatomy), in which "perversions were disorders of a natural urge that could not be located in physiology," as well as his adherence to a method based in biographical case-studies.[43] Krafft-Ebing's work was the most dominant at the entrance into the 20th century, where it is rewired in opposing directions under the major influences of Sigmund Freud and Magnus Hirschfeld.

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[38] Havelock Ellis writes on this arc of Krafft-Ebing's thought in Ellis, *The Study of Sexual Inversion, Volume 2: Sexual Inversion,* third edition (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1930), 70.
[39] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*, 12th edition, translated by F.J. Rebman (New York: Pioneer Publications, Inc., 1953), 342-344.
[40] Quoted in Kennedy (1981), 108.
[41] Oosterhuis (2000), 139.
[42] Bauer (2009), 35.
[43] Oosterhuis (2000), 61.

Though the Germans crafted most of its conceptual architecture, "inversion" gets its historically-descended name originally in English from the poet John Addington Symonds's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (published 1883, written 1873), and then from sexologists in the Italian and French contexts—Arrigo Tamassia uses it in 1878, and Jean-Martin Charcot and Victor Magnan in 1882.[44] Most of the sexologists of late 1800s France, from which came a veritable explosion of medical writing on homosexuality, were interested in homosexuality as an acquired trait, but many others (especially those influenced by German writing) wrote quite literally of men's homosexuality as a female brain coupled with male sex glands.[45] The rise of Krafft-Ebing's influence, the foreshadowing of psychoanalysis in the work of Alfred Binet, and the gay activist opposition of figures like the Catholic poet Marc-André Raffalovich changed the tenor of these debates at the turn of the 20th century. In the English context, even more than in its continental iterations, sexology is overwhelmingly affected by literary culture.[46] The end of the 19th century sees the Wilde trials and the writing of the Oxford Hellenists (like Symonds and Carpenter) weigh heavy influence on Havelock Ellis, who will be England's first major thinker of sexological homosexuality.[47] In the United States, Krafft-Ebing's remediation of Ulrichs through social degeneration was particularly appealing to a class of particularly moralizing sexologists who saw inversion as a congenital pathology associated especially with the racial mixing of cities. Physicians like James G. Kiernan and Frank Lydston wrote of "Uranism" as an atavism associated with "the original bi-sexuality of the ancestors of the race,"[48] which was more

[44] Ellis, 3.
[45] For example, Eugene Gley in 1884 and Magnan in 1885. Krafft-Ebing briefly summarizes their positions in *Psychopathia Sexualis,* 343-344.
[46] Bauer (2009), 19.
[47] See Ivan Crozier, "Nineteenth-century British Psychiatric Writing About Homosexuality Before Havelock Ellis: The Missing Story," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 63, no. 1 (2008): 65-102, for the discourse that predates Ellis's disproportionate influence.
[48] James G. Kiernan quoted in Jay Hatheway, *The Gilded Age Roots of Modern Homophobia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 120. On Lydston, see also Hatheway, 144-146.

prominent among people of color who they saw as evolutionarily regressed. Kiernan especially held on to Ulrichs's formulation, writing "it seems certain that a femininely functionating [*sic.*] brain can occupy a male body and vice versa," while adapting it to the particular racial politics of the 19th-century United States.[49]

The inversion model declines in the first half of the 20th century, especially by the growth of two important and very different models in the study of sexuality: the endocrinal model and the psychoanalytic model. The growth of psychoanalysis and endocrinology in this period create lasting divisions between trans, intersex, and gay meanings. Though a complete history of these fields is outside of the scope of this dissertation, we can begin to see their effects on the inversion model in the microcosm of a singular intellectual rivalry, namely that of Magnus Hirschfeld and Sigmund Freud. Hirschfeld and Freud agreed in their belief that homosexuality was a phenomenon of the "psyche," defined not by particular acts or by particular pathologies of genital anatomy, and stemming from an original state of natural intersexuality.[50] Both even connect homosexuality to the mother, in more or less major ways.[51] Hirschfeld, as much an activist as a physician, believed in a spectrum of "intermediate types" between male and female, and focused much of his attention on distinguishing these types. The coiner of the phrases "*transvestiten*" and "*transexualismus,*" Hirschfeld believed that the social or physical expression

[49] Kiernan quoted in Hatheway, 139.
[50] In Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women,* translated by Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000), he argues repeatedly that "only when the physical is an expression of the psychological can you speak of genuine homosexuality" (231); he also refutes the science of genital pathology (165-166) and speaks in similar terms to Ulrichs on the intersex state of the embryo; Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* translated by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), rejects degeneration theories (6), writes on original intersexuality (7) of infantile sexuality as latent, lacking defined object, and "polymorphously perverse" (43-57).
[51] Freud's theory of maternity and homosexuality is spoken of in more detail in the next chapter. Hirschfeld, more simply, recorded that his homosexual patients exhibited "psychological fixation on the mother," but did not think of it as causal. Hirschfeld, 164.

of femininity was not enough to indicate men's homosexuality,[52] and he followed the growing division between "inversion" and "homosexuality" made by his contemporaries like Albert Moll and Sándor Ferenczi.[53] But for as psychological as his understanding of inversion is, Hirschfeld also speculated that it may be caused by internal intersex "secretions" not yet identifiable with contemporary technology. Influenced by Ernst Haeckel's concept that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,"[54] Hirschfeld recommended that "in the mucus of the female urethra and vagina we should especially look for proof of sperm, in the male urethra for periodical flow of blood corpuscles,"[55] and that "constituents (*Einsprengsel*) of ovary tissue" should be searched for "in the body of men."[56] Though unable to prove this in his moment, Hirschfeld saw the horizon of sexology as the discovery that "[t]he decisive factor in contrary sexual feeling, therefore, involves not the mind or the soul, as Ulrichs believed (*anima inclusa*), but the glands (*glandula inclusa*)."[57] This movement from *anima inclusa* to *glandula inclusa* is the foundation of the early history of transsexual medicine, which utilizes the grammar of early inversion theory but shifts its methods and objects of analysis. Hirschfeld oversaw some of the first surgical transitions in modern history, and his speculative analysis on endocrinal effects on sexuality was the direct predecessor of the innovations by John Money, David Oliver Cauldwell, and Harry Benjamin in transsexual medicine.[58]

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[52] Hirschfeld, 77.
[53] Hirschfeld, 59. Moll's distinction between "inverts" and "homosexuals" was based on gendered behavior and the age of sexual object, seeing "inverts" as feminine and preferring mature men. Ferenczi distinguished between "subject-homo-eroticism" (sexually passive and feminine) and "object-homo-eroticism" (sexually active and masculine). Sándor Ferenczi, "The Nosology of Male Homosexuality," in *First Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, , translated by Ernest Jones (London: Karnac, 1994 [1914]), 296-318; on Moll, see Harry Oosterhuis, "Albert Moll's Ambivalence about Homosexuality and His Marginalization as a Sexual Pioneer" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 28, no. 1 (2019): 1-43.
[54] Vernon Rosario's introduction to Hirschfeld, 15.
[55] Hirschfeld, 171.
[56] Hirschfeld, 27.
[57] Preface to the 1919 edition of *The Homosexuality of Men and Women.* Hirschfeld, 31-32.
[58] For a history of the endocrinal model and the development of transsexual medicine, see Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

On the other hand, Freud, in the same period, published and revised his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* which revolutionized the conception of childhood sexuality and the psychoanalytic approach to sexual desire. Freud's perspective on the inversion model and its relationship to the intersex theories of Ulrichs is directly stated:

> The theory of bisexuality has been expressed in its crudest form by a spokesman of the male inverts: 'a feminine brain in a masculine body.' But we are ignorant of what characterizes a feminine brain. There is neither need nor justification for replacing the psychological problem by the anatomical one. Krafft-Ebing's attempted explanation seems to be more exactly framed than that of Ulrichs but does not differ from it in essentials.[59]

Freud's edit of Ulrichs' maxim as "brain," rather than "soul," reflects some of the neuropsychiatric turns that Ulrichs' influence had taken in the ensuing decades between his writing and Freud's. Freud had once been interested in Hirschfeld's work, but by 1910 had denounced him,[60] and had become interested in the rhetoric of some of Hirschfeld's masculinist opponents, like Hans Blüher.[61] Opposing these schools of thought that attempt to find inversion in the somatic dimension of the brain or the glands, Freud established a theory that attempted to denaturalize all sexuality, reinscribing its development to the family, the erogenous zones, and the fetish theory of Binet. In a rather famous footnote to the 1915 revision of the *Three Essays*, Freud writes:

> Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character. By studying sexual excitations other than those that are manifestly displayed, it has found that all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious….Thus from the point of view of psycho-analysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature.[62]

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[59] Freud, 8.
[60] Vernon Rosario's introduction to Hirschfeld, 12
[61] Tobin, 71.
[62] Freud, 11n1.

For Freud, the etiology of homosexuality resided in childhood and an identification with the mother, a theory he expounds upon in *Leonardo Da Vinci, A Memory of His Childhood* (1910). Notably, this highly influential theory was taken by some of Freud's contemporaries, such as Havelock Ellis, as a reinvigoration of the "now antiquated conception of homosexuality as an acquired phenomenon."[63] However, he was also taken by others, especially later, to be destroying the 19th-century organizing concept of perversion entirely, an ultimately emancipatory move against minoritizing and pathologizing models of sexuality.[64] This double-reading of Freud seems to generate from his resistance to the gay-rights discourse of his context, especially in its iterations in the inversion model and the developments from Ulrichs. Freud's resistance to inversion moves the cross-gender/cross-sex aspects of the inversion model out of the singular self and into a relational dynamic between son and mother, a theory that influences a bulk of gay theorization and literature, as will be discussed in later sections of this chapter and in the following chapter. Contemporary to and in the wake of Freud, many Freudian psychoanalysts, especially in the American context, applied this matrocentrist model to conversion therapy systems.[65] On the other hand, his theorization of a polymorphous perversity and its ceasing to tie sexuality to natural systems enabled a plethora of gay-affirmative theory outside of inversion rhetoric, especially after the mid-20th century.[66]

Hirschfeld and Freud represent the two major conceptual moves made out of inversion in the study of sexuality in Europe at the start of the 20th century. If inversion still held onto the

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[63] Ellis names Freud, Schrenck-Notzing, Ferenczi, Isidor Sadger, and Ludwig Jekels as this wave of "Freudians" supporting acquired etiologies. Ellis, 302-304.
[64] Davidson, 79, 90.
[65] See Henry Abelove, "Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans," *Dissent* 33 (1986): 59-69. I borrow the term "matrocentrist" from Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 161-163.
[66] Both an example of this affirmative theory and a reckoning with the problems of Freud for gay thought can be found in Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, eds. *Homosexuality & Psychoanalysis,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

greater portion of the social and medical opinion by this point, its final death-blow would come with the publishing of the Kinsey reports in the mid-century, which the historian John D'Emilio has described as having "permanently altered the nature of public discussion of sexuality as well as society's perception of its own behavior."[67] Add to this the effects of various feminist movements in the first half of the 20th century that radically shifted the nature of public discussion of femininity, a property rather essentialized by inversion discourse. Ulrichs's unscientific maxim had driven scientific research into sexuality for decades, but was now treated only as an antiquated metaphor, one with ostensibly little relevance to the studies of sexual difference that characterized the 20th century. Inversion surely has its scientific afterlives (as scholars have written on the work of neuroscientist Simon LeVay and the psychologist J. Michael Bailey),[68] but my interest in the rest of this chapter is on its literary afterlives. Being that the inversion model comes into the world in the form of a maxim, a fundamental metaphor, or what Ellis called "an epigram [of] the superficial impression of the matter,"[69] inversion already inscribes an aesthetic contention of interior femininity beneath the surface of (something like) masculinity. In the writings I will focus on, inversion becomes not just a model for understanding the gay characters whose stories are detailed therein, but a structure and raison d'être for writing in the first place. This trope outlasts inversion's supposed debunking from the world of sexology, transforming in light of the innovations of gay political activism and cultural aesthetics in the late 20th century. For examples of this process, I will first read two texts across the line of inversion's scientific fall from grace to see their interaction across time and how inversion

[67] John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970,* second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 33-34.
[68] Tobin 236-238; Brooks, 178; Gilbert Herdt, "Introduction: Third Sexes and Third Genders," in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 47.
[69] Ellis, 310.

becomes their narratological premise. Then, I will home in on a particular manifestation of inversion's afterlives in a trope of interiorized Black femininity in gay men's literature around the 21st century.

Dead Fathers, Invert Daughters

Two books, written 78 years apart, one a novel and one a graphic memoir, represent an interesting parallelism: both cast their lesbian protagonists as inverts who learn of inversion through their well-read queer fathers and who come into sexual adulthood in the wake of their fathers' deaths. These books are Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006). In the latter, Bechdel reads the former. Both *Künstlerromans*, these books consider the inverted artists' development in relation to (the loss of) a fatherly reader figure and his connection to a network of literary and scientific discourse of inversion. Their plots and styles are quite different, but what interests me in discussing them together here is this troped movement of inversion, across historical moments and geographic contexts, as a product of reading what the father has read. In them is a key example of how the inversion model enables a discourse of sexuality simultaneously as a thing of gender and as a thing across gender, a condition both a father and daughter could share; it is precisely in inversion discourse that we found our contemporary sense of a generic relationship between lesbianism and gayness and between different-gendered forms of transness. As well, in the specificity of their pairing, these texts construct inversion as temporal and genealogical, a condition in history as much as of history. In a neologism, they are *Urninginbildungs*, narratives of the female invert's development. As Jean Radford writes, in an argument presaging my own in this chapter, "[i]f *The Well* remains…'*the* lesbian novel,' this is partly because no 'metalanguage' about homosexuality

(or sexuality) has been produced since."[70] By reading *The Well* together with *Fun Home*, a 21st-century memoir that self-consciously experiments within the very same metalanguage as its modernist predecessor, we will see a critical example of how the discourse of inversion determines narratives of sexual development across and after the 20th century.

In *The Well of Loneliness,* we see the artistic and sexual development of Stephen Gordon, a depressive and physically awkward writer, beginning with her time growing up on her family's country estate with her sympathetic and curious father, Philip, and her distant mother, Anna. In *Fun Home,* we see the autobiographical artistic and sexual development of Alison Bechdel, a rebellious and curious writer, beginning with her time growing up in her family's ornate Victorian home with her closeted and depressive father, Bruce, and her mother, Helen. *The Well* is likely the most famous and infamous sexologically inflected novel, accompanied in most editions by an approving preface by Havelock Ellis and narrating at its core a scene of reading Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis.* It is written with a clear political purpose of documenting the affective registers of the invert's social life, with a special emphasis on inciting "pity" for this maligned group. This particular relation to sexology has made the novel's reception over the century since it was written nothing less than stormy, taken by some as a lesbian and/or trans classic and decried by others as an embarrassment to queer letters.[71] *Fun Home,* on the other hand, has little immediate discourse with sexology and nowhere near as polarized a reception. Instead, its relation to inversion comes from that discourse's absorption into the modernist canon, namely as a term learned from reading Proust. One may hesitate to discuss a graphic memoir

[70] Jean Radford, "An Inverted Romance: *The Well of Loneliness* and Sexual Ideology," in *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction,* ed. Jean Radford (New York: Routledge, 1986), 99.
[71] For an account of the novel's reception, see Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 100-128; as well as Laura Doan and Jay Prosser, "Introduction: Critical Perspectives Past and Present," in *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on* The Well of Loneliness (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 1-31.

with a novel like Hall's, but Bechdel's voice here is absolutely obsessed with narrativizing her life story as if it were a modernist fiction. "My parents are most real to me in fictional terms," she writes to explain her frequent leaning on literary allusion (from Proust, to Wilde, to Joyce, to James) to describe her family's peculiar dynamic.[72] *Fun Home*'s story, and therefore Bechdel's family, is dominated by literature and readers; not only are literary references frequent, but scenes of reading are generally the major action of the memoir. As Ariela Freedman writes, Bechdel reads fiction with "autobiographical speculations," writing her life reflexively into the canon of modernism.[73] Between this and Hall's interest in fictionalizing medical models of sexuality, both of these books use fiction as access points to nonfictional texts (and vice versa).

In *Fun Home*, this relation to fiction generates as a result of her father's occupation as an English teacher and an interior design obsessive. His library, ornate with mahogany, brass, and 19th-century gilt, is the magnum opus of a decorative style Bechdel finds affected and reflective of a general unreality to his life. It is also, notably, the place from which he lends out books to favorite male students he attempts to court.[74] As we learn, the secret of the Bechdel family involves her father's sexual interest in younger men, including Bechdel's former babysitter—a secret that Bechdel discovers only after coming out as a lesbian herself. She sees herself and her father as odd parallels: "Spartan to my father's Athenian. Modern to his Victorian. Butch to his nelly. Utilitarian to his aesthete."[75] Where her father's homosexuality was repressed and depressed, stuck in the same town he was born in and fraternizing in secret with teenagers,

[72] Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 67.
[73] Ariela Freedman, "Drawing on Modernism in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home,*" *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 4 (2009): 127.
[74] Bechdel, 60-61.
[75] Bechdel, 15.

Bechdel comes into her homosexuality politically and with community, having moved away from home for college and starting relationships with other students and community members.

In *The Well*, Philip is much less explicitly homosexual than Bruce Bechdel, but we are told early in the novel that he is "a queer mixture" with "one of the finest libraries in England."[76] He is an eccentric intellectual who studies Stephen as much as he plays with her. He is the reason for Stephen's surprising name as, before her birth, Philip desires a boy and prenatally gives the child her masculine name. This description of her birth echoes a belief reported by one of Krafft-Ebing's invert case studies, that "at the moment of his conception, his father had wished for a girl."[77] Indeed, the descriptions of Stephen's life and family follow closely to the discourse of sexology, especially around physical markings of her difference, as with her "enormous" hands.[78] I would argue that the "queer" Phillip, described as "a bit of a dandy" in his youth,[79] may be designed by Hall to represent a latent queer predisposition in the Gordon family line, an idea common in sexology for explaining a hereditary nature for inversion, especially in Krafft-Ebing who wrote that "manifestations of sexual perversion are frequently found in the parents."[80]

As with Bruce, Philip is both a queer father and a reader of inversion. In his library, Philip is shown reading a slim volume by Ulrichs, likely one of his pamphlets. Philip takes copious notes on the text and occasionally jumps up to look at a portrait of Stephen and Anna. He sees beauty in his wife, but in Stephen he sees "that indefinable quality…that made her look wrong in the clothes she was wearing, as though she and they had no right to each other, but

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[76] Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness,* New York: Anchor Books, 1990 [1928], 26.
[77] Quoted in Oosterhuis (2000), 158.
[78] Hall, 137.
[79] Hall, 167.
[80] Krafft-Ebing, 343. If we follow Laura Doan in arguing that Edward Carpenter's theory of the "intermediate sex" is a tacit influence on the novel, we may also read Philip as embodying Carpenter's "more normal and perfect" type of invert. Doan describes the character of Martin Hallam this way, who I later describe as an analogue to Philip. Laura Doan, "'The Outcast of One Age is the Hero of Another': Radclyffe Hall, Edward Carpenter and the Intermediate Sex," in *Palatable Poison,* 170.

above all no right to Anna." The idea that Ulrichs is providing a text by which to study Stephen is not as explicit here as when later Stephen finds her own name scratched into the margins of her father's copy of Krafft-Ebing, but the implication is obvious. Interestingly, Ulrichs's text here reflects not just on Stephen, whose nature remains "indefinable" to her father at this point, but to this family's triangular dynamic: the ill-fit of Stephen to her mother, the straining of Philip and Anna's marriage in relation to Stephen, and Philip's self-imposed role as the primary "reader" of his daughter's nature. Ulrichs's feminine maleness begins our roadmap towards Philips' queer fatherhood and his ability to put language to Stephen's masculine femaleness. Philip is never described as having either a feminine soul or an attraction to men in the way Bruce is, but his reading habits, his comportment, and his relationship to his daughter all make him seem outré, if even perverse. An ostensibly heterosexual English layman with a habit of reading German gay activists and sexologists like Ulrichs (presumably in the original German, as the only way to have read Ulrichs in English at this time would have been in excerpt in volumes by others) and Krafft-Ebing (whose publications were often limited to purchase by physicians) makes for a queer figure for his time.

As with Bechdel's statement that she was the "butch to [her father's] nelly," Stephen and Philip are images of each other through a funhouse mirror. Anna takes note of "their movements so grotesquely alike; their hands were alike, they made the same gestures."[81] She, who fails to understand or relate to her daughter, thinks of Philip and Stephen as a pair that excludes her, "as though both of them were children."[82] The important initial difference between father and daughter, however, is an understanding of Stephen's sexual "nature." Until Philip's death, Stephen lives in a kind of confused torment about why she feels different from others, while

[81] Hall, 80.
[82] Hall, 14.

Philip keeps his theories about her to himself. Even on asking him, "is there anything strange about me, Father…?," Stephen is lied to "glibly" by Philip.[83] The novel describes that this question made "his loins ach[e] with pity for this fruit of his loins," a phrase whose incredible awkwardness maps how the novel has, following its sexological roots, poised the father and daughter as mirrors divided by an emergency in heredity.

In both *Fun Home* and *The Well*, fathers represent both queerness and their daughter's access point to a particular discourse of queerness: they are inversion literature's readers as much as its objects. Thus, the father in these texts is the catalyst of the text's own narrativizing of inversion, an operation that will then occur under the aegis of the writer-daughter, as if passed on like a baton. But these parallel narrative structures (reader-father, writer-daughter, inverts all—whether latent, locked-up, or liberated) come under very different pressure after the father's death and their protagonist's entry into a queer social world away from the family.

When Philip dies, by the falling of Anna's favorite tree onto him, he attempts to tell Anna his sense of Stephen, but can only get out "it's Stephen—not like."[84] As we will see in a moment, the issue of "like" and "unlike" is essential to the novel's terms around queer community, but here it seems to capture the tension around Stephen's being both "like" and "not like" those at the family estate, especially her parents. In this scene as in others, Philip fails to bring his language for Stephen's nature outside of his books, and it will take Stephen's diving into his library for her to recognize her father's unspoken sense. The only other person in the estate who seems to understand what Philip understands is a maid, Puddle, who the novel heavily implies is also inverted but who does not seem to exhibit the same kind of gender dysphoria as Stephen.[85]

[83] Hall, 105-106.
[84] Hall, 118.
[85] Hall, 96, 154-155, and 196.

Philip's death is not immediately revelatory for Stephen, nor are Puddle's tender gestures towards her; in fact, the novel is as dedicated to capturing Stephen's nonrecognition as it is her eventual epiphany. Its central invert only seems to look down at herself in shame, missing the movements and knowledge of other queer people around her. Her mother seems to understand that something in Stephen is "not like," but she can only manifest this knowledge antagonistically, which accelerates after Philip's death to Anna's total refusal of Stephen.

It takes this rejection and a visit to her father's library to finally bring Stephen into her type. A "natal instinct" draws Stephen towards her father's copy of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, with her father's handwritten notes of her name over Krafft-Ebing's descriptions of the invert. "You knew!" Stephen exclaims, "Oh, Father—and there are so many of us—thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because they're maimed, hideously maimed and ugly—God's cruel; He let us get flawed in the making."[86] This is one of gay literature's most famous scenes of the phenomenon Lee Edelman describes in "Homographesis," in which identity is produced in a scene of reading.[87] For Edelman, who is interested in the way that gayness has been overdetermined by a relationship to inscription and signification, these scenes purport to capture identity recognition, but actually capture identity generation. In other words, such scenes ostensibly appear as a character seeing something about themselves in language, but what is really happening is that language is generating and modifying that thing about themselves, which they retroactively clarify as a recognition. Edelman's sense of gayness's relationship to inscription is highly influenced by the aftermath of

[86] Hall, 203-205.
[87] Lee Edelman, "Homographesis," in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14-21.

sexology and its interest in finding signs of "homosexual difference," signs that identify—as one identifies a culprit in a police lineup—gayness.[88]

An epiphanic moment certainly, one where sexological writing leads Stephen into sexual adulthood, but it must be noted that this epiphany is dealt in terms of hereditary injury clearly influenced by Krafft-Ebing's commitment to the degeneration model. I am not willing to say that *The Well* endorses this sense of the invert as "maimed," as none of its other queer characters speak in such terms. I follow Heather Love's argument that inversion discourse gives to Hall a language for describing "the way negative social experiences are somatized."[89] But I would add that this discourse's fictionalization creates a novelistic scenario where Stephen's overreliance on the medico-literary discourse of inversion leads her to a kind of miserabilist relationship to herself and her community. Further in the novel, we see that Stephen has little comfort around the community of queer people she finds in Paris. At a predominantly lesbian party, Stephen tries to identify the party guests' sexual differences by some common "stigma" in "the timbre of a voice, the build of an ankle, the texture of a hand," reading them as a sexologist would, but is confounded by the variety she finds there.[90] She finds herself out of joint with even this crowd. She eventually makes friends with an inverted male writer named Jonathan Brockett, a light-hearted and supportive chatterbox with the "soft white hands of a woman," who is able to see "through a secret keyhole into her mind."[91] But this male analogue is of mixed comfort, as Stephen resents him as a social climber, an effete, and a "cruel" studier of people. As Terry

[88] Edelman, 5.
[89] Love, 108. In a different register, Heike Bauer has argued that Krafft-Ebing's text is a source of sexual pleasure for *The Well of Loneliness,* and one whose case studies' influence on the language of some of *The Well*'s more erotic moments. I find this argument convincing, but "pleasure" as a term in the novel is heavily mitigated and even spoiled by Krafft-Ebing's degenerative theories and the kind of somatization that Love identifies. Heike Bauer, "Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* as Sexual Sourcebook for Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness,*" *Critical Survey* 15, no. 3 (2003): 23-38.
[90] Hall, 352-353.
[91] Hall 234.

Castle has written, even though Brockett's light, effete, and keen sensibility represents a counter to "Stephen's gloom," his voice "remains the most *un*heeded voice in the novel.…In the same way that Hall's homosexual characters bear the visible signs of their sexual 'morbidity'…so the narrative itself seems marked."[92] I would argue that Brockett's inability to change the course of Stephen's life (and therefore the course of the novel itself) reflects Stephen's unyielding commitment to the theories of degeneracy interwoven in Krafft-Ebing's account of inversion. The inversion model in *The Well*, though it brings Stephen to her father and into identity in the wake of her father's death, keeps her out of sync with her contemporary community. "[Brockett] belongs in some other work," writes Castle, "*The Well of Sociability*, perhaps."[93] We could put this another way: Stephen's sense of her type across gender points her more towards her father than it does towards the inverted men of her time. This is part of why the phrase "like to like" (in Puddle's words)[94] so haunts this novel, as likeness becomes complicated by Stephen's viewing of the sexual world through the lens of inversion literature.

In *The Well of Loneliness,* queer people beyond Stephen do not seem to share her intense affective profile. Even and especially with her (mostly very feminine) lovers Stephen feels out of sync. Her married lover Angela, who seems to resent her own queerness, says to her "I couldn't go under again—I couldn't be one of those apologetic people who must always exist just under the surface, only coming up for a moment, like fish—I've been through that particular hell."[95] While the comment is literally meant to show Angela's self-hating disinterest in the clandestine life of queerness that she would have with Stephen, we can also read into her comment a

[92] Terry Castle, *Noël Coward & Radclyffe Hall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 52. Castle writes convincingly of Brockett's character as based on the dramatist Noël Coward, with whom Hall was friendly. Castle takes their friendship as the basis of an analysis of artistic relationships between lesbians and gay men.
[93] Castle, 55.
[94] Hall, 248.
[95] Hall, 181.

disinterest in a depth model of the self that Stephen so readily represents. Alongside Stephen's discomfort in the queer social scene of Paris, readers are given the sense that Stephen is impossible just about everywhere, except perhaps in the ideation of her father. For some scholars, especially Jay Prosser, this problem of community sync signifies what is specifically trans, rather than lesbian, about Stephen.[96] While useful and certainly well-evidenced, such a reading seems like an attempt at historical repair, a hindsight distaste for the adhesion of gay and trans meanings in the language and period of inversion. I am interested in how this novel, purposefully written to fictionalize and spread particular sexological concepts, ends up propelling an incredible tension and discomfort around typification—a tension that indeed propels debate on its protagonist's type even in our contemporary. Sexological texts of the inversion model give Philip and Stephen their first sense of Stephen as one of a type, but Stephen fails to flourish in her type's social life in early 20th century Paris. In *The Well,* typification in a medico-literary discourse does not yield to social, community belonging. Or in other words, inversion may give Stephen language, but it does not give her life.

This is, I argue, the very cause of *The Well's* so polarized reception: it seems to advocate for a set of medico-literary knowledge that its narrative watches fail. By the end of the novel, we see that Stephen only feels comfort with a man like her father, an eccentric, well-read, ostensibly straight man, represented by her longtime friend Martin, who she gives up her last lover to. "Yes, strange though it was," the novel reads, "with this normal man she was far more at ease than with Jonathan Brockett, far more at one with all his ideas, and at times far less conscious of her own inversion; though it seemed that Martin had not only read, but had thought a great deal about the

[96] Jay Prosser, "'Some Primitive thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition': The Transexual Emerging from *The Well,*" in *Palatable Poison,* 134.

subject."[97] Stephen finds comfort in Martin's knowing, masculine silence, as opposed to Brockett, the effeminate chatterbox with a frustratingly sharp read on Stephen's thoughts. Brockett's inverse inversion is a minor but potent sign in *The Well of Loneliness*, one that should feel like a comforting parallelism but instead renders as a subtle irritation through the book's second half.

In *The Well of Loneliness*, Philip and Stephen's reading of Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing brings Stephen into a type, but it does little to make her feel at home in herself or her community; instead of a unity with her inverse Brockett, she stays adhered to an ideal of her father, inversion's reader. This is one way that Bechdel's *Fun Home* is so radically different from Hall's novel, even when the conditions of familial and sexual development seem parallel. In *Fun Home,* reading, even as it is an act learned precisely from the father, acts as a path away from the father and towards lesbian politics and community. In fact, in *Fun Home,* Bechdel worries that her coming out as a lesbian perhaps, just perhaps, caused her father to die.

Sometime after she comes out and discovers her father's secret, she learns that he has been run over by a truck. *Fun Home* may be described as Bechdel's frustrated attempt to frame this event in a very particular way—as the suicide of a gay man. But it is unclear that this is indeed what happened. He may have died accidentally, he may not have been gay.[98] Bechdel admits, "perhaps my eagerness to claim him as 'gay' in the way I am 'gay,' as opposed to bisexual or some other category, is just a way of keeping him to myself—a sort of inverted Oedipal complex."[99] Bechdel is devoted to narrativizing the story of his death as foretold in

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[97] Hall, 416.
[98] Hillary L. Chute writes on this dynamic as "touching her father through drawing him." In this sense the memoir is "not a book about 'what happened' to Bechdel's father. Rather, it is a book about ideas about what happened to Bruce Bechdel, and arriving at a collection of ideas through an intense engagement with archival materials." Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 175, 180.
[99] Bechdel, 230.

earlier events, as an inversion of her lesbianism, and as literary in and of itself. Framing his death this way is a way of connecting them in her grief. This unique version of blame makes for a comforting connection of father and daughter, a "last, tenuous bond."[100] Though we may also venture that this reading of Bruce's death and character is a kind of narrative protection against a more disturbing possibility: that his desire was specifically geared towards the intergenerational, that his desire was specifically pedophilic rather than homosexual, the possibility buried in the "or some other category" of Bechdel's framing. In such a case, Bechdel's calling upon inversion discourse in her memoir is a form of narrative self-defense, a discursive control from and for her father's legacy.

The year before Bechdel's father's death, he speeds his way through Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*,[101] and the novel becomes one of Bechdel's many fictional points of comparison to her life. Text describing Swann's garden is juxtaposed with illustrations of her father's gardening and indoor plants; Proust's transposition of genders juxtaposed with illustrations of her father's flirtations with the babysitter. As Ann Cvetkovich has written, "[Bechdel] can't separate herself from her father's sexuality or his aesthetics, a point that she underscores by noting Proust's ability to convert one into the other."[102] Diving deeper into Proust's version of homosexuality, Bechdel writes:

> Proust refers to his explicitly homosexual characters as 'inverts.' I've always been fond of this antiquated clinical term…It's imprecise and insufficient, defining the homosexual as a person whose gender expression is at odds with his or her sex, but in the admittedly limited sample comprising my father and me, perhaps it is sufficient. Not only were we inverts. We were inversions of one another. While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him…he was attempting to express something feminine through me….It was a war of cross-purposes, and so doomed to perpetual escalation.[103]

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[100] Bechdel, 86.
[101] Bechdel, 28.
[102] Ann Cvetkovich, "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1-2 (2008): 119.
[103] Bechdel, 97-98.

Over a century after Ulrichs's model-defining pamphlets and almost 80 years after Hall's novelization of the model, Bechdel's memoir looks to inversion as a narratological model, one that will make sense not only of her and her father's sexuality and gender as it crosses with the complications of kinship and aesthetics, but that will also make sense of why their sexuality and gender would lead to the death of one and the flourishing of the other. Conceived of as inverts inverting each other, Bechdel and her father can only move in an intimate binarism towards his possible suicide. Or at least, this is how *Fun Home* makes sense of the events of Bechdel's family, for her father's sexual secrets and subsequent death introduce such an epistemic problem that Bechdel dedicates her memoir to throwing narrative at it to make it cohere. That narrative is deeply connected to the literature of inversion precisely because this literature provides a fundamental language for thinking of homosexuality as a cross-gender phenomenon, one that could be shared in a bond between father and daughter. In inversion's defining of surfaces and depths at odds, it also gives Bechdel language to make sense of the sharp contrast she sees between her father's ornate, anal aesthetics and his secretive sexuality. To Bechdel, Bruce's death needs the queer sensemaking of Proust, Hall, James, Wilde, and others—from them, Bechdel weaves a particular afterlife for the inversion model in the 21st century. This is not exactly the inversion model born from pathological medicine and intersex medicine that we see in Ulrichs and Hall, but an echo of it using the same name, where "inversion" refers less to the soul and its physical manifestations, but more to décor and secrets, to the construction of narrative, and to a metaphorical mirroring effect between father and daughter.

Though Bechdel gains her appreciation for reading from her father, reading becomes a temporary route away from her father during her first years of college when she is putting words to her sexuality, even as her father refuses to do the same for himself. "My realization at nineteen

that I was a lesbian came about in a manner consistent with my bookish upbringing," she writes. She calls this "[a] revelation not of the flesh, but of the mind," as if literary engagement itself establishes an exterior/interior divide.[104] Unlike Stephen, Bechdel does not have her epiphany from reading her father's own collection of books, but from independently reading lesbian texts from an assortment of college bookstores: Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's *Lesbian/Woman*, Casey and Nancy Adair's *Word is Out: Some Stories of Our Lives,* and, among some others, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness.*

In its own dedicated panel, *The Well* is illustrated being pulled by Bechdel's hand from an alphabetical shelf, with the vague caption "[one] book referred to other books, which I sought out in the library."[105] It is a somewhat subdued intertext; in a memoir that so frequently claims *X modernist novel's plot is similar to Y event in my life,* Hall's gets no such treatment. But the novel especially weighs on *Fun Home* as we hear Bechdel's assumption that her coming into lesbian community through reading is an escape from her father, his depression, and her early homelife. "This entwined political and sexual awakening was a welcome distraction," Bechdel writes accompanied by an image of herself with a reading woman wrapped between her legs, "the news from home was increasingly unsettling."[106] In contrast to Bechdel's assumption, and informed by *The Well,* we should say that Bechdel's entry into lesbian community is instead generated precisely from her father's depressive, solitary sexual torment, with readership as its medium. If we do so, we would see in Bechdel and her father an inversion of *The Well*'s depressive, readerly Stephen and her social, readerly father. Bechdel's lesbian community steps away from her depressive father, but she is forced back to him by his death; Stephen's depressive inversion

[104] Bechdel, 74.
[105] Bechdel, 75.
[106] Bechdel, 81.

keeps her connected to her father, who she is pulled away from after his death. I have been writing on the parallel structure in these novels of a lesbian coming into her sexuality via reading after the death of her father, but I can say now that these parallels are also inversions of each other: Stephen may be the parallel of Bechdel's father, and Bechdel may be the parallel of Stephen's father—or, perhaps, of the other social inverts, like Jonathan Brockett, who try but fail to cut through Stephen's gloom by appealing to community. This relationship to the *The Well* is a more muted version of the narrative inversion Bechdel opens and ends her memoir with—that she is Daedalus the father and her father is Icarus the son, rather than the other way around. It is also subtly parallel to the inversions of parent and child in *The Well* itself, where Stephen's mother's fears that Philip and Stephen are too much like two children together. In both novels, the lesbian child and the queer father interchange at surprising velocity.

I have argued that *The Well of Loneliness* can be read as something like a cautionary tale about the inversion model, a narrative about how an enduring commitment to this model creates in the invert something like a melancholy that blocks their ability to cohere with queer community. In Bechdel, we see the opposite. Inversion acts as a narrative model that allows Bechdel to move forward from her father's depressive sexuality and into lesbian community. In Hall, inversion makes for narrative depression; in Bechdel, inversion is a narrative anti-depressant. In both novels, inversion is the text of the relationship between queer father and queer daughter, a relationship grounded in gender transposition and constant role reversal. The death of the sissy father and the afterlife of his library act as the foundation of the butch daughter's becoming, though what and how they become is a vastly different proposition in each.

Let's take a process photo of Bechdel's as a final emblem of the inversion model's course in these two texts (Figure 1). The vast majority of the panels of *Fun Home* are drawn from

reference photos of Bechdel herself meticulously posed as other people, including members of her family. The photo below is of Bechdel dressed as her father, suit and all, which was used as the reference for a panel that draws Bruce with the caption "in my earliest memories, Dad is a lowering, malevolent presence."[107] The memoir then tells of how their relationship warmed through shared intellectual pursuit and the discussion of books. I see this photo and its subsequent remediation into the memoir as an example of what Elizabeth Freeman has called "temporal drag," the queer performance of the tug of history on the present. For Freeman, "temporal drag" especially describes the weight of supposedly passé lesbian history on the supposedly radical queer contemporary, the return of now outmoded cultures and discourses to the present.[108] Using all of that term's punny specificity, I argue that Bechdel's paternal drag enacts not just a queer performance of her lineage for the purpose of her memoir, but literalizes as a performance of gender the temporal tug of the turn of the 20th century, the seat of inversion as represented in the modernist literature her father introduced her to. Her pose here is a microcosm of *Fun Home*'s project and of what I have been calling the afterlives of the inversion model. It is a gesture of historical return in which gayness is framed as of and across gender, of and across time.

As a photograph later drawn, it also emphasizes how far away we seem to be from something we could truly call "interiority," as in both *The Well* and *Fun Home* it is really exteriors (décor, the shape of a hand, the mark of Cain, the father's suit) that have come to signal the invert. The "interior" as a concept in the course of these texts, though a constant metaphor of reference, has come to look significantly more like a series of signifying surfaces. In this photo,

[107] Bechdel, 197.
[108] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 62.

Bechdel the writer-daughter puts on the signifying surface of her reader-father (his image as encoded by his suit and "lowering" pose) counterintuitively to reveal herself in the project of her graphic memoir. By posing as the reader of modernism, Bechdel poses herself as the writer of the contemporary. Thus, let us say what has been implicit throughout this section, that inversion in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Fun Home,* as a discourse of interiority/exteriority in queerness, has actually performed more as "inversion" in the sense of transposition: the transposition of male and female, father and daughter, reader and writer, past and present, but also the *trans position* of gayness, a discourse of sexuality as a discourse of gender.

Fig. 1: Alison Bechdel posed as her father, reference photo for Fun Home.

The Inner Black Woman

So far, even in discussing *Fun Home,* I have somewhat buried the particularities of the uptake of European sexological concepts into the United States. In part, I have done so because the major sources of sexological knowledge in the U.S. are exactly the same as those of Europe: American sexology takes major influence from Krafft-Ebing (translation of whom appeared in the U.S. in 1888) and Havelock Ellis (whose work was published in the U.S. in 1900 and who was influenced in turn by U.S. sexologist James Kiernan).[109] The American sexological canon, at first glance, looks remarkably like the European sexological canon. But what is remarkably different in the United States, and what I will be discussing in this section, is how sexological concepts, and the inversion model especially, have adhered to analogies of racial Blackness. As many scholars have traced, European sexology is deeply interwoven with the effects of 19th century race science (phrenology, eugenics, comparative anatomy, and anthropology) and the infrastructures of colonial power.[110] As Siobhan Somerville has explained, "structures and methodologies that drove dominant ideologies of race also fueled the pursuit of knowledge about the homosexual body."[111] Whereas racial analogy in the European sexological context focused especially on Judaism (as aforementioned) and the "primitive" cultures of European colonies, the U.S. context hinged significantly and specifically on racial Blackness.[112] At the turn of the 20th century, prevalence of homosexuality in the U.S. was routinely associated with working class

[109] Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 18-19. See also Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999), 74-119.
[110] For a non-exhaustive list of examples, see: Somerville; Aliyyah I Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012; Terry, 27-39; Melissa N. Stein, *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830-1934*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
[111] Somerville, 17
[112] Somerville, 13.

and Black populations, as in the physician Irving Rosse's 1892 lecture stating that the "majority" of "moral hermaphrodites" were Black.[113] European sexologists made a similar assumption of homosexuality as a Black American phenomenon when they described it as increasingly prominent in U.S. cities, where dense urban space mixing racial groups and economic classes would supposedly increase the prevalence of sexual perversions.[114]

This kind of rhetorical connection of Blackness and sexual perversion emanated especially from American sexologists following degenerative and atavistic models, most famously in the early Krafft-Ebing.[115] But this connection needs to be seen in the context of what Hortense Spillers has described as the ungendering of Black flesh in American plantation slavery.[116] The "severing of the captive body from its motive will" in slavery created a symbolic loss of subject position and gender difference, placing the Black enslaved body into a symbolic order where it was "the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality...reduced to a thing, to *being* for the captor….[I]n this distance *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide[d] a physical and biological expression of 'otherness[.]'"[117] C. Riley Snorton has built on Spillers's argument to show how Blackness acted as condition of possibility for transness and the greater scientific infrastructure of sex and gender.[118] The violent science and economy of slavery and its treatment of Black people as fungible created a "critical context for understanding sex and gender as mutable and subject to rearrangement in the arenas of medicine and law."[119]

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[113] Quoted in Terry, 94.
[114] Terry, 88, 90-92.
[115] Terry, 78.
[116] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 207. See also Abdur-Rahman, 20, 40, on the relationship between the process of ungendering Black flesh and sexology.
[117] Spillers, 206.
[118] C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 135-136.
[119] Snorton, 11-12, 33. See also Marquis Bey, *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Gender,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Robyn Wiegman makes an important, related argument when she writes that in "the nineteenth century's production of racial discourse, the privilege accorded to analogy enabled a host of other cultural determinants to be linked to and organically defined within the sphere of the body. Through the crafting of analogic relations, the deployment of race was multiplied, radiating outward to constitute new identities of bodies as sexual, gendered, and criminal excess."[120] For her, then, the analogy to race to describe sexual and gender difference is an extension of the discourse of race, a deployment of its logic to embody other forms of difference as themselves racial or racialized. It is, as with Ulrichs's look to Judaism's social symbolic position as a form of difference, a way of founding the meaning and essence of sexual difference by extending the territory of racial difference. This is parallel to what Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman has described as Blackness's "visual supplement" to taxonomies of sexual desire, where the logic of racial corporeality managed sexuality's increasing sense of invisibility.[121] That is to say that, as pathological anatomy's ability to locate sexuality in pathologies of the body continued to wane in the advancement of the sexual sciences, racial Blackness was looked to for the purpose of according homosexuality a symbolic body. What we see in American sexology is the intellectual canon of European sexology being applied to a distinct distribution of racial power and visuality, building an analogic relation locating sexuality through Blackness.

But what provokes my interest here is a particular complication of this analogic relation. Here, I explore how inversion's afterlives invert the logic of "visual supplement" in the relation of race and sexuality via the trope of the "inner Black woman," a mostly vernacular (but sometimes literary or filmic) trope in which a gay man self-describes as having within him an

[120] Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 32.
[121] Abdur-Rahman, 9.

"inner Black woman." If, as Somerville and Abdur-Rahman argue, Blackness acted as a kind of visualized symbolic body for homosexuality's increasing interiorization and de-visualization at the turn of the 20th century, why do we see in the turn of the 21st century a trope constructing Blackness as an invisible interior for the gay body? Is this a reversal, or simply a mirror-image in historical descent? Also, if the adhesion of Blackness and homosexuality was quite literalized at the turn of the 20th century by a research infrastructure that assumed same-sex desire and gender-transgression were more common among Black people, and by a structure of power and domination that inscribed Blackness with sexual dissidence and fungibility, why by the 21st century does this connection become increasingly abstract and detached from the structure of medicine and law? No longer an institutional declaration of the queerness of Blackness, the "inner Black woman" trope acts more like a loose social analogy claiming the Blackness of queerness. I argue that the afterlives of inversion give the "inner Black woman" trope its metaphoric vehicle, staging in a rhetorical difference between exterior and interior a refraction of the "invisibility" of sexuality through the "visibility" of race. Or in other words, using a phrase from Abdur-Rahman, this trope shows the interiorization of sexuality refracted through the "iconicity" of race.[122] In this, I read the "inner Black woman" trope as an example of what Anne Anlin Cheng calls the "dream of a second skin—of remaking one's self in the skin of the other[.]" I study this trope to give us a long view of how gay sexuality, to use another turn of phrase from Cheng, "looks to [B]lack skin, not for disavowal but for articulation."[123] The "inner Black woman" deserves to be traced for its mapping how sexuality and race have entangled in the cultural descent of the sexual sciences across the 20th and 21st centuries.

[122] Abdur-Rahman, 155.
[123] Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker & The Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

Important to the context of the "inner Black woman" trope is how gay civil rights discourse of the 20th century learns from and extends the racial analogies of sexual science. As the 20th century develops, much of gay activist discourse begins to make analogy to Black activism, especially after the legalization of interracial marriage and the victories of the Civil Rights movement.[124] By the early 21st century, with gay marriage's dominance as the issue of gay civil rights du jour, these analogies become particularly explicit and tendentious.[125] This is summed up best by the title of *The Advocate*'s December 2008 cover story on California's Proposition 8, titled "Gay is the New Black: the Last Great Civil Rights Struggle." Clearly, such an analogy heterosexualizes Blackness while Whitewashing gayness, setting historically intertwined rights struggles into opposition, but notably it also places them into an invented temporal relationship, where Blackness is framed as old-fashioned but the key to futurity, and gayness is framed as historically recent but the end of difference itself. Jane Ward and Amy L. Stone have shown that these analogies to Civil Rights are rooted in 19th century sexual science's original racialized formulations, but develop under the pressure of abstraction and social friction in the wake of late-20th-century waning of institutionalized sexual science and solidification of Black and gay activism.[126]

It is in this context that the "inner Black woman" trope emerges. In an emblematic example of this trope, blogger Perez Hilton tweeted in 2014, "inside every gay man is a fierce

[124] Somerville, 4, 7. Notably, even Radclyffe Hall's novel briefly makes a similar analogy, as is discussed in Jean Walton, "'I Want to Cross Over into Camp Ground': Race and Inversion in *The Well of Loneliness*," in *Palatable Poison,* 277-299.
[125] Amy L. Stone and Jane Ward, "From 'Black People are Not a Homosexual Act' to 'Gay is the New Black': Mapping White Uses of Blackness in Modern Gay Rights Campaigns in the United States," *Social Identities* 17, No. 5 (2011): 605-624 details this pattern in gay rights campaigns as well as a parallel rhetoric in which anti-gay discourses describe gay rights as an opposition to Black rights.
[126] Stone and Ward, 611.

[B]lack woman!"[127] As "fierce" implies here, the "inner Black woman" trope is often a statement about matching a racist stereotype of affect and physicality associated with Black womanhood, using a metaphor of interiority to describe an idea about exteriority. In an opinion column first published in the school newspaper of the University of Mississippi but later republished by *TIME* magazine to some controversy, titled "Dear White Gays: Stop Stealing Black Female Culture," Sierra Mannie writes "I don't care how well you can quote Madea, who told you that your booty was getting bigger than hers, how cute you think it is to call yourself a strong [B]lack woman, who taught you to twerk…you are not a [B]lack woman, and you do not get to claim either [B]lackness or womanhood. It is not yours."[128] Framed as an issue of appropriation and stereotype, Mannie remarks that "[t]he difference is that [B]lack women with whom you think you align so well, whose language you use and stereotypical mannerism you adopt, cannot hide their [B]lackness and womanhood to protect themselves the way that you can hide your homosexuality."[129] A "b[l]ackhanded compliment," as one blogger called it,[130] non-Black gay men's deployment of ostensibly affirmative alliance to (presumed straight) Black women traffics in racist stereotype. A response like Mannie's, though, often encodes a discomfort with gay men's historical identification with femininity and an essentialized view of the "private" nature of sexuality. An uncomfortable mix of minstrelsy and drag wearing the costume of inter-

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[127] Quoted in Bridget Minamore, "The 'Fierce Black Woman' Inside You Doesn't Exist," *Poejazzi,* February 27, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140603192125/http://www.poejazzi.com/the-fierce-black-woman-inside-you-doesnt-exist/

[128] Sierra Mannie, "Dear White Gays: Stop Stealing Black Female Culture," *TIME*, July 9, 2014, https://time.com/2969951/dear-white-gays-stop-stealing-black-female-culture/

[129] Some of the controversy surrounding this article stemmed from what was taken to be an essentializing view of gayness. This features in responses to the article like J. Bryan Lowder, "The Trouble With 'Stealing' Cultures," *Slate,* July 11, 2014, https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/07/are-gay-white-men-really-stealing-black-female-culture.html; Steve Friess, "Dear Black Women: White Gays Are Your Allies, So Don't Push Us Away," *TIME,* July 16, 2014, https://time.com/2988033/white-gays-black-women-allies/; and H. Alan Scott, "Dear White Gays: Don't Listen to *TIME* Magazine," *Thought Catalog*, July 10, 2014, https://thoughtcatalog.com/h-alan-scott/2014/07/dear-white-gays-dont-listen-to-time-magazine/.

[130] Keyanna Drakes, "B[l]ackhanded Compliment," *The Western Gazette*, February 27, 2017, https://westerngazette.ca/features/b-l-ackhanded-compliment/article_8845f5b8-e8b2-11e6-82a1-cff262137c20.html

community admiration, what this trope does more than anything is put into relief historical tensions between gay maleness and femininity, Whiteness and Blackness, and the intersections and imitations therein.

Though most of its iterations are in vernacular and "low" or pop cultural contexts, we expose some of the mechanics and consequence of the trope if we look deeper into its literary iterations. I want to emphasize that the trope of the "inner Black woman" is not exclusive to gay men,[131] nor exclusive to White people. In fact, in the remainder of my analysis, I focus on deployments of this trope by non-White gay male authors, specifically in the work of Korean-American novelist Joon Oluchi Lee and Black American critic and essayist Hilton Als. I want to risk thinking the kind of cheap, quick, and racist iterations of this trope by someone like Perez Hilton together with these more complex literary examples by artists of color to define a range for this trope's life. Doing so, we recognize clearly its connection to the discourse of inversion that precedes it by more than a century.

The career of Joon Oluchi Lee is defined by narratives that aestheticize the feminine interiorities of queer men and trans femmes. This interest structures two novels [*94* (2015) and *Neotenica* (2020)] a collection of short fiction [*Lace Sick Bag* (2013)], and several shorter writings, including those on his blog *lipstickeater: a compendium of femme feminist faggotry,* where he describes himself as "joony shcecter better known as BLACK MISTRESS TINA," a "Korea-born, Midwest-bred, Virginia-groomed, Bay Area-harvested faggotte who is above all a [B]lack feminist."[132] Throughout his work, gayness and transfemininity are intimately entangled,

[131] As in the reality television show, *Girlfriend Intervention*, a short-lived 2014 *Lifetime* program similar in concept to *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy*, where Black women give lifestyle makeovers to White women; or as in the 2019 film *Loqueesha,* directed by Jeremy Saville, about a straight White radio host impersonating a Black woman for improved ratings.
[132] Joon Oluchi Lee, *lipstickeater* (blog), https://lipstickeater.blogspot.com/

character exteriors and interiors are divided and stylized, and both of these patterns are foregrounded by a particular relationship to racial Blackness. Across several writings where transness, Black femininity, and gay Asianness wildly cross-pollinate, Lee argues for a representational politics of "the defamiliarized self as the complement of a familiarized other…, [a politics] which dreams of doing away with not only hierarchies but the very invisible barriers put up between bodies."[133] In his essay, "Joy of the Castrated Boy," Lee makes this politics explicit by reference to David L. Eng's idea of "racial castration," Eng's psychoanalytically informed sense of the Freudian trauma of sexual difference as always a trauma of racial difference.[134] Lee writes that "embracing racial castration can be a potentially liberatory willingness to embrace femininity as a race and, vice versa, race as femininity."[135] Informed by Eng's sense of Asian American maleness as "both materially and psychically feminized within the context of a larger U.S. cultural imaginary,"[136] Lee encounters the racial and sexual situation of his gay Asianness through the "complement" of Black femininity. In an autobiographical example, he tells us that, as a child, he cut his hair to mimic Janet Jackson's character in the sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes:* "now I could dream: pretty in purple plaid pussy bow-collared blouse with leg-of-mutton sleeves and tight indigo jeans, smarter than her cute boyfriend, sassily articulate, and [B]lack….In the end, the joy of the castrated boy is that which he initially dreaded: to be mistaken for something that you are."[137]

In Lee's fiction, such a racial representational arrangement is continually staged within an aestheticization of interiority and puncture. His novel *94*, which describes an Asian trans woman

[133] Joon Oluchi Lee, "Joy of the Castrated Boy," *Social Text* 23, nos. 3-4 (2005), 44.
[134] David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 2-3.
[135] Lee, "Joy of the Castrated Boy," 44.
[136] Eng, 2.
[137] Lee, "Joy of the Castrated Boy," 53.

in 2014 looking back at her life 20 years prior, begins with its protagonist observing a man with a lip piercing: "He was an ideal vision of how a hole can be a decorative item on the body. But… my thoughts on the boy's body just skimmed the surface merrily without stirring any of the boilable liquids within."[138] This puncture makes her reflect on her own childhood:

> As a child I was girly, but I never had any real angst about my inside not matching my outside….To me, the outside was the outside and the inside was the inside—wasn't that the point of having two different words for two different worlds?...But the younger trannies nowadays seem to be genuinely addicted to angst. No one says: I want to be a girl because I want to look beautiful. It's always: I've always known I was a girl; *I'm in pain!* Now, deep things—and I mean, literally deep, as in under the skin and textile…—can just be indexed with hashtags….I just want my insides to be my insides.[139]

The puncture of the lip piercing, like a punk-rock madeleine, takes the novel into its reflection on the history of its protagonist's interiors and exteriors. In this passage, she expresses distaste for the wrong-body trope of trans embodiment, preferring a sense of her transness as an aesthetic project, a desire to be beautiful. Her protectiveness of her "insides" sets her into discomfort with her community's contemporary relationship to personal narrative.

As the novel provides a portrait of her pre-transition life, much of its action consists of the conflicts, intimacies, and resentments between the protagonist, her girl friends, and the student groups of her university. At one point, she wistfully complains to a Black girl friend that she would rather be going to the Black Student Union's 'Fall Ball' than a meeting of the LGBT Student Union. At the latter meeting, she introduces herself by saying:

> …that I was a sophomore, and that I identified as a transexual. I said that I didn't need to have surgery to be who I felt myself to be inside, which was really a [B]lack girl. I then said a few sentences about how important it was for me to go beyond the identity of 'gay man' which seemed to me both totally sexist, racist, and so not me.[140]

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[138] Joon Oluchi Lee, *94* (Portland: Publication Studio, 2015), 5.
[139] Lee, *94,* 9-10.
[140] Lee, *94,* 61.

An angst about identification—her resentment for the student group, her political distaste for the category of "gay man," her disinterest in transition—turns into a leaning on a racial metaphor. In her present in 2014, she somewhat regrets her choice of words then:

> I felt like I was all carved up, like this was the shape I would hold for the rest of my life. So I used my words and bottom-heavy voice to ram it down everyone's throat. But in reality, I had taken in all the words that trickled out of these people into the soft and feathery turning parts deep inside me….In reality, in that room that was reality, I just wanted to become something heavy and gorgeous without a voice, like a big empty bowl made of thick seamless translucent glass in deep blue.[141]

Under the pressure of her embodiment (her "shape") and the social friction of community, our protagonist initially uses an image of internal Black femininity as a forceful, purposefully discomfiting, but psychologically alleviating metaphor. The reference to Black girlhood temporarily resolves what is really an abstractness of her desire—not quite a desire for physical transition, not quite a comfort with the politics of gay maleness, not quite an identity that could be represented by something as banal as a student union, what our protagonist instead verbalizes is a desire for embodiment in the abstract shape of beauty. Rather than say she feels to be a girl inside and so therefore desires transition (what she parrots with "I've always known I was a girl"), the protagonist says instead that she feels to be a *Black* girl inside and so therefore *does not* desire transition. As an adult, the image changes from that of the Black girl she claims both to be and not be to an image of a "heavy and gorgeous…big empty bowl made of thick seamless translucent glass in deep blue." The earlier image that once rested on the binary of interiority and exteriority and resisted both transition and gay maleness by looking to Black girlhood now becomes abstracted, ornamental, and notably "translucent." *94*'s protagonist develops from a protectiveness of her particular version of exterior/interior divide to a desire for transparency, to be an image that light and vision can move through. If Blackness in the character's youth

[141] Lee, *94,* 62-63.

represented the psychic alleviation of what was uncomfortable about her lack of desire for transition surgery, now transition is replaced with the horizon of transparency.

Lee himself makes a statement on his *lipstickeater* blog that is remarkably similar to this character's comments at the LGBT student union group. On a planned book that did not come to fruition, Lee writes:

> Ever since I was a child, I've been writing because I can't sing, dance, or get pregnant. I was a frontwoman without a band, a failed ballet dancer, and a transsexual who doesn't believe transsexual surgery can solve my problems. When I entered graduate school in 1997, I was determined to write a book that would not only express my particular tangle of racial and gender identities (I've always felt myself to be a [B]lack girl trapped in an Asian gay male's body…) but turn my own psyche into a live test for the theories of performativity which is my formal training….I laid out a detailed phenomenology of cross-identification, showing that to embody the race and gender that you are not requires a rigorous ethics of emotional, political and physical positions. But this wasn't just an idea; it was me, my body.[142]

It seems that in Lee's work, where transition is not, Blackness is. Black femininity stands in for a gender and aesthetics that, incorporated, relieves the pressure of a trans femme embodiment that resists transition as its telos ("a transsexual who doesn't believe transsexual surgery can solve my problems"). In Lee's particular vision of his Asian gay and trans femme psyche, Black gender is a constant, tranquilizing reference. Blackness seems to name an alternative to transition surgery as a bridge between gay and trans embodiment; it enacts a different narrative of gender and sexuality's relationship to change, violence, and relationality. Unresolved in the narrative possibilities of both transition and gay maleness, Lee's work takes Blackness as a standing metaphor for the resolution of his particular racial, gendered, and sexual embodiment. This is not to say that these are qualities of Blackness as is, but rather that Lee's work depends on "Blackness" as a name for these qualities. I take this entire rhetorical operation as symptomatic

[142] Lee, "It Died a Virgin," *lipstickeater* (blog), June 27, 2013, https://lipstickeater.blogspot.com/2013/06/it-died-virgin.html

of the deeply racialized American science of inversion and its reformatting in the development of trans medicine, as I laid out earlier in speaking of Hirschfeld. These historical developments are the ones that set Blackness, transness, gayness, and interiority into tandem motion; they are precisely the developments that enable the possibility of Lee's rhetorical subsumption of Blackness as an invisible interiority to a gay trans femme embodiment. Lee's politics of "the defamiliarized self as the complement of a familiarized other" depend on the historical symbolic pressure put on both Blackness and queerness in the regime of the sexual sciences.

Lee thinks quite explicitly of this as an ethical and political position, one that embraces rather than abjects Black femininity as a liberatory possibility. But much as we might pause at what Ulrichs's sense of the woman's soul in himself essentializes about women, we may also pause at what Lee's work seems to symbolically burden Blackness with. Namely, Lee's work stands in uncomfortable relationship to the racial stereotypes its subsumption of Black gender kicks up. At the beginning of Lee's second novel *Neotenica*, a character only referred to as "Young Ae's husband," who is nominally straight but has sex with men and has many feminine features and identifications, is beaten by a group of young Black men on the BART. Deceptively tough looking, Young Ae's husband thinks "[s]ometimes you think that the way you look will protect you from the dangers of the world," but the narration tells us that "if you could have punctured his soul with a small hollow needle you would have found that the stuff inside was as soft as buttercream but without cake sweetness."[143] This is a classic Lee image, where interiority takes on a rich, tangible, and almost-liquid quality. When he sees the group of men, "he didn't think of any racist words like 'gang.' He thought: Army." This commentary on the presence or absence of racism in the character continues:

[143] Joon Oluchi Lee, *Neotenica* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2020), 3.

> They were dressed in a way that made you think they were wearing exactly the same thing, but in fact they were just wearing three unremarkable colors: beige, grey, and white….The clothes had a looseness that denoted comfort more than racist stereotype….He didn't know what made the army want to pounce on him but he knew the feelings that came out of them. It had something to do with West Oakland. It wasn't anything about bullets, though; it wasn't anything about guns or old cars wearing chrome stilettos. It wasn't about welfare…no fathers…Rodney King…cops…bags of pot or fat bottles of malt liquor with dumb obscene names. It wasn't about Hunter's Point…predator and the prey. It wasn't about low-income housing…GEDs. It wasn't about AIDS…babymamas. It wasn't about the war in Iraq and it wasn't about the overcrowded prison system that seemed to encircle the entire peaceful, still hippy-dippy Bay Area. It wasn't about history and it wasn't about hate.[144]

What is going on in this parataxis of stereotype denied? Is this Young Ae's husband's anxiety—or perhaps Lee's own anxiety—that what is happening in this scene and in his perception of these young men may just be, in fact, "about history" and "about hate?" While Young Ae's husband is captured with a metaphor of interiority, this group of fungible Black men "wearing exactly the same thing" is all exterior, all style and stereotype.

This contrast recalls Elizabeth Alexander's question at the beginning of her essay "Toward the Black Interior": "If [B]lack people are the subconcious of the Western mind, where is 'the [B]lack subconscious,' both individually and collectively articulated?"[145] She writes, "We are too often prisoners of the real, trapped in fantasies of 'Negro authenticity….' Where is our abstract space, our space of the real/not-real, our own unconscious?"[146] One of the consequences of the "inner Black woman" trope is that internalizing an image of Blackness as the essential self of another (usually non-Black) person risks formulating Blackness as essential, as counter-intuitively all exterior itself—and if the trope's iteration is willing to extend itself to ask what in turn is within the Black body, it becomes limited by its own reciprocity. Blackness's interior gets lost. Young Ae's husband has his own fantasy of the Black interior when he, long after the fight,

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[144] Lee, *Neotenica*, 4-6.
[145] Elizabeth Alexander, "Toward the Black Interior," in *The Black Interior* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2004), 4.
[146] Alexander, 7.

remembers that "one member of the army actually had a slash of pink across his beige t-shirt that made him look like a rare vegetable, split open as for a snack. Until the train came… he quietly and gently fucked that pink memory."[147] In parallel to the earlier image of puncture into buttercream, here this non-individuated Black man is given the illusion of puncture, an imagined orifice. What Young Ae's husband fantasizes as a path to the interior, which he imagines sexually penetrating, is in fact just surface again, just a stain of clothing. What seems like internal femininity for the Black man is really just a stain of pink. Lee's work in this opening scene of *Neotenica* stages an erotically charged distribution of aestheticized interiority and objectified exteriority. If Young Ae's husband's exterior means too little compared to the rich and soft interior that the work of the writing itself is to unravel, then the exteriors of the Black men he fixates on mean too much, bringing with them an endless and anxious listing of racist association. Their interiority is unwritable, or better said, not writable in Lee's formulation.

This critical motif of Lee's, the subsumption of Black gender at the site of a gay/trans femme embodiment that divests from transition, gives us no vocabulary for thinking about Black interiority. However, we would be missing something if we left it at that, if we saw the "inner Black woman" trope as a wresting of interiority from Blackness to create a sign for sexual and gendered difference. For one version of an answer to Elizabeth Alexander's question of the Black interior in light of this particular trope's work, we should turn instead to Hilton Als's *The Women,* which incorporates the "inner Black woman" to structure a memoir of cross-identification between Black women and Black gay men. Echoing the twin directions of inversion's supposed debunking that I wrote of earlier, if Lee's work has the infrastructure of trans medicine as its point of narrative comparison and rejection, in *The Women* Als writes in the shadow of

[147] Lee, *Neotenica,* 8.

psychoanalysis. More precisely, Als will use the trope of the "inner Black woman" to form his own version for the Freudian matrocentrist model that writes gay maleness as an identification with the mother. I am deliberately contrasting Lee's gay "transracial" writing with a book on kinship as I generally follow Cressida Hayes's sense that what makes a transracial claim (such as Lee's) popularly incoherent is that it "implicates others," that the fact that "an individual's racial identity derives from her biological ancestors undermines the possibility of changing race, in ways that contrast with sex-gender."[148] But Als's work, and its relationship to the discourses of both psychoanalysis and inversion, will complicate Heyes's logical sense that "one's identity as a boy or girl is not taken to mimic one's ancestors— I am not a woman just because my mother is a woman."[149] Als's writing in *The Women* will seem to say something quite different, something that could be phrased as "*I am a man with a woman within him because my mother is a Black woman*."

In the first section of *The Women*, Als writes at length about his relationship to his mother and their shared identification as what he calls a "Negress." Borrowing the word from his mother's vocabulary, Als defines the "Negress" as an image of the Black woman as "a single mother, reduced by circumstances to tireless depression and public 'aid,'" "a romantic wedded to despair," who "loves men who leave her for other women" and is "subject to depression and illness."[150] A symbol of "puritanical selflessness" and "self-abnegation," a "specter of dignity—selfless to a fault,"[151] the "Negress" can only own herself through "polite" and "protracted suicide."[152] Als analyzes his mother's story, his early childhood, and his mother's relationship to

[148] Cressida J. Heyes, "Changing Race, Changing Sex: The Ethics of Self-Transformation," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 37 No. 2 (2006): 271, 273.
[149] Heyes, 276.
[150] Hilton Als, *The Women* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1996), 6.
[151] Als, 7-8.
[152] Als, 11, 14.

what he calls "the Negress in me."[153] Like many a memoir of early gay childhood, Als captures going "to the dark crawl space behind her closet, where I put on her hosiery one leg at a time…so that I could have her—what I so admired and coveted—near me, always."[154] This ritual, and similar ones with the clothing of his sister, "deflected from the pressure" that Als "felt in being different from them. As a child, this difference was too much for me to take."[155] Taking on the term "Negress" for himself does a similar kind of work, it brings the maternally identified gay man/boy into closeness to the mother that he is frustratingly aware he is sexually distinct from.

But such an identification also comes relationally from outside the family, as a status conferred in sexual relation to men, and this is where the psychic closeness between the female maternal "Negress" and her gay son becomes frictional and uncomfortable. Als writes of his sexual experiences, including an early one with an adult man at ten years old, as bringing him into his "inheritance as a Negress."[156] The mother and son sharing a direction of desire towards adult men summons a unique form of two-way jealousy. After a party at the age of thirteen, Als tells his mother that he met a man that he thought was charming and handsome:

> My mother's face became hard when I mentioned his first name, Eldred. She would not look at me when she said: 'That was the man I was married to. That was my husband.' The air was still between us; it became a wall. I knew I was a Negress because of the jealousy I felt over her having left someone I coveted. I glanced at my mother; her face, her body told me that she had been where I wanted to be long before I began imagining being a Negress. We stood in the kitchen for quite some time. I saw myself in my mother's eyes; the reflection showed a teenage girl, insecure, frightened, and vengeful.[157]

[153] Als, 16.
[154] Als, 6.
[155] Als, 9.
[156] Als, 17-18.
[157] Als, 32-33

In this scene, the inner Black woman in Als is at conflict with the inner child in his mother, a metaphor of her having already experienced what her child wants to experience but cannot because of his sexual difference. The "Negress" as a particular image of Black womanhood names Als and his mother as loci of desire for what they cannot be or have, a particular romance of "despair." In this scene, their desires constitute each other's to the degree that they threaten each other's.

This is not quite Freud's matrocentrist model of homosexuality, where the homosexual identifies as his mother and loves other men the way she has loved him.[158] Instead, in a similar grammar, Als's matrocentrism describes a homosexual who identifies as his mother and loves other men the way she has loved *other men*. Whereas Freud's model connotes an overcloseness between mother and son, a coddling that results in poor imitation, Als's matrocentrism connotes an initial maternal closeness which then grows antagonistic as the sexuality of the child develops, as he becomes her inverted rival. Earlier, I described Freud's psychoanalytic turn as making inversion's central metaphor relational, no longer an abstract woman's soul within a man's body, but a man-child's identification with his mother; Als's description keeps this relational quality, but sees the metaphor return inward as the relational aspect becomes tainted. As he senses both his mother and sister wanting him to become "a [B]lack man who was for *and* against them," he grows instead into holding onto his inner "Negress," sharing it sexually with other men. Therefore, the metaphor of the inner "Negress" permits Als a closeness to his mother in spite of how the parallel directions of their desires have brought them into opposition.

"Until the end," Als writes:

> I avoided recounting these facts to my mother….I avoided explaining that I had been motivated to sit in parked cars [by the piers] with one man and then another by the same

[158] Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood,* translated by Alan Tyson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964), 50.

> desire and romantic greed that had propelled her to move from Barbados to Manhattan. I avoided explaining that when I sat in parked cars with one man and then another, I felt closer to my mother's experience of the world than I ever did in my mother's presence. I avoided recounting how I met other Negresses like myself on the piers….I also avoided mentioning that what most of us Negresses were looking for on the piers was that construction known as male, necessary for shutting our Negress selves down.[159]

This scene reflects the sexual tension between mother and son in this particular version of matrocentrism, but it is also worth noting how this description of Black gay desire frames it as sex between mothers pretending that the other is not a mother, but a man. Black gayness, via identification with the mother, is reframed as a phantasmatic Black lesbianism, where two or more inner "Negresses" meet and fuck, hoping that the other's exterior will meet "that construction known as male." The situation of Black gayness in Als is one where having a mother, being a mother, femaleness, maleness, heterosexuality, and homosexuality have all become irreducible to each other, are all able to be rearranged into each other.

As a condition of possibility for this situation and his own "Negress" identification, Als writes that "'maleness' is not a viable construct in colored life. Colored life is matriarchal; any matriarchal society can be defined as colored."[160] In *The Women,* sexological and psychoanalytic models of gay gender come under the pressure of what Snorton has called the "anagrammatical quality" of Black gender, its being "subject to reiterative rearrangement,"[161] and what Spillers has described as the way enslavement's effects on maternity and kinship "define, in effect, a cultural situation that is *father-lacking.*"[162] Spillers, deeply influenced by psychoanalysis,[163] writes that these conditions make it so that "the [B]lack American male embodies the *only*

[159] Als, 60.
[160] Als, 40.
[161] Snorton, 135.
[162] Spillers, 227; See also Snorton, 103-104.
[163] Indeed, she writes that "slavery in the United States [is] one of the richest displays of the psychoanalytic dimensions of culture before the science of European psychoanalysis takes hold." Spillers, 223.

American community of males handed the specific occasion to learn *who* the female is within itself….It is the heritage of the mother that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the power of 'yes' to the 'female' within."[164] Could we see Als's framing his gayness as "the Negress in me" as an attempt to answer Spillers's call of reclaiming the female within? That is, if Blackness for Als is already matriarchal, then Black homosexuality in Als is the mother's incorporation. Such a framing of the "inner Black woman" makes this trope's iteration read less as an analogy of difference adhered to an anachronistic metaphor and instead read more as an attempt to psychically and symbolically encounter the injuries of gender, sexuality, and kinship accumulated onto American Blackness in the afterlives of slavery. Read this way, Als would represent a unique, contemporary, and distinctly gay version of what Snorton calls the Afromodernist rearticulation of the problem of the color line, "substitut[ing] the question of what it feels to be a problem with what it means to have a [B]lack mother."[165] Snorton argues that the Black mother symbolically "reproduces the borders between a [B]lack self, endowed with an interiority, and racial [B]lackness, as it is always and only given by the social." Reading Als as an extension of this tradition would reveal how much the possibility of the Black man's "yes" to the "'female' within" must interface with the logic of homosexuality, as homosexuality has become the dominant symbolic field of man's identification with the mother after sexology and after Freud. The afterlives of inversion have made it so that saying "yes" to "the female within" while also saying "no" to the homosexual is (at best) symbolically incoherent or (at worst) a repression of precisely what the male's gesture of saying "yes" threatens to say about "the male."

[164] Spillers, 228.
[165] Snorton, 104.

In the course of these readings, we have seen how Blackness and gayness, in the wake of 19th century sexual and racial science, have both come to signify with gender transitivity and with transitivity across the symbolic barrier of the interior/exterior divide. The "inner Black woman" trope has been a surprisingly mobile one in these readings: most commonly a sloppy analogy for difference after Civil Rights, in Lee's hands it has come to signify a path through the tension of gay and trans meanings against the narrative telos of trans medicine, and in Als's hands it has come to signal a formulation of gayness as a path through Black kinship. In treating its range, I have argued for thinking of this trope as indexical of Blackness and gayness's symbolic entanglements in American science and culture after the 19th century. The adherence of sexuality and gender to the slippery metonymy of interiority after sexual science has done a strange work of de-epidermalizing Blackness in the form of this trope, treating it as that which is *not* on the surface, which cannot be accessed visually but only psychically. In doing so, it has applied to race the mechanics of gender and sexuality, making two initially illogical statements seem (at least symbolically) coherent—that Lee's gender could make him the race he is ostensibly not, and that Als's race could make him the gender that he is ostensibly not.

Conclusion

Though inversion has been popularly rejected for a theory of gayness as a sexual object choice parallel to one's (uncorrelated) gender identity, it is clear that inversion's innovation in constructing the same metalanguage for sexuality and gender as indexical of what one has and is, of their individuality and their type among others, has remained symbolically dominant. This chapter's emblematic examples that revive and embody Ulrichs's axiomatic construction, *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*, are only the clearest sparks created by the friction of gender and

sexuality's historical and discursive shuffling within this metalanguage. I situate this analysis in this first chapter to frame all of the various claims on one or another's gender and sexuality that we see in the extent of this chapter. In the following chapters, the travesti novel of the Latin American 20th century, Lou Sullivan's trans uptake of the erotic discourse of sameness, and the feminist conflicts and allegiances with gay men during the sex wars, will all present very different rotations of the gender of gay men, but they must be understood as framed by the deeply entrenched language of Ulrichs.

Chapter 2:

The Literary Travesti: Transfeminine Aesthetics and the Latin American Gay Novel

The dominant cultural representation of gay men in the West is predominantly a feminine one; if the imagined, representative gay man is not himself feminine in manner, temperament, build, or voice, then at the least his aesthetic interests will be. It is simply taken as common sense that if a man is fussy, obsesses over Rita Hayworth, walks with a little sugar in his step, loves his mother, cries often, wears glitter, gossips, speaks in a high voice, reads the complete works of Jane Austen, wears dresses and makeup—well, he might just be a homosexual. Indeed, the only comedic thrust of Saturday Night Live's recurring character "Lyle the Effeminate Heterosexual" is that the character is not gay, indeed must insist to those around him that he eroticizes women, not just imitates them. As Didier Eribon has written on the characterization of gay men after the Oscar Wilde trials, "a drawing of an effeminate man 'represents' male homosexuals—all of them—even when one knows this has no basis in reality."[1] As the "Lyle" example phobically implies, the representational adhesion of gayness to femininity is excessive, tagging gay maleness into situations and persons that may otherwise exclude it: a straight woman who loves Liza Minelli may be accused of being a "fag hag," even when she is a woman fanning over a woman; a lesbian trans woman may be accosted with the word "faggot," even though she's never identified as a gay man; straight men everywhere may police how their peers eat, sleep, sit, talk, all for the fear of being too much like a gay man. Hence Esther Newton's sense that "drag queens symbolize homosexuality," that the very act of crossing masculinity to femininity symbolically produces gayness and vice versa.[2] This is to say that gay men in the West have been constructed

[1] Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self,* translated by Michael Lucey (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 71.
[2] Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972), 3.

and generalized as symbolically transfeminine, both in that word's etymological sense as that which crosses towards femininity and in its identitarian sense in specific relationship to trans women.

The intellectual tradition analyzing this symbolic relationship between male gayness and (trans)feminine aesthetics is a rich one. Work by Eribon, Newton, David Halperin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Moon, D.A. Miller, Ed Cohen, Marlon B. Ross, among many others, has pushed forward our sense of the conditions of possibility for this relationship as well as its political and personal uses.[3] This tradition is not without feminist pushback against its perceived subsumption of an essentialized womanhood and femininity,[4] but what I am particularly concerned with in this chapter is a recent critical trend of scholars working in trans studies who have expressed political distaste for a perceived subsumption of an essentialized trans womanhood in this tradition of gay studies. Recent work by Gayle Salamon, Grace Lavery, and Emma Heaney have variously challenged gay studies frameworks that "reduc[e] the difference between 'trans' and 'queer' to nothing, and tucking the former term neatly into the latter…diffuse the tension between the two constituencies by entirely eradicating the distinctiveness of one of them."[5] That is to say, recent trans studies approaches have found that this tradition of writing gayness as symbolically adhered to gender discordance and feminine aesthetics erases the

[3] See: David M. Halperin, *How to be Gay,* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies,* Durham: Duke University Press, 1993; Michael Moon, *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol,* Durham: Duke University Press, 1998; D.A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998; Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of Discourse on Male Sexualities,* New York: Routledge, 1993; Marlon B. Ross, *Sissy Insurgencies: A Racial Anatomy of Unfit Manliness,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.

[4] See the discussions in the Introduction and Chapter 4 on the tense allegiance of feminist and gay studies.

[5] Grace Lavery, "Egg Theory's Early Style," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2020): 392.
See also: Gayle Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia,* New York: New York University Press, 2018; Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Transfeminine Allegory,* Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017.

particularities of trans experience. Such a critical moment has become rather territorial, even antagonistic.[6] It is apparent that gay studies approaches need a new path through the questions raised by this work.

In this chapter, I want to temporarily move away from the North American scenes and objects at the center of these debates, turning instead to the Latin American context. My rationale for doing so, as will become clear in the course of this chapter, is that Latin American gay literature and gay studies has found incredibly productive ways of thinking the relationship between trans and gay meanings, cultures, and aesthetics. My hope is that a turn to these lineages can be used to productively read back into the North American debates I have just flagged, loosening some of their knottiest moments by undoing some of their most staid cultural assumptions. In this sense, this chapter's work is distinctly hemispheric,[7] placing critical traditions and literary works in dialogue across the Americas in the name of a gay and trans theoretical analysis, while also analyzing the national, continental, and diasporic specificities that influence these works.

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[6] Take, for example, the published debates between Grace Lavery and Christopher Reed (occasionally alongside Christopher Castiglia). Though the articles that characterized this debate initially focused on the treatment of trans studies and trans people by two cis gay professors who saw transness as "divisive" and characterized by "outraged victimhood," Reed and Castiglia's pieces constantly emphasized that their perspective came from a "camp" sensibility in the vein of Oscar Wilde, drag artist Taylor Mac, Susan Sontag, Djuna Barnes, and Eve Sedgwick. In this, and in Lavery's deconstruction of this claim of lineage in her pieces, a gay femme aesthetic is being positioned against transness in general and trans womanhood in particular. This debate is a primary source for Lavery's "Egg Theory" essay. See: Grace Lavery, "Grad School as Conversion Therapy," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (blog), October 29, 2018, https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/grad-school-conversion-therapy/; Christopher Castiglia and Chirstopher Reed, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (blog), December 11, 2018, https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/conversion-therapy-v-re-education-camp-open-letter-grace-lavery/

[7] My understanding of the possibilities of hemispheric analysis is influenced mainly by the account of the field's trajectories given in Ralph Bauer, "Hemispheric Studies," *PMLA* 124, no. 1 (2009): 234-250, the work of Diana Taylor, Rachel Galvin, and the continued efforts of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. As well, my method is contoured specifically by the hemispheric conversations in Latin American gay studies in the work of José Quiroga, Daniel Balderston, José Maristany, Sylvia Molloy, Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, Stephen Murray, and others.

In particular, this chapter will investigate a series of novels by Latin American gay male writers that feature transfeminine protagonists. I argue here that the birth of the Latin American gay novel as a distinct tradition depended on a concatenation of gay and trans meanings in the form of a literary operation that took transfemininity as a sign for male homosexuality. The transfeminine figure that is centered both in this chapter and in the novels I discuss is specifically the *travesti.* By travesti, I am referring to the Latin American transfeminine identification that is neither gay man, straight trans woman, nor "cross-dresser," but a combination and movement between and beyond all of these. In these novels, the travesti is a character who says both yes and no to identifications such as "man/hombre," "woman/mujer," "gay," "straight," "transgender," "loca," "maricón," etc. and defines herself in terms of survival, care, precarity, eroticized sexual difference, feminine aesthetics, a feminine interior sense of self, and (often) a relationship to sex work.[8] As Cole Rizki writes, not on the literary travesti I will be discussing here but on the lived identity of travestis in Latin America, "to claim travesti identity is to embrace a form of opacity and fugitivity…[that] subverts both normative expectations of femininity and trans politics structured around assimilation and respectability."[9] As Rizki alludes, the travesti has a troubled relation to affirmative forms of, especially U.S.-centric, transgender politics. The term itself has a recuperated derogatory edge, alluding to the insult of travestis as "merely" "transvestites," as social pariahs, as illegitimate both in their womanhood and in their

[8] This is close to how Malú Machuca Rose characterizes travesti identity. Importantly, however, her characterization of the travesti de-emphasizes the travesti's erotic attachment to sexual difference. In contrast, an important characteristic of the literary travesti of the gay Latin American novel, as we will see, is an almost obsessively aestheticized problem of the travesti's erotic desire for (mostly heterosexual) men. Malú Machuca Rose, "Giuseppe Campuzano's Afterlife: Toward a Travesti Methodology for Critique, Care, and Radical Resistance," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2019): 242-243. For more on the travesti's complicated but enabling relationship to sex work, see Marlene Wayar, *Diccionario Travesti de la T a la T,* Buenos Aires: Editorial La Página, 2019; and Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

[9] Cole Rizki, "Latin/x American Trans Studies: Toward a *Travesti*-Trans Analytic," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, No. 2 (2019), 149.

gayness.[10] But for those who claim it for themselves, travesti harnesses the particular, transgressive, and precarious forms of Latin American queer and trans life. Malú Machuca Rose writes, "the fact that we simultaneously cause so much social anxiety, lust, and distress is the key that, in this project of travesti as a politics, we are trying to claim for ourselves."[11]

I want to emphasize that the literary travesti of this lineage of Latin American gay novels from the mid-century is different from lived travesti identity in either the 20th or 21st centuries. What I am interested in here is how this particular aesthetic instantiation of the travesti became the fundamental figure on which the innovations of the Latin American gay novel were built. What does this tell us about the relationship between gay and trans meanings in Latin America and beyond? Is this literary operation, as Emma Heaney has written on British gay modernism, just a symbolic appropriation? Is this it simply the flattening of trans femininity into an allegory, "a figure that holds explanatory power regarding the sex and sexuality of cis people," creating a "representational disjuncture between trans self-knowledge and trans meaning"?[12] Or does this aesthetic instantiation reveal something critical about the enmeshment of gay and trans meanings in Latin America and beyond?

I begin the chapter by surveying some of the history of the travesti as a figure in the Latin American gay novel, followed by briefly reading an essential scene from likely the first gay travesti novel, José Donoso's *El lugar sin límites*. Then, I use a comparative reading of two novels by Manuel Puig, *La traición de Rita Hayworth* and *El beso de la mujer araña,* to revisit the North American debates I have flagged above. In this section, I pay particular attention to

[10] Don Kulick's 1998 ethnographic study of travestis in Brazil emphasizes that travestis do not see themselves as transgender or transsexual, but rather gay and still (to some degree) male. There are some problems with this interpretation, especially as travesti identity has transformed in the 20 plus years since Kulick's account, but it is useful to keep in mind when thinking about the self-descriptors of the travesti protagonists of the lineage analyzed here. Kulick, 5-6.
[11] Machuca Rose, 243.
[12] Heaney, 6.

childhood development and theories of gay/trans etiology in both of Puig's novels and in contemporary North American trans studies. In the last section of the chapter, I read Mario Bellatin's novella *Salon de belleza* as a self-conscious narration of the end of the travesti novel, as allegorizing this lineage's inability to meet the massive historical shifts of the late 20th century and onwards. In my analysis, I pay particular attention to erotics, particular how the travesti novel thinks through sexual difference and the erotics of gender. I argue that this lineage's relationship to the erotic is precisely where its merging of gay and trans meanings is most productive.

The Travesti Novel: Social Criticism, Semiotics, Sex

The novelization of the travesti was probably inaugurated by *Los cuarenta y uno: Novela crítico-social,* written under the name Eduardo Castrejón in 1906. The novel is a fictionalized portrayal of a real police raid in 1901 of a private party in Mexico City where 41 people, all of whom were referred to by the press as men, half of whom were wearing women's clothing, were arrested and publicly humiliated. The raid and the novel both emphasize the party's play with binarized gendered roles, its partygoers paired in butch-femme gala costuming. The novel is a moralizing, homophobic, and transphobic bit of social criticism, highlighting especially a disjuncture between cosmetic appearance and moral infraction. Its influence on its contemporary readership is unclear, though it received revitalized critical discussion in Latin American sexuality studies in the late 90s in the work of Carlos Monsiváis and Robert McKee Irwin.[13] The

[13] See: Carlos Monsiváis, "Ortodoxia y heterodoxia en las alcobas," *Debate Feminista* 6, no. 11 (1995): 183-210; Robert McKee Irwin, "The Famous 41: The Scandalous Birth of Modern Mexican Homosexuality," *GLQ* 6, no. 3 (2000): 353-376.

raid itself, however, would be deeply influential on Mexican queer culture, seeing variously gay- and trans-affirmative adaptations throughout the 20th and 21st century.[14]

The first novel by a gay author to feature a travesti protagonist would arrive in 1966 with José Donoso's *El lugar sin límites*, a massively influential novel about a travesti who co-owns, along with the mother of her child, a brothel in an economically failing town outside of Talca, Chile. Like *Los cuarenta y uno*, *El lugar sin límites* has been primarily read as a novel of social criticism: it is seen as interpreting the difference between appearance and reality, as capturing the uneven distribution of Chilean industrialization at mid-century, and as refracting through its central travesti character a view of Latin America through the carnivalesque. These two novels are foundational for the interpretation of the travesti character as national and cultural allegory.[15]

El lugar sin límites would set the stage for a flourishing of gay-authored novels featuring travesti characters in the late sixties and early-to-mid seventies, most notably in the work of Severo Sarduy and Manuel Puig. Sarduy was extensive in his theorization of the aesthetic dimensions of the travesti, of transness, and of cross-dressing across various essays, and he wrote several novels with travesti protagonists—*De donde son los cantantes* (1967), *Cobra* (1972), and *Colibrí* (1984), among them. In Latin American sexuality studies, Sarduy is essentially the primary thinker of travestismo; as Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui puts it, "when talking about transvestism in Latin American literature, the name of Severo Sarduy is almost synonymous with such a topic. Furthermore, it is cliché to hear that Sarduy proposes that 'transvestism is a

[14] The event sees new literary influence beginning in 1963 with the novel *41 o el muchacho que soñaba en fantasmas,* written under the name Paolo Po. See also: Miguel Hernández Cabrera, "Los cuarenta y uno, cien años después," *La Jornada Semanal* 353 (2001), https://www.jornada.com.mx/2001/12/09/sem-hernandez.html; Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003; *El baile de los 41,* directed by David Pablos, Netflix, 2020.

[15] See, for example Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui's reading, through the work of Marjorie Garber, of transvestism as a "third term" of gender in comparison to Latin America as a "third world" in Cold War politics. Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature: Genders Share Flesh* (New York, Palgrave, 2002), 9.

metaphor for writing.'"[16] Indeed, Sarduy is most known for his writings on how the travesti and her aesthetics inform the semiotic project represented in his *neobarroco* style. Particularly influenced by Donoso's novel, Sarduy argued that the travesti revealed the construction not just of all gendered signs, but the construction of the sign system and of subjectivity themselves. That is to say, Sarduy's sense that the travesti represents a disjuncture between appearance and reality (he is unyielding in his sense that the travesti is a male adorned with the signs of femininity) represents the work of literature itself, and furthermore bridges the lessons of structuralism and of psychoanalysis in a singular figure. In his writing, he speaks consistently of the travesti as a figure with the productive capacity of "inversion"—the word doubling in its sexual sense and in the semiotic sense of appearing as what one is not. [17]

Sarduy's contemporary Manuel Puig would employ the travesti figure rather differently. Among his work only *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), his novel on a sentimental and conservative travesti and a straight Marxist revolutionary co-habiting a prison cell in Argentina, features a travesti protagonist, but its influence on the Latin American gay novel in particular and on hemispheric literary traditions is unmatched. Though Puig was equally influenced by Donoso's novel,[18] and actively dialogued with Sarduy as friends in exile in Paris,[19] Puig's travesti Molina (as we will see) complicates the appearance-reality thematic of these authors. Unlike the inversions and simulations of Sarduy's *neobarroco* travesti, Puig's travesti aches for

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[16] Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 119. For other studies on Sarduy and the travesti, see: Anke Birkenmaier, "Travestismo latinoamericano: Sor Juana y Sarduy" *CiberLetras: Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* 7 (2002), https://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v07/birkenmaier.html; Krzysztof Kulawik, *Travestismo lingüístico: el enmascaramiento de la identidad sexual en la narrativa latinoamericana neobarroca,* Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2009; Carlos Riobó, *Sub-versions of the Archive: Manuel Puig's and Severo Sarduy's Alternative Identities,* Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011.
[17] Severo Sarduy, *La simulación* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1982), 62.
[18] He was the uncredited screenplay writer for the 1978 film adaptation of *El lugar sin límites,* directed by Arturo Ripstein. Suzanne Jill Levine, *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2000), 286-287.
[19] Levine, 169-176.

normativity through an obsession with North American and European cinema, acting as a vehicle for his work's deployment of pop cultural forms and melodrama. Molina is presented to us not only as an ace critical reader of popular media and of gendered norms, she is also Puig's testing ground for various theories of gayness, sex, gender, imperialism, and development.

This constellation of Donoso, Sarduy, and Puig between the 60s and 70s represents the critical juncture of the travesti's literary deployment in gay literature. It is also, not coincidentally, the period most frequently interpreted as creating a fundamental shift in the Latin American gay novel as a distinct literary tradition.[20] Though the travesti takes a representational backseat in the 80s,[21] her representation in the gay novel is taken up with renewed force in the 90s and 2000s. This includes several novels by Reinaldo Arenas, Mario Bellatin's *Salón de belleza* (1994), and the work of Pedro Lemebel. Lemebel, unlike almost every author mentioned so far, publicly identified with the term travesti, and has been most known for his 2001 novel *Tengo miedo torero*, which draws clear influence in terms of both character and structure from Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña.*[22]

What is interesting about these novels is their mutual influence and their deep disagreement about how to mobilize the travesti aesthetically in the novel and in her relationship to gay men's cultural production. The literary travesti is not a stable aesthetic formulation, but a constantly shifting site for the working over of gay men's relationship to transfeminine aesthetics

[20] Daniel Balderston and José Maristany, "The Lesbian and Gay Novel in Latin America," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel,* ed. Efraín Kristal, 200-216, Los Angeles: University of California, 2006.
[21] One likely reason for this dip in the 80s is the total domination of adaptations of *El beso de la mujer araña*: a stageplay in 1983 adapted by Puig himself, a 1985 English-language film directed by Héctor Babenco, and a 1993 Broadway musical with music by John Kander and Fred Ebb, and book by Terrence McNally. Sarduy's late work can be seen in this period as well, but the popularity of the *neobarroco* was already waning.
[22] Perhaps in the wake of Lemebel's more authorially transfeminine work, the 2000s and 2010s also bring about travesti novels by both cis women, like Gabriela Cabezón Cámara's *La virgen cabeza* (2009) and Mayra Santos-Febres's *Sirena selena, vestida de pena* (2000), and trans women, like Camila Sosa Villada's *Las Malas* (2019) and *Tesis sobre la domesticación* (2019).

and for the literary instantiation of queer-trans political struggle. In this history, I have noted two major ways that the travesti's aestheticization in this period has been read: as social allegory and as semiotic inversion. But I want to put forward a different way we can understand the deployment of the travesti in the Latin American gay novel; that is, I argue here that the travesti's relationship to gender is used in these novels as a catalyst towards thinking about sexuality and power. Particularly, this lineage, I argue, is concerned with employing the travesti as a sign for the subversive qualities of queer eroticism. It is this capacity that makes the travesti as symbol such a foundational one for the Latin American gay novel. And in this capacity, we may read a different mode for thinking the relationship between gay and trans eroticism and gay and trans aesthetics.

This argument is where my work diverges from other critical accounts of the travesti in Latin American literature. Both Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui's *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature: Genders Share Flesh* (2002) and Vek Lewis's *Crossing Sex and Gender in America* (2010), though providing useful historical and analytical insights into these novels, strike me as encoding certain anxiety about thinking what is specifically gay and specifically sexual about this period's aesthetic instantiation of the travesti. Sifuentes-Jáuregui's analysis essentially takes the travesti as a deconstructive and reconstructive symbol of gender and nationality; citing the early work of Judith Butler and Marjorie Garber, he writes of transvestism as "the figure that describes in its own embodiment and realization the difficulty of gender."[23] This is a relatively common argument about transvestism, one that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Moon resisted by noting that it evaded a sustained analysis of the relationship between

[23] Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 2.

transvestism, gender, and homosexuality in particular.[24] Sifuentes-Jáuregui does not avoid gayness, per se, but he fears conflating homosexuality with gender discordance and transfemininity, writing that "too often in Latin America, the gay and the transvestite are synonymous."[25] But the reasons for this "too often" synonymity are left somewhat on the cutting room floor. His analysis consistently assumes that this synonymity is an error; he even attributes the error to Donoso's travesti protagonist La Manuela, in his sense that "Manuela lacks the language of gender, so she assigns culturally-defined gender signs to mark the parameters of the sexual…Her basic instinct is to (con)fuse the two practices into one."[26] Lewis's argument, like Emma Heaney's recent work on British Modernism, puts forward political discomfort for the travesti's role as social allegory in the 20th century and its inability to think with the "emergence of a politicized travesti subjectivity,"[27] arguing the travesti writer Lemebel would be the first to truly treat the travesti "as subjects who exist in the real world."[28] In this, Lewis's analysis seems overly cautious about asking what the persistent deployment of transfeminine aesthetics in gay literary culture reveals about how gayness and transfemininity depend upon each other for meaning. Furthermore, my sense is that the eroticism of these works, an eroticism equally influenced by the particularities of gayness and by an against-the-grain reading of sexual difference, cuts against the deconstructive and allegorical readings that Sifuentes-Jáuregui and Lewis, among others, employ.

To begin to get a sense of the particular erotics of the travesti novel, let us look closely at one scene from Donoso's *El lugar sin límites.* The novel takes place in the fictional Estación El

[24] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Moon. "Divinity: A Dossier, A Performance Piece, A Little-Understood Emotion (with Michael Moon)," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 221.
[25] Sifuentes-Jauregui, 10.
[26] Sifuentes-Jáuregui, 97.
[27] Lewis, 3.
[28] Lewis, 197.

Olivo, a small rural town which once gained most of its income as a station along the railroad tracks. Once train paths were diverted away from the town, El Olivo became more and more economically blighted. The novel begins some ways into this condition, when a rich landowner referred to as Don Alejo has (misleadingly) promised the town that he will bring them onto the electric grid and into a new economic boom. To tell its story, the novel centers on a brothel in disrepair, once run by La Japonesa Grande, and now run by her travesti friend and one-time lover La Manuela and their daughter La Japonesita. Manuela is an older travesti, obsessed with flamenco and bolero, who wears a Spanish dress and loves to entertain the brothel's clients with dance. The town is charmed, repulsed, entertained by, and obsessed with Manuela. In some ways, she acts as the spirit of the town, the life of the party, the emblem of its joy; in some ways, she is the constant butt of the joke, she is repeatedly beaten by men in the town, and she represents for the citizens of El Olivo the face of their economic and moral fall. Nobody represents this ambivalence about Manuela as much as Pancho Vega, the masculinist huaso in unyielding financial debt to Don Alejo, who is as sexually obsessed with Manuela as he is violent and hateful towards her—an ambivalence she returns to him in the form of equal parts lust and terror.

As may already be apparent, all of these character names are nicknames. This is one of the bases for the novel's larger thematic concerns about appearance versus reality. La Japonesa is not ethnically Japanese, and her daughter's nickname is only a reference to her own. The townspeople repeatedly la Manuela "Manuel," as if it was a way of punishing her by bringing her to "reality." La Japonesita, her resentful daughter who has been distant and volatile with her since the death of La Japonesa, does this with unique force, insistently calling Manuela "Papá." *El lugar sin límites* is obsessed with scenes of misgendering Manuela or revealing her gender as

simulated and fragile. More generally, Manuela depends on fantasy for survival, a characteristic which the townspeople, and perhaps the novel itself, are equally entranced by and disgusted by.

At the core of the novel lies the conception of La Japonesita, a sex scene between Manuela and La Japonesa in response to a bet from Don Alejo: he will give the deed of the brothel to La Japonesa (who rents it from Alejo) if she can seduce Manuela and bring her to orgasm while he watches. The scene is framed as Manuela's flashback as she hides in a chicken coop from Pancho Vega. In this context of intense fear of gendered violence, Manuela remembers her gendered strength in this sex scene: "solo sé bailar, y tiritar aquí en el gallinero….Pero una vez no tirité."[29]

In the scene, La Japonesa has told Manuela of the bet and has promised her half-ownership of the brothel if they can go through with the sex together. In first person narration, Manuela describes La Japonesa's body as both a comfort and a repulsion ("[cuerpo] caliente…desnudo y asqueroso pero caliente");[30] she trusts La Japonesa to take care of her, but she shows distaste for their performance throughout, especially for La Japonesa's attempts to kiss her when Manuela had said earlier that it would disgust her. Repeatedly, Manuela and La Japonesa call their sex "una comedia," referencing it as both a performance, a scene put on for someone else, and as a series of awkward, funny, and visceral bodily acts. Sometimes, sex as comedy is a framing that brings Manuela relief, as when she imagines that instead of Don Alejo making fun of her, she and La Japonesa are in fact making fun of him, taking him for a ride. Sometimes, that framing is what hurts the most; is she the joke, laughed at by both Alejo and her friend? Is she the one who is disgusting?

[29] "I only know how to dance and to shiver here in the henhouse….But one time I didn't shiver" (translation by Levine), José Donoso, *El lugar sin límites* (Barcelona: Editorial Bruguera, 1984), 143.
[30] "[Body] heat, Big Japonesa's naked, repellent, but warm body" (translation by Levine), Donoso, 143.

Most of the scene is based in La Japonesa's varying attempts to turn Manuela on, and Manuela's varying distrust, acceptance, passion, and disgust. At first, la Japonesa asks Manuela to "dime que nunca con ninguna mujer antes que yo, que soy la primera, la única," which Manuela, resentfully, takes as a gesture for La Japonesa's pleasure rather than her own. Manuela thinks La Japonesa is trying to reach "a una parte de mi…que no existe y no ha existido nunca."[31] Then, La Japonesa changes tactics and encourages Manuela to see them as two women making love, a lesbian sexual scene for the pleasure of Don Alejo. This attempt recognizes Manuela's gender, though ignores her sexuality in favor of amplifying the performative aspects of the scene, of making it more legible as una "comedia," or even a kind of pornographic performance.[32] On this strategy failing to rouse Manuela, La Japonesa encourages her to see herself as a woman but to see La Japonesa as "la macha" (figuratively "the butch," but grammatically the feminine form of "the male"). She compliments Manuela's breasts, "sí tienes pechos, chiquitos como los de una niña, pero tienes y por eso te quiero."[33]

This last strategy actually works, in the sense that it brings Manuela to erection. This is not exactly because she finds attraction to the "macha" that La Japonesa is playing, but because Manuela begins to imagine her breasts being caressed. She begins to enjoy the heat of La Japonesa's body and she imagines La Japonesa's body swallowing not her own body, but "a un yo que no existe."[34] Note this match in words: whereas, in an earlier erotic strategy, La Japonesa's gesture towards a Manuela "que no existe"—a version of her that was attracted to women—was received with dissociation and disgust, now La Japonesa's gesture towards a

[31] "Tell me not with any other woman before me; tell me I'm the first, the only" and "a part of me…that doesn't exist and never has" (translation by Levine), Donoso, 146.
[32] Sifuentes-Jáuregui writes on this aspect in some detail on 105.
[33] "You do have breasts, tiny like a little girl's, but you have them and that's why I love you" (translation by Levine), Donoso, 147.
[34] "A me that doesn't exist" (translation by Levine), Donoso, 147.

Manuela "que no existe"—a version of her as a woman with breasts—is received with pleasure. They laugh together and Manuela begins to view Alejo's audience with less shame and more gratification ("qué importa…mejor así, más rico"). She soon achieves orgasm. Satisfied and dazed with sex, La Japonesa whispers to her "mijita, mijito, confundidas sus palabras con la almohada."[35] And Manuela comes out of her memory thinking of La Japonesa, "ya no existe ese tú, ese yo que ahora estoy necesitando tanto," a phrases that represents her present need for the late La Japonesa and this moment of gendered strength, but also the way that in this moment of gendered strength she relied on a "yo que no existe," an improvised fantasy that moved her through this complex web of disgust, laughter, shame, pleasure, surveillance, and fantasy.[36]

What we have here is a scene of sexual and gendered improvisation and performance, in response to a transphobic and homophobic bet and the voyeurism of its maker, to achieve for the pair a degree of economic sovereignty. This is a complex scene, not just because of its narration's quick shifts in tense and perspective, but because the two characters involved are strategically and experimentally weaving layers of gendered and sexual fantasy for each other and for Alejo. All the things that the "yo que no existe" captures—versions of Manuela and La Japonesa with varying genders, sexualities, fantasies, (dis)pleasures—create overlapping sex scenes, some available to Alejo's viewership, some available to the pair, some only in Manuela's mind. La Japonesa finds a way to access Manuela's sexuality by narrating performances of Manuela's gender; Manuela finds her sexual enjoyment through a sexual fantasy about her gender; Don Alejo finds both phobic comedy and erotic pleasure in viewing this scene of cis-trans straight-

[35] "What does it matter…that makes it better, sweeter" and "my sweet girl, my sweet boy, her words muffled in the pillow" (translation by Levine), Donoso, 147. The latter phrase may be more accurately translated as "her words confused in the pillow," which connotes the sexual itself as the cause of the gendered confusion.
[36] "What I'm needing so much now no longer exists, that you and that me" (translation by Levine), Donoso, 147-148.

gay sexuality; and the pair both get economic gain by moving through Alejo's abusive bet. Here, a queer erotic fantasy of various versions of sexual difference gets Manuela and La Japonesa through Alejo's economic sadism.

There's a clear way to read this scene, as Severo Sarduy did, as an emblem of the appearance-reality paradigm, or, as Sifuentes-Jáuregui did, as a concentrated moment where gender and sexuality are being confused for each other. But what I think is essential here is how homosexuality, transfemininity, and cis femininity are converging and collaborating at the level of erotic fantasy in a way that is not as simple as confusion or mixed vocabulary. They are enabling each other and enabling a travesti and cis woman pair to move through a vice grip of homophobic, transphobic, and sexist economic abuse. This is a rare moment of queer survival and strength in a novel that repeatedly exposes to Manuela to violence, culminating in a beating to death in the final episode of the novel. And that this survival happens at the level of the sexual symbolic attests to some of *El lugar sin limites*'s opening of possibilities for travesti narrative. This scene destabilizes any description of Manuela's womanhood as false in comparison to La Japonesa's cis womanhood, but importantly does not put forward a falsity or arbitrariness to all gender. Here, no one's womanhood is false; two versions of womanhood experiment with how their femininity manifests in the realm of fantasy—their own, each other's, the male Alejo's.[37]

This formulation of travesti erotics in Donoso, I argue, is key to how the novel catalyzes the lineage I am following here, particularly in its influence on Sarduy, Puig, and others. It is my

[37] The experimentation between La Japonesa and Manuela seems a more pragmatic version of Italian philosopher Mario Mieli's somewhat idealist statement that "Eros also finds liberation via the creation of new erotic relationships between women and gay men…in tendency and intention a new form of intersubjective pleasure and understanding." Notably, Mieli calls this kind of anti-patriarchal, polymophous eroticism "transsexuality." Here, the erotics cannot escape the economic and sexist coercion that enabled it. But this scene of experimental sexuality does represent for Manuela the lost horizon of possibility and strength that figured a better and more sovereign life for her and La Japonesa. Mario Mieli, *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique,* translated by David Fernbach and Evan Calder Williams (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 201-202.

sense that these erotics are also particularly informed by the symbolic adhesion of homosexuality to transfemininity. But this will become even more apparent as we look to the work of Manuel Puig.

Puig-Toto-Molina: Sissy Childhood, Travesti Adulthood, and the Erotics of Development

Let us deal with the friction made by two of Manuel Puig's novels placed together: his first novel, *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1968), and his fourth novel, *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976). The former is a community-spanning portrait of a fictionalized version of his Argentinian hometown in the 30s and 40s, centered around the childhood and adolescence of José "Toto" Casals, including his frequent visits with his mother to a local cinema to see American and European films and his emergent queerness. The latter novel, in a much more claustrophobic plot, depicts the conversations between two cellmates in an Argentine prison: the masculine, heterosexual, and Marxist political prisoner Valentín, and the sentimental, conservative, and film-obsessed travesti Molina, charged with corruption of a minor. Though the characters are separated by eight years of publication, two other novels, and their vast age difference, there is a critical tradition of reading Molina and Toto as versions of each other and as fictionalizations of their author. Walter González Uriarte writes, "a su manera, Molina es un Toto adulto" and Juan Manuel García Ramos calls Toto Molina's "antecedente más obvio."[38] One of the ways that this connection manifests, as Pamela Bacarisse reminds us, is that in the narrative of *La traición* "almost everything in Toto's childhood points towards homosexuality in his adult life, and

[38] "In his own way, Molina is a grown-up Toto," and "most obvious precursor" (translation by Bacarisse). Pamela Bacarisse, *The Necessary Dream: A Study of the Novels of Manuel Puig* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), 87 and 246.

effeminate homosexuality at that."[39] Like Sedgwick's description of Willa Cather's Paul of "Paul's Case," Toto is a "tense, unlovely, effeminate, histrionic boy,"[40] overly attached to his mother, strained in his relationship with his father, obsessed with female movie stars and Hollywood glamour, emotionally sensitive, and bullied by his peers. Despite a lack of Toto's self-description as gay in the novel, he is read by the other characters and by much of Puig criticism as a protogay child.[41] These exact qualities (his effeminacy, maternal attachment, paternal absence, cinephilia, and sentimentalism) are shared by the adult travesti Molina and write her as Toto's possible outcome, though they come from different social classes and hometowns.[42]

But if we follow this logic that the young Toto will become (someone like) the adult Molina, a person who both refers to herself as gay, "loca," and, at the same time, not gay, that she and people like her are "mujeres normales que nos acostamos con hombres,"[43] we encounter an important tension. For in this case, all those qualities that seemed to code Toto's childhood as leading towards a gay adulthood actually result in a transfeminine adulthood, one that sometimes accepts alignment with gayness and other times explicitly rejects it. To read Toto as leading to Molina, or to read Molina as originating in Toto, leads to a clash of etiologies, of terms, of gay and trans meanings, and of investments in queer childhood. *El beso* itself, at the level of its form, seems to narrate this anxious intertextual between Toto's sissy childhood, Molina's travesti

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[39] Bacarisse, 87-88.
[40] Sedgwick, "Willa Cather and Others," in *Tendencies*, 167.
[41] See: Bacarisse; Levine; Manuel Betancourt, "The Hollywood Affair: Manuel Puig and the Queer Movie Fan," *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 49, no. 1 (2016): 79-94; René Alberto Campos, *Espejos: la textura cinematica en* La traición de Rita Hayworth, Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 1985; Jonathan Tittler, *Manuel Puig,* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993; and Ricardo Vivancos Pérez, "Una lectura *queer* de Manuel Puig: *Blood and Sand* en *La Traición de Rita Hayworth,*" *Revista Iberoamericana* 72, nos. 215-216 (2006): 633-650.
[42] All of these qualities are also shared by Puig himself, though his childhood contained somewhat more sexual acts than Toto's explicitly does. See Levine, 42-46.
[43] "We're normal women; we sleep with men" (translation by Thomas Colchie). Manuel Puig, *El beso de la mujer araña* (New York: Vintage Español, 1994 [1976]), 207.

adulthood, and Puig's gay authorship: though composed primarily of dialogues between Molina and Valentín, these are repeatedly footnoted by summaries of sexological and psychoanalytic texts concerning childhood gender/sexual deviance and of texts of sexual politics. In this section I want to think through this common reading of Molina and Toto as versions of each other, as well as the equally common reading of Molina and Toto as, in some way, autobiographical representations of Puig himself (especially in his effeminacy and cinephilia),[44] as a tense triangulation of figures that highlight issues around gay-trans divisions and overlaps, sexual and gendered development, the influence of psychoanalysis, and gay attachments to transfeminine aesthetics.

Reading through this triangulation echoes two concerns of the work of Eve Sedgwick in *Tendencies* on gay childhood that have come under pressure in contemporary trans studies: first, that post-Freudian psychoanalysis cannot seem to think about gayness without thinking in terms of etiology (the question "where do homosexuals come from");[45] second, that the heterosexual world, including and especially in the psychoanalytic clinic, wants to push the protogay child away from an adult gay outcome, even by (Sedgwick seems to fear) veering instead towards a trans outcome.[46] I argue that thinking through Toto-Molina-Puig is useful for revisiting Sedgwick's writing on gay childhood in light especially of Grace Lavery's recent argument that this work is characterized by an omission of and antagonism towards trans lives, the path of transition, and the infrastructure of trans medicine. Like Sedgwick's work, these two novels by Puig are interested in recovering and loving the queer child as a site of erotic, aesthetic, and

[44] Indeed, Puig himself once remarked "Toto soy yo," quoted in Bacarisse, 8, and the reading of Molina and Toto as cyphers for Puig's childhood and adulthood is much of the premise of Levine's critical biography of Puig.
[45] Sedgwick, "Is the Rectum Straight? Identification and Identity in *The Wings of the Dove,"* in *Tendencies*, 95.
[46] This is the basis of Grace Lavery's critique of Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys," in *Tendencies,* 154-164.

etiological investment, but in contrast to Sedgwick they do this work through the figure of the transfeminine, the travesti. The connection of the travesti to the queer child and to the gay author is one that is written by Puig with a deeply felt erotic attachment, one that may undo some of the tensions of Sedgwick's leaving trans childhood unthought. This recovery of the queer child involves great conceptual risk: of getting too close to the pathological queer child of psychoanalysis, of getting too close to the conflation of gayness and pedophilia, of getting too close to flatly conflating gayness and transfemininity. But it is that very risk, one enabled by the budding lineage of the travesti novel at his historical moment, that lets *El beso* stake the place it has in the history of the Latin American gay novel.

Puig was a lay reader of Freud and often inscribed Freudian familial paradigms into the plots of his novels.[47] In a letter to Rita Hayworth herself, Puig describes *La traición de Rita Hayworth* as an Oedipal drama, where the key to Toto's development is the absence and rejection of his father, his deep attachment to his mother, and his intense obsession with the fantasies provided by North American cinema.[48] Toto seems to be a constellation of two critical traditions around gay childhood, that of the Freud of "On Narcissism" and *Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of his Childhood,* and that of the gay child brought into his identity by feminine media attachments, most vividly anatomized by critics like D.A. Miller, Michael Moon, and David Halperin. *La traición* blends psychoanalytic models with queer fandom: Toto feels safest at the cinema with his mother, he obsesses over Rita Hayworth because of his father's sexual attraction

[47] Characteristically, he was introduced to Freud by cinema, specifically Hitchock's *Spellbound*. Levine, 60, 163.
[48] "Carta a Rita Hayworth," *Materiales iniciales para* La traición de Rita Hayworth, ed. José Amícola (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios de Teoría y Crítica Literaria, 1996): 433-434. That the novel fictionalizes the Freudian Oedipal drama of gay childhood, with a cinematic twist, is also the most common critical reading of the novel. See, for example: Campos; Vivancos Perez; Tittler; Linda Craig, *Juan Carlos Onetti, Manuel Puig, and Luisa Valenzuela: Marginality and Gender,* Suffolk, UK: Tamesis, 2005; and Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "*La Traicion de Rita Hayworth.* Una tarea de desmitificación," *Narradores de esta América* no. 2 (Buenos Aires: Alfa Argentina, 1974): 365-380.

to her,[49] and he even has sexualized daydreams of saving Shirley Temple from a villainous version of his father.[50] Toto's favorite films are the ones that luxuriate in a glammed-up version of the heterosexual form, especially the romances and musicals of the 30s and 40s, like *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *The Great Waltz* (1938), and *Blood and Sand* (1941).[51] For Puig critics like Bacarisse, René Alberto Campos, and Emir Rodríguez Monegal, this is because the cinema offers Toto a fantastical remediation of his strained relationship with his parents, where his mother and father act as ur-texts for women and men in general, and his constant identification with women characters reflect his adhesion to his mother. In this reading, Toto's cinema obsession is the sign of his social alienation, his ongoing Oedipal drama, his identification with his mother, and his object-cathexis to his absent father. Toto, it seems, is bound to follow the trajectory that Freud laid out in his writing about Leonardo da Vinci's childhood:

> "The boy represses his love for his mother: he puts himself in her place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love. In this way he has become a homosexual. What he has in fact done is to slip back to auto-erotism: for the boys whom he now loves as he grows up are after all only substitutive figures and revivals of himself in childhood—boys whom he loves in the way in which his mother loved *him* when he was a child.[52]

In Freud's mise-en-abyme, the protogay boy becomes his mother to later love himself, who he continually re-finds in his love of other men and boys. This structure codes gay adulthood as definitionally regressive, cross-gender, introspective, pedophilic, and formally heterosexual. This makes Puig's project in the novel, the gay adult's fictionalization of his protogay childhood, appear formally congruent with homosexuality itself. Or in other words, the novel dramatizes

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[49] Manuel Puig, *La traición de Rita Hayworth,* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1995 [1968]), 82.
[50] Puig, *La traición,* 45-48.
[51] This is Richard Altman's general description of the early Hollywood movie musical. For him, it is a genre whose story trajectory depends on a structural and aestheticized heterosexuality. Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 19.
[52] Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, as quoted in Tim Dean, "Homosexuality and the Problem of Otherness," in *Homosexuality & Psychoanalysis*, eds. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 122-123.

what this Freudian model describes as constitutive of homosexuality: a trans identification with his mother leads the gay man to become stuck in love with his own childhood. In *La traición*, the movie musical of North America is the medium for this process.

But what is so fascinating about *La traición* is how deeply frustrated and unfinished this process of development into gay adulthood is—equal and opposite to *El beso*'s fixation on rehearsing and repeating this development. *La traición* ends in regression rather than sexual or identitarian epiphany, flashing back in its final moments from Toto's adolescence to his infancy, as if forming a loop to the novel's beginning where Toto has just been born. Indeed, towards the end of the novel, Toto's mother says that when she looks at Toto she can only see younger versions of him layered just beneath, "como una cebollita."[53] This is not the typical gay bildungsroman, where coming of age is dramatized in an identitarian epiphany that solidifies the feel of difference that was already present into something knowable and usable in adult life;[54] rather, *La traición* is stuck cycling the transparent-yet-opaque protogay childhood of Toto, as he repeatedly goes to the movies while everybody around him has already decided the name for his difference before he has.[55] The relation between Puig and Toto recalls what Kathryn Bond Stockton has called the queer child's "asynchronous self-relation," and the "act of retrospection" that makes it appear, though in *La traición* that appearance is narratively and formally fragmented.[56]

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[53] "Like a little onion" (translation mine). Puig, *La traición,* 151.
[54] As in, for example, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* or Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (see Chapter 1).
[55] In sticking to the anxious social scene of queer development without clear outcome, Puig's writing also echoes the critique of the gay leftist activism of his era, namely that of the short-lived Frente de Liberación Homosexual (of which Puig was a member), which described childhood as a site of inculcation into heteropatriarchal social roles. See: Nestor Perlongher, "La Batalla Homosexual en Argentina," *Prosa Plebeya: Ensayos, 1980-1992,* eds. Christian Ferrer and Osvaldo Baigorria (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Colihue, 1997), 244.
[56] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 6-7.

In this sense, the novel describes what gay critics have called the process of gay "initiation," but without a clear and cathartic result for this process. For D.A. Miller, Michael Moon, and David Halperin, initiation describes how the protogay child lands upon their gay self-knowledge indirectly, not by early gay sexual experience, but by feminine media attachments. For the protogay boy, the excessive sentimentality and expressiveness of genres like the musical and the melodrama, of figures like the diva and the tragic heroine, cut through "the solitude, shame, secretiveness" of developing "sentiments allowed no real object."[57] For Miller, the boy looks to the female star and transforms her "into the familiar figure that every woman becomes once we bury thus our desperate adoring faces in her skirts. Call her Dolly, Mame, Eva, or the Spider Woman," referencing the 1993 musical adaptation of *El beso,* "by any other name, she is still…a Momma who returns each of us to the dependent condition of a Momma's boy fearful she will leave him."[58] Brett Farmer has written that the tropes of what he calls Freudian gay "matrocentrism" and of gay childhood cinephilia are deeply interwoven. He writes that again and again, in gay men's fiction, memoir, and cinema studies, going to the cinema with one's mother is posed as a key moment of gay childhood.[59] Part of the pleasure of subsequent adulthood gay cinephilia in these narratives is the repeated activation of the memory of maternal love, of looking at the cinema the way one's mother once did or the way one did with their mother.[60]

But this sense of sissy childhood is not exclusive to the development of adult gay men; stories of transfeminine development tell similar tales. In a conversation between travesti scholars and activists Claudia Rodriguez and Marlene Wayer, Rodriguez remarks that many a

[57] Miller, 26.
[58] Miller, 110.
[59] Farmer is referring to narratives by David Pendleton, Patrick E. Horrigan, Roland Barthes, Dick Scanlan, and Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman,* alongside his own ethnographic findings. Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 161-163.
[60] Farmer, 169.

travesti childhood is characterized by a love for Hollywood or other sources of glamorized images of women, where "todo lo otro que no fuera la belleza de la mujer" is rendered banal.[61] Wayer has written frequently on childhood as the critical site for travesti embodiment, a site where social norms are being implemented but are not quite yet fully accepted. Don Kulick's ethnography of travesti life in Brazil notes the way travesti self-narratives narrate a childhood mix of "homosexual desire and effeminate behavior" as a way of legitimating travesti adulthood.[62]

Though, as aforementioned, *La traición* evades the outcomes of Toto's development, it seems appropriate that critical traditions imagine the travesti cinephile Molina to be his outcome. In Suzanne Jill Levine's biography of Puig, she makes this constellation of psychoanalysis, cinema, and queer/trans development between the two novels rather explicit: "The voice of Toto explaining movies is also his mother's voice, a device which becomes central to *Kiss of the Spider Woman,* where Toto grows up to be Molina, in a sense, but is also still Mother."[63] We can add Puig himself to Levine's equation too. Puig too was a notable cinephile of "women's cinema" from the same period as Toto and Molina's tastes. In both novels lie reference to Puig's lived cinematic habits: his attendance with his mother to the Hollywood films they would show in his local theater in Colonel Vallejos,[64] his campy use of North American actress's names to refer to himself and his friends,[65] and even his first masturbation to the image of Tyrone Power dancing with Rita Hayworth.[66]

[61] "Everything other than the woman's beauty" (translation mine), Claudia Rodriguez in Wayar, *Travesti*, 37-38.
[62] Kulick, 52.
[63] Levine, 31.
[64] Compare Puig, *La traición,* 31-33; Puig, *El beso,* 116*;* and Levine, 28-29.
[65] Compare Puig, *El beso,* 269 and Levine, 200-201.
[66] Compare Puig, *La traición*, 82 and Levine, 37.

If *La traición* cyclically re-narrates the incomplete process of sexual development through the cinematic feminine in the sissy boy Toto, *El beso*—though ostensibly narrating a story of politics and cinema between the travesti Molina, the straight political prisoner Valentín, and their carceral state—will be shadowed by the idea of its central characters' childhoods, especially as these are mediated by psychoanalytic paradigms of sexual development. If Toto's story repeats, layers, and regresses, Molina's story will see her and Valentín forced by state powers to encounter and care for the child they once were and will regress into.

For a brief plot summary: Molina, imprisoned for corruption of a minor, and Valentín, imprisoned for his Marxist political activity, have been planted in a cell together. To pass the time, Molina summarizes the plots of various films to Valentín. Through this, the character's initial distrust for each other, and especially Valentín's masculinist distaste for Molina, dissolves into affection. Though the novel dedicates itself to emphasizing the various binarized differences between the two, the course of the novel sees their steady and eroticized fusion. What Valentín does not know is that Molina has been planted in the cell to report his secrets to the warden, who wants further information on Valentín's comrades. Molina, attempting to strategically play both sides, visits the warden under the guise of visits from his mother; out of care for Valentín, she stalls the warden's demands as long as she can, and asks him to give her gifts of food and other comforts from her "mother" to bring back to Valentín. In a moment when the warden has been disappointed with the results of Molina's spying, he asks her to poison Valentín with food that would make him sick. Much of the novel sees Molina's attempts to care for the poisoned Valentín, both through cinematic summaries and through warming him with blankets, feeding him water, and cleaning his diarrhea. In the end of the novel, the freed Molina is killed by Valentín's comrades and Valentín is left tortured and drugged in the prison.

Through Molina's crime of "corruption of a minor," her fake visits from her mother, and various memories the characters share of family and childhood, the novel's action is filled with reference to the characters' development. We are primed especially to read for narratives of gay etiology early on in the novel, as when Molina, frustrated by Valentín's initial stereotyping of her, says: "Y ahora te tengo que aguantar que me digas lo que dicen todos…Qué de chico me mimaron demasiado, y por eso soy así, que me quedé pegado a las polleras de mi mamá y soy así…que lo que me conviene es una mujer, porque la mujer es lo mejor que hay….y eso les contesto…ya que las mujeres son lo mejor que hay…yo quiero ser mujer."[67] This moment is a good example both of how the novel is interested in discourses of sexual development and how Molina's self-narration of her gender and sexuality is both radical and reactionary—as her particular form of travesti femininity is essentially a collage of cinematic references to 30s and 40s cinema, her sense of herself is both reprehensibly normative and deeply transgressive. Though in a moment like this one she transforms the voice of compulsory heterosexuality ("lo que me conviene es una mujer") into a position of trans affirmation ("yo quiero ser mujer"), she will just as often express allegiance to the same patriarchal forces that doom her (like Donoso's Manuela before her, Molina wants nothing more than a man whose machismo inspires in her a mix of terror and intimacy).[68]

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[67] "And now I have to put up with you while you tell me the same old thing everybody tells me…How they spoiled me too much as a kid, and that's why I'm the way I am, how I was tied to my mother's apron strings and now I'm this way, …and what I really need is a woman, because a woman's the best there is….and my answer is this…since a woman's the best there is…I want to be one" (translation by Thomas Colchie). Puig, *El beso,* 25.

[68] In interview, Puig describes Molina as an attempt at writing a "romantic heroine," a woman "que creyese todavía en la existencia del macho superior….[Hoy] ese personaje no podía ser una mujer…un homosexual, con fijación feminina, sí, todavía, puede defender esa ideología…porque…sigue el engaño." In her deeply citational transfemininity, Molina is both melodramatically attached to norms she could never fit into, and a potent agent in deconstructing the "engaño" of patriarchal heterosexuality. Translation: A heroine "who still believes in the existence of the superior man….Nowadays that character couldn't be a woman…a homosexual, with feminine fixation, yes, even now, could defend that ideology…because…they follow the ruse" (translation mine). Puig, in interview with Manuel Osorio, as quoted in Sifuentes-Jauregui, 152-153.

But after this early moment, it is primarily the novel's footnotes, composed of increasingly distracting summaries of expert discourses on psychoanalysis, sexology, and sexual politics, that bring the children Molina and Valentín both were and are into view. The first footnote, which summarizes psychiatrist Donald West's *Homosexuality* (1955), appears as Valentín notes to Molina that he knows little about "gente de tus inclinaciones,"[69] causing the footnote to read as a text of expertise in contrast to Valentín's ignorance. The summary of West explains his disagreement with three common sexological and psychological theories of the physical origin of homosexuality, including the endocrinal model, the intersexuality model, and the heredity model.[70] Here, the expert texts that indirectly fill in Valentín's lack of knowledge about people like Molina are the kinds of texts that Jules Gill-Peterson historicizes in her *Histories of the Transgender Child.* Gill-Peterson describes how, through the 20th century, the child acted as a metaphor for an invisible but material plasticity of sex and became an experimental site for the construction of gender in the sexological, endocrinological, and psychoanalytic clinic.[71] She writes how gay, trans, and intersex connotations were tangled in the clinic by doctors who were attempting to code childhood gender nonconformity and intersexuality as a form of mis- or underdevelopment, for which sex assignment acted as its correction and completion.[72] The texts that appear in this footnote as the bibliography of expertise on "gente de tus inclinaciones" are the site of the very invention of the sex, sexuality, and gender division in the clinic, which was crafted by experiment on a long history of queer-trans children.

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[69] "People with your type of inclination" (translation by Thomas Colchie). Ibid, 66.
[70] Ibid, 66-68. The third footnote of the novel, on pages 102-103, returns to West to explain three lay theories of homosexual development: that of perversion, seduction, and segregation.
[71] Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 35.
[72] Gill-Peterson, 98-99.

After this initial footnote, the transitions from main text to footnote become increasingly arbitrary and invasive, to the point that in the second half of the novel even a moment of silence between the prisoners is footnoted.[73] Of the nine footnotes of the novel, six explicitly deal with childhood sexuality and gender and the development of homosexuality. The other footnotes apply these theories of childhood sexuality and gender to literature on sexual norms and sexual revolution, from Herbert Marcuse to Kate Millett to Dennis Altman.[74] The richest source in the footnotes is that of Freudian psychoanalysis, especially the Freud of *The Interpretation of Dreams,* "On Narcissism," and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.* Describing Freudian psychoanalysis as a theory where "las peculiaridades sexuales tienen su origen en la infancia,"[75] the footnotes pose Freudian childhood as a key for reading the sexual adulthood of our main characters. When it comes to homosexuality and transfemininity, the footnotes focus on the Freudian theory of maternal identification. We so clearly see an echo of the narrative movement from Toto to Molina when the footnotes describe the child who adopts "como modelo la figura maternal y no encuentra a tiempo una figura masculina que contrarreste la fascinación maternal" and eventually grows to "finalmente identificarse él mismo como mujer."[76] Much of the dynamic between *La traición* and *El beso* read together depends on the adhesion we see in the Freudian theory of homosexuality of same-sex desire, transfemininity, maternal identification, and desire of/for the child.

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[73] Puig, *El beso*, 199.
[74] Included in these is also words of the fictional doctor "Anneli Taube," who rehearses some of the talking points about childhood of the leftist gay activist group El Frente de Liberación Homosexual. See: Osvaldo Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en Argentina,* quoted in Juan Moralejo, "*El beso de la mujer araña*: literatura, sexo y revolución en Puig," *La Izquierda Diario*, Red Internacional, November 27, 2016, https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/El-beso-de-la-mujer-arana-literatura-sexo-y-revolucion-en-Puig.
[75] "Sexual peculiarities have their origin in infancy" (translation by Thomas Colchie). Puig, *El beso,* 103.
[76] "The maternal figure as a model and fails to encounter sufficiently early some masculine figure—to check his fascination for the maternal" and "to finally identify himself as a woman" (translation by Thomas Colchie). Puig, *El beso,* 141.

In "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," Eve Sedgwick identifies and responds to American developments in "revisionist" Freudianism and ego psychology of the 70s and 80s, the 1973 declassification of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association, and the 1980 inclusion of "gender identity disorder (GID) of childhood" in the DSM-III.[77] She shows how the revisions of Freud conducted in books like Richard C. Freidman's *Male Homosexuality* (1988) and Richard Green's *The 'Sissy Boy Syndrome' and the Development of Homosexuality* (1987) pose childhood gender nonconformity (especially in boys) as a pathology leading to homosexuality. This pathologization, melded with a nominal tolerance of adult, masculine gay men, is related in Sedgwick's analysis to the crystallization of GID and the work of sexologists like John Money and Robert Stoller, which she sees as "radically *re*naturaliz[ing] gender" in the face of a cultural denaturalization of sexual object-choice.[78] Her fear in this essay is that some of the victories of gay-affirmative analysis have left the feminine protogay child as "the haunting abject of gay thought itself," the "discrediting open secret of many politicized adult gay men."[79] Clearly responding to what she sees as homophobic revisions of Freudian matrocentrism, Sedgwick argues that ego psychology curses identification with the mother and the femininity of young boys to pathologies in need of repair.[80] This is, for Sedgwick, just a symptom of a larger

[77] Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," in *Tendencies,* 155-156.
[78] Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," 159, emphasis in original. David Valentine agrees with the estimation here that the 1973 depathologization of homosexuality by the APA and the 1980 inclusion of GID in the DSM-III in 1980 marks a quintessential moment in which homosexuality and transness are sheared from each other, where the assumption of all gender nonconformity onto the category "transgender" codes homosexuality as gender normative and sexuality as divided from gender. David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 55.
[79] Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," 157-158.
[80] Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," 160. See Gill-Peterson, 145, for a description of how Robert Stoller's work on transsexuality in childhood rewrote the Freudian theory of infantile sexual development and matrocentrism.

cultural desire for the extermination of gay people, a set of techniques offered by ego psychology to move children away from a gay outcome in adulthood at all costs.[81]

Sedgwick's "strong, explicit, *erotically invested* affirmation"[82] of gay childhood femininity comes at a steep cost: a scapegoating of some of the fundamental moments in the history of trans medicine and a global omission of the very idea of trans children of any gender from her analysis. This is key to Grace Lavery's critique of Sedgwick in "Egg Theory's Early Style," where she more generally argues that a certain thread of queer theory "has been predicated on the impossibilization of transition."[83] Sedgwick is an emblem for what Lavery calls "egg theory," a strain of queer universalizing theory that abstracts the difference between "trans" and "queer" meanings by "tucking the former term neatly into the latter" and "eradicating the distinctiveness of one of them," creating a theoretical allergy to transition.[84] In arguing, as I have thus far, that the travesti novel of Latin America shows how trans and gay meanings depend on each other for their specificity, I am quite caught by Lavery's argument. Her analysis is so useful for thinking about and resisting the travesti novel's particular allegorization of transfemininity, and it especially highlights the widespread lack of representation of medical transition in gay men's travesti novels (in comparison to the real, varied, and constantly innovated forms of DIY and professional transition technologies in travesti life).[85] But in its

[81] Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," 161.
[82] Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," 164, emphasis in original.
[83] Lavery, 395.
[84] Lavery, 395. Gill-Peterson also writes that Sedgwick's non-conceptualization of trans children in this moment in psychiatry encodes trans children as a "successor" to gay children, an encoding she contests in her rich history of how thinkers like Stoller and Money were working with trans children. Gill-Peterson, 169.
[85] On the latter point, see, among others, Kulick, *Travesti*; Marlene Wayar, *Diccionario travesti de la T a la T*; and Marcia Ochoa, *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. A rare exception to how decidedly uninterested these novels tend to be in scenes of surgery and transition procedure is Zapata's *La hermana secreta de Angelica María*, where the protagonist's transness is accessed through her intersex status. The situation is different outside of the Latin American context. Take Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckenridge* (1968), published very soon after *El lugar sin límites* and contemporaneously to Sarduy and Puig's early work, a gay man's novel with a transfeminine protagonist that absolutely revels in the technologies of medical transition as sources of comedic, erotic, and carnivalesque charge.

resolved faith that there are indeed specificities worth dividing between gay and trans meanings, and that the core of those specificities adhere around medical transition, Lavery's analysis seems somewhat limited in its ability to identify how what she calls "the apparatus of trans health care" is already steeped with the superimposition of gay meanings, hence its central place both in Sedgwick and *El beso*.[86]

It is precisely because Lavery is so right that "not all effeminate boys grow up to be gay men" that the two Puig novels I have been discussing here seem useful to read together. *El beso*, published squarely in the intervening years between the 1973 declassification of homosexuality and the 1980 classification of GID, is such a clear reflection of the push and pull between trans and gay classification in the scene of childhood. Puig's work, though certainly eggy in Lavery's terms, offers us a way of thinking about the division of trans and gay meanings that is not only "felt as anxiety,"[87] but also is felt as erotic and aesthetic investment.

To understand this investment, I want to identify a phrase repeated in both the famous sex scene of the novel and in the scene of Molina's cleaning of Valentín's self-soiling. The first time Valentín soils himself comes almost immediately after Molina mentions that he's never told her about his mother, and—almost in place of a response to this—Valentín stutters with surprise at his defecation ("Ay…ay…perdóname… ay…qué he hecho…").[88] The second time, where Molina is already used to cleaning Valentín with their blankets, Valentín asks her with worry and affection, "¿No te da asco?"[89] In these scenes, Molina, who the footnotes prime us to read as the aftermath of a maternally-aligned childhood, becomes the mother figure to an infantilized Valentín. This scene emphasizes the binarized differences between them, all while noting how

[86] Lavery, 395.
[87] Ibid, 393.
[88] "Agh…Aghhhh…I'm sorry…Ugh, what am I doing?...," (translation by Thomas Colchie), Puig, *El beso*, 123.
[89] "But it doesn't disgust you?" (translation by Thomas Colchie), Ibid, 145.

rapidly these roles (mother, child, feminine, masculine, etc.) can be put on and switched out under the pressure of their confinement. Later, when the pair are having sex for the first time, we see the very same combination of speechlessness and the question of disgust. Here, it is Molina, penetrated by the mostly silent Valentín, asking if she is disgusting:

> —…
> —¿Y así puedo tocarte?
> —…
> —¿Y así?
> —…
> —¿No te da asco que te acaricie?
> —No…[90]

The erotic charge of both of these scenes, responds to the abjection of both the anus and the mother by centering, rather than evading, infantilization and gay matrocentrism. "Ya estás quedando bien limpito," Molina sweetly and maternally reassures Valentín as the latter is infantilized by the prison's poisoning of him; "No hables…por un ratito, Molinita," Valentín carefully and kindly says to dismiss Molina's comments during sex.[91] In both these scenes, one character becomes diminutive and cared for, fearful that their anuses make them disgusting to their companion, and the other character becomes a loved figure, both parental and erotic, who calmly asserts that no, they are not disgusted. In both of these scenes, our characters—whom the novel takes such pains to portray as both binaristically opposite of each other and increasingly interchangeable with each other—love each other as the children they were and are, as simultaneously homosexual and heterosexual lovers, as simultaneously men and women, as caretakers and parents. It is no wonder, then, that after their sex scene, Molina remarks, that after

[90] "—… / —And this way, can I touch you this way? / —… / —And this way? / —…/ —It doesn't disgust you to have me caress you?" (translation by Thomas Colchie), Ibid, 220.
[91] "You're getting to look all tidied up now" and "Don't talk, Molina…for a little while" (translation by Thomas Colchie), Ibid, 146 and 221. Note that in translation, Colchie has rendered the first quote's diminutive 'limpito' in the kiddish "tidied up," but the second quote's diminutive "Molinita" is given no equivalent.

sex with Valentín, she reached to her own face to touch a mole that only Valentín has: "me pareció que yo no estaba acá, …que estabas vos sólo…O que yo no era yo. Que ahora yo…eras vos."[92] In this quintessentially cinematic image, influenced by the many transformations we have already seen in the movie summaries Molina has recounted,[93] she places herself as both camera and character, looking on to her own body which has, in post-coital bliss, become an image of Valentín's.

The previously binarized characters come more and more, in both the course of their relationship and under the pressure of state violence, into a state of interchangeability. Like the sex scene in *El lugar sin límites,* erotic fantasy acts as a tool of survival for two actors pinched by an oppressive power. But in these scenes of soiling and sex, Puig has created a complex constellation of forces: a distinctly gay erotics of the abjected anus, a psychoanalytic association of the gay-trans child and their mother (who they eventually, in pathological form, become), transfeminine modes of care, a transmedia employment of the cinematic technique in the novel, and a queer allegiance between two politically victimized people in the vice grip of state power. We may say that the travesti, the gay man, and even the straight leftist man are united, in *El beso* through the anus, through the mother, through the child.

Thus, in a surprising move, the Freudian matrocentrist model of homosexuality—which phobicly and sexistly adheres the gay man, the trans woman, and the mother—has been remodeled by Puig to offer an erotic, aesthetic, and political narrative that is both gay and trans affirming. Freudian matrocentrism as the organizing principle of *La traición* and *El beso* offers

[92] "It seemed like I wasn't here…like it was you all alone…or like I wasn't me anymore. As if now, somehow…I…were you" (translation by Thomas Colchie). Puig, *El beso,* 222.
[93] By this point in the novel, Molina's film summaries have recounted the transformation of woman into panther in *Cat People* (1942), a love-influenced transformation of the ugly into the beautiful in a film based on *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945), and a transformation by a witch doctor of a woman into a zombie in a film based on *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943).

Puig a structure wherein Molina can love Valentín as the boy and man she was and is not, from the position of mother and woman lover, and wherein Valentín can love Molina as his own mother, as his daughter, and as someone like him.[94] Like Marlene Wayar's writing on the redemptive and affirming power of travesti motherhood as a "reparación del odio social,"[95] Puig's vision of Molina as mother (indeed as the mother the sissy boy both worships and becomes), stands in stark contrast to the intense forms of political violence that come upon her. But importantly, her position as mother does not exclude her from the gay erotics of the novel; in fact, they depend on it. In their sex scene, Molina becomes Valentín only by becoming his mother. Sexual sameness is simultaneous to sexual difference. Her feminine gender is affirmed, not in spite of but in conjunction with the affirmation of the erotic and politically subversive potential of homosexuality.

This is the dynamic that I find most compelling about *El beso*'s mobilization of the travesti protagonist, who plays in the interface of matrocentrism, aesthetic devotion, and homoerotic longing. In crafting Molina out of Toto, which is to say in centering the effeminate child as the material of the travesti Molina's present political and erotic encounter, and in crafting both characters by reference to his own life attachments, Puig's gesture here seems much bigger than allegory. I am not quite able to buy a reading that would call Molina a transfeminine allegory in the terms of Emma Heaney's or Vek Lewis's sense of transfemininity as allegory for

[94] Valentín often puts more stock in reading Molina as a gay man than she does. His attachment to her depends on his reading of her as akin to him in terms of gender just as often as it depends on his reading of her as a woman, as substitute mother, or as substitute girlfriend.

[95] Marlene Wayar, intervewed by Claudia Acuña, in *Trans-Formaciones* (Buenos Aires: La Vaca Editora, 2019), 51. On the side of North American trans studies, Hil Malatino writes similarly of trans mothering as an essential form of care through the work of Sara Ruddick. He writes that the "intensified forms of vulnerability and exposure to violence and debility" and the scrambling of "normative temporalities of development" that are represented by trans life mean that trans people "remain in need of mothering (in the many-gendered, expansive sense of the word)." Hil Malatino, *Trans Care* (Minneapolis: University of Minesotta Press, 2020), 67-68.

the corruptions and transformations of the social order.[96] There's almost too much invested in the Molina-Toto-Puig triangle to think of Molina as only a symbolic displacement. It is true that Puig's travesti is still part of an aesthetic operation by Latin American gay male writers that takes transfemininity as a sign for homosexuality. But by locating the travesti through the sissy child, especially the sissy child of a psychoanalysis that so intricately merges gay and trans meanings, Puig places himself and Toto much closer to Molina than allegory's distancing principle would allow. There is a real risk for Puig and for the project of gay literature in Latin America, a risk not just based in merging gay and trans meanings, nor just in aligning homosexuality with political and aesthetic conservatism.[97] The risk in this work is Puig's loving gesture of recovering the "haunting abject" of the sissy child and not narrativizing them into adult, masculine homosexuality, but rather in treating them as the place where the child, the gay man, the travesti, the political radical, the socially victimized, and the aesthetic obsessive all meet.

Salón de belleza: the End of the Gay Travesti Novel?

Mario Bellatin's novella *Salón de belleza* (1994) is instructive for thinking through the gay travesti novel's developments by the turn of the 21st century. In the novella, an unnamed travesti protagonist has converted the hair salon she runs into a hospice for victims of a new plague spreading through her city, referred to as "el mal."[98] As a stylist, before "el mal" set in,

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[96] Lewis, 10-12. Heaney, 5-12.

[97] Though the latter connection was a major point of conflict in Puig's life. Though he was a member of the FLH, Puig saw his political views to be in some friction with the "Stalinist gays," as he both lovingly and acidicly called them (Levine, 262). For Puig, too much of gay leftism (both in Argentina and in Paris, where he lived in exile) saw leftism and femininity at odds, looking down upon his exploration of women's media and culture. *El beso* is in some ways Puig's most developed statement on this conflict. For more on Latin American gay leftist internal conflicts regarding gender and aesthetics, see: Néstor Perlongher, "Historia del Frente de Liberación Homosexual de la Argentina," *Prosa plebeya*, 77.

[98] Translation could be "the illness," "the bad," or "the plague." Mario Bellatin, *Tres novelas: Salón de belleza, Jacobo el mutante, Bola negra,* Mérida, Venezuela: Ediciones *El otro el miso,* 2005.

the protagonist tended to cis women's hair and makeup and lavishly decorated her salon with aquariums full of a variety of tropical fish. At night, she and her friends would cross-dress and go out to the streets. At the salon's height, when her "acuarios llegaron a su esplendor,"[99] she and her staff realized that cross-dressing at work led to "un ambiente más íntimo en el salón" where the female clients could "decir libremente cosas que las hicieran sentirse aliviadas de sus problemas."[100] This a highly constructed and aestheticized space, constituted of profitable care work directed towards a cis female clientele. Our protagonist's stylization in femme glamour at night with friends, and later during the day with the clientele, represents some of the ways that the salon owner both caters to cis women and escapes from them, using their aesthetics for a form of play amongst herself and friends. The arrival of "el mal" changes everything.

"El mal" initially and mostly affects queer men, which in the terms of the novel also includes travestis.[101] Our protagonist recalls that the hospice began when one of the salon's staff reported that her friend was sick, that no hospital would accept him, that his family had kicked him out of the home, and that his economic situation left him no other option than to "morir debajo de uno de los puentes del rió."[102] The hospice begins, out of a feeling of ethical obligation, as a way of avoiding this possibility. In light of widespread institutional failing and a necropolitical rejection of the victims of "el mal" from social safety nets, the hospice begins to

[99] "Aquariums reached their splendor," translation mine. Bellatin, 49.
[100] "a more intimate environment in the salon" where the female clients could "more freely say things that would make them feel relieved of their problems," translation mine. Bellatin, 48.
[101] The narrator generally refers to herself, her friends, and her staff as men, although ones who cross-dress ("travestir") regularly. She refers to the plague as affecting "a los compañeros, a los amigos, a la gente desconocida. A los jóvenes fuertes, a los que alguna vez fueron reinas de belleza…" The grammar of the first sentence seems to connote its clauses as separate groups, though the grammar of the second sentence is more ambiguous, perhaps describing "jóvenes fuertes" who "alguna vez fueron reinas de belleza." Translation: affecting "colleagues, friends, strangers. Affecting strong young men, those who once were beauty queens…," translation mine. Bellatin, 59.
[102] "die under one of the bridges on the river," translation mine. Bellatin, 50.

take victims in under its unique conditions of care.[103] Though the hospice offers its residents food and shelter to die with dignity, it specifically restricts any forms of medicine that could extend the victims' lives, visits from family or friends, mirrors, and funerals. All residents must rid themselves of their belongings before entering and their family and friends can only drop them off gifts of cash, bed sheets, or candy (tokens of means, comfort, and pleasure, respectively). Our protagonist refuses to individualize the residents of the hospice and says, not short on bitterness: "No me conmovía la muerte como muerte. Lo único que buscaba evitar era que esas personas perecieran como perros en medio de la calle, o abandonados por los hospitales del Estado."[104] Hers is not an idealistic care, hoping for her residents to live as long and as fulfilled as possible; her care is cynical, resentful, burned out, and hopeless, but dignified, stoic, and efficient.

Another rule of the hospice is that it exclusively takes in men. As "el mal" began to spread to women, more and more asked for entry to the hospice and were refused. The protagonist tells us, "El salón en algún tiempo había embellecido hasta la saciedad a las mujeres, no estaba dispuesto a echar por la borda tantos años de trabajo sacrificado. Nunca acepté, por eso, a nadie que no fuera del sexo masculino."[105] In a combination of fear at the ruin of women's beauty by illness and resentment at how much care had already been offered to women, the hospice rejects women entirely. In this, the plague manifests a problem of gender for the protagonist and her system of caregiving. Femininity in total, even among the men of the hospice, has seemed to become alienated by the plague, as the protagonist, in her own

[103] This set of conditions recalls Hil Malatino's description of the contemporary, North American "queer trans care web" as having "emerged because of the way the normative and presumed centers of a life have fallen out, or never were accessible to or desired by us in the first place." Malatino, 2.
[104] "I wasn't moved by death as death. The only thing I wanted was to avoid that these people perished like dogs in the middle of the street, or abandoned by the hospitals of the State," translation mine. Bellatin, 51.
[105] "At one time the salon had beautified women ad nauseum, I wasn't willing to waste so many years of sacrificed work. That's why I never accepted anyone who wasn't of the male sex," translation mine. Bellatin, 39-40.

developing sickness, has abandoned wearing women's clothing or going out on the town. This process of transformation, from the beauty salon's care for women to the hospice's care for its male residents, is allegorized within the novel by recurring descriptions of the protagonist's fish, as they get sick with their own mysterious illness and die. The splendor of the fish's color is marred by some kind of fungus, and in turn the protagonist notes blotches on her skin that she claims would ruin her femininity when she went out.[106] In this novella, aesthetics are feminized and femininity is aestheticized, but the plague signifies aesthetic ruin and therefore the ruin of femininity.

The obvious intertext of "el mal" is the AIDS crisis, from its visual sign in a skin lesion, to its initial concentration in queer men, to its chronological focal point in the 80s and early 90s. In *Salón de belleza,* a plague crisis like AIDS seems to catalyze the dissolution or impossibility of transfeminine aesthetics. In this sense, I take *Salón de belleza* to be a novella self-consciously anxious about whether or not the gay travesti novel, and more largely the aesthetic connections between gay men and (trans)femininity, can stand up to the force of the plague years. Said another way, if the travesti novel is, as I have argued thus far, a lineage where Latin American homosexuality is thought in terms of the aesthetic and cultural by reference to (trans)femininity, Bellatin's formulation is one where the travesti's aesthetics falters under the pressure of wide-spread disease. Where writers like Donoso, Sarduy, and Puig use the travesti protagonist as a site for thinking homosexuality's relationship to aesthetics, femininity, narrative, and politics, Bellatin's travesti acts as a record of that constellation's instability and dissolution at the end of the 20th century. In her sick body, resentfully and lovingly caring for those like her, our

[106] Bellatin, 61.

protagonist represents both the "esplendor" of her salon days and the devastation of her hospice ones.

Of course, the formulation here where transfeminine aesthetics and AIDS oppose each other is not the only way of formulating this, as the work of his contemporaries (such as Pedro Lemebel's "crónicas" and the queeny HIV literature of Reinaldo Arenas's later years) would certainly attest to. As well, the gay travesti novel does not truly dissipate in the turn to the 21st century. Instead, what I argue is that *Salón de belleza* is wracked with the question of whether its aesthetic operations can outpace the devestation of the plague years. The novella even inscribes some ambivalence over its very proposition in an important scene of non-suicide. Our protagonist, on seeing sores developing on her cheeks, burns all her dresses, feathers, and sequins in a large bonfire. She describes the burning melting synthetics creating a foul and toxic smoke. As she does this, this sacrificial gesture of her aestheticized transfemininity, she sings to herself and dances. She imagines herself in a discotheque, wearing the clothes she burns, with her face and neck completely covered in sores, and she thinks of suicide: "Mi intención era caer, yo también dentro de aquel fuego. Ser envuelto por las llamas y desaparecer antes de que la lenta agonía fuera apoderándose de mi cuerpo."[107] But the song delays her suicide. As she continues to sing and dance, she begins to remember other songs, songs that bring her memories from her past. She sings to herself so long that the fire goes out before she can burn herself alive. Like Manuela's love of flamenco and Molina's love of bolero, a song and dance mediate between the travesti and a brutally difficult world. Though this scene literalizes how much "el mal" devastates our protagonist's relationship to her aestheticized femininity, it also notes, more subtly, that this might be precisely what makes her survive.

[107] "My intention was for me to fall, too, into that fire. To be enveloped in flames and disappear before the slow agony seized my body," translation mine. Bellatin, 54.

Thus, *Salón de belleza* is useful to us as an anxious record of both the gay travesti novel's productive potential and its failings under the weight of the late 20th century. This lineage of novels, in its steady and complex merging of trans and gay meanings at the aesthetic level, its distinctly gay approach to the erotics of sexual difference, and its subversive approach to forms of heterosexual power, is a deeply productive—if resolutely ambivalent and thorny—one for thinking through the continued relationship between gay and trans cultures and between gay maleness and the aesthetics of femininity

Chapter 3:

Lou's Men: Sameness, Leo Bersani, and the Legacy of Lou Sullivan

One of the primary rejoinders to the influence of the inversion model, and more generally to the connection between homosexuality and the aesthetics of femininity, has been the model of sameness. From Marc-André Raffalovich's late nineteenth-century coinage of "unisexuality" as a masculine alternative to Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs's feminized "Uranian,"[1] to the contemporary "Boyfriend Twin" blog, which gathers internet images of gay couples where partners appear nearly identical,[2] the conceptualization of gayness as an attraction of the same or to the same (gender, sex, type, body, genitals, look) has been an incredibly productive and durable one for gay culture. Sameness has been conceptually mobilized by gay men for myriad political purposes, from gay-affirmative revisions of the Narcissus myth;[3] to Adolf Brand's misogynistic magazine *Der Eigene*, which stressed German Romantic ideals of friendship and a homogenized masculinism;[4] to Cleo Manago's coinage of "same-gender loving" as an African and Black diasporic alternative to the term "gay."[5] Sameness's appeal, especially in its role as a rejoinder to inversion, has been two-fold. First, it has degraded the hegemony of sexual difference as the fundamental basis of desire. Sameness cuts through inversion's retention of heterosexuality as its theory of desire, its implicit sense that to desire a man, you must be (at some level) a woman. Second, as Eve Sedgwick has noted, models of gay sameness have tended to subtend gender-separatist understandings of gayness (conceptualizations that pose gayness as the sexual position

[1] See the comparative discussion in the introduction of this dissertation.
[2] "@boyfriendtwin." Tumblr (blog). https://boyfriendtwin.tumblr.com/
[3] See: Steven Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
[4] For a discussion of *Der Eigene* as a response to Ulrichs, see: Gert Hekma, "'A Female Soul in a Male Body': Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology," in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 227-228.
[5] "Cleo Manago," National Black Justice Coalition, September 21, 2017, https://beenhere.org/2017/09/21/cleo-manago/

most aligned to one's gender, such as in Adrienne Rich's "woman-identified woman" or Benedict Friedländer's "League for Manly Culture"). In this, models of sameness have also tended towards what Sedgwick calls "*universalizing* understandings of homo/heterosexual potential," in contrast to the strict minoritarianism of the inversion model and of a large swath of 20th-century gay politics.[6] Indeed, in contemporary discourse, "same-sex/same-gender desire" has become both synonymous with gayness and its universalizing parent category, incorporating desires beyond identificatory gayness.

In this chapter, I take up some of the conceptual consequences of thinking gayness through sameness, but I do so through a somewhat unconventional path. As evidenced by the examples of Raffalovich, Brand, and Friedländer above, the sameness model has frequently been employed to cast away the sexual, aesthetic, and social connections between gay maleness and femininity and between gayness and transness. Because of this, the sameness model has, in the course of gay studies, been as applauded for its divestment from sexual difference as it has been critiqued for its homogenizing masculinity and cissexism.[7] In this chapter, I investigate the critical and cultural potential of sameness, but I center transness and trans study. Rather than accepting the transphobic and misogynist exclusions performed by much of the literature on sameness, I investigate what sameness has offered the cultural, theoretical, and erotic connections between gayness and transness that are central to this dissertation's study. We will find along the way that indeed the afterlives of the inversion model are not as far away as someone like Raffalovich might have hoped, as the structuring metalanguage of inversion will play a fundamental role in the theories I trace here.

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[6] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 [1990]), 89.
[7] Ben Nichols, *Same Old: Queer Theory, Literature and the Politics of Sameness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 2-11.

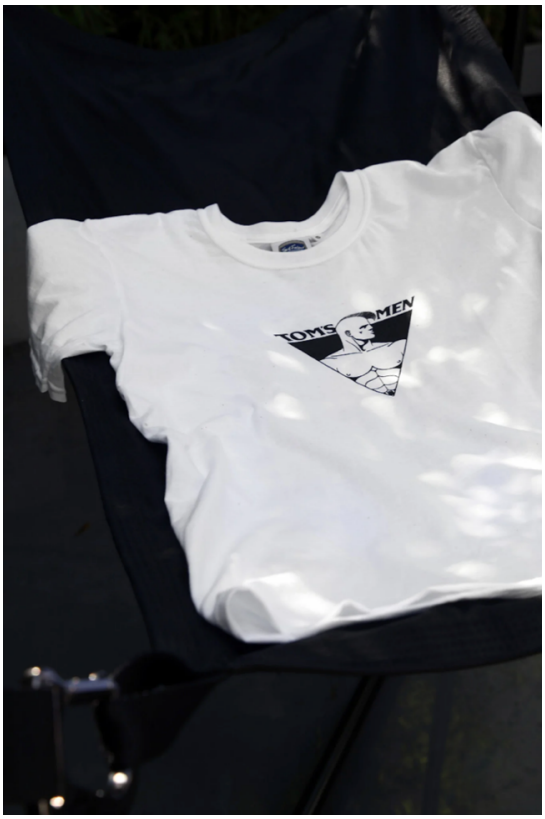

Fig. 2: "Tom's Men" t-shirt, Tom of Finland Foundation. © 2024 Tom of Finland Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

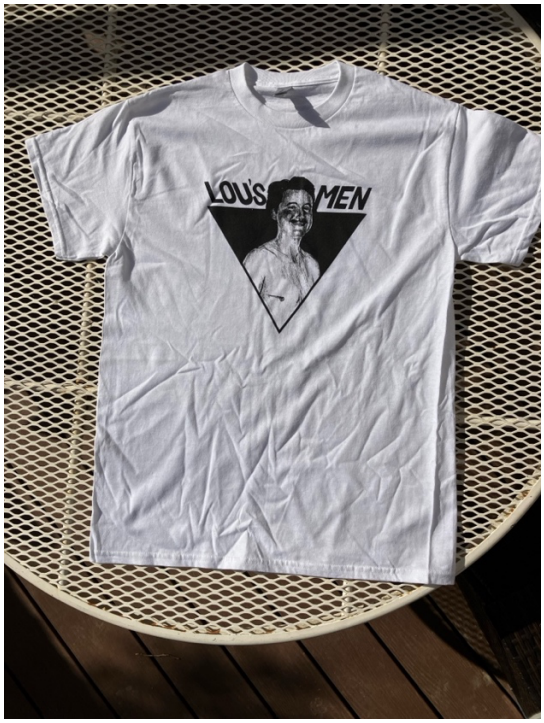

Fig. 3: "Lou's Men" t-shirt, design and photo by Sami Brussels.

To introduce how such an analysis could be possible, let us first compare two iconic images of gay sameness. In a t-shirt from the Tom of Finland Foundation, the phrase "Tom's Men" adorns one of the artist's drawings of a bare-chested and chiseled man placed within a downward pointing black triangle (Figure 2). This man is but one of Tom of Finland's serial erotic creations, nearly interchangeable with the thousands of other square-jawed, muscular, masculine, and nearly identical men that made the artist an indelible reference point for gay culture in the mid-twentieth century. As part of his pornotopic conceit, Tom of Finland's erotics are based on an aesthetics of sameness.[8] "Same-sex desire" is represented by illustrations populated with uniform men—uniformly masculine, uniformly shaped, and usually wearing some kind of uniform. In Tom of Finland's world, as in the world of gay "clone" masculinity his work so directly inspired, the "same" of "same-sex" desire is quite literal, at least aesthetically: to be a man who has sex with men is to become visually uniform. As a merchandising logo, adorning t-shirts and sweatpants alike, "Tom's Men" implies that its wearer could be or become one of these men, could enter this world of desire for masculine sameness. "Tom's Men" represents not only Tom of Finland's artistic world of clones, but embodies his art's capacity to act as a cloning machine—its capacity to turn people onto, and therefore into, "Tom's Men."

In 2020, in a clear tribute to "Tom's Men," illustrator and gay trans man Sami Brussels designed and sold a t-shirt that read "Lou's Men" atop a drawing of activist, writer, and gay trans man Lou Sullivan placed within a downward pointing black triangle (Figure 3). Unlike Tom's Man, Lou Sullivan here is slender, smiling, and approachably forward-facing. Replacing the iconic and anonymized macho of Tom of Finland's world is the specific, historical, self-

[8] By "pornotopic," I am referring to Steven Marcus's concept of "pornotopia," which describes the fictional narrative world of most pornography, where social interactions, characters, and contexts seem constantly primed for spontaneous and serial sex. Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (New York: Routledge, 2017 [1964]), 216.

identified sissy and sissy-loving trans figure of Sullivan. If Tom of Finland's erotics of sameness break through sexual difference with their appeal to a uniformly aestheticized masculinity, how do we conceive of the gesture of this shirt, which takes as its iconic figure someone who approached his desire for the same from and with a difference? What could it mean to be or become, perhaps just by donning this shirt, one of "Lou's Men"? Why is Lou Sullivan, specifically, the face of this gesture of gay trans sameness? And what does it mean that, here, Sullivan is both the author of his image and the image itself? If "Tom's Men" is a gesture of uniting cis gay men under an icon of erotics, sameness, and masculinity, "Lou's Men" extends and transforms that gesture in its appeal to gay trans men and sissies, staging Sullivan to open up the concept of "same-sex desire" to gay trans sexual cultures.[9] In this chapter, I am interested in asking how this reading of the desire for sameness as a specifically trans gay desire refines our sense of the connection of gay and trans meanings, eroticism, and community.

To answer these questions, I close read Sullivan's diaries—written from the 1960s to the 1990s and recently published in a substantive volume as *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan* (edited by Zach Ozma and Ellis Martin, 2019)—and personal correspondence for the way his writing reveals rigorous thinking about the relationship between his gay trans identification, gay sexual cultures, and the desire for sameness. I argue that Sullivan's writing represents an erotic theoretical project of gay sameness, comparable in particular to the 20th century's most developed theory of gay sameness, Leo Bersani's concept of

[9] While I use "cis" here and elsewhere in the chapter to contrast the trajectory of embodiment of someone like Lou Sullivan from someone like Tom of Finland, much of the work of this chapter (and this dissertation as a whole) is to show Sullivan's own eroticized rendering of gay maleness as already a trans position. For Sullivan, as we will see, gayness and transness were compossible. When I use "cis" here, I am not attempting to make a definitive declaration on a particular figure's gender, but instead am using it as a comparative term to mark the difference in life trajectory that often affected Sullivan's interpersonal relationships or that is present in the tributes to him analyzed in the final portions of the chapter. The distinction between "cis" and "trans" in the case of gay men, though challenged by the very premise of the dissertation, presents a real dimension of difference that is significant to the erotic dynamics covered herein.

"homo-ness"—what he calls gayness's capacity to "manifest not the limits but the inestimable value of relations of sameness."[10] I will show, however, that Bersani's version of this concept, like those that preceded it, fails to incorporates trans embodiment and desire, especially in its continual grounding of relations of sameness in genital parallel. Sullivan's writing, instead, offers a conceptual architecture around the desire for sameness that is much more attuned to transness and to relations of eroticized sameness between cis and trans gay men. He accomplishes this through a complex reading of gay men's gender (including his own) that understands gayness as an already trans position. In doing so, Sullivan's writing creates a new path towards thinking gay studies and trans studies together, especially providing new theoretical purchase on the question *what is this "same" in "same-sex" or "same-gender" desire?*, a question that has too often been used to write transness out of gayness entirely.

I argue here that the Bersanian version of gay trans sexuality represented by Sullivan's life and work is the foundation of his contemporary iconicity, not just his prolific activist work and strategic navigation of the trans medical complex. Contemporary tributes to Sullivan—based on the intimate community readership of his personal writing, both in its current home at the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco and in republication[11]—actively dialogue with the erotics of sameness that I will be anatomizing in Sullivan's work. Thus, my analysis of his diaries here is not meant as an individual psychological case study of Sullivan, but as a close reading of a body of work with wide readership and profound community influence. Indeed, in

[10] Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 6-7.

[11] The GLBT Historical Society was the first to publish excerpts from Sullivan's diaries in their newsletter in 1993 with framing text by Susan Stryker. Stryker, having processed Sullivan's papers for the GLBT Historical Society, was an early posthumous champion, detailing his activist career in an essential 1999 article. Only brief lines from Sullivan's diaries were published in quite scattered venues until 2009, when Sean Dorsey incorporated substantive diary excerpts into a dance piece (see the last section of this chapter). More substantive selections of diary excerpts were later published in Brice Smith's 2017 biography of Sullivan, a 2018 monograph by Lanei M. Rodemeyer, and two 2019 essays by Francisco González and Barry Reay. *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* represents the largest selection of Sullivan's diaries published as of this writing.

the last section of this chapter, I substantiate my sense of Sullivan's influence by looking at works that pay tribute to the erotic dimensions of his diary practice. This includes a 2009 dance performance by Sean Dorsey as well as the 2019 publication of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* and two short films that reference it: *Bros Before* (dir. Henry Hanson, 2022) and *I Have to Think of Us as Separate People* (dirs. Chris Berntsen and Stephen Ira, 2019). Diving in this way into artifacts of Sullivan's reception, I argue that Sullivan's iconicity for gay trans men signals not just the representational desire for queer ancestry, but a revolution in gay trans erotics around the desire for sameness. In tributes to him, including in the "Lou's Men" shirt above, Sullivan works as an icon for an eroticized sense of community among gay trans men and between trans and cis gay men as peers, lovers, and clones of each other. In this argument, I am especially influenced by Cass Adair and Aren Aizura's writing in favor of thinking "the erotic [as] a site of producing trans identity or practices."[12] Reading Sullivan's legacy through Bersani's homo-ness allows us to think of him (and of gay trans sexual culture in his wake) as a figure representing the coming together of gayness and transness to fulfill what Tim Dean calls the "promise" of the clone, "that one may embrace rather than remain alienated from oneself."[13]

When I make such an argument about Sullivan as a foundational thinker of Bersanian "homo-ness," I do not mean to imply that foregrounding "homo-ness" in trans desire cleanses its more pernicious conceptual dynamics. Following some of the racialized critiques of sameness in gay studies, as in José Esteban Muñoz or Stephen Knadler, it is apparent that we cannot ignore the prevailing whiteness of the archives of both the Sullivan and Bersani traditions.[14] As Michael

[12] Cassius Adair and Aren Aizura, "'The Transgender Craze Seducing Our [Sons]'; or, All the Trans Guys Are Just Dating Each Other," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (2022): 46.
[13] Tim Dean, "Sameness Without Identity," *UMBR(a): Sameness* (2002): 36.
[14] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 34-35; Stephen Knadler, "Leo Bersani and the Nostalgia for White Male Radicalism," *Minnesota Review* no. 47 (1996): 169-176.

Warner warned us, a conceptual overreliance on gender as the axis of difference/sameness in the scene of desire can elude how other distinctions, such as race, produce senses of alterity.[15] In the objects of these archives, whiteness seems an active, if often tacit, contour of gendered identification. However, in the course of this chapter, we will also see two important influences for Sullivan's thought with an interesting racial proposition—a somewhat obscured Latinidad. In thinking about Sullivan's own icon figures, namely John Rechy and Jack Bee Garland, I will attempt to interpret how their racial self-localizing affects Sullivan's worship of them and therefore his sense of the desire for sameness. I will emphasize that what I take as Sullivan's trans intervention in the gay studies approach to sameness does not avoid the criticisms of homo-ness's racial obfuscation.

Another, this time more intimate, form of ambivalence around sameness will also appear in the course of Sullivan's writing: his lovers, the anchors of his eroticized sameness, were often strongly opposed to the trajectory of his transition. While Sullivan was deeply attached to an eroticism that blended desire and identification, framing his lovers as versions of a self he felt to be both present and imminent, his relationships with other men often became the most conflicted scenes of his continual becoming. Sameness here generates both the mechanics and the friction of Sullivan's personal and erotic development, indexing how transphobia and desire deeply interlink. I use Sullivan's reflections on this situation to create a productively ambivalent re-reading of what Bersani calls "self-subtracted being."[16]

Therefore, rather than endorsing homo-ness from a trans lens, I am interested in understanding how our sense of sameness as an erotic axis and as a concept in gay and trans

[15] Michael Warner, "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality," in *Engendering Men: The Question of Feminist Criticism,* ed. Joseph A. Boone (New York: Routledge, 1990), 200.
[16] Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," *UMBR(a): Sameness* (2002): 11.

studies changes via an understanding of Sullivan's body of work and iconized reception. Furthermore, I am interested in how approaching sameness through Sullivan's work reframes the conceptual, aesthetic, and erotic connection between transness and gayness.

"I Feel He is My Soul"

For Lou Sullivan, diary writing was always a masturbatory practice. From when he began his diary as a ten-year-old in 1961 in Wisconsin to just months before his passing in San Francisco in 1991 from AIDS-related complications, Sullivan used his diaries to process the desire for others as a desire for himself, to process a developing interlinkage of his sexuality and gender.[17] "He is my heart + mind in a person" Sullivan wrote as a child about one of his first celebrity crushes, The Richard of the short-lived Milwaukee band The Velvet Whip; "That's why I love to look at T. Because that's where I'm at inside," he wrote as an adult about his last long-term lover.[18] Writing through his childhood boy-craziness (including his rather potent Beatlesmania) or his adult loves and sexual escapades, Sullivan used his diaries to transmogrify his external desires for others into a dense and intimate sense of self.

When I call this a masturbatory practice, I am not being euphemistic about the auto-referential. Rather, I am being quite literal: the diaries excelled in their role as a space for Sullivan to work out the complex fantasies and desires that inspired his masturbation and sex life. In a description of his masturbation in the early 1970s, he notes a convergence of desire and

[17] Francisco J. González, "Writing Gender with Sexuality: Reflections on the Diaries of Lou Sullivan," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 64, no. 1 (2019): 70.
[18] Louis G. Sullivan, *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan,* eds. Ellis Martin and Zach Ozma (New York: Nightboat Books, 2019), 45, 326. Sullivan's journals often include idiosyncratic and vernacular spellings. This includes what Ozma and Martin describe as a "glyph…his plus sign-ampersand hybrid" (14) to mean "and" throughout his journals. I am rendering the text of his journals as faithfully to the 2019 Nightboat edition as possible, but in the case of this glyph I have chosen to typographically simplify it by rendering it only as a plus sign. I also follow this edition's discretion in referring to Sullivan's principal lovers as J and T, rather than using their first names.

identification: “and so I had to sleep with the boy I am + make love to myself, like I have every nite. I pretend I’m a boy in bed + think how it feels.”[19] Early in his life, this fantasy was often as disorienting as it was satisfying. An entry written just before the one previously mentioned reads, “I held myself + stroked my skin like I always do + imagining I was a beautiful boy I was sleeping with + then it began to get too real + I felt my mind + my body separating.” Indeed, we see tracked in the arc of Sullivan’s diaries that it is through masturbation, both the literal act and the writing of it, that he solidifies a vocabulary for himself of his “interior” and “exterior” as differing domains of his selfhood. That is, this vocabulary comes to Sullivan long before his reading of sexology or trans activism; it emanates not from the lineage of the “wrong body” trope, but instead from the early constellation of sexual desire, gender identification, and life writing represented in his diaries.

Sullivan frequently expressed his desire for other men as the experience of recognizing an internal and abstracted sense of himself—his “soul,” “inside,” “heart,” “mind”—reflected in them. “When I’m with him I just feel like a part of myself is walking around in another body + we’re out together,” he wrote of J, the main love of his 20s.[20] This language is not only used to reflect on cis men, but also on trans elders and mentors: about meeting fellow trans men’s activist (and later Sullivan’s personal counsellor) Steve Dain, Sullivan writes “I cannot help falling in love with him. I feel he is my soul.”[21] This distinction between his interior and exterior is not always, or even primarily, dysphoric.[22] It is often the method by which Sullivan comes to

[19] Sullivan (2019), 105.
[20] Sullivan (2019), 148.
[21] Sullivan (2019), 170.
[22] While I say that this was not primarily a dysphoric relation, it is true that Sullivan was often frustrated by his body and saw it as a limiting feature of his selfhood, but he most often described this in terms of disability. Sullivan spent significant amounts of time in support groups for men with disabilities, before and after his seroconversion. This is also the rhetorical model he advocated to others with. In *Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual,* his successful guidebook, Sullivan (1985: 29) writes that “many people must face life physically handicapped—the female-to-male is one of them.” In a 1980 letter to another gay trans man about difficulties in the

recapture erotic investment in himself by reference to others. In this sense, Sullivan's homosexuality acts as an art of the self that affirms who he is and will become by erotic study of the men he sees as similar to his emerging sense of self. I would like to propose that this formulation, which as Sullivan's life develops becomes more and more directed to the self-development of his body and gender, is the core of a trans theoretical project akin to Bersani's "homo-ness," the network of "inaccurate replication" that characterizes gayness's ethical and psychic intervention.[23] The "inaccurate replication" that Bersani describes helps us frame essential moments in Sullivan's diaries, such as his writing that "in my search for the perfect male companion, I find myself. In my need for a man in my bed, I detach myself from my body and my body becomes his."[24] In Sullivan's writing through his desire for others towards the kind of subject he will continually develop into, we see the erotic and temporal dimensions of Bersani's axiom that "every subject re-occurs differently everywhere."[25] "Homo-ness" in Sullivan is immanent and imminent—it reflects an essential self-image in the image of other gay men and this reflection guides the continued aesthetic and erotic development of Sullivan's body.

But this is not, conceptually speaking, how Bersani's "homo-ness" is supposed to work, as on close analysis his framework depends on genital parallel as the anatomical reference underlying the sameness of gay relations. Bersani's revaluing of sameness, as it is most deeply articulated in *Homos*, begins as a decrying of how social construction theorists like Foucault, Butler, Wittig, and Warner, have made it so that "gay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared

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man's relationship with a cis man, Sullivan writes "[y]ou are someone born w/o loegs [*sic*.] watching someone running." For more on Sullivan and disability, see Awkward-Rich 2020: 20-36 and Smith 2017: 161-184. Letter from Sullivan to Stephen Ihatomma Russell Royce, December 3, 1980. Box 1, Folder 48-80 2:2 FTM Correspondence, Louis Graydon Sullivan papers (1991-07), Courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

[23] Bersani (1995), 146.

[24] Sullivan (2019), 209.

[25] Bersani (2002), 17.

into their sophisticated awareness of how they have been *constructed as* gay men and lesbians."[26] This disappearance of the ontological specificity of gay identity, what he calls "de-gaying gayness," marks these discourses as "*desexualizing* discourses."[27] He writes, "You would never know, from most of the works I discuss, that gay men, for all their diversity, share a strong sexual interest in other human beings anatomically identifiable as male."[28] This leaves the gay critic with a gap in his ability to theorize the psychosexual life of gayness: "How, for example," Bersani asks, "does a gay man's erotic joy in the penis inflect, or endanger, what he might like to think of as his insubordinate relation to the paternal phallus?"[29] What *Homos* offers is a "provisional acceptance" of the constructed category of homosexuality, especially its etymological basis of desire for the same, for the sake of investigating such questions.

From here, Bersani offers the core of what he calls "homo-ness," his reading of homosexuality as a "privileged model of sameness." In homo-ness we find "a salutary devalorizing of difference…a notion of difference not as a trauma to be overcome…but rather…a nonthreatening supplement to sameness."[30] For Bersani, homo-ness closes the gap between self and other. This is homosexuality's ethical intervention—undoing the antagonism of sovereign subjectivity and, in Tim Dean's summary, "lay[ing] bare…the relational potential of dissolving the boundaries between oneself and others, or of apprehending these boundaries as illusory."[31] The theory of homo-ness is echoed, implicitly or explicitly, in all of Bersani's work, including his later career interest in the dispersal of subjectivity and receptivity,[32] and it has been

[26] Bersani (1995), 4.
[27] Bersani (1995), 5.
[28] Bersani (1995), 5-6.
[29] Bersani (1995), 6.
[30] Bersani (1995), 7.
[31] Dean, 31.
[32] See Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity,* London: British Film Institute, 2004; and Leo Bersani, "Force in Progress," in *Receptive Bodies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 51-84.

a major concept for many gay studies thinkers in Bersani's wake, such as Tim Dean, Mikko Tuhkanen, Jonathan Kemp, and Ben Nichols, among others.[33] This theory's emblematic figure, according to Tim Dean, is the clone of the gay 1970s, who "makes the image of what one might have and the image of what one might be the same image."[34]

But we should question one of the steps of argumentation in *Homos* that I mentioned above, namely the assumption that gay men "share a strong sexual interest in other human beings anatomically identifiable as male" and exhibit an "erotic joy in the penis." Here, Bersani grounds his critique of the social construction of gayness and his theorization of gayness's relationship to sameness in genital parallel. Bersani is thoughtful about how gay men relate to gender at the psychic level, namely in how gay sexual practices relate to the psychic dominance of the phallus and how his "the incorporation of woman's otherness" acts as a "major source of desiring material for male homosexuals."[35] But the anatomical presence of the penis in gay sex (and its signification of a body "identifiable as male") seems surprisingly entrenched. Bersani sees same-sex desire as "detraumatiz[ing] sexual difference (by internalizing it)" through gay men's psychic identifications with women, creating a "desire for the same from the perspective of a self already identified as different from itself."[36] But his formulation of "desire for the same" structurally depends on the perceived reality of the penis and its anatomic correspondence to the position of maleness. Thus, when Bersani attempts to apply his theory of homo-ness to transness, as he does in later writing on the film *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Pierce, 1999), we see how his focus on genital meaning causes his theorization to stumble in regard to trans sexuality.

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[33] See Dean; Nichols (2020); Jonathan Kemp, *Homotopia?: Gay Identity, Sameness & the Politics of Desire,* New York: Punctum Books, 2015; and Mikko Tuhkanen, "Clones and Breeders: An Introduction to Queer Sameness," *UMBR(a): Sameness* (2002): 4-7.
[34] Dean, 36.
[35] Bersani (1995), 60.
[36] Bersani (1995), 58-59.

On the subject of trans man Brandon Teena and his lover Lana, historical figures fictionalized as protagonists of *Boys Don't Cry*, Bersani questions how it is possible for Brandon and Lana to think of their coupling as a heterosexual one.[37] Brandon's trans identity, he writes, could be thought of as a repudiation of what could have been his lesbianism, a turning to a more conventional shape for desire: described with Proustian inflection, "Brandon desires girls who desire boys…[and] must fake being a boy in order to be a 'real' dyke."[38] In any case, what Bersani seems more interested in is Lana, who desires Brandon as a man even though "Brandon has what is universally recognized as an unambiguously female sexual anatomy."[39] Bersani writes in answer to this so-called contradiction that Lana's girlhood is so "fully incorporated" that "what Lana is attracted to in Brandon is Teena… the girl under Brandon's appropriated masculine façade."[40] He concludes that, rather than counteracting Lana's desire, Brandon's genitals and chest act as "the anatomical confirmation of the profound correspondence between the two." Here, Bersani returns to homo-ness: "to draw the most far-reaching lesson from the astonishing figure of Lana, we might say that she exposes…the constitutive homo-ness of desire."[41] He draws from Lana an axiom: "*the object of human desire must, to a certain extent, correspond to the being of the desiring subject.*"[42]

To reframe his theory of homo-ness to this scene of trans desire and desire for transness, Bersani has to contort to fit what he finds as irreducible genital meaning to the psychic movements of desire for the same. Distrustful of the authenticity of Brandon's gender and both Brandon and Lana's sexualities, Bersani fails to imagine transness as a stage that both generates

[37] Bersani (2018), 64.
[38] Bersani (2018), 66.
[39] Bersani (2018), 65.
[40] Bersani (2018), 69.
[41] Bersani (2018), 70.
[42] Bersani (2018), 69.

and receives desire. He sets his own problem for himself when he insists that Brandon's genitals are "universally recognized" and "unambiguously" female and then questions how the heterosexual Lana could find them attractive. In my estimation, Bersani even contradicts his own search for the psychic specificity of gay desire in *Homos* by asserting that a) Brandon could so easily transform lesbianism into heterosexuality via trans identification, and b) that Lana's girlhood could phantasmatically incorporate the lesbianism Brandon supposedly turns away from. This theorization only works if gay desire is reducible to desire across genital sameness and if, as he insists in another writing on trans cinema, that genitals announce gender in advance of and in contrast to the trans subjects they are attached to.[43] Bersani leaves little room to imagine the psychosexual ramifications of the idea that the scene of Lana and Brandon's desire could reinscribe Brandon's genitals as that of a man, or that what Lana could desire is not the "Teena" in Brandon but the Brandon in Brandon.

We can actually keep homo-ness as our guiding concept and get to the value of Bersani's axiom that subject and object corresponded while neither tying ourselves into the knots that Bersani does in talking about transness nor reinscribing the regime of sexual difference. This is, of course, what I argue Sullivan's work does, but other writers in trans studies have also set up the building blocks for such an argument: in fact, Bersani's axiom is a fitting summary of philosopher Talia Mae Bettcher's "When Selves Have Sex," where she argues that taking trans sexuality as primary in the study of sexuality reveals that a gendered eroticization of self contours sexuality equally to the gender of the erotic object. For Bettcher, "erotic object and the

[43] Bersani and Dutoit, 111. On the two trans women characters of *Todo sobre mi madre* (dir. Almodóvar, 1999), Bersani and Dutoit write, "Anatomically, they both have dual identities: they announce themselves as women with their clothes, their breasts and their make-up, and, with their genitals, they repeat themselves as men."

erotic subject are components on one and the same intimization track."[44] While the social allegorizing of genitals to gender does influence the scene of sexuality, Bettcher describes how trans sexual practices recode genital and gendered meaning in light of erotic content and context. "Indeed," she writes, "the erotic uptake of the body part is structurally part of [one's] sexual desire *for* the other partner."[45] While both Bettcher and Bersani seem to agree that "gender is the prime modality by which self and other are mirrored," Bettcher's trust of trans sexual practices opens her analysis to a wider sense of gender's relation to the body.[46]

My interest here is in how gayness in particular works in this reading of erotics. Gayness provides the structure of Sullivan's lucid interweaving of erotic subject and object, but without a psychic foundation in genital parallel. I follow Vernon Rosario's sense that once one pays due attention to trans sexualities, one finds that "clearly, the union of same-sex genitals is not the *sine qua non* of homosexuality"—nor need it be, I add, the *sine qua non* of homo-ness.[47] Instead, we will see that Sullivan conceives of male gayness as already a trans position, especially in its relation to the aesthetics of gender. It is this reframing of the gendered meaning of gayness that subtends the premise of sameness between himself and his lovers.

Sullivan was enraptured by gay men's styles of gendered play, from sissies and drag queens, to ephebic beauties and hypermasculine leather daddies.[48] Sexually he was particularly interested in effeminate men, which during the first half of his life he understood as a reflection of his selfhood as a "boyish girl" and which he later understood as a male sissy alignment.[49] An

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[44] Talia Mae Bettcher, "When Selves Have Sex: What the Phenomenology of Trans Sexuality Can Teach About Sexual Orientation," *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no. 5 (2014): 615.
[45] Bettcher, 611.
[46] Bettcher, 616.
[47] Vernon A. Rosario, "Trans (Homo) Sexuality? Double Inversion, Psychiatric Confusion, and Hetero-Hegemony," in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 43.
[48] Sullivan (2019), 64; González, 71.
[49] Sullivan (2019), 66.

adolescent Sullivan, on reading John Rechy's *City of Night*, writes "my heart + soul is with the 'drag queen.'"[50] Most of his major relationships were with feminine men who sometimes also identified as "transvestites" or "crossdressers" themselves; much of their sexual relationships was based in eroticized gendered play. Though these lovers did not necessarily or always self-identify as gay, it is clear Sullivan found his gender to be, to put it simply, easier in gay contexts. On going to a leather bar in 1974, Sullivan writes "after a while I began seeing how un-hard the whole scene was…. I just leaned up against a wall acting hard + it was fun. We're all girls pretending we're big shot boys! HA HA."[51] In reading gay men as pretend men, as internally feminine, as gendered performers, Sullivan affirms a position for himself among them. Sullivan, here, sees gayness as already transmasculine, and therefore operational as a site of belonging for him. His sense of this leather scene is that the masculinity paraded there is brittle and performed, and therefore sexy, interesting, and useful for positioning himself within it. Because of this I am inclined to disagree with Hil Malatino's recent evaluation of Sullivan's particular blend of desire and identification as an experience of envy, as "a desire to have that kind of uncomplicated, carefree, rather thoughtless relationship to masculinity."[52] For Sullivan, it is precisely how complicated, careful, and performed gay masculinity is that makes it appealing. With this in mind, we may revisit the sophisticated metaphor of interiority/exteriority I mentioned above. When Sullivan says "that's where I'm at inside" about his lovers, he is not just saying *this is a man and within me there is a man*, he is saying that the particular constellation of gender in the gay men and sissies that he loved reflects the experience of his transmasculinity. Said another way, even before Sullivan has come to recognize himself as a gay man, he recognizes something

[50] Sullivan (2019), 62.
[51] Sullivan (2019), 111.
[52] Hil Malatino, *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 84.

about himself in gay men; what he recognizes, counterintuitively, is gender, a certain form of masculinity askew that rings with his sense of self. Eventually, Sullivan will find the best way to describe his gender to be (in his words to a psychologist) a "fruity little faggot."[53]

Though in Sullivan's activism he was known for separating the medical complex's assumption of a causal relationship between gender and sexuality, arguing for the recognition of gay trans people by a medical complex that treated transition as a normalizing procedure,[54] in his journals his gayness was not a separate proposition from his transness. Rather than conceiving of gayness as an appended condition to his becoming a man, Sullivan lived his trans identity as a life of being and becoming gay. "It's so easy for me to substitute 'gay' for 'transsexual' and still have the story come out the same," wrote Sullivan in the mid 1980s.[55] It might even be right to say that "identifying as a man," as our current lingo might put it, was a rather secondary proposition of Sullivan's gender to the more primary "being gay." Founding his vision of erotic sameness on this conception of gayness represents a rather different way of thinking trans homo-ness than Bersani gives us a roadmap for. But thinking in this way lets us reveal what I take to be an important truth about homoerotics: that "gay" operates as a gender, not despite its being a sexuality but precisely because it is a sexuality.

This being said, we would be pastoralizing if we characterize gayness and sexuality as always affirming for Sullivan. His sense of belonging in the social worlds of gay men was often unstable and his primary romantic relationships, though sites of affirmation and pleasure, were where his gender came under the most pressure. Both of his life's serious lovers, J and T, cast

[53] Sullivan (2019), 212.
[54] Eli Coleman and Walter O. Bockting, "'Heterosexual' Prior to Sex Reassignment – 'Homosexual' Afterwards," *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality* 1, no. 2 (1988): 69-82; Susan Stryker, "Portrait of a Transfag Drag Hag as a Young Man: The Activist Career of Louis G. Sullivan," in *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Kate More and Stephen Whittle (London: Cassell, 1999), 62-82.
[55] Sullivan (2019), 325.

doubts on Sullivan seeking further medical transition. J at first saw Sullivan's contemplation of hormones and surgery as an extension of a problem "of fashion," which Sullivan understood and for some time agreed with as a distinction between his being a transvestite rather than transgender.[56] J had similar queer interests early on, writing to Sullivan in 1974, "So what's this straight doing frequenting fag bars? Good question. Am a vampire…I suck out the forms. I'm after gay forms of behavior…new ways of being masculine."[57] Their early relationship was characterized by the eroticization of their parallel gendered play, or as Sullivan put it in his reply to J's aforementioned letter, "You're my counter-ego. A mirror image."[58] However, as their relationship went on while living apart, and while Sullivan's sexuality and gender clarified and J's normalized, J's feelings about Sullivan's transition grew increasingly negative. On Sullivan's getting top surgery, J writes him, "You are killing yourself in my mind."[59] He accused Sullivan of pursuing transition because the two of them no longer lived together, that the surgeries were an indirect way of continuing to be with him. Sullivan replied in a twisting of J's accusation, "You are right…that when I don't have a boyfriend, my urge to dress + pass becomes strongest. I think it's because when I'm alone, I have no man to pretend I am, no man to live through vicariously, which is what I did with you. You were 'me.' Now that I'm alone, I see…that we cannot expect others to fulfill us."[60] During the difficult emotional knots of this relationship dynamic, Sullivan wrote in a note-to-self, "I have to think of us as separate people,"[61] a reversal

[56] Sullivan (2019), 169.
[57] Letter from J to Sullivan, c. March or April, 1974. Box 3, Folder 105 2:3 Correspondence, Jim Koetting, 1974 (3 of 5), Sullivan papers, GLBT Historical Society.
[58] Letter from Sullivan to J, April 15, 1974. Box 3, Folder 105 2:3 Correspondence, Jim Koetting, 1974 (3 of 5), Sullivan papers, GLBT Historical Society.
[59] Letter from J to Sullivan, 1979, copied in the diaries of the same year. Box 1, Folder 11 1:4 Journals, 1975-1989, Sullivan papers, GLBT Historical Society.
[60] Letter from Sullivan to J, October 3, 1979, copied in the diaries of the same year. Box 1, Folder 11 1:4 Journals, 1975-1979, Sullivan papers, GLBT Historical Society.
[61] Loose, hand-written sheet, tucked into the back of 1975-1977 journals.

of the form of desiring-sameness that merged his love of J and his gay transmasculinity in the early years of their relationship.

Unfortunately, this dynamic repeated with his second primary lover, T, with the prospect of his bottom surgery. "He said he WANTS to have sex with me, but it's hard to reconcile if I'm a man or a woman; that he feels living with me would be too much of a strain on his energy," Sullivan wrote.[62] As the sexual side of their relationship developed, T was quite fixated on Sullivan's genitals and strongly resisted Sullivan's desire for phalloplasty. T self-identified as straight and exhibited an obvious degree of panic at the thought that desiring Sullivan made him gay. Though Sullivan saw these relationships, being intimate connections to men who loved him, as affirming to his sense of his life as a gay man, any reader of these diaries is painfully aware of how his lovers deny or reroute particular trajectories of his erotic, gendered life. Malatino adroitly reflects on this paradox in Sullivan's erotic life, especially in his relationship with T, as a sobering recognition that desire and dysphoria are so entangled in a transphobic society as to seem consubstantial:

> [Trans people] are surrounded by faithless witnesses and fetishized by them to boot. Our bodies are interpellated as not enough, too much, but also…desired and desirable precisely because of this, in ways that run roughshod over our gender identities, our sense of self. To kiss—to engage viscerally and intimately—might be to trigger, to run headlong into haptic and verbal forms of bodily misrecognition. Desire and dysphoria are tightly bonded to one another, and in the midst of transition, even the most well-intentioned and routine forms of intimacy run the risk of being received as confirmation that an other wants a bodymind that we aren't (entirely or quite).[63]

Sullivan's diaries not only provide a record of this knotting of desire and dysphoria, they also show a life that intimately attaches itself to this knotting. Sullivan, precisely because of his structuring fantasy of desiring-sameness, seemed to actually remain longer in these

[62] Sullivan (2019), 290.
[63] Hil Malatino, *Trans Care* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 53.

entanglements. He hoped for them because he saw them as integrally connected to the coherence of his selfhood. In internalizing J and T as mirrors of his selfhood, Sullivan struggled to detach from these men even when they barred the progress of his developing body and self.

What is so painful for Sullivan is the realization, often a slow one, that he would have to abandon these relationships to move forward with particular stages of his medical transition, that the constitutive and affirming fantasy of fusion to his lovers also presented a challenge to his bodily transformations. "I feel that I'll have to lose T in order to have cock surgery, like I felt I had to lose J to take hormones," Sullivan wrote.[64] Here, the men who erotically reflect a sense of self that Sullivan feels "inside" are exactly the nearest barriers to a set of medical procedures that would make him more physically and psychologically comfortable. These relationship dynamics seem to me to expose a tense underbelly to Sullivan's essential structuring fantasy: Sullivan's merging of desire and identification meets with the tight bond of desire and dysphoria as his lovers forcibly assert their misrecognitions onto him. Though Sullivan recognizes something about himself in J and T, J and T's self-recognition depends on their misrecognition of Sullivan as held frozen in a particular point of his transition. Sullivan is aware that his body reflects on the sexuality of his lover, which is precisely the condition of his desire to continue to transform it, but his lovers fear that his transforming body will reflect a version of their sexuality they are unable to reckon with. Here, we are clearly not in Jonathan Kemp's Bersanian "homotopia,"[65] an erotic horizon where desire never depends on lack and difference; that world does not yet hold under the conditions of transphobia. Sullivan's writing of "I have to think of us as separate people" represents the two conflicting sides of his structuring erotics: a fantasy of experiencing his self in the self of others, while learning that it is precisely his self that must be defended for

[64] Sullivan (2019), 329.
[65] Kemp, 30.

the sake of his development and survival. Here lies another essential difference between Sullivan and Bersani: Sullivan cannot ascribe fully to Bersani's sense of the self as a defensive, violent construct worth losing in the ecstasy of merging—not just yet—as he needs the self's defenses to achieve the bodily transformation from which he can endeavor to dissolution without dysphoria. "Self-subtracted being," as Bersani called the horizon of homo-ness, is for now too tied up with the risks of a world inhospitable to Sullivan's becoming.[66]

Lou Sullivan's Gay Studies and the Obfuscation of Race

Because I am arguing that Sullivan's oeuvre represents an intervention in the lineage of gay studies, I want to look closer at some of the ways Sullivan actively positioned himself within the gay studies of his moment and how this intellectual position may reflect on the Bersanian dynamics that I am describing here. Most famously, Sullivan dedicated himself to a scholarly project of finding predecessors and analogues for himself as a gay trans man in the historical archives. Prior to the 1980s, Sullivan had long been interested in collecting news clippings on historical or contemporary transmasculine people and "passing women," and in 1975 he published a short biography of the American soldier Deborah Sampson/Robert Shirtliff.[67] But Sullivan's interest in queer historiography truly blossomed on witnessing a slideshow lecture by gay historian Allan Bérubé in 1979 titled "Lesbian Masquerade: Some Lesbians in Early San Francisco who Passed as Men." Bérubé's argument, which was part of a major rise in gay historical work and the first generation of a solidifying American gay studies field,[68] described its subjects as lesbians who passed as men so that they could have relationships with other

[66] Bersani (2002), 11.
[67] Louis G. Sullivan, "A Bicentennial Gem: The True Story of Deborah Sampson, 1760-1827," *GPU News* 4, no. 9 (1975): 10-14.
[68] Stryker (1999), 73-74.

women while mitigating attendant homophobia. This was an electrifying argument for Sullivan, a display that gay history writing had advanced significantly in the last decade. He would attend this presentation five more times in as many years. But some of Bérubé's argument seemed off to Sullivan: his own trans gayness destabilized the terms of Bérubé's argument, which saw passing as an attempt to socially recontextualize gayness as straightness through trans performance/embodiment. Sullivan knew from his own research over the years of watching the presentation that one of Bérubé's subjects, Jack Bee Garland,[69] had had no female partners and frequently sought the social company of other men; indeed, later in his life Sullivan would claim that his own "gay sensibility" told him Garland was a "man loving man."[70] Sullivan endeavored to research Garland further, research that would eventually form into a book-length biography.[71] Bérubé, impressed by Sullivan's rebuttal, and recognizing him from multiple visits to the same presentation, invited Sullivan to join the efforts of the soon-to-form GLBT Historical Society, which he would be active in until his passing.[72] When Susan Stryker calls trans studies queer theory's "evil twin," and writes that trans studies "willfully disrupts the privileged family narratives that favor sexual identity labels…over the gender categories…that enable desire to take shape and find its aim," we may hear an evolution from the intervention on Bérubé's historiography enacted by Sullivan, who Stryker deeply admired and whose papers she processed during her time working for the GLBT Historical Society.[73] In his work on Garland and others, Sullivan finds and entangles with an ancestor figure who both reflects his own trans gayness and reverses the assumptions of a forming gay studies.

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[69] Garland used many names and pronouns throughout his life. In line with Sullivan's writing, I tend here to use the name "Jack Bee Garland" and he/him pronouns.
[70] Sullivan (2019), 141.
[71] Louis G. Sullivan, *From Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland*, Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990.
[72] Stryker (1999), 74.
[73] Susan Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 212.

In Sullivan's relationship to Garland, we may see an example of what scholars like Heather Love have described as a queer historical impulse towards establishing ancestry "as a means of securing a more stable and positive identity in the present."[74] Indeed, Sullivan's research played a prominent role in emotionally sustaining his medical transition and substantiating his early formations of transmasculine community.[75] But Garland makes for an odd object for this kind of historical attachment from Sullivan. In sharp contrast to Sullivan himself, Garland's sexual life and preferences are noticeably undocumented, only implied by some of his social company; as well, Garland's own words are overshadowed in the archive by a plethora of scandalized journalistic writing on his social presence. What seems to interest Sullivan most explicitly are Garland's techniques of passing, which beyond masculine dress, relied on pretending to mutism to avoid exposing any perceived femininity to his voice.[76] Sullivan too employed analogies of disability and transness, as in his influential guidebook for trans men, where he writes that "many people must face life physically handicapped—the female-to-male is one of them."[77] But Garland also relied on another form of passing: an obscuring of his paternal Mexican heritage, especially in taking his white mother's surname. As Cameron Awkward-Rich has written, "Garland's gendered passing relied on a form of racial/ethnic passing….Garland's proximity to whiteness not only undergirded their ability to cultivate relationships with other white men but also, we might speculate, accounted for some of the fascinated attention their gender presentation provoked."[78] When Sullivan interprets

[74] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 34.
[75] C. Jacob Hale, "Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead: In the Butch/FTM Borderlands," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 319-320.
[76] Cameron Awkward-Rich, "'She of the Pants and No Voice': Jack Bee Garland's Disability Drag," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2020): 22-23.
[77] See note 22.
[78] Awkward-Rich, 26.

Garland's social goodwill amongst groups of white men as a sign that Sullivan's own trans homosexuality has been precedented in history, such an assumption relies on the social transformation afforded by Garland's racial passing.

This peculiar racial dynamic is present as well in another major influence on Sullivan's theorization of gayness—the fiction of John Rechy, whose novel *City of Night* Sullivan encountered as a nineteen-year-old and quickly became obsessed with.[79] It is in Rechy that he first encountered intimate portrayals of hustlers and drag queens and from which he adopted the term "youngman," slang which Rechy used to refer to hustlers, but which Sullivan used for his whole life to refer generally to queer men he was attracted to. For example, in an entry from the early 1970s, Sullivan wrote, fantasizing about J touching his strap-on, "want J to touch it, stroke it while I'm wearing it, as tho it were rly me…. Let me be his youngman."[80] Rechy, though always honest about his Chicano and gay identities, has repeatedly disavowed what he calls "labels" of literary "segregation," including terms like "Chicano literature" and "gay literature."[81] Ben Nichols (2016), has written that, in contrast to Rechy's public distaste for the reduction of his work to (in Rechy's own words) "a restricted audience of like identification,"[82] his fiction actually revels in the erotics of being reduced to sexual likenesses.[83] On Rechy's characters, Nichols writes, "these 'youngmen' become a type, as much from a factory line as the shop mannequins to which they are frequently compared…. The sex world requires them to be nothing other than types…such that they get to be interchangeable" (Nichols 2016: 424-425). In

[79] Sullivan (2019), 62.
[80] Sullivan (2019), 122.
[81] Debra Castillo, "Interview with John Rechy," *Diacritics* 25, no. 1 (1995): 113.
[82] Castillo, 113.
[83] Ben Nichols, "Reductive: John Rechy, Queer Theory, and the Idea of Limitation," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 22, No. 3 (2016): 409-435. As María DeGuzmán has written, Rechy's narrative relationship to both gay and Chicano literature has vastly changed over the course of his fiction. Therefore, Nichols's argument makes most sense when speaking only of Rechy's early work (which is the work Sullivan would have had access to). María DeGuzmán, *Understanding John Rechy* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 75.

City of Night, the particularities of Rechy's unnamed Chicano narrator's life, including his heritage and familial upbringing, are buried in the seriality, taxonomy, and anonymity of the hustling world. In this narrative dynamic, Nichols argues, Rechy provocatively revalues reduction, which makes his work emblematic of Bersanian homo-ness (413).

"The last week or so I've wanted to go + leave everything + join that world," the young Sullivan wrote (2019: 63) of Rechy's metropolis of sexual types. That Rechy's authorship stands in somewhat ambivalent relationship to his own gayness and Latinidad, and that his youngmen actively find these specificities reduced in the scene of sexuality, may be precisely the enabling factor for Sullivan's reverence. In this adolescent moment, where Sullivan's identity as a gay man was still developing, Rechy's alternative and eroticized typology (his "identities" without identities, so to speak) offered a web of relationality that Sullivan felt able to weave himself into. His lifelong use of "youngman" to describe the objects of his attraction signals just how much Rechy's erotic system frames the erotics of sameness with which Sullivan navigates the gay world.

Thus, sameness in Rechy and Garland, formative figures for Sullivan's dedication to gay studies and erotic sameness, is premised on a strategic obfuscation of racial ties. I take this as evidence that whiteness acts as a tacit term modifying gender in the erotics of sameness that I have been describing in Sullivan's work and legacy. Because of this, I want to emphasize that what I take as Sullivan's trans intervention in his contemporary gay studies—publicly around the terms of gay historiography and more privately around the terms of erotic sameness—does not avoid the racial substance of the essential critiques of sameness in gay studies launched by writers like Michael Warner, Stephen Knadler or José Esteban Muñoz.[84] Though Sullivan's

[84] Knadler, 169-176; Muñoz, 34-35.

version of homo-ness offers much in terms of a trans reading of "same-sex" sexuality, it is still hampered by the limit of leaving race unthought as an axis of erotic sameness/difference. I do not mean to say that this is a requisite to any account of gay sameness, but that in the specific lineage I'm tracing here through Bersani and Sullivan, racial differences become obfuscated.[85]

Lou's Men

This will be useful to keep in mind as we encounter the texts of Sullivan's reception in this final section, which take up and embody Sullivan's particular version of homo-ness to generate his continued erotic legacy. Far beyond what Sullivan was able to do with Garland, contemporary media and performance by gay trans men has substantiated Sullivan's symbolic uptake by referencing the fervently self-documented, concentratedly erotic personal writing of Sullivan, including and especially its dedication to erotic sameness. In other words, to use a phrase from Julian Carter, the "transgenderational touch" directed towards Sullivan has a particular erotic contour based in Sullivan's sex writing, his lacing of sexuality and gender, and his homo-ness.[86] Here, I am interested in anatomizing a pattern that Cassius Adair and Aren Aizura describe as their "anecdotal observations" that "[Sullivan]'s diaries circulate among a very ftm4ftm readership. The publication of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* may be looked back on as initiating…the construction of a fandom-like social network that brings t4t trans masc readers into community with one another, including (we believe) through anachronistic t4t desires for Lou himself."[87] This social network is one where Sullivan's image, influenced by the

[85] For example, Joseph Beam and Essex Hemphill's *Brother to Brother* anthology, from about the same period, presents a model of gay sameness that works explicitly through racial Blackness. Joseph Beam and Essex Hemphill, *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men,* Washington, DC: RedBone Press, 2007 [1991].
[86] Julian B. Carter, "Sex Time Machine for Touching the Transcestors," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 705.
[87] Adair and Aizura, 61 n16.

homo-ness expressed in his personal writing, encodes an eroticized scene of contemporary gay trans cloning, an ongoing romance of producing and loving "Lou's Men."

One of the first artistic works to engage in depth with Sullivan's diaries, which had until then been available for readership at the GLBT Historical Society but only published in brief excerpt, was a dance piece by trans choreographer Sean Dorsey. In 2009, Dorsey created a suite of dance pieces based on the diaries of various queer figures; its longest section choreographs movement to the words of Sullivan's diary entries, read aloud by dancers or in voice-over with added commentary scripted by Dorsey. In the piece, four male dancers (including Dorsey himself) wear simple, almost identical undergarments. They frequently move in pairs, embracing and supporting each other. Dorsey and his fellow dancers move in and out of symbolically representing younger and older Sullivans, Sullivan's lovers, and fellow community members. Dorsey often breaks out of this interchange to speak and move as himself. Sullivan's words constantly accompany the dancers' movements, acting as their interpretive frame. The piece is organized by a visual sense of interchangeability between its dancers, between Sullivan and his love objects, and between moments in time.

As Julian Carter has written on the performance, "Dorsey offers a vision of transsexual self-fashioning in which the gay man who will be the end product of transition guides and supports the trans man-in-the-making as he begins to realize himself…Time's pleating here is inseparable from affective and intercorporeal connection."[88] Carter's interpretive gambit is that he sees Dorsey's performance as a refashioning of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs's phrase *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*, the maxim of sexual inversion, where "inclusa" is interpreted

[88] Julian B. Carter, "Embracing Transition, or Dancing in the Folds of Time," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. Aren Aizura and Susan Stryker (New York: Routledge, 2012), 136.

not as "trapped," but rather "embraced."[89] Dorsey's dance stages the mutual embrace, Carter argues, of various points along Sullivan's transition timeline, of the various gendered versions of Sullivan's "anima" (soul) and "corpore" (body), of Sullivan's life and the lives of the trans and gay men who have come after him.

In support of Carter's reading is the dance's interest in a kind of sissy choreography, where its male dancers perform typically feminine movements. In a key example, the dancers mimic Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Cygnets" while a voice-over reads Sullivan's diary entries on coming into gay community. Francisco J. González has written on this gesture as a particularly gay aesthetic "ricochet of gender" performed in light of Sullivan's life-long project of thinking through the imbrication of sexuality and gender.[90] Here, as in Sullivan's early life, a drag gesture (in this case, a becoming-ballerina) acts as an access point to the masculinity of homosexuality.[91] But it is also worth saying that the "Dance of the Cygnets" casts its dancers in a line, one that makes them appear as repetitions of each other. Here, it is not only that such a sissy's choreographic quotation plays with the gender of gay men, but it also creates an aesthetic of interchangeability across time, a line of identical dancers from Sullivan to Dorsey's troupe. The interaction of this sissy "ricochet of gender" with an aesthetics of interchangeability harkens to the dynamics of sameness and gender that I identified in Sullivan's repeated phrasing that the men he loves are the image of his "soul." To return to Carter's framing, in Dorsey's piece the "corps de ballet" becomes the embrace of the "corpore" and "anima," the embrace of Sullivan to men like him.

[89] Carter (2012), 131.
[90] González, 60.
[91] Carter (2012), 139.

While Dorsey's piece is somewhat muted about its sexual implications, Dorsey himself is not. In a 2013 issue of the trans men's lifestyle magazine *Original Plumbing*, titled the "Hero Issue," Dorsey wrote the cover story on Sullivan, titled "You are the Beauty that You Create" after a quote from the diaries and adorned with a shirtless photo of Sullivan in his bedroom. "After years of physical self-consciousness," wrote Dorsey, "Lou blossomed into a voraciously sexually active gay man. Throughout the 1980s, many of Lou's diary entries are rollicking odes to the joys of the flesh…full of cocksucking and wonder and joy."[92] Sullivan's "hero" status in the contemporary is integrally tied to his role, in Dorsey's words, as a "sexual pioneer." Here we see that the sexual, and Sullivan's invested writing of it, though only implicit to Dorsey's dance piece, was always an enabling factor to that piece's gestural vocabulary.

In tributes to Sullivan, the sexual modifies the terms of "community," "belonging," "identity," and "history" that may take center-stage over it. This is certainly the case of the 2019 publication of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*, the largest and most widely-read selection of Sullivan's diaries thus far. While its editors Zach Ozma and Ellis Martin (both gay trans artists and archivists) set out to render as complete a picture of Sullivan's life as possible in the book's pages, it is clear that the erotic pleasures and displeasures of Sullivan's life take central editorial attention. This is observable even in the book's recognizable front cover, which plays off of the aesthetic of the gay lifestyle magazine *BUTT,* cribbing its familiar pink background and black Impact font, centering an image of a marble sculpture's butt. In an interview, Amos Mac asks Ozma and Martin what surprised them most while poring over Sullivan's diaries:

> Ozma: "I didn't quite understand what a pervert Lou was….I think a lot of the lives he had lived surprised me."

[92] Amos Mac and Rocco Kayiatos, eds. *OP/Original Plumbing: The Best of Ten Years of Trans Male Culture* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2019), 166.

> Martin: "The jewelry fetish. That was the one. I've been calling our book launch 'International Trans Masturbation Day' as a joke, because it does feel like we compiled this really smutty book…I really do think he could've written about every single interaction he had in a sexual context…"
>
> Ozma: "And in glorious detail."[93]

As well, at the book's launch event at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, host Isaac Fellman (the GLBT Historical Society's reference archivist) mentions Sullivan's responsibility for "formulating what transmasculine community looks like," to which Ozma responds, "and I think specifically for articulating, like, a desirability there…both among trans men for ourselves and in [the] larger gay community, beginning to carve out a space for an additional variety of gay man."[94] In the reception of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure,* we see how much Sullivan's readership generates trans/homo/erotic pleasures—pleasures that embrace the dynamics of homo-ness from the desiring position of trans embodiment and trans history. In his legacy, Sullivan has become a major node for thinking about, in Adair and Aizura's words, how the (homo)erotic can be "a site of producing trans identity or practices."[95]

In their co-written essay on the early reception of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*, Ozma and Martin describe how the book has facilitated erotic encounters between its readers.[96] "Several people have told us they've been taking turns with their partners reading out loud from Lou Sullivan's diaries in bed," they write with notable pride. For them, Sullivan's diaries also become "a disseminator of public sex culture," a "promise in its own way to living trans men: you can go to gay places; I have been there before."[97] *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*, as perhaps

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[93] Amos Mac, "Lou Sullivan's Diaries Show the Transformative Power of Queer History," *them*, September 23, 2019, https://www.them.us/story/interview-we-laughed-in-pleasure-lou-sullivan.
[94] Video of this event is available at https://youtu.be/-V8fwHdaZbA
[95] Adair and Aizura, 46.
[96] Ellis Martin and Zach Ozma, "Lou Sullivan and the Future of Gay Sex," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (2020): 598.
[97] Martin and Ozma, 599.

the most widely read artifact of Sullivan's life, distributes gay trans sexuality. This is more than clear in the sundry tributes and merch spawned from *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*'s readers, including (among plentiful other examples) the "Lou's Men" shirt from the beginning of this chapter, an Instagram zine for gay trans men titled *Lou's Club*, a short film by Mya Byrne imagining Sullivan cruising, and ephemera by Izzy Kroese, Ozma and Martin themselves, and countless others. *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*, symbolically, creates "Lou's Men" as it moves through the world, as it is traded between hands or read aloud in bed.

Indeed, a recent short film by Henry Hanson actually narrativizes the way in which *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* itself facilitates erotic encounters and identity recognitions. *Bros Before* (2022) is a parodic film starring an all trans cast, in which two initially straight best friends (Billy and Elijah) masturbate together, constantly reassuring each other that their actions do not make them gay. When Billy begins dating a woman, Elijah anxiously navigates his obvious romantic feelings for Billy. The way the viewer learns that Elijah is indeed gay, though in public denial, is by his reading of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* (Figure 3). After a fight between the friends, Billy finds Elijah's copy of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* and reads it with a mix of shock and interest (Figure 4). This surreptitious reading of Sullivan brings the three characters back into a kind of social harmony with each other. Here, Sullivan's diaries are working quite like *The Symposium* in E.M. Forster's *Maurice:* a canonical, homoerotic literary object whose reading and exchange between friends enacts a moment of gay recognition that has thus far felt impossible to speak aloud. If in Sullivan's life, gay literature and pornography enabled him to formulate his identity and to experiment with the sexual cultures of gay men, this published version of Sullivan's diaries is acting here to set gay trans men into a new, erotic relation with each other—Adair and Aizura's "fandom-like social network" of "t4t trans masc

readers." The book itself seems to activate the erotic sameness that animates its pages, as it goes about creating "Lou's Men."

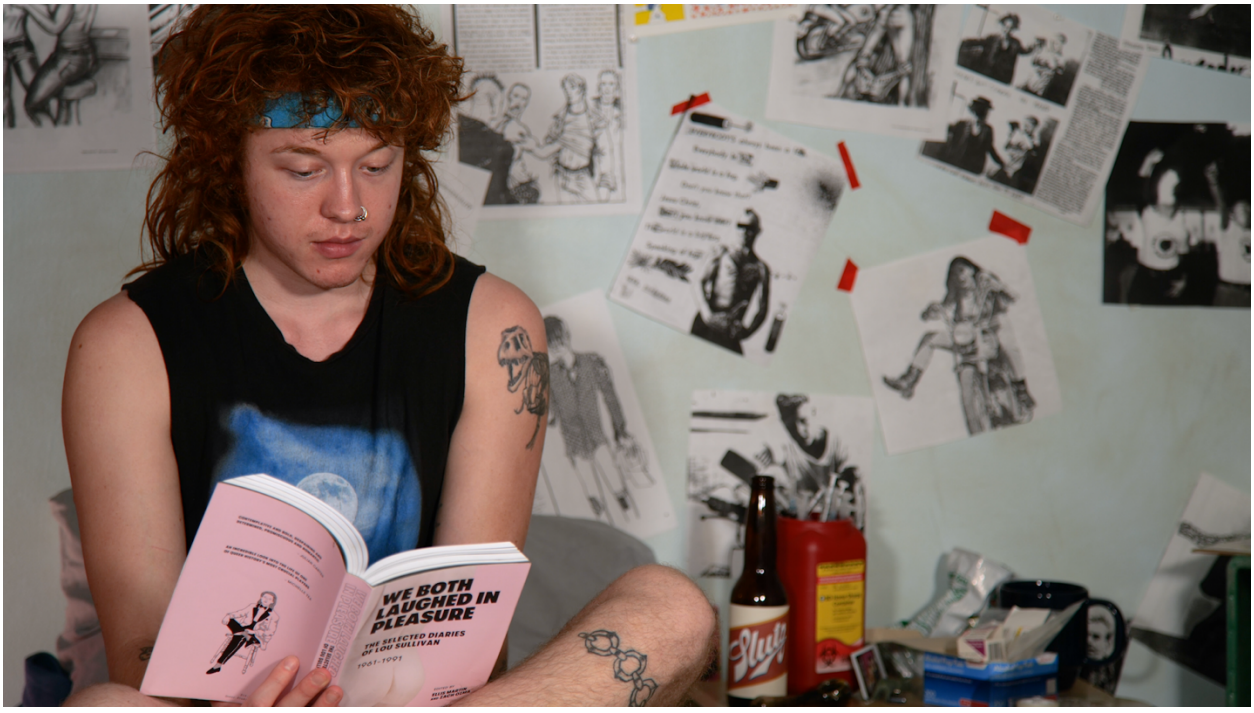

Fig. 4: Elijah (Marten Katze) reading We Both Laughed in Pleasure*. Still from* Bros Before *(dir. Henry Hanson, 2022).*

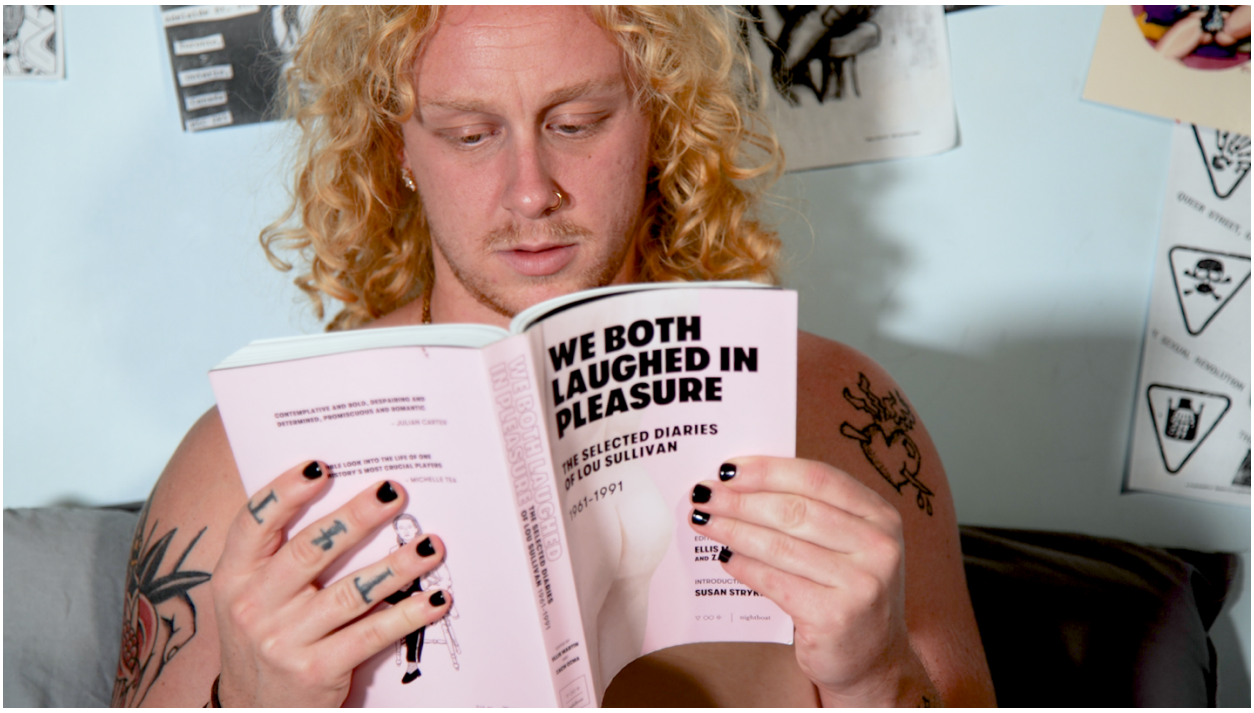

Fig. 5: Billy (Radcliffe Adler) reading We Both Laughed in Pleasure*. Still from* Bros Before *(dir. Henry Hanson, 2022).*

I have been arguing that Sullivan's lucid sex writing encodes a Bersanian erotics of homo-ness, an erotics that, in Sullivan's historical descent, becomes the reference material for a similar desiring-sameness in contemporary gay-trans erotic relations and art making. While I have mostly noted how this dynamic influences the contemporary "t4t" desires remarked on by Adair and Aizura and *Bros Before*, it is also important to say that Sullivan's homo-ness similarly supports desires between cis and trans gay men, an erotic formulation that feels inarguably more fruitful and safer in the wake of Sullivan's life and writing. Why this matters especially is because the cis/trans divide may seem a difference that would short-circuit the erotic sameness premising Sullivan's work. I argued earlier that this is the case in Bersani, but it is not the case in Sullivan or the artifacts of his legacy. Emblematic of this is Stephen Ira and Chris Berntsen's 2019 short film *I Have to Think of Us as Separate People.* The film is dedicated to Sullivan and its title comes from his aforementioned note-to-self about his struggles with J. Ira and Berntsen, a cis-trans gay couple, represent this line in their film's collage of their voices and naked bodies (Figure 5). Each of the two filmmakers film and interview the other about their mutual affection and desire, and the resulting film mixes both recordings until their separate origins are hard to parse. We are shown repeating visual cues to their physical isomorphism, even if we might note their differences, as Berntsen and Ira discuss desire between them and between cis and trans men more generally (phrased, ambiguously, as "boys like you" and "boys like me"). Sullivan and his relations with cis gay men act as an implied precursor to Berntsen and Ira's desire, a guide from the past who found the very erotic sameness worshipped here. The title somewhat twists the original meaning of Sullivan's note-to-self, since the film seems to revel in the eroticism of fusion and gay transmasculinity that in that particular moment Sullivan was attempting to reorient himself to. But their co-interview audio restores the note-to-self's generative tension in

its discussion of anxious desire and clumsy eroticism across cis-trans lines. In their film, the filmmakers desire into sameness, despite—and it might be better said, precisely because of—their cis-trans division. The film begins with one of its filmmakers saying "Our bodies are really different. Like, they look really different. I just, like, feel this really strong, intense impulse towards being one thing. Like, being physically one." At this point, the other filmmaker's voice comes in, and other recordings of both filmmakers speaking overlap. The narrative course of this first statement gets lost as its sound melts into the film's mélange of voices. Here, counter to Bersani's foregrounding of anatomical correspondence to a larger project of sameness, it is precisely a trans-cis gay coupling and their corporeal differences that enact the Bersanian principle of "a willingness to be less," to be one rather than two.[98] "Identities are never individual," Bersani writes with Ulysse Dutoit, "…homosexual desire would be the erotic expression of a homo-ness that vastly exceeds it, a reaching out toward an *other sameness.*"[99] For Ira and Berntsen, Sullivan is the iconic predecessor to such a "reaching out toward an *other sameness*," the erotic actor who has modeled the desire that would produce the "intense impulse towards being one thing" in the coupling of a gay cis man and a gay trans man. He is not simply a parallel to the trans side of Ira and Berntsen's cis-trans relation, but rather is the image of their middle, what is produced by their desiring each other in "a self-love hospitable to difference."[100]

[98] Bersani (2002), 11.
[99] Bersani and Dutoit, 120.
[100] Bersani (2002), 18.

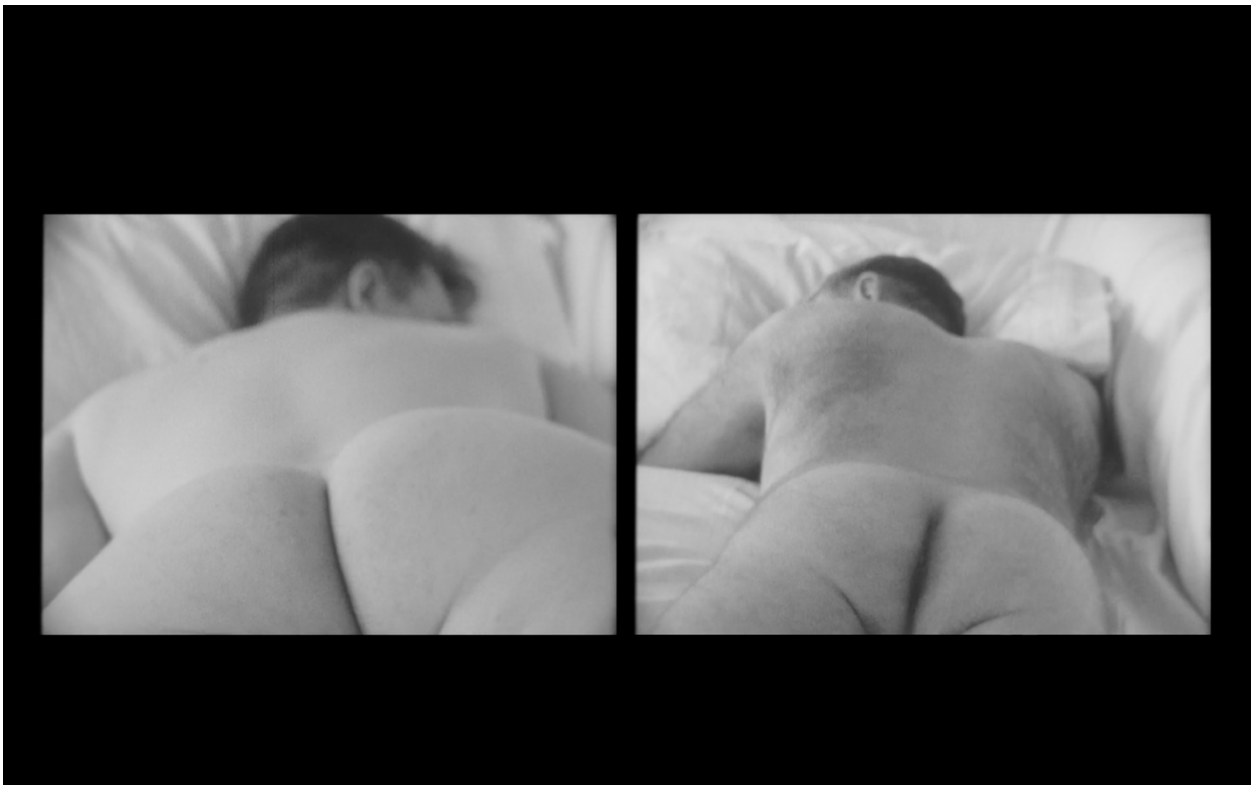

Fig. 6: Still from I Have to Think of Us as Separate People *(dir. Stephen Ira and Chris Berntsen, 2019).*

Ozma and Martin have written that "Lou's diaries offer one way to fold a transmasculine body into the erotic utopic imaginary of gay sexual life."[101] I think this is quite right, but I would also offer here this statement's equal opposite: that Sullivan's diaries offer one way to fold a gay body into the erotic utopic imaginary of trans sexual life. They open gayness, gay sex, and gay theory to the possibilities afforded by thinking with transness, trans sex, and trans theory. I have argued in this chapter that Sullivan's diaries represent the trans erotic dimensions of Bersani's theory of a gay "pleasure in losing or dissolving the self that is in no way equated with loss, but comes rather through rediscovering the self outside the self."[102] It is this version of gay trans

[101] Martin and Ozma, 599.
[102] Leo Bersani, Tim Dean, Hal Foster, and Kaja Silverman, "A Conversation with Leo Bersani," in Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 175.

sexuality that has made Sullivan an emblem for how gay and trans erotics desire into sameness with each other, how they embrace by appearing as forms of each other.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a reading of gay sameness against its own grain, against its tendency towards distancing gayness from transness and from effeminacy, against its tendency towards founding sameness in genital parallel. I have done so not to politically redeem various iterations of the sameness model, but to understand the limits and potentials of sameness as a category for organizing and theorizing the political, cultural, and erotic basis of gayness. Putting sameness under the pressure of this reading, and using Sullivan's innovations as our particular locus, we have revealed sameness's ability to provide a useable and rigorous sense of what is erotically conferred between gayness and transness. I offer Sullivan's account as equal and opposite to the melodramatic, politically frictional, and profoundly intimate renderings of sexual difference and the aesthetics of transfemininity in the gay men's travesti novel of Chapter 2. There, a heavily aestheticized version of sexual difference as a distinctly gay erotics built a symbolic foundation in transfemininity for the founding of the gay Latin American novel. Here, Sullivan's capture of sameness has built the conditions for a new discourse of gay transmasculine erotics.

Chapter 4:

The Possession of Men: Anti-Porn Feminism and Gay Pornography

In the run-up to the 1979 San Francisco mayoral election, which sought to replace both George Moscone and openly gay city supervisor Harvey Milk after their recent assassination, lesbian-feminist activist Sally Gearhart wrote a campaign letter to oppose the gay candidate for Milk's position (Harry Britt) and instead support the heterosexual, progressive candidate, Kay Pachtner. Gearhart's comments reflect a San Francisco deeply divided over gay issues and a feminism troubled by recent developments in gay men's culture. In her letter, she rejects the idea that San Francisco's gay community needs a gay supervisor, critiques the sexualized culture of the Castro, and expresses the differing interests of lesbian and gay male communities. She writes, "I will, of course, continue to defend my gay brother's right to his sexuality…though many of its dimensions embarrass and frighten me," referring explicitly to promiscuity, public sex, "physicalist" Castro culture, and efforts to change age of consent laws. "But I am frustrated and angry," she continues, "that…many gay men remain totally oblivious to the effect on women of their objectification of each other."[1] This phrasing by Gearhart is an instructive one for the organizing questions of this chapter: what does it mean to conceive of objectification as having an effect on a class of people (women) nominally not included in the act of objectification itself (sex between men)? Indeed, how is objectification itself conceived to reify the generic division between men and women? Or more specifically, how is objectification thought to reveal that lesbianism and gay maleness (two categories typically thought by this point in American history

[1] Quoted in Richard Goldstein, "I Left my Scalp in San Francisco: The Politics of Sexuality in an American Town" *Village Voice* (October 1, 1979), 12.

to be generically related)[2] are distinct at the level of cultural and political interests and organization? Lest we lose sight of Gearhart's feeling of frustration and anger, and because this chapter situates itself in the period aptly known as "the sex wars," we should also ask, how do the sexual politics and culture of one group come to be framed as a betrayal of the interests of another? Gearhart's campaign letter is one example of the fiery, intercommunity debates occurring in the American 70s and 80s around gay men's sexual cultures as a marker of their gendered identifications and allegiances.

In this chapter, I am interested in taking up these debates from the particular cultural nexus of pornography, the sexual media form that in this period experienced renewed cultural interest and artistic development, as well as intense legal scrutiny, academic theorization, and activist debate. In the argument of the anti-porn feminist position of the 70s and 80s, porn was generally seen as playing an integral role in gendered power—specifically the socially and symbolically violent hierarchization of men over women. As Andrea Dworkin put it in her classic text of anti-porn feminism, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981), porn embodies male power, a gender system in which men are self-possessed via the possession of women. For Dworkin, porn constantly produces images and events that reinforce, nearly pedagogically, this gendered hierarchization in which women are objectified (which is to say, divided from selfhood) for the extension of male selfhood and power. The debates around this position, which never enjoyed consensus even within its most ardently supportive camps, have been extensively analyzed by critical scholarship.[3] But in this chapter, I want to focus on an important dimension

[2] See my discussion of Allison Bechdel and Radclyffe Hall in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
[3] See, among others: Lorna Bracewell, *Why We Lost the Sex Wars: Sexual Freedom in the #MeToo Era,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021; Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Carolyn Bronstein and Whitney Strub, eds. *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s,* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016; Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

of the sex wars that has garnered less scholarly attention in our contemporary, but which invited no less heated debate in its moment: that is, the interpretation of the gendered aesthetics and politics of gay, all-male porn.

Gay porn, in its relative absenting of women from its erotic imagery, represented a problem case for the anti-porn position. To some anti-porn feminists, it represented an exception; to others, an imitation of its straight counterpart with men simply playing the role of women; and to a select few, gay porn represented an apotheosis of patriarchal representation, the most forceful image of male sexuality. In this same period, though, many gay activists and scholars were theorizing for the first time how gay porn was integral to the catalyzing of gay subjectivity and community. Indeed, for many of these thinkers, who frequently self-identified with the goals of feminism, gay porn represented a resistance to heteropatriarchal oppression and masculine power. Gay porn was composed of erotic representations that went against the very gender and sexual norms that the anti-porn position was warring against. In the context of a growing gay pornographic market and culture, and with a growing theoretical front of what will eventually be called "gay porn studies," anti-porn thinkers were faced with conceptualizing the consequences of gay porn on the gender system they were mobilizing against. Debates between anti-porn feminists, pro-porn gay activists, anti-porn gay activists, and pro-porn feminists (along with the many shades of porn-ambivalence in all camps) took up an incredible amount of space in community forums, public events, documentaries, newspapers, scholarly monographs, and critical volumes. These debates, at their core, represent a working over of the question of the gender of gay men, particularly how their gender relates to the possibility of collaboration or conflict with the goals of feminism.

In this chapter, I interpret this moment as an important flashpoint in the unsteady allegiance between gay men's activism and feminist activism and between gay studies and women's studies. In the arc of the history I trace, we see a vast array of claims on the gender of gay men, including and especially their relationship to masculinity as a system of power. This moment especially tests some of the limits, affordances, and consequences of thinking of gay men as "men," of thinking of homophobia as a byproduct of sexism, and of thinking of gay men as collaborators or enemies of feminism. In sharp contrast to the first two chapters of this dissertation, in which gay men's aesthetic, social, and psychological proximity to women represented the essence of their sexual and cultural condition, here a conception of gay men as men forms an important base for the theoretical and activist debates covered in this chapter. What we see in this period especially is a debate over if and how gay men's erotics and pornographic aesthetics are aligned to masculinity writ large. Because this chapter engages primarily with intellectual and activist history, we will primarily see contradictions in perspective rather than any clear argumentative throughline, but we will come out of the mire with a clearer sense of how this moment's claims on gay men's gender in relation to their erotic imaginary founds our contemporary sense of gay and feminist studies' non-synonymous relation.[4] In the chapter's second half, I attend more specifically to how gay porn studies originates in an encounter with the ideas of anti-porn feminism. I argue that gay porn studies, as a subfield of sexuality studies, is founded in a debate about gay men's gender in pornographic representation.

As implied by this last phrase, it is important for my analysis that the debates of this moment are not simply about the sociopolitical relationship between men and women, but rather

[4] This acts a supplement to arguments by Judith Butler and Janet Halley that identify the debates around lesbianism and feminism in this moment as the catalyst for divisions between feminist studies and gay/lesbian/queer studies. See: Judith Butler, "Against Proper Objects" *Differences* 6, nos. 2-3 (1994): 1-26 and Janet Halley [as Ian Halley], "Queer Theory By Men," *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy* 11, no. 7 (2004): 7-53.

how this relation is represented and constructed by aesthetic representations. The texts that I engage with here are all related to a veritable explosion of scholarly texts in the 1960s and 70s looking at popular aesthetics, especially those of cinema, as a field for the manipulation of beliefs about sociopolitical groups and the lived treatment of these groups. This includes works on the representation of racial difference,[5] gender,[6] and homosexuality.[7] These scholarly accounts saw activist iterations in the intense protests of controversial events and films, such as the feminist protests of the Miss America pageant of 1968 and the 1976 film *Snuff* (which several scholars think of as an inciting event of the anti-porn feminist movement),[8] as well as the gay and lesbian protests of the 1980 films *Cruising* and *Windows*. This explosion of scholarship and activism around representation, along with sociological and historical accounts of the newly matured pornographic industry of the 70s,[9] gave the debates about porn their essential analytic tools. Thus, my analysis focuses on how the debates of the sex wars conceive of gay porn aesthetics as representing and shaping gay men's position within or without masculinity.

Towards these goals, this chapter traces, a) how foundational arguments in anti-porn feminism conceptualized gay men's sexuality, gender, and pornography, and b) how foundational

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[5] See, among others: Natasha Friar and Ralph Friar, *The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel*, New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972; Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films,* New York: Viking Press, 1973; and Jim Pines, *Blacks in Films: A Survey of Racial Themes and Images in American Film,* London: Studio Vista, 1975.

[6] See, among others: Betty Friedan's writing on advertisements in *The Feminine Mystique,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963; Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & The American Dream*, New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973; Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies,* London: New English Library, 1974; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 6–18. Carolyn Bronstein similarly describes these works and others as laying the foundation for the feminist interpretation of porn in the sex wars (Bronstein, *Battling Pornography,* 144-145).

[7] See, among others: Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*: *Homosexuality in the Movies*, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972; Richard Dyer, ed. *Gays and Film,* New York: New York Zoetrope, Inc., 1984; and Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet,* New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

[8] Bronstein, 86-92; Strub, 232; Duberman, *Andrea Dworkin: The Feminist as Revolutionary* (New York: The New Press, 2020), 89-93.

[9] See, among others: William Rotsler's *Contemporary Erotic Cinema,* New York: Ballantine Books, 1973; Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Made Them,* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974; and Paul Alcuin Siebenand, "The Beginnings of Gay Cinema in Los Angeles: The Industry and the Audience," PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1975.

arguments in gay studies in general and gay porn studies in particular were catalyzed by an encounter with anti-porn feminist writing and activism. In the next section of this chapter, I look to some the relationship between feminist and gay men's activism and thought in the early 70s for context on the concentrated rise of the anti-porn movement. After that, I focus on the life-long intellectual collaboration between Dworkin and her intimate partner John Stoltenberg, who primarily self-identified as a gay man. This section pays particular attention to Dworkin and Stoltenberg's ways of fitting gay porn into the anti-porn feminist position, especially through a theorization of gay men's relation to gender. Then, in the last two sections, I look at analyses and defenses of gay porn by gay men. After charting what I call the "liberation argument" in favor of gay porn, I look to foundational writings of gay porn studies by Richard Dyer and Thomas Waugh from the mid-80s. Because much of the writing covered here is published prior to the institutionalization of gay studies in the university, I will pay especial attention to the role of the gay press (especially community magazines like *Gay Community News, The Body Politic,* and *Fag Rag*) in propelling these debates and the intellectual formation of gay porn studies. In this, I follow Michael Bronski's insistence that perspectives in the gay press "not only laid the basis for lesbian and gay studies, but, in a very real sense, *invented* them."[10]

Feminism After Stonewall: Allegiances, Conflicts, and the Rise of Anti-Porn Position

In the earliest days of the contemporary gay movement, in the period preceding and immediately following the Stonewall riots of 1969, the gay movement in large part modeled itself on the activist strategies and theoretical foundations of feminism.[11] For various gay

[10] Michael Bronski, "'Teacher, is there a paper in discourse?'" *Gay Community News* 18, no. 18 (November 11, 1980), 11, 14.
[11] See: Gayle Rubin, "Sexual Traffic: Interview with Gayle Rubin by Judith Butler," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 289; Strub, 261; and Halley, 28.

thinkers of the moment, such as John D'Emilio, feminism revealed that the "root cause" of gay men's oppression was sexism, that homophobia was an expression of misogyny towards deviant and unmanly men, meaning that the flourishing of any gay movement would require an allegiance to feminism.[12] But two parallel problems arose nearly immediately from this allegiance. First, some lesbians who had joined Gay Liberation groups in the excitement of post-Stonewall coalitions quickly became disillusioned by misogynistic attitudes in various gay groups. Important lesbian thinkers like Del Martin and Barbara Grier wrote pieces in 1970 decrying the inauthenticity of "co-ed" organizing.[13] While many lesbians facing this issue invested in lesbian separatist organizing, others, like Andrea Dworkin, centered themselves in the larger Women's Liberation movement (which had been gaining strength after the Ms. America protest of 1968, the founding of Redstockings in 1969, the *Rat* magazine takeover of 1970, among many other events).[14]

The second issue with gay/feminist coalition, felt especially by those lesbians who took their chances on Women's Liberation, was the apparent homophobia and heterosexism of a wide swath of feminists. The early 70s saw a significant retreat by lesbians and gay men from feminist groups in response to various controversies of feminist homophobia. Known as the "gay/straight split" in second-wave feminism, this period was particularly characterized by battles between

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[12] John D'Emilio, "The Universities and the Gay Experience," in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (Routledge: New York, 1992), 124.

[13] Del Martin, "If That's All There Is," *The Ladder* 15, nos. 3-4 (December/January 1970-1971), 4-6; Barbara Grier [as Gene Damon], "The Least of These: The Minority Whose Screams Haven't Yet Been Heard," in *Sisterhood is Powerful,* ed. Robin Morgan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 297-306. As early as 1972, Jill Johnston declared that "the romance of Gay Liberation is basically over. The family romance of the brothers and the sisters. For the favoritism of the parents towards the sons has become manifest. The activist Gay Males have revealed their own complicity in the bargain by pursuing the status awaiting them as the prodigal perverted sons." Jill Johnston, "Hordes of Dykes and Faggots," *The Village Voice* (June 29, 1972), 29.

[14] Dworkin in the early 70s had attempted to find an intellectual and activist home in the gay organizations of New York, including the Gay Academic Union and the National Gay Task Force, but found that the gay men there were less interested in feminist goals (Duberman, 115). See also Duberman, 73 and 299 for discussion of Stoltenberg's shared discontent with GAU, as well as D'Emilio, "The Universities and Gay Experience," 117-127, for an account of discussions of feminism among GAU members.

lesbian and straight feminists.[15] Most emblematic is Betty Friedan's characterization of the lesbian contingent of the National Organization for Women (NOW) as a "lavender menace" in 1969, which caused the resignation of prominent figures like Rita Mae Brown from NOW and the founding of separatist group Radicalesbians.[16] Much of straight feminist invective against lesbianism in this period depended on associating certain kinds of lesbianism with maleness and male sexuality, even as certain strands of lesbian separatism saw themselves as feminism par excellence. Susan Brownmiller, who was at the center of plenty of gay/straight antagonism in feminism in the 70s, wrote that lesbians have "bought the sex roles we [feminists] are leaving behind," referring to the debates around butch/femme.[17] Perhaps even more revealing of the acrimonious tone of so much of the sex wars is the anecdote that at an event in 1979, a lesbian separatist called Brownmiller a "cocksucker," to which she replied that this activist "even dresses like a man."[18] Gay men were in the crosshairs as well: feminists such as Robin Morgan and Karen Lindsey compared drag to blackface and domestic violence, whereas others like Johanna Stuckey compared the homosociality of gay men's community spaces to the "murder" of women.[19] Though gay men relied on feminism as a theory of heteropatriarchal power and a practice of resistance, many activists were discovering in this period that some strands of feminist organizing were antagonistic to aspects of their lives and culture.

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[15] Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19-20.
[16] Bronstein, 54.
[17] Susan Brownmiller, "Sisterhood is Powerful," quoted in Bronstein, 233.
[18] Strub, 239.
[19] Robin Morgan, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions," in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), 180; Karen Lindsey, quoted in Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 205-206; Johanna Stuckey, "The Politics of Powerlessness: An Essay on Patriarchy, Radical Feminism, and Gay Liberation," *The Body Politic* 63 (May 1980), 29.

As the decade goes on, these intercommunity tensions become more and more adhered to issues of sexual practice and representation. As Carolyn Bronstein has written, the genesis of anti-porn feminism in part attempted to repair some of the tensions of the gay/straight split by giving feminists of various stripes a shared rallying point.[20] Debates around porn (as well as sadomasochism and public sex) [21] certainly reshuffled and realigned certain feminist affiliations and greatly expanded mainstream journalistic coverage of feminist activism, but these debates also exacerbated the tensions between lesbian activist groups and between gay men and feminism. The 1976 feminist protest of the film *Snuff* and the obscenity conviction of *Deep Throat* star Harry Reems from the same year garnered uneasy response from gay activists who felt that such attempts at censorship would quickly turn around on gay publications.[22] Then, at its 1980 convention, NOW, attempting to revise its shaky reputation with lesbian feminists, released a resolution to adopt "Lesbian rights issues" in the "official position of NOW," but with the staunch condition that "NOW does not support the inclusion of pederasty, pornography, sadomasochism, and public sex as Lesbian rights issues."[23] As Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter have written, this resolution was part of a larger trend in this moment in which homophobic and sex-negative sentiments were projected particularly onto gay men's sexuality, "allowing 'nice'

[20] Bronstein, 62.
[21] For discussion of the relationship between anti-sadomasochism and anti-porn feminist activism, namely their near synonymity, see Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" and "Blood Under the Bridge: Reflections on 'Thinking Sex'," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 169, 207; and Alex Warner, "Feminism Meets Fisting: Antipornography, Sadomasochism, and the Politics of Sex," in *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s*, eds. Carolyn Bronstein and Whitney Strub (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 251.
[22] Duberman, 92; Strub, 262; See also Bill Callahan, "Harry Reems—Unlikely Civil Liberties Cause" *Gay Community News* 4, no. 21 (November 20, 1976), 3, 6.
[23] National Organization for Women, "Lesbian and Gay Rights," in "Notes and Letters," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 1 (1982): 195-196.

lesbians to feel normalized by their distance from 'disgusting' male sexuality and promiscuity. This move required that 'bad' lesbian sex be attacked as male-identified."[24]

And so it was: as increasing feminist attention was devoted to sadomasochism, pedophilia, porn, and public sex, feminists like Robin Morgan, Robin Ruth Linden, and Dana Lobell continually asserted that lesbians participating in these acts were over-identifying with or imitating gay men.[25] Morgan, who interpreted sadomasochism as a patriarchal act of revenge against feminism, wrote that lesbian sadomasochism seemed "linked to a recent reidentification with male homosexuals…a possible by-product of the new 'bonding' within the 'gay community'…a lesbian copy of a faggot imitation of patriarchal backlash against feminism."[26] It is no coincidence that the 1982 anthology *Against Sadomasochism* begins with Ruth Linden's description of her life in the Castro district and witnessing the "men wearing the paraphernalia of sadomasochism," including her discovery that "recently, there is an occasional woman in similar dress."[27] In the stream of thought Alice Echols calls "cultural feminism"—which she ascribes to the likes of Morgan, Brownmiller, Kathleen Barry, and Mary Daly among others—the identification of particular sexual acts as male-identified (even when the participant was not themselves male) was part of an attempt to define "male sexuality" and "female sexuality" as polarized sexual natures that crossed gay/straight lines.[28] As Morgan puts the divide:

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[24] Duggan and Hunter, 11.

[25] Dana Lobell's comments are from a transcript of a workshop at the Pittsburgh Conference on Pornography 1980, published by Andrena Zawinski in *off our backs* 10, no. 7 (July 1980), 9. Her comments are specifically that Patrick Califia's writing in favor of lesbian sadomasochism in *The Advocate* is a sign of women's "colonization…by gay men."

[26] Robin Morgan, "The Politics of Sado-masochistic Fantasies," in *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis,* eds. Robin Ruth Linden, Darlene R. Pagano, Diana E.H. Russell, and Susan Leigh Star (Palo Alto: Frog in the Well, 1982), 122. She notes that her use of "faggot" is not intended to be pejorative, but in line with the style of the Revolutionary Effeminists, of which her husband Kenneth Pitchford was a leading organizer.

[27] Robin Ruth Linden, "Introduction: Against Sadomasochism," in *Against Sadomasochism*, 1-2.

[28] Rubin, "Sexual Traffic," 289-290; Alice Echols, "The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968-1983," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality,* ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 61.

> Every woman here knows in her gut the vast differences between her sexuality and that of any patriarchally trained male's —gay or straight…that the emphasis on genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, emotional noninvolvement, and coarse invulnerability was the *male style*, and that we, as women, placed greater trust in love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, commitment.[29]

In this partly biological, partly cultural rendering of gendered sexuality, these thinkers, Echols argues, prioritized the task of "exorcizing the male within us and maximizing our femaleness," a goal that often meant the alienation of gay men and any lesbians that may be perceived as being too male-identified.[30] This interpretation of gendered sexuality interprets gay men as men in a rather strict sexual sense, but also leaves open the possibility that one could choose, ethically and politically, to disidentify with their gender's sexuality—either positively in the case of feminist-aligned men, or negatively in the case of lesbians becoming too close to gay men.

These community debates and antagonisms make up the tense context for the theoretical interpretations of gay porn in relationship to gender, feminism, and power that proliferate through the late 70s and 80s, which I detail in the following sections. But before touching on those, I want to emphasize that the perspectives outlined above on "male sexuality" were not held only by feminist women. Indeed, a notable example of feminist gay men espousing similar politics can be found in the radical, but relatively small and short-lived, Effeminist Movement—which prominently included Morgan's husband, Kenneth Pitchford. Populated by a group of connected organizations and publications (Pitchford, Steven Dansky, and John Knoebel's *Double-F* magazine being the most notable), the Effeminists preached a feminist and anti-gay-liberationist ethos, along with invectives against drag, camp, transness, bar culture, cruising, sado-masochism, and porn. Referencing the pseudo-history of the etymology of "faggot," (as

[29] Morgan, quoted in Echols, 59.
[30] Echols, 53.

stemming from the burning of gay men as kindling during medieval witch-hunts), the Effeminists take the word on as their appellation of allegiance to women under patriarchy.[31] Stemming from the earliest days of the New York Gay Liberation Front, the Effeminists soon began to protest the 1972 New York Gay Pride as part of a "sexist plot," to name lists of "gay enemies" in the ranks of Gay Liberation, to name sexism as the root of all other forms of oppression, and to argue that faggot activism must work to clear the way for "the restoration of the ancient worldwide matriarchal gynocracy."[32] In their theory of the gender of gay men, faggots are oppressed because of the greater patriarchal oppression of the "female principle."[33] In an echo of the inversion model, Pitchford writes that "the effeminate in us is both the source of our oppression and the clue to our liberation."[34] Faggots are, as Steven Dansky puts it, "a paradox of men" both oppressed by and professing sexism. This is both the problem and the potential of faggots:

> It is this concrete experience of sexism—a bitter inheritance—that might allow us to glimpse the clues that other men miss, clues that lead us to making a valid commitment against the forces of male supremacy. We are in a precarious balance in relationship to this choice. I want to polarize faggots, to throw them off balance, to bring them over to the side of anti-sexism.[35]

In this moment of gay men's unsteady allegiance to feminism, the Effeminists offer the theory that gay men occupy a problematic balance in relation to manhood and womanhood (a theory that will recur, though altered, in later feminist positions such as Dworkin and Stoltenberg's), but that this balance can be shifted by refusing Gay Liberation and embracing the

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[31] Kenneth Pitchford, "Faggot Militants: From Sexual Liberation to Revolutionary Effeminism," *Double-F: A Magazine of Effeminism* 1 (Summer 1972), 2-3.
[32] Faggot Effeminists, "Don't March! It's Part of a Sexist Plot" flyer, reprinted in *Double-F* 2 (Winter/Spring 1973), 11-12; Steven Dansky, "The Gay Enemy," *Double-F* 2 (Winter/Spring 1973), 33; Pitchford, "Faggot Militants" 7; Kenneth Pitchford, "Change or Die," *Double-F* 2 (Winter/Spring 1973), 19.
[33] The Revolutionary Effeminists, "The Effeminist Manifesto," *Double-F* 2 (Winter/Spring 1973), 5.
[34] Kenneth Pitchford, "Where We Came From and Who We Are," *Double-F* 1 (Summer 1972), 22.
[35] Dansky, "The Gay Enemy," 33.

true liberation represented by feminism. Here, the Effeminists recalibrate the logic of inversion's essential feminization of gay men into a theory of gay men's political relation to patriarchal power. I elucidate their position here because they are a fitting example of how this period is shifting the terms of gay men's gender from the field of psychology and anatomy to political experience and organization.

As the 70s and its attendant feminisms developed, porn became, more and more, a primary site for thinking through these ongoing tensions of feminism, patriarchy, and gender. Early anti-porn feminist writings (as in Brownmiller and Morgan) developed on recent writings on rape to interpret porn as a kind of male propaganda for the rape of women, a media form that encouraged sexual violence.[36] Until Dworkin and Stoltenberg's work, analyses of gay porn in these writings were usually limited to passing reference. Gloria Steinem's popular 1972 essay "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference" gives gay porn only a parenthetical comparison to straight porn's power dynamics: "(though, of course, homosexual pornography may imitate this violence by putting a man in the 'feminine' role of victim)."[37] This idea of gay porn as straight porn's imitation was echoed by Kathleen Barry in 1979, when she wrote that gay porn "acts out the same dominant and subordinate roles as heterosexual pornography," to such a degree that it "appeals not only to gay but also to straight men."[38] Brownmiller, too, did little to repair her anti-gay reputation when she titled her piece against porn "Let's Put Pornography Back Into the Closet," complete with concluding comments that feminist censorship efforts "are not saying 'Smash the presses' or 'Ban the bad ones,' but simply 'Get the stuff out of our

[36] Most famously, this connection is made by Robin Morgan's essay "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape," in *Take Back the Night*: *Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 134-140. On the connection between early anti-porn feminism and the study of rape, see Bronstein, 51-52.
[37] Gloria Steinem, "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference," in *Take Back the Night*, 37.
[38] Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York: Avon Books, 1979), 206.

sight.'"[39] As for Morgan, in response to the gay press's criticism against feminist support of obscenity censorship, responded "*which* gay publications do they fear will be censored for being obscene?...What I mean to say is, if the shoe fits…."[40]

This period's repetitive and antagonistic battles over gayness, feminism, and porn would not settle but rather intensify in the 80s. The theory and activism of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon will radically transform the conceptual and legal basis of anti-porn feminism, while the rise of gay and lesbian studies and pro-sex feminism in the academy will enable unprecedentedly detailed analyses of porn. In the next section, I look not at how Dworkin's partnership with Catharine MacKinnon shook up the feminist argument against porn, but rather how Dworkin's partnership with John Stoltenberg shook up the feminist argument against gay porn (and thus the feminist theory of gayness) in particular. Beyond that section, I trace the span of the 70s and 80s in the birth of the defense of gay porn in the gay press and the development of an affirmative academic field eventually named gay porn studies.

The Meaning of the Fuck: Andrea Dworkin and John Stoltenberg

The intimate and intellectual collaboration between Andrea Dworkin, perhaps the most recognizable figure of the sex wars, and John Stoltenberg, her much less infamous but no less fiery life partner, represents one of the more radical feminist exchanges on gay men's sexuality and relationship to feminism. Unlike the parallel partnership between Robin Morgan and Kenneth Pitchford, Dworkin and Stoltenberg actively wrote against any sense of male and female sexuality as biologically or culturally predetermined and divided. For as much as Dworkin and Stoltenberg have been accused of essentializing gender in relation to sexuality in

[39] Susan Brownmiller, "Let's Put Pornography Back Into the Closet," in *Take Back the Night*, 255.
[40] Robin Morgan interview with *Gay Community News,* quoted in Strub, 262.

the mode of the "cultural feminists," their works contradict such a reading. Rather than gender "confirming" sexuality (to borrow the sociologist Michael S. Kimmel's phrase),[41] Dworkin and Stoltenberg insist that sexuality is a system of institutions, representations, and acts that pedagogically creates and reproduces a patriarchal system of binary gender, a system they are both attempting to be rid of. As Stoltenberg pithily puts it, "sexuality does not *have* a gender; it *creates* a gender."[42] In his work especially, gender is an ethics of sexuality, an ethics that individual men can choose to refuse in the name of a better, feminist ethics. Such a refusal of patriarchal ethics is essentially the refusal of gender, as made explicit by Stoltenberg's polemical title *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice* (1989). In his estimation, gay men (like himself) have all the reason and all the tools to refuse manhood, but in most lived cases are actually more wedded to manhood and its sexual ethics than many of their straight counterparts. Especially in their interest in porn, he writes, gay men are "sexually hooked" on the values of patriarchy.[43]

Though I do not seek to write a total review of Dworkin's writing,[44] I do believe reading her and Stoltenberg's works together highlights how they conceive of gay men in light of their radical, anti-porn feminist project. Both thinkers, I argue, characterize gay maleness by a particular problem of gender, its simultaneous distance from and closeness to masculinity—a problem for which gay porn offers phantasmatic resolution. In this, Dworking and Stoltenberg's

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[41] Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2005), 142.
[42] John Stoltenberg, "How Men Have (A) Sex," in *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice* (Portland, Oregon: Breitenbush Books Inc., 1989), 33.
[43] John Stoltenberg, "Gays and the Propornography Movement: Having the Hots for Sex Discrimination," in *Men Confront Pornography,* ed. Michael S. Kimmel (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1990): 249.
[44] Recent critical reappraisals of Dworkin are plentiful. See, for example: Duberman; *Last Days at Hot Slit: The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin,* eds. Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder, New York: Semiotext(e), 2019; Dana Glaser, "Andrea Dworkin: *Last Days at Hot Slit,*" *Chicago Review* (July 28, 2021), https://www.chicagoreview.org/andrea-dworkin-last-days-at-hot-slit/

work conceives of gender as taught, with porn as a primary element of this pedagogy. In my reading here, I also pay particular attention to what Stoltenberg says Dworkin taught him—how Dworkin's writing and feminism in general represented an intervention in his own gender as a gay man.

For both Dworkin and Stoltenberg, sexuality is a system of dominance, inscribed and reinforced by law, that creates gender. It divides the human into the subject-man and the object-woman. Fucking (the act itself) has a very literal grammar: "The woman is acted on; the man acts and through action expresses sexual power, the power of masculinity….In the male system, sex is the penis, the penis is sexual power, its use in fucking is manhood."[45] This grammar comes from the social institutions that govern fucking; though fucking is an act experienced as private, intimate, and between individuals, it is highly scripted by social forces that nearly disappear in the act's symbolic and embodied force.[46] Unlike Morgan and others who subordinate sexuality to gender, Dworkin subordinates gender to sexuality. As she puts it rather succinctly, "the whole meaning of the fuck—gender[.]"[47] This grammar of sexuality is not a biological given about sexed anatomy, nor an unchangeable reality. The construction of gender by the dominance of male sexuality is socially constructed and therefore destroyable. For both Dworkin and Stoltenberg (though Stoltenberg gives the issue more space), other intimacies, other sexualities, and other genders are not only possible, they are already here in nascent, subjugated forms. It is forces like the law, like the media, like porn, that make us think otherwise.

For both thinkers, porn is one of the social forces that scripts fucking, in that it endlessly repeats, both in the facts of its production and its representational force as a mass-distributed

[45] Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Plume, 1989), 23.
[46] Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 79.
[47] Dworkin, *Intercourse,* 154-155.

image repertoire, this grammar of sexuality as dominance. It is worth studying for the feminist scholar because its embodiment of this system is literal. In Dworkin's words, it is the "blueprint";[48] to study it is to study dominance, for porn "reveals that male pleasure is inextricably tied to victimizing, hurting, exploiting….It is in the male experience of pleasure that one finds the meaning of male history."[49] It is not, as Dworkin frequently retorted to her leftist and pro-porn opponents, abstract fantasy. It exactly embodies, and therefore repeats by image distribution, the system of male dominance. But for the literary-inclined Dworkin, whose anti-porn treatises frequently devoted time to close readings of literary texts, porn's literal embodiment of male dominance does occur through symbolic and metaphorical structures. Indeed, Dworkin's peppering of phrases of symbolic interpretation throughout *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (such as, "they carry rifles…suggesting erection" or "the spiked heels suggest cruelty, associated with the lesbian, the quintessential castrator")[50] appears to be the foundation of her larger critiques of the literary defenses of porn that thinkers like Susan Sontag or Roland Barthes had been putting forward in the prevailing decades.[51] For Dworkin, porn works through a "symbolic reality."[52] The symbolic reality of male dominance is therefore (not nevertheless) its literal one, in that the symbolic category "sexuality," defended by symbolic institutions such as "the law," encodes the literal violence that individual men continuously commit in reality. Porn's symbolic force is also integral to its pedagogical force, as its symbolic system catalyzes its reproduction of the representational system of gender, the division into

[48] Dworkin, new introduction for *Pornography,* xxxix.
[49] Dworkin, *Pornography*, 69.
[50] Dworkin, *Pornography,* 26, 46.
[51] Particularly, she targets Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 35-73, and Roland Barthes's, "Sade, I," in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola,* translated by Richard Miller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1976]), 15-37.
[52] Dworkin, *Pornography*, 46.

subject-men and object-women in those who view it or "on whom the pornography is used."[53] This is the distinction between her work and those anti-porn thinkers that came before her: rather than seeing porn as a mediated expression of a male sexuality that preceded it and as a propaganda for rape instead of ethical sexual relations, Dworkin saw pornography as a representational system that constructed maleness and femaleness as positions in which rape and sex become basically synonymous.

Because both Dworkin and Stoltenberg see sexuality and porn in this way, gay men's sexuality, gender, and porn present particular interpretive issues. For both thinkers, like with the Effeminists before them, the subjugation of gay men is a byproduct of patriarchal dominance. But, in contrast to the Effeminist belief in gay men's relationship to a real and ancient 'womanhood,'[54] Dworkin and Stoltenberg argue that homophobia-as-sexism targets gay men for a perverted relationship to power: their sociosexual adoption of the constructed position of woman. Stoltenberg writes, "the 'infamous crime against nature' is in effect a crime against the presumed nature of people with penises. *They do not get fucked*….The male-supremacist social hierarchy necessarily derogates both those who are female and those who are queer—namely, those who are male anatomically *but not male enough sociosexually.*"[55] Homophobia, then, is a primary mode of the continuation of patriarchal dominance, of gender—as Dworkin puts it,

[53] Andrea Dworkin, "Pornography Happens to Women," in *The Price We Pay: The Case Against Racist Speech, Hate Propaganda, and Pornography,* eds. Laura J. Lederer and Richard Delgado (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 183.
[54] According to Duberman, 72, Dworkin saw the Effeminist belief in a real and ancient "womanhood" to be "a disguised imitation of the limited sexual imagination it purported to be in rebellion against."
[55] John Stoltenberg, "Gays and the Propornography Movement: Having the Hots for Sex Discrimination," 250. Dworkin expresses nearly the same thought in *Intercourse*, writing "The concept of a crime against nature…came to mean that the person who did the act had the nature that was the crime. He was too feminine in a world of real, natural, unpolluted masculinity….The abomination is to do to men what is normally done to women in the fuck: the penetration; the possession; the contempt because she is less" (153, 155).

"sodomy laws are important, perhaps essential, in maintaining for men a superiority of civil and sexual status over women."[56]

But gay men, in their account, too often try to game this system by calling upon their phantasmatic manhood, pledging allegiance to the patriarchal domination that damns them. The problem with gay men, they argue, is that precisely because homophobia condemns their femininity, most gay men naively and insidiously "conspire with male heterosexuals,"[57] "escape through macho, hypermasculine costumes and posturing,"[58] and "pa[y] only lip service to the feminist struggle to end discrimination against *all* women."[59] Stoltenberg wrote, in words that may conjure up an anxious inverse of Hilton Als's or Manuel Puig's matrocentrism, homophobia's effect on gay gender "means you dread that anything about your body might remind you of females in general, or perhaps your mother in particular, it means that in your own queer way, you're in a constant quest 'to be the man there.'"[60] Dworkin was occasionally even more explosive, as when she wrote in a 1977 piece for *Gay Community News* that the gay movement was "unreservedly antifeminist, ruthlessly contemptuous of women, and unashamed in its advocacy of sexual brutality as the essence of masculinity. The gay male movement, with its increasingly self-involved, self-congratulatory, navel-(chains-whips-urine)-gazing commitment to male supremacy, functions in solidarity with those who hate lesbians and all women[.]"[61] This piece caused a lengthy chain of heated responses: by 1978 you could read in the newspaper's pages John Kyper's response to a letter from Rudy Grillo responding to a letter

[56] Dworkin, *Intercourse*, 155.
[57] Dworkin, *Pornography,* 128.
[58] Stoltenberg, "Gays and the Propornography Movement," 250.
[59] This is Martin Duberman's paraphrase of John Stoltenberg's position. Duberman, 76.
[60] Stoltenberg, "Gays and the Propornography Movement," 251.
[61] Andrea Dworkin's response in roundtable piece "What do you think the lesbian/gay movement has achieved in the last five years, and in what direction would you like to see it leading?" compiled by Lisa Schwartz and Neil Miller, *Gay Community News* 4, no. 52 (June 25, 1977): 12.

from "Cha Cha Heels" responding to an article by Wayne Dynes responding to Allen Young's defense of Dworkin against letter writers responding angrily to Dworkin's original piece.[62] Dworkin's invective against gay men's so-called collaboration with patriarchy, and the troubled debates that followed, point to a crisis around gay men's gendered coalitions, especially their allegiance or lack-there-of to lesbian advocacy. In Dworkin and Stoltenberg's account, gay men, especially at the sexual level, attach themselves to the patriarchal forces that may make them feel, even temporarily, that they are the man they are not socially allowed to be. As Stoltenberg summarizes it, male supremacy "simultaneously produces both a homophobia that is erotically committed to the hatred of homosexuality *and* a homosexuality that is erotically committed to sex discrimination."[63]

The crisis of gay men's gender, in this pair's works, is that the patriarchal system of gender positions them in the subordinated bounds of femininity, but invites them to run from it by sexual and political allegiance to patriarchy. Stoltenberg attributes that very crisis to himself and points to Dworkin's work as what saved him from it. Stoltenberg writes, on reading Dworkin's *Women Hating* and her insistence that humanity is a "multisexed species":

> I first read those words a little over ten years ago—and that liberating recognition saved my life. All the time I was growing up, I knew that there was something really problematical in my relationship to manhood. Inside, deep inside, I never believed I was fully male—I never believed I was growing up enough of a man. I believed that someplace out there, in other men, there was something that was genuine authentic all-American manhood—the real stuff—but I didn't have it…I felt like an impostor, like a fake. I agonized a lot about not feeling male enough, and I had no idea how much I was not alone. Then I read those words—those words that suggested to me for the first time that the notion of manhood is a cultural delusion, a baseless belief, a false front, a house of cards. It's not true…However removed you feel inside from 'authentic manhood,' it

[62] In chronological order: Greenfox, "Community Voice: Flaming Paranoia," *Gay Community News* 5, no. 3 (July 16, 1977), 4; Allen Young, "Community Voice: Taking Dworkin Seriously," *GCN* 5, no. 5 (July 30, 1977), 5; Wayne Dynes, "Speaking Out: The New Victorianism," *GCN* 5, no. 7 (August 20, 1977), 5; Cha Cha Heels, "Community Voice: Reactionary Attack," *GCN* 5, no. 8 (August 27, 1977), 4; Rudy Grillo, "Community Voice: Dogmatic, Witless Cha Cha," *GCN* 5, no. 10 (September 10, 1977), 4; John Kyper, "The Myth of the Common Denominator," *GCN* 5, no. 35 (March 28, 1978), 8-9.
[63] Stoltenberg, "Gays and the Propornography Movement," 255.

> doesn't matter. What matters is the center inside yourself—and how you live, and how you treat people, and what you can contribute as you pass through life on this earth…[64]

Here, it is no coincidence that Stoltenberg's description of his own gender crisis occurs in the metaphorical stage of the interior. As my first chapter argued explicitly, inversion created the dominant metalanguage for not just gay men's unique gender position but also gender and sexuality in general. The idea that homophobia is a byproduct of sexism, so common among these thinkers of the 70s and 80s, holds onto some of the core logic of inversion, namely that the essential problem of gay men is an unresolved single-body interaction between femininity and masculinity. But Dworkin's feminist analysis revolts against the essentialized and internalized femininity of inversion rhetoric and instead anatomizes the sociopolitical forces of patriarchy, coercive femininity, and an anti-sexist ethos. In this passage from Stoltenberg, Dworkin's work cuts through the experiential logic of inversion, and opens up the possibilities of an ethics of refusal of masculinity. Here, feminist pedagogy resolves the crisis of gender represented by male gayness—in Stoltenberg's own words, it "put to rest that certain trouble."[65] It provides an answer to the Proustian problem of the invert who endlessly desires the real (i.e. straight) man who will never desire the invert's false femininity in return; in Stoltenberg, the invert can instead refuse manhood, can align with women in an ethics of feminism, can revolutionize desire as a system. In a sentence that as much holds onto inversion as it simultaneously imagines an outside to it, Stoltenberg conclusively writes, "Radical feminism helped me honor in myself the differences that I felt between myself and other men."[66]

For these two thinkers, most gay men's allegiance to patriarchy occurs primarily on the stage of their sexual desires. In their accounts, gay men enact the subordination of femininity in

[64] Stoltenberg, "How Men Have (A) Sex," in *Refusing to Be a Man,* 29.
[65] John Stoltenberg, "Other Men," in *Refusing to Be a Man,* 188.
[66] Stoltenberg, "Other Men," 189.

their sexualization of masculinity and in their cultural defenses of sadomasochism and porn. These forms of sexuality participate in patriarchal violence, objectification, and sexual anonymity and revolt against the "more diffuse and tender sensuality that involves the whole body" that women and anti-sexist men allegedly want.[67] In a 1980 interview for *Gay Community News*, Jil Clark asked Andrea Dworkin, "Do you feel that there's a difference between gay male and straight male pornography?," to which she replies: "I think that what they have in common is more significant [than] what's different about them. What they have in common is the power differential and the sadism of whoever is more powerful. What they also have in common is woman-hatred."[68] Stoltenberg's work says much the same, saying that gay porn erotically values "taking, using, estranging, dominating—essentially, sexual powermongering."[69] They argue throughout their careers that gay porn, even when absent of women themselves, speaks in the same language as straight porn—a language whose grammar is objectification, power divisions, violence, alienation, and the worship of the penis. In their analysis of porn, this often occurs by effeminization and objectification of the pornographic bottom, an operation that masculinizes and therefore subjectifies the pornographic top.

In *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin summarizes the role gay porn plays in upholding the ideology of straight porn by summarizing a pulp novel called *I Love a Laddie*. She pays special attention to moments in which the male characters of the novel are feminized by the text, such as when "Garry places Dave on his back 'like a girl' and fucks him" or when another character describes his sex act with "I was the male stud and Jules was my woman."[70]

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[67] Dworkin, *Intercourse,* 126.
[68] Jil Clark, "Andrea Dworkin on Her Writing, the Holocaust, Biological Determinism, Pornography and S&M," *Gay Community News* 8, no. 1 (July 19, 1980): 11.
[69] Stoltenberg, "What is 'Good Sex'?", in *Refusing to Be a Man*, 110.
[70] Dworkin, *Pornography*, 38, 41.

These kinds of descriptions abound in *I Love a Laddie* and, to Dworkin's interest, are usually accompanied by the language of pain, as when fucking is described by the novel as "raping," "split[ing]," and characters are described as "fuck[ing] as painfully as he can." As well, to Dworkin's interest, much of the sex between men in that book occurs as an imitation of the positions in heteroporn magazines perused by the characters. Though every character swaps sex roles at a constant pace, Dworkin writes that "the emphasis is not so much on who does what to whom as it is on the perpetual motion of the penis, its efficacy in producing pleasure for its proud carrier and receiver."[71] The penis, in *I Love a Laddie*, hurts because it effeminizes, effeminizes because it hurts, and creates pleasure out of pain and out of femininity. "As a result, fucking is inherently sadistic," Dworkin writes.[72] But where *I Love a Laddie* in specific and gay porn in general innovates on patriarchal sexuality is that this mix of pain, pleasure, and femininity is absorbed by a male subject who is made all the more virile by not being destroyed by it. "But in no sense is the beloved annihilated," Dworkin writes, "[h]is virility continues to animate his own behavior….This evocation of the feminine is constantly exploited to emphasize the extreme masculinity of the men who worship cock."[73] For Dworkin, gay porn dons the masochistic, passive, receptive, victimized, effeminized sexual role as a way to renew its worship of the cock's power, to prove the flexibility of the man's virility—and therefore his masculine gender—to temporary submission. Dworkin, in her proposed civil ordinance against porn (co-authored with Catherine MacKinnon), attempted to codify the ability of gay porn to place people who are not women in women's pornographic position: in defining porn as "the graphic sexually

[71] Dworkin, *Pornography*, 42.
[72] Dworkin, *Pornography*, 43.
[73] Dworkin, *Pornography*, 43, 44.

explicit subordination of women," the ordinance makes clear that "the use of men, children, or transsexuals, in the place of women…is pornography for purposes of…this statute."[74]

Stoltenberg, in agreement with Dworkin, writes that the fundamental difference between straight and gay porn is that "gay male pornography invents a way for men to be the *objects* of male-supremacist sex without seeming to be its *victims.* In its own special fashion, gay male pornography keeps men safe from male-supremacist sex—by holding out the promise that you'll come away from it more of a man."[75] Gay porn, like all porn in Stoltenberg's account, plays an integral role in gay men's "gender-actualizing—[to] feeling like a real man."[76] It represents an image of "what nearly all men believe enviable sex in an anatomically male body might be like if they were ever to have endless quantities of it themselves."[77] Gay porn then represents in some ways a concentration of porn's pedagogical center—the structuring and subjectification of masculinity via the objectification of women in images of sex and violence. All the men in gay porn who, by taking up the "feminine position," by betraying the confines of the tenets of masculinity, only do so to find in that distance from the masculine center their strength to return to it. Stoltenberg writes that this is the particular appeal of porn for gay men: "if you think the problem facing you is that your masculinity is in doubt because you're queer, then the promise of gay male pornography looks like forgiveness and redemption. Not to mention what it feels like: communion with true virility."[78] Thus, gay porn is interpreted as a resolution of the problem of

[74] "Minneapolis Ordinance, 1984" in *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings,* eds. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997)*,* 435. Gloria Steinem worked from the same formulation, writing that "homosexual pornography may imitate this violence by putting a man in the 'feminine' role of victim." Steinem, "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference," in *Take Back the Night,* 37.
[75] John Stoltenberg, "Pornography and Freedom," in *Refusing to Be a Man,* 132-133.
[76] Stoltenberg, "How Men Have (A) Sex," 33.
[77] Stoltenberg, "What is 'Good Sex'?" 110.
[78] Stoltenberg, "Pornography and Freedom," 133.

gay men's gender. It is the fantasy of finally meeting with masculinity and solving the problem of the femininity of one's desires with a good fuck.

Stoltenberg's work lays out a kind of forked path with regards to the problem of gay men's gender: go down the path of porn and be affirmed, however falsely, that your manhood is real, that you are a true subject, that those around you whose manhood is false are mere objects, and lose your ability to communicate with your femininity and to have sex as a "whole person"; or, go down the path of feminism and learn an ethics of refusing manhood, of refusing gender, and of communing erotically with embodied wholeness and without gender. If it sounds binaristic, it's because it is, and Stoltenberg wasted no time making the binary quite apparent to those he felt were on the other side: "I do not believe that it is possible for anyone seriously committed to feminist principles to maintain an alliance or affiliation with gay men as a group except by compromising those feminist principles or except by compromising and deceiving women."[79]

Angered responses to these thinkers abound from across political factions, but what might surprise us is how many of Dworkin and Stoltenberg's analytical tools—symbolic reading, porn as pedagogical, an understanding of porn as integrally about gender, an understanding of porn as a stage of power—will be taken up by these otherwise opposed responses. In the next section, I detail how the field of gay porn studies developed in response to anti-porn feminism, particularly in response to this idea that gay porn represents a phantasmatic communion with the masculinity gay men are held away from. Thus, I argue that gay porn studies began as an analysis of gay men's gender as it relates to representations of their sexuality.[80]

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[79] John Stoltenberg, "Sadomasochism: Eroticized Violence, Eroticized Powerlessness," in *Against Sadomasochism,* 130.

[80] See also John Paul Stadler, "The Queer Heart of Porn Studies," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58, no. 1 (2018), 170-175, for a discussion of the relationship between gay porn studies and porn studies in general.

Porn Liberation: Writings from the Gay Press

Gay men's responses to anti-porn feminism were as varied as the feminist theories they were responding to, but there are some trends worth our attention. The gay press represented the major location for gay community debates around anti-porn feminism (including sustained coverage of the major and minor events of the sex wars). Though every publication differed in how it centered perspectives and arguments,[81] the gay press was home to some of the first analytical engagements with gay porn (especially in its relationship to feminism, censorship, morality, and gay liberation), building the foundations for later institutionalized porn studies.

One fundamental trend of porn analysis in the gay press is the development of what I will call the "liberation argument" for gay porn. In the liberation argument, gay sexuality is a socially repressed form of human sexuality that is erased from both visual culture and social life by heterosexual power. Gay porn, by representing and distributing gay sexuality in text and image, represents gay sexuality's liberation from this repression. It evidences to its viewers that gay sexuality exists and is not harmful or pathological, but rather pleasurable. In a representative example of the argument, Michael Bronski writes:

> In a society which has a distinct heterosexual bias, any depiction of gay male sexuality is, for gay men, a breath of fresh air….[Gay porn] depicts sexual desire, bringing it out of the mind and into the reality of the material world….The sexual identity of the viewer is consequently reinforced, bolstered by the fact that the viewer has been engaged by, and responded to, a sexual object.[82]

[81] Certain publications, especially *Gay Community News,* published arguments from all sides and took no clear editorial stand, making their pages the veritable battlegrounds of the porn debates; others, like *The Body Politic* and *The Advocate,* occasionally published anti-porn pieces, but primarily centered an anti-censorship perspective; and others, usually smaller publications like *Fag Rag,* took clear pro-sex and pro-porn stances (though not without internal debate).
[82] Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash,* 161.

I call this the liberation argument for gay porn not only because it is based in the idea that porn liberates a repressed sexuality by its visual representation, but also because of its historical association with the particular cultural perspectives of the Gay Liberation movement in the time between Stonewall and the full swing of the AIDS crisis. In many ways, it is also a reaction to historical and contemporary associations of gayness with obscenity law and the idea of social indecency. The obscenity trials against *ONE Magazine,* which reached the Supreme Court in 1958, are but one example in a long history. As the opinion of a presiding district judge on the *ONE* case remarked, gay people's opinions of community standards should not count for judgment in obscenity trials because their "own social or moral standards are far below those of the general community."[83] In this heterosexist logic, all forms of homosexuality are rendered "*ipso facto* pornographic."[84] The liberation argument supposes that if any representation of homosexuality is considered obscene, then anti-obscenity/anti-porn censorship are part of a greater mechanism of homophobic repression. Thus, many gay writers formed sophisticated defenses of gay porn as a sexually and socially liberatory form of expression.

The liberation argument developed as early as the beginning of the 70s, when landmark gay porn films like *Boys in the Sand* (1971) and *L.A. Plays Itself* (1972) revolutionized the portrayal of gay sexuality in porn theaters. Even Kenneth Turan and Stephen Zito's early and mostly heterosexual history of porn from 1974 notes that gay porn "has to a great extent mirrored the emergence of a more liberated attitude towards the gay experience itself."[85] However, as the interviews in Paul Alcuin Siebenand's 1975 dissertation attest, the reception of these films by

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[83] Bronski, *Culture Clash*, 163.
[84] Though this particular phrasing is from Bronski, *Culture Clash,* 163, John Preston uses remarkably similar phrasing some years before: "It is almost a truism that we live in an antisexual society. The very presence of gay men and our acknowledged erotic nature is judged an *ipso facto* obscenity by the majority of the nation." John Preston, "Goodbye to Sally Gerhart" [sic.], in *The Christopher Street Reader*, eds. by Michael Denneny, Charles Ortleb, and Thomas Steele (New York: Perigree Books, 1984), 370.
[85] Turan and Zito, 196.

Gay Liberation was rather mixed. In his interviews with Harold Fairbanks and Tom DeSimone, both remarked that porn films "have gotten the Gay Lib people up in arms because they are so completely sexist" and because they "make homosexuals look like degenerates who only fuck all the time."[86] As well, there was a notable agnosticism amongst Siebenand's interviewees around the question of if gay porn helps gay men find or affirm their identities, though some interviewees like Fred Halsted did contend that porn "liberates you. Gay porno helps gays."[87] Indeed, in a questionnaire Siebenand gave to 62 self-identified gay porn viewers, only 45% said "yes" to the question "Did the viewing of gay porno films help you in any way to find and recognize your true sexual identity?" and only 53% say "yes" to the question "Has the viewing of gay porno films helped you to be more self-accepting of your gayness?"[88]

The agnosticism around the liberation argument in this early period seemed to be related to the perceived gender politics of both Gay Liberation and gay porn, including the intercommunity tensions that are covered in the first section of this chapter. Andrew Dvoisin wrote in 1975 for *Gay Sunshine* that Gay Liberation seemed "antithetically opposed" to the fantasies of sex with working class, masculine straight men (trade) that pervaded the porn of this moment: "the advent of a magazine like *Straight to Hell* depended, I think, on a certain disenchanted stage of gay liberation's being reached."[89] Bronski, writing in the early 80s, believed that "most of the sexual iconography" from the 50s through the early 70s represented a masculinizing reaction to the stereotypical image of "the limp-wristed swish."[90] Only later, he says, in the developments of the 70s and 80s, would other sexual "types" opposed to the straight

[86] Siebenand, 31, 100-101.
[87] Siebenand, 227.
[88] Siebenand, 276. Somewhat telling to the development of the liberation argument of the 80s is that the "yes" answers to these questions skew towards the younger questionnaire respondents.
[89] Andrew Dvoisin, "Straight-to-Hell: A Personal View of Pornography," *Gay Sunshine* 24 (1975), 30.
[90] Bronski, *Culture Clash,* 170-171.

macho become common in gay porn. There was a sense in the rhetoric around gay porn in the early 70s that though it may be able to unburden a repressed gay population, it may also be too macho to really represent the ideals of a Gay Liberation that was integrally (if uneasily) tied to feminism of the period.

As the 70s went on, the liberation argument became more common and more entangled with the anti-porn feminist movement. Writing by Gregg Blachford, Scott Tucker, John Mitzel, Michael Bronski, Andrew Hodges, Robert Halfhill, The Wild Lavender Housing Co-Operative, and John Preston, among many others, defended the liberating possibilities of gay porn against anti-porn feminism's predominant arguments.[91] Their perspectives were not all the same, varying especially by their political alignments and intended targets.[92] More integral distinctions, however, present themselves in relation to how these liberationist writers tackled the issues of gay men and gender, porn and masculinity, and the separation or connection of gay and feminist activism. The continued influence of feminism on gay thought is clear in some pieces, as when Gregg Blachford wrote that gay men must resist their porn's sexualization of the "macho,"[93] or perhaps even more so when Michael Bronski wrote that gay porn plays an analogous role to

[91] Gregg Blachford, "Looking at Pornography: Erotica and the Socialist Morality" *Gay Left* 6 (Summer 1978): 16-20; Phillip Brian Harper & John Mitzel, "Gay Men & Pornography: The Beginnings of a Dialogue" *Gay Community News* 10, no. 11 (October 2, 1982): 8-9; Michael Bronski, "What Does Soft Core Porn Really Mean to the Gay Male?," *Gay Community News* 5, no. 29 (January 28, 1978): 6-7; Michael Bronski, "Notes and Thoughts by One Gay Man on Pornography and Censorship" *Gay Community News* 6, no. 22 (December 23, 1978): 11, 14, 17; Andrew Hodges, "Divided We Stand: 'Lesbians and Gay Men.'" *The Body Politic* 30 (February 1977): 22-23; Robert Halfhill, "Speaking Out: On Anti-Porn Efforts and Gay Male Separatism," *Gay Community News* 11, no. 44 (May 26, 1984), 5; The Wild Lavender Housing Co-Operative, "Gay Porn—A Discussion," *Achilles Heel* 6/7 (1982): 42-43; John Preston, 368-380.

[92] For example, leftist gay writers like Blachford, Mitzel, and Bronski, while repeatedly defending porn's liberatory possibilities, also argue that gay men need to resist porn's role in the commodity culture of the new "gay lifestyle" (Bronski, "What Does Soft Core Porn Really Mean to the Gay Male?," 6-7; Blachford, 16-20; Harper & Mitzel, 8-9). As well, all of these writers vary in the targets of their acrimony: Tucker mainly takes issue with Stoltenberg, Halfhill mainly targets Dworkin and MacKinnon's Minneapolis ordinance and other legal actions on gay bookstores and publishers, and Blachford and Bronski focus on slightly earlier thinkers like Susan Brownmiller and Robin Morgan.

[93] Blachford, 19.

Woolf's famous "Chloe liked Olivia" sentence in *A Room of One's Own.* If "Chloe liked Olivia" breaks the sexist representational bounds of literature by presenting women relating to each other intimately, Bronski argued that a gay pornographic sentence, like "it seemed obvious to Jack that he had never been so satisfied before in all his life," breaks the heterosexist representational bounds of literature by presenting gay men sexual pleasure.[94] On the other hand, writing by Mitzel and Tucker, along with a conversation by the Wild Lavender Housing Co-Operative, attempted to distinguish the relationship between gender and power in homosexuality from that in feminist analyses of heterosexuality. Taking aim especially at anti-porn feminist statements that sexual power dynamics in gay porn are informed by or imitate heterosexual ones, Tucker wrote, "when I choose to give my partner the chief balance of power in sex, so that he strokes my cock with his asshole while I lie bound to a bed, then something is going on which is not reducible to 'patriarchy.'"[95] The members of the Wild Lavender Housing Co-Operative similarly commented that "the relationship between men in gay porn is as much as any relationship can be a relationship between equals, or at least has the potential for that equality."[96] Mitzel contested on a larger scale what he saw as feminism's binary thinking on men and women. In this, "they lack an understanding of what it's like to be a faggot."[97] For Mitzel, one of the members of the *Fag Rag* collective, the faggot is a radical gender position, one that "acts as a wonderful anti-toxin to the poison of Macho" and is "in the avant-garde among males who are working for the 'normalization' of relations between sexes."[98] This group of thinkers seemed to agree, as Andrew Hodges puts it, that gay sexuality and gay porn "subtly or not so subtly undermine the image of

[94] Bronski, *Culture Clash,* 161.
[95] Scott Tucker, "Gender, Fucking, and Utopia: An Essay in Response to John Stoltenberg's *Refusing to Be a Man,*" *Social Text* 27 (1990), 16.
[96] Wild Lavender Housing Co-Operative, 42.
[97] Harper and Mitzel, 8.
[98] *Fag Rag* Collective, "A Tribute to Faggots" *Fag Rag* 5 (Summer 1973), 24.

the male."[99] In this, they imply that anti-porn feminists misunderstand the anti-patriarchal potential of gay porn.

But an explicitly masculinist and anti-feminist thread appeared in some camps of the liberation argument as well. In John Preston's lengthy rebuff of the feminist anti-porn position, he argued that "homosexuality is, after all, the most complete expression of male sexuality possible. It is very clear that the *maleness* of gay men presents an image many feminists find repulsive."[100] He specifies further, "above all, the message of gay pornography is the affirmation of the male's love for other men….It is for this reason that the women's movement has so much trouble accepting it. But what is male homosexuality if not the love of men?"[101] He took this as a given, though both premises—that gayness is the pinnacle of male sexuality and that gay porn's message is the affirmation of men by men—are not only historically debatable but were vastly debated in this particular moment. Given Preston's larger antipathy in the article for feminist organizing, the phrase "the love of men" rings doubly, merging sexual desire for men into political coalition with men. But what is revealing about Preston's account is not only its status as emblematic of the way certain strands of gay separatism hinge on an identification with masculinity and anti-feminism, but also that his claim for the masculinity of gay men is based in his particular sense of the relationship between sex and liberation. As Preston phrased the problem of the sex wars, women dislike porn because it is a "symbolic act of rape," but gay men like porn because it is part of "unlearning those lessons of socialization which made our cocks and asses dirty."[102] The error of the anti-porn feminists, in his argument, is that they confuse the masculine sexuality of gay porn, of clone culture, of adult retail stores, of gay bookstores, with

[99] Hodges, 22.
[100] Preston, 370.
[101] Preston, 379
[102] Preston, 368.

the "same male sexuality which leads to rape."[103] Yes, they are both masculinity, but gay male sexual cultures are "the manifestation of a primary form of gay liberation," not the masculinity that creates "the fears that entrap" women. In Preston's article, the gay sexual cultures of the 70s and 80s, interpreted as tools of liberation against repression and shame, enable a psychic and political identification with masculinity and a community separation from feminism.

The liberation argument, as I have been detailing, was not one unified theory of the relation of porn to feminism, of gay men to porn, nor of gay men to women. But I survey this thread of the earliest analyses of gay porn because it strikes me that these thinkers consistently nest their arguments for porn's liberatory potential within arguments about the relationship between gayness and feminist activism. What unites them all is their sense that anti-porn feminism has yet to fathom how gay porn serves an evidentiary, community-growing, and identity-solidifying purpose. Together they assume that gay porn's purpose as a medium is that of evidencing and affirming the repressed desire of homosexuality.

In their presupposition of a cultural situation of sexual repression and their allegiance to a subversive theory of sexual liberation, they are not only clearly an offspring of Gay Liberation, but even more so are offspring of the sexual revolution, with the influence of the writings of Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich. In contrast, as gay studies absorbs the influence of Michel Foucault's counter to the repressive hypothesis in the first volume of his *The History of Sexuality* (which enters the English-speaking world in 1978), other thinkers engaging the question of porn's connection to gayness will begin to formulate their studies against the liberation argument. With scholars interested in denaturalizing gay sexuality and analyzing instead the

[103] Preston, 377.

social construction of sexuality in general and gay sexuality in particular, a new strand of the gay response to the porn debates emerges.

Richard Dyer, one of these thinkers, presaged the innovation of his critique of the liberation argument in his review of Vito Russo's classic text on the representation of gay men in cinema, *The Celluloid Closet.* Russo's book, in his account, suffers from taking an unclear stance on a problem inherent to gay studies of the moment, "determining whether the object of one's thought is what society has done with homosexuality at a given point in time or how homosexuality has been socially constructed at a given point."[104] He calls the former "gay liberationist" and the latter "a social materialist politics." He writes:

> 'Gay liberationist' politics was based on a conviction that gayness had certain inherent qualities that straight/bourgeois/patriarchal society had buried away; they needed releasing; and the very act of releasing them was an act of revolution against the society that had repressed them. The other kind of politics starts from the assumption that homosexuality is a social category forming part of a general system of regulating sexuality…[105]

Dyer's review (and indeed *The Celluloid Closet*) does not touch on porn's relationship to this question, but Dyer's positioning of himself in relation to the representational politics of Gay Liberation sets the stage for a new, social construction informed model for interpreting porn.

Gay Porn Studies: Richard Dyer and Thomas Waugh

In 1985, *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema* published a dossier on sexual representation with a heavy focus on gay porn, which called upon past contributors Richard Dyer and Thomas Waugh to lay the grounds for the cinematic analysis of gay porn. The journal, which prioritizes a feminist and leftist perspective on film criticism, had already published several

[104] Richard Dyer, "Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1983)" (1983), in *The Richard Dyer Reader,* eds. Glyn Davis and Jaap Koojiman (London: The British Film Institute, 2023), 171.
[105] Dyer, "Vito Russo," 172.

articles both on women and porn (in 1981) and on gay men and film (in 1977, with contributions from Dyer and Waugh),[106] but had not yet published any work on gay porn. In an earlier issue, Waugh had critiqued the omission of analysis of gay porn from cinema studies journals like *Jump Cut* and *Cineaste* in their perspectives on the sex wars, remarking that the feminist analysis of porn was distinct from the one coming from gay men because of gay porn's "formative influence on gay culture, a progressive influence even."[107] Dyer and Waugh, both self-avowed feminist and gay film critics, were well-equipped to take up the charge of encountering these issues.[108] Dyer's "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms" and Waugh's "Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight" form the backbone of the 1985 dossier and represent landmarks in the formation of gay porn studies as a discrete scholarly field.[109] Both of these essays are catalyzed by an engagement with anti-porn feminist ideas and the determination to think through what gay porn does or does not have to do with maleness. They do this by writing through the idea of a continuum between straight porn and gay porn as genres of men's erotic attachment. In this, they initiate gay porn studies as an analysis of gay men's erotics in terms of the representation of their gender.

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[106] See: *Jump Cut* 16 (1977), especially Thomas Waugh, "Films by Gays for Gays" (14-18) and Richard Dyer, "Homosexuality and Film Noir" (18-21); *Jump Cut* 26 (1981), especially Julia Lesage, "Women and Pornography" (47) and Valerie Miner, "Fantasies and Nightmares: The Red-Blooded Media" (48-50).

[107] Thomas Waugh and Chuck Kleinhans, "A Dialogue on gays, straights, film, and the left" *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 16 (1977): 27-28. Especially with regards to the idea of censorship, Waugh believes that gay and anti-porn feminist attitudes were divided. This division became more concrete for him when the Canadian gay journal *The Body Politic,* where he was a frequent contributor, twice faced obscenity charges (in 1977 and 1982).

[108] Indeed, they had already begun to. Waugh, at the suggestion *Jump Cut* editor Chuck Kleinhans, had been researching the early 20th century erotic visual materials housed by the Kinsey Institute and had already published two brief reports on their importance in the Canadian gay magazine *The Body Politic* in 1983 and 1984 [Thomas Waugh, "A Heritage of Pornography" *Body Politic* 90 (January 1983), 29-33; Thomas Waugh, "Photography, Passion & Power" *Body Politic* 101 (March 1984), 29-33]. Dyer, already a noteworthy critic of popular culture, had dipped his toes into the relationship between gay porn and feminism in a 1982 article for *Screen* where he wrote on the relationship between erotic images of men and recent feminist film criticism regarding the gaze and the agency of looking [Dyer, Richard. "Don't Look Now: Richard Dyer Examines the Instabilities of the Male Pin-Up." *Screen* 23, nos. 3-4 (1982): 61-73.]

[109] Their essays are accompanied by an essay on gay video art by John Greyson and a review of the anti-porn documentary *Not a Love Story* by Lisa DiCaprio.

In "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms," Richard Dyer attempts to define the narrative structure of contemporary gay porn as analogous to the social construction of male sexuality, while not condemning the aesthetic or social possibilities of the genre entirely. With a self-described "commitment to the more feminist inflections of gay politics," Dyer defends Dworkin's "rage" at pornographic representation, but moves out of step with her definition of porn as intrinsically "degrading."[110] Rather, he employs a wider notion of porn as "*any* film that has as its aim sexual arousal in the spectator." This definition, in its italicized "*any,*" ignores the popular but contentious divisions of porn and erotica circulating in anti-porn feminist writing,[111] and moves away from the rhetoric of harms (as practiced in MacKinnon and Dworkin's ordinance) to a definition based in aesthetic intention and audience effects. Here, Dyer proposes a generic continuity—years before Carol Clover and Linda Williams would define "body genres"[112]—between porn and "the weepie," "the thriller," and "low or vulgar comedy," genres which are "supposed to have an effect that is registered in the spectator's body." In this, Dyer reads the possibility for porn to be an integral space for "bodily knowledge of the body," as opposed to intellectual and non-experiential knowledge of the body. Here lies his other major deviation from Dworkin: by understanding porn as a medium between narrative and body, he takes its pedagogical capacity to be much less absolute and much more flexible than Dworkin does. The problem with porn as a site for knowledge of the body in the contemporary, Dyer writes, is that "it is mainly bad knowledge, reinforcing the worst aspects of the social construction of masculinity that men learn to experience in our bodies."[113] But this need not be

[110] Richard Dyer, "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms" *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 30 (1985): 27.
[111] The most famous, but by no means the only, example of which is Gloria Steinem's in "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference," 35-39. The distinction is rejected in Dworkin and MacKinnon's work.
[112] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991), 2-13.
[113] Dyer, "Coming to Terms," 27.

the case. Dyer's most profound intervention is his insistence that porn could be a site for "re-educating desire" from its current patriarchal and masculinist directives, that gay and feminist scholarship and activism alike should work "with/within pornography to change it." In this reading, Dyer does not excuse gay porn from its fault in a pornographic system that so frequently represents and enacts the subjugation of women. Rather, he divides the realities of harms from porn's generic dimensions. Constructing porn as a genre based in erotic intents and effects, Dyer sees its primary importance, and therefore its primary vulnerability, as its ability to elicit the body's thought. In its current forms, including in its gay forms, this thinking is adhered to the social construction and defense of patriarchy, but this need not mean that it cannot be turned towards an affirmation of women and of gayness without the hegemony of masculinity.

In Dyer's effort to write out this analysis, he also establishes a critical language (his "coming to terms") for the aesthetic, cinematic analysis of gay porn—a language distinct from some of the activist discourse that precedes him.[114] Integrally, he rejects the defense of gay porn common in the gay press that gay porn is important because it represents and liberates a "natural" sexuality repressed by heteropatriarchy.[115] Instead, taking a cue from the social construction model of sexuality via Foucault, Dyer writes that porn is one mechanic by which ideas of sexuality and gender are socially constructed. Dyer substantiates this with a close reading of gay pornographic narrative as it constructs an eroticized relationship to masculinity. He writes, in a clear echo of Dworkin's *Pornography*, "the goal of the pornographic narrative is coming; in filmic terms, the goal is ejaculation, that is, visible coming…. The emphasis on

[114] Dyer presages the need for such an intervention in his introduction to *Gays and Film*, where he writes that "the debate about pornography seems so hopelessly enmeshed in moral posturing (on both sides) that any useful intervention in it needs to be concerned principally with changing the terms of the debate." Dyer, "Introduction" in *Gays and Film,* 2.

[115] In particular, Dyer names Gregg Blachford's "Looking at Pornography: Erotica and the Socialist Morality" as an example of this line of thought.

seeing orgasm is then part of the way porn (re)produces the construction of male sexuality."[116] He argues (in a point that Waugh's article contests) that even in the sphere of anal pleasure "the narrative is never organized around the desire to be fucked, but around the desire to ejaculate." This narrative troping reflects a truth about gay maleness in general: "Like male homosexuality itself, gay porn is always in this very ambiguous relationship to male power and privilege, neither fully within it nor fully outside it. But," he insists, "that ambiguity is a contradiction that can be exploited." For Dyer, gay maleness's ambivalence in gender represents a critical opportunity: though gay men and gay porn may be politically or aesthetically participating in the narrative of masculinity as erotic domination, they also represent an outside to this operation, a possibility for the rejection of this narrative and the establishment of a more radical experience and knowledge of the body, of erotics, of gender. Here, Dyer frames gay porn as an aesthetic analogue to gay men in general, as erotically but ambiguously allied to masculinity writ large.

Waugh's analysis in "Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight" largely agrees with Dyer on the premise that a feminist-informed gay criticism can imagine an otherwise to porn—in his terms an "alternative practice, a grass-roots pornography to counter the industrial…a challenge to our sexuality as well as a celebration of it," which he sees emblematized in Curt McDowell's film *Loads*.[117] Also like Dyer, he prefaces his own defense of porn as a genre with his self-described "solidarity in words and actions with women's rightful denunciation of pornography as an instrument of…the merchandizing and degradation of women's bodies." But Waugh takes more explicit issue with the lumping of straight and gay porn histories and industries and expresses discomfort with feminist casting off of gay and lesbian porn as perverse, unacceptable,

[116] Dyer, "Coming to Terms," 28.
[117] Thomas Waugh, "Men's Pornography Gay Vs. Straight." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 30 (1985), 35.

and degrading in the same way as straight porn.[118] At the level of conditions of production, at the level of cultural importance, and at the level of political representation, Waugh insists that gay porn cannot be compared to straight porn. Waugh had already argued in *The Body Politic* in 1983, based on his research at the Kinsey Institute, that gay erotic images represents the "cultural heritage" and primary visual culture of gay men.[119]And in a 1984 article for *The Body Politic*, he explicitly takes issue with Kathleen Barry's comments that "homosexual pornography acts out the same dominant and subordinate roles of heterosexual pornography,"[120] writing that for a "community to whom erotic images have meant so much historically," Barry's comment seems an "ill-informed, ill-considered assault."[121]

Unlike the close-reading Dyer, Waugh's method for showing this is mostly through taxonomy: the centerpiece of his article is a massive chart detailing the differences and similarities between gay porn and straight porn in terms of production, exhibition, consumption, depicted sexual practices, narrative, and ideological essence. To repeat his taxonomy here would be tedious, but important to our purposes are two important findings. First, gay porn's distinct conditions of production and distribution—much smaller in scope and financial backing, confined to the bounds of the gay "ghetto," largely projected in spaces that double as community sexual venues, while also being largely interwoven with community politics and events—signal a vastly different relationship to patriarchal power at all levels than is seen in straight porn. Gay porn's fantasy world reflects the culture of "the gay ghetto" more than it reflects that of the heterosexual world.[122] Second, in contrast to Barry's equivalence above, Waugh remarks that in

[118] He explicitly names as motivation for his analysis the 1980 condemnation by NOW of "pornography, pedophilia, sadomasochism, and public sex."
[119] Waugh, "A Heritage of Pornography" *The Body Politic* 90 (January 1983), 33.
[120] Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery*, 206.
[121] Waugh, "Photography, Passion & Power," 32.
[122] Waugh, "Men's Pornography, Gay & Straight," 32-34.

gay porn acts represented on screen and viewer's erotic identification are both in flux and not predetermined by gender divisions in any systematic way. Penetrative sex is not universally narratively privileged nor associated with proper masculinity, nor is receptive sex universally associated with objecthood or femininity. Though he admits that gay porn is often characterized by "phallus obsession," Waugh also remarks in contrast to Dyer that gay porn frequently narratively centers the erotics of receptive sex and of non-anal, non-genital sexualities that do not "organiz[e] around the narrator's ejaculation." Thus, at the levels of narrative, production, and exhibition, gay porn does not simply mimic or invert the gender politics and aesthetics of straight porn. Its own gender politics may be informed by patriarchy, but its genealogy, its representational priorities, and its cultural role is distinct.

But for Waugh, gay porn, like "the gay ghetto" it comes from, is both "progressive and regressive," as subversive of masculinism as it is reinforcing. In its hermeticism, gay porn's world simultaneously "provid[es] a protected space for non-conformist, non-reproductive and non-familial sexuality" and "perpetuate[s]" the "patriarchal privilege of male sexual expression." These are not so much conflicting phenomena as they are one in the same: "the patriarchy is propped up equally by the reinforcement of the gay male spectator's self-oppression, by his ghettoization." Only a pornography that challenges as much as it celebrates gay sexuality will work to undo this cultural situation. He writes, "Our pornography is shaped both by [our] oppression…and by our conditioning as men in patriarchy. We must direct our claim to our pornographic culture, not towards occupying our share of patriarchal space, but towards shattering that space, transforming it."[123]

[123] Waugh, "Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight," 31.

In this, Waugh's article shares with Dyer's the critical sense that gay porn reflects gay men's own ambivalent position with regards to heteromasculinity, that what is both problematic and valuable about gay porn is that it reflects the construction of male sexuality while interpreting an outside to that construction. So even as "Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight" takes pain to taxonomize the distinction between gay and straight "men's" porn in response to anti-porn feminist equivalences, it implicitly reinforces the idea of their connection. He remarks on this irony in a 2017 revisit of his article:

> it feels with 30 years' hindsight as if this concept of 'men's' pornography—with gay and straight being on a continuum rather than in separately lived worlds, echoing [Dyer's] similar thrust—might be the piece's standout contribution….In 1985, part of my tactical stance was undoubtedly defensive: to clearly distinguish between gay men's pornography and straight men's pornography was to argue that all of those horrible things arch-pornbaiters Andrea Dworkin and Kathleen Barry were saying about pornography did not apply to my brothers and me. But the effect may have been the opposite; that men gay and straight shared a constellation of erotic and representational practices for all their important political and cultural (and biological?) differences.[124]

Thus, Waugh still holds that gay porn is integrally involved with the social construction of gay men as men, even as it represents an otherwise to the politics and culture of straight porn.

Together, in their encounter with anti-porn feminist writing, these two pieces "burst open the whole taxonomical logjam" (to borrow Waugh's phrase)[125] of the debates around gay porn, establishing not just a critical vocabulary for its study, but also insisting that it represents a bodily knowledge and cultural heritage that can be improved, innovated, and imagined otherwise. As cornerstone pieces of the formation of gay porn studies, these essays are remarkable for their foundation of a branch of sexuality studies through an argument about the representation of gender in porn. Anti-porn feminist thought catalyzed for both Dyer and Waugh

[124] Thomas Waugh, "'Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight': A Personal Revisit," *Porn Studies* 4:2 (2017): 131-132.
[125] Waugh, "'Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight': A Personal Revisit," 132.

a need to critically revisit the relationship between gay men and masculinity—the role of gay men in the larger category of men—as a relationship constituted at the level of erotic aesthetics.

These foundational engagements began career-long engagements for both Dyer and Waugh with the aesthetics of gay porn, making them both venerated figures of gay porn studies. Waugh has remarked that the analysis in "Men's Pornography, Gay Vs. Straight" was the germ of his book *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall,* a massively detailed and oft-cited history of 19th and 20th century gay pornographic cultures.[126] Dyer continued to write articles and give interviews on the aesthetics of gay porn, developing his somewhat ambivalent view of the role of gender in gay porn. In an interview from 1989, Dyer and his interviewer name Dworkin as a particular opponent of gay porn's representation of the masculine. In his reply, he admits that "how gender is constructed in society at large" informs gay porn, but disagrees with Dworkin on the basis of the point (made by Waugh in "Men's Pornography") that gay porn allows for an oscillation between and destablization of power roles, not only between the male performers in the porn but between the viewer and these performers:

> [W]hen I say I want to feel or be the man I desire, my reaction is informed by the notion that 'that image or object is different from women.' So a sense of gender difference is present….But the important thing is to ask whether [this] difference always entails an assertion of superiority….[F]or me, to acknowledge my desire for another man is *also* to acknowledge I am not a 'real man,' that I am not fulfilling a proper role, that I am socially inferior.[127]

In this, gay porn oscillates not only in terms of fantasy roles of dominance/submission, but specifically in terms of identification with masculinity. Native to gay desire, and therefore to

[126] Thomas Waugh, "Introduction," in *The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writings on Queer Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 5.
[127] Richard Dyer, "A Conversation About Pornography," in *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Pleasure,* eds. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 202-203.

gay porn, is a formal merging of desire and identification and a simultaneous closeness and distance from masculinity. He expresses that, in gay porn, this expresses itself as a "sophisticated" study of the "relationship of viewer and being viewed."[128] This statement, developed from his disagreement with Dworkin's thought, became the germ for his 1994 article "Idol Thoughts: Orgasm and Self-Reflexivity in Gay Pornography," which analyzes metafilmic tropes (especially films-within-films) in gay porn.[129] In it, he builds from the analysis in "Gay Male Porn: Coming to Terms" of porn's address to the body and argues that gay porn's viscerality relies on its self-reflexivity, its naming of itself as a pornographic construction. This is just one thread to follow in how Dyer's work, foundational for gay porn studies, develops by encounters with anti-porn feminist thought.

Conclusion

In this history of the place of gay porn in the sex wars, what we have seen is not only a varied chorus of claims on the gender of gay men, but a virtual agreement between conflicting figures that erotic aesthetics construct gendered experience. In the case of sex wars debates about gay men, virtually all of these figures agree that gay porn mediates gay men's relationship to their status as men—whether as a masculinist fantasy of confirmation, a subversive rebellion against masculinity, a bodily knowledge of the sexualization of power, etc. We are historically far from the inversion model's dominance; indeed, this is the very period that sees the 1973 declassification of gayness as a psychological pathology. And yet, extant in these debates is the sense that gay men represent—at the level of their desires, their bodies, and importantly for this

[128] Dyer, "A Conversation About Pornography," 206.
[129] Richard Dyer, "Idol Thoughts: Orgasm and Self-Reflexivity in Gay Pornography," *Critical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1994): 54.

period, their media—a conflict between feminine and masculine, male and female. Along with the other major events of the sex wars—the Barnard conference, the contributions by Samois and the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce, and the first years of the AIDS crisis—the rage of these debates catalyzes the emergence of a gay and lesbian activism that sees itself as distinct from feminist activism and a gay and lesbian studies that sees itself as distinct from feminist studies.

Coda: On "LGBT" and the Possibility of Gay-Trans Coalition

In 1973, Sylvia Rivera's opportunity to speak at the Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally was hotly contested and nearly blocked by a split, angry crowd and organizing staff. "Alright, it's up to the gay people, what do you wanna do?" asks one organizer to a crowd that responds in a nebulous yell. Rivera finally speaks after a supportive contingent makes themselves known. She is greeted to raucous boos. "I've been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help and you all don't do a goddamn thing for them," she yells into the mic:

> The women have tried to fight for their sex changes or to become women of the women's liberation and they write STAR [Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries], not to the women's groups. They do not write women, they do not write men, they write STAR because we are trying to do something for them….You tell me to go and hide my tail between my legs. I will not put up with this shit. I have been beaten. I have had my nose broken. I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation and you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you all?...I believe in the gay power. I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights….The people [at STAR] are trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women that belong to a white, middle class, white club. And that's what you all belong to.[1]

She ends her speech spelling out "GAY POWER," echoed by the portion of the crowd that supports her: "Gimme a G! Gimme an A!..." As in the history covered in the last chapter of this dissertation, this speech is a key moment in the frictions of post-Stonewall coalitional organizing, the enduring tensions between gay, lesbian, trans, and feminist activisms and communities. The word "gay" in this speech and moment is incredibly ambivalent; in both the staff member's comment that Rivera's right to speak is "up to the gay people" and Rivera's use of the term throughout, "gay" seems to capture both Rivera's inclusion and exclusion from its

[1] Video of this speech is available here: https://youtu.be/mprUOGBWCvY?si=I8U_gjxHBIqG7ic1

political promises. It represents both gendered marginalization and the aspirations to gender normativity by a particular political formation of 70s Gay Liberation. Rivera's call for "gay power" is a bitter one, a call for a gay power that is not merely equivalent to a sexually minoritarian extension of the economic and political power of middle-class whiteness, but instead includes working class and incarcerated trans people.

"Gay," in this scene of trans antagonism, is performing much of the work the phrase "LGBT" has done in the decades since. It captures a coalitional politics of sexual and gendered difference, but also highlights community distinctions, tensions, and antagonisms. The acronym itself has been subject to a variety of political manipulations, its letters expanded and reduced, acting primarily as a microcosm of the problems of coalitional politics since the 1990s when the term gained popular use. There are plenty of successors to the trans antagonism of the 1973 rally in the LGBT politics of the young 21st century. For an example from one of the largest organizations dedicated to supposedly LGBT organizing, take the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) involvement in the path of the proposed Employee Non-Discrimination Act. In 2007, in a bid to make the proposed act more palatable to the Bush-era Congress that had been repeatedly shooting it down, gay Senator Barney Frank introduced a version of the act that removed protections for gender identity. Whereas nearly every major LGBT activist and legal group opposed this version of the act, the HRC opted not to take a stand in a public statement, but privately endorsed the bill in a letter to House representatives.[2]

[2] Paul Schindler, "HRC Alone in Eschewing No-Compromise Stand," *Gay City News*, October 4, 2007, archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20080409024947/http://www.gaycitynews.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=18883568&BRD=2729&PAG=461&dept_id=568864&rfi=6;
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights letter, signed by the Human Rights Campaign, November 6, 2007, archived at:
https://web.archive.org/web/20150924063629/http://www.pamspaulding.com/graphics/LCCR_ENDA_%20Letter.pdf

Though one might chalk it up to the predictable disappointments of engaging in federal politicking, this is a rather direct example of the uneasy alliance inherent in the "LGBT" label. "LGBT," as the primary label for queer politics in the contemporary, holds out a promise that the forms of sexual and gendered minoritarianism that have come to the political fore by the end of the 20th century can speak to each other and show up for each other as they approach the horizon of a world that "gets better." But its enumeration of identities, as seemingly infinite in expansion as constantly reducible, serves as a reminder of that promise's recurring failures to cohere. Too much of LGBT politics in the 21st century has seen both the holding out of that promise and the simultaneous betrayal of it. This is similar not only to problems of the late 20th century Gay Liberation politics that betrayed Rivera, but also to the situation of 19th and early 20th century sexual and gendered taxonomic activism—as attested to by my introduction's comparison of the counterpoised "invert," "unisexual," and "pederast."

This problem feels especially apparent in the contemporary wave of transphobia and anti-trans panic, primarily but by no means exclusively in the United States and Britain. Take, for one example, the British hate group the LGB Alliance, which formed in opposition to LGBT charity Stonewall for its inclusion of trans rights issues. The LGB Alliance argues that lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people are united by "sexual orientation, [which] has nothing to do with being trans," and supports conversion therapy for trans people, "biological definitions of sex," and the banning of childhood hormone replacement therapy.[3] This is to say, the LGB Alliance ostensibly rests on a politicized division of sexuality and gender difference (opposing the partial

[3] Genevieve Gluck, "What's Current: Dispute Over Gender Identity Splits Stonewall, Creating LGB Faction," *Feminist Current*, October 23, 2019: https://www.feministcurrent.com/2019/10/23/whats-current-dispute-over-gender-identity-splits-stonewall-creating-lgb-faction/

convergence implicit in the promise of "LGBT"), but quickly reveals that their position is, essentially, that transness should be legislated and therapied out of existence entirely.

What might be surprising about groups like the LGB Alliance, were they not so repeatedly precedented in historical queer activisms, is that the heterosexual majority of the anti-trans panic gripping Britain and the United States includes plentiful forms of gayness in its phobic crosshairs. The simultaneity of anti-trans panic and "Don't Say Gay" laws, anti-drag bills, and the rise in anti-gay hate crimes in both the United States and Britain is not merely coincidental; transphobia and homophobia include each other. A gay group, like the LGB Alliance, that attempts to side-step a transphobic force by joining it is decidedly counterproductive, if not totally incoherent. One way of expressing the problem of the three examples of trans-antagonism by gay people that I have pointed to here—Rivera's tense crowd, the 2007 HRC, and the LGB Alliance—is that they hope for something that is impossible to achieve: a transphobia that would somehow not swallow them alive.

In this dissertation, I have explained the interlinkage of transphobia and homophobia by arguing that gayness has been a major site for sexuality and gender's appearances as forms of each other. More precisely, I have argued that the homosexual's solidification as figure in the Western 20th and 21st century formulated through the enduring conceptual architecture of the inversion model, which interwove sexuality and gender into a metaphorical structure of interiority vs. exteriority, essence vs. type. I have shown, counter to contemporary separations of gender and sexuality, that this model's endurance has meant that the question of the gender of gay men has been an incredibly productive one in cultural, political, theoretical, and erotic discourses of gayness through the 20th and 21st centuries. We have seen across the course of this dissertation a wide variety of claims staked on the gender of gay men, from those of Raffalovich

or the LGB Alliance that see gay men as gender normative men, to those of Ulrichs or Sullivan who see gayness and transness as nearly synonymous, to those of Dyer and Als who see in gay men a profound allegiance to womanhood, and so on. I have attempted to historicize and interpret the contours of these claims, and the conceptual separations or overlaps between gay maleness, transness, womanhood/feminism, and masculinity. In doing so, we have seen that the idea of the "cis gay man," one who could coherently separate himself from transness and from womanhood, is a historically late and terribly fragile construction.

In the work of this dissertation, I have attempted to provide us with a fuller view and a more precise historicization of the unsteady allegiances between gayness and transness, between gayness and feminism, and between gayness and masculinity. I have included these examples of trans antagonism by gay activist groups in this coda to situate what is, perhaps, one of the dissertation's largest ambitions. My hope is that the research represented here can serve as the foundation for a more robust and intimate vision of gay-trans solidarity, one that goes beyond the divided coalitional politics of the LGBT model, one that is more precise than the expanse represented in contemporary deployments of "queer," and one that rejects the defenses of territorially-defined identities and communities. This vision of gay-trans solidarity would understand gayness and transness as sharing the experience of figuring gendered and erotic marginalization and transformation. Though the cases analyzed here—from Als's inner Black mother, to the improvised erotics of Donoso's Manuela, from Sullivan's trans fag sameness, to Dyer's call for a gay pornography outside of the social construction of masculinity—are not meant exactly as prescriptive models of such a solidarity, I elucidate them here to show what the stakes, dimensions, pleasures, and difficulties of such a solidarity have been and could be.

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