

THE SPACE OF SEX

THE PORN AESTHETIC IN CONTEMPORARY
FILM AND TELEVISION

SHELTON WALDREP



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Shelton Waldrep

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For Jane, whose body is the landscape of all my desire.

Contents

List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgments	x
Introduction	1
Part 1 Topographies of Desire	
1 Framing the Image: The Female Body in Late Kubrick	15
2 The Spy Who Loved Me: Bond and the <i>Playboy</i> Aesthetic	55
Part 2 The Pornographic Imaginary	
3 Theorizing Pornography	83
4 Body of Art	133
Part 3 The Space of Sex in Contemporary Film and Television	
5 Porn as Form and Content	165
6 Spatializing Desire	215
Bibliography	261
Index	281

List of Figures

0.1	Title sequence. <i>Goldfinger</i> . Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists	4
1.1	Grady sisters. <i>The Shining</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1980. Warner Brothers	16
1.2	Street at night. <i>The Killer's Kiss</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1955. United Artists	17
1.3	Stargate. <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	17
1.4	Sunlamp. <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1964. Columbia Pictures	18
1.5	Sunlamp. <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	19
1.6	Pyle. <i>Full Metal Jacket</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1987. Warner Brothers	20
1.7	Sniper. <i>Full Metal Jacket</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1987. Warner Brothers	20
1.8	Opening image. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	21
1.9	Opening image detail. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	21
1.10	Model. <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1971. Warner Brothers	22
1.11	Woman in shower. <i>The Shining</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1980. Warner Brothers	22
1.12	Bill and Alice before the mirror. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	23
1.13	Marion. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	24
1.14	Domino. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	24
1.15	Women with Red Cloak. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	25
1.16	Sally. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	26
1.17	The sacrifice. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	27
1.18	Rainbow costume shop. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	44
1.19	Curtain of lights at the Ziegler mansion. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	45
2.1	Berlin. <i>Barry Lyndon</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1975. Warner Brothers	57
2.2	Chateau. <i>Paths of Glory</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1957. United Artists	58
2.3	Bowman's celestial hotel. <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	58
2.4	The War Room map. <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1964. Columbia Pictures	59

2.5	Dr. No's lair. <i>Dr. No</i> . Terence Young. 1962. United Artists	60
2.6	Ft. Knox. <i>Goldfinger</i> . Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists	61
2.7	Villa Savoye. Le Corbusier. 1929–31. Author	63
2.8	Glass House. Philip Johnson. 1947–9. Author	65
2.9	Blofeld's conference room. <i>Thunderball</i> . Terence Young. 1965. United Artists	66
2.10	M's conference room. <i>Thunderball</i> . Terence Young. 1965. United Artists	67
2.11	M's conference room map. <i>Thunderball</i> . Terence Young. 1965. United Artists	67
2.12	The Minister of Police's conference room. <i>Barry Lyndon</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1975. Warner Brothers	67
2.13	Villa Savoye detail. Le Corbusier. 1929–31. Author	72
2.14	Glass House detail. Philip Johnson. 1947–9. Author	72
2.15	Jill Masterson. <i>Goldfinger</i> . Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists	74
2.16	Jill Masterson detail. <i>Goldfinger</i> . Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists	74
3.1	An edging session. "Monster Dick Cums 3 Times." Cumcontrol 101	88
3.2	Karova Milk Bar. <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1971. Warner Brothers	116
3.3	Orgy. <i>Eyes Wide Shut</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers	116
4.1	<i>David</i> . Donatello. 1430–40. Author	137
4.2	<i>David</i> . Michelangelo. 1501–4. Author	138
4.3	The Parthenon frieze. British Museum. Author	140
4.4	Detail of the Parthenon frieze. British Museum. Author	141
4.5	<i>The Deposition</i> . Michelangelo. 1547–55. Author	142
5.1	Dave Bowman. <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	190
5.2	Taking a selfie. <i>Beach Rats</i> . Eliza Hittlman. 2017. Neon	204
5.3	Double portrait. <i>Beach Rats</i> . Eliza Hittlman. 2017. Neon	204
6.1	Hilton Hotel. <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> . Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	225

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Introduction

“Tout l’art est érotique.”

–Adolf Loos, “Ornement et Crime,”
Les Cahiers d’aujourd’hui, no. 5 Juin, 1913

This study examines how the fragmented body is represented in various media via its position in space and the illusion of the built environment created by sets, camera angles, and other aspects of filmed culture that contribute to the representation of gender and sex on the screen. My argument is that mainstream, independent, and foreign film and “prestige” television in the United States are increasingly preoccupied with the human body as an erotic object. As film and television become ever more focused on the pornographic gaze of the camera, the human body undergoes a metamorphosis, becoming both landscape and building, part of an architectonic design in which the erotics of the body spread beyond the body itself to influence the design of the film or televisual shot. The body becomes the *mise-en-scène* of contemporary moving imagery. This book looks particularly at what might be considered a second wave of influence of pornography on mainstream film and television that has taken place since the 1970s.¹

An interest in researching and writing about adult film grew out of the final chapter and coda of my book *The Dissolution of Place*, where I looked at images of the body in the late films of Stanley Kubrick and at the architectural metaphors that are a part of virtual communities, especially pornography. This work has become the central focus in *The Space of Sex*. I argue that the pornification of culture, especially nearly all forms of visual representation, marks a further intensification of what I have termed elsewhere “self-invention,” the constant performance of a self as a way to advertise and publicize a constructed persona.² What was once the domain of the artistic few—from Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol and David Bowie—has become the desire of many who are able to utilize technology, especially social media, to push their performance of self constantly in a nonending accretion of details, images, updates, selfies, posts, and video clips. Porn is a subset of this performativity, one based specifically on sex and the body as a display of parts and sexual acts. In this sense, pornography is performance and everything that is performance also contains at least an element of porn, the aspect that is most likely to arouse a bodily response from the viewer.³

This book's three-part structure begins with a discussion of Kubrick's final film and his career in general (including his work as a still photographer); moves on to a consideration of porn in contemporary film, literature, and theory; and ends in a final part with case studies from film and television of the twenty-first century. The second part (and to some extent the first) is intended to put forward the theory I am working from, with the last part comprising the examples. The first part has a relation to the last part that is similar to the one that Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* (2002) has to *The Modernist Papers* (2007). While all three parts discuss individual movies, the last functions mainly as an attempt to illustrate what has come before in the book in a more theoretical or historical context.

The examples of film and television that I use here to examine the vicissitudes of the body and its moving image are taken purposefully from pornography, action film, and the late cinema of Stanley Kubrick. What they have in common is gender and sexuality, especially the representation of the body in relationship to architecture and design. The erotic nature of these spaces is connected to their reflection of and uses by bodies—specifically, sexuality and its ability to leave traces in the designs we fantasize about as much as the people who are supposed to inhabit them. Indeed, the two cannot be separated. In terms of the first, I am especially interested in porn as both content and subject—that is, films and television that deal with erotic material, the emergence of porn as a genre or influence, and actual pornography itself. In terms of Kubrick, I see the importance of the representation of the body in his work as emblematic of the uniting of high and low art via the still image. His posthumous and unfinished *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) lends credence to the idea that pornography can be a subject of art, and vice versa.

Defining the Body

The corporeal turn in film studies has manifested itself in a surprisingly persistent way, from Freud to surrealism, Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze (Brinkema 122). Marx's philosophical system, especially as it is outlined in the *Grundrisse*, is grounded in the materiality of the body and what is actually done to it, and with it, by both abstract and human forces. Marx's writing there is particularly attuned to an almost fin-de-siècle attention to surface, to the body and the senses. From at least the nineteenth century on, the body is no longer "a substance with an essence, as in classical ontology" but "a singularity comprised of force, or as an assemblage of multiple forces" (122). Nietzsche replaces "the body" with "bodies" (122), though what we define as a singularity is itself multiply theorized. While we can define bodies in numerous ways, the rise of pornography—in literature, in film, and even referenced more and more in music and on television—gives rise to the post-HIV awareness of the limits of the body, of the actual physical vessels that we inhabit. Just as there is an internet of things, we are now bodies of things—data, relations, and even other living organisms that not only travel in and on us but constitute us as well. In the twenty-first century, the most potent theoretical definition might well be that of the inability to disentangle the individual body from everything else—the planet, other

species, even the biomass of microscopic flora and fauna that make up our bodies and make us into something resembling a symbiotic community of millions of organisms—humans as Portuguese Men of War. Whether we are the troubling center of the Anthropocene, the dawn of a planet-killing period of time, the notion of a post-human mindset has meant that the idea of embodiment has never been so often discussed, most especially in terms of difference—species, gender, race, class, and sexuality, to name only a few (Rossini 155). At the same time that these differences are politicized, even fetishized, the notion of post-human calls into question the human-centered quality of difference, the ability to even think of material distinctness as anything but an illusion (156–7). In this scenario, the best thing to do with the body is to “pluralize” it, to remove the very notion that it is a discrete whole separated from anyone, or anything, else.

When we talk about the body, we are, of course, talking about something that is always already both material and illusory. Does the body begin and end at the skin’s surface? Or does it continue well beyond via the use of technology or simply the mind’s own mental picture of what it thinks a body is? Most importantly, in terms of the body’s representation on film and in television is the extent to which the body is necessarily fragmented into parts—the edits that attempt to focus on it up close and the emphasis, in porn especially, on the part representing the whole. In general, porn represents the female body in a state of wholeness, a landscape whether a nude by Giorgione or a title sequence for the Bond franchise. The male body is more likely to be seen in parts, the penis, especially, functioning as the metonymy or synecdoche for the male body as a whole, made mammoth and larger-than-life in porn, but always reflected in film as a stand-in for masculinity.⁴ As Eugenie Brinkema notes, the corporeal turn in philosophy owes much to Nietzsche, though for him, as Sedgwick demonstrates in the *Epistemology of the Closet*, the move is specifically toward a masculine body, not just any body (123)⁵ (Figure I.1).

All bodies, then, are subjects of history and identity, and this situation, while less consequential in art rather than life, can be doubly so there. More importantly, perhaps, theories of the body do have a place in theory generally as all discussions involving “the body” refer to specificities, whether they belong to you or not, and allow us to develop tools for understanding how we live embodied lives and how understanding the body elucidates other aspects of theoretical engagement. A necessarily interdisciplinary study, work on the body means understanding not only how art affects the body directly by making it react to stimuli that affect the body—a horror film or a porn short, for example—but also how all of our experience of culture involves the body, our relationship to it, to others, and to its complex changeability. The study of the body is, and always will be, a dynamic one. The representation of the body in film is always one in which the representation of an object or of a supposed concrete reality is never actually in a direct or naïve one-to-one correspondence with the world. That is, we should not assume that “the cinematic image is somehow an altered ... re-presentation of the world” (Richmond 68). On the one hand, there is such a close relationship between film and the objects that it displays that we cannot ignore this connection entirely, especially since the appearance of an object tends to disappear behind the object it displays (69). On the other hand, we should, as



Figure 0.1 Title sequence. *Goldfinger*. Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists.

Scott C. Richmond writes, resist this transformation and ceaselessly remind ourselves that the appearance is never the reality.

At the level of the everyday we tend to see bodies as ideological wholes, as the presentation of an idea through materiality. And while all bodies contain anatomical and physiological differences, some differences are arguably more important than others. We tend to emphasize gender, skin color, age, and culturally defined notions of beauty, for example, while ignoring others, including the fact that bodies tend, overall, to have more traits in common than not. What is perhaps most important, however, is to understand that bodies are phenomenal. They are objects that are present in real sensory contexts. To that extent, they are objects of definition and desire but also already a part of the universe of sensations. For the purposes of this book they are also, in general, actual bodies that exist mainly as representations—in film, television, graphic novels, and fiction. In that sense, they are not real *per se* but in the sense that they are bodies represented in cultural production. Still, to talk about the body can seem to talk about a concept rather than a thing, a unitary position that may be an illusion. The paradigm of the body, in general and in particular, changes over time. I would, in fact, argue that nothing takes on the baggage of representation more than does the notion of the body and the changes that show up in the visual representations of the body that are now, for better or worse, ubiquitous thanks to changes in technology that allow us to record digital images of the body constantly and share them with the world.⁶

As a way to understand perhaps the most radical way that bodies can be different, one only has to look at Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on Gary Fisher, an African American writer whose diaries she edited in the 1990s who was fascinated by certain kinds of

BDSM. As Jason Edwards argues, Fisher's work was something Sedgwick explored "as part of a Queer performative project of sexual representation that was frightening even to Fisher in its ambition and intensity. Fisher's was ... a literary project that was not just concerned with representing sex but with stretching every boundary of what sex could represent" (87). In that sense, then, BDSM should be seen not as "a symptomatic and politically dangerous internalised endorsement of violence and oppression" but "as a potentially reparative, queer performative scene in which what takes place can be performatively complex, specific, challenging, changing and rewarding" (87). This is precisely the way that BDSM, race, and sex are used by Jennifer C. Nash, who opens up a space where bodies can be seen in ways similar to Sedgwick's framing of Fisher.

As Nash argues, female Black buttocks have been the source of a "pedagogical site" (452) at least since the Hottentot Venus reduced African American women to a body part that represented racial difference (440). This metonymy for the Black body has carried over into pornography, where it has become the notion of anal sex, which itself is seen as "synonymous" with Black identity (441). Among the many associations with Black anality are "waste," "filth," "excess," "display," "spatiality," and "grotesquerie" (441). The Black female anus has been seen as a portal between the interior of the body and the supposedly outside world of the ghetto. The anus becomes a metaphor, in other worlds, that is supposed to represent the real. So strong is this association that Black heterosexual sex is always already queered by the image of Black anal sex, which takes on the doubled notion of bottoming as both racial and sexual abjection (445). In pornographic film in particular, the Black anus receives special significance, even to the point that in scenes involving anal sex the final money shot is not of the penis but of the semen-filled anus (449), which takes control of the visual logic of the genre itself. Given Nash's linear connections, it is not surprising that the scenes involving the Black anus focus on "upcloseness" (450), in which the camera moves into the anus itself to see the inside. Not surprisingly, the interior of the Black female anus looks like any other and "the 'secret' of Black interiority" is "a kind of profound corporeal sameness, a sameness that is all the more surprising because it is laid bare in a genre that incessantly promises the distinctiveness of Black bodies" (452). Nash ends with a discussion of a short film—"Juicy Ass Moon Bounce!"—in which "astronauts" who have anal sex with women on the moon celebrate after the act by pouring beer, not body fluids, down their asses. The display "represents Black female sexuality as a receptacle for waste, as a site that literarily houses—and perhaps even luxuriates in—the wasteful impulses and desires of Black men" (455).

If the Black female body can be seen as always already objectified via gender and race, the two existing simultaneously within our culture, then this same abjection, far from being seen as shameful and inevitably demeaning, can also be seen as "a space of play, pleasure, desire and insight for black subjects" (456). As Nash emphasizes, "black feminist work has given us sufficient tools to critique the violence of the visual field and to consider strategies for recovering black female flesh" (456). One example of this recovery work can be seen in Ariane Cruz's paean to Black female BDSM, *The Color of Kink*. For Cruz, thanks to the "sex wars" of the late twentieth century, "violence is usually conceptualized as men enacting violence toward women and is usually framed

as harmful and unproductive” (9). In her own work in “pornography and racialized sexuality” (8), she is instead “interested in how violence and aggression become a source of sexual pleasure and possibility for women and how women are active agents of violence and domination rather than passive victims” (9). Cruz goes on to read the art of female material and body artists, porn films, and ultimately pornographic technology (such as BDSM mechanical “fucking machines”) as sites of complex layers of degradation and pleasure. For her,

The politics of perversion works to queer “normal,” to unveil its kinks, disclose its ethical foundation, and destabilize its privileged zenith on a hierarchy of sexuality. In a Freudian tradition wherein sexual perversions represent that which contests the authority of heterosexual genital penetration as the purportedly “true” and “correct” form of sex, to pervert *is* to queer. The politics of perversion reflects this queering power of perversion. (17)

In a chapter on porn in film, Cruz analyzes the Mitchell brothers’ classic *Behind the Green Door* (1972), specifically the scene where former boxer Johnnie Keyes has sex with the film’s star, Marilyn Chambers. While I discuss this film at length in Chapter 3, what matters here is the spectacle of Keyes, who is African American, having sex with the white Chambers but also saying, in an interview that Cruz quotes, that he saw the scene as a form of “revenge pornography” (130). For Cruz, this complex historical reference crosses and re-crosses through most, if not all, interracial sexual acts and their representations: “Though they do not explicitly analyze interracial pornography’s scripts of racial-sexual aggression, such as the script of (inter)racial-sexual revenge, they evoke Keyes and his legacy, referring to the pornographic icon of the prodigiously endowed black male whose role is to ‘punish erring White women and reduce their status’” (131). The missing term in this scenario is the white man, who is present but supposedly absent, the jealous missing third term that nevertheless lurks as observer—literally or figuratively (132). Cruz rejects this formulation, however, as the further erasure of the Black female. More important is the way in which sex between a Black man and a white woman already complexifies the pairing in terms of sex, gender, race, and sexuality—a space opened up by BDSM (133).⁷

A specific example of how this complexity might work can be seen in the subgenre of interracial cuckold pornography in which a white man watches his white wife have sex with a Black man. The husband or boyfriend might participate or merely observe, might be upbraided or simply forced to comply with the situation. Among the many types of desire that these scenes ignite, the most salient is probably the homoerotic one of the two men—the husband’s desire for the Black man as transmitted through the avatar of the wife. As Cruz notes, “the narratives of BDSM and queerness are, like the white man who is seemingly suspended in the backdrop of these images, peripheral yet important. Here the margins are actually the center: queer desire and BDSM take their seat in this perverse family play” (143). Categories slip and the notion of pornographic genre is no longer clear: Is this straight porn? Gay? Queer? Interracial, certainly, but

how? (147). Representations of sex, while pulling on the historical record of the body, nevertheless complicate this reality by creating its own history and generic constructs.

* * *

This book opens with a chapter on the late work of Stanley Kubrick as it relates to the aesthetic of the still photograph. I discuss here the use of a particular female body type that signals an interest on his part in not only the framing of the body but also the notion of stillness and time that permeates his oeuvre. I move from the body to the topic of the picturesque or pictorial as it becomes increasingly important in his films. The discussion in the second chapter brings in the Bond franchise, which shared a production designer with Kubrick, Ken Adam, and is a mass cultural version of the same interest in bodies in space. Part I sets up some important tropes for the book: the movement between high and low art; the emphasis on the body, looking, and framing; and the general intermedial and interdisciplinary methodology of the book as a whole. The work on Kubrick forms an anchor for the project, but the meta-theme is the impress of the body on the design of film and television.

In Chapter 3 of Part II I also deal specifically with pornography as a genre and look at the utopian potential of porn as well as its dystopian aspect. The more I have written about the utopian aspects of film design, the more instances I seem to come across of its connection to actual architecture. All recent media that deal in some way with porn harken back to the brief moment in early 1970s filmmaking in the United States when the porn industry made narrative-based films such as *Behind the Green Door* and *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976). The utopian elements of 1970s porn get reprocessed in a complex way in the twenty-first century as both a utopian impulse—the desire to have sex on the screen, to re-eroticize sex as something positive and lacking in shame—with a mixed feeling about pornography itself and an industry that can be seen in a dystopian light. Sex, in other words, in our contemporary world, still does not come without compromise. We are not post-AIDS, or perhaps more specifically from the standpoint of utopian studies, we are still not, and perhaps never can be, a pre-AIDS era again. At the same time that the representation of sex on big and small screens becomes more ubiquitous, it also exposes our simultaneous desire for a sexual utopia and distrust of it—the same duality that disrupted the pornographic revolution in the mid-1970s to create a trajectory we have been on ever since. One might say that recent work on sex on screen has attempted to go back to the early 1970s and create the trajectory that was never able to complete itself. What would the film world be like if we had never had *Miller v. California* (1971)? If Reagan had not been elected? If the AIDS crisis had never arisen? The utopian desire to know but not to believe in this possibility marks our current discourse around sex.

The third part of the book shifts to specific examples of the porn aesthetic in contemporary film and television. Chapter 5 focuses on how sex, gender, and sexuality are represented in several recent films, including Paul Schrader's *The Canyons* (2013),

Oliver Stone's *Savages* (2012), Steven Soderbergh's *Magic Mike* (2012), Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac* (2013), and Joseph Gordon-Levitt's *Don Jon* (2013). Each of these mainstream or independent movies, and several more, are examined for the ways they have attempted to absorb pornography, if not the pornography industry specifically, into their plots. While many of these directors seem to build upon the pioneering work of Michael Winterbottom in *9 Songs* (2004), Vince Gallo with *The Brown Bunny* (2003), or the directors of the 'New French Extremity' (or *cinéma du corps*) school of neo-pornography such as Catherine Breillat (*Romance*, 1999, for example), Gaspar Noé (*Irréversible*, 2002), or Bruno Dumont (*Twentynine Palms*, 2003), more recent directors have attempted to deal with porn as a topic rather than a shock effect—not making porn films with a minimal plot but rather making conventional films that integrate porn elements or deal with the topic of porn as a part of the content of the film.⁸ These chapters discuss films, television shows, and other pop cultural phenomena as they relate design to gender and sexuality. I try to explain how the notion of architectural space is actually key to understanding changing definitions of the gendered and sexualized body as it enters the loop of viewer reaction. One example of this change can be seen in the notions of gender identity that have emerged on television shows during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Specifically, the use of vampires and shape-shifters to represent disenfranchised gay men on *True Blood* (2008–14), the notion of the double agent and its link to closeted gay men on *Mad Men* (2007–15), and the complex relationship between gender instability and monstrosity on the show *Lost* (2004–10). The material on the TV show *Lost* is one place to look to talk about the loop between the show and the audience and how the latter can actually change the former via social media.

The particular television shows and films that I discuss illustrate changes in the way we think about the body on screen. In order to talk about the televisual body, especially, I discuss some broader ways that television has altered our sense of time, space, and technology. As a part of this discussion, in the coda to the last chapter, I analyze non-visual texts like graphic novels that deal with gender and sexuality, such as *Y: The Last Man*, *Saga*, and *Sex Criminals*. Comic books are a major influence on film and television, providing much of the content for new shows. I would be remiss in not at least briefly discussing them, and I am not sure that a book devoted exclusively to one medium or genre exists anymore.

A Note on the Overall Structure

The three parts of the book represent their own kind of spatialization of the topic of corporeality in film and television, moving, in part one, from the permission to take porn seriously contained within Kubrick's last film to ways to read the connection between space and the human body in the Bond films. Part II discusses the development of a definition of pornography as it has come to us through art history, film, literature, and theory, with a special emphasis on visual art, especially sculpture,

which sometimes functions as a literalization of the body. The third part is an attempt to illustrate the book's own argument that porn is now mainstream, often at the margins of culture, but increasingly forming or influencing the content of visual media, which is now often decentered, created, or influenced as much by the audience as the auteur. I attempt to illustrate this phenomenon by providing my own notes toward a critique of contemporary film and television, one that is, like a blog, endlessly temporal, even linear, but also spatial or rhizomatic. Just as a new generation does not experience or even see the stability of gender or the codification of aesthetics, so, too, does this book suggest in its structure the endless idea of the additive quality of porn. Like Sade, there is always one more story, one more barrier to be reached, one more thing to see.

The technology contained on mobile phones and personal devices erodes the barriers between self and other, body and representation. This book's structure, likewise, attempts to bridge some of the gaps between history and contemporary culture, media, expertise, art, and mass culture. Desire does not choose where to go, but levels out the field, moving toward the mystery that exists at the heart of sex and sexuality. Kubrick's film cautions the viewer that all is not what meets the eye where sex and the body are concerned. The attempt by men to control the beautiful female body is misplaced, dangerous, and only unlearned through experience. The Bond films, especially in the guise of the villain, show us the spatialization of sex that is the villain's lair and the blending of virtual space with the body that results in the final objectification of the female body as a landscape in and of itself, one that dwarfs the hero. Sex becomes space. Much as the camera tracks through the corridors of the Somerton Mansion in *Eyes Wide Shut*, we are unable to escape the phallogentric aesthetic of the Bond or *Playboy* vision of the world, one in which we see the world as a series of chambers of pleasure.

Porn becomes a metaphor for history and culture, unveiling the body as a sort of anti-fetish that contains within it the primary way in which we experience art or entertainment. Ultimately, the line between what is and is not porn has eroded to the point that the distinction no longer has any meaning. Pornography is everything; everything is pornography. This book's chiasmatic or triptych structure is an attempt to make that point. Like porn on the internet, it can be read from front to back, or in Part III, dipped into to see what might be of interest, now, or in the always-receding future that is the past.

Finishing the final stages of this book during a global pandemic in some ways emphasizes the prescience of Kubrick's claim that sex, in its essence, never changes. Whether it is the fear of syphilis during the era of Freud and Arthur Schnitzler, upon whose work the film is based, the plague masks of Venice featured so prominently in the film, the HIV-positive test that one of the characters in the film receives, or our own health crisis, sex is an often negotiated, complex dance that contains many dangers, not all of them psychological. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a situation in which many people are separated by masks. The miming of kissing with masks on in the film's orgy scene reads very differently today, when the isolation of uncoupled people is yet another reminder of what has been lost in society, if only temporarily, in

terms of physical touch, social connection, and sex itself. Public health organizations have suggested the return of the glory hole as a safe sex alternative (Parker-Pope). Kissing has become the new taboo. Not surprisingly, technology has stepped in as more people have turned to the internet as a way to connect for sex that, while lacking in physical contact, at least provides what porn delivers: bodily representation and a sense of other people, however virtual. The nude selfie has perhaps never had more prominence (Spechler), and the rise in internet sex work has never been greater (Drolet).

The claims I make in this book that porn in general and the masked orgy scene of *Eyes Wide Shut* in particular have become the metonym for sex on the narrative screen have only increased as sex has been pushed toward the virtual by the Zoom-based reality of the pandemic. Kubrick's film is now code for sex in film and television much as the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is for science fiction or the ax from *The Shining* (1980) for horror. Kubrick left an indelible mark on the genre of porn as well. Whatever the debates about what the rise in porn might say about our cultural moment separate from the pragmatic urgency that technology has given to it, we see the multiplication of venues for porn giving rise to new cultural representation as well. The film *Shakedown* (2018), a mainstream documentary made in cooperation with Pornhub that features a strip club for lesbians (Ryzik), or the series *P-Valley* (2020–) on Starz, which is based on an African American strip club in the Delta region of Mississippi, would not be possible without the current mainstreaming of porn. In both cases, female desire, created by and often for women of color, emerges from the opportunity to take porn seriously.⁹ Pornography on the big and small screens is not a luxury for some but a way to see the visibility of their desires expressed. Now, in these dark times, it is also a necessity for everyone seeking the safety of the representation of the body that the visual media that deliver pornography offer. The analysis of porn should always be a part of the historical contingency that shapes it and is shaped by it. Neither should be underestimated.

Notes

- 1 Linda Williams traces the beginning of this time in the last chapter of *Screening Sex*—“Hard-Core Art Films since the 1990s.”
- 2 See my *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie*.
- 3 Stephen Barber:

Performance and film both pivot around the human body; the binding ligature between the two forms is corporeally made of gestures, enactments, movements, falls, assaults, transformations, vanishings. But the material of film ... is distinct from the material of performance, in its props, scenery or other objects.... Those objects surrounding ... performers have not encountered any fundamental change for millennia. [...] But film began to take on its distinctive identity as a medium for the documentation and exploration of performance at a particular moment, in 1893, with the

widescale availability of celluloid film capable of holding and eventually projecting moving-image sequences, and the resultant severing of film from still photography. (37)

- 4 Tattoos and piercings further fragment the body and resist wholeness or naturalness. Tattoos have recently gone from being minor, if ubiquitous, to taking over more and more of the flesh of some celebrities, with the most recent trend to connect the spaces between them to make larger, torso-covering maps of images. These total body tattoos make the male body no longer seem to be covered in flesh. The skin becomes a screen on which to project permanent images. The body no longer reads as flesh but as a smudge, a different kind of reality.
- 5 While it is hardly the only salient topic to discuss in an attempt to define the body, it is paramount that we understand that gender is at the center of any discussion of the body—that it is there, lurking, in some form in all situations and that it should not be considered the provenance of the minority, the secondary identity only to be discussed by theorists who do mostly or exclusively feminist theory or themselves identify as female. It is not possible to discuss porn and the erotic without discussing the sex/gender system. Likewise, it is important to understand that the issue of sex and gender is central to all critical discourses and media and that it is work that should be carried out by everyone who engages in cultural critique. For more on the nuances of this debate, see Jones and Getsy.
- 6 To the extent to which porn is or is not a positive force, there are arguments both ways. On the one hand, one can see porn as subjectively unpleasant, as not to one's taste or not acceptable in terms of gender or class. This argument, when kept to a personal one, is certainly defensible, though when taken to apply to the culture at large, one needs to ask to what extent the argument is an overblown reaction to the supposed immorality of porn—a reaction that often far outweighs the actual effect of porn and that contains an argument about sexual morality that is culturally relative. Porn can be pathologized, and in the case of porn addiction, perhaps necessarily so, but one has to separate ideas about the representation of sex from the immense baggage that comes with sex itself—no easy feat. It is difficult to differentiate attitudes toward porn from sex work or even casual sex, not to mention the host of more specific issues that might arise—porn as commodification of sex, the working conditions of porn actors, and so on. On the other hand, one can also argue that porn is here to stay and that it is better to attempt to come to terms with it and its influence and to try to make better porn.
- 7 The line between the mainstream and porn is crumbling, but so is the line between mainstream porn and feminist or queer porn. The abuse of women that has been documented in the porn industry is now, in the #MeToo moment, acknowledged as a part of the mainstream film industry. Some of the specific questions directed at porn—what is coercive or abusive in BDSM, for example—should be asked of all films. While the industry of porn contains many pitfalls, for women especially, porn has attempted to change its image by presenting behind-the-scenes clips of porn sets—something once seen on Kink.com, for example, where you see the performers after a session explaining not only how they are okay but how they have enjoyed the scene that they just filmed. BDSM, with its emphasis on rules and boundaries, could act as a paradigm of how to make porn in a way that is safe and even empowering.

- 8 Kate Ince argues that intermediality comes from “the growth in television and new media studies, the conversion to digital, and increasing cross-fertilization between film studies, queer theory, critical race theory and other strands of cultural studies” (38). Jonathan Mack places some limits on the concept:

This aspect of intermediality [that media are kept distinct] also prevents it from becoming too broadly inclusive of specific elements we might consider fundamental constituents of film. Third-person narration is not always intermedial reference to literature; freezing the frame or holding still in a *tableau vivant* is not always intermedial reference to painting. It is the self-reflexive nature of these occurrences that finally classify them as intermedial. The medial difference must be relevant.... This presents intermediality as something that, importantly, is performative. It is often an action, part of a dialogue between media and arts in which influences and even rivalries are recognized. (30)

- 9 Another documentary, *The View* (2020) on HBO, chronicles the complex history of the sex cult NXIVM, in yet another example of how porn has entered the mainstream, though in this case in complex and unsettling ways. A Scientology-like cult of personality complete with its own Manson figure in Keith Raniere, the group was initially based in sex trafficking but became, ultimately, a pyramid scheme that amassed millions of dollars from its members. The organization involved not only the branding of women and other elements borrowed from BDSM but also the idea of a secret society such as we see in *Eyes Wide Shut*. The documentary series is nine episodes long.

Part One

Topographies of Desire

Framing the Image: The Female Body in Late Kubrick

The cinema of Stanley Kubrick is filled with symmetry, *tableaux vivants*, and various kinds of static moments that emphasize his origins in still photography. From his famous image of a newspaper vendor reacting to the death of FDR that he sold to *Look* magazine as a high school student to his insistence at the end of his career that the VHS versions of his films should be released whenever possible in “full frame” mode (i.e., 1.33 aspect ratio), Kubrick’s eye behind the camera was very much that of a still photographer.¹ Many of his most famous compositions emphasized their origins in paintings or photographs by other artists—whether the still images from *Barry Lyndon* (1975) that echo French and English eighteenth-century portraiture or the Diane Arbus-like ghost girls of *The Shining* (1980).² Quotations to visual art are everywhere in Kubrick, sometimes obliquely as in the references to Goya in the same film or to Man Ray in *Killer’s Kiss* (1955). Like Edvard Munch’s paintings, Kubrick’s films often seem to be filmed *tableaux*, ones in which the viewer is aware of something being framed (Sørnes 50). Even when Kubrick creates a signature moving image, such as the blood gushing from the elevator doors in *The Shining*, the scene emphasizes the lack of movement of the camera—that something, or someone, is remaining fixed and still. Kubrick returns to the aesthetics of the still camera again and again as a way to set up meaning in his films, especially in the repetition of images of the body—twins that don’t quite match up; female and male bodies that transpose; vertical bodies and those that are supine. The voyeuristic quality of the still image—its documentary aspect, if you will—begins to change with Kubrick’s posthumous *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) to become a meditation on looking itself, film as a form of not knowing—willed ignorance that shuts out as many interpretations as it allows and that explores what the camera doesn’t see as much as what it does. Self-consciously linking this point of view to the male gaze, the exploration of the notion of gendered looking that Kubrick begins at the end of *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) comes to fruition in *Eyes Wide Shut* as the film bifurcates between two different ways of seeing sex and the body itself³ (Figure 1.1).

There is about Kubrick’s films a certain walled-off quality, as though they are self-contained and airless, almost claustrophobic, in their ability to create a world parallel to but different from our own. In these worlds, everything seemingly has meaning—from the colors we see to the dialogue and the movements of the actors.



Figure 1.1 Grady sisters. *The Shining*. Stanley Kubrick. 1980. Warner Brothers.

All elements of filmmaking have been not only well-considered but exhaustively so. It is difficult not to imagine authorial intention in almost everything that Kubrick created and small details loom large. Further magnifying this approach to his work is the fact that Kubrick tends to repeat compositions throughout his oeuvre, emphasizing the self-conscious nature of his work but also his tendency to cannibalize his own past, further emphasizing its hermetic nature. His tendency to repeat images stretches throughout his career and binds his many diverse films together. A trippy nighttime voyage through the streets of New York in *Killer's Kiss* becomes the infamous “stargate” sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) many years later. The famous fight sequence in the mannequin factory at the conclusion of *Killer's Kiss* is likewise subtly echoed in *2001* when HAL silently observes that Dave Bowman has made the critical mistake of leaving his helmet on board the *Discovery*. His dangling helmet, without a body, is one of the many uncanny images suggesting connections between man and machine or man and his many anatomical others (Figures 1.2 and 1.3).

It has only been during the time since his death that we have seen some of the many photos that he took prior to his making films and been able to assess his skill as a still photographer. His compositional ability is, not surprisingly, striking and often mirrors the balanced compositions of classical painting in his ability to compress narrative details into a single image. As Elvis Mitchell writes, “almost any still from his monochromatic movies tells a complete story” (2). The most telling example of this ability is the development of Kubrick’s first significant film, the short “Day of the Fight” (1951), which tells the story of the amateur boxer Walter Cartier as he spends a day getting ready for a major fight in the evening. Of Kubrick’s four first films—two other shorts and the disappointing first feature, *Fear and Desire*



Figure 1.2 Street at night. *The Killer's Kiss*. Stanley Kubrick. 1955. United Artists.



Figure 1.3 Stargate. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

(1953), which Kubrick later disowned—“Day of the Fight” seems fairly satisfying and contains numerous images, *tableaux*, and motifs that would show up in later films—especially in the film that was arguably the most important trope or turn in his oeuvre, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Indeed, along with the first full-length film that Kubrick was somewhat satisfied with, *Killer's Kiss* in 1955, “Day of the Fight” provides much of Kubrick’s visual vocabulary in his most famous films from the second half of his career.

“Day of the Fight” is also the only film by Kubrick that began as a series of still shots: a photo-story in *Look* magazine in 1949. To some extent this film allows Kubrick to set the still images in motion, recreating some static shots from the layout in the film. On the other hand, the film also allows Kubrick clearly to expand on narrative, and

many of Kubrick's later images are already signaled here. The boxing motif of "Day of the Fight" was to be recreated, to some extent, in *Killer's Kiss*, which one might say is in part a fictionalized retelling of the same story from the *Look* photos. At the heart of all of Kubrick's films is the tension of the one-on-one standoff between two adversaries—literally and symbolically represented by the boxing motif. Every film is built on a central conflict in which two people are ultimately nakedly exposed in some type of arena in which they must defeat or be defeated by an equivalent antagonist.⁴ The male body is emphasized in its phallic vertical pose and in the opportunity often to see the male body semi-clothed in an objectified state. These images are often contrasted with those that show the male body as the opposite—supine and horizontal, often lost in sleep, unconsciousness, or even self-absorbed bliss. The objectification of the male body, in other words, is made clear and even emphasized by the homoerotic cradling of the male body by other men⁵ (Figures 1.4 and 1.5).

The homoerotic nature of these images is given an even more complex spin if one considers the fact that Kubrick has at times framed his male and female actors in similar poses, sometimes even identical ones. The female Vietcong sniper of *Full Metal Jacket* is seen lying on her back before she is symbolically gang raped at the end of the film after she has possessed the phallic power of the rifle throughout the long sniper sequence in Hue City that ends the film—echoing and doubling the psychological torture of recruit "Pyle" at the beginning of the film as he lies supine on his bunk and his ultimate murder/suicide at the end of the film's first sequence while sitting upright in the barrack's "Head." Kubrick constantly oscillates between upright and supine as a way to suggest changes in power, but also in the relative feminine and masculine roles that characters inhabit at a given moment in a film. The predominate bodies that are shown are definitely male ones, though the use of the male gaze is never as



Figure 1.4 Sunlamp. *Dr. Strangelove*. Stanley Kubrick. 1964. Columbia Pictures.



Figure 1.5 Sunlamp. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

simple as it may seem as we are always asked to study the body that is on display as a self-conscious gesture: placing the body in space, giving it a gender, and contemplating its reason for being thus called attention to.⁶ Compositions involving the body seem to float away from the narrative arc that is supposed to tether them and take on their own social meaning separate from the ones we might associate with the context of the screen. By the time that astronaut Dave Bowman arrives in the Louis XVI room at the end of *2001*, he has been rendered vulnerable, essentially erased, ready to be remade as something new, or something other. As Arthur C. Clarke originally wrote, “he was ‘penetrated by something [that] invaded his mind’” and “he stood ‘wide-eyed, slack jawed, and wholly receptive’” (qtd. in Janes 139). This effect, I would argue, is a residue of Kubrick’s early work with still photography, where the context of the image had to be even more self-contained, even further embedded in life itself rather than a master filmmaker’s oeuvre (Figures 1.6 and 1.7).

What did change about Kubrick’s use of the still frames of the body was a general movement from the male body in “Day of the Fight” and *Killer’s Kiss* to the female in *Lolita* (1962) and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) to the male in *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and back again to the female in his final posthumous film, *Eyes Wide Shut*. Whatever we may think about this film’s artistic merits, which are, at best, complicated, the film foregrounds the notion of looking and seeing and represents the most sustained instance in his filmography of the meditation upon the female body. The film opens with Nicole Kidman’s body framed by two classical columns, which themselves call attention not only to the notion of seeing her body as a part of a spatial structure but also emphasize its proportions, elongation, doubling in the mirror, and framing, much like a filmed photograph. This shot is also, of course, that of a famously naked movie star, one half of a real-life Hollywood power couple and the reason that many people were interested in the film. Immediately after showing Kidman naked Kubrick cuts to the title of the film, which acts as a pun on seeing and the give-and-take aspect of the film as a whole: we get to see Kidman, but then she is taken away; we think we know

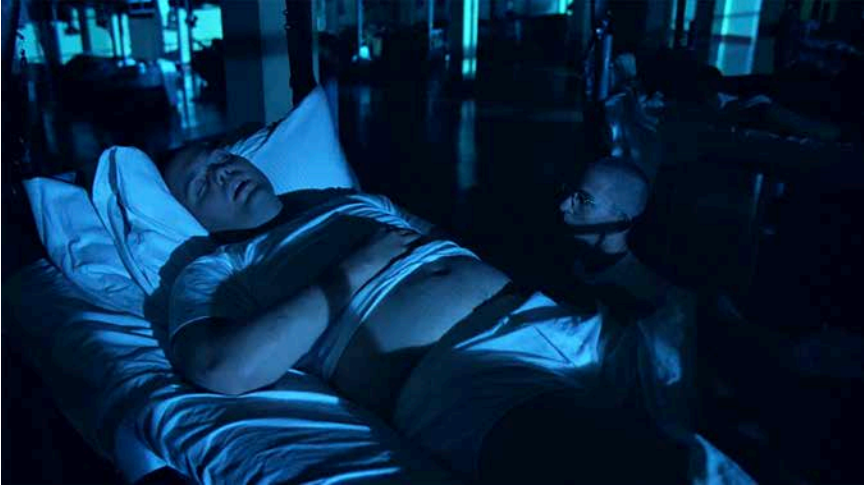


Figure 1.6 Pyle. *Full Metal Jacket*. Stanley Kubrick. 1987. Warner Brothers.



Figure 1.7 Sniper. *Full Metal Jacket*. Stanley Kubrick. 1987. Warner Brothers.

what we see, but we don't. Just as Tom Cruise, as Dr. Bill Harford, is never able truly to see his wife, so is the film, finally, about the audience's inability to see what is in front of their eyes. Are we looking at the character Alice Harford, or at Nicole Kidman? Do we ever know her any better than Bill does? What is the film "really" telling us about marriage, fidelity, and the act of looking itself? (Figures 1.8 and 1.9).

This tricky surface is emphasized by the display of Kidman's skin and the type of her body. From this point on in the film, the audience will encounter a plethora of naked, semi-naked, prone and supine female bodies, many of which will echo Kidman's specific



Figure 1.8 Opening image. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.



Figure 1.9 Opening image detail. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

body-type. Kidman's body, while the originary text for the women in the film, is herself a particular type that has shown up in other of Kubrick's films—tall, even statuesque, with long fair hair and well-proportioned in the classical European sense of that word: long legs; ample, though not large, hips and breasts; conventional good looks.⁷ While not quite Teutonic, the shape is clearly not accidental on Kubrick's part and Kidman's body recalls that of the topless actress that Alex must confront in *A Clockwork Orange* as part of the demonstration that the Ludovico Technique has stopped not only his desire for violence but sex as well. Likewise, when Jack Torrance confronts the ghostly woman

in the bathroom of room 237 in *The Shining* she is clearly supposed to be the same irresistible type, an ideal for the male psyche. This type, in fact, exists in Kubrick as early as his still photography.⁸ In *Eyes Wide Shut* the multiplication of Kidman that begins in front of the mirror will continue as she looks into a mirror in their bathroom before they go to a party at the home of a wealthy client, Ziegler (played by director Sydney Pollack), and then watches herself in a bedroom mirror as she and her husband make love upon returning home that night. In both instances, she is wearing glasses, almost as if to emphasize that she wants to see herself clearly (Figures 1.10, 1.11, and 1.12).



Figure 1.10 Model. *A Clockwork Orange*. Stanley Kubrick. 1971. Warner Brothers.

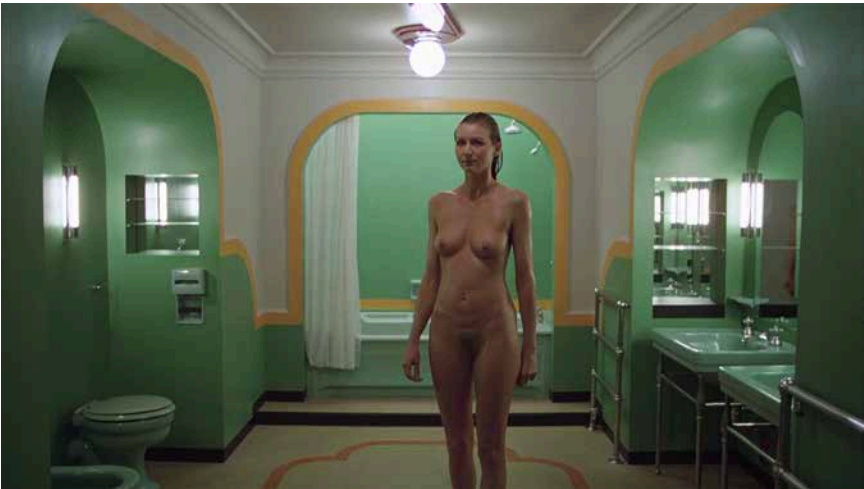


Figure 1.11 Woman in shower. *The Shining*. Stanley Kubrick. 1980. Warner Brothers.



Figure 1.12 Bill and Alice before the mirror. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

At the party, where the set is decorated like a painting by Klimt, both Harfords undergo attempted seductions.⁹ Bill, in particular, is accosted by two models who walk beside him and echo the columns that frame Kidman at the beginning. Bill is then secretly taken upstairs to attend to a nearly-overdosed model and/or prostitute, Mandy (Julienne Davis), who lies semi-conscious in Ziegler's huge bathroom. Mandy, in particular, looks like Kidman and her death later in the film is made purposefully confusing and possibly unsolvable to the audience. The next night Bill and Alice have a fight about the nature of sex and love, echoing Zeus and Hera on the question of who really enjoys sex more. During the course of their drug-induced argument, Alice tells Bill that she once fantasized about a Naval officer that was dining near them in a restaurant in Cape Cod. She was willing to leave Bill and their daughter for the chance to spend one evening with the officer. Alice's purposeful spurning of Bill sends him on a nocturnal journey that will make up the majority of the film as he attempts to betray his wife. Bill's odyssey, however, is never resolved and his ability to find sex is, as in a dream, constantly interrupted by coincidence. During this long, frustrating night, however, he sees Kidman everywhere, without really knowing it. She shows up in the first visit he makes of the night, to console a patient, Marion (Swedish actress Marie Richardson, who supposedly replaced Jennifer Jason Leigh in the role), who makes a grief-stricken pass at the comely doctor. Bill is next offered the services of a beautiful prostitute he sees on the street, Domino (Vinessa Shaw), who invites him to her small apartment. Their transaction is interrupted by a mobile cell phone ring. Not surprisingly, Domino looks like Kidman as well. Her offer comes right after Bill is harassed by a group of male college students who berate him with homoerotic insults that could easily be a reference both to Cruise's good looks and the persistent rumors that he is gay (Figures 1.13 and 1.14).



Figure 1.13 Marion. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.



Figure 1.14 Domino. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

The doctor's night ends, most famously, in the Somerton Orgy, which is arguably also the film's longest sustained dream sequence. Separated from the reality of the film proper, it stages sex as a mechanical act, possibly merely a performance for the titillation of a secret society or perhaps an elaborate trap for Bill to fall into. At the heart of the orgy is a parody of a black mass in which a ring of women, supposedly hired for the evening, drop their clothes and mock lesbian soft-core porn. The most interesting aspect of this scene is, arguably, the continued multiplication of the

female body—here, becoming not singular and linear, but circular and sumptuous in number—and the extreme emphasis on the almost photographic similarity of the bodies on display. Kidman as Alice is reproduced in a dizzying number, overwhelming the film's logic and Bill's ability to deal with the situation. Indeed, the film seems to break down at this point for many viewers as well as the orgy sequence is neither erotic nor off-putting, but merely odd (Figure 1.15).

The sequence continues as once again Bill is accosted by two women, but in this case separately. Their naked bodies being almost indistinguishable, the audience can only tell them apart by their masks. One woman attempts to seduce him, while the other attempts to warn him that he is in danger. Soon after the warning, Bill is called away—a motif that has repeated throughout the film—to return to the main room and be unmasked and, worse still, threatened with literal exposure. He is to disrobe, seemingly as a prelude to death, though in the Freudian context of the film, this seems a fate worse than death.

Just at the moment that the film seems about to allow Cruise to display his body and balance the moment that Kidman displayed hers, one of the two female figures intervenes and offers her life for his. This woman is, apparently, Mandy, though we never know that for sure. The mock-dramatic moment of her offering up her life is a strange one in the film in that it plays as purposefully melodramatic and is later explained to have been staged for Bill to warn him away from the Mansion. The added dramatic twist to this moment is the fact that when Bill leaves and returns to Alice, sheepishly ashamed and scared that his attempt at sexual triumph was not only unsuccessful but almost resulted in his own murder and possibly the death of someone else, Alice is awaking from a dream in which she is at an orgy having sex with numerous men. Is this the orgy that he just attended? Alice is once again the author of his reality, or the



Figure 1.15 Women with Red Cloak. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

one who plays him like a marionette. In the harsh light of day, he attempts to return the costume he rented for the orgy, to find his friend who told him about it, and, in one more attempt to get back at his wife and her confident sexuality, to try again to hook up with Domino. These encounters are, in their own way, equally as sexualized as the ones from the night before, but all with a negative twist: the costume shop owner attempts to pimp his underage daughter to Bill; his friend has been kidnapped and the hotel's male front desk clerk attempts to seduce Bill; finally, Domino is not home, but her roommate, Sally (Fay Masterson), tells him that she has AIDS. Bill once again returns home, this time to tell Alice everything and to confess to his demasculinization (Figure 1.16).

Not, however, before he has one more encounter with Ziegler. In an interminable scene set around a blood-red billiards table that echoes the red cloak of the masked faux-priest of the orgy (Leon Vitali), Ziegler explains that the whole orgy was merely for show, that Mandy was a prostitute who was not killed but later finally overdosed, and that Bill is lucky to have escaped with his life. According to co-screenwriter Frederic Raphael, this scene was added late in the scripting process at his insistence. It certainly complicates the plot by creating a scene where everything is seemingly explained to the viewer (and to Bill). The question, of course, is why? More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that neither the audience nor Bill can trust anything that Ziegler, a man of immense power and influence, might say. The film finally fails to resolve its mystery. The female body, so tantalizing present in the opening, is finally never ever in reach. This point is driven home in the last real glimpse of the Kidman-like female form we are given, when Bill discovers that Mandy has, in fact, died in an apparent overdose, and out of a sense of guilt, he visits her body in the morgue. The last image we have of her, as the first, is supine, lying on a slab. In the film's most arresting moment, Bill



Figure 1.16 Sally. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

bends over her as if about to kiss her, Eros and Thanatos connecting, for a moment, in a true frisson of physicality. Mandy's real sacrifice is that she dies not for Bill (perhaps) but for Bill's subconscious mind. He wanted to kill Alice, and though he was unable to do that, hurting her was the main goal of the evening. Mandy somehow suffers instead (Figure 1.17).

We never know for sure what is real. Which woman died, and why? In the original screenplay, the film ends with the confusion about who is at the morgue and Bill's possible collusion with murder. That mystery is enfolded into a larger plot in the final screenplay, one in which Mandy's death still may or may not be his fault, but is not as central as is his relationship or reconciliation with Alice. Who is manipulating Bill, and why? Who was at the orgy, lurking behind the masks? Ziegler and his wife? Domino? Why does Domino have a roommate if she lives in a one-bedroom flat? According to one version of the script, she is a sociology major at NYU, which would explain the sociology textbooks on her shelves. But is she a student who prostitutes, or is she just playing that role for Bill? Why does Bill know so little about what is happening to him? What does he actually see? The film offers these mysteries, but they are finally visual ones, as in all of Kubrick, an essentially visual artist. In this sense as well, the film has parallels with porn. Bill imagines his wife's infidelity with the Naval officer by seeing the two of them supine, making love, in a black-and-white loop of film he constantly replays in his mind. He sees everything in black and white. His wife is the one who knows him, not the other way around.¹⁰

In comparing Kubrick's early black-and-white films with his later color ones, Elvis Mitchell sees the former as sexy, the gelatin prints "luminescent and hot" (2). He claims that Kubrick purposefully leached the color out of *Full Metal Jacket* and always "treated emulsion as a character" (3). Certainly, in the original studio film version



Figure 1.17 The sacrifice. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

of *Eyes Wide Shut* one could see the graininess of the film, feel the fact that Kubrick pushed the low-light sources in the film as far as they could go. In the same way that Mitchell sees the early and late films as running hot and cold, he sees the later ones as compressing time, lingering on the moment, and forcing time itself to be just one more element in the film (3). This dilation is the opposite of what happens in the earlier films, which seem to race to include everything in a limited interval such as the sexual maturation of *Lolita* (4). To Mitchell, likewise, the early photos seem to be compressed films, with storylines and dialogue implied in the complex composition and psychology of the characters we see (5). The later films, by contrast, can take their time to tease out the implications that still photography can stuff together but must leave frozen on the page. The still photos, in other words, want to be movies, but Kubrick had to wait for that transformation. The other side of this equation, however, is telling: to what extent do the movies themselves want to be photos?

Of the many technical aspects of the still photograph that Kubrick learned from none may have been more important than the documentary aspect. Kubrick's lifelong fascination with being factual in his films—from the interior of the B52 bomber in *Dr. Strangelove* onward—is evident in the naturalist aesthetic of the images in *Look* and *Life*. People wanted to see, almost voyeuristically, parts of the world, the real world, that they could not normally see. The black-and-white images balanced the richness of the surface of the image against the realness of what was being seen to create a sort of sensuous reality that was both truthful and yet, somehow, better than reality itself might look. According to Crone, early on Kubrick understood how to combine this documentary quality with an aesthetic or even theatricalized sense of drama, the latter often coming from painting. In the photo *Henry Koerner, Subway* (1947–8) and many others, Kubrick photographed paintings within realist settings or people against paintings to interweave the naturalistic and the aesthetic. During this same period, Kubrick would also photograph with mirrors—couples, for example, embracing and seen as a reflection. Kubrick, who famously said that a shot in a film must be a photograph of a photograph, made his viewers aware of the sensation of looking even in his still photography—something that never leaves his work. As Crone concludes, “In Kubrick’s photography, dealing with memorized time and reflecting one’s own perception prove key moments for the genuinely human process of individuation” (249).

As noted earlier, the more one looks at Kubrick’s oeuvre, the more self-cannibalizing it seems. Each film has references to the films that preceded it, with *Eyes Wide Shut* containing a reference to at least each of Kubrick’s films from 2001 on. But the more one looks at this collection of references, the more one can also see their origins in still photography—or, at the very least, cognates. The long take, for example, is probably a result of the photograph as is his penchant for voiceover narration, which he often employed as a shortcut for context (in, for example, *The Killing* [1956] and *Paths of Glory* [1957]) and planned for other films from which it was ultimately axed (2001, for example) is paralleled in the use of captions in the photo essays he did for *Look* (Mather 11).¹¹ As Philippe Mather and others have shown, many of the images in Kubrick’s films that we think of as iconic—Jack at the typewriter in *The Shining*, for

example—have their origins (or at least their doppelgängers) in Kubrick's earlier still photography (12). While this content repeats, the style frequently remains the same—a sort of Hollywood neo-classical naturalism, a documentary clarity that brings attention to detail, to the surface of things, while illuminating all in a bright, even light.

While Kubrick's influences from his teenage years were probably mostly photographic, there were other sources of influence as well. Kubrick's high school friend Alexander Singer, for example, wrote a treatment of Homer's *The Iliad* that included "continuity sketches" (Mather 17). Likewise, *Look* magazine's approach to photography was to systematically research a topic as much as possible—a characteristic that Kubrick definitely took with him throughout his career (33). *Look*'s director of photography, Arthur Rothstein, introduced him to the writings on film of Eisenstein and Pudovkin (38). The emphasis on visual storytelling at the magazine—for the writers and the photographers—encouraged not only research but teamwork, another lesson that Kubrick seemed to take with him, especially in his ability to be his own writer, director, producer, and sometimes, photographer, on his films (54). At the same time, Kubrick's penchant for depending upon others for core narratives—novelists, hired co-screenwriters—may have developed here as well (55). Certainly, Kubrick's home studio used the same staff film after film much as Ingmar Bergman had his own stable of performers and cameraman, or just as Orson Welles used the staff of the Mercury Theater. Kubrick, likewise, featured the same actors in minor roles throughout his career in England.

Other habits may have also developed at *Look*, or at least first became obvious there, early in his career. Kubrick's infamous penchant for multiple takes, reaching a peak with the millions of extra feet of film exposed for *The Shining*, is presaged in the fact that he took on average 500 shots for every photo session at *Look* and 1,255 for his photo-essay on boxer Walter Cartier, which became the basis of his film short (Mather 62; based on the *Look* archives in Library of Congress). *Look*'s aesthetics was based upon the personal—in contrast to *Life*'s cooler approach—which meant attempting to find the personal or specific within the conventions of documentary realism, an emphasis that may have resulted in Kubrick's attempt to plumb the psychological dimension of his characters on screen, in part by getting beyond the "real" to the "interesting" (96). As early as high school, he was willing to wait for the right moment for a subject he was photographing (108). If he couldn't direct them, which he would, he would wait patiently until they forgot he was present—the two essential methods he used working with actors throughout his career (116). Kubrick's tenure at *Look* infused not just the subject matter of his later films but the approach as well. Kubrick's photo spreads required a large number of shots so that he could have continuity, a technique that already seemed to prefigure cinema. The photo-essay also required that the photographer have a story to tell and that, at least to some extent, the people being photographed had to be coached or directed, at least in some situations (Sante 19).

The guiding force at *Look* was Daniel D. Mich, who was known to hire photographers from both within the staff and without and to emphasize more varied subject matter than that found in *Life*, including topics that might be considered seamier or more

related to human nature. Mich was himself also a jack-of-all-trades, something that must have influenced the young Kubrick (Albrecht and Corcoran 10). It is difficult now to look at Kubrick's photos from the early 1940s and not see a liberal number of images that appear later in his films but subject matter as well. In 1950 he did a piece on "Jealousy: A Threat to Marriage," the theme of *Eyes Wide Shut* fifty years later. Numerous photos show couples embracing in various public venues. The female body type that dominates that film is seen here in his 1949 images for "Peter Arno ... Sophisticated Cartoonist" that shows Arno working with a nude model in his studio. Female nudity is featured as well in a female model in an art class in an article about Columbia. Likewise, it is difficult not to see the money fluttering out into the night air at the end of *The Killing* as suggested by the man with the cigar attempting to clutch his tip sheets in unpolished photos from a racetrack in 1948 or the photoshoots involving parties and masks such as the surreal "Philadelphia's First Beaux Arts Ball" (1949). His frequent use of architecture to frame shots of human bodies shows up as early as a photo-essay on a high school in Texas in 1947 and one on the University of Michigan campus in 1949. Likewise, symmetry, ambivalence toward technology, back lighting, spotlighting, and many other effects are there on the pages of *Look* as well.¹² One could, as Mather does, attempt to explain Kubrick's film career as not only structured by the underpinnings of documentary realism but as a career-long experiment in the overlapping of photography and film—how the one influences the other, and vice versa (225). The use of the freeze frame at the end of both *Barry Lyndon* and *2001* is one place where some sort of overt dialogue between the two media seems to be taking place.

Garrett Stewart notes that the more cinema calls attention to the apparatuses that make it, the more illusions are stripped away and film becomes minimal, the more it seems to be about perception itself (101). In this sense, the purely experimental aspects of Kubrick's films could be said to call attention to "the whole technique of perception" (101). Kubrick shares with P. Adams Sitney the notion of "visionary filmmaking," the ability to reduce the experience of film to something other than itself. The objective, documentary aspects of film—"the objective past (as in photography)"—give way to the mind thinking, "distilled in a play on verbal elision that stages in the narrowest possible compass the very cognitive fusion it attributes to reading" (Stewart 102). At the end of *2001* the four freeze frames we get of Bowman in the stargate sequence are the last four images of reality we see before he arrives at the holding cell he will live the rest of his life in. Kubrick captures him in the still images—"entirely spatialized as a single unit of film"—before slipping away into "evolutionary time" as he sees his own time "slipping away into an older self" (110). Bowman is trapped even before his transformation into the future. The opposite happens in *The Shining*, where Jack is also trapped at the end of the film, in the photograph, but the world depicted in the film is one in which the present has been supplanted by the past, by history, the "present vaporized by the past" (178). The skeletons and desiccated corpses that Wendy (Shelley Duvall) sees in her vision are the real state of the hotel's denizens who are normally preserved and made living by photochemical processes (181). The photographic becomes the "cultural nostalgia for the very bodies its chemistry used to embalm" (223). The body has been

supplanted by its technological reproduction, which nevertheless is obsessed with its own origins, however much it is never able to embody them literally.

Woman Unknown

The first draft of the screenplay of *Eyes Wide Shut* available in the Kubrick Archive, written by co-screenwriter Frederic Raphael, includes details that are ultimately omitted by Kubrick but that follow the book's structure more closely than does the final film. The emphasis in the first screenplay is on the question of whether or not Bill caused the death of the woman who seems to sacrifice herself at the orgy. Raphael emphasizes the mystery by having Bill unable to conclusively identify her at the morgue and having not one woman but two women approach Bill at the orgy. The original screenplay also ends with Bill's all-night confession to Alice and their daughter's joining them in the bedroom as the sun begins to rise on a literal and symbolic new day.¹³

The original screenplay, like another later one that circulates online that is somewhat closer to the final film, has Bill speak in voiceover. As noted above, this awkward convention was a favorite one of Kubrick's and he did utilize it to especially good effect in *A Clockwork Orange* and in *Barry Lyndon* (where there is an anonymous narrator). Here, as in *2001*, he planned for a voiceover and then opted to drop it. In the original screenplay, however, we know more about Bill and Alice because of the material that Raphael includes in the voiceover. In the screenplay, dated 1995 and entitled "Woman Unknown," there is also a great deal of more emphasis on sex and gender. The film's subtext is more on the surface. We find out that Bill's father was a gynecologist. Bill's chauffeur listens to Gene Kelly's "Our Love Is Here to Stay." At the party at the Zieglers' mansion, Bill and Alice pass a nude painting on the stairs and Alice says, "What's that she's saying? 'Ready of anything, John!?'"¹⁴ The nude woman upstairs is situated like the nude woman in the painting, which in the film appears in the bathroom, uncommented upon.

In Raphael's controversial memoir of working with Kubrick, *Eyes Wide Open*, he remarks that Kubrick objected to a conversation between Alice and Bill about same-sex attraction. In the original script, the conversation appears on page twenty and seems, actually, to be an opportunity for Bill to proclaim his absolute straightness— whether to protest too much, or to define his limited imagination, is perhaps unclear. Certainly, Alice is the more vocal of the two when it comes to discussing sex, and the actual conversation, as they walk on the street at night, reveals her openness to sexual fluidity:

Alice: You do this a lot, don't you, with women?

Bill: *Exclusively* with women!

Alice: (Another tone now) Did you miss something, do you suppose? Not going with men?

Bill: Miss? No. Not a bit. Sexually speaking, I come at the very end of the spectrum. Next to indigo violet. No known ambivalence. Very suspect!

Alice: When we were fucking, did you never once, for a *second*, imagine I was a boy?
 Bill: I don't have that kind of imagination. I probably have very little at all. And to make you into a boy, I'd need an awful lot, wouldn't I?
 Alice: [...] I've imagined being one. I've imagined a lot of things. You know what I like about hotels?
 Bill: You're an artist. I'm not.
 Alice: (looking up at the lighting of the Pierre) You could be anybody.¹⁵

She goes on to ask Bill if he has ever had a threesome, to which he does not answer. Later, in the scene where Alice discusses her fantasy of an affair with a Navy officer (in Denmark in the novella, Cape Cod in the film, Hawaii here) that forms the basis of the film's plot in that Alice's discussion of the mere possibility of adultery sends Bill on his nocturnal quest to seek revenge by sleeping with a stranger, Alice makes clear in the dialogue in this first version that there is a difference between what is real and what is imagined, though the mere fact of her desire for another man is enough to upset Bill's carefully ordered universe. Interestingly, Raphael links this primal scene of seeming betrayal back to the notion of her as a boy:

Bill: You have had a lover, is that it? In the past. Since we ...
 Alice: Absolutely not (Touches a little unease in his face) I guessed you'd be disappointed. Dexter is gay. I told you that.
 Bill: Yes, you did. You also [...] said you sometimes wanted to be a boy.
 Alice: *Imagined being*. That's not the same, is it, doctor?
 Bill: Something happened, didn't it? What?
 Alice: Something didn't. Which is maybe the same. When we were in Hawaii.¹⁶

The much larger cast of characters here and more numerous scenes were trimmed and combined by Kubrick, something that occurred in all of his late films, but the emphasis on sexuality by Raphael is telling in that his own forays into desire as it is and is not contained in a marriage went outside of the usual heterosexual script. Kubrick repeatedly told Raphael and friends that one aspect of the novella that appealed to him was that what it had to say about marriages, and maybe desire itself, is that little has ever changed. Raphael's attempt to update the Freudian underpinnings of the novella with Kinsey and the idea that sexuality is on a bisexual spectrum is something Kubrick seemed to object to, even though he wanted to place the film in New York in the present and not the past of Schnitzler's fin-de-siècle Vienna. What Raphael was attempting to get at in making Alice play with the notion of sexual fluidity is unclear, though in other parts of the screenplay, Bill's sexuality seems reaffirmed. Nightingale, who attended medical school with Bill but left to become a musician, tells Bill, "You had plenty of girls."¹⁷

In his memoir Raphael claims that he was trying to give Bill and Alice an interesting backstory in part as a way to get himself interested in the characters and make the

change in time and setting believable. But Kubrick thought the first part of the script was “too good” (132) and would unbalance the film by making it top heavy. Raphael seems to think that Kubrick entertained the idea of making the script worse (133). If so, that explanation might explain a lot about the film’s ultimately flat dialogue and plotting.

The orgy is different in the original script as well in that the women are supposed to have different body types. Raphael describes them as having “whitely-powered breasts and black-hearted pubes.”¹⁸ Raphael wanted the orgy to seem like a shopping mall of different sexual delights (145), an idea Kubrick seemed to keep in the final film, but in the film version, Kubrick goes out of his way to emphasize that the actresses’ bodies are almost interchangeable, and they might have actually been treated as such in that the “Mysterious Woman” who approaches Bill at the orgy is played by Abigail Good, while the woman who is at Ziegler’s party and the one in the morgue at the end are played by Julianne Davis (O’Sullivan). A second mysterious woman approaches Bill at the Orgy. Called “Young Woman” in the script, she is apparently another actress. Though the two women echo the two models (Louise Taylor and Stewart Thorndike) who attempt to seduce Bill at Ziegler’s Christmas party, neither is Mandy, who almost overdoses at the beginning of the movie. To further complicate the emphasis on illusion, the voice of the “Mysterious Woman” is Cate Blanchett’s, who was dubbed in after Kubrick’s death (Ebiri).¹⁹ The masks, which are supposed to obscure identity, force the audience to look instead for other markers of identity—mainly, the breasts and other body parts of the two women. Whether this is a sly joke on the part of Kubrick or an intentional attempt to force the viewer to look with eyes wide open—to remind them that even when they are looking longingly at a beautiful body, they are not seeing what they think they see, what is right there on the surface—is unclear. Kubrick complicates the original literary source by doubling the women at the party and, ultimately, making the story about something more than the accidental death of another person into an elaborate charade purported by an evil organization. He may have made the doubling or trebling of women throughout the film another complication that could not be completely explained.

In the film, the gay references in the original screenplay seem to be displaced onto Bill’s gay baiting by college boys on the street. In the screenplay, they are Yalies and they are Jew baiting Marion. While this scene is often read as a possible comment on Cruise’s own sexuality, it is perhaps more significant that Kubrick ultimately does not allow any references to Jewish identity in the film, a fact that caused Raphael some consternation (77). Kubrick felt that Bill’s racial or ethnic identities had to be as bland as possible, though he seems to play up Bill’s friendship with Nightingale. When Bill is hit upon by a gay desk clerk, he responds, in part, by attempting to revisit the prostitute Domino, only to be told that she has tested positive for AIDS. Bill is repeatedly shamed in the film as not quite the man he thinks he is.

The sexuality that permeates the film and gives it its *raison d’être* in the scatter-shot form of Raphael’s initial screenplay was transformed by Kubrick into something much more elegant and personal, or we could say again, Freudian. Bill sees sex everywhere

but can never access it. And if he had been able to, he would have either contracted a then-incurable disease from the lesbian prostitute, Domino, or been literally exposed publicly at a masked orgy and, possibly, killed as well. Bill acts on his anger and his jealousy over his wife's desire for other men. It is never clear, however, that he has his own fantasies about other women. He reacts to her recounting, not once but twice, of the dream she had of having sex with other men—the Navy officer she discusses while stoned and her own private orgy that she has in her dream and which she describes while in a half-awake state on the night after the Somerton orgy that Bill attends. Their dreams cross-over but connect only at the level of imagination. She dreams sex that he sees; he imagines her having sex with the officer but she never does. They have sex at the beginning of the film and then will again after Alice speaks the last word in any Kubrick film: “Fuck.”

While Kubrick was never one to shy away from disturbing subject matter, one sees a move in the late films from the G-rated, Vatican-approved *2001* to the initial X rating of *A Clockwork Orange* to his last PG film, *Barry Lyndon*, before moving on to the hard-R of *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Eyes Wide Shut*. Though *Spartacus* (1960) and *Lolita* both dealt with the topic of sexual acceptability—Crassus' bisexuality and Humbert's pedophilia—Kubrick was able to represent sex and sexuality more explicitly in the latter half of his career. Kubrick was always attracted to sex and sexuality in his film projects, even the ones never released. In 1956 he wrote a 100-page screenplay entitled *Burning Secret* with Calder Willingham, who helped with the screenplay of *Paths of Glory*, arguably Kubrick's first great film, based upon a Stefan Zweig novel from 1913. In the screenplay, an adult man seduces a ten-year-old boy as a way to get to the boy's mother.²⁰ The treatment combines the plot of *Lolita*, in reverse, with the mature sexual material that we see in the deleted “snails and oysters” scene of *Spartacus* and later in *A Clockwork Orange* and, especially, *Eyes Wide Shut*. Kubrick was always trying to explore subject matter that was ahead of its time—and the production codes of Hollywood, especially. Here we seem to have the origin of *Eyes Wide Shut* in that Kubrick takes another fin-de-siècle Austrian novel that deals with sexuality and recasts it in contemporary America, which would then have meant the 1950s.²¹

While sexuality permeates *Eyes Wide Shut* on many levels, most clearly in the many nude female bodies on screen, Kubrick intended to include much more sex in his initial plans for other films, including *Barry Lyndon*. A screenplay dated February 18, 1973, includes many more scenes of nudity and sex than the final completed film does (Kubrick, “Barry Lyndon”). In this early draft Kubrick was, as Raphael did with *Traumnovelle*, keeping more of the original literary source work in the script and the film Kubrick seemed originally to have planned was much more of an episodic rogue film of the *Tom Jones* (1963) variety. That is, the eighteenth century that we get on screen had more action and sex than the final finished product. It was also more focused on the relationship between Barry and Lady Lyndon (Honorina). The end of the film would have focused on the melodrama of Lady Lyndon trapping Barry in an elaborate ruse that involved having him travel to London to a lawyer's office, where he is arrested by constables for his many debts. Lady Lyndon throws herself into the arms of her son, who shows up with the police. Barry's last years are spent in Fleet Street prison, where

he is initially well-off thanks to Lady Lyndon's pension. But Lord Bullingdon's ultimate revenge is not delivered with a duel but with stopping the pension upon the death of his mother, an act that impoverishes Barry within the prison and leads to an unhappy death.

As usual with Kubrick, the script changes profoundly over time, most especially with the pruning or combining of many scenes into a few longer set-pieces. In the case of *Barry Lyndon*, it is especially striking that a long, shambling tale that would have fit more closely to the one that Warner Brothers advertised—a stylish, romantic eighteenth-century adventure—was transformed into an altogether different film, one that became instead a meditation on time, art, and the cinematic form itself. Kubrick transformed the story from one that was particular to its time, which one might call a necessary comedy, to one that seemed instead to be about the melancholy and tragedy of a life seen in full. Barry is nothing if not trapped by his time, but we see him both as a player within a period film and as viewers from the twentieth century who see aspects of his life that he cannot see himself. Kubrick changes the voiceover in the film from Barry's own voice, which copies the novel's first-person narration, to that of a famously detached, quasi-omniscient narrator who speaks in the cadences of the eighteenth century but whose knowledge of the events is taken from someplace in the future. Kubrick makes the story his through optical choices, the famous reverse zooms, for example, but also through the script, making the story about fathers and sons and the essential tension at the heart of Barry's and Bullingdon's animosity, which comes metaphorically to blows in the form of the third and final duel of the film.²²

This new shape, however, seems to have caused Kubrick to remove material from the film of a more sexual nature, reducing Barry's relationship with his wife, but also more scenes of Barry's betrayal of her and earlier escapades with women before he is married. In an earlier version of the screenplay, for example, Barry and Honoria travel together to London, where they make love one night while they are staying in Reading (Kubrick, "Barry Lyndon" 161). Likewise, Barry encounters an unscrupulous Mrs. O'Reilly on the road to Dublin, who takes his virginity on the first night there. Once Barry is established with the Chevalier, he attends a masquerade ball (90) at which he meets one young woman with whom he has sex. Before doing so, however, he "takes from his portfolio a little jacket ... eight inches long and closed at one end, and which by way of a pouch string at its open end, has a narrow pink ribbon" (92). His companion places the condom on him and then concludes, "There you are, dressed by my hand. It is nearly the same thing; but despite the fineness and transparency of the skin, the little fellow pleases me less well in costume. It seems that this covering degrades him, or degrades me" (92-3). In addition to being a commentary on technology, her comments, made while she is wearing a mask, would seem to suggest something about costuming itself and what the difference is between sex with and without it, the implication, here at least, that it is potentially demeaning. This scene is an interesting foreshadowing of the orgy in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Likewise, the scene of Barry and Lady Lyndon having sex was apparently filmed but left out of the final cut. It was not until his last film that Kubrick represented actual sex between a married couple—the first time since *Lolita*.

While this early screenplay suggests ways the film changed, concept artwork for the film fills in some other gaps, perhaps, especially, the ways that Kubrick planned to film some of the other scenes ultimately written out or cut out of the film. What is striking about many of these drawings, which were made by Ivor Beddoes, the choreographer Ken Adam's assistant, is the amount of nudity and sexual suggestion that may have been originally discussed by Kubrick and his collaborators.²³ For example, some of the drawings seem illustrations of scenes in the 1973 screenplay, such as Barry's tradition of giving pennies to the servants when his carriage arrives home, while others suggest scenes that do not appear but which may have been planned for some early version of the screenplay. We know, for example, that filming began in Ireland in 1973 with a long but incomplete script in which entire scenes were described but lacked dialogue. After the IRA threatened Kubrick and his crew for filming the epic in the Republic of Ireland, an act they equated to a kind of neo-colonialism, Kubrick returned to England and suspended production until after the Christmas holiday in 1974. Scenes planned for Dublin Castle, for example, were never shot. The concept art, therefore, probably hails from the early initial period in which Kubrick had yet to work out the essential scenes, or even the through line for the film's primary themes. This fact would explain why some scenes that appear in the artwork or in the 1973 screenplay never made it into the movie.

As in the more picaresque script, the concept scenes contain more sex and nudity—even more than the script as Beddoes was apparently letting his imagination come up with possible ideas for the scenes on the page. For Barry's affair with Lischen, for example, there is a drawing of the two of them kissing with their clothes on (dated September 8, 1973), but later, drawings from October 6 that show the two of them naked in bed with Lischen on top. Another drawing has them in bed again, but this angle shows Barry's naked ass. Some drawings show the couple in intimate but more romantic poses, such as Barry kissing Lischen's open palm (in the film, her hand receives a more chaste kiss on the top) and a semi-close-up shot of Barry bending over in bed to kiss her.²⁴ Other images show other women in bed with Barry and often semi-clothed. One, dated October 20 of the same year, shows a "Girl [sic] chased ... into a room. She smashes the window screaming for help—she falls, grabs the curtain and in fighting they roll themselves into it. She is helpless."²⁵ This action seems to take place in the "Desolate German Inn at night" when Barry is with Postsdorff, at least in the film.

The Dublin scenes, which were never filmed, contain other possibilities of a sexual nature as well. In one, described as "Barry and Friend involved in brothel fight over two girls," two pairs of men are shown fighting, one pair on a table, while two women, their dresses pulled down, have their breasts exposed.²⁶ In another, entitled "The Horrors of War," "A Girl is carried off. The father rushes for his pistol. Barry Sees him and kills him."²⁷ In "The Humiliations of War" we see a topless woman wearing a tripod hat tied to a chair, her chin tilted back, while four soldiers draw straws.²⁸ The horrors of war, then, seem to involve the rape and pillage by soldiers, which includes, in one scene, four soldiers apparently smoking opium.²⁹ While these details did not end up in the final film, they do get referenced in a compressed form in the scenes with Lischen, which comes across as both sexual and, for Barry, romantic.

In the drawings for the second half of the film, which takes place mostly at the Lyndon estate, Castle Hackton, there is one scene of Barry with two topless women in what is apparently a bordello or orgy.³⁰ Further evidence that Barry is acting as an adulterer and libertine, the concept art work makes clear that there was even more sex outside of marriage at least contemplated for the film. In one drawing for scene 224, dated August 15, 1973, we have “Barry with jovial Friends—He has a Farm Girl. Everybody getting drunk—Mother passes—and is pleased with Barry’s ability to drink.”³¹ Barry is shown on a couch kissing a woman who is on her knees and between his. Later, we have a scene entitled “Castle Hackton Int Drawing Night, Mother watching over Barry until he is too drunk.”³² While the final film shows the mother (Marie Keen) having Barry taken off to bed after he drinks himself to sleep, a seemingly regular event after Bryan dies (apparently scene 225 in this version), here “Barry Has Farm Girl to Whom He Addresses His Affections.”³³ There is also a drawing of two naked or semi-dressed women with Barry with Mrs. Barry looking in—similar to the shot in the final film, though apparently happening at the Castle instead. The 1973 screenplay also includes many scenes of Mrs. Barry that are edited from the final screenplay. Like the final film, she is always there for him, even in Fleet Street, but she also spies on Lady Lyndon and acts, to some extent, as the jailer for her and for Runt. In one piece of art work, in a scene taking place two scenes later (226), she is “proud of her son’s ability to Drink More Beer than anyone else in the County—Awakens him next morning with his first beer.”³⁴ Barry is shown in bed without a shirt, and perhaps in a sexual situation. The mother, while defender of Barry’s attempt at a title, is, in this early concept art, also goading her son on to drink and to philander under the watchful eye of his enabling mother.

The version of the film we get in this artwork also includes a scene, number 73, entitled “The Pleasures of War,” which shows Prussian soldiers liberating a French town and Barry kissing a German woman.³⁵ The pleasures and the horrors of war, like those of his marriage, are in stark contrast to the more pensive and victimized Barry of the film, one in which his character is more the object of fate than he is of his mother, and someone who reacts to the circumstances of his life more than he acts as one who is in control of life or in the active search for its pleasures. The film that Kubrick ultimately created is a very different kind of film, but one that reflected his own interests more than Thackeray’s, or the filmic genre that has grown up around the novels about the eighteenth century. As we know now, on the fiftieth anniversary of the premiere of *2001*, even that G-rated film originally had a much stronger sexual component. Sex often found its way into Kubrick’s ideas for films, though not always onto the screen itself. Though *Barry Lyndon* was far less sexual than others of his films, sex lurked off-screen in all of his films, even those that did not deal explicitly with it. Of course, Kubrick had planned to make what would become *Eyes Wide Shut* as early as the 1960s and, certainly, with *A Clockwork Orange* serious sexual situations are shown, though many of them are really forms of violence, not sex. Sex, however, is always a theme in Kubrick, whether it is the suggestively homoerotic attraction of HAL for Poole or the naked woman in the shower who tempts Jack in *The Shining* or the tubercular prostitute in *Full Metal Jacket*, a foreshadowing for *Domino*.

Blue Movies

The associations between Kubrick and the notion of an artistic version of a pornographic film were rumored at least as far back as the 1960s when Kubrick was working with Terry Southern on the script for *Dr. Strangelove*.³⁶ Southern and Kubrick never created the film, though if they had at that time, it might have been based on Schnitzler's novella as Kubrick bought the rights to it in the 1960s. Kubrick's widow, Christiane Harlan Kubrick, claimed in a televised interview to have dissuaded Kubrick from making a film based upon material that she thought was pornographic, in part for personal reasons.³⁷ At that point in their young marriage, she did not want her husband writing about that topic. She also could not see the point in working with the subject matter. Both she and Kubrick, it seems, were glad that he allowed the idea to gestate and that he completed a film about sex and marriage later in his life. While critics might not agree, Kubrick, by all accounts, seemed satisfied with his final film.³⁸

While Southern and Kubrick's project did not happen as or when they had supposed it would, the idea of working with Kubrick on a blue movie left an imprint on Southern. In 1970 he published a difficult-to-define novel entitled *Blue Movie* which purports to be about a famous director known for his art films who makes a pornographic film. To some extent the novel is a kind of roman à clef in that elements of Kubrick's personality, or at least history, are woven into the description of the character Boris. "King B.," as he is also called, "was really a *film-maker*—in the tradition of Chaplin, Bergman, Fellini—an artist whose responsibility for his work was total, and his control of it complete" (Southern, *Blue Movie* 15). He is also a director who has known controversy, been censored, and had his work called "'Obscene,' 'indecent,' 'immoral,' 'pornographic'" (15). Charges such as these had plagued Kubrick since *Lolita*, and he was forced to make subtle changes to *A Clockwork Orange* and *Eyes Wide Shut* to earn an R rating. The book goes on to show the making of the fictitious film, spoofing the producer, Sid, and the male star, Les Harrison, often letting the character of Boris act as an ironic aside—someone who is not wholly comfortable with the making of what turns out to be a run-of-the mill porn film. The more withering commentary by Southern seems to be aimed at the producer and the stars, though generally it is the Hollywood production industry, rather than porn in particular, that Southern seems to skewer (and to understand), though none of the characters is treated too harshly.³⁹

The book's style is written in Southern's version of New Journalism as though the events being described actually happened. There is, per that literary subgenre, a great deal of attention given to the writing itself—a lot of declamatory dialogue, exclamation points, and slang—which has the effect of making the reader self-conscious about the act of reading itself. If the book's events were real, then this style might make sense as a way to insert the reader into the events, but as they are not, the effect is to exaggerate the already exaggerated idea of the book's subject.

While Kubrick and his career were not advanced enough at the time that Southern wrote the book to be based upon much of Kubrick's oeuvre, it is remarkable the extent to which the book, in places, is a prescient view into Kubrick's future work and obsessions. Southern describes one scene being filmed:

[a] curious tableau, almost a still-life, for at the moment they scarcely moved, just sitting there as in some kind of extraordinary exotic tea ceremony. But then, still entwined in a deep, deep, closed-eyed kiss, two blond heads as one, they slowly began to writhe ... languorously, caressing each other, hands delicately tracing the contour of the face, neck, shoulders, breast, waist, stomach, thighs, of each, simultaneously. Because of their incredible resemblance, it was as though a girl were fondling her own image in a three-dimensional mirror. (21)

The mention of the static tableau could describe the War Room scenes in *Dr. Strangelove* but is more apropos to *Barry Lyndon*, whose eighteenth-century pace emphasized the slowed-down, almost-static nature of time during that period. Likewise, the description of the sexual embrace is a reverse image of similar moments in the orgy scene of *Eyes Wide Shut* when two female actors pantomime performing cunnilingus on one another while tracing their hands over each other's body.

Southern's book deals directly with two impulses in filmmaking that have since come to pass: the possibility of trying to make artistic porn, and the idea that in mainstream film that the representation of sexual acts had not gone far enough. As Southern writes, "*male genitalia*" had been too much, even in a flaccid state, but Boris "knew better. No erection, and no penetration—how to explain that little oversight to the muse of creative romance?" (26). Explicitness is connected with being artistically "*ambitious*" and finally Boris tells his producer, "I'd like to make one of those.' He nodded toward the projection room. 'One of those Stag films'" (29). What follows is a debate between Sid and Boris in which Sid argues that the genre exists in the form of underground films like Andy Warhol's while the character Boris says that they do not go far enough and show the outer reaches of sexual representation such as penetration. This argument is inaccurate, at least of Warhol's films, but it allows Boris to get to his real point: "But what I want to know is, why are ... the stag films ... always so ridiculous? Why isn't it possible to make one that's really *good*—you know, one that's genuinely erotic and beautiful" (31).

While his producer considers and even films different possible movies—from the episodic, like most porn films, to the historical ("Marie Antoinette" [173])—they eventually get to the topic of a gay male sex scene. The problem, according to Boris' writer, Tony, is that the image of "two *guys*, hairy legs, hairy ass-holes, hairy cock and balls" is not beautiful, unlike two lesbians. Boris suggests: "What if they're beautiful ... young, beautiful ... *Arab* boys, fourteen or fifteen, slender as reeds, smooth olive skin, big doe-brown eyes" (174). Not only does Boris seem to offer Pasolini's solution to the "problem" of representing gay male sexuality on the screen but he essentially offers the suggestion that the way to make male same-sex sex palatable is to make them stand-ins for women. Tony goes on to recount penetrative sex with his friend Jason Edwards when they were boys and he imagined his friend's ass was his twin sister's vagina. Tony and Boris finally have their conceptual breakthrough when Tony concludes, "And all I'm trying to say ... is that we would end up using *chick values* ... or rather, non-gay values toward chicks. I mean, if you try to romanticize fucking a young, supple, smooth-skinned boy in the ass, then what you're really talking about is fucking a *chick*. Right?" (176).

While Southern is ironically playing with the notion of a conceptual discussion of sex, he is also, at one level, seriously discussing what is and is not attractive about the body on screen. Earlier, Southern examines the notion of saying that a woman is or has a great ass: does this suggest a desire for anal sex, or is the ass, as with Jason and Tony, a stand-in for something else (40–1)? Not only what does it mean to reduce a woman to a body part but also which part is one talking about? If sex or romance on the screen is about beauty, then how is it linked to the erotic? Southern had earlier written an erotic novel, *Candy* (1964), that followed the dictates of the porn genre.⁴⁰ But here he seems to be interrogating them, at least as something to appear on the screen, or to be transferred there from a book. While Southern purportedly showed Kubrick's film in his home to which Kubrick did, in fact, muse that someone good should try their hand at one, Kubrick apparently tried to get Southern to help with what would later be called *Eyes Wide Shut* (Tully 134). By the time that Kubrick does in fact make his own film, one of the major questions it raises, perhaps, is the one brought up somewhat satirically in *Blue Movie*: What are we to think about the numerous perfect female bodies in the film? Is their beauty erotic? Is eroticism beautiful? Where is the link and why must it run through the female body?

Although the veracity of co-screenwriter Frederic Raphael's memoir of working with Kubrick on *Eyes Wide Shut* has been called into doubt, Raphael takes credit for the invention of a part of the plot of the film that is alluded to though never explicitly discussed in the final film. Raphael purports to have invented a Kennedy-era group of men who call themselves "The Free" and whose motto is "Enough is never enough" (Raphael 146). As Raphael explains,

The main expression of this freedom was sexual: members were recruited only among the friends of the friends, and their induction involved an undertaking to seek pleasure for themselves and not to deny it to others of the fraternity. Men began the club and, during the early period, sometimes hired women to participate in their pleasures, which were always taken on private premises. (146)

After a scandal involving prostitutes in the 1980s, "women began to be admitted as full members" (147). This change, as Raphael notes, coincided with the women's movement in general. At other places in the memoir Raphael talks about the desire on Kubrick's part to look at the history of Roman orgies, and Raphael, who claims an extensive knowledge of the Ancient World, may have been translating that milieu into the present. Some of Raphael's description seems to show up in the film, though in different or contradictory ways. He says that sometimes new members were introduced into the masked parties in which a charade was put on and the member was ejected by the policing body of The Free known as The Plumbers (148). Also, that husbands and wives were never recruited together (148). While Raphael claims that Kubrick was amazed and enthralled by Raphael's invention (149), it is unclear if Dr. Bill is in fact being tested as a possible recruit in the film.⁴¹

What is clear is that Kubrick's film gave other filmmakers the feeling of *carte blanche* to treat eroticism, especially pornography, as a serious subject for film and to connect it, to some extent, with the secrecy and the abuses of power of the ruling class. Just as Kubrick's other films have left an indelible imprint on the genres he tackled—science fiction, horror, historical epic, the war film—so, too, did *Eyes Wide Shut*. While we might classify that film as an erotic thriller, a film about marriage, a psychological examination of a possible murder, or as something else, it has, I would postulate, come to be seen mainly as a film about sex. This conjecture could be challenged since the film seems to promise sex more than it delivers. Most obviously, we never really see the film's stars, then a famously married couple, have sex. We see them nude, but only Kidman in any significant way, and then only at the very beginning of the film and in the lovemaking after the party. The sex we see at the orgy is obviously simulated (and meant to be); the nudity, while on copious display, is clearly meant to be dream-like. The film, in other words, does not seem to fill the dictates of the genre of high-art porn. But what Kubrick film does? The first major film of his late career, *2001*, is famously cerebral and open-ended. Its human characters act like robots, and its homicidal computer is the most poignant character in the film. *The Shining* concludes with a Moebius loop of an ending that refuses any closure. The film's logic is repeatedly undone in a film filled with asymmetrical doppelgängers: two Gradys, from two different eras and in two different professions; two Grady girls who seem the same age but are not; etc. The film locates horror and monstrosity, within the family, within the patriarch and the patriarchy.

In other words, it is no surprise that *Eyes Wide Shut* is not what it seems. That it would have such an effect on audiences, even without the critical plaudits his other films would eventually accrue, attests to Kubrick's influence on popular culture at large. At the very least, Kubrick's film is prescient in its ability to foretell the pornification of culture, the continued rise of pornography, and the general coarsening of American culture during the decline of its global empire where money infects everything, including, especially, sex. Bill Harford is an extremely successful New York doctor who attempts to buy off prostitutes (Domino), shopkeepers, cab drivers, but is completely out of his depth with some of his wealthy clients—Marion, who makes a pass at him while they are keeping vigil beside her father's body, and Ziegler, who is wealthy beyond Bill's imaginings and who is able to cover up a murder. Standing in for fin-de-siècle Vienna, fin-de-millennial New York is even more decadent and depraved. The shift is from sex to money, though it is, perhaps, the representation of sex in the movie that is most remembered.

The erotic fantasy of the orgy, quite probably meant ironically as the antithesis of sex, has now become the symbol of sex itself.⁴² In numerous films and television shows since *Eyes Wide Shut* was released in 1999, orgies are set in palatial interiors with the participants in masks or costumes. What was meant by Kubrick to be a miming of sex, or a dream-like ideal of the male gaze in cinema, is taken literally as the very definition of what an orgy should be. If one finds porn boring, then one answer is to try to make it more interesting, more artistic, if you will, pushing at the boundary

between erotic art and pornography. What Kubrick's film may have unleashed, then, was not the legitimizing of sex as subject matter for art but the idea that porn itself could somehow be made better (McGlotten 117). What if you made videos that would be interesting even if they did not contain sex? What would they then be (118)? Pornography, like the internet itself, is about browsing, looking, not knowing what you might want (135). It is, in that sense, about not doing. That is precisely what Tom Cruise's character does—he is defined solely by looking.⁴³ It is also clear that Raphael's idea of a secret society has become real, though not in the concrete canyons of New York City but in the rich silicon valleys of Northern California. As Emily Chang discusses in her book *Brotopia: Breaking Up the Boys' Club of Silicon Valley*, sex parties have evolved in tandem with the wealth of the high-technology businesses that have accumulated in the Bay Area of San Francisco.⁴⁴ Almost as if scripted by Raphael, these parties were originally organized and hosted by wealthy men who invited women based on their attractiveness and, in most instances, their youth (Chang, "Bacchanalia 2.0" 68). The parties break down into two types: alcohol- and drug-free sex parties and drug-induced "cuddle parties" (68), which may or may not be all-out orgies (69). As in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the hosts and guests are in the know, getting information through word of mouth or via Snapchat invitations that vanish from their apps. Also, like *Eyes Wide Shut*, the parties are always at private locations, sometimes with no catering allowed. And, as in the final orgy scene in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the ambivalent status of women is front and center. While women might be invited to a sex party in Silicon Valley as someone powerful in their own right, they also might feel out of place there or pressured to attend out of a mixture of status and objectification. Participating in a party, which means being a part of the sex, can create awkward workplace situations for women, especially, who might be seen differently than their male co-workers—especially by the men themselves (106).

San Francisco has long had a liberal attitude toward sexuality, one that comes from its tradition as a mecca for gay and lesbian culture as well as its progressive politics. It is difficult to say whether or not the rise of sex parties in the Valley is a part of this aspect of the area's culture as much as anything else. The sexual experimentation that is popular in the Bay Area is one in which the boundaries of sexuality become fluid. Books and articles have been written about these changes, often from an almost anthropological perspective, one that often seems to see San Francisco as a bellwether for the future of sex itself.⁴⁵ From these studies, a few things can be surmised about the current state of American sexuality: (1) that the fluidity of sexuality is practiced more by women than by men. If bisexuality is more accepted in San Francisco in general, it is practiced more by women than by men. (2) That sexual experimentation often means non-monogamous sexuality—or at least periods in a marriage or relationship that is not strictly monogamous. The practical result of this arrangement might just mean threesomes (with two women and one man the usual formula), or it might be a more complicated arrangement involving more people on a rotating basis. Several authors of recent studies on contemporary sexual habits have concluded that couples who get involved in non-monogamous

situations come to regret them, if only because of the emotional strain they can cause. (3) That the roles in sex, at least where gender is concerned, remain stable and unaffected. To the extent to which the hypersexualizing of the Bay Area means an actual change in sexual culture is, perhaps, debatable, at least in terms of gender. That is, men are not liberated from their (hetero)sexuality and women are not liberated from their gender. Everyone, arguably, ends up in the same spot. (4) The sexual culture of the Bay Area does work toward normalizing certain alternative forms of sexuality. The popular porn site Kink.com, for instance, is connected to the BDSM scene, one that has long existed in Northern California's gay male sexual culture. One could make a case for BDSM for, as Michel Foucault argued before he died, shifting sex away from the genitals and toward other parts of bodily pleasure (*Ethics* 165). Certainly, the site itself offers another version of a contemporary utopia, one in which people's attractiveness seems to come from the fact that they seem healthy, happy, uncoerced, and yet also average and normal looking. The emphasis is not on the same physical attributes as regular porn—abnormally large penises and alarmingly thin female figures. The site emphasizes sex as the giving and receiving of pleasure according to predetermined rules and expectations that are as important as the outcomes themselves. While there is no perfect utopia, Kink.com comes closest to representing a true alternative utopia in the future known as San Francisco. It is certainly not the brotopia of the Valley.

Despite his emphasis on documentary realism, Kubrick's female bodies are shown as almost unflinching beautiful. They are often represented in a full-frontal way that seems to make a virtue of never flinching. In this sense, they are represented as real, though they are deromanticized at the same time. The documentary effect of Kubrick's films is complicated, but even as the surrealism of certain scenes contain a subjectivity that undercuts the seeming objectivity of the documentary style, he retains certain aspects of that aesthetic throughout his oeuvre. What is taken for the intellectual content of his work might in fact be a subtle de-aestheticizing. In a sense, the women in *Eyes Wide Shut* wear "the hardened masks of fetishized femininity" so obviously that it is difficult not to be aware of Kubrick's commentary on the male gaze and the importance of countering its eroticizing tendencies (Ince 115).⁴⁶ As Philip Kuberski argues, Kubrick emphasizes the "palpability" of the female nude over its "sensational potentials" (88). He nonetheless keeps "a proper respect and veneration for its dire powers" (88). The mixture of semi-clothed male bodies—the boxers in the first of Kubrick's films, for example—and perfect female bodies from throughout his films is part of two different tropes—violence and sex—which come together in "Fear and Desire," in the flesh and the gaze (90). The body is often turned into a sculpture, or perhaps more properly, a mannequin, such as we have in the fight scene at the end of *The Killing*, but also the orgy at the heart of *Eyes Wide Shut* (91). Other mannequins exist throughout—arguably, the male astronauts of *2001* and even the stiffness of the male and female bodies in *Barry Lyndon*, an association that seems to be made literal in the eighteenth-century mannequins in the costume shop in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Mannequins, in other words, are not always female in Kubrick, though they perhaps do carry with them the connection of sex with commerce (91)⁴⁷ (Figure 1.18).



Figure 1.18 Rainbow costume shop. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

The ultimate point about sex in *Eyes Wide Shut* might be that it has been warped by the ideology of capitalism to become nothing more than an outward show—something akin to shopping. Hence, as Dr. Bill walks through the Mansion from room to room, he sees lifeless sexual acts performed as if by mannequins or robots. As noted earlier, Raphael claims this was staged and filmed like a shopping mall for sex. This interpretation is reinforced by ending the film in what is obviously supposed to be FAO Swartz—a fancy toy store filled with children’s toys that replicate objects in adult life like a baby stroller. Sex is perverted in the film, as can be seen as well at Rainbow Fashions, where Milich displays the costumes but they are tawdry and dressed up with colored lights much like the film’s innumerable Christmas trees. Whereas Milich sells his underage daughter for sex, Ziegler has sex in the upstairs bathroom of his own Christmas party. The original meaning behind Christmas is parodied by the black mass at the orgy and by the commercialization of Christmas which reminds the viewer of the ways that the film uses vertical power structures. There are two floors at Ziegler’s mansion, with an upstairs to the second, to which Sandor (Sky du Mont) invites Alice. Ziegler and his wife look down on Bill and the women-as-escorts at the Somerton Mansion. As Bill goes out in the film’s second half to reenact his nocturnal journey in the piercingly bright daylight he encounters the vertical power of Ziegler and his class, which ultimately brings Bill back to Ziegler’s own mansion in Manhattan and the red billiard table that takes the place of the orgy room. In this, reading, sex as something to be consumed and controlled, like the bodies of the women at the party, is similar to porn, where sexual acts are themselves divorced not only from relationships but from narrative, even bodies, to become little more than self-contained pieces of erotic obsession—like the scenic fragments that Bill imagines of Alice and the officer⁴⁸ (Figure 1.19).



Figure 1.19 Curtain of lights at the Ziegler mansion. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

The body in the form of Eros, then, is central to Kubrick's vision. And his male protagonists can be seen, over the course of his late films, to move from an all-female world where Eros never exists, *2001*, to one where Alex, the rapist, sees sex and violence in its most polarized way only to end up, in an optimistic reading, as changed back to his original self only with his erotic and violent senses realigned into a normal pattern (or perhaps that is how we might read his final vision, in which the woman is on top and he has at least learned not to be a rapist) (Kuberski 95). Barry of *Barry Lyndon* and Jack of *The Shining* both leave Eros behind—Barry with the German woman Lischen and Jack with the woman in the green bathroom. Each man loses his way in a big house only to replace his wife with something sinister and unobtainable, mistaking what is squarely in front of them for something else (96). By the time we get to *Full Metal Jacket* women have again disappeared only to reemerge in the second half of the film as representations of sex and violence that are more than the male marines have bargained for, or been prepared for, in the misogynist and homophobic reconditioning that they have undergone (97). The prostitute who is a thief and the Vietcong soldier who is an expert marksman turn the tables on the marines, making Kubrick's point that male obsessions and power over women are misplaced, dangerous, and ultimately a myth that men are conditioned to believe unless other conditioning, or experience itself, shows them the tragic error of their way. The body, as Eros, is not what it seems in Kubrick. As with everything in his films, there is more at stake than there might appear to be. The naked body of a beautiful woman is more than a mere object. It might be beautiful, but it is much, much more than that.

It is possible, in fact, to imagine *Eyes Wide Shut* as a self-conscious subversion of Laura Mulvey's famous concept of the "male gaze" of cinema (Webster, referencing Hunter Vaughan 145). Kubrick seems to go out of his way to push Bill's gaze—from

the black-and-white fantasies he imagines of his wife having sex with the Navy officer or her fantasy to the many women who offer their bodies to him to his shocked debasement from the college boys who gay-bait him on the street to the dressing down he further receives from Red Cloak, his wife, and finally Ziegler himself. It is all about Dr. Bill, except it is not. In fact, Alice is much more in charge of her erotic life, and her fantasies, especially, than he is (or ever will be, given his obviously limited imagination), while Ziegler has the power to make his sexual fantasies real. As Alice makes clear, in the very first scene of the movie, Bill never looks at her. Yet everyone else does, commenting on her beauty—the babysitter, Ziegler, the Hungarian lothario at the party. Just not Bill. Yet the male gaze is potent, since Alice's greatest admission, arguably, is to say that she would have walked away from Bill and their daughter if she had received even a glance from the Naval officer back on Cape Cod (Webster 146–7). But he never gave it.

Bill's inability to see his wife is in part because he idolizes her. He thinks he has already seen her or already knows her. He has sex with her after the party and wants to again the next night when their stoned hangover fight makes clear to him how little he knows about his wife, or about women in general. Alice is quite aware of this fact, however, and in the first scene, when she chastises him for not looking at her, she is wiping herself while sitting on the toilet. Kubrick debunks the notion that women are mere objects of beauty, that they are "vessels," in the classical art-historical sense. Here, they have holes (Webster 149). Kubrick makes clear to the audience that Bill's notion of women as hermetically sealed objects rather than subjects of their power and desire is the opposite of what Kubrick believed. And Alice and her many doppelgängers go on to make clear to Bill over and over that this is the case. Marion kisses him; Domino propositions him; the Mysterious Woman sacrifices herself for him; and so on. Alice's recounting of her fantasy of "fucking" a great number of men is the symmetrical repetition of her admission about the Naval officer—and perhaps the most potent moment of demythologizing that is delivered to Bill by a woman in a film that has many.

Finally, the orgy scene is one that, among other things, asks Bill if this is what he really wants: Sex outside of marriage, where it is reduced to mere fucking? Sex outside of love, where it is, arguably, a charade? Is it possible that sex of this type is, finally, dangerous for both the men and women involved? If so, then this is both a hopeful and a bleak film. If the alternative to married sex is the pornographic, then Kubrick seems to be underselling sex for its own sake. But if the film is about the necessity to channel desire within a marriage—the possibility that sex is both something that keeps a couple together but that also, as a dark urge, can tear them apart as well—Kubrick's tale can perhaps be seen as an attempt to represent a problem in full. Like his other late films, he opens up a number of questions about his topic without fully answering any of them. But for the first time since *Barry Lyndon*, perhaps, he attempts to show something about two people that is true to the complexity of life itself. While *Barry Lyndon* is an epic that shows the adult life of one person in full, *Eyes Wide Shut* does attempt to show this extremely important chapter of one couple's life in full in which they escape the possibility of divorce.

But it is unclear, at the end of the film, that we are in a new version of reality. The final scene in the toy store might suggest a new kind of life for Alice and Bill, but we have already seen that reality and dream coexist in the world of the film. Just as *The Shining* makes absolutely clear that the supernatural can literally affect the reality of the film when Delbert Grady lets Jack out of the dry storage locker, so, too, does the appearance beside Alice of Bill's rented mask show that reality here is not stable. Perhaps the mask was moved by a Plumber for The Free, but it is just as likely that its appearance suggests that just as Alice's sexual fantasies cannot be contained to the realm of the dream world, neither can Bill's transgressions in "reality" avoid having an impact on Alice's sleep. While Schnitzler subsumed everything to a notion of reality (Botz-Bornstein 61), which is what a theory of dreams does—dreams are a subset of reality—Kubrick actually combines the two realms. By eschewing fake dream-like effects, he makes reality seem porous and not necessarily any different in its logic. Kubrick avoids surrealism but keeps the basic aesthetic law of surrealism of using hard realism to lend believability to the depiction of dreams.⁴⁹ As in many of Kubrick's films, this one is like a waking dream, or in most of his pictures, a waking nightmare, in which reality is a mental construct, time is circular, and space is defined as the expression of someone's desire.⁵⁰

Eyes Wide Shut's specific version of the dream is similar to Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), which creates a dream-like state through dialogue, camera movement, and editing that constantly disorients the viewer's ability to know exactly what is real or not and when events might have taken place within the film's timeline. The visual style of the film has been frequently copied, most recently in Danish director Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011). While Kubrick is not nearly as abstract as Resnais, his films follow somewhat of the same logic as *Marienbad*, as described by its writer, famed novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet. In the introduction to the script, Robbe-Grillet ponders:

What are these images, actually? They are imaginings; an imaging, if it is vivid enough, is always in the present. The memories one "sees again," the remote places, the future meetings, or even the episodes of the past we each mentally rearrange to suit our convenience are something like an interior film continually projected in our own minds, as soon as we stop paying attention to what is happening around us. But at other moments, on the contrary, all our senses are registering this exterior world that is certainly there. Hence the total cinema of our minds admits both in alternation and to the same degree the present fragments of reality proposed by seeing and hearing, and past fragments, or future fragments, or fragments that are completely phantasmagoric. (13)

Kubrick's own cinema has often been described as a total cinema, an immersive experience that is reconceived for each film. *Eyes Wide Shut* certainly continues that tradition but also contains within its frames all of the details enumerated by Robbe-Grillet here, which are also contained within his own film. In one of many famous shots, Robbe-Grillet describes a balcony scene in which "the characters are standing

... against the balustrade or even half-sitting on it. There could be a statue (or pedestal) in the immediate vicinity. Everyone is motionless. X is looking at A; M is looking at X; the others are looking at each other” (76). Within the erotic triangle of the film, “A” is the woman who may be married to “M” and “X” is the man who seeks to dominate both of them, sometimes violently. Much of the film seems to hinge on A’s claim to have met X, who does not remember him. The feeling that Robbe-Grillet and Resnais are trying to invoke here is one of sculptural psychology, a defamiliarization of the body and its setting that makes the body itself a plastic part of the landscape. This impulse comes together most famously in the sequence at the geometrical garden, where people cast elongated shadows but the plants and other architectural details do not. Shot on an overcast day on the French set, the shadows are painted on. In *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick takes his own homage to *Marienbad* to an extreme, not only including his own geometrical garden at Spa, Belgium, but also his own nearly static *tableaux*, which increase in number during the second half of the film, most of which takes place indoors in manmade spaces. By the time we reach the film’s apex, the duel between Barry and Bullingdon in a barn, the actors are mostly motionless, exchanging glances that speak volumes, and only move to make gestures that are significant and ultimately change the course of the life of the protagonist. Like *Marienbad* as well, Kubrick’s films, as noted, use the image of the French chateau as a complex meditation on memory, civilization, and the entrapment of culture—everything, in other words, that makes up the notion of society, which can be considered both a blessing and a curse, but which perhaps best defines us as human. By the time we get to *Eyes Wide Shut* the women in the Somerton castle are almost literally statues, the moving embodiment of the female sculptures that decorate the Korova Milk Bar in *A Clockwork Orange* and are similarly ambiguous, mysterious, and hyper-sexualized.⁵¹ *Eyes Wide Shut* makes the corporeal nature of Kubrick’s cinema unavoidable. Though Kubrick might seem to care about certain recurring themes such as the nature of the intellect, the problem of evil, etc., perhaps gender was one of them. “Mankind,” as the title reads in *2001*, may well have been meant man as a social being, a part or product of culture, as opposed to humankind. If nothing else, *Eyes Wide Shut* is a parody of our attitudes toward gender. Alice is a prostitute—an object to be bought; the women in the movie are all her; everyone is at the orgy. Women are degraded by Bill, as they are in society, sacrificed and killed. No one is free—sexual liberation is illusory. The point of *Eyes Wide Shut* is that Dr. Bill’s fantasy of sex, like that of most men, is wrong. It fails. Porn fails to fulfil even as it supplies the primary language, or code, for doing so. Only Alice has phallic agency via sexual fantasy, in her dream of an orgy or in her desire for the officer. Bill has only his jealousy and his lust for revenge. He is a dick, and not in a good way. He is, in other words, just playing himself.

Notes

- 1 There has been much controversy over the years about Kubrick’s preferred aspect ratios. Since he died just as he was beginning to turn his attention fully to the digital medium, we do not know precisely what he would have preferred as his films became

digitalized. While he often preferred to release the theatrical versions of his later films in 1.6, they were often projected in 1.7 or 1.8. What is most striking about the VHS and DVD releases and re-releases of his films that he did approve is that he insisted on 1.33, full frame or full gate. These criteria give these films a slightly vertical feel and provide more visual information, especially at the top of the frame. This means that these films are unmasked and that the visual information even exposes some flaws or mistakes in the films (such as the infamous helicopter shadows and blades in the title sequence of *The Shining*). For all of the technical superiority of the Blu-Ray versions of his films—especially *Barry Lyndon*, which had long languished in inferior prints—they do not represent Kubrick’s final wishes in terms of their aspect ratio, which is 1.85.

- 2 Which not only look like Arbus but also like Shigeo Gocho’s two girls in a park from the “Self and Others” series of 1975–7. See Ken Johnson, “Picturing Social Upheavals in a Personal Way.”
- 3 Chris Marker, in *La Jetée*, emphasizes “visuality,” which “is literalized by the quasi-cinematic position of the hero in *La Jetée*, whose entry into the film’s commodity dreamworld is based on the effacement of his physical body” (Croombs 26).
- 4 For more on this motif, see my discussion in *The Dissolution of Place*, chapter seven.
- 5 For more on the pietà motif in Kubrick’s work, see my discussion in *The Dissolution of Place*, chapter seven.
- 6 This vertical and horizontal tension is seen even in the black monolith from *2001*, which stands vertical through much of the film except at the moment of the “stargate” sequence, when it becomes horizontal and its dimensionality, like the reality of the film itself, seems to stretch and become meaningless. The horizontality suggests, among other things, a sort of vaginal space into which Bowman falls. In the succeeding light show, his “pod” clearly becomes a spermatozoon that is floating through a liquid space. The obvious sexual connotations suggest a literal cosmic rebirth, not just a symbolic one. He becomes his own child.
- 7 In the draft screenplay online Kubrick and Raphael mention the fact that all of the women he meets should remind him of his wife (Kubrick and Raphael).
- 8 All of the women in Kubrick’s films look like illustrations created by Robert McGinnis, whose very distinctive female bodies on movie posters and book jackets established a risqué visual style in the 1960s and can perhaps be summed up in his frequent illustrations of Audrey Hepburn and of “Bond girls” in several of the films. See Callahan.
- 9 Klimt is used throughout this long party sequence as a symbol for parallels between the fin de siècle of Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century and that of New York in the next century. Ziegler’s opulence is both decadent and deadly, as is the world Bill will enter. Kubrick’s desire to set the novella in the present underlines the connection and shows the extent to which Kubrick was making a social statement about the evolution of society in general—from the suffocation of the eighteenth century to the automatism of the future. He focuses especially on the problems of three decades: the 1960s with *Full Metal Jacket*, the 1970s with *The Shining*, and the 1990s with *Eyes Wide Shut*. The gap between Ziegler and Bill and Bill and most everyone he meets, in terms of class, is matched with the gap between how he sees his wife before her revelation of mental adultery and after—i.e., Madonna and whore. Similarly, Klimt’s portraits and drawings of women often betray a similar split, despite his tendency toward a kind of naturalism in regard to the body and sex. See

- Ken Johnson, “Ethereal and Exalted Spirits of Femininity.” The original screenplay contains the following description by Frederic Raphael: “Alice is lying asleep, dreaming. An art book of Egon Schiele’s drawings and paintings, which she was looking at before she went to sleep is face down, but open, in the space BILL usually occupies.” Stanley Kubrick Archive, SK/17/1/1.
- 10 Kidman, as Emily Nussbaum notes in a review of her performance in *Big Little Lies* (2017–), often seems to work best when it seems untransparent, when “she can wear a mask and simultaneously let you feel what it’s like to hide behind it” (83).
 - 11 Kubrick tends to hold on an image for thirteen seconds while the average film rests for five to six (Prammagiore 8).
 - 12 While boxing was central to Kubrick as a motif in his films, as can be seen in his photo-report on Walter Cartier that turned into “Day of the Fight” and bits of which were repeated in *The Killer’s Kiss* and *The Killing*, Kubrick also did a photo-essay on Rocky Graziano, who allowed Kubrick to follow him into the dressing room and photograph him nude (Crone 172). The resulting photos of Graziano in the shower or being rubbed down add to the critical commentary on Kubrick that notes his objectification of the male body. As Crone argues, Joyce Carol Oates wrote about “the implicit homoeroticism of boxing” (245), “the obvious difference between boxing and pornography is that boxing, unlike pornography, is not theatrical” (qtd. in Crone 245). If so, Kubrick restores the porn aspect by making films about boxing and turning the ring into a stage on which nearly naked male bodies could duck and weave, embrace, and connect, moving beyond the essay to become art as pornography, or pornography as art.
 - 13 Schnitzler started to adapt his own novella for G. W. Pabst but only got to the costume store scene (Boozer). An earlier version of the novella has been found and it ends with Fridolin being chased away by Albertine (Oltermann). The ending that Raphael and Kubrick had has the husband and wife reuniting at dawn as their daughter runs into their bedroom—a scene that is included in the original screenplay. SK/17/1/1.
 - 14 SK/17/1/1.
 - 15 SK/17/1/1.
 - 16 SK/17/1/1.
 - 17 SK/17/1/1.
 - 18 SK/17/1/1.
 - 19 Likewise, Red Cloak is not always Leon Vitali, but is sometimes dancer Russell Trigg (Ebiri).
 - 20 Widely reported; see, for example, O’Malley.
 - 21 Apparently, Kubrick had some of the basic ideas for the themes of *Eyes Wide Shut*, if not some of the plot points, at least as early as the 1950s. See Alberge.
 - 22 If we focus just on his use of the camera, we can argue that to some extent Kubrick varies his approach according to the film he is trying to make. Hence, we get extreme wide-angle views in the neo-expressionistic *A Clockwork Orange* and grand reverse zooms (and reverse tracks) in *Barry Lyndon*. Up until the point of *The Shining* in 1980, Kubrick used handheld cameras, stationary cameras, and tracked cameras depending upon the circumstance. From *The Shining* onward the Steadicam was added to the mix. What is perhaps striking about Kubrick’s technical choices is the extent to which he so often used fairly static shots—to the point where we tend to notice when he sets the camera in motion. Many of the still shots contain movement, but the movement is within the scene and not coming from the camera itself.

- 23 According to the notes for these images in the Kubrick Archive catalog, these illustrations correspond to the early version of the film contained within the online script when Barry was called Roderick.
- 24 SK/14/2/6/3.
- 25 SK/14/2/6/3.
- 26 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 27 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 28 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 29 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 30 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 31 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 32 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 33 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 34 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 35 SK/14/2/6/2.
- 36 In a different origin story, Kirk Douglas claimed that the idea came from a visit that he and Kubrick took to a psychiatrist when they were making *Paths of Glory* together. Douglas thought that Kubrick was talented but “troubled.” The psychiatrist, however, was so taken with Kubrick that he pitched him the idea for *Eyes Wide Shut* (Douglas 50). According to Simone Odino, Kubrick wrote to Southern looking for a new topic for a film after the completion of *Dr. Strangelove*: “I haven’t come up with any brilliances yet for a new story [...] if you see anything you think might be good, let me know! Atomic warfare, science-fiction, mad sex relationships” (qtd. in Odino 21).
- 37 She has made this claim in different interviews. See, for example, “*Eyes Wide Shut*: Introduced by Jan Harlan and Christiane Kubrick.”
- 38 Steve Martin also discussed the project with Kubrick when he was in London in 1980 doing his standup comic act. See Barfield.
- 39 The novel may have ultimately come to the screen in an oblique way as the basis of Blake Edwards’ *S.O.B.* (1981). Starring Julie Andrews as Sally Miles, an actress who is convinced to bare her breasts in a musical, the all-star cast includes Richard Mulligan as director Felix Farmer, who wants to reshoot scenes of his studio big-budget flop to make them “erotic.” The musical number that results looks like *Cabaret* crossed with *Behind the Green Door*. More than anything, the film is about the changing habits of Hollywood, mainly turning family entertainment into adult sexuality. Los Angeles is portrayed as the epicenter of licentiousness, complete with an orgy and several nods to Kubrick. Marisa Berenenson spends most of the film on her back while receiving cunnilingus from the film’s male lead and Shelley Winters stars as Miles’ lesbian agent.
- 40 It became a film of the same name in 1968.
- 41 David Foster Wallace wanted to write a book about porn after seeing Paul Anderson’s *Boogie Nights* (1997). Anderson visited the set of *Eyes Wide Shut* (“The Wider World of Paul Thomas Anderson” 33). Anthony Frewin, Kubrick’s personal assistant for many years, authored a pornographic novel, *London Blues*, in 1997 (Abrams 26, 53n). Quilty wants to put Lolita in an “art movie” (37).
- 42 The influence of Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* can be seen in episode six of the second season of *True Detective* when detective Ani Bezzerides (Rachel McAdams) goes undercover at a high-class hooker party “up North” and has to negotiate an orgy

- based on *Eyes Wide Shut* (mentioned in recaps and apparently discussed by people making the show). Similarly, on the documentary series, *Sex On 11* features an organization that tries to recreate the “Free” from the film in the form of a private club in Beverly Hills. Recruits have to be selected, and some wear masks out of the movie. Cameras are not allowed. There are various levels, or tiers. Applying to join requires submitting photos, which must be “full length,” and doing a private show for members only. “It’s like *Eyes Wide Shut*.” “Everybody handsome or just gorgeous. Gorgeous girls.” The erotic content of television has, like those of many films that deal with porn or the body, come directly from Kubrick’s film. The explosion of porn-inflected content is both a tribute to that film’s creation of a new subgenre, the erotic thriller, and to its prescient awareness that the twenty-first century would be the century of sex and the body.
- 43 Porn has also rewritten film genres in important ways. The Roman Porno Reboot Project in Japan, for instance, is turning a 1970s Japanese porn genre into a real art form in which the characters create poignant feelings and complex characters and situations out of what was an exploitative subgenre (Kramer). And as I will discuss throughout this book, Stanley Kubrick’s posthumous *Eyes Wide Shut* has spawned a plethora of knockoffs in film and in real life, often becoming shorthand for group sex. Real life, however, makes clear that much of the premise of the film—that a secret society stages orgies but also kills and manipulates people with impunity—already exists, such as the NXIVM group that originated in Albany, New York, and brands women and trains them as sex slaves. See, among other articles, Meier.
- 44 A claim disputed in *Wired* magazine by CEOs who claimed to have been at the party. See Griffith.
- 45 See, for example, Emily Witt’s *Future Sex*.
- 46 In a discussion of Eva Ionesco’s commentary on her mother Irina’s eroticizing of the female body in the film *My Little Princess* (2011).
- 47 Cf. Eco’s claim that one can tell a porn film by the large amounts of wasted time it contains. The film has to spend time showing someone going “from A to B” because the documentary-like filler provides the sex in the film with “a background of normality” (“How to Recognize a Porn Movie” 224). The pornographic film would be intolerable without it. He makes the point that porn films are not “movies with some erotic content” (222). Is Eco’s theory of the documentary aspect of porn similar to the idea of the Fleming effect that he ascribes to the James Bond novels, one in which the almost relentless descriptions of Bond’s commercial acquisitions and his established tastes and preferences—martinis, etc.—are meant to provide a background of normalcy in order to make the more unlikely aspects of the novel—the villain, the plot itself—seem believable? As O’Toole argues, porn would have to be much longer if you devoted as much time to story as you have to to showing the sex (85).
- 48 One critic even talks about *Eyes Wide Shut* as a VR game. See “‘Eyes Wide Shut’: A Tense, Nightmarish Exploration of Marriage and Sexuality in Kubrick’s Ultimate Film.”
- 49 Which might be why Kubrick didn’t do a period film. Also, Raphael’s screenplay follows the original novella—the point is to find out about Mandy at the end. Vienna is kept vague and unreal in the book—that much is perhaps similar (Betz-Bornstein 66–7).
- 50 In her pioneering essay on *2001* Michaelson notes that “[f]ilm proposes ... and most sharply when it is greatest, a dissociative economy of viewing” (“Bodies in Space” 59).

Because “cinema is, more than any other art form, that which Plato claimed art in general to be: a *dream for waking minds*. The paradox testifies to the manner in which film provokes that delicate dissociation, that *contrapposto* of the mind, that constantly renewed tension and readjustment” (59; emphasis in original).

- 51 The sexual positions in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Eyes Wide Shut* were also present in the preliminary designs for the futuristic city of *AI* (2001) that was completed by Steven Spielberg without using Kubrick’s drawings. In Kubrick’s version the buildings have vaginal openings—women’s spread legs.

The Spy Who Loved Me: Bond and the *Playboy* Aesthetic

In Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975), Lady Lyndon is slowed down by the wheelchair of her infirm husband and the gate of a child.¹ The entire film seems always about to freeze into a photo and does, in a few instances, become a tableau. Indeed, the tableau, as Eugenie Brinkema notes, is often associated with the family and with a melodramatic moment in which something is revealed or made clear. It is an apotheosis or "heightened moment" (106). While neither of these effects is necessarily present in Kubrick's films, they are definitely moments of intermediality in which the film seems to freeze into a painting, or perhaps conversely (or in a different medium) a painting seems to try to come to life, to become animated like a film. In the latter case, "the tableau *vivant* is a tableau *mort*, conferring death not through intermedial juxtapositions but through a co-opting of stasis *for* cinema" (106).

When we talk about what a static image might be in Kubrick's cinema, we are often talking about different technical effects. As Garrett Stewart notes, there is the freeze frame, such as one has at the end of part two of *Barry Lyndon* when we see Barry for the last time as he enters a coach never to be seen corporally again on the screen, and then there is the "filmed photo" such as one has at the end of *The Shining* (1980) when we see Jack Torrance smiling from behind the mask of 1920s class privilege and racial unease (71). The two types of images are not only not the same but arguably opposite in that the freeze frame stops the stream of pictures before the audience and calls attention to the materiality—and technical artificiality—of film itself, while the latter can actually place the film front and center in a different way and provide no break in continuity—indeed a heightened continuity or connection between the audience and the elision of filmic with actual dimensional space. We might say that the freeze frame is diegetic and the filmed photo nondiegetic.

As Philippe Mather and others have argued, Kubrick's aesthetic of the still and the moving picture depends upon realism to work. While this realism was often a heightened one, it comes from the essentially documentary aesthetics of pictorial journalism—one that required some sort of connection between the subject matter of photographs and everyday life. That is, representation was linked to recordability. The magazine photo-essay at *Look* emphasized the personal, the warm, in contrast to the cool aloofness of *Life* magazine (Mather 33). The photo spread also taught editing—contrasting montage editing à la Eisenstein—and the importance of knowing your

subject or subject matter—i.e., research (38; 33). One could even argue that the naturalistic lighting required by the photo layout influenced Kubrick's penchant for it throughout his film career (12). The necessarily collaborative nature of the photo-essay form likewise made collaboration a necessity—between the photographer and the writer, but with the editor as well (55). Despite the notion of the auteur, which Kubrick is often said to represent, filmmaking is always a collaboration of talented people working together. The essence of Kubrick's style, then, is arguably documentary, especially in the sense of a heightened version of the real.

Although we might think of Kubrick as a director with a distinct style—one, like Orson Welles, who emphasized certain recurring stylistic choices like symmetry, deep focus, wide-angle lenses, fluid horizontal takes, and filming from above or below, to name only a few—it is also important to see that Kubrick's expressionistic or fantastic aspects exist in a dialectic with his naturalistic tendencies and whatever personal attributes he brought to his visual art he was always lodged in the commercial world of filmmaking. Like *Look* magazine, Kubrick was attempting to make money with his art (Mather 180). His photographs and his films, for all of their borrowing from modernist or fin-de-siècle sources, were ultimately based in the commercial realm. In his films, Kubrick was much more willing to experiment with overall narrative structure than he was with how he photographed those events. Individual performances could be extreme or eccentric, but the filming of them always had to appear to be real. One need only think of the banality of Heywood Floyd in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), or even the monolith itself, versus the fantastic tropes, themes, and events that the film chronicles overall. As Kubrick noted in interviews, the film would not work if the reality of it could be questioned in the slightest.

This documentary approach is used by Kubrick in service of many different kinds of films—from the dark satire of *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), where the documentary look is flat and matter of fact in the base and bomber sets but more heightened and surreal in the War Room sequences and used throughout to make the film believable enough to be scary and provide an edge to the uncomfortable humor—to the seemingly pictorial use of imagery in *Barry Lyndon*. As Ken Adam, the film's creative director and set designer, has noted, Kubrick's desire for the visual look of the film was to make a documentary of the eighteenth century.² What we might now think of as the painterly look of the film was, to some extent, a happy accident in that Kubrick did not have photographs from the era to draw from, only paintings. (As Adam has said, if he had had photos, he would have used them instead.) Kubrick's use of paintings, however, does not mean that his approach to history is naively objective. Kubrick knows that history is built upon narrative and that the story it tells is always authored by someone. Throughout the film we have a semi-objective voiceover narrator, title cards, and, of course, Kubrick's camera itself. Whenever imagery emphasizes the documentary feel of the film—such as the use of specially adapted Zeiss lenses to film with candlelight—there is a concomitant aesthetic effect that echoes the painting or literature of the era. The edge between the light created by the bubble of luminosity from candlelight and the extreme darkness just outside of it, for example, is stark and different from that

created by electric light. This effect is as much realistic as it is aesthetic. Like much of the film, we are constantly reminded of the trappings of a different era that was not only a different physical world but artistic one as well. The higher up the social ladder that Barry climbs, the more ornate, elaborate, and engulfing the artifice that surrounds him becomes. The second half of the film, in which he reaches the pinnacle of wealth via his marriage, he completely leaves the natural world of his mother's thatched hut in Ireland, with the chickens roaming free, and is entrapped within an almost completely interior world in which the walls are lined with paintings and tapestries that modulate, refract, and control the movements, emotions, and possibilities of the owners who move among them. In a discussion of Edvard Munch's painting as it relates to the aesthetics of early cinema, Anders R. Sørnes notes that André Bazin argued that film is always like a window, with space and time radiating beyond the frame, while a painting is always encased by the edge of the frame, focusing the gaze inward (47). This centrifugal-versus-centripetal difference, as Bazin calls them, is arguably reversed in Munch's paintings, which themselves seem cinematic in their jumping the edge of the frame (47).³ *Barry Lyndon* seems to dilate back and forth between these effects or possibilities, forcing the audience to contemplate the relationship between painting and film, or art and life (Figure 2.1).

Using the eighteenth century, or painting itself, as an index of culture or a stand-in for civilization, if not humanity, is a trope that runs throughout Kubrick's oeuvre. In the many instances of frozen compositions in *Barry Lyndon* that echo paintings from the era, Kubrick's *tableaux* seem to dissolve time into space. Kubrick's painterly *tableaux* not only borrow compositionally from art but in some instances actual paintings are reproduced. Whether the paintings on the walls of the chateau of Major General



Figure 2.1 Berlin. *Barry Lyndon*. Stanley Kubrick, 1975. Warner Brothers.

Broulard in *Paths of Glory* (1957) or the Fragonards in Dave Bowman's cosmic hotel at the end of *2001*, Kubrick used eighteenth-century painting in particular to suggest memory and the vicissitudes of temporal change.⁴ Both *Strangelove* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* suggest a sense of time without humans—both before and after their existence. *Barry Lyndon* comments on the extreme mutability of time—its dynamic, essentially subjective malleability and the impossibility to ever really know the past. The aspect of the film that most allows for this uncanny displacement is, arguably, the aesthetic choices made by Kubrick in collaboration with set designer Ken Adam⁵ (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).



Figure 2.2 Chateau. *Paths of Glory*. Stanley Kubrick. 1957. United Artists.



Figure 2.3 Bowman's celestial hotel. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Kubrick's work is linked to EON Productions' Bond films via the British film industry. Kubrick employed actors from the franchise (such as Philip Stone) and helped with the lighting for the film *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), which was made at Pinewood Studios near Kubrick's home. It is not surprising that Kubrick and the Bond producers shared a production designer in Adam, whose War Room set in *Strangelove* was based upon his iconic design for the first Bond film, *Dr. No* (1962). The cross between bunker and laboratory updated the notion of the mad scientist as someone who attempts to understand the world in toto via a brain that is essentially malformed and diseased. The huge tactical board of *Dr. Strangelove*, which spatially counts down humanity's end, is arguably a parody of the same type of totality that one finds throughout the Bond franchise—the place of safety for the villain, who looks at the world only through his own set of magnified priorities (Mather 254)⁶ (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).

Fantastic Architecture

The intermediality of painting and film was central not only to Kubrick's aesthetic but to that of the seemingly more generic or impersonal Bond franchise. Both used the space between the two to create a dialogue about the future via the past, progress via stasis, and the desire of the villain, or the rogue, to stop time, or, at least, like Bond himself, step outside of it and suspend the encroachment of mortality. Indebted to fantasy architecture, such as Étienne-Louis Boullée's *Entrance to a Cemetery* or even his more perfectly geometrical cenotaphs (Sylvester, "Ken Adam: Production Designer" 15),



Figure 2.4 The War Room map. *Dr. Strangelove*. Stanley Kubrick. 1964. Columbia Pictures.



Figure 2.5 Dr. No's lair. *Dr. No*. Terence Young. 1962. United Artists.

Adam's designs utilized the contrast of black-and-white film to create strong geometric shapes that dominated the look and feel of a scene. The Bond films, which combined naturalism with fantasy, allowed him a great deal of leeway to perfect his approach to design and Adam enjoyed the opportunity to be inventive. He established a look and feel for the design of the first film, 1962's *Dr. No*, which was arguably perfected by *Goldfinger* in 1964.⁷

The most telling design for the Bond franchise may have been the private lair that Adam frequently designed for the villain. Beginning with *Dr. No*, these designs often involved a mixture of modernist architectural aesthetics and traditional taste. This almost schizoid mixing of the modernist and the traditional perhaps reaches a peak in *Moonraker* (1979), where Hugo Drax has a modernist missile complex and space station but lives in an eighteenth-century chateau brought from the Loire valley to California (French 34). This combination of the fantasy modernist and the traditional, especially the eighteenth century, can be seen throughout the designs by Adam and in Kubrick's films. Dr. No's home is underwater and includes a giant magnified aquarium, which Bond accuses of containing "minnows pretending they're whales," but it is also strewn with the accouterment of a more traditional interior design—a Goya painting, telescope, and leather-bound books. The design mixes the inside with the outside—mental states with nature—by juxtaposing incongruent items. While not completely consistent from movie to movie, the architecture associated with the villain tends to be distinctly modernist, or as Adam described it, "slightly tongue-in-cheek, slightly ahead-of-contemporary" (qtd. in Sylvester, *The Visionary Art of Ken Adam* 66). An émigré from Berlin, Adam had been influenced as a child by the work of German Expressionist cinema such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), which not only emphasized the angular proto-noir of horror films and the way that set design could

express disordered states of mind but also freely used the set as a painting, complete with lines drawn over the floors and the walls to emphasize the painterly nature of what the viewer was seeing (Vidler 15). In London, Adam started his career studying as an architect at the Bartlett School before switching to film design. Always drawing his sets using a black felt-tipped pen, his designs for Kubrick and the Bond franchise retained a sense of expressionist chiaroscuro. His lines usually remained sharp and linear until his designs for *The Spy Who Loved Me* in 1977, when he finally began to experiment with curved forms.⁸ This particular type of set arguably reaches its pinnacle in the set design for *You Only Live Twice* (1967). Set inside an inactive volcano in Japan, the War Room here takes on enormous size and ambition, and Adam built the set to actual scale, including two working monorail systems. The gargantuan set proved to be the real star of this particular film, though similar sets such as the gold bullion depository room at Fort Knox in *Goldfinger*, the submarine docking station in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, and the orbiting space station in *Moonraker* were also famous (Figure 2.6).

While in architecture school, Adam was influenced by Bauhaus and, though he never completed his studies, was thankful to them for exposing him to the vocabulary of architectural history. While one might assume that the architecture that makes its way into his films was there because of personal taste—the homage to Frank Lloyd Wright that is the rumpus room set in *Goldfinger*, for example—another theory has been promulgated that the author of the Bond franchise, Ian Fleming, hated modern architecture and purposefully attempted to parody it in his books.⁹ The story goes that Fleming was upset by the destruction of a row of Victorian houses on Willow Road (1939) in Hampstead, where modernist architect Ernö Goldfinger built a home for himself and his family. Though the structure is now a part of the National Trust and



Figure 2.6 Ft. Knox. *Goldfinger*. Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists.

was built by the architect with references to the original structure, it was still, overall, overtly modernist and his later work, such as the Trellick Tower (1972), also a protected property, was at first a controversial Brutalist project. While it seems unlikely that the villains of the Bond films live in faux-modernist interiors as part of an ironic protest against the encroachments of modernism, it is probably true that Fleming's Auric Goldfinger was a name borrowed from Ernö Goldfinger, but probably because Fleming played golf with John Blackwell, a cousin of Goldfinger's wife Ursula Blackwell, who mentioned the architect to Fleming (Warburton 1). When the novel was published, Fleming's publisher, Jonathan Cape, was sued by Goldfinger and agreed to have the name "Auric" precede the name "Goldfinger" in any promotional materials.

Space, as the design of sets and of the movement of the camera through them, is in some ways more like architecture than film, as can be seen in the montage technique of architect-to-be Eisenstein or in the cinematic quality of such modernist architecture as Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. Film developed along with modernist architecture, with both of them focusing on the picture window, the effect of light on a flat surface that yet retained the ability to also show three dimensions. In the early history of the cinema, the 1920s, the emphasis on the "pictorial," on making "pictures that are moving compositions in the same sense that a great painting is an immobile composition. At any point in a photo-play, a photographic 'still' should reveal people and scenery in perfect artistic coordination" (qtd. in Ramírez 31), resolved into the importance of how a film looked and on the artistic merging of the director's vision with that of the art director. Films were not merely to be the "pantomimes" of silent film (Ramírez 31) but use all of the aspects of visual style, music, writing, camera, and editing to create a multidimensional experience. Set design, as one of the most important parts of the visual design, developed certain characteristics: (1) "movie architecture is fragmentary" (81); (2) "[m]ovie architecture changes the sizes and proportions of real architecture" (83); (3) it is "rarely rectangular" (84); (4) it is "typically exaggerated architecture" (85); (5) it "is elastic and mobile" (86); and (6) it must be built quickly and/or remain usable after filming (89). Sets were designed with their destruction in mind. Likewise, the colors used were dictated by their filmability and ability, even in black and white, according to how many semi-tones could be created. Such obvious criteria as the amount of available space for sets, budget, and materials also determine what the final aesthetic decisions would be (109–11). While the image on the screen was the most important factor, and the only permanent record, many material aspects determined what we think of as independent aesthetic decisions (Figure 2.7).

The version of modernist architecture that we have in the Bond franchise is, of course, something of a fantasy. What distinguishes the villain's lair is not only its sense of spectacle—its essentially theatrical quality—but its hidden quality as well. The villain's lair is never what it appears to be. It is always constructed with a distinctive inside and outside. Dr. No resides deep below the ocean; Blofeld's lab is within a volcano; Stromberg (Curd Jürgens) in *The Spy Who Loved Me* lives in a spider-like bathysphere; etc. The villains do not want to be seen, though they cannot resist showing off for Bond and the "Bond girl" when circumstances allow for it. The fantasy elements of



Figure 2.7 Villa Savoye. Le Corbusier. 1929–31. Author.

these sets and of the Bond series in general reference the overlap between architecture and other media that was increasingly occurring in the 1960s and 1970s. Architectural movements such as Archigram designed projects that similarly emphasized advanced technology, consumption, and the melding of cinematic elements with architectural spaces. Their projects were often presented as collages of architectural spaces and cut-outs of women in bikinis or movie stars.¹⁰ While ultimately Archigram was more interested in the modular and the environmental, they did introduce the element of fantasy into the often-staid world of architecture and suggested the notion of an architecture without architecture—something that becomes a reality in filmic and virtual spaces.

Archigram ultimately thought that the solution to architecture was to make modernism more extreme—to take it to its logical conclusions. The historical irony is that architecture went, for a time, in the exact opposite direction as, post-1970s, modernism was countered with postmodernism—modernism's bitter antithesis (Sadler 194). What both Archigram and Adam were up to instead was an eroticization of architecture. As Beatriz Colomina notes, in *Playboy* magazine in the 1960s, "Architecture turned out to be more seductive than the playmates" (3). The interiors depicted in the magazine often emphasized design and the objects that populated the bachelor spaces were fetishized as much, if not more, than the bodies of the unclothed women in the magazine. The scopophillic effect of the gaze of the male extended beyond the women to the objects in the spaces that they and the men inhabited—stereos, beds, cars.¹¹ It is not by accident that the epicenter of the *Playboy* empire is a mansion—an architectural space. The bachelor pad is an area of scopophillic desire

that is entirely and completely controlled by the bachelor and eroticized by him—a lure for the woman, but a constant titillation for both of them. Adam places the eroticism on the screen, especially in the futuristic set design, which borrows from modernist architects in its minimalism, rich surfaces, play of inside and outside, but also in the fact that it is not merely like a boy's comic book fantasy but is eye candy that could actually exist. In other words, whatever is wrong about the villain, he has a cool pad to be bad in.

In some ways the bachelor pad is always out of scale in the Bond films and taken to a grandiloquent extreme that matches the ego, if not the megalomania, of its owner—a joke, perhaps, about overcompensation. In real life, the pad was exactly that—something small, like an urban apartment, that was, following the aesthetics of Archigram, modular, reproducible, even mobile (the apartment as a wearable suit was an Archigram project). Buckminster Fuller's "City of the Future," Paolo Soleri's "Cathedral-Cities for a New Society," and Moshe Safdie's "Habitat" for Expo '67 in Montreal are similar avant-garde versions of the same (Colomina 4). One might argue that these "bachelor machines," as Rem Koolhaas has called them, begin in the futurism of Le Corbusier and predate the *Playboy* aesthetic by decades—reaching their peak, perhaps, in something like the total aesthetic control of Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949), which completely obliterates the interior and exterior to aestheticize the world through glass—bringing the outside inside, but also turning the outside, from the inside, into a film screen.¹² It is difficult to explain how ubiquitous the notion of the bachelor space was in the 1960s—almost as common as the romanticizing of the spy. In *How to Murder Your Wife*, a 1965 film directed by Richard Quine, Jack Lemmon plays a successful cartoonist whose life is turned upside down when he drunkenly marries an Italian woman at a bachelor party. His urban oasis of a bachelor pad in Manhattan is turned upside down by the intrusion of a woman. While initially disdainful of her, he comes to love her once she is kidnapped. As a cartoonist, he has been writing a column in which the same thing happens. This meta-commentary, not to mention fusing of the artistic man with the man of action, is one of the film's many layers of irony—as is the idea of having a beautiful wife who does not speak English. Lemmon's character is not the one who is most annoyed by the situation, however, but "Charles—Mr. Ford's man," played by Terry-Thomas as the ultimate fussy English butler. In introducing the apartment, over the film's credits, he takes the audience on a tour of the abode in which he details Lemmon's possessions, the most telling comment is:

This is Mr. Ford's living room.

Notice, if you will, the complete absence of a so-called woman's touch. No gay little chintzes, no big gunky lamps. In fact, everything masculine—and perfect. In fact, the sort of place you could have had if only you had had the sense not to get married. Ah, but you say, poor lonely man, how does he spend his evenings?

At this point, Charles finds a pair of high-heel shoes behind the furniture. The implication, of course, is that Mr. Ford is a playboy, and the film is a perfect example



Figure 2.8 Glass House. Philip Johnson. 1947–9. Author.

of that philosophy. The camera lavishes attention on his stereo, leather furniture, Kline painting, books, primitive statues—everything you might find, at the time, gracing the pages of *Playboy*. When we finally get to Mr. Ford himself, he is naked in bed. The woman, we assume, has been gotten rid of—only her shoes, Cinderella-like, left behind, and Charles takes care of those (Figure 2.8).

Architecture of this nature could be called a form of feminization, of domesticity so virialized that it begins to break down into camp, or queer, or at least postmodern forms (Eversole 9). Certainly this argument has been made about the architecture of Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, and Johnson.¹³ The Bond villains, by exaggerating their subconscious minds to such a degree via their architectural extravagance, give much of themselves away. They prefer buildings to people; hence, the destruction of their property in the final reel is always the true revenge by Bond and the intelligence services. The coldness and cruelty of the villain is supposed to be apparent in their physical ailment—the hand, in the case of Dr. No and Dr. Strangelove—a symbolic castration that speaks volumes about the supposedly even more twisted elements of their psyches, especially their libidos (Macintyre 88).¹⁴ There is something about them that is not quite human or assimilatable by society, but they represent our own dark natures—or appetites for order, transcendence, and control that lurk in the shadows of society, coming out, like Strangelove does, when the time is ripe. They are the picked-upon geniuses who strike back and almost win but for the police force that keeps them in check.¹⁵ What we admire in them and see in ourselves is their ability to think outside the box, to be slightly ahead of their time. They are punished for this, but we get to enjoy their hubris and their vision.

The mixed coding of architectural styles of the villains suggests aspects of themselves that they do not know, or a complexity in their personalities—a striving for conventional legitimacy sought via unconventional means. More often than not, though, the more traditional architecture is associated with Bond and his allies as we can see in the retrained, even boringly conventional decoration of Bond’s apartment in *Dr. No* or in M’s padded door that leads to his smoke-filled government office. The most extravagant instance of this anti-modernist style has to be M’s conference room, which is shown in *Thunderball* (1965) to be a chateau-like interior that, behind the scenes, contains the same kind of technology one would find in the lair of one of the villains. Just as the nuclear reactor set of *Dr. No* seems to serve as a model for the War Room of *Dr. Strangelove*, so does M’s conference room predate the interiors created by Adam for *Barry Lyndon*, especially the office of the Prussian Minister of Police in Berlin. The irony of Adam’s winning an academy award for *Barry Lyndon*, one he commented on frequently in interviews, was that he did not design a single set for the film since Kubrick wanted, in his documentary way, to photograph real European eighteenth-century interiors whenever possible. Adam created filmic spaces via the careful splicing together of real interiors from different buildings—no mean feat—and from the careful arrangement of the furniture, curtains, paintings, etc., within these spaces. The visual continuity helps to create a world for the film, a look that was vital to its success and remains to this day the sine qua non representation of eighteenth-century luxury and elegance on film¹⁶ (Figures 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, and 2.12).

A director influenced by both Kubrick and the Bond franchise (and Mies van der Rohe), Christopher Nolan, commenting on his own version of *2001*, his film *Interstellar* (2014), notes that “what he admires about Kubrick is his pure-cinema pursuit of ... ‘the one powerful image.’” “What is the one shot that says everything?” (Jensen 28). For *2001* that image is probably the monolith, but others might qualify as well. For the Bond films, that image would often be a set by Adam. Certainly, for *Barry Lyndon*, the same could be said but in a different way. Adam was integral to the design of some of the most influential and iconic films of the contemporary period. His work with the pictorial echoes what Alain Badiou has called the “impure elements” of art. “No film, strictly speaking,” he writes, “is controlled by artistic thinking from beginning to end.

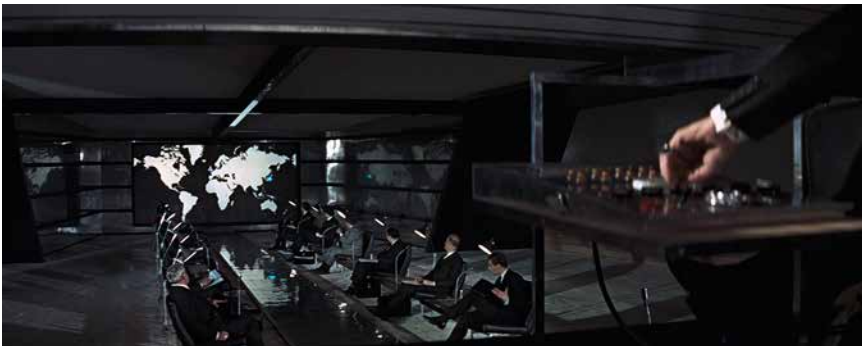


Figure 2.9 Blofeld’s conference room. *Thunderball*. Terence Young. 1965. United Artists.



Figure 2.10 M's conference room. *Thunderball*. Terence Young. 1965. United Artists.



Figure 2.11 M's conference room map. *Thunderball*. Terence Young. 1965. United Artists.



Figure 2.12 The Minister of Police's conference room. *Barry Lyndon*. Stanley Kubrick. 1975. Warner Brothers.

It always bears the detritus of other arts.... Artistic activity activity can only be discerned in a film as a *process of purification of its own immanent non-artistic character*. This process is never completed” (84). As Badiou concludes:

This is what makes cinema, intrinsically and not empirically, into a mass art: its referent is not the artistic past of forms, which would suppose an educated spectator, but a common imagery whose filtering and distancing treatment is guaranteed by potential artistic expectations. Cinema gathers around identifiably non-artistic materials, which are ideological indicators of the epoch. It then *transmits*, potentially, their artistic purification, within the medium of an apparent indiscernibility between art and non-art. (86, emphasis in original)

In their very different ways, Kubrick’s and the Bond franchise’s genre-smashing films create a pure cinema of pictorial reference that presupposes no prior knowledge of anything but, vaguely, our own collective memory.

Playboy Architecture

When Hugh Hefner moved permanently from his original Chicago Playboy Mansion to the Mansion West in the Los Angeles area, he tacitly embraced what was always a key part of the *Playboy* empire—that it was an adult version of Disneyland, an attempt to make interior fantasies real and palpable. He was also acknowledging the fact that his empire was similarly one in which multimedia interconnected to form a synergistic capitalist vertical monopoly. Just as Walt Disney’s films were at the center of his vast entertainment world, so was the print publication for Hefner. Yet the genius of Disney and of Hefner was in selling a fantasy that interconnected with a number of different products and niches. The Disney television show *Wonderful World of Disney* featured Disneyland and clips from the films that acted as corporate self-advertisement.¹⁷ The Parks feature characters and scenes from the films. Likewise, Hefner had television shows such as *Playboy’s Penthouse* or *Playboy after Dark* that advertised the magazine’s attitude, or lifestyle, as well as its products. The architectural realization of this fantasy was the two Playboy mansions as well as, eventually, the tightly controlled Playboy clubs that ringed the world. In the Chicago mansion, Hefner centralized his empire to his famous round, rotating bed, which contained telephones, television, CCTV, and other media. Hefner could control the mansion, and his empire, without ever leaving his bed. He understood that what made this feat possible was embracing multimedia. Though *Playboy* was a print publication, he presciently foresaw that the future of pornography was film and television, or at the very least, the profit was.

At the center of Hefner’s concept of the playboy, the boy who plays others, is the idea of the bachelor. While the centerfold sold magazines, the magazine itself attempted to sell a lifestyle. What Hefner hoped to deconstruct was the notion of marriage, especially the 1950s idea of the nuclear family in the suburbs. He posited instead

the idea of the urban bachelor, a concept that was mostly defined by discussions of architecture, and the consumer products to go with it, on the pages of *Playboy*. The bachelor pad was a place for entertaining and seducing women as well as an attempt to claim the domestic space of the home as a masculine one. Hefner flips the notion of the outside as masculine and the inside as feminine in an attempt to redefine the house or apartment as the domain of the man, not the woman. Any slippage in sexuality allowed by the reverse of gender is supposed to be negated by the overt heterosexuality of the images of nude women. The real fantasy space of the *Playboy* phenomenon, however, is the new definition of the interior as a modernist space devoid of feminine decoration, children, or anything that does not serve the immediate needs of the “sophisticated” male.¹⁸ Supposedly liberating men to shun marriage, the notion of a playboy was supposed to be liberating to women as well, who were also free to form unions based not on marriage but on sex. Hefner himself practiced polyamory within and without marriage and, at least briefly, bisexuality (“Hugh Hefner”). Hefner always saw the sexual and gender politics of the magazine not only as a part of the sexual revolution of the 1950s and 1960s but as a vanguard attempt to rethink sex as a fundamental part of society.

The bachelor apartment, as codified in designs in *Playboy* but actually represented in numerous films and actual built environments, was a performative space where masculinity was defined and made visible by an environment that collapses interior and exterior space to make the private public (Cohan 31). Key to the design was open space, like a stage, with zones to define functions rather than rooms. Technology is present to aid the bachelor, such as wash the dishes in the kitchen, but also as an extension of his personality—the hi-fi stereo, for example. Furniture in the apartment is often convertible—a couch becomes a bed—the better to turn the bachelor apartment into a trap for the unsuspecting female, to seize the moment (Preciado 89–90). Play becomes work and work becomes play.

Michel Foucault, for one, understood the importance of architecture to the deployment of power over sex—from prisons to schools, the regulations concerning sex, and the deployment of visibility as a shield from it—is a recurring theme in his notion of the post-Enlightenment change in our notions of sexual discourse (Williams 16). J. G. Ballard, similarly, associated most modern notions of space—the high-rise apartment building, the car, the “concrete islands” of motorways—as linked with sex (Williams 16). What Marc Augé might call “non-places” are frequently suffused with sexuality. Boredom, lack of identity, and the dissolution of place combine to create forerunners of internet pornography—spaces that are filled with sexuality and longing. Pop art often focuses on these interior spaces as does work on postmodern architecture, whether heterosexual, in the case of Tom Wesselmann, or queer, in the paintings and drawings of David Hockney. Everything becomes a sign for sexuality, even the billboards and casino signs of Las Vegas, advertising nude women (87).

Hefner was designing his empire at the same time that some modernist architects were exploring the effects of multimedia on architecture itself (Preciado 23).¹⁹ Masculinity, rejecting any natural definition, is constructed, specifically through

multimedia. The playboy becomes a kind of spy—secretive, sophisticated in his use of technology, hidden away in a protected room where he watches everything that happens within the space of a new definition of the body (35). Whereas Hefner saw his magazine as revolutionary, one might also say that it was an early warning of what was to come: the movement from “the disciplinary regimes typical of the nineteenth century ... to the flexible neoliberal capitalist forms of production and control that defined the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (39). Hefner argued against marriage as a healthy institution, but also against homosexuality as well, which he found to be equally unnatural (40–1). The consumption of porn at stag parties that were exclusively male was frowned upon and replaced, ultimately, by the notion of the need for women and men to discuss, to consume, sex together. For the purposes of the magazine, however, and eventually Hefner’s mansions, a strict division between men and women was kept. That is, men did not appear with women on the pages of *Playboy*, a clear separation between men as subjects, as viewers, and women as objects, the viewed, had to be maintained (43). But if wives were banished from the bachelor’s home, where were the women to come from? Hefner’s answer was the girl next door. The *Playboy* centerfold was the woman just outside the space of the apartment, “right at the threshold of the bachelor’s own house, accessible and yet separated from his own domestic environment” (52). The centerfold as the avatar of the girl next door plays an important part in the “resexualization of everyday life” (53). This transformation is played out in the process of looking at the centerfold itself. The model first appears in clothes, as a girl next door would, but the process of unfolding the centerfold, and especially, turning the magazine into landscape view to see the image, transforms the model from the everyday to something extraordinary and no longer the same (57–8). The power of this transformation lies both in the sexualizing—the making public of the private, in this case—but also in the fact that the “girl” is both unthreatening and desirable. The potential power of the everyday is unlocked. Few other pornographic magazines had the ability to make their models appear to be believable and resist the often-telltale markers of class and background that is often conveyed by other more hard-core magazines and films. In that sense, *Playboy* has always remained closer to *Esquire* or to the “laddish” magazines today such as *Maxim*—neither family material nor hardcore pornography. Like Hef himself or one of his bachelors, the playmate might be shown in the magazine reading or wearing pajamas, doing everyday things in domestic interiors. As in all of the *Playboy* empire, nudity is secondary to architecture, or rather, architecture is needed to construct the narrative of the girl next door, the fantasy of the real (59).

The centerfold feature of the magazine, especially as it unfolds as a two-dimensional version of a striptease, plays a part in a uniquely modern phenomenon: the notion of public nudity, especially as a commercial enterprise (Preciado 67). For the Victorians, sexual content was not a problem so much as the proper space in which to consume it, the discreetness of a private space being distinctly preferable and the division between public and private spaces an inviolable one (68). This political “regulatory wall” still exists and polices mainly public sex, while private sex is left to personal ethics (69). Likewise, what was subversive about *Playboy* was not so much the sexual content itself

but the exposing of it by making the private public (76). Just as the magazine penetrated the private spaces of America, the magazine assiduously represented interior spaces in its pages, repeatedly linking sex to the private domain that it was now exposing, page by page, in a strip-tease of visual information. The real message can be found in the architecture and design, which was the real paradigm shift that Hefner made. Photo articles took the place of psychological interiority as well, creating a story out of the visual context in which models, people who were being profiled, and others were represented (80). The inside literally became the outside as a photographed built environment.

At the same time that Hefner was using architectural representation to dissolve the difference between interior and exterior parts of the self, Mies van der Rohe and Johnson were literally dissolving the notion of public and private in their architecture, the Farnsworth House (1951) and the Glass House, respectively, by building houses with glass exterior walls and almost no interior ones.²⁰ The Playboy Mansion had some glass walls, most famously, the see-through one forming part of the swimming pool, but the mainly substituted cameras for glass walls, filming the sexual escapades of the guests and making everything, and everyone, part of a multimedia voyeurism to be sold (Preciado 114). In a modernist building such as Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1931), we have ribbon windows that suggest the changing dynamics of a film screen, or filmstrip, while in Johnson's Glass House, we have glass walls reminiscent of a television screen, ever changing with the seasons or even the light of one day. In the Playboy Mansion, we have the opposite—cameras facing the guests, a perpetual “dark room” (qtd. in Preciado 116) or even Disneyland “dark ride.” The Taylorization of sex was perhaps subtle for the guests who created product but it was factory-like for the women who worked there as Bunnies. Twenty-four workers were housed on the fourth floor of the Mansion in barracks with communal bathrooms and bunk beds. There they were trained and were expected to follow the rules of the “Bunny Manual” and the commands of a “Bunny Mother” (Preciado 124–5). The Mansion was the world's “first multimedia brothel” (127) (Figures 2.13 and 2.14).

Of the many eccentric traits we might associate with Hugh Hefner—the anachronistic pipe, the silk pajamas and robe—none may be as important as his penchant for horizontality. If the playboy's penthouse or mansion is an attempt at a new kind of masculinity and a new kind of domestic space, one that brings the man inside and flirts dangerously with effeminacy or homosexuality, this radical conceptualizing of male sexuality is continued not only into the bed and Hef's famous rotating round bed but into his almost permanent state of supine lounging. Rather than assuming the verticality of virile maleness, he assumes the horizontal position associated with passivity, the feminine, and the female. In a sense, the horizontal pose was the metonym for the dissolving of public and private spaces that was the *Playboy* empire, as seen in its creator's own body, which occupied a space of both work and leisure. Hef fucked for a living, and his own workspace, perhaps not surprisingly, was his bed—literally and figuratively.

Among other prescient ideas that Hefner foresaw was the inability for us to distinguish between “private and nonprivate spaces” (Preciado 139), a distinction long



Figure 2.13 Villa Savoye detail. Le Corbusier. 1929–31. Author.



Figure 2.14 Glass House detail. Philip Johnson. 1947–9. Author.

of little use to many artists and academics that is now true of almost anyone who has access to the internet, especially social media. The bed, for Hefner, was no longer a place for sleep, but for work (146). Indeed, it became “a biopolitical transformer” producing “signs (text, photographs, video footage ...) capable of being decoded to

produce both capital and affects, immaterial commodities and identity” (140). Hefner and his bed moved through space and time without actually going anywhere (148). The bed moved but didn’t travel physically. Hefner became a virtual flaneur who found himself, like the protagonist of *The Time Machine* (1895), stationary but always moving anyway. Hefner “electrified the body and transformed sexuality into pure data” (161).

The horizontal position that Hefner assumes has an historical precedent in the Roman aristocrats, who spent parties prone, or the many cultural precedents for royalty who traveled in their beds. The *lit de justice* was described in the nineteenth century as a public bed upon which royalty would recline, while the *lit de parade* was in use by the fourteenth century and allowed public bodies to be seen without their occupants leaving bed. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France, the supine position was the traditional way for prostitutes to welcome clients (Preciado 161). Hefner essentially eroticized his own public body while further connecting it with female prostitution, further alienating himself from the usual definitions of masculinity (163). One could even say that Hefner’s rootedness to the bed, and the supine position he assumed there, suggested a kind of disability that linked him to the disabled veterans of the “postwar period” (165). As can be seen later in the twentieth century with a phenomenon like John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s bed-in, the politicization of the bed further collapsed the distinction between public and private, one’s sex life and objective politics (178). This expansion of the sexual led to the pop porn of the 1970s films and the pornification of the present.

As Steven Marcus explains in *The Other Victorians*, “The essential imagination of nature in pornotopia, then, is this immense, supine, female form. Sometimes this figure is represented in other positions and from other perspectives; sometimes other orifices are chosen for central emphasis. Whichever way it is regarded, however, this gigantic female shape is the principal external natural object in the world we are describing” (252). The supine female figure, for Marcus, can be seen as the earth itself—a topography onto which we project nature. The Bond film franchise makes this connection clear in its opening credits, made famous and indelible by Maurice Binder in *Dr. No* but arguably perfected by Robert Brownjohn in *Goldfinger*, which used often monumental female nudes to both titillate the viewer and give the Bond films a romantic start to each film. The gun-barrel sequence, filmed by Binder originally, suggested the hard, phallic, violent aspects of Bond, but the female body suggested the complement—either sex, romance, or the feminine. The female body was always objectified to a ludicrous degree, becoming almost surreal, a landscape as much as anything else, against which the Bond figure, when he appears, is small in comparison (Figures 2.15 and 2.16).

In negotiating his empire from his bedroom, Hefner seems to have suffered the same kind of agoraphobia as Kubrick. They both turned their homes—large, wooded, rambling—into fortresses for work and leisure. Whereas Kubrick had a fairly typical family made up of children from two of his three wives, Hefner created an alternative family, ultimately eschewing, to some extent, the bachelorhood of his creation, the playboy, but surrounding himself with people and activity nonetheless. Like the Bond villains, both men were fascinated by technology and by the need to create a hermetically



Figure 2.15 Jill Masterson. *Goldfinger*. Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists.



Figure 2.16 Jill Masterson detail. *Goldfinger*. Guy Hamilton. 1964. United Artists.

sealed world—Hefner, in the notion of the new kind of bachelor, and Kubrick, in the dreamscape of each one of his films, which, while sharing themes and even images, recreate his cinema afresh with each genre he attempts. As Maria Pramaggiore argues, throughout Kubrick's oeuvre, he presented an alternative masculinity for his male characters. *Dr. Strangelove* spends much of the film deconstructing the idea of male

fear of potency and of competitive coupling, as though war was but a perverted version of sex, a pissing contest between boys. In *Barry Lyndon*, we have a similar, if more poignant, vision of the limitations of masculinity. While Barry is, at first, virile and strong, winning boxing matches and sword fights, his one real bit of sexual passion seems to be with Lischen, but that romance is created and capped by the circumstances of war (107). The marriage with Lady Lyndon is mainly for reasons of a name and title, the latter which he never attains. All versions of the family within the aristocracy are somehow grotesque failures: Lord Lyndon is an invalid; Bryan dies; Lord Bullingdon is in love with his mother; etc. The family unit seems doomed to failure or to always be falling apart (106). Barry is supposed to be performing masculinity, but he fails at it during the second half of the film. He either remains too rough and Irish—beating Bullingdon—or is finally unable to convince the English that he is really one of them. He is a spy in their house. When he “steals Lieutenant Fakenham’s identity papers” from a gay spy while he has an intimate discussion with his lover in a pond, Barry enters a closet from which he never emerges (107). From that point on he fakes his way through the film, always attempting to play someone of a higher station than that to which he was born, but also by attempting to use a different kind of masculinity—the rogue or libertine, rather than the soldier, a pairing that he is never able to pull off (107). The paradox of trying to finally defeats him when he chooses the wrong role in the duel with Bullingdon and plays the price of being nearly erased from the film and the world of Castle Hackton itself.

It is arguable that with *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick did what he never got to do with the aborted Napoleon project: to film a life in full. The file-catalog system that Kubrick set up for the Napoleon project had a card that corresponded to every day of Napoleon’s life. In a sense, Kubrick mapped Napoleon’s entire life quantitatively and completely if not artistically. Like so much of the preparation for *Napoleon* contributed to *Barry Lyndon*, this desire to tell an epic story, from beginning to end, might have been suggested by the Napoleon tale as well. *Barry Lyndon* has a tripartite structure: the way that Barry views his own life (which is often plainly wrong—he’s a bit dull-witted); the way that the Narrator and people around him do (seeing what he doesn’t, including, for example, Lischen and Captain Potzdorf); the viewer—who has the chance to put it all together in the end, not knowing what happens beyond the edge of the frame, which is both temporal (1789) and spatial—able to put the pieces together in a way that forms a three-dimensional portrait of both an age and a person in it. The film is ultimately able to create a dimensionality that is rare in a visual medium. The solidity of the sets and costuming, the realism of the lighting, the literariness of the narrator, and the painterly visual motifs of the *tableaux vivants* create a satisfying intermediality that only adds to the fullness of the perspective, which is to say that all parts work together. All of these layers come together in the final duel scene.

Hefner’s last great paradigmatic shift may have been from the Mansion, where he was the literal and symbolic center of the universe at the point of origin, his round bed acting as a sort of ground zero, to the worldwide Playboy clubs. If the phenomenon that Hefner created began with objects, the magazine, it expanded ultimately to the selling of an experience. The clubs sold the sense of being an insider (Preciado 181)

allowed into “a periodic organization of space where masculinity and femininity are staged through the actualization of a heterosexual yet not monogamous narrative” (187). Hefner attempted to redirect sexuality “toward new, horizontal, flexible, and risqué ways of controlling subjectivity and the body” (191). The pornotopia of the Playboy world was literalized in the clubs, which became extremely influential. In the Bond film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), Bond passes time while reading a copy of *Playboy*, including looking at the centerfold. By the next film, *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), he has a Playboy Club key card. By the 1970s the clubs weren't just synonymous with urbanity; they helped to define it and literally create it (197).

Whatever one might say about the merits or demerits of the *Playboy* empire, the magazine itself has, for the most part, refused to become as raunchy as hard-core magazines did by the 1970s or even mainstream print publications like *Hustler* and *Penthouse* ultimately became. In print, *Playboy* retained its girl-next-door aesthetic that emphasizes naturalness, cleanliness, and Americanness as attributes of the centerfold and of most of the women portrayed between the covers. While certainly not to everyone's tastes, there is a consistency that now, perhaps, seems not so much quaint as a relief when compared to the onslaught of amateur internet porn. The print version of the girl next door doesn't really translate to the medium of the screen, where it becomes a version of soft-core pornography, so white-washed as to become generic. But within the confines of a slick print publication, the bodies of the models still retain a powerful jolt and one that is dependent upon the warmer medium of print. The sturdiness of this formula is perhaps made clear by the decision to abandon full frontal nudity for a year beginning with the March 2016, issue. In an attempt to revamp its image, *Playboy's* new young editor, Hef's son Scott, attempted to put the magazine in synch with millennials with a cover that featured a distinctly text-like greeting—“hey;”)—and much younger models than normally used.²¹ The approach was abandoned when there was a mild cultural uproar about losing the nudity and other defining attributes, such as the cartoons, in an attempt not only to capture a younger audience but to compete with magazines that featured similar editorial content minus the photos. The nudity, finally, was too defining to let go of, and its loss made for a lack of identity for anyone who thought of *Playboy* as still a brand that established some sort of benchmark. Its retro aspect, in other words, was still relevant even if the magazine itself was not. The distinction between edited nudity in a slick magazine and graphic nudity on the internet was a real one—or was perceived to be, it seems, by those who objected to the change.

The importance of *Playboy* as an icon is still undercut by the criticism that it objectifies women, yet it has outlived its criticism becoming, for men and women, entertainment for both.²² With print sales plummeting, it might not be here to stay, but the historical anomaly of the pinup girl is still with us as is the centerfold and the notion of the approachable woman—the woman you want to marry, not just sleep with, which is, finally, what *Playboy* sells, much to Hef's own chagrin, perhaps. In that sense, Hefner can be credited with humanizing pornography by making its embodiment as attractive as possible. One might argue that Kubrick's cinema has always dealt with the opposite,

the possibility that humans could lose their humanness. While this phenomenon is prevalent in many of his films, no more so than in the form of the HAL computer in *2001*, Marshall McLuhan cautioned that artists are the warning signs of things to come. The use of the cut-up in art, writing, and music; the dependence upon machines; and the violence of technology all presaged a change in the body itself, which would no longer be linear.²³ The viewer edits the body, moves around it. Bodily displacement—split perceptions, watching yourself watching—would become the norm.

Notes

- 1 As Kate McQueston notes, “The scent of death follows her from her first appearance with her aging, ailing husband. Emotionally, she deteriorates through the drama, her state gauged roughly by her outward appearance, the narrator’s descriptions, and music” (202).
- 2 Note that Adam’s career coincided with that of the Italian Neo-Realists (Frayling 45).
- 3 While Bazin goes on to discuss films about paintings, which *Barry Lyndon* strictly is not, his attempt earlier in the essay to separate paintings from the screen is helpful. He notes, “the baroque complexity of the traditional frame whose job it is to establish something that cannot be geometrically established—namely the discontinuity between the painting and the wall, that is to say between the painting and reality” (*What Is Cinema?* Vol. I 165).
- 4 Porn’s connection to the eighteenth century and that century’s connection to realism can even be seen in the work of such seemingly anti-realists as Fragonard. Though the notion of sexuality that we have here seems, perhaps, very distant from the contemporary one, here lies the origins of porn’s present. The work of the Rococo School is filled with the erotic—women’s bodies are on full display and often seem to suggest some form of play that is at least partially sexual in nature. Pierre-Antoine Baudouin’s *La lecture* (1765), for example, shows a woman in apparent postmasturbatory bliss after reading from a novel. By the late nineteenth century we have moved on to something as stark as Manet’s *Olympia*, which seems to illustrate a post-Baudelerian view of women as intelligent creatures who are themselves bored or at least beyond any innocent pleasures we might associate with sex in general, prostitution in particular (Butterfield-Rosen 127–32). By the late nineteenth century we have “Edvard Munch’s 1895 *Vampyr II*, whose shockingly frank depictions of the sexually active and powerful woman may have triggered the process of refiguring desire. But in 1895 female sexuality was still forced to function as a symbol of alien forces rather than as a realm of experience in its own right” (Blom 111).
- 5 As Gombrich argues:

[N]ature could never have become “picturesque” for us unless we, too, had acquired the habit of seeing it in pictorial terms. Richard Payne Knight, a clear-sighted art lover of the eighteenth century, knew very well that the search for picturesque beauty that sent poets and painters to the Lakeland was a search for motifs that reminded the art lover of paintings, preferably those by Claude and Poussin. (315)

- 6 Kubrick asked Adam to act as production designer on *2001* but Adam demurred for fear of Kubrick's relentless perfectionism and because he was already engaged with *Thunderball* (Benson 93).
- 7 "At a sex ... training camp, straight out of the training camps in Bond movies like *Goldfinger* or *From Russia with Love*, you see Misty going through her paces and getting better by the day" (O'Toole 92).
- 8 At the center of Stromberg's lair is a dining hall decorated with Italian Renaissance frescoes and dominated by Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1484–6). Water is his metaphor. Like a modern Nemo, he is surrounded by it and rules over it. The painting slides away, as in *Thunderball*, to reveal sharks. People arrive by elevator but sometimes do not leave.
- 9 Much thanks to former student Michael Costa for pointing this connection out to me in a class he had with me in 2014.
- 10 One project, from 1971, for a swimming pool for Rod Stewart, for example, used a cut out of actress Ali MacGraw.
- 11 It is not by accident that Adam also designed boats and cars for films, most famously, the Aston Martin in *Goldfinger*. He also designed the car in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968).
- 12 For more on the interior and exterior of buildings, see my discussion in chapter one of *The Dissolution of Place: Architecture, Identity, and the Body*.
- 13 See, for example, Betsky.
- 14 According to Macintyre, Le Chiffre is based on Crowley, so there is an explicit sexual connection. Macintyre also notes that Noel Coward was a close friend of Fleming's and that most of the villains seem to be parodies of sadistic Public School housemasters (Principals) who cane their students. Perhaps the torture of Bond is a reference to that?
- 15 For more on the psychology of the Bond franchise, see chapter four of my *The Dissolution of Place: Architecture, Identity, and the Body*.
- 16 While the Academy was probably just finding a way to give Adam some credit while not bestowing the notion of artistic excellence on the Bond franchise, Adam also came into film after the notion of the "art director" was established, most likely by David O. Selznick's bestowing the title on William Cameron Menzies for *Gone with the Wind* (1937) (Sylvester, "Ken Adam: Production Designer" 12). Menzies, too, was a great designer, one who is synonymous with modernist design, and whose *Shape of Things to Come* (1936) probably had an influence on Adam. Like Adam, he was not actually hired to design but to supervise the aspects of the overall visual look of the film.
- 17 For more on the interconnections between synergistic aspects of the Disney empire, see my contributions to *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*.
- 18 For more on this phenomenon, see Cohan and Beatriz.
- 19 For more on the connections between modernist architecture and multimedia effects, see the first chapter of my *The Dissolution of Space: Architecture, Identity, and the Body*.
- 20 For more on Johnson, see chapter six of my *The Dissolution of Place*. Of course, the one space that is not on view in Johnson's house is the bathroom, which is enclosed in the fireplace-like central core of the house. This perspective, as I note in Chapter 4 in a discussion of the Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), is the one we get from the penthouse bathroom of the villain, which is likewise windowless but

contains television screens that look out onto the casino below in a sort of scatological panopticon. As Preciado notes, “Architecture is an epistemological system” (110).

- 21 One can argue that the use of informal language, or internet speak, is an attempt to return the impress of the body onto written language. Since few young people talk by phone, or in person, there has to be a written way to express emotion, especially tone, via texting and emails. The rise of the new kind of internet textual communication “has been evolving ‘to restore our bodies to our writing ...’” (qtd. in Szalai).
- 22 Interestingly, as Preciado notes, the main designer of the images was a woman:

Russ Meyer ... was in charge of *Playboy’s* erotic pictures of women and of photographs of apartments. His work often implied creating a cinematographic script that was recreated through a serial photographic montage of static images. But, against an essentialist reading of the erotic “male gaze” and *Playboy’s* own male-only discourse, *Playboy’s* most influential photographer of the 1950s and 1960s was not a man but a woman: Bunny Yeager. (62)

Some of the storytelling aspects of the magazine’s layout—the fact that the centerfold model is often given a backstory that is presented in the visual and sometimes written version of their section—also suggest *Playboy’s* connection to the photojournalism of *Life* and *Look* and hence to Kubrick’s aesthetic.

- 23 The action film genre is, as Nick Jones theorizes, one that is able to represent the postmodern world, one in which space itself consists of non-places. The action film strings together these spaces and shows at least a theoretical attempt to master them by moving through them geographically and virtually—the action star, like a shark, constantly moving forward even while tracked, or tracking, the villain he follows. As Jones writes,

Not just air travel but the Internet, satellite television and container shipping are all manifestations of the constant travelling undertaken, experienced and relied on by many of us today. Action cinema may not be able to represent globalization in the purest sense but it can grapple with its effects. It can represent this new modality of looking through movement-images that generate a rhizomatic global space of interconnection. (66)

Action film “highlights the instrumentality of space, how space orders and delineates movement” (148). While the spaces represented in action film can be filmed spaces that fit these requirements, it is also important to understand that the architecture created by the films are really their own distinct spaces and that they are created, in fact, through the illusion of camera angles, lighting, editing, etc. Space in film is neither the mere recording of actual spaces nor the creation of “locations” that are subservient to other elements of the film. The emphasis of space in film

instead ... comes loaded with all the possibilities of real space, even if it cannot be lived by us in the same manner. As such, the cinematic spaces of action cinema inform and interrogate our understandings of real space, just as much as real spaces—and their histories, restrictions, possibilities and connections—inform the cinematic spaces of action cinema. (148–9)

As I noted in *The Dissolution of Place* in reference to Stanley Kubrick’s films, “One might ... argue that in so architectonic a cinema as Kubrick’s the use of the built environment is always both a metaphor and a literal extension of the meaning

of the film—never merely a backdrop or location” (184). As our actual lived space becomes more processed and generic, action film protagonists at least offer the possibility of change. These protagonists often master the spaces they are in, if only to destroy them, and the films rarely end without some sense that the protagonist has changed the spatial landscape in some dramatic way (Jones 152). In this sense, the action film emphasizes the body and the shock of spatial change even as it emphasizes its distinctly cinematic construction as a genre (153). The changes wrought by the recent version of Bond as played in films starring Daniel Craig or in the Jason Bourne films emphasize the personal as well as the political changes to space. Virtual space erodes the distinction between public space and private, the real and the digital. While this situation can seem stifling, these films “stress the possibility for place to be created through personal, physical activity even under the conditions of globalising neocapitalism” (154). As Jones concludes:

action films employing paraspaces bring spatial production into the personal realm and explicitly show how space can be tied to psychology, and action films set in cyberspace construct this relatively new form of networked communication as a site of embodied experience. These films all prompt consideration of the tremendous and potentially destructive energies running through everyday spaces, drawing attention to their alienating qualities and technical innovations. These films work ... to reindustrialise the consciousness of the viewer through their depictions of successful spatial appropriations. (154)

Action films, then, emphasize the notion of new definitions of space as they appear while also inserting the body into these spaces with a type of overt corporeality that calls attention to the body in space and the heavy physicality of it as well. The virtual architecture of film fuses with the body that is on display to create one dynamic image, one fused symbiosis, in which space and the body interact and magnify each other. As I also argue in *The Dissolution of Place*, the notion of place as something that contains history, memory, and specificity has been increasingly replaced with the notion of space, something that is instead abstract, generic, and capable of being virtual or real. The cinemagraphic space is one example of this type of virtual space. As John David Rhodes argues, modernist architecture makes space the primary building block of architecture itself—more important than the notion of style, finally subsuming the architectural paradigm of modernism completely. Modernist architecture, in other words, is the design of space (106). The representation of modernist architecture in film, especially of the 1920s and 1930s, was to promote this new form while at the same time adapting it to set design. The foregrounding of space in films was often an exaggeration of the spatiality favored by modernist architects. If modernism changed domestic architecture, it also changed its representation in film and gave us an exaggerated, dramatic presentation of the modernist spaces made famous, in part, by film. Sometimes these sets were in stark contrast to the realism of the film’s other aesthetics (109).

Part Two

The Pornographic Imaginary

Theorizing Pornography

If Stanley Kubrick's films in general and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) in particular legitimize porn as serious subject matter for film, then it begs the question of what, exactly, constitutes pornography and how might a better understanding of it allow us to further analyze the film? While pornography has always been with us, its use and significance to culture is an area that has arguably been undertheorized. As pornography becomes more ubiquitous, it becomes more important for us to find ways to talk about it and for criticism and scholarship to catch up with the pornographic images, themes, and influences that are now bearing down on popular culture. While archeological research keeps pushing the origins of pornography back further and further in time, it is clear that it has always been a part of human society—at least since the origins of any kind of two-dimensional or three-dimensional visual representation. What is perhaps more difficult to track is whether there has always been a stable definition of porn. While some element of humor always seems to be involved, as does, obviously, arousal, what constitutes the latter varies. While we might count ancient Greek culture itself as pornographic, or a metonym for pornography in our own culture (especially gay male), the representation of the male body in Greek culture is appropriately aesthetic. The body, while proportioned to the golden mean, purposefully includes a flaccid penis whose size is appropriate to the rest of the body's parts.¹

While the Greek ideal seems suffused with sexuality—and is, arguably, an entire culture that seems to us pornographic—it obviously did not to the Greeks themselves. More significantly, perhaps, the Ancient Greeks seemed to save their pornographic representations for the illustrations on pottery. In the absence of more Greek two-dimensional visual art, the pottery provides us with much of the information that we have about how the Greeks thought about sex, gender, and sexual representation. Sexual positions, behaviors, roles, activities, preferences, and prohibitions can be inferred from the information that these works provide. It is clear, for example, that little was off limits to the Greek imagination and that much that we now think of as forming the vocabulary of acts that we associate with sex was already codified by the Greeks.² While complemented and fleshed out by the writing of Plato/Socrates and various other philosophers and historians, Greek attitudes toward sex, as Michel Foucault and others have told us, were complicated and seemingly contradictory to our own Judeo-Christian belief system and post-Enlightenment scientific skepticism.³ The more explicit vase illustrations seem to us more conventionally pornographic, with

phalluses sometimes longer and bigger than humanly possible in order to emphasize a point—make a sexual act visually unambiguous, for example. In general, though, these illustrations, while varied and explicit, show some of the restraint of other modes of Greek visual art. Some images, however, show the comically exaggerated phallus—as graffito, dildo, or in any number of other forms. In this sense, as in so many others, Greek representations presage Roman ones. If in some contexts Greek ideas of the penis could be modest, in Roman art and representation, that was rarely the case.⁴ The exaggerated graphicness of the Satyr plays, used as a joke by Greeks, became the standard against which all phalluses, manmade or natural, were defined in Roman culture. In that sense, our own porn seems related to Roman tastes for the exaggerated, the larger-than-life, and the un-aesthetic. What was once a joke is now taken seriously.⁵

If taste in porn, at least in the West, has not changed much in 2,000 years, the ever-shifting definition of what pornography is is difficult to explain. If the Roman taste for an unaesthetic porn is taken as central, then pornography can be circumscribed as the erotic removed from an artistic setting or goal—eroticism for the purpose of arousal only. In that sense, Greek sculpture of the fifth century BC would not be included under the definition of pornography. The reality is much more complex, as such a negative definition of pornography not only assumes a clear line between the artistic and that which is not but assumes a moral definition, a utilitarianism to art, that some would refuse tout court. It also assumes a connection between art and eroticism that does not exist. *Eroticism* is the name we give to bad art of a sexual nature—a hollow effect (from an artistic sense) that pretends to be art via the specious notion of good taste.⁶ More effectively, or more importantly in a modern sense, is to understand the urge of pornography and how it exerts itself upon the imagination, the divide between art and pornography never remaining stable or even separate. What is considered pornographic may be nothing more today than the description of a subcultural practice. That is, pornography is defined not by what it is not but by what it records—the practices, actions, identities, and desires of a set of people who are outside of the mainstream. Indeed, they may well be considered a part of a vanguard of taste. That is, pornography is the recording of the tastes and the activities of individuals who consciously push the envelope of what is sexually normative. If this definition is accurate, then an inextricable part of the pornographic experience is the technology through which this subculture is recorded and shared. One might say that the technology of the medium has always been important to porn—from vase glazing to leather phalluses—but obviously in the contemporary period that the medium is the message is truer than ever.

While porn has always existed in a variety of media, it is difficult to separate its main influence now as anything other than filmic. From short loops on cheap film, to the thirty-five-millimeter full-length movies of the late-1960s and early-1970s, back to the short loops of film of the video tape era, to today's proliferation of professional and amateur films and presentations via the internet, porn derives much of its cache from being tied to the motion picture. The verisimilitude of porn assumes an aesthetic that is as stylized as it is naturalistic—codes that identify levels of porn from soft-core to hard-core and niche and beyond. Porn exists now as a social obsession. While the

filmic aspect has remained stable, technology's ease of access to porn via the internet is the biggest revolution in porn that we have ever seen. Access to screens via smart phones, tablet devices, watches, and computers has put porn within constant reach of those who have basic internet access. Porn is so easily accessible now that it is more easily consumed than avoided, people having to learn how to block it at work or from their children. Pornographic content is essentially free. Denizens of the internet, which includes most people, seek it out in staggering numbers, making porn by far the most watched content on the internet. To a large extent, many of the resources of the internet are used to deliver porn to eager consumers of it. While networked accessibility has certainly changed how we consume porn, it is possible that it has not affected the content of porn quite as much as we might think it would. Certainly, the internet has intensified the competitive situation within the field of porn in which new stars, new sexual acts, new studios vie for novelty and popularity, but many of the formulae of porn have remained the same. As porn has become mainstream, the content itself has remained perhaps stubbornly unchanged. While porn certainly reflects new sexual interests in the country at large, it also educates people on those interests or fads. The most striking, perhaps, is the spread of BDSM. Spurred in part by the popularity of the illiterate novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*, its sequels, prequel, and films, the activities of this subculture have infiltrated the mainstream. Porn that originates or is inflected by Kink.com, located in San Francisco, marks a dramatic new interest on the part of the sexual quotidian in what was previously seen as a specialized sexual subculture—indeed, something that might not even be sexual, per se, but an extra-sexual fetish. Overall, however, the conventions of porn never seem to change. People who would argue that straight porn is demeaning to women or that gay porn is ageist or lookist would still have plenty of reasons to object in the same ways they did in the past. Likewise, porn has done little to get beyond the conventions of the genre, some of which are as much a barrier to a viewer's enjoyment as a pleasure.

For example, the conventions of large, artificially enhanced breasts on female porn stars or male porn stars chosen for their large penises rule out not only anyone who likes small breasts and small penises but average ones as well. The extreme artificiality of the female breasts creates more than its share of dissonance for some viewers. And directors favor larger penises, in part, because they are easier to film. That is, longer length, in particular, means that scenes in which penises enter vaginas show more of the penis as it is inserted and as it is thrust into and pulled out of the vagina. There is, in a sense, more for the camera to "see." The reality, however, is that the penis is made into a specifically visual fetish with the assumption that the bigger it is, the better it must be—and feel and taste and seem—to the partner who is encountering it. The tyranny of the larger penis perhaps separates porn from real life more than any other conventional feature. As science seems, perhaps for the first time, to get some sort of handle on penis size, which is much smaller than the six inches reported for decades, it is clear that most penises are nowhere near the size of those found in porn, nor would most people want them to be (any more than most women or men would enjoy balloon-like breasts as opposed to the real things). The penis in porn, therefore, becomes a sort of anti-fetish—an object that some find arousing to look at, but also

easy to ignore. For the vast majority of men to enjoy porn, they have to disassociate themselves from the ego bruising, that is seeing a large penis on the screen. However much one might tell oneself that a porn penis is extremely statistically rare, the fact that it is so ubiquitous in porn creates the sense that it is everywhere, that it is the secret norm. Men no longer use their own bodies as the measure of the world (or those of their friends, male relatives, etc.). While women suffer much more from body issues, most men suffer from the dysmorphia of penis shame—from thinking that large is normal, when it is not. A major part of the problem of the way we talk about the penis is that it is quantified. While there may be legitimate reasons to quantify female breast size in terms of bras or other clothes, for example, there is no reason to do the same for penises. The quantification of the penis, as with any female or male body part, is mostly the imposition of a standard onto something that is always nonstandard. That is, penises rarely fit a pattern; they are as irregular, maybe more so, as any part of the body. A penis can be very long but very thin, very short but very fat. Irregularity of shape, skin, and many other subtler details make each penis as unique as a palm print. To judge penises from within a normative grid is the primary problem with how we talk about penises. Likewise, separating them from the bodies that frame them removes them from their context and further reduces them to a highly objectified identity that they are not meant to have. Many penises fit the body of which they are a part so well that they look much the better for it, and vice versa. Pornography's singling out the penis creates more problems than it solves—even in terms of visual pleasure or erotica. That fact does not prevent our culture, however, from insisting on doing just that. Human penises and breasts are ridiculously hobbled with the baggage of expectation. And even people who perhaps know, via feminism or women's rights, not to conflate the penis with the phallus still give inordinate attention to the penis in a different way as we become more willing to talk about sex in public. Indeed, the willingness of female journalists and public figures to discuss the penis is justly celebrated as an overdue celebration of straight female sexuality. Women should enter the public discourse about their own desires. They are right to complain about the lack of male full-frontal nudity, for example, even on subscription television, or the frequent invisibility of the erect penis, especially. The one down side to this discourse, however, has been the emphasis on the joke "does size matter"? The presumed answer is that one is supposed to officially say, "No," as in, "It's not what a man has but how he uses it," while the real answer is "Yes, of course, otherwise, why would you even be asking this question?" While the open discussion of the penis is welcome, the only real topic that seems to be open to discussion is not only size but also the hypocritical idea that there is ever any other topic to discuss. The winking "truth" about the penis, therefore, fits into discourses about the penis in porn and helps to further the idea that not only does size matter but that larger than average size of penises equals female satisfaction (at least visually) and that whatever feminists might say about the problematics of straight porn, that society as a whole celebrates and supports at least one cliché of porn: that men must have large penises if they are to be considered worthy of sexual attraction.

Porn as film, therefore, works almost despite itself. The conventions that allow for the externalization and visualization of sex often mean that porn must overcome aspects of sexual acts that remove it from realism, that disrupt the suspension of disbelief. Having to remove the penis from the vagina just before coming, the “money shot,” in order to externalize the male orgasm is only the most famous of a number of ways, including large penises, that porn constructs its own alternate aesthetics. While the female orgasm is displaced onto the sound track, the male orgasm is rendered solitary and masturbatory—in some ways a literalization of the experience of the male viewer. Porn is rarely accompanied by any sense of sex as it is actually experienced between two people. Porn must, therefore, find a way to overcome its own Brechtian devices, its own ways of distancing its viewers. While narrative is one way to naturalize the sex acts, it is used sparingly. There is no one magic formula for what makes porn successful. For some, it is entirely subjective. For something to be popular, or successfully pornographic, there is usually something in the performance that appears genuinely spontaneous and that cuts across the anti-realism of the genre. An actor might seem genuinely vulnerable or a scenario actually believable.⁷ While many viewers of porn probably want, or depend for their pleasure upon, a tried-and-true formula, for others it is only in the seams that eroticism or attraction really resides. There is somehow set up a permeability between the representations on screen and real life—either life as you live it or life as you want to live it. Porn slips between the inflexible doctrines of its aesthetic, its Sadean quantification, and the messiness of real-life desire. In this sense, the best porn is unexpected and the best porn experience is one that makes you feel, during its duration, that nothing else exists in real life. Like the best art, it is greedy and self-contained.

Actual Porn

An example of the complexity of how porn works can be seen in something like the online pornographic video “Monster dick cums 3 times” originally posted on the porn site X-Tube by “Dr. Cum Control.”⁸ While a short that takes advantage of the interest in the notion of *edging*—of bringing a man or woman close to orgasm (the plateau stage) but not into climax—the video features the putative controlling dominant teasing the extremely large erect penis of a twenty-year-old man, Sam Bridle, alternatively with his hands and a Hitachi Magic Wand with a Hummingbird attachment. With lots of lube and patience, the stroker brings the strokee close to climax but does not give him “permission” to have an orgasm. For a male viewer, at any rate, what makes the clip effective is that the penis, while outsized, becomes a believable metonymic stand-in for one’s own penis. This effect, which might be the desired one of most porn, certainly porn that involves a man masturbating himself, is the combination of what is controlled and controllable and what is not in porn. Or between the knowing professional actors who make porn, with their often winking self-knowing fakiness, and the genuinely cringe-inducing amateur porn in which one might recoil from the

abject state of the performers. Sam might simply be a (very) well-hung young man, but he seems to be merely playing along with the bondage scenario. What he seems to be enjoying is indeed the edging, though his exaggerated reaction to it may or may not be good acting. It is just real enough to be believable. His pleas for the masturbator to stop are really warnings that he is about to come. At the twenty-minute mark, he does, after being vibrated a second or two too long, and it is clear that he tries to stop his own orgasm—even to hide it. He spurts long and hard, however, and it is Dr. Control who has the sense to part his legs and turn his magnificent reaction toward the camera (Figure 3.1).

Sam comes two more times, and despite the fact that he takes poppers on screen and has his scrotum bound, the scene still appears real, even naturally spontaneous. The actor's miscue, while apparently unintentional, adds to the realness—that underneath the conventional bondage scenario that actual sexual play is occurring, Sam is at some level getting off. The masturbator, one assumes the director and the author of the scene, is hardly believable as a truly scary dominate, but appears instead to be someone who is enthralled to Sam's penis—a surrogate, if you will, of some in the audience. The clip



Figure 3.1 An edging session. “Monster Dick Cums 3 Times.” Cumcontrol 101.

ends with Sam breaking character, laughing, and exchanging an OMG moment with his partner in crime, amazed at his experience—that he could come three times.⁹

It is certainly true that for a male viewer, no matter the sexuality, that the clip works in such a way that it allows the viewer to feel that they are experiencing Sam's excitement—especially the tension and the release of the orgasms. His penis, the main focus of the film, becomes the centerpiece literally and figuratively. It is something that no one can completely control, but that takes on mythic proportions. Two other similar clips made by the same two people and released later, when the actor was slightly older, lack the same kind of perfect synchronicity of shot, angle, lighting, sequence of actions, and, finally, plausibility. Whatever magic is caught the first time does not work in the sequels. The penis is never as perfectly engorged, the tone is not quite the same, and the nearly rote repetition of the edging session is not a good idea. Like a perfect theatrical performance captured on film, the first clip is a perfect film of its subgenre, repeatable and perfectible still as a theme, but not exactly reproducible. It is effective because it takes porn back to the basics and makes the viewer care about another person's pleasure, to identify with it, as it is mostly contained in the erect penis, and seeing that penis not as a threat or as something wholly other but as an extension of yourself and as something genuinely beautiful to behold at the very moment when, for this individual actor, it is at its most perfect form. The penis, even more than the young man to whom it is attached, is art, and the ability of the clip to create sexual tension fuses the eroticism with an aesthetic effect that adds a frisson lacking in all but the most effective visual porn.

Of course, you have to like penises—have one or have enjoyed them—fully to appreciate the film, perhaps, as something more than a well-made addition to a subgenre of porn. Its corporeal effectiveness, if you will, is probably not universal. Though perhaps, like any cultural product, that depends upon the audience's suspension of disbelief and willingness to identify with the representation on the screen. Porn, like any other cultural product, can only be considered effective in terms of numbers of people who like it or, perhaps, the judgment of an aficionado. Porn can obviously exist as fantasy, a documentation of an act that you would not like to do, or want to think about doing but not do. It can be about a desire that we did not know we had—triggering something like a lost memory of a desire, an action, or a sexual subterranean spark somewhere in our childhood. It can also be a fantasy of something we cannot have or know. This aspect of the fantasy is perhaps especially true for men, who can never know, unless they already have one, the reality of a porn-star penis. In that sense, all porn, straight or gay, is a fantasy for most men. More importantly, perhaps, for porn to have staying power for an individual, to become a classic, it probably contains an act or acts that represent, or become, something that you would like to try to reproduce on your own. That is, it is something you would like to try at home—assuming the possibility of a willing and available partner (if the sexual act is not a solo act) and the act involves something that you can accomplish physically. While not unique to this type of film, porn's strong combination of voyeurism and identification opens it to a strong sense of desire as a circuit, as something to be completed by the viewer in a separate space. It insinuates itself into the psyche and, like an earwig, invades

the subconscious until it reproduces itself in a replication of the pornographic act. It fulfills itself, in other words, by taking over the body of the viewer and leading it to at least attempt the act. Some porn is perhaps only complete when it leads to this point. Some porn is more doable than others. But while the act may be a novelty or a tried-and-true one, the point is that it is different for different people and, ultimately, highly subjective. In this sense, also, porn is educational. While many porn conventions do not necessarily transfer well into real life, the facial, for example, some porn demonstrates how to perform effectively positions and other sexual acts that instruct the real-life user in how to do some things differently or better.¹⁰

Of course, one never knows what is or is not real in porn. Unlike other film, but perhaps similar to documentary filmmaking, porn functions in the space between the real and the imaginary. Like certain genres, horror, for example, porn must have a corporeal effect on the viewer. One must be scared, or as in a comedy, amused. The physical must be mobilized. And for porn, the sexual response is paramount, though perhaps it is more difficult to achieve than one might think. It is certainly tricky to make it work within the dictates of a nonpornographic film. As Steven Shaviro notes:

Film extinguishes the *power* of sight, but this extinction is not a definitive conclusion. Horror fans know that the dead always walk again, even as consumers of pornography know that no orgasm is ever the last. Film is a mode of ... *antivision*. The disempowering of the gaze opens a space of horror and obscenity And it occurs in a time of repetition, without a living present, a time that linear narrative cannot fill. (55)

Ultimately, pornography fragments the body into constituent parts, some of which are gendered and some of which are not, and recodes the body as no longer singular but multiple. In some ways, it estranges us from the body and achieves success only by forcing the viewer to connect the film with reality—to force a connection and forge a loop of meaning between the screen and the body via the mind. This loose, fragile singularity is what we call porn; that is what we are talking about when we are talking about porn.

In a discussion of R. M. Fassbinder's film of Jean Genet's *Querelle* (1982), Shaviro notes, "When everything exists merely to be looked at, everything is equally co-optable, and the line separating Good from Evil, or bourgeois norms from transgressive revolt, entirely disappears" (173). One might argue that the pornographic does just that and that the pornographic space, at one time a limited and circumscribed one, is now free to morph and grow almost unchecked on the internet, a literalization of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, of the body without organs. The pornographic imaginary, such as Shaviro sees in Fassbinder's film, is available everywhere on the internet, and increasingly, is spreading into mainstream culture at large. What Shaviro argues about Fassbinder's film, which features an array of hunky men looking at each other, and ultimately deriving enjoyment in sex that is rendered as particularly abject, violent, and even unpleasant, is that the structural logic of the film requires that

the viewer be “complicit in this process; my pleasure is all too explicitly predicated upon a willing engagement in processes of abasement and subjugation. My own self-aggrandizement (or pornographic gratification) fatally leads me to the point at which my vulnerability is exposed” (181). While there are several characters in the film about which this may be said, the protagonist Querelle (Brad Davis) is the obvious point of origin. The particular type of pornographic effect that Fassbinder is playing with is, perhaps to some extent, a part of the logic of pornography generally. That is, to what extent is the viewer implicated in porn? Is the viewer protected by being the voyeur, or made vulnerable? Is porn an act of debasement by the viewer? One in which the viewer is giving up power and control? Is viewing porn the ultimate act of consumerism? Is it active or passive? If the viewer is the top, is not the bottom really, as in most things, the one in control?

If so, then the logic by which the viewer, maybe especially the male viewer, is put in a vulnerable position is through “the social forces that define masculinity” and “the intractability and impersonality of desire” (Shaviro 183). Porn is never merely bodies in pleasure but the culture into which desire is itself enmeshed. Culture always has its reasons for which one’s actions are symptoms of a larger goal that culture has in mind for you. It is possible that porn is an attempt not merely to access sexual content but to liberate us from our own social conditioning, however much porn itself seems to define that force. Culturally, we are arguably at a point within Western society where porn is being liberated at the same moment that it seems to be increasingly straightjacketed. How it will bend to fit our desires is at least as interesting as seeing how seemingly conventional desire is being bent by porn. It is important to keep in mind, as Shaviro writes, that

[t]he masochistic enjoyment of beauty, born in one’s suffering, is not (as is so often said) an internalization of oppression. On the contrary, it reflects an exacerbated awareness that there is nothing to internalize, that the outside is always already inside, and that the utopian fiction of a space free from power and domination is itself an insidious manifestation of normalizing power. (197)

Various filmmakers have always created a version of the power plays that characterize porn, compressed spaces in which the forces that act on the body are examined. Shaviro counts not only Fassbinder but also such seemingly unpornographic directors as Robert Bresson (245, 249). Bresson is actually extremely body-centered, fragmenting the body with multiple shots that displace it in space and time much like a Cubist painting. His use of automaton-like nonactors emphasizes a robotic lack of emotion that calls attention to the body and its disassociation from what Bresson might call the soul. In a completely different way, Nagisa Oshima focuses on the body in his work to the exclusion of little else. While we can see similar power plays as in Fassbinder in something like *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1983), the ultimate Oshima film may well be *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), in which the “violently intense erotic play” of the film’s couple, Sada (Eiko Matsuda) and Kichi (Tatsuya Fuji), “is rooted in materiality, not fantasy.” The physical intensity of their relationship, which results in Sada’s cutting

off Kichi's penis as a way to keep them together forever, especially sexually, is finally "a radical, utopian rejection of the militaristic Japanese society of the 1930s" (Shaviro 262). It is only at the end of the film that we know it is based on a true story that took place in 1936, an especially important year in Japan of heightened militarism. One might say, that if Yukio Mishima's fiction eroticizes the same-sex desire of militarism, Oshima critiques that desire from a different perspective, turning the brothel into a zone of "subversive privilege ... in which power is intensified, hyperbolized" (262). Pushed to what we might call an overly literal extreme, the film makes clear that it is "because the film is so excessively penis centered that it is *not* 'phallogentric'" (262). I would argue that Stanley Kubrick and many other film and television directors go on to make similar use of the body in space to critique the notions that we have of the body and of how it is constructed socially and culturally. Film is "a technology for oxymoronically intensifying corporeal sensation, for affecting and transforming the body, for at once destabilizing and multiplying the effects of subjectivity" (Shaviro 267). It is "a zone of affective intensity, an anchoring point for the articulation of passions and desires, a site of continual political struggle" (267). It can be a place of "masochism and abjection," which can be "a possible form of resistance" (267). As Frances Ferguson has argued, why did the word *pornography* drop out of usage after late antiquity, only to be revived in the eighteenth century by such figures as the Marquis de Sade? "After all, we know of no time when erotic literature, erotic painting and drawing, and now erotic film have not existed. But these things are not necessarily pornography ...; it's only pornography if you have that power disequilibrium as part of the system that's being set up by the use of representation" ("Pornography as a Utilitarian Social Structure" 53).¹¹ Porn in film is often the acting out of power and gender and is nearly always implicitly or explicitly implied in the notion of dominance or submission, vertical or horizontal axes, that we see on display. Porn, in other words, is a discourse.

The Porn Debates

Sometimes in the name of feminism, but often in the name of anti-sex Christianity, the anti-porn discussion has entered the public consciousness as a new kind of addiction narrative. In some ways we are now in an anti-porn phase two. After Andrea Dworkin lost the battle to label porn, if not heterosexual coitus itself, "rape" or the moral equivalent thereof, the latest indictment of porn is that young men who access it via the internet no longer have the ability to have long-lasting relationships with women, that they allow the medium to form their images of what having sex is, or should be, and are disappointed with the reality of actual sex. Central to the logic of this supposedly causal chain is the idea of addiction, that internet porn, once sampled, can't be put down and that young men are especially vulnerable to its effects. What is striking in this formulation is the assumption that masculinity, especially being biologically male, carries with it a penchant not only for violence but for susceptibility as well. The narrative always includes the notion that men

begin at a young age; that they crave more; that they get cut off from reality; that they become misogynistic; that they begin to neglect responsibilities; that they are desensitized; and that they lose control of themselves, their relationships, etc. (Smith and Attwood 52–3).

A more useful approach, however, might be that of porn's most astute reader of class, Constance Penley, when she summarizes Laura Kipnis' analysis of *Hustler*, in which Penley notes that the type of masculine sexuality promulgated in the pages of the magazine defines itself against the "male fantasy that represents power, money, and prestige as essential to sexual success and mocks those who believe the upscale promises of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. Kipnis was thus one of the first scholars to debunk anti-porn activists' claims about men's monolithic consumption of porn, as one that revels in dominating and degrading women" (189). Porn studies, in other words, can only expose the workings of society if we are willing to take it seriously as an art form and to see it for what it is trying to say rather than having a preconceived notion of what it must not be able to do. Like any other cultural production, we have to take porn seriously in order to understand it. As more and more women are themselves becoming consumers of porn and reject the notion that they see themselves as victims within its narratives, even those that are about the subjugation of women, we are seeing a generational sea change in the attitude toward porn, one that increasingly sees it as a medium or genre equal to any other. Indeed, the resistance to censorship and independence that even something like *Hustler* may have represented becomes a part of the freedom of expression that many porn consumers insist porn is about. As writer and porn actor Lorelei Lee explains:

The amorphous monolith we call "pornography" is just a microcosm reflective of, and influenced by, the attitudes toward sexuality held by society as a whole. The queer and feminist movements' most powerful rhetoric has always been that of freedom of choice and self-definition. Sexual desire and sexual identity are absolutely essential to the freely defined self. Images that explicitly express the vast multiplicity of those desires communicate something larger and more basic to humanity than can be put into words. If those images should be criticized, they should be criticized individually, with consideration for both the context of their appearance and the context of their creation. Pornography is not one thing. (213)

In terms of pornography and the sex wars debates, it may help to see pornography as sex positive, mainly by refocusing the argument away from gender and toward sexuality. Simon Watney's argument for the importance of porn to gay men in a post-AIDS world connects to the postmodern shift away from the porn producer as the author of porn and toward the audience as the one that gives much of porn its meaning.

In his pioneering *Policing Desire*, Watney provides one of the best analyses of the myths surrounding porn—especially gay porn—by focusing on the assumptions of the two groups that would like to limit the representation of gay desire: the fanatical

evangelical right and the anti-porn wing of the feminist movement. The very fact that porn is divided into subgenres gives the lie to the idea that it is monolithic or easily deconstructed or dismissed as inherently evil. As Watney argues:

This is a level of sexual organisation which is entirely overlooked in a theory of sexuality which is mechanically rooted in distinctions between biological sex difference, and sexual object-choice. It is a level which organises individuals over and across all other divisions of class, gender, race, age and also sexual orientation. It is for this reason that a scenario of sexual fantasy—let's say a master/slave image—will be as ludicrous or pathetic to one pair of eyes as it is instinct with charged eroticism for another. Sexuality does not fix us into two immutable camps, consisting of male fantasies and women as the objects of men's fantasies. Rather, we all move constantly between accepted and rejected identifications with one another, all the time, guided by desire. It is not pornography which is everywhere, it is fantasy. (74)

What is consistently missed about pornography is that it is not composed, nor ever has been, of male consumers and female objects:

What anti-pornography campaigners identify as "pornography" in a hierarchy of extremes is, in fact, merely the most direct and fixed expression of psychic processes which are omnipresent, either in the sexually projective way in which we all scan the world, or sublimated into the entire fabric of our everyday lives, lending a pleasure to doing the ironing for one person, motivating the career as a photographer for another. (74)

Pornography is about desire, and it is impossible to define or predict the patterns that desire will take.

Writing in the specific milieu of the first wave of death from AIDS, Watney makes the point that though it might be impossible to be pro-porn given all that is stacked against it, one can be actively "pro-(safe) sex" in the hope that one can confirm the eroticism of one's own body (76). One can, that is, see porn as a tool for "healing" what has come about via AIDS: fear of one's body, of eroticism itself. The reaction to porn at the height of the AIDS crisis was to link it to the notion of "excess" (Walkowitz 121). Gay men were having excessive sex, which led to disease; porn is an excess of desire. This same logic relates to "the repetition of moral panics, their fundamentally *serial* nature, the infinite variety of tone and posture which they can assume" (Watney 43). In his work, Watney argues that "[w]e need precisely to be able to *relate* phenomena which present themselves, in terms of the theory of moral panics, as discrete and unconnected" (43).

Arguing for a more generous reading of porn, at least gay male porn, can also be seen in Amalia Ziv's theory of the phallic turn in lesbian sex. By her formulation, gay male pornography offers an alternative for lesbians precisely because the signifiers associated with the feminine and "branded by the lesbian feminist orthodoxy as

symptoms of patriarchal false consciousness, are transcoded in gay male culture ... and if for gay men these desires may still bear some traces of femininity, for lesbians their routing through gay masculinity redeems them from their feminine coding and their relation to gender oppression" (93). Indeed, "identification with gay male sexuality also gives scope to aggressive, penetrative, or sadistic desires in women, desires that lesbian feminism denounced" (93). For Ziv, the penetration with anything other than the penis shifts the motivation for the penetration from the penetrator to the one being penetrated, thus short-circuiting any possibility of "objectification and abuse" (123).¹² Other kinds of penetration, then, can take on even extreme forms of aggression without being guilty of penis-centered problems. She discusses, for example, Patrick Califia's *Sadean Macho Sluts* (1988) and its scene of anal fisting as one of "transcendence rather than dehumanization" because it is anal, hence non-gender-specific; centered on the recipient's pleasure; and goes beyond the physical to ultimately become a mental form of pleasure, fusing or obliterating the difference between active and passive forms of pleasure since it is ultimately a well-coordinated act of partnership (133). It is impossible, in other words, to see porn as something defined only by the discourses that would give it a negative valence or to presuppose what it might be, or mean, to populations other than the one that you inhabit.

The Psychology of Porn

How would we define gender for the purposes of pornography, or the pornographic effect in contemporary pop or mass culture, which places so much emphasis on the body as a sine qua non of identity? While recent feminist theory has imported the methodology of other theoretical approaches, such as object-oriented analysis or Anthropocene theory, which arguably take the notion of the politics of gender away from the (human) body, some might say that this trend has been going on since Judith Butler's groundbreaking *Gender Trouble*. Published in 1990, it is most famous for outlining the possibility of seeing gender as a performance, though one tied to the body and one that has to be constantly repeated as a simulacrum, a copy without an original that must maintain its own illusion by being constantly enacted, refined, and, most of all, repeated. Gender, one might say, turns people into automatons, machines of hyperrealism, of incessant repetition that hides the fact that there is really no there there except for the uncanniness of gender expression. While widely misunderstood at first, Butler's book and her subsequent work on gender and sexuality studies have been especially influential for the space it opened up for sexuality studies and the constructedness of all gender and sexuality. While Butler meant to make clear that she was not suggesting that gender can be performed equally well by everyone and that gender or other identities can be tried on or discarded like clothing, she did redirect feminist theory toward the idea of performance—of how presentation, gesture, voice, and the choreography of the body create a sense of unity, if only for a moment, that telegraphs a gender. What we might later call a queer approach to

gender and sexuality, or a post-structuralist or postmodern one, was one of many forces that edged the debate around women from a biological to a cultural one, ultimately displacing the notion of sex with that of gender. If the body itself is a performance, then isn't the cultural construction of the content, of gender expression, more important than the biological or chromosomal one? What had for a long time appeared to be a dichotomy—sex or science versus gender or culture—suddenly seemed to get subsumed by the latter. Or, at the least, the presumed hierarchy of sex over gender was suddenly flipped, and the privileged term in the Derridean binary now seemed to be gender, not sex.

All of these possibilities make up the nexus of forces that converge on the body and turn it into an intersection of competing identities, desires, realities, and fantasies that make it such a complex whole. The body is never completely rooted in the corporeal materiality of uniqueness or difference, but is also a mental construct. This is the point at which representation comes into the definition, and pornography, arguably, is the name we give to representations of the body that we try to make that include fantasy, that include the ways that the mind constructs the body as much as, if not more, than the flesh itself. In this sense, we are all fluid gender and sexuality in that the same awkwardness that a trans couple might have in negotiating bodies that are made up of competing ideas and parts that have to be made to work together in new ways; we are all, to some extent, a part of the same negotiation of shame, practicality, desire, and its many *doppelgängers*. While few of us fit the definition of the preferred bodily type, there is still a great deal of latitude in what might be possible among definitions of the body, including not only various nodes on the spectrum of ideal forms.

Queer theory before the recent visibility of the trans movement has certainly not been without its moments of discussion about the need for dealing with the vicissitudes of the gender binary. Since the early days of the AIDS crisis, the political efficacy, at least, of the response by the queer community has foregrounded the importance of cooperation between all members of the community. Gay men and lesbian women were especially keen to work together, though it was usually assumed that this meant retaining gender identities that were still based upon same-sex desire. As early as 1973, the Deleuzian cultural theorist, filmmaker, and author Guy Hocquenghem pondered the need for gay men to rethink sexuality in terms of gender. Writing two years after the founding of FHAR (front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire), Hocquenghem bemoaned the inability of this group, of which he was one of the leaders, to bring together lesbians and gay men in political solidarity. Meant to be a model for queer activism that eschewed the low-key approach of earlier gay and lesbian homophile groups (the Mattachine Society or the Daughters of Bilitis, for example), the group was all but ended by the mid-1970s. In addition to the desire for a more confrontational, leftist approach to gay politics, Hocquenghem hoped the group would bring lesbians and gay men together over the issue of feminism, not just queer politics. He acknowledges that the reason the group was failing was because it "sank beneath the weight of the phallus" (66). In an echo of the work of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in a feminist context, Hocquenghem explains the plight of women:

Man is ancient. Woman is future. The masculine homosexual is caught between both. When he becomes feminine, it is only according to a masculine model. His only existence is the phallus. For his virile mythology, the lesbians who construct their relationships without the phallus seem like an empty mirror reflecting an empty mirror. [...] And yet they possess the lack he lacks. They know the operative secret of this illusion of lack; they bring us face to face with the evidence that such lack is not truly lack but that it is energy without power.... Without them we would not ever learn anything we do not already know. (65)

The seeming complement to man is constructed as lack—by Freud, by Western ontology generally—but this very fluidity and unknowability is a strength and represents not absence but a fuller, more complex presence.¹³ That Hocquenghem maintains the function of the dichotomy of male and female is perhaps not the issue so much as his desire to, in a move somewhat like Baudelaire's belief that lesbians were the race of the future, elevate women to the dominate term in the gender binary: "I now dream of lesbians who do not copy men, who live without the phallus and without the terror of the phallus. Even if one single lesbian exists, I wish to lie at her side ... like a future woman. For an instant, for the instant of the sexual revolution, I will think of myself as a lesbian" (66). Hocquenghem seems to channel the work of Monique Wittig here, especially her notion that "woman" designates a class that can never be free as long as there exists any division between the sexes. Though Wittig goes further, into defining a future of non-men and non-women, her privileged term is also that of lesbian, which designates the only extant women who are not enslaved by gender.

At the beginning of the end of his movement, Hocquenghem tries to think seriously about the possibility of loving women as a gay man. As he writes, "I would like to go, stupidly, towards the bodies that my anxiety has kept me from" (67). Arguing that it should be gay men who approach lesbians, because men "are the ones guiltier of tyranny, but in feeling and in reality" (67), he acknowledges that lesbians may resist. He persists, however, in imagining a fantasy, perhaps, in which, he asks: "Like two virgins, can they play together and enact the childhood of the bodies?" (67). While acknowledging that this scenario might be "utopian," he argues that "the embryonic couple formed ... could feel ... the *welcoming* of a male body that is forgetting its gender" (68). Perhaps, he concludes, imagining this "couple has gone too far, that its experience can't escape being theoretical ... and terribly experimental" (68). If so, "I don't give a fuck" (68-9). In imagining the ultimate connection between lesbians and gay men as actual sexual congress, Hocquenghem is also theorizing that this means, at least for gay men, the surrender of gender. Masculine or male gender here means patriarchy, phallogocentrism, and just simply a male attitude toward the universe. He sees gay men as participating in a kind of toxic masculinity that they need to unburden themselves of—perhaps by becoming some version of what Wittig would later call "lesbian peoples." In any case, the surrender of gender seems to be a relief for Hocquenghem, who earlier in his essay proclaims, "Long live snails! ... What luck they have to be both male and female without ever copying the other gender" (66). The binary of gender, locked into a kind of complementarity that cannot be easily outdone,

seems to frustrate him as both the reason for the failure of FHAR and the necessary origin for its politics as well. In the end, perhaps, he sees the desire to free the politics of sexuality felled by the intransigence of gender.

For young people brought up on internet porn, with the availability of so many sex acts and possible couplings, it is perhaps not surprising that they see gender and sexuality as a Deleuzian rhizome—a series of nodes of infinite possibility. Perhaps for some, this is a reality in their sex life—the ultimate Tender or Grindr app fantasy. For others, it may not be the practice but perhaps the theory of sex for them—that is, they might not be, or can't be, so permissive with their bodies, but perhaps their minds are opened up to the possibility of more sexual orientations or a nonbinary approach to gender and sexuality for others (or for themselves, if it were to happen with certain stipulations). In the United States, certainly, the swiftness with which anti-homophobic attitudes are changing is a cultural shift that has been supercharged by changes in the rule of law. Unlike misogyny and racism, homophobia is less likely to be a partisan issue. While hardly gone, homophobia (and transphobia, in particular) is always poised to make a comeback whenever right-wing legislators see an opportunity, but for now, it is not the burning social question that the other two cultural issues are. However changed the thinking about sex may be, in part because of the rise of porn and dating apps that are based on technology, it is also important to keep in mind that porn is still a hierarchy. Despite the fact that internet porn allows for niche porn to be visible to almost everyone with an internet connection, the most searched-for images are those of young females and fairly expected mainstays of pornography. Perhaps this fact is expected given the audience for porn is mostly men, but though the audience for porn is expanding, with more women searching for porn than ever before, it also seems a fact that most porn that is consumed by men is fairly conventional. Perhaps this tendency reflects the general conservatism of what people watch as entertainment generally; or perhaps it reflects something about people's sexual tastes—what their fantasies are. For all of the theorizing of fantasy as a zone of the exotic—or at least of something other than the everyday that one experiences—porn may be a genre, like many others, in which people want the conventional, or the familiar.¹⁴ Part of the reason that porn is such a predictable genre is because most people's sexual tastes are as well.¹⁵ As much as we would like to think that people have more interesting approaches to sex now because they have more access to studying it via porn sites or because we assume that people become more liberated in a liberal society (something that is now under threat globally, but that was, for decades, assumed) as a kind of progress of sorts, perhaps people don't. Just as homosexuality is much less than the Kinsey 10 percent, maybe constituting no more than 2 percent of the population that is exclusively homosexual, so most people might be content, even enthusiastic, about porn that is vanilla in content.¹⁶ Indeed, the pornification of the mainstream does not necessarily mean that the porn is any better—any edgier or interesting—than any other mainstream cultural product. People may want sex and violence in their entertainment, but that does not mean that they want anything that really makes them think about either activity. Indeed, most sex is presented as knowledge—as some sort of activity that you have done, or not. It is experiential. While porn continuously

pushes at the level of normalization of activities once considered “perverse” or literally unheard of (BDSM, for example), most sexual activities have been around since the dawn of time and knowledge of an activity is not the same as doing it. Kinsey related intelligence, or level of education, with willingness to engage in some activities (anal sex, bisexuality, etc.). It is not clear that, overall, this correlation has changed. While San Francisco has morphed from a gay and lesbian cultural mecca to a heterosexual space that places pressure on straight people to be, at the very least, bi-curious, at the most, into a variety of sexual mores, this is also one of the wealthiest, most liberal, most well-educated parts of the country, and one that is a part of the West Coast ethos of escape from society, from the European values and boundaries that contains the rest of the country (even the equally liberal New England). People in California are not supposed to be puritan. Indeed, they are running away from all forms of it.

Pornography is based on its own conventions, but they are based on assumptions that are not supported by reality. The extreme gender dichotomy on display in the films is not based upon real life, either. Both porn and, to some extent, feminism are based upon the notion of being hyper-aware of the difference of sex, or the importance of gender, but it is not clear that all or most women go around thinking about their difference.¹⁷ It is in this sense as well that porn might be seen as a different space, or a fantasy space, in which sex (the act) and sex (the biological distinction, however iffy) are highlighted in a way that it is not in real life. This emphasis or framing is also perhaps a part of the unusualness of trans identity. While the impetus to come out as trans might be important to some trans people as a way to come to terms with their gender (or sex), it also calls attention to the process of living in the body and being aware of identity in a way that someone who is at peace (more or less) with their originary biological sex might not be. It calls for a heightened political awareness but also a heightened sense of pushing that identity to the forefront of others. In this latter sense, it is also perhaps a bit like porn in its construction of an alternative narrative and reality for something that is perhaps a given to many people: sex/sex.

Trans identity within porn also highlights the way that the physical body can embody sex but not gender. In the usual dichotomy that is within porn, the body of the trans man, say, might consist of a male-presenting body with a vagina (perhaps with an enlarged clitoris functioning as a proto-penis). While the presentation of self might be said to be the most important way to read the body in terms of gender, what does it mean to keep the vagina, even if it is modified, as a marker of sex that arguably changes the interpretation of the body by an observer? For the trans person, the desire to be objectified as an object of their desire might be paramount, a point made by both Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam about the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) (Halberstam 83–92; Butler, *Undoing Gender* 134–44). The film, about the brutal rape of a trans woman, sets up two complementary scenes before and after the rape. The first occurs when Brandon Teena (Hilary Swank) has sex with Lana Tisdel (Chloë Sevigny) in the small Nebraska town where he has charmed the local beauty. In this scene, the sex between them makes clear that the gendered roles align with Brandon's desires. The scene is repeated later in the film after Brandon has been forced to reveal his female

anatomy and is later raped by a friend of Lana's family. The second sex scene disrupts the sense of identity, and while dispiriting and seemingly a part of the tendency of Hollywood film to normalize the body and expose Brandon's fantasy as a failed reality, the point of the scene might also be to show the pathos of the unmasking. The rape is about ontological violence—forcing Brendon to admit what he does not want to admit, to strip him of his dreams. What is important to keep in mind is the role that Lana plays in that it is through her eyes that Brandon is a boy. When she refuses to acknowledge this except as sympathy, the triangulation fails. Brandon sees himself as a subject (male) that is realized via the objectification as male by a female. When this circuit is turned off (and worse, made into sympathy, not lust), that is when his subjectivity is rendered objective. He becomes an object, not a subject. Trans porn similarly raises questions about how we see the body of a trans person. If we see a trans woman's body as male, the genitalia should be as well. If porn features a trans man having sex with a cisgendered woman, then are we to assume that what we are seeing is a queered version of heterosexuality? If we see a loop in which a trans woman has sex with a man, are we to assume that the trans man or the cisgendered man is gay? How do gender and sex link in such a scenario? Gender, sex, and sexuality? The complicating factor of porn is that it shows all the actors, to some extent, as objectified. The desires of the trans man, unless articulated in some way within the film, are going to be objectified, as are his genitals. How the viewer reads these bodies, and their parts, is, of course, somewhat subjective but raises the point that porn forces objectification and takes away the notion of agency. A body is put on display to be read in terms of the pleasure of the reader. The emotional construct of the actual actor, or of their nominal role or character, is perhaps not really represented. And though the roles may be especially scripted and seemingly reductive, the pleasure in porn is the ambivalence that can be had in reading against the script, or of seeing the person not as they are meant to be but as the viewer wants. A trans body can, then, make especially visible the way that sex and gender are encrypted on the body in porn—there to be read, but not necessarily as the titular narrative would have it. A trans man's performance with another man might be titillating, in differing and similar ways, to a straight woman (the trans man as a man); a straight man (the trans man's vagina, or penetration); a gay man (the trans man as a man and/or the male actor and his body); etc. Genitals and gender cross and uncross, but through the mechanism of porn, which allows us to focus on the visual. The instability of the visual is maximized by the minimalism of the narrative.

The Golden Ages of Porn: The 1970s

In writing about Gustave Courbet's infamous female crotch shot, *The Origin of the World* (1866), Barry Schwabsky notes that in the severe cropping of the image in order to focus on the woman's genitalia Courbet creates the effect of a photograph, perhaps especially pornographic ones that would have existed at that time. The naturalistic way

in which he paints the flesh of the model, in particular, strengthens the sense of photo-realism (28–34).¹⁸ Premodernist painting by Édouard Manet perhaps owes something to Courbet's radical removal of body parts and daring decision to focus on the body so extremely.¹⁹ Just as Manet's philosophers, buglers, rag pickers, absinthe drinkers, and, especially, matadors seem to float freely in space, without a clear background or context, so too does Courbet's female torso, while on a bed or divan, seem to begin to float free from its mooring, to suggest a modernist excision of concrete reality in favor of a radically abstract removal of everything but that which is essential to the composition. Courbet connects pornography with technology and presciently foresees the way that technology will redefine the pornographic.²⁰ Courbet's provocation now looks like a film still, or a still photograph from a pornographic magazine from the 1970s, the model's ample pubic hair as much a fetish as anything else in the frame.²¹

If Courbet looks ahead to the technology of cinema, one of film's most famous early theorists, André Bazin, takes great pains to separate what he sometimes calls "eroticism" in film from that on the stage. For Bazin, sex is best represented on the screen precisely because it is completed not on the screen but in the mind of the viewer: "because unlike the theater, an actual acting space based on consciousness and conflict, the cinema unreels in an imaginary space which demands participation and identification. The actor winning the woman gratifies me by proxy. His seductiveness, his good looks, his daring do not compete with my desires—they fulfill them" (Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. II 174). While Bazin is arguing for the freedom for film—"There are no sex situations ... whose expression is *a priori* prohibited on the screen."—in order for film to succeed where theater cannot, it must not show everything, and it must bow to "abstraction" in order to attain the erotic (*What Is Cinema?* Vol. II 174). Bazin understands the importance of film eliciting a physical reaction from the audience but resists the logical conclusion, to "idealize pornographic film." The solution is to resist realism itself. To his credit, he also understands the "limitations" of this argument and concludes his essay by calling for the same freedom for film that is accorded the literary: "To grant the novel the privilege of evoking everything, and yet to deny the cinema, which is so similar, the right of showing everything, is a critical contradiction which I note without resolving" (*What Is Cinema?* Vol. II 175).

To some extent, Alain Badiou takes up Bazin's unresolved contradiction when he asks: "Is pornography necessarily a specialty and not a genre? And if so, why? This is a particularly interesting question with regard to the very essence of cinema insofar as it is confronted with the full visibility of the sexual" (89). As Badiou muses earlier, what would the sexual be like on screen if it could be "purified" of the influence of censorship? How might we explore the relationship between love and sex? "What degree of visibility can be tolerated by what one could call the amorous body?" (88). As with Bazin, what would happen if we could imagine a cinema free to express sexuality and nudity openly? While Badiou claims that Jean-Luc Godard has begun to explore those possibilities, as Badiou notes, "no conclusive work has been one on this point" (89).

One place to look to see what that possibility might look like of a mainstream cinema free to embrace the sexual in all its freedom is the brief period in the 1970s when pornography and mainstream cinemas overlapped. The desire to make porn films that

reflected the burgeoning sexual revolution found a niche in mainstream films as date movies seen by young couples. These films could be seen at art houses, on-campus theaters, and independent theaters in large urban centers. There was a market for the films and places to show them. The aesthetics of porn fused with the technical know-how of Hollywood to produce films that aimed at a kind of respectability. Perhaps beginning with Swedish imports in the late 1960s, such as *I Am Curious (Yellow)* (1967) and *I Am Curious (Blue)* (1968), films on American shores began to open up to nudity and the representation of sexuality. European films by famous auteurs such as Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni, among others, paved the way for a second generation of foreign films that introduced American audiences to ever-increasing sexual content (Nagisa Oshima, for example) and attitudes toward sex and the body that contrasted with American puritanism. Eventually, it became chic for American films to ape not only European films but for the porn film industry to influence US films from another route.²²

The usual origin of 1970s porn is 1972's *Deep Throat*. This film is given the honor of establishing the short-lived idea of the porn date movie. While many foreign films had often straddled the divide between porn and mainstream movies, or simply represented porn elements of sex, sexuality, or nudity being brought into mainstream movies that were more common in porn, *Deep Throat* was a porn movie that got seen by some couples in theaters in urban areas. While the film itself was ultimately mired in various controversies having to do with the large amount of money it made and who did or did not get those profits and the tragic fate of Linda Lovelace (Linda Boreman)—who became a poster girl for anti-porn feminists before she renounced that position—the film was originally a somewhat unlikely breakthrough film. Clocking in at barely over an hour, it can perhaps best be described as a one-joke movie. Harry Reems, her costar, plays Dr. Young, who is helping Lovelace with what she sees as sexual dysfunction, the inability to have an orgasm, discovers that her clitoris is in her throat. While she is at first saddened by this fact, he tells her that at least she has one and it can, with practice, be effectively stimulated. The answer to her problems, of course, is the deep throating of the movie's title. While the concept is silly, there are two aspects of the concept that perhaps make the film, in some ways, more acceptable as a crossover film. In its absurdity, the idea gives the film a light-hearted tone, especially in the over-the-top bad acting of Reems. While much of porn has often consisted of a certain seriousness, especially porn meant to be seen by men in the presence of other men, when the downbeat tone is meant to connote the idea that we are in the presence of a masculine genre, the goofier tone of *Deep Throat*, consciously or no, gently parodies the genre of which it is a part. The humor releases some of the uncomfortable tension of the film's genre and makes the film more easily watchable in different-sexed groups. Likewise, though the film might seem to be about the arguably male-centered notion of *irrumatio*, the position that Lovelace takes when performing deep-throating is to lean across Reems' chest and place his penis in her mouth while she is in a position opposite him. The visual effect of this position is to place her on top—very different from having Reems stand before her while she is kneeling or hanging her head off the side of a bed (the two other standard positions). The way that the deep-throating is

filmed certainly draws attention to the extreme length and thickness of Reems, and hence to Lovelace's skill; it also, in the long close-ups of the act, removes Reems almost completely from the frame. He becomes a penis, which itself quickly disappears into Lovelace's body. Visually, he ceases to exist and Lovelace's head dominates the screen. She retains much more faciality and subjecthood than Reems. In terms of gender, the film makes it easier for female viewers to watch porn and, to some extent, overcomes what may seem like a doubling-down of the dominance that heterosexual sex already contains for some people.

Deep Throat ends with the image of Linda Lovelace's mouth, which appears, in extreme close-up, like a set of vagina dentata, which slowly spin and turn over—a reference to her usual position in relation to the penis. This slightly threatening image is scarier than it is funny, suggesting the surreality of the movie as a whole—an ultimately strange juxtaposition of the sensual and the grotesque, the sexy and the humorous. The anomaly that is *Deep Throat*, however, did not really continue in porn. While much porn now has a winking ironic self-consciousness about its tone, calling attention to its own conventions of “bad” acting, the initial 1970s response was to attempt to make artier versions of porn—to increase the production values, narrative complexity, and, especially, to blur the distinctions between reality and fantasy—to mine a kind of 1970s porn surrealism. While ultimately this direction led to a couple of genuinely breakthrough porn movies—*The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) and *Barbara Broadcast* (1977)—the first two films to bank on *Deep Throat*'s success, *Behind the Green Door* (1972) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), pointed the way toward more explicit films but also ones that were more pretentious as well. *The Devil in Miss Jones* continues the idea of a woman exploring her own body. The star of the film, Georgina Spelvin, is as talky as Chambers is quiet. The film privileges anal sex well before it was fashionable, and even seems to use anal as an homage to *Deep Throat*, trying to do for it what *Deep Throat* did for oral sex. The plot works its way through a variety of sexual experiences for Miss Jones; it ends with double penetration, which is completely controlled by Miss Jones, who directs the actions of the two male lovers so that she will have maximum pleasure. When she is ready to orgasm, she instructs, “I want to feel you come outside.” The film ends where it began, with a truly chilling vision of Hell, which suggests how very different a film it is in terms of tone.

Behind the Green Door shares with *Deep Throat* and *The Devil in Miss Jones* what could be considered an emphasis on female pleasure. The plot involves a tale within a tale. A truck driver named Barry Clark (George S. McDonald) stops at a diner where he and a friend are called upon to tell the story of the “green door” to the diner's staff. Playing off the verbal tradition of porn—from *The Thousand and One Nights* to Rabelais—*Door* combines *Deep Throat*'s frankness with high-art pretension. The framing of the diner gives way to a flashback that at times resembles a performance piece more than a porn film. The tone of the story, as the driver's friend tells it, is serious. The story within the story begins from Chambers' point of view. She drives a sports car to a secluded hotel on a lake in what looks like northern California. The driver and his friend are also staying there. She comes out onto the terrace of the hotel while the two

friends are talking—much as they are now at the diner. During their conversation, at the terrace's restaurant, the film's female protagonist is first introduced. Overhearing the conversation, she appears to be attracted to the two men though she does not speak to them and, in fact, never utters a single word throughout the picture. Chambers plays Gloria Saunders, a wealthy San Francisco woman who is abducted that night and taken to appear in a sex show in a theater in North Beach—an area that is known for its sex shows. She is promised an erotic evening that is full of surprises. Chambers later said in an interview that she indeed did not know what to expect during the course of the film (“Marilyn Chambers”). Chambers is brought out on stage through the titular green door. She finds herself before an audience of men and women who are apparently there to be turned on. Dressed in expensive clothes, they also wear masks.²³ During the evening, they slowly become more and more sexually excited and do not hesitate to touch each other or themselves as they do. On stage, Chambers receives erotic massages and oral sex from a bevy of women in a sequence that runs on for several minutes. The next act is a similarly long sequence in which she has sex with a boxer, Johnnie Keyes, in the first interracial sex scene ever shown in mainstream porn (Williams, “Skin Flicks” 299). When Chambers' character has an orgasm, Keyes stops and withdraws.²⁴ The first two sex scenes have emphasized Chambers' pleasure. While that is about to change, *Door* shares with *Throat* at least the possible awareness of the importance of female pleasure to sex—or at least, that heterosexual sex is a two-way street. The next sexual act to be featured involves Chambers and four men. Chambers is lifted via a gigantic trapeze above the stage where three men are similarly raised up. Chambers performs oral sex on one while masturbating two other men. A fourth man below engages her in vaginal sex. While the emphasis on pleasure shifts from the female to the male body, the film withholds the “money shot” of an ejaculating penis during most of this sequence. When it finally does appear, however, the film makes the most of it by showing a penis ejaculating for seven minutes, in slow motion, in a loop that emphasizes the visual but also turns into an abstraction—the ejaculation, penis, and Chambers' face being shown in different colors that suggest some type of drug-induced high.²⁵

For all of the delay in the representation of male pleasure, the film makes clear that all porn ultimately leads to the externalized orgasm of a male actor. The simultaneous stimulation of four men at once finally leads to a breakdown in the weak fourth wall separating the action on the stage and the audience watching it. An orgy breaks out in the theater and life finally penetrates art when the narrator of the story leaps from the floor to carry Chambers back through the green door and out into the real world. The film ends with the truck driver concluding his tale, leaving the diner, and once again driving his rig. Only this time he remembers what apparently happened at some time after the rescue when we see Chambers and the narrator making love, on the floor, in a conventional setting. Chambers' body fades in over the night, and the stars and topography of the road parallel her body, which becomes larger than life. Like *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*, *Green Door* seems to suggest that sex ends with conventional coitus between a man and a woman in private. Adding another level of self-consciousness, the film seems to posit that the real point of porn is to act as

foreplay for a heterosexual couple. It is a fantasy, a “story,” that is meant to highlight novelty and mutual pleasure. The film marries the pleasures of country music and the typical American road film to the theatrics of the San Francisco milieu of the film’s directors, Jim and Artie Mitchell. It is well photographed and emphasizes throughout the beauty of the actors’ bodies. In its ultimately conceptual construction, the film balances realism—the hard-core sex—with purposefully withheld storytelling that forces the audience to be aware of themselves as an audience—as voyeurs. In this sense, it seems to look forward to something like Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*, which similarly features, in its central orgy scene, a clothed audience watching various elaborate sexual antics, as if on a stage. The members of the audience, similarly, wear masks.

The film’s very minimalist approach is used to advantage by the filmmakers. The sex, while graphic, is frequently shot from angles that are unusual, even disorienting, for the viewer. The female body, while hardly shied away from, is often rendered in choice details—a briefly noticed erect nipple, for example—rather than full-on gynecological shots that are favored by some porn directors. The emphasis on female pleasure often takes the form of cunnilingus, which is shown in abundance, and often without any sort of penile tête-à-tête. The racial component of the film is perhaps as interesting as the gendered one, though it is arguably more complex and problematic. Keyes is very self-consciously marked as “African” with face paint (albeit, artistically designed) and a bone necklace that the actor himself chose to wear. His only other clothing consists of a pair of insulated underwear in which the crotch has been cut out—as though to emphasize his sexuality via his large penis. Porn scholar Linda Williams argues that Keyes is used as a trope. He becomes an early instance of the African American male body switching registers from dangerous and taboo to desirable, eroticized, and fetishized (“Skin Flicks” 303).

For Williams, the aestheticized African symbolism given to Keyes was supposed to signal empowerment (300) and the film looked ahead both to the explicit interracial spectacle of *Mandingo* (1975) and to the interracial porn staple that scenes of interracial sex would eventually become. She also argues, here and elsewhere in this essay, that interracial sex always suggests an absent third term—the white man that the white woman does not have sex with, in this scene, or the Black woman who is absented in scenes between Black women and white men (300). While Williams attempts to prove that the process of turning Black men into sexualized objects was, in fact, decadal in the making, I would argue that it reaches its apotheosis in something like Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Black Book* (1986), in which a white gay man fetishizes his lovers, literally turning them into works of art, placing them on stands to be both admired and gawked at, at the same time. While Williams understates the troubling racism inherent in this play with stereotypes, she does it to make a point: that the pornographic element of porn spares no one from the gaze of objectification. One is forced into the zone of the erotic—to see or be seen through this optic. What is important in the scene between Keyes and Chambers is that it works in spite of its markers of racial difference. Keyes, famously, thrusts for a very long time, to the point where one forgets about anything other than the intimacy of the physical act between the performers.²⁶ The

Mitchell brothers manage to make the sex acts somewhat abstract, to decontextualize them on the stage set. They become performance art that emphasizes the performance. Paradoxically, the performers become more individualized despite the fact that we know little about them. They become not tropes or types but bodies in space sharing a narrative that is created in real time with our help, with the benefit of our observation.

As recounted by Raymond J. Haberski Jr., famous film critic Andrew Sarris, who did much to introduce the United States to auteur theory, disliked the vogue of art-house porn movies precisely because the artistic pretention, in his mind, “destroyed the only suitable context for them” (391), which was “steamy temptation, degraded and disreputable ... proceedings” (qtd. in Harberski 391). While Sarris saw the films as an historical event, he did not see them as the revolution that sex in mainstream film was supposed to be. Indeed, he seems to prefer an almost 1950s or early 1960s vibe—sex as sleaze via John Waters—or a pre-1970s classic like the biker movie *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965). While the grind-house circuit might have been preferred by Sarris, other film critics enjoyed the porn films that were shown in Times Square porn theaters before the area of New York City was gentrified. Richard Schickel, Richard Corliss, and Brendan Gill all waxed poetically about the experience of enjoying porn films as film (Harberski 391–3). The coming of the Golden Age of porn, then, was complicated at the time, seeming unsuccessful to some as either art or as porn, and perhaps displacing earlier versions of porn. While the porn films made during this era might read now as high-art porn, it is also important to remember that to some extent porn was getting its cues from non-porn-related art house films. As Mariah Larsson notes, in *The Virgin Spring* (1960) and other films in the 1960s, Bergman did not shy away from highly sexual subject matter and put people’s sexual and psychological dysfunction on display in many of his films for over twenty years (25). Likewise, in Italy, Pier Pasolini’s “trilogy of life” series, which retold the episodic stories of the *Decameron* (1971), *Canterbury Tales* (1972), and the *Arabian Nights* (1974) as bawdy, sex-filled morality tales about a prelapsarian time when bodies were unashamed and wholesome in their pre-capitalist state, were an attempt to recode the body as some sort of alternative to the modern body. One might argue that the link between the worlds of porn and those of art film reached their point of closest proximity in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the sexual frankness and violence of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *I Am Curious (Yellow)* were continued with *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and *Last Tango in Paris* (1973) (Harberski 398). Popular films of the time likewise took on more sexual content, even expanding into gay and lesbian themes, and, eventually, deep into the 1970s, the intensification and everydayness of sexual culture was often portrayed in film and television as a natural, even suburban, phenomenon.²⁷ It is perhaps not surprising, then, that some critics would compare a porn classic such as *The Devil in Miss Jones* to *Last Tango in Paris* (401).

Indeed, it is essential to note not only how much the “high” art underground, mainstream cinema, and supposedly “low” brow porn interpenetrated each other but how much it provided cover, if you will, for the representation of sex on the screen. Whether or not one considers sex in film to be merely titillating erotic content or a high-art attempt at real porn, porn, likewise, has its moments of risking the

pretentiousness of art film. This relationship, and indeed the very origin of the notion of the artfully done porno or the art film with elements of porn, differs according to the culture you are discussing. In Sweden, the legalization of pornography in the 1960s came out of an impulse to educate young people about sex. The hope was that there would be a general dialogue about sex that would better society, including raising the quality of porn films (Larsson 22). When porn failed to improve in artistic quality, and porn spread into seedier realms in terms of visual arts and, in the form of cinemas and prostitution, architecture, a backlash against porn actually fueled the women's movement in Sweden, which was formed, in part, to counter the rise of porn (22–3). In its origins, however, Sweden's liberalizing of laws against porn obviously fueled a reputation in Sweden and the Nordic countries in general that equated them with an openness to sex and sexuality. As Larsson argues, "While Sweden was perceived of as a sexual paradise (or nightmare), this perception was also heterosexual, and could even be described as an international male gaze at a femininely gendered nation/object, where female models and actresses embodied the project of the national" (22). What began as an attempt to educate the populace about sexuality as early as the 1930s developed by the 1960s into a reputation for sex that Sweden and its citizens have even today. The historical details are important, however, as in Sweden children were not seen as needing protection from sexually explicit content (unlike in most countries) and the sexual frankness of the films we associate with Sweden was heterosexual and dominated by men who subsequently shaped the image to express their desires. This view of Scandinavian sexuality is echoed by Ina Blom, who notes that Scandinavian culture removed the naked body from drama. There was a "no-nonsense tone in which sexual education was administered, the unflagging belief in the healthy body, and the deep suspicion of anything having to do with seduction, masquerade, or any of the familiar uses of boudoir culture" (111). This tradition of sex education stemmed directly from the women's suffrage movement (112). What remains to be understood, perhaps, is how the "once critical and utopian" aspects of sexual freedom could, during the last forty years, have become obsessed with the notion that the body is now necessarily the abused body (112). Sex itself has become sexuality, which is anything but the undramatic healthy body-centered sexuality of a Nordic sensibility.

In Italy, Pasolini's trilogy was an attempt on his part to film the bodies of "the Roman subproletariat" or of the youth of the third world in an attempt to film the bodies of the past, his assumption that in parts of Europe and the Middle East sections of society have changed so little that bodies there would represent an uncorrupted state as it may have appeared in the past. Pasolini was later to all but disinherit these films, in part because he ultimately felt that they did not really escape from the politics of the present, and in part because they inadvertently gave rise to a genre of Italian filmmaking that used the themes of the trilogy, and their literary sources, as an excuse to create hardcore porn. Ultimately, Pasolini's three films are held together by shared approaches to filmmaking that one sees in all of his films—symmetrical close-up compositions centered on the face; the use of location shooting that emphasizes design, architecture, and topography; postproduction sound recording; and literary sources

that are in the public domain.²⁸ What is unusual about these three films, however, is that they are united by their focus on the body, especially an approach to sex that seems touchingly direct and even childlike (MacCabe, “The Past Is Present” 25). While this sensuality is what was most influential, the films are—like all of Pasolini’s films, from his masterpiece *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) to the posthumous Sadean fable, *Salò* (1975)—ultimately built for the mind, not the body (Bachmann 61). That is, Pasolini’s films are meant to be a form of political realism, especially Marxist, as it is worked out in a critique of modernity (MacCabe, “Brave Old World” 51). For Pasolini, the main effect of every film was to deliver a moment of self-awareness for the audience in which the present is suddenly defamiliarized by the past and made clearer through his critique. With the possible exception of *Salò*, this goal is perhaps not met, but the surfaces of his films still intrigue us, especially in the fact that the bodies he depicted are just as likely to be male as female, gay male sex often shown on an equal footing with heterosexual sex, even in the past (“Decamerotic” 29).²⁹

Pasolini was later to write an essay entitled “*Trilogy of Life Rejected*,” in which he acknowledged the impossibility of seeing an uncorrupted body—a body before neoliberalism. He specifically rejected the attitudes he associated with young people and the student movement and regretted making the movies. The literal reaction on his part was *Salò*, a film that continued the use of the body as subject but turned everything in the trilogy upside down. The body is objectified but only to torture it and defile it. Young people’s bodies are literally torn apart—sex becomes sexual violence. Pasolini is commenting here on 1940s Italy but also on the present from a radically different perspective. Neoliberalism has won. Sex, youth, and bodies are completely corrupted. Life itself is consumerized. Television has made everything a spectacle. This fact is made clear in the film’s symmetry and use of medium shots that echo the aesthetics of television. The film’s final orgy of violence is viewed through binoculars, where we see what the sadists see. The audience is now complicit in the process. Life is hell, and we are all guilty of abetting the fascists. It is a film that still stands as a landmark in transgression. It is also his best-made film, most politically assure, and most considered. Perhaps Pasolini was better at death than life, tragedy than comedy. It is not surprising that *Salò* was supposed to be the first entry in a new “Trilogy of Death.”

The pornographic universe may seem like a dystopia to some, but it is structured as a pure form of utopia. In her seminal work in porn studies, *Hard Core*, Linda Williams sees porn film as coming in three highly stylized versions of utopias, echoing Richard Dyer: “separation, integration, and dissolution” (182). Porn had, at the time of the book’s publishing, moved toward the direction in which women were not merely objects but became instead the subjects of the film—the ones who narrated films as flashbacks or who told the story about themselves. She uses as her example Chambers’ film from 1980, *Insatiable*, which shows the famous star recalling lovers and even eschewing the money shot for her own gratification. She is insatiable because she likes sex, but narratively, at least, for her own reasons, not for a male character’s. She cares that she comes, which is the end toward which the film ultimately moves, eschewing the money shot as the implied telos.

This idea of utopia can be seen as specifically 1970s, a utopia that perhaps still demands a futurity. Even before the end of the decade, dystopias began to run parallel if not dominate our notion of utopia and, one could certainly argue, were correct in their estimation of where humanity was headed in the twenty-first century. One could argue that the utopian impulse at work in the 1970s porn film, or maybe in porn in general, which is nothing if not optimistic, is a version of what Tom Moylan terms “critical utopia,” which is “revolutionary, self-reflexive, feminist, and politically driven as well as politically transformative for the reader” (Jorgensen 421). Whether it is possible to imagine a post-1970s utopia that is positive or that finds a mode with which to critique the present in ways that illustrate a believable praxis is open to debate. Perhaps it would have to be “postnational” (421), or maybe cannot be understood outside of the generation of politics of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁰ In any case, the notion of a critical utopia can involve an internalized self-critique in which the idealized notion of a utopia might be rejected or at least analyzed. Porn in the 1970s probably does just that even as it represents a world in which sex is for the asking and sexual knowledge, as a sort of unifying force, could bring couples together to watch films with disingenuous shame. As Linda Williams notes, the central sex act of 1970s porn was oral sex, specifically the blowjob (*Hard Core* 150). One might say that if sex itself, or simply nudity, especially male nudity, was made visible in the Swedish films of the 1960s, and European art cinema in general, by the time of *Deep Throat*, the blowjob took on the metonymy of sex and was, by the time of *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*, being satirized by being turned into pedagogy—the truth of sex that is taught as the truth of sex. In other words, it was now passé. In other words, porn, like any genre or subgenre, is self-conscious and even critical of its own practices and assumptions.

* * *

The line between what we might call gay and straight porn is a thin one at best, and it is not clear that the two areas are ever really separate. At the very least, straight porn plays on a back-and-forth between gay and straight with the most prominent porn stars often self-identifying as “bisexual.” It is a given that it is only a matter of time before female and male stars appear in a scene with someone of the same sex—supposedly a matter of suspense, such conventions are now a bit of a joke. For male stars, the price of their bottoming is perhaps related to their status as tops and to the length of time it takes for them to not give up their gay “virginity,” as though there were some kind of truth factor in porn. The reality is that there is little or no correspondence between the actors and the parts they play, though some sort of correspondence is probably important as an illusion for some of the fans—and maybe even some of the performers. It is probably best to think of porn as consisting of genres, with the notion of sexes and genders merely a convenience related to the activity that subsumes them. In any case, like the genre of straight porn, some of the films that make up gay porn arguably fall into the realm of art film or, in the case of someone like Fred Halsted, BDSM, or maybe both. His seminal *LA Plays Itself* (1972), for example, is mostly a documentary about male hookers in Los Angeles rather than an explicit porn film

and manages to act as a sort of time capsule of the city that gives almost as much attention to the ecological changes as to the sexual ones. Halsted was considered for a film version of William S. Burroughs' *The Wild Boys* (1971), a project that was also considered with Terry Southern, who worked on a project with Stanley Kubrick to make a high-art porn movie, perhaps one that ultimately became *Eyes Wide Shut* (Jones 85).³¹ At a time when mainstream porn was crossing over into mainstream film, gay porn was a part of this process, too. Halsted was friends with Kenneth Anger and a fan of *Scorpio Rising* (1963) (Jones 86).³² Burroughs was a fan of Halsted's later film, *Pieces of Eight* (1980) (102). Halsted's favorite mainstream Hollywood director was Robert Altman (128). Perhaps what separates gay male porn from straight porn is that in the former "the performers are not 'objects' like the women in straight" porn "but rather sex 'tools,' instruments to play out fantasies, implements to realize dreams" (128). Halsted's embracing of BDSM images and scenarios in *Sextool* (1975) and elsewhere perhaps suggests this. In an interview from 1979, Halsted discusses the spread of gay themes into mainstream film such as the bisexual character played by bisexual Brad Davis in *Midnight Express* (1978) and Alan Strang in Peter Shaffer's play *Equus* (1973; later a film in 1977) (reprinted in Jones 163). Halsted was interested in the overlap between hard-core straight porn and gay porn and would have been interested in working between the two or in porn films that were more artistically conceived, such as Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (165).

If *Deep Throat* can be considered the seminal early-1970s straight porn film, then *Boys in the Sand* (1971) might be considered the gay equivalent. As sexual practices such as oral sex and anal sex went from seeming exotic to everyday over the course of the decade, so did porn films.³³ Just as the sexual acts that form the core of gay male sex became a part of straight sex, gay male high-end porn such as that practiced, or at least dreamed of, by Halsted came close to being accepted in the mainstream, though perhaps never as accepted as films like *Deep Throat* or *Behind the Green Door*. While gay themes eventually found their way into mainstream cinema—from *Cabaret* (1972) to *Cruising* (1980)—gay male porn films did not. *The Boys in the Sand* may have come the closest, and certainly its director, Wakefield Poole, like Halsted, desired a crossover hit. Starring the Robert Redford lookalike Casey Donovan, the film recounts sexual encounters he has with three different men in three different locations on Fire Island—on the beach, by a swimming pool, and inside an elaborate beach house.

According to Cindy Patton, Donovan was thought to have the best chance of some type of crossover appeal (67). While Donovan was known for his modeling and some film work, he ultimately became a highly paid escort in Europe. To Poole, the film may have represented another early 1970s dream, where not only porn and mainstream might meet but gay and straight sex as well.³⁴ Halsted's *Sex Garage* (1972) contains a scene of straight sex, as did later films by Poole. Likewise, Poole always associated the gay men in *Boys in the Sand* as "sophisticated" rather than "liberated" (qtd. in Patton 69). For Patton, *Boys in the Sand* was an attempt to model a jet set brought about quite literally by jet travel and "libertine" bisexuals who saw themselves as above common morality (69).³⁵ Poole was trying for his own version of the avant-garde, perhaps a more commercial version of Warhol, something to titillate his artist

and designer friends (71). The Fire Island of his film is fairly exclusive, the sexual encounters eerily isolated and fantasy-based. There is little sense of a gay community, of an identity that is outside of the places that seem to conjure the actors through some kind of animism. While one might criticize Poole for a kind of classist construct, he did represent the BDSM aspects of even mainstream gay culture—Donovan emerges from the water in the opening sequence wearing a cock ring. Likewise, Poole saves the last and most elaborate section for an interracial tryst in which Donovan has sex with African American actor Tommy Moore, who plays a utility worker Donovan cruises from inside the house and ultimately invites in. As Poole discusses on the director's cut of the film, Donovan and Moore had been lovers at one time, and Poole chose Moore on purpose for this scene, assuming, correctly, that the two actors would be more comfortable with each other, perhaps especially in a series of scenes that involve a good deal of fantasizing on the part of Donovan's character, who imagines sex with Moore's character before Moore actually arrives at the door. While these scenes could be said to play into Donovan's fantasies about Moore because he is Black, at the same time, the scenes between them have an intimacy lacking in the sex earlier in the movie. As the film progresses, the sex goes from expected (on the beach) to athletic (by the pool), to elaborate but emotional (in the house). In each case, it is clear that Poole has thought through the choreography and the film is nothing if not creative and studied in its sex scenes, but the hottest are those between Donovan and Moore.

If Halsted showed Los Angeles as a West Coast gay paradise, Poole, a year earlier, located this nirvana on the opposite coast. Both were tied to place, and though Halsted may have been paying homage to Poole, Poole was definitely parodying *The Boys in the Band* (1968; film, 1970), which placed gay awakening in an urban setting where the economic opportunity of a major city provided the independence and anonymity needed to be out of the closet. The film (and the play) saw as the cost of that freedom a certain amount of unavoidable self-hatred. Poole and Halsted had no guilt, but did crave an artistic melding of high and low culture and a slippage between straight and queer culture. In both of these instances, they were ahead of their time and, in terms of the later, able to see further than their straight counterparts who were making films in the 1970s that attempted to bring porn into mainstream culture.

The Victorians

Any definitional matrix of porn would be incomplete without the insights into how it functions that have come from the literary analysis of porn. In his foundational study of the phenomenon of modern pornography as a literary medium, Steven Marcus notes that Freud distinguished between an older form of sexuality, one that was obsessed with the drive itself, and a newer one that placed all of the emphasis on the choice of erotic object. For Marcus, "remnants" of this older form survive into the eighteenth century, as seen in something like the novel *Pamela* (1740), but is gone by the nineteenth century. Modern pornography is composed, then, of a "nostalgia" for

this lost meaning from the “infancy of our civilization” and from our own childhoods as this other form of sexuality is “edited” by our adolescent selves (178). One can trace modern porn, then, from the middle of the nineteenth century until today (212). In that sense, porn is something that can be understood as having a history, and just as porn itself might have its own historical phases, so, too, might something like male sexuality also be understood to be “historically influenced and determined” (212). Like Foucault, Marcus sees porn as increasing in amount, especially during the last decades of the nineteenth century (283). He sees the continuation of porn’s popularity as inevitable.

Though Marcus analyses literary pornography, particularly in the novel, much of what he discusses as the function of porn applies to other media as well. At the center of porn is the desire for repetition. Marcus notes that Freud described sexual desire as a constant unfulfillable repetition and suggests that this repeating formula itself argues for the fact that something “is *not* being gratified as well” (181). Freud’s later work on “repetition compulsion” goes “beyond the pleasure principle” and sees repetition as existing at the “borderland between pathology and biology” (182). For Marcus, pornography represents a “rich example” of how a drive can be persistent and yet not related to pleasure per se. Pornography could be explained as a genre “obsessed with pleasure and yet unpleasurable, whose aim is said to be pleasure, although it is a pleasure from which the actuality of gratification is excluded, and whose impulse toward totality is the equivalent of obliteration” (182). For all of the insight that applying Freud’s concepts to porn supplies, Marcus ultimately feels that Freud’s theory of the pleasure principle falls short of explaining the logic at the center of porn: “I do not think, however, that its distinct unpleasurableness, its violence and aggressiveness, its impulse toward extinction are satisfactorily explained by that principle alone. Something darker seems to be there, something inexorable, from which there is no escape and which cannot be understood as pathology alone” (182). Ultimately, perhaps, this nihilism is linked to the refusal of the gratification of pleasure. Porn can never come to an end. “The ideal pornographic novel,” Marcus writes, “as everyone knows, would go on forever—it would have no ending” (195). Pornography excludes much from its purview—to Marcus, all but a kind of aggressiveness and compulsion. Porn pits “infinite pleasure” against “genuine gratification,” and by omitting the latter, porn becomes “anti-literature and anti-art” (195). One might say, however, that this radicalness of structure is also a part of its fascination as a genre or a logic. It cannot be easily assimilated into other forms of art precisely because it destroys them. As Sade knew, porn was ultimately a machine; as Georges Bataille understood, porn was connected to death itself.

The specific methodology of porn, as Marcus recognizes, is the visual. As he says, “Language is for pornography a bothersome necessity; its function is to set going a series of nonverbal images, of fantasies—and if it could dispense with words it would. Which is why ... the motion-picture film is what the genre was all along waiting for” (208). While Marcus connects pornography to the culture of sensibility (205), he also sees it as a literature that “adapts by subtraction and is always less than what it takes. In pornography the whole is smaller than the sum of its parts. [...] It exists as something

less than literature, and it persists because it meets certain needs that literature does not and cannot meet” (210). Even as literature, one might argue, porn is something else, perhaps further strengthening its link to the visual. As he says later in his book, porn uses metaphor, and verbal figures in general, not to

fuse or identify similar characteristics from disparate objects with the aim of increasing one’s command over reality—and the objects in it—by magically exercising one’s command of the language through which reality is identified and mediated. Its intention is, rather, un-metaphoric and literal; its aim is to *de-elaborate* the verbal structure and the distinctions upon which it is built, to move back through language to that part of our minds where all metaphors are literal truths, where everything is possible, and where we were all once originally supreme. (240–1)

As aesthetics, porn, at least for Marcus, fails to be subversive except in terms of exposing society’s hypocrisies around sex. It can never, however, take “the next step of subversion: it cannot supply a vision that either transcends or transvalues what passes for current reality” (230). In part, this conservative aesthetic exists because in pornography, “as in the mind of a child,” “no distinction is made between thought and deed, wish and reality between what ought to exist, what one wants to exist, and what does in fact exist. It is a fantasy whose special preconditioning requirement is that it deny, delay, and stave off for as long as possible the recognition that it is a fantasy” (230). One characteristic of this fantasy is the fact that though

emotions are elicited by the presence of another person ... in pornography there is no “other person,” only oneself, the emotions—even the lust that one feels toward an actual living object, in contradistinction to the abstract and self-referential lust of fantasy—which might be expected to accompany a representation of sexual activities between two persons have no real place there and no real way of being expressed. (231)

Yet the logic of porn dictates that porn, “if it is to remain pornography and not transform itself into something else, must stop short of full explicitness.... It cannot explicitly state that it is only a bit of fantasy; it must remain within its self-enclosed universe, wherein it repeats, reconstructs, and spins out yet once again those immemorial fantasies which it cannot relinquish” (232).

However contradictorily it functions within porn, fantasy ultimately leads to Marcus’ famous concept of “pornotopia—the imagination of the entire universe beneath the sign of sexuality” (242). For Marcus, the very vagueness of porn, its abstractness, is intentional and is meant to render porn a lingua franca for sex itself (277, 269). For this reason, porn is the ultimate utopian gesture as it is set, often, in “no place,” or in a setting so generic, an “isolated castle” or a “secluded country estate,” that it might as well be anywhere (268). Indeed, Marcus presciently notes that this utopian space is mainly concerned with the number of possible combinations for sex and the “filling-in

or writing-out is largely a matter of adornment” (271). For this reason, “a pornographic novel might be written by a computer” (271). Finally, “[p]ornography is not interested in persons but in organs” (281) and is a genre whose “aim is to move us in the direction of action” (278) like an advertisement or an argument by Plato.

In a chapter on Victorian sexuality and the taste for poetry and fiction of flagellation, Marcus illustrates the complex connection that porn has to reality by analyzing the homoerotic subtext of much of this genre of writing. He notes that in this literature gender identity “is remarkably labile” (259), with boys and girls interchanging. The language, however, is very much that of the English public school and the ultimate fantasy hiding behind the scenario is a specifically homosexual one (260). Marcus theorizes that sadomasochistic literature met with less resistance than overtly homosexual equivalents but that both could help to bridge the gap between “conscious fantasy and action” (262). While this claim might not be true for, say, the erotic poetry of flagellation of Swinburne, which contained, like the poetry of Baudelaire, a worship of the dominant female, it does plausibly suggest a movement toward the representation of homosexuality by a pornographic loosening up of alternative sexualities in general, moving from the outer reaches of heterosexuality toward same-sex desire. In this sense, as well, Marcus may be said to be in accord with Foucault, especially with what might be considered a role that pornography plays in literally establishing a discourse of sexuality. While Foucault perhaps chastises Marcus for promulgating the repressive hypothesis of Freud, it is necessary for Foucault to establish this notion of the Victorians because, indeed, it was only by being repressed that sexuality could be forced into a discourse, one made possible by repressing sexuality as discourse via the confession, the court oath, and the medical diagnosis. As Marcus and others noted, Victorian sexuality was not really repressed, and the invention of homosexuality that Foucault postulates (and, hence, the invention of heterosexuality as well) assumes a form at least by the time of Oscar Wilde. His trial, however, disseminated it and, while destroying him, clearly created the homosexual as a type and sexuality as a new discourse born of homoeroticism.³⁶

On Pornography

In her essay “The Pornographic Imagination,” Susan Sontag also argues for the idea of pornography as a literary tradition, one that is contested as art, of having any sort of artistic merit at all.³⁷ Her goal, at least in part, is to define a space where porn might seem to be treated as serious cultural production, even a genre of art.³⁸ Perhaps typically, Sontag equates porn with avant-garde culture in particular in the sense that it was also equally mistreated and dismissed by the old guard as “the last of its noble, sterile line” (43). For her, pornography as a genre is no less functional than fantasy and shares with that genre the idea that what you are seeing is beyond the physical traits of most human beings (46). The acting in porn is “affectless, emotionless” as the “frenetic agitation” combined with “underacting” results in “self-canceling” (55). Porn shares a

vocabulary with silent films—a refusal to draw the audience in or to call attention to emotions lest they distract from the bodily. In this sense, the character of “O” in *Story of O* (1954) “does not simply become identical with her sexual availability, but wants to reach the perfection of becoming an object” (55), which she attains at the end of the book when she attends a party enchained and in disguise and no one recognizes her or thinks to talk with her (55). A fashionable Parisian who is whisked away to a mansion to be trained as a sexual slave, she is ultimately passed on from René to Sir Stephen, whom she falls in love with and who completes her transformation into someone who craves to be dominated. Earlier in the novel, O muses about René:

although he had so often told her that what he loved in her was the object he had made of her, her absolute availability to him, his freedom with respect to her, as one is free to dispose of a piece of furniture, which one enjoys giving as much as, and sometimes even more than, one may enjoy keeping it for oneself. (Réage 81)

The formerly anonymous novel that forms a cornerstone in the porn literary canon has become one of the main ways of understanding the BDSM aspect of porn.³⁹ The reference to a piece of furniture shows up in Kubrick’s famous design for the Korova Milk bar in *A Clockwork Orange*, which is itself referenced in *Eyes Wide Shut* when some of the women at the centerpiece orgy are filmed like tables or furniture. Kubrick’s film also features Venetian carnival masks and contains other details that could have come from the novel. Just as the film recounts the dream-like state of Dr. Bill and the actual dreams recounted by his wife, Alice, so too does *Story of O* depict a dream-like state for O. O feels “lost in a dream you have had before and are now beginning to dream all over again: certain that it exists and certain that it will end, and you want it to end because you’re not sure you’ll be able to bear it, and you also want it to go on so you’ll know how it comes out” (74). Like the opening shot of *Eyes Wide Shut*, with Nicole Kidman standing nude between two columns, O is led to a “tiny bedroom, newly painted, and hung with dark red silk. Half of the room was occupied by a rounded stage flanked by two columns” (169). The stage set of *Behind the Green Door* has become the lens of Kubrick’s camera, one that teases or instructs the audience that this view of Kidman is all they will see of her body, though her body is reproduced and mirrored throughout the movie in the form of other women. In the *Story of O*, O “heard Sir Stephen moving about in his room. She knew that he could see her, although she could not see him, and once again she felt that she was fortunate indeed to be constantly exposed this way, constantly imprisoned to these all-encompassing eyes” (192). Tom Cruise as Bill is a constantly cruising pair of eyes throughout the film, though he is ultimately cornered, unmasked, and subjected to the eyes of everyone at the party. His greatest fear, and ultimate punishment, is objectification. This point is driven home by Ziegler’s threats in the final scene between them when he alludes to what he knows about Bill’s identity. As for the woman who seemingly sacrifices herself for him, Mandy, Ziegler says that she merely “got her brains fucked out.” She becomes, like all the women at the party, or like O at the end of the book when three characters “helped O to her feet, led her to the middle of the courtyard, unfastened her chain and

removed her mask and, laying her back upon a table, possess her one after the other” (199). As in *Sade*, the serial sex continues, unabated, machine-like. In the novel, this conclusion is startling and seems almost poignant in the sense that the reality created in the novel has been transformative at the same time that it has seemed serial and unending. Unlike the Thanatos of Kubrick’s film, *Story of O* suggests that the drive of Eros is its own ultimate generator and conclusion (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).



Figure 3.2 Karova Milk Bar. *A Clockwork Orange*. Stanley Kubrick. 1971. Warner Brothers.



Figure 3.3 Orgy. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick. 1999. Warner Brothers.

Story of O and *Eyes Wide Shut* illustrate, in different ways, Sontag's point that "[w]hat pornographic literature does is precisely to drive a wedge between one's existence as a full human being and one's existence as a sexual being.... Normally we don't experience ... our sexual fulfillment as distinct from or opposed to our personal fulfillment. But perhaps in part they are distinct, whether we like it or not" (58). In *Story of O* this wedge is bondage and pure objectification. In *Eyes Wide Shut* it is the uncanny, the release from reality that negative emotions create. The death of a model or prostitute and the near-death of Bill align *Eyes Wide Shut* ultimately not with the writer of *Story of O* or even the death-obsessed Bataille but with Sontag's definition of Sade: "Death is the only end to the odyssey of the pornographic imagination when it becomes systematic; that is, when it becomes focused on the pleasures of transgression rather than mere pleasure itself" (62). Sade's "counter-idealisms" are, for Sontag, a stalling tactic, an attempt to never "arrive at his ending" (62). In that sense, perhaps, Sade actually fulfills a criticism Sontag says is often made of porn: that, following Theodor Adorno, it is always without a beginning, middle, or end (63). But Sade's end is in the asides, the critiques of Enlightenment, and, finally, in death itself. Only death can result in an ending. Though in *Story of O*, which she calls a "tragedy," that is not what actually happens. But what Sade, Kubrick, *Story of O*, and other canonical pornographic texts do is to show that the porn universe is a totalizing one and one that exists, perhaps like fantasy, in parallel to our own. It is not the future, though it may often seem to be in that mainstream mediated porn can be a subtle barometer of the present. In reality, though, porn is another world, one that exists in our minds, like dreams that have become real, but that do not always cross over. Sometimes they might, in the bedroom, or in a work of art, like *Eyes Wide Shut*, where dream and reality are interpenetrated, but normally the purpose of porn is to allow us to examine problems and find solutions by removing barriers between the conscious and unconscious minds, or between the personal and the public, the law and the non-law, the family and the other, male and female, life and death. As Sontag astutely concludes:

The universe proposed by the pornographic imagination is a total universe. It has the power to ingest and metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything into the one negotiable currency of the erotic imperative. All action is conceived of as a set of sexual exchanges. Thus, the reason why pornography refuses to make fixed distinctions between the sexes or allow any kind of sexual preference or sexual taboo to endure can be explained "structurally." The bisexuality, the disregard for the incest taboo, and other similar features common to pornographic narratives function to multiply the possibilities of exchange. Ideally it should be possible for everyone to have a sexual connection with everyone else. (66-7)

Story of O has never really left the porn world, endlessly acting as a reference point, especially for Sadean BDSM scenarios. One potent update is the *Story of Joanna* (1975), directed by Gerard Damiano, who also made *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* among other classics of the Golden Age of Porn. Set in the eighteenth century, with unusually

high production values for a porn film, it follows the plot of the story in many respects. Like *Eyes Wide Shut*, it contains the book's focus on sexual pedagogy, which showed up in parodic form in *Misty Beethoven*. In this film we also have a dream sequence and two orgies, the first of which Jason (Jamie Gillis), the male protagonist, observes fully clothed. The one difference between the book and the film is that over the course of the latter, we have voiceover narration in the form of a letter being written by Jason, "my little game." We learn that though he never says he loves her, he has left her a gift. At the end of the movie, Joanna (Terri Hall) reads the letter and comes into his study to confront him. The gift is an eighteenth-century pistol that she places to her throat, but he moves it to his own mouth and fires. The servant, Griffin (Zebedy Colt), rushes in. "It was an accident," she says. Just remove that." She takes over the position of dominance. "Dinner is to be served at the usual hour," she tells him. "Yes, Madam," he replies.

Sade, Bataille, Adorno

Sontag's interest in what *Story of O* can tell us about how porn functions owes a debt to work in critical theory that has attempted to historicize porn and its relationship to literature and the role of the individual subject in society at large. In Laurence O'Toole's historical overview of porn history, legal context, and cultural production, *Pornocopia*, he argues that porn was originally controlled in early modern Europe not because of its sexual content but because of its political content, its ability to parody and question ideas that were considered unassailable (1). From an early point, porn was also associated with the politics of gender since women, far from the shy, retiring maids of domesticity, appear in porn as interested in nonprocreative sex and inhabit spaces that are obviously not differentiated by gender (3). In a discussion of the function of sex in the future as represented in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Adorno observes:

Huxley has recognized the contradiction that in a society where sexual taboos have lost their intrinsic force and have either retreated before the permissibility of the prohibited or come to be enforced by external compulsion, pleasure itself degenerates to the misery of "fun" and to an occasion for the narcissistic satisfaction of having "had" this or that person. Through the institutionalization of promiscuity, sex becomes a matter of indifference, and even escape from society is relocated within its borders. (103)

In other words, "He fails to distinguish between the liberation of sexuality and its debasement" (103). Adorno thinks that Huxley's desire for sexual liberation based on Sade would not be possible in a totalitarian state: "All dictators have proscribed libertinage" (105). But a dictator can't have the rights "of all over all" when you have the power of one over all.

Like Adorno, Bataille believes that taboos no longer have any justification. As he notes, “If the taboo loses its force, if it is no longer believed in, transgression is impossible; but the feeling of transgression persists if only through sexual aberrations” (*Eroticism* 140). Here and elsewhere Bataille explains why taboos are inadequate—morality doesn’t matter; sexuality can only be aberrant. In the orgy scene in *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick makes clear that the sexual taboos of the secret society shown in the film are clearly outside of normal society. Dr. Harford has stumbled into a situation in which eroticism itself is deconstructed. As Bataille argues, “A pretty girl stripped naked is sometimes an erotic symbol. The object of desire is different from eroticism itself; it is not eroticism in its completeness, but eroticism working through it” (130).⁴⁰ Kubrick is making the same claim in his film. The women at the party are seemingly prostitutes hired for the occasion. As Bataille notes:

What prostitution puts forward as an object of desire (prostitution in itself is simply this offering of something as an object of desire), but fails to supply (if it is the prostitution of degradation and makes something foul of it), is there as something to be possessed. Beauty is its meaning, what gives it its value, and indeed the element that makes it desirable. (142)

The women are a part of the erotic system that seems to be in place at the Mansion, but they are unable to fulfil it; they are mere symbols of it. They are objects of desire but also objects for sale. As Bataille notes about Sade’s notion of the “sovereign man,” we have no equivalent now of the riches and excesses of kings:

The kind of sexuality he has in mind runs counter to the desires of other people (of almost all others, that is); they are to be victims, not partners. De Sade makes his heroes uniquely self-centered; the partners are denied any rights at all: this is the key to his system. If eroticism leads to harmony between the partners its essential principle of violence and death is invalidated. Sexual union is fundamentally a compromise, a half-way house between life and death. Communion between the participants is a limiting factor and must be ruptured before the true violent nature of eroticism can be seen, whose translation into practice corresponds with the notion of the sovereign man. The man subject to no restraints of any kind falls on his victims with the devouring fury of a vicious hound. (167)

“De Sade’s system,” therefore,

is the ruinous form of eroticism. Moral isolation means that all the brakes are off, it shows what spending can really mean. The man who admits the value of other people necessarily imposes limits upon himself. Respect for others hinders him and prevents him from measuring the fullest extent of the only aspiration he has that does not bow to his desire to increase his moral and material resources. (171)

The women at the orgy complete the logic of Sade: they are merely there to act as victims, not partners. In this sense, the death of Mandy, or of one of the women there, whether staged or real, is the logical end to the evening. Bill's mixing of death and sex, which culminates with his visit to the morgue, is the inevitable trajectory toward which the film leads: the kiss by Marion's father's body; the kiss from HIV-positive Domino; and the realization, when he returns home the second time and sees his mask beside his wife, taking his place in their bed, that he has subjected her and his daughter to the possibility of death. Yet, despite the limitations of Sade's system, Bataille gives credit to his legacy:

De Sade knew nothing about the basic interrelation of taboo and transgression, opposite and complementary concepts. But he took the first step. This general mechanism could not be completely comprehended until we finally and tardily arrived at an understanding of the paradox of taboo and transgression. De Sade expounded his doctrine of irregularity in such a way, mingled with such horrors, that no one paid any heed to it. He wanted to revolt our conscious minds, he would also have liked to enlighten them but he could not do both at the same time. It is only today we realise that without de Sade's cruelty we should never have penetrated with such ease the once inaccessible domain where the most painful truths lay hidden. [...] The deep-seated unity of our nature is the last thing to appear. And if today the average man has a profound insight into what transgression means for him, de Sade was the one who made ready the path. Now the average man knows that he must become aware of the things which repel him most violently—those things which repel us most violently are part of our own nature. (196)

Roland Barthes theorizes that Bataille's work of surreality, "*Histoire du l'oeil*, is actually the story of an object" (*Critical Essays* 239). "Do all these signifiers 'in series' refer to a stable signified, the more sacred for being buried under a whole architecture of masks?" (241–2). Barthes explains that the way that Bataille's story works is through metonymy as Sade uses a "syntagmatic" approach in which a few scenarios are exhausted in an encyclopedic way. Bataille thinks like a modernist, fixating on a few metaphors that are really metonyms (eye, sun, anus, egg; urine, running egg yolk, semen, etc.) to create a different kind of narrative structure in which all possibilities are linked: "By metonymic exchange, Bataille exhausts a metaphor, doubtless a double metaphor, each chain of which is weakly saturated" (246).⁴¹ As in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the chain of signifiers is a series of beautiful female bodies, mostly with red hair. The various scenarios are exhausted—each one is both different and the same, crossing sex with death. The orgy's various sexual *tableaux* are the same as the masks—a veil across reality, a dream that blurs the edges of identity. Eroticism is, finally, a system in the film—a logic that is never-ending in which the object is unattainable.⁴² Sex is a substitute for more sex.

In his astute book on Sade, William S. Allen makes the case for Sade's extreme literary experimentation. Well before Marx, Sade seemed to understand that the material world was the basis of modernity and his novels mainly thought experiments

in which he “examin[ed] the scope of empiricism, as it is revealed through the mode of an eroticized and autonomous touch” (2). In this regard:

Literature becomes the field for this experimentation in sensibility, which, in the form of eroticism, is guided by its explosive and contagious sensuality as by its materiality. Erotic Literature is a laboratory for a particularly extreme kind of materialist thinking, which is made apparent in its reading as much as in its writing. The significance of this point is carried further with the realization that erotica does not merely demonstrate a preexisting model of sensibility but extends and transforms it by way of its own logic or desires. This transformation will have its effects on the nature of the materialist vision that then ensues and will make the issue of why Sade writes as he does more understandable. (2)

Indeed, Sade’s style of writing is extremely nondescript, almost completely lacking in allusion or any literary pretense whatsoever. This very flatness and lack of affect allows for the language of pornography to remain unmediated and to have a direct effect on the reader. As Allen notes, Adorno argued that one could read Sade or any other pornography in a foreign language, and it would make no difference—the meaning would come through. Porn works on the body, not the mind, and the less conceptual the language, the better. As Allen summarizes Adorno, “this experience is like that of a sleepwalker (*nachtwandler*) who is able to follow paths and avoid obstacles without being aware of them, the implication [is] that the presence of sexuality in language acts as a mimetic guideline, supplying an unconscious erotic pressure that enables the reader to follow what is going on even without the ability to translate it” (30). Much like Bill Harford in *Eyes Wide Shut*, in other words, who follows his erotic desires as a literal night wanderer, gets lost but at the same time is pushed forward by events and their concomitant dangers that he doesn’t understand. Eroticism, like death, contains a mystery in the Freudian sense, but also a path that functions by its own logic. The film, like any pornographic medium, works by its own generic rules. As Allen notes, “pornography is a very strange form of writing as it seeks to displace itself in favour or actuality, it seeks to actualize itself, almost according to Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, as a form of writing that is not content with discussing change but wishes to bring it about” (35–6).

Sade is not Hegel, however, and his materialism does not define a phenomenology of spirit. There is no hierarchy in Sade’s writing. His materialism is completely horizontal. One excess leads to another in an endless chain. Gender and sexuality are subjected to “extreme denormalization” (Allen 58). Sade does not privilege one gender or one sexuality over another. What matters is the instrumentality of writing itself—its ability to affect the world and the limits of reason, in particular. In Sade’s writing, discussions are endless and form chains that interlock as a series of Deleuzian rhizomes. Sex spreads like a contagion, running through bodies and creating a materialism that is not based on “mechanism” and does not connect to “a transcendent state” (73). His alternative model “displaces the Enlightenment thought of reason into a nonhuman context” (73). Freed from teleology, the seeming perversity of the Sadean body is

simply the body without limits, without some sort of goal. Sade charts “the materiality of desire,” which forces the realization that consciousness cannot be freed from the body and that, while we can displace the body onto something like literature, we can only, at best, try to come up with a new way of thinking, of philosophizing. Desire warps reality and our ability to think about it. This new reality is what Sade hopes to represent: “Desire, when taken literally, bears its own form of truth and realism, which deforms experience according to its exact material fantasies and involves reason in the turmoil of a nature without humanity” (78).

It is important to keep in mind that in Sade, as in porn, thought mirrors nature in its endless proliferation of invention and destruction. The language must remain neutral. Sade finds a way to represent language outside of conceptualization, but it is not without meaning. It “appears as a proliferation of contingency, which is strictly neutral in regards to thought and exposes it to extremity as such, as the best or the worst” (Allen 107). Again, this effect is possible in literature by ignoring the idea of any exterior “aim or value” (107). The neutral nature of the language bleeds over into the narrative as well. Sade’s scenes begin and end abruptly, a structural necessity for creating the sense of endlessness that Sade wanted in his narrative. As Allen theorizes:

The scene stops in order to restart, to recover the movement that enables it to escalate. Hence it is not just the erotic imperative that drives the episodic structure of Sade’s writing, or if it is it exceeds itself by indicating how excess as such occurs by way of writing, which may explain his unconventional use of erotica. This is not writing that seeks just to arouse, rather it is intent on pursuing excess for its own sake, excess in any and all forms, which necessarily involves sex and violence but is not limited to them. (113)

Sade’s narrative structure, in other words, mirrors the build-up and release of sex itself and seems the harbinger of the pornographic film, which is likewise scenic, but builds toward some sort of scene or complexity that is completely a function of the logic of its own desire.

Sade’s materialism, therefore, emphasizes the body and the multiplicity of sexual experience. While anticipating the commodification of the body, Sade also understands its stubborn resistance (Allen 127). His notion of materialism, however, sees desire as inherently anti-social. In that sense, his work is incompatible with Marx’s idea of materiality as only comprehensible within the social or the communal. The Surrealists tried to bridge that gap, but it is probably Adorno and the Frankfurt School, with their emphasis on “the materiality of desire and the imagination” (138), that come closest to making Sade’s thinking compatible with a Marxist tradition. Sade, however, rejects art and resists it in his writing. In that sense, he does not achieve the permanence that Adorno reserves for art; Sade is purposefully entertainment, “pre- or anti-artistic” (138). Sade sees the world as it is, which includes domination. He does not see it idealistically. In some ways he concurs with Adorno, who sees the world only in terms of negative critique. As Allen

notes, “Thought always operates from within the current world and so can only offer a negative critique; equally it cannot offer a leap into that which is otherwise, thought can only point to transformations within the world where its contingent material alternatives are exposed” (139). How to bring praxis to theory is one of the problems that plagued the Frankfurt School, but Adorno, uniquely, saw that the only way out might be to look at the point where sexuality and taboo meet to see where theory and praxis might be critiqued. In Sade’s writing historical dialectics are disrupted and a new form of thinking is made possible, which is to say that “Sade’s writings become something other than literature, by way of literature; they become a mode of engaging with the world and bringing about change” (140). For Adorno, art must contain anti-art, and Sade’s writing continuously undoes itself, creating violence that goes beyond its form as literature to affect life itself. As literature, it has no meaning, only effect on the reader. It is its own experience. For Adorno, this might be a form of art, but what Sade creates is “a formlessness that comprises both materiality and abstraction” (141).

The anti-art of Sade is, of course, present in the difficulty of reading his texts. Sade does not offer the traditional notion of the pleasure of the text but, rather, continually tests the reader by distancing them from the libertines, whose cruelty becomes ever worse, and by the ramping up of violence as the text works its way through ever more extreme taboos to break from. The text shatters social meaning and asks why we expect art to be a vessel of morality, a place to monitor desire or say what can and cannot be thought. One is left in a text by Sade with longing, in the “formlessness of literary space as that which comes from nowhere and goes nowhere and knows no other logic than one of going on and further. The autonomy of literary space is, like that of desire, impelled by the constant self-stimulation of the movement of language” (Allen 144). Not a textual thinker like Barthes, Sade sees literature as “a field without external limits” (145). Its material has meaning but is not based on exteriority. Its contagion-like movement is, like criminality, an “influence [that] carries on” (156). For “Sade’s understanding of erotica ... is grounded in this sense of criminality as a self-propagating contagion, which allows for persistence without continuity or tradition, *historie* but not history” (156).⁴³

Barthes sees Sade’s writing as unable to deal with physical beauty except in the most generic way. He notes that the beauty of the body can only be understood by Sade “by means of cultural references” (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 127). Part of this conundrum is built into language itself, and, I would argue, all representations of the body, in whatever medium:

Being analytical, language can come to grips with the body only if it cuts it up; the total body is outside language, only pieces of the body succeed to writing; in order to *make* a body *seen*, it must either be displaced, refracted through the metonymy of clothing, or reduced to one of its parts; now the description becomes visionary, the felicity of the utterance is re-established (perhaps because there exists a fetish vocation of language). (127)

Sade's solution, according to Barthes, is to theatricalize the body, much like the use of lighting on a stage, rendering it beautiful from a distance as a totality. The essence of "Sadian eroticism," however, "is the saturation of every area of the body: one tries to employ (to occupy) every separate part. This is the same problem the sentence faces (in which respect we have to speak of a Sadian erotography, there being no distinction between the structure of ejaculation and that of language)" (129). Indeed, for Barthes, what he calls Sade's "*pornography*" is the fact that "libidinous practice is a true text" (133). It is not "the discourse being sustained on amorous acts, but this tissue of erotic figures, cut up and combined like rhetorical figures of the written discourse" (133). The "crudity" of Sade's diction, as Barthes describes it, is almost utopian. It is "a discourse *outside meaning*"—one that is "stubbornly determined not to signify" (134). Words for objects that might seem disgusting in another context are giving meaning in Sade's text according to the subject. To the Libertine, almost anything might be given a positive connotation. At the same time, the locally contingent meaning of a word seems "to believe in the possibility of a subject-less lexicon" (134). In this sense, it does achieve a kind of utopian poetic possibility. The overall structure of Sade's novels, according to Barthes, is "rhapsodic" in that they consist of "purely and simply juxtaposing iterative and mobile fragments" (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 140). There is no order, only confusion. As Allen argues, Barthes thinks the novels have "no *meaning* or *direction*, nothing compels it to progress, develop, end" (140). Barthes goes as far as to claim that *Juliette* (1797–1801) and *Justine* (1791) show, in fact, a "disrespect" (150) for the novel form itself. He notes that they bear the same relationship to the novel form that cruising does to real love (150).

Sade writes anti-novels, in other words, or writes against the narrative. For this reason, there is no striptease in Sade, as that would assume a narrative. There is no mystery to reveal, no conclusion to get to. Bodies are simply naked, there for all of their orifices to be used. The end point is not orgasm, which would be "the unveiling of truth" but "ejaculation" (Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 158). Sade's "materialistic" (158) language makes clear that the body is not a mystery. In fact, this materialism carries over into the body as machine. As Barthes notes, Sade takes the body well beyond the notion of the automaton, a very eighteenth-century fascination, to entire sexual scenarios in which people work together to form a well-run system at the heart of which is usually one person (Justine, say) to whom is added different partners who themselves have more people added, etc. (152). The machine is architectural but also communal in that no one is allowed to remain outside of it (153). The ultimate expression of the architecture of the machine within Sade's writing may well be the *tableau vivant*, which emphasizes the theatrical aspects of Sade's pornography and raises questions about visual art and writing. Barthes points out that the *tableau* ultimately freezes a scene into a painting, one that suggests that there is an observer outside the frame watching or looking at the frozen moment. While *tableaux* exist in Sade, they are contrasted with scenes of movement, and with the latter, the watcher lifts from their chair and enters the action (154–5). Sade's writing, therefore, marks a moment when we pass from the classical notion of the object to be contemplated to the modern one of the "scene" (156), from painting to film, or from spectator to the audience interacting with

the actors. Like *Marat/Sade* (1963) or *Behind the Green Door*, we have a “production” in which the two sides of the stage disappear, the materiality of the bodies makes the tableau real, and the act of labor, which disappears in realism, is visible once figuration disappears into the abstract, or into writing (156).

Notes

- 1 The Greek ideal lives on, to some extent, in male fashion models, whose bodies often exhibit a modern version of the same proportion and restraint.
- 2 See, for example, Forberg, *Manual of Erotology*.
- 3 For Foucault, what distinguished heterosexual sex from homosexual sex was the tradition of the romance. For many centuries, the goal of courtship was love which was physically embodied by sex. For gay men, however, the sexual act was free from this tradition, at least in modern times (*Ethics* 149). One might say, however, that the great chroniclers of the sexual act itself are all gay writers—Foucault names Cocteau, Genet, Burroughs (150)—who have had a chance to look at sexuality as an act rather than an emotion. What is interesting to consider is what has happened to both heterosexual and homosexual sex in an age when neither is, arguably, burdened by the courtship narrative, when sex can be had readily via technology and changing moral narratives? For Foucault, the answer is that the energy that was previously channeled into courtship is now put into the sexual act itself (151). Foucault’s own prescriptions for escaping from the boredom of this situation are BDSM and the possibility of exploring the sexualization of parts of the body normally considered ancillary to sex as well as the possibility of new definitions of pleasure—something he claims we have not really defined for our modern time (269). For Foucault, who died in 1984, one objective that was clearly not on his mind was gay marriage. Indeed, he saw the redefinition of relationships—the possibility of expanding the notion of what we legally call marriage, family, adoption was necessary to “fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric” (158). Like Sedgwick in some of her last published work, Foucault did not see the conservative institution of marriage as a useful paradigm for gay relationships. See, for example, Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust*, 200–1.
- 4 At least in Roman art and representation tied to Priapus, whose large, unusable penis was both mocked and used as a symbol of fertility and good luck.
- 5 As Peter Lehman notes, if anything, art, nude photography, and porn have long misrepresented the flaccid penis as exposing much more of the shaft than happens in real life: “The normative representation of the flaccid penis . . . usually shows a penis with a significant portion of the shaft prominently displayed hanging down in front of the scrotum, covering much or all of it” (112). So common and persistent is this representation that it is culturally assumed to be anatomically true, even though it isn’t. Lehman wonders where one might find images of the “unregulated penis,” and indeed, despite the plethora of images of penises on the internet, it is not as easy to find as one might suppose. While Lehman, to some extent, points to DIY sources, a better one might be BDSM websites like Kink.com, where the actors are also amateur and involved with the pornographic activities of the site for reasons that have to do not so much with genitalia as with the imbrication of the body into narrative. This

is not to say that the people filmed for Kink.com are not uncommonly attractive; they often are, but they do not fit the type of the standard porn star, where the size of certain body parts obviously supersede other physical considerations, especially plausibility. The people on Kink.com do look like real people, if, perhaps, especially fit people who fit the standard norms of physical beauty.

- 6 While Cortázar makes a distinction between the false dichotomy of “eroticism” and “pornography,” he does argue correctly that “[i]n Greek and Latin thought, human erotic activity is on exactly the same level as any other activity: it is part of the totality of being human” (220). In ancient literature, “eroticism is never a subject that one is obliged to handle with care” (220).
- 7 One may well ask what porn scenarios are for: Do they exist to incite sex or masturbation? Does excitement only exist within the fantasy? Studies show that male viewers don’t always identify with the male actor (O’Toole 43). Porn can also be seen as the utopian fantasy of sex with strangers: the cruise and the excitement of sex as something with someone who is attractive but not a knockout—the girl or boy next door. This kind of excitement creates a connection between people—inclusion, a kind of networking. It is not surprising that this scenario often shows up in porn, though not always with actors who would really fit the notion of “everyday” or ordinary attractiveness. In some mainstream films or avant-garde porn—perhaps ones that emphasize “nakedness” over “porn”—you can get some version of this body, and the effect can be more erotic than porn.
- 8 Currently available on XNXX.com and elsewhere. The actor has an orgasm at the following minute marks: 20, 32.50, and 42.40.
- 9 As Zabet Patterson notes,

The loss of control of the amateur is contrasted to the control of the professional—and it is the loss of control that guarantees the realness of the sex. It also demonstrates ... the photographer (and, by extension, the viewer) is turned on by seeing something the girl [performer] does not necessarily want to reveal, something that goes past the performance of sex. The pleasure, then, comes from the “real” pleasure of the other. (116)

Or, as Patterson argues later, “What this suggests is a situation in contemporary culture in which people displace their enjoyment onto others; that what they enjoy seeing in pornography is not necessarily the impulse toward masturbation, but precisely the experience of seeing, and having, someone else enjoying in their place” (119).

- 10 As Amelia Ziv argues:

Quite obviously, the figure of the dildo in the nascent genre of lesbian video porn draws on the figure of the erect penis in the established tradition of straight porn and explores its erotic valences. Linda Williams asserts that in the new lesbian pornography “the dildo is a fetish if ever there was one” ... yet she also regards fetishism as the defining characteristic of the representation of the penis in heterosexual pornography. For Williams, the penis itself, and particularly the ejaculating penis, which has become a sine qua non of hardcore porn, is a cinematic fetish. (162)

The money shot, according to Williams, is an attempt to embody an extremely literal substitute for the Freudian “mythic phallus”(162). She concludes:

But if the pornographic penis attempts to embody the fantasy phallus, which is itself, as Judith Butler notes, an idealization of male morphology, then the often remarkably long and certainly perpetually hard dildo is an even more perfect approximation of the phallus than the erect penis. Lesbian dildo fetishism, through its mimetic relation to penile fetishism, thus serves to expose the cultural fetishization of the male member itself. If fetishism is defined as overvaluation, then the idealization of the penis as the phallus is a form of fetishism. And Freudian psychoanalysis both plays a major role in the cultural fetishization of the penis and functions to occlude this fetishization by taking the overvaluation of the penis for granted. (162)

This is another explanation of what is happening in this short film.

- 11 In an overview of Oshima's career, critic Jonathan Rosenbaum refers to *In the Realm of the Senses* and *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* as Oshima's two "hard-core porn" films. He notes that *Senses* is "based on the true 1936 story of renegade prostitute Sada Abe, who erotically asphyxiated her lover Kichizo Ishida with his seeming complicity, then severed his penis and testicles and carried them around in her purse for several days" (343). "It may qualify as his most celebratory feature, in its emphasis on the pleasure and rapture of sex." For more on *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, see my discussion in *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie*, chapter five.

- 12 Cf. Ziv:

I have argued that in female-authored porn an investment in gay male masculinity and homoeroticism functions as a phantasmatic strategy that enables women to recode their sexuality and thus gain symbolic access to sexual subjectivity. When such an investment is naturalized and closed off to integration and masculine identifications are consolidated in identitarian terms, their function in the project of articulating female sexual subjectivity is obscured. (225)

- 13 The paranoid-schizoid personality that is the basis of Hocquenghem's theory can perhaps be rethought in terms of Sedgwick's discussion of Melanie Klein's theory of affects. According to Sedgwick, Klein "is fearfully attuned to human relations that are driven by the uncontrollable engines of resentment" ("Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes" 636). Sedgwick notes especially the primitive defense mechanisms associated with the paranoid-schizophrenic defense, most importantly, projection, and "the prophylactic need to split good from bad, the aggressive expulsion of intolerable parts of oneself onto—or, in Klein's more graphic locution, *into*—the person who is taken as an object" (636). The goal is power over the object by the one practicing the "projective identification" and for Sedgwick the strategy is essentially an adult version of Nietzschean resentment. It is key to understanding, among other things, politics, which may well be a part of Hocquenghem's theorizing of FHAR and of the politics of sexuality and gender as well. Hocquenghem makes clear that he is trying to sort out the female in his maleness, open to the possibility that it is there and needs to be understood while at the same time attempting to define maleness and femaleness in paranoid ways that attempt to control what he sees by splitting them in two and then reinserting them in different bodies—or into the one, himself. As Sedgwick concludes: "Projective identification is related

- to Freudian project but more uncannily intrusive: for Freud, when I've projected my hostility onto you, I believe that *you dislike me*; for Klein, additionally, when I've projected my hostility *into* you, you *will* dislike me" (636). While the paranoid-schizoid stance is superseded in Klein's writing by the depressive, which mitigates some anxiety, the paranoid-schizophrenic state is "marked by instability, hatred, envy, and anxiety ... a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into the world around one, and vice versa" (636).
- 14 For porn sites, sexuality is always already a marketing tool. It is fragmented by sex acts, which might be defined by sex (or sexuality), but is part of a different way to define sex itself—as an act or even new type of identity. If you want "fisting" do you mean vaginal or anal? If the latter, women or men? If you mean extreme fisting, do you mean prolapse? The possibilities are not endless, but they do represent a very different way to map desire, and their complete lack of interest in gender or sexuality is an almost machinic way in which computers dial up sex that is not open to interpretation. It is, however, scripted and made into something that gives the illusion of choice. For more on this, see my discussion in the coda of *The Dissolution of Place: Architecture, Identity, and the Body*.
 - 15 I was struck by this possibility when discussing porn with a friend who listened to a podcast about porn and had had a great deal of heterosexual sex, especially while younger, some of which was decidedly outside the norms of what most people actually experience (numerous, and quite regular, threesomes, for example). I was somewhat surprised to hear those details that would suffice to allow him successfully to masturbate. They were, perhaps not surprisingly, such details as large breasts on the female actor. There was nothing about the overall scenario that was outside the typical clichés of porn, certainly nothing that suggested a particularly refined sense of what constituted sex—or art, for that matter. While this realization might say more about this individual than anything else, it does suggest that porn scenarios need to be anything but exotic or imaginative to work successfully for most viewers.
 - 16 It is becoming more common for articles on the percentage of the population that self-identifies as gay or lesbian is much lower than post people think—possibly under 10 percent. While this percentage may be much higher for young people, it is exaggerated by conservative media in reference to the US population as a whole.
 - 17 Sedgwick questions the extent to which biological (chromosomal) sexes can even be considered "opposite" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 28). She often used to speak of thinking the sexes' relationship to each other as orthogonal.
 - 18 *The Origin of the World* (1866) by Gustave Courbet can be seen and examined at https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire/commentaire_id/the-origin-of-the-world-3122.html.
 - 19 See, for example, *The Dead Toreador* (1860s) and other paintings by Édouard Manet available at <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1179.html>.
 - 20 "According to Foucault, Manet made every painting a commentary on painting itself, a situation already predicted by the turned canvas in the picture by Velazquez, where painting began to depart from its former and traditional manner of showing itself as meaning" (Soussloff 53). This opening up of the possibility of new meaning in painting is one that Foucault marks as making not only painting after Impressionism possible but contemporary art itself (54). Manet opens up a theoretical space between the painting as a representation of an object and the painting becoming an object

itself. As in Kubrick's films, the painting forms a tableau, which is significantly not a collection of images but a single unitary one. As explained by Louis Marin,

the referent is not the objective referent from the actual world, for example, the thing referred to is not an object of the world but the *tableau* itself. The entire *tableau* is thus a referent, which is also the pictorial artifact. But the *tableau* is also a designator, in which the designated, that is, the depicted form, is the pictorial instance that contains it. (Soussloff 40)

One only need look at the “shadows, light, spaces” on the margins of Manet's paintings to see this effect (57). As Foucault writes in his chapter on *Las Meninas*,

Here, the very action of representation consists in bringing one of these two forms of invisibility into the place of the other, in an unstable superimposition—and in rendering them both, at the same moment, at the other extremity of the picture—at that pole which is the very height of its representation: that of a reflected depth in the far recess of the painting's depth. (*The Order of Things* 8)

The inclusion of a mirror by Velasquez in the painting allows for a “metathesis of visibility that affects both the space represented in the picture and its nature as representation: it allows us to see, in the centre of the canvas, what in the painting is of necessity doubly invisible” (8). This effect can be seen especially in Manet's early penchant for the use of black paint, which provides an unstable depth in the painting—a depth that perhaps seems to push out from the surface toward the viewer. It is also, for Foucault, a masking effect that hides, especially, female sexuality—from *The Balcony* to *Olympia*—and perhaps most especially in *The Masked Ball at the Opera*, “Where the actual black masks worn by the figures in the painting serve also to mask them as individualized subjects” (Soussloff 64). As with Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, the paintings of Manet register what Foucault thinks of as the visible and the invisible, but which we could also see as the tension between the photograph and the painting, or the photographic and the event. The “strata” create a history that is a part of art history (113).

- 21 Whether art film or mainstream porn film, the celluloid movies of the 1970s became to some extent completely different things with the advent of videocassettes and the video distribution system of the 1980s. As has been often remarked, the ability to make porn a private viewing experience changed the genre in profound ways, leading to the CD and then, finally, the rise of internet porn. In some ways, the internet has brought us back to loops, away from the full-length movie. In other ways, it has allowed for viewers exposure to earlier porn classics, such as those from the 1970s, though now seen, as David Church describes, as a form of “vintage” porn that emphasizes their “historicity” (132). While 1970s porn is placed within a context that emphasizes the superficial aspects of its period details, by putting porn from the past with porn from the present, porn sites manage also to suggest the universal, unchanging nature of most sex acts. This context works against the temporal one and perhaps is strangely comforting to some viewers. The work of the scholar, or of the porn aficionado, is to read the text, subtext, and context of older porn films all at the same time. In the case of 1970s, this means reading the parts of the film only within their original theatrical running time, not as a series of discrete scenes separated from the larger work.

- 22 Cruz also claims that films changed briefly in response to the definition of porn as needing “redeeming social value” (127). One might say that in this sense the porn film genre began to try to make legitimate art—or at least the patina of such, which meant plots, better acting, more expensive sets, etc.—the opposite, if you will, of literary trials for obscenity that ground the true artistic merit at the center of the novel. Inadvertently, though, this legal definition may have led to the opportunity for porn to actually stretch into a more artistic realm anyway—or at least create more pretentious movies. Mainstream cinema sees the sexual revolution as dysfunctional; the results are feminism, gay rights, etc. The cinema of the 1960s is pure misogyny, but this changes in the 1970s when Hollywood ceases to care about normal couples.
- 23 Frederic Raphael notes that Kubrick sent him Helmut Newton photos of clothed men and naked women as a possible inspiration for the screenplay (112).
- 24 In an interesting read of the scene with Keyes, Cruz sees the film through a BDSM perspective and Keyes’ sex with Chambers as “revenge pornography” “in which racial humiliation takes a starring role” (129). “However vexed Keyes’s commentary is, it conveys a lust for revenge that speaks to the explicit fantasies of racist violence that animate performances of black-white interracial sex in modern pornography” (130).
- 25 The money shot itself plays a complex role within the economy of the porn scene. While on the one hand it proves the reality of sex, or at least orgasm, for the male character, it also splits him into two pieces—the erect penis, which produces cum, and the face, which registers the pleasure of coming. The subjectivity of the actor is fragmented into images, close-ups, and details (Aydemir 97). The money shot is itself an example both of literal narrativity that ends in telos and of literal narrativity that ends in a loop that never ends but always returns and repeats (111). Linda Williams’ notion of a cum shot in straight porn is that the male performer’s ejaculation closes the narrative (in its generic linearity), but the split subjectivity of the money shot also suggests the polymorphously perverse pleasure of repetition and masturbation. Unable to show female pleasure—or to authenticate it—the straight porn film, which aims to make female pleasure visible, has to resort to its analogue—making male pleasure literally in your face. (How might the money shot, for example, read differently in an edging video? Does that genre, assuming that it shows the man in full, unsplit the signifier?) Patterson sees male porn performers as taking pride in the precision of their performances—being able to come where and when they are told (Aydemir 115). There is an instrumentality to their performance of control. But if the actors have power from this control, how does their masculinity get made and unmade by the shot? What might it mean for gay porn, again, such as edging porn, where the control is putatively (literally) in the hands of the “master”? Another way to see the cum shot is as a break with narrativity—a sudden self-conscious moment when the viewer is reminded that they are watching a film (126). It is also a material event that alters the performer’s body and makes visible his presence in the film in a different way (117). Whether or not the release of cum anchors the actor or allows him to drift away, out of the film, is another matter. Does it suggest meaning or nonmeaning (119)? Does it matter? Since masculinity does not inhere in cum or the cum shot, it may well hover over the scene (120). The sticky substance, after all, does not necessarily stick to the penis (122). On the other hand, the lack of meaning may adhere in the form of the materiality of the ejaculate and the visual experience of it, which may be pleasurable by themselves (127). The break in realism that is the cum

shot is almost Brechtian in that it is meant mainly for the audience and ultimately completes a circuit with them—a promise to give the attention to them. Ultimately, the money shot is a form of masturbation that involves the hand as much as the penis. If the money shot featured coming without the aid of the hands or any other type of instrument, the male body's orgasm would seem reactive and pleasurable rather than active and controlling (128). The body might appear vulnerable, enveloped in a spasm of jouissance. Instead, the typical money shot suspends masculinity between real, awkward materiality—real semen and sperm—and the instrumentality of the image (133).

- 26 According to Keyes, he thrust for forty-three minutes (Pryor).
 27 See, for example, my work on *Diamonds Are Forever* in chapter four of *The Dissolution of Place: Architecture, Identity, and the Body*.
 28 Pasolini's pre-Trilogy and Trilogy periods featured exotic landscape—Morocco for *Oedipus*, Turkey for *Medea*—but *Arabian Nights* was filmed in multiple places that might have been the basis for the original tales. These films are dream-like, tales within tales.
 29 The extensive inclusion of the male body, especially, served a gay-rights agenda. Pasolini was making meta-cinema, as he says in one interview, and puts himself in the first two movies as an artist.
 30 For more on this concept, see chapter nine of the new edition of *Demand the Impossible*, in which Moylan discusses the term in relation to Aldous Huxley.
 31 For more on *The Wild Boys* see my discussion in *Future Nostalgia: Performing David Bowie*, chapter six.
 32 Cf. Jonas Mekas on *Flaming Creatures* (1963):

And still, when you look back now at *Flaming Creatures*, from all this perspective, it remains the unique and classic masterpiece of its genre, one that crackles with strange and inimitable dynamics, and it seems it said everything that had to be said on the subject, and nobody has added a bit to it. Same goes for Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*, for Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour*, and for Anger's *Scorpio Rising*—they are simply inimitable, and they explore their worlds so totally and so deeply that there is nothing more to say on the subject. (reprinted by Jones 117)

- 33 There are many statistics on the former, but see, for example, Vargas-Cooper.
 34 This last was filmed at the Nan Stibane Schultz residence, 1964, designed by Horace Gifford. See Rawlins. Reminiscent of Paul Rudolph, Marcel Breuer, and Louis Kahn, the house is knotty pine done in a modernist style. Tree houses. Windows. Seductive architecture like a gay *Playboy*.
 35 In many ways his life seems to echo that of Truman Capote's own roman à clef, the unfinished *Answered Prayers* (1987), whose protagonist is a bisexual swinger who mingles with both the gay demimonde and the ultra-rich of Europe. Patton calls *LA Plays Itself* "a cinematic roman a clef" (79). For more on *Answered Prayers* see my discussion in *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention*, chapter four.
 36 For more on Wilde and the invention of homosexuality, see the first three chapters of my *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie*.
 37 Porn as an object of study is a slippery field to quantify. Michael Gamer has argued that "[c]ritical studies of pornography ... have largely jettisoned the notion that it

has some kind of essence recognizable across history and instead have focused on its heterogeneous origins, theorizing it as a collection of mutating writing and publishing practices working within hostile conditions” (1044). What perhaps holds porn together is “its ability to polarize otherwise harmonious communities, its tendency to produce dogmatic prurience in its most devout foes” (1044). Indeed, porn was the first genre of writing to be legally banned as a “*category* of writing” that was in fact not a particular text or one that “had to attach specific individuals or the government to be considered libel” (1046). From the eighteenth century onward, the secular courts made clear that the problem with porn was “neither subject matter nor recurring conventions but rather perceived readerly effects” (1046). Porn was, if you will, the first literature outlawed according to reader-response theory. The legal attack on porn was later applied to Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), in an attempt to tar an entirely new literary genre with guilt by association with porn and to continue to destabilize the notion of a text by its presumed effect on the body—and hence the morals—of the reader.

38 As Sontag notes,

Everyone has felt (at least in fantasy) the erotic glamour of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things that are vile and repulsive. These phenomena form part of the genuine spectrum of sexuality, and if they are not to be written off as mere neurotic aberrations, the picture looks different from the one promoted by enlightened public opinion, and less simple. (57)

39 The author is purported to be Anne Desclos, though Sontag couldn’t have known that at the time she wrote the essay.

40 “But although she symbolises the contrary, the negation of the object, she herself is still an object. Hers is the nakedness of a limited being, even if it proclaims the imminence of her pride’s surrender in the tumultuous confusion of the sexual spasm” (131).

41 And: “For Bataille, what matters is to traverse the vacillation of several object [...] so that they exchange the functions of the obscene and those of substance” (246).

42 Foucault argues that Sade represents the transition from the classical to the modern just as Don Quixote did for the movement from Classicism to the Renaissance. Sade defines the Libertine age, the last one before the advent of sexuality:

[T]he libertine is he who, while yielding to all the fantasies of desire and to each of its furies, can, but also must, illumine their slightest movement with a lucid and deliberately elucidated representation. There is a strict order governing the life of the libertine: every representation must be immediately endowed with life in the living body of desire, every desire must be expressed in the pure light of a representative discourse. Hence that rigid sequence of “scenes” ... and, within the scenes, the meticulous balance between the conjugation of bodies and the concatenation of reasons. (209–10).

43 As Allen concludes, “Sade’s critique of reason is grounded in the fact that it is crime that forms the link between freedom and necessity; and it is thus through contingency and contagion that criminal reason finds its purposeless material expression” (157).

Body of Art

Pornographic film has a rich and complex relationship to the visual arts, especially, to sculpture, which often attempts to embody the human form. Art that represents the nude offers an alternative to the mass cultural porn that has been prevalent since at least the 1970s. It also acts as the source for our ideas about bodily types, especially idealized ones, and how society sees itself mirrored in, and by, the artist's interpretation of sex.

In a meditation on the body and narratology, Fredric Jameson discusses the body of Christ in the Western art-historical canon and the many ways that it allowed for a variety of theatricalized scenes to be explored. Christ's body allowed not only for representation of the body "from its birth to its agony and death" (8) but also for sexuality. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses in *Epistemology of the Closet*, the nude or semi-nude body of Christ allowed for a visible representation of gay male desire, an acceptable male body to view and worship (148). It is not by accident that Oscar Wilde returns to Christ, in a sense, in his post-prison writings. For Jameson, religion as the subject matter for art allowed for a way to narrativize visual art via the theatrical: "Christ's body ... served as the laboratory for innumerable experiments in the representation of the body in all its postures and potentialities ... enabl[ing] the theatrical staging of equally innumerable dramatic—which is to say narrative—scenes" (8). Ultimately, for Jameson, this theatricality could be termed "cinematographic" (8).¹ Jameson goes on to focus specifically on Peter Paul Rubens' *Samson and Delilah* (1609–10). This particular painting shows a post-coital Samson asleep, his massive body arraigned across the painting, his torso tossed onto Delilah's, his strong left arm acting as a diagonal element that crosses nearly half the painting. That arm, as Jameson notes, is "more materialist and carnal in its sheer strength as well as its abandon, than Christ's whole body" (16). The dead weight of the Christ of the pietà or the descent from the cross is nothing in comparison. The painting "virtually reeks of sex" (16) and in that sense outdoes anything by Caravaggio or Rubens. If Christ's body is other than human, then Samson is a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, a body that expresses, finally, not so much sex as the life force itself (17). Paintings of the Renaissance often represent a sort of cinematic "freeze frame," as Jameson calls it, or a tableau (19). The artists attempted to represent a particular "moment" in time, however malleable that might be. In this painting, Rubens is not interested so much in "linear temporality" as in an "absolute" time, a conceptual time that lies outside of the regular definition (19),

or perhaps allows for several different timelines to exist simultaneously. Perhaps the painting enacts the very question of time, or its time, and therefore achieves a “raw immediacy” (26), one that allows for conceptual thinking “in a painterly way” (28). From this line of thought, as Jameson concludes:

Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel: through this breach or gap now stream all the ideological binaries piling up like pus or toxin in the naturalization of sex: the battle of the sexes ... their virtual transformation into two species; but also—mind or spirit versus body or matter ... the politics versus sexuality (public versus private)... In these oppositions the ethical bouncing ball touches first on one then the other, passing back and forth from one term to the other (bound together as they are by History), now certifying one as good and the other evil until the inevitable alternation and reversal, thereby perpetuating the timeless Apollonian stillness of the two eternal figures. (28–9)

Jameson's reading of this particular painting by Rubens attempts to understand how time functions within it, and therefore, how narrative elements work here. Jameson seems to imply that Rubens' solution is superior to that of the painters of the Renaissance, who saw narrative as a sort of frozen time—that they were only able to think in a mostly literal way. But a central tenet of Walter Isaacson's *Leonardo da Vinci* is that the great artist's paintings are not only the result of his scientific observation but they are characterized by his ability always to fold complex notions about time (and space) into his paintings. As early as *The Annunciation* (1472–5) Da Vinci represents the angel Gabriel as having just alighted within the garden walls. The grass blows forward; his sleeves flutter back as though from the breeze created by his flight (Isaacson 59). Space suggests a narrative, a particular moment in time but also the moment before it as well. In the two versions of *The Virgin of the Rocks*, in the Louvre (1483–6) and the National Gallery in London (1495–1508), Da Vinci represents not one moment but two: the baby St. John recognizes the Christ child who blesses him in return, while Mary attempts to enfold them both in protective gestures while the angel seems to communicate directly with the viewer. In the first version, he points to the Christ and looks directly at the viewer; in the second, he merely reacts to the scene as a whole (Isaacson 230), likewise outside of it, in time, if not space. Even in the *Mona Lisa* (1503), Da Vinci gives us a figure whose presence seems both a part of a mythic past and almost eerily present as well—her eyes rendered with such attention to physiognomy and optics that they seem to move and adjust to us in ways that give them their famous immediacy. This effect, combined with the rare three-quarters view of the subject that Da Vinci had first used in *Ginevra de'Benci* (1474–8) (64), emphasizes the portrait's presence, its intimacy as a portrait that demands to be experienced in the here and now.

While Isaacson argues for seeing Da Vinci as a master of the ability to represent time in a complex way in his paintings, perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in his fresco of the *Last Supper* (1490s). While now a ruin, in its original form, the

fresco could be read from left to right and represented the apostles in four groups of three figures each. Each group represents a slightly different moment in time, ranging from just before Christ's announcement that one of them has betrayed him, to the moment during the reaction to his statement, and just after. Christ himself seems to enact the actual moment of speech, his mouth still slightly open, while his hands gesture toward the bread and wine, whose full significance is yet to come. While other paintings by Leonardo are often read from left to right in a complex clockwise direction that emphasizes their spiral organization, this painting is rectilinear and attempts to reference the space of the refectory where it is located. There are multiple spatial tricks that try to make the fresco's illusion of space and architecture seem like an extension of the room it is in. The problem for Da Vinci, however, is that viewers might stand at different places in a room or, in the case of this work, enter from a door on the right and then move to a table in front of it. That is, all paintings that attempt a realistic, even scientific, version of the world must also deal with the fact that one's sense of perspective shifts as one's position in front of the painting does. There are multiple places in Da Vinci's paintings where he seems to have been trying to combine perspectives, ultimately choosing which ones he wanted to make most important (Isaacson 58). Some of the choices here result in some of the anomalies—the foreshortened ceiling, which creates a sense of depth using a theatrical trick of a steep incline (289); the fact that the tapestries on either side of the table at which Christ and his apostles sit do not match up (287); the shallow table at which they dine and from which they stare, theatrically on one side, at the audience; etc. (289). Classical painting, in other words, was never perfectly seamless or symmetrical. It was more like cinema: a two-dimensional attempt to render not so much space as the movement through space, which is to say, perhaps, not space but time.

The subject matter of paintings, however, is figuration, which is to say, the body. Many of the effects of pornography in film are prefigured by the tradition of Western painting itself. For thousands of years, artists have tried, in sculpture, vases, two-dimensional art, to represent the body realistically, which has always meant representing the body in narrative. Pornography is nothing less than the attempt to give to the reality of the body a story that makes the actions of sex, in particular, visible and realistic.

As in a painting, the porn body is not naked; it is nude. This fact is one of the essential differences between porn and other genres or media that depict naked people. The nude actors of porn disrupt one of the joys of nakedness—its identification with averageness, its variety, the fact that a fairly randomized group of naked people of any sex or gender will provide variation. Porn, by contrast, is radically stylized—it pushes the actorly notion of types to an extreme and combines it with an idea borrowed from modeling that only certain body types are erotic. Any real eroticism might be in the crossover—actors or pseudo-actors who seem like porn stars but are safely in the mainstream. Porn never shows us the beauty and innocent carnality of nakedness—1960s Woodstock footage, say, or nudist beaches, or sexual situations that are not co-opted by the commercial and aesthetic dictates of porn professionals or amateurs. How we talk about porn, therefore, is the problem of how to talk about the nude body as a form.

The Nude and the Naked

In his classic study of the naked body in art, Kenneth Clark provides one of the few books that gives us a vocabulary for talking about the naked or nude body, the relationship between the parts and the whole, and the changing representations of the human body in art across time in both two- and three-dimensional representations. *The Nude* continues to be influential since its original publication and only grows more important as we deal with the rapid increase in the visual representation of the naked body. As Clark makes clear at the onset of his study, *naked* means unclothed but *nude* means “the body re-formed” (3). *Nude* means proportion and shape as the naked body in real life usually lacks both (5). Still, the representation of the nude body cannot be completely divorced from its erotic content, or its link in real life with the naked body (8), though certainly the nude body can be used to represent many other emotions or ideas than that (9). In tracing the origin of the nude, it is important not to underestimate the audacity of Greek sculpture in its radical belief in the unveiling of the human body. The lack of self-consciousness about the human form is, as Clark notes, related to the Greek philosophical and aesthetic belief in the centrality of the human to define the world. While Clark refers to this belief as a kind of “wholeness” (24), a more accurate description might be that the human is the measure of all things—even Greek gods are given human characteristics (though often in a magnified way). The nude human body is a metonymy for the literary epics and tragedies, the architecture, and the philosophy of Ancient Greece in its belief in the power of human reason and in the body as the measure of the natural world. For Clark, what he calls “wholeness” reaches a peak with Praxiteles’ *Hermes* (fourth century BC) when “physical beauty is one with strength, grace, gentleness, and benevolence” (46). After that point, “we witness ... the fragmentation of the perfect man, and the human body becomes either very graceful or very muscular or merely animal” (46). The history of the nude after this point of early Greek sculptural perfection is, then, I would argue, at one with the history of pornography itself.

As Clark traces his way through art history, representations of the human body obviously change over time. Lysippos, “the last great name in Greek sculpture,” “invented a new proportion, with smaller head, longer legs, and a slenderer body” (48). Ancient writers note that he did a famous “figure of an athlete scraping himself, which was popular in ancient Rome” (48). By the time the male nude is rediscovered in Renaissance Italy in the form of Donatello’s *David* (1440s), the focus of the body’s architecture has shifted from “the flat rectangular chest” to “the waist” as “the center of plastic interest” (55), where it would remain throughout the Renaissance. The *Cuirasse esthétique* perfected by Polykleitos into a structure so perfect or harmonious that armor was based on it (40) was supplanted by a form that, for Clark, makes Donatello’s *David* seem more like a real boy, and not only in terms of youth. The Renaissance version of the male body reaches its perfection in Michelangelo’s nudes, which for Clark contain the same celebration of the male body that one finds in classical Greek sculpture though his nudes are “unique” in their ability to be “both poignant and commanding” (89) (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).



Figure 4.1 *David*. Donatello. 1430–40. Author.



Figure 4.2 *David*. Michelangelo. 1501–4. Author.

While today the phrase “the nude” might, without any gender attached to it, assume to refer to the female nude, the opposite sex would have been assumed prior to the seventeenth century, which is why Clark’s study begins with the male nude. Greek culture did not promote female public nudity in the same way as it did for men (only Sparta allowed women to show their legs or compete in athletic competitions

almost nude) and Ancient Greek legends of Aphrodite suggest that she was draped (Clark 72). The notion of a Venus coming naked from the sea was an Eastern import (73). Female nudes on pottery in the sixth century BC tended to be elongated. The elaborate curves and circles “from which the classic Aphrodite was to be constructed” (73) came later. Clark posits that Polykleitos, in the Munich *Girl* of circa 400 BC, shows the perfection of the line that sweeps from a cocked hip to “the sphere of the breast, and the long, gentle undulation of the side that is relaxed” (80). The balance and tension and the sensual line that unites the parts of the body have, to Clark, become synonymous with the female nude and the notion of beauty attached to it. For him, Rubens was to the female nude what Michelangelo had been to the male—someone who perfected the form and added to it—mainly, sensitivity of observation and also the erotics of the surface, which became textured and took on colors that would be added to by Rococo artists such as Boucher and Watteau (148). Until this time, the front side of the female form had been considered the most important, perhaps the backside considered overly sensual such as that of the Hermaphrodite. Perhaps because of this sexual insinuation, female bottoms become important in the eighteenth century (150). By the nineteenth century the female body began to take the place of the male one in academic studies of the nude, probably because of Ingres and the meticulous way that he observed the bodies of women (158–9). Up until this point in art history the female nude was often placed within a narrative—groves, woodlands, the bath, etc. Nature or idealized interiors were common. While male nudes also had their origin stories or contexts—the associations with Apollo or the story of David and Goliath—nothing quite prepared the world of art for Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), in which the woman, a prostitute, looks at the viewer with a stark, unmistakably naturalistic stare. While artists had long drawn from actual women, they were also often idealized or somehow softened (164). Manet, like Lautrec, refused to do that and the late nineteenth century was the first time that the nude became naked—or the female nude a woman. Only Renoir, from this period, seemed to continue to see the nude as a viable tradition in its own right, though he managed to apply the lessons of Impressionism to his treatment of them.

Even now, when people discuss the desirability of a specific body or body type or part of the body, they do so by alluding to sculptures or paintings of the Western tradition—parts of a canon, while hardly inviolate, that is useful as a frame of reference. While porn on film is hardly the same thing, it is part of the tradition of representations of the body that are meant to be studied for their aesthetic and erotic attributes. Clark goes on in his study to take on the notion of movement or action in nudes. Just as pornography has existed for generations as a still photo or model—the *Playboy* pinup or the Athletic Model Guild “art photograph”—and as film, video, or digital loops or movies, sculpture and painting have dealt with the balance of combining the two—how to show movement in a still image. For Clark, the notion of the athlete in movement allows for the artist to find a way to balance the arms and legs with the torso by carrying movement through the torso and freeing it of any stiffness (178). The torso becomes the focal point, but the limbs are connected in a fluid, elegant pattern. For Clark, the sine qua non of this effect is the *Diskobolos* (460–450 BC) of Myron.

The cinematic attempts to represent complex, continuous actions on the metopes of the Parthenon are unsuccessfully stiff and static for Clark (an opinion not necessarily had by others), but he argues successfully that the work of Myron, in its economy of the fluid line, suggests, as Rodin would argue about nudes, seeing an action at two different moments simultaneously (180). If Greek sculpture had tried to show the body in repose before it might do almost anything, now the problem was showing the body stopped in a moment of action (180). While this opposite state seems more problematic for Clark, it might now remind us of the two kinds of still images that we still have in porn—the poised publicity still and the freeze frame from an actual film (Figures 4.3 and 4.4).

Representing the human body in states of movement or action continued to evolve for mostly cultural reasons. In late-fifteenth-century Florence, for example, it would have been in the form of male nudes in battle. Michelangelo, far from making perfect bodies like these, often creates nudes that seem to express an inner life more than a realistic outer one. If these figures were to step off the pedestal or ceiling, they would actually look grotesque (Clark 209). By the end of his life, the nude collapses completely into itself: the Duomo *Pietà* (1547) in Florence is completely without classical proportions and Michelangelo's confidence in the body has been replaced with an almost Gothic spirituality (259). By the time of the drawings by Michelangelo of the *Resurrection* (1532; *The Last Judgement*, 1536–41) in the British Museum, Michelangelo depicts Christ floating up to heaven, as though finally freed of the body (307). Once again, for Clark, the female nude took the place of the male nude by the



Figure 4.3 The Parthenon frieze. British Museum. Author.



Figure 4.4 Detail of the Parthenon frieze. British Museum. Author.

eighteenth century, with Rubens once again leading the way. What are muscles in early Michelangelo becomes skin in Rubens, the surface becoming expressive (265). Perhaps like late Michelangelo the surface starts to become semi-abstract, like Rembrandt's self-portrait in Vienna, and to break down at the level of the skin. By the time of Degas the female nude had become, once again, more animal-like and the nude had taken on more of a connection between art and life itself (223). In sculpture, Rodin brings a chapter of classical art to a conclusion. While some of his sculpture could be, to Clark, overdone and exaggerated, it is, like Wagner, for a purpose, becoming vulgar to express our modern times (271) (Figure 4.5).

The classical tradition that Clark traces is, of course, one based upon the Greek ideal. An alternative tradition, as he terms it, can be found in the early Medieval, or perhaps more accurately, Gothic body that shows the human form not as nude but as profoundly naked, "an object of humiliation and shame" (309). This rendering of the body had its own conventions but was built upon the conviction that the body expressed almost the opposite stance to the Attic one. As Clark summarizes, "While the Greek nude began with the heroic body proudly displaying itself in the palaestra, the Christian nude began with the huddled body cowering in consciousness of sin" (311). The primary plastic embodiment of this change was in making the focus of the body the curvature of the stomach as opposed to the hip, which creates an upward thrust that equates with "energy and control" (318). The stomach, by contrast, "is created by gravity and relaxation" (318). The stomach "does not take its shape from the will but from the unconscious biological process that gives shape to all hidden organisms" (318).



Figure 4.5 *The Deposition*. Michelangelo. 1547–55. Author.

The Gothic female body, with its small breasts, long torso, and sagging stomach, can be seen as an alternative representation of the nude, but can it be seen as the naked complement to the more “abstract” classical nude? And does it cross time to become, in the future, any representation of the body that sees it as naked—or renders it in an unidealistic way? Clark ends with these concerns, and we might take them further. Is

porn an attempt at the Greek or the Gothic body? In *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) Kubrick seems to render perfect, perhaps classical, bodies, but one of his inspirations was Klimt and the German Expressionists, who were certainly creating Gothic bodies if anyone ever was. In Schiele's nude self-portraits "seemingly decaying bodies posed in sexually exhibitionistic ways displaying his groin and genitals, morbidity mingles with eroticism, suffering with lust" (Rewald 55), an effect that Kubrick attempts to create at least in terms of the film's constant mixing of death and sex. For Clark, the modernist move toward the nude "as an end in itself" was actually a movement back toward Greek classicism, in which the nude was supposed to express an idea or an abstraction at the precise time when artists began to think of art as "an intellectual, not a mechanical, activity" (351). The naturalistic bodies rendered from real life are replaced with the extreme minimalism of Matisse's nudes. Freed of narrative and of associations, the nude becomes simply itself—its own pure form.

In a later book entitled *Feminine Beauty*, which Clark considered more of a précis or outline of the subject, he ends the book with photos—the last one of Marilyn Monroe. Perhaps Clark saw photos as the next metamorphosis of the nude. Though Clark does not claim photography as an area of his expertise—indeed, he didn't deal much with the contemporary at all—he must have thought that photography changed the notion of the nude in some way, if only in the attention that photographers give to the nude human form. Photography continues to develop the theories undergirding the notion of ideal forms, or the representation of the body visually, in the scientific work that has been done on perspective, proportion, and how the eye translates two-dimensional (and even three-dimensional) forms into the illusion of the physical body. This more mathematical approach is often combined with an art-historical interest in stylistics and how the technical display of the body changes over time and is linked to aesthetic choices.

Erwin Panofsky argues that the differences between Egyptian and Greek representations of the body stem from the difference between what the artists are trying to represent. For the ancient Greeks, sculpture was an attempt to bring an already living being to life, while the Egyptian purpose was for art to preserve the body for later reanimation ("reenlivened") (Panofsky 61). The sculpture of the body is a mere "imitation" (62) or form (61); for the Greeks, it is "reconstruction" (62) and "function" (61), respectively. The mechanical aspects of Egyptian art were systematic rather than observational. Any artist in the kingdom would know where an ankle should go or what the proper proportion of it would be. An underlying geometric system governs art. For this reason, Egyptian art rejects the notion that limbs, for example, are a part of an expressive movement such as we see in Greek athletes, the position of limbs are instead "purely local changes in the positions of specific members" (57). Egyptian artists likewise eschew foreshortening, the "apparent extension of the plane into depth," and the flattening of any "three-dimensional volume" in sculpture (57–8). The results of these formulae were the creation of the familiar conventions of Egyptian art—sculpture (with some exceptions) is either fully frontal or in profile; two-dimensional painting presents the body frontally but the head in perspective (58).

The system of proportion developed in Greece had a different goal: to capture the real. As systemized by Polykleitos, the rigid sculptural influences of Egyptian art that can be seen in the early Kritios boy sculpture of the Archaic period slowly give way, one innovation after another, to the pre-Hellenic high period of classical sculpture. Though we may take this style for granted now, it was, of course, not to be followed during most of the history of art in the West. Byzantine art followed a different formula and Gothic art its own. The latter brought sculpture and painting back to the Egyptian ideal in which a design was placed over representations of the body that governed how bodies would look with the naturalistic aspects not only secondary but even resented. The Renaissance restored the Greek approach and, for the first time, truly codified it in a mathematical way in order to render it not only natural but also spiritual—a Neo-Platonic yoking of the body to the soul (Panofsky 90).

As E. H. Gombrich argues, it is important to keep in mind that Greek art is based upon a limited number of repeating types, and in this sense, it is just as constricted as Egyptian art, maybe even more so (142). The type in Greek art is based on nature, but an idealized form of it—bodies as perfect specimens of the athlete, soldier, etc. While some aspects of nature are rendered—pubic hair, for example—some, such as underarm hair, are not (Scranton 224). The conventions change, however, over time, from the semi-abstraction of the Archaic period to the increasing particularization of the body and its details in the Hellenistic era (224). It is not always possible to tell one male (or female) figure from another. The props given to the character are sometimes important in this way, though what is paramount is the human figure (238). The narrative context, however, is inherent in some figures, such as the self-consciousness of Praxiteles' *Aphrodite* (fourth century BC), which includes the spectator in the narrative, completing the circuit. This use of psychology gives Greek sculpture of the classical period a spatial as well as temporal dimension (251).

It's also important to remember that our associations with Greek sculpture now, and especially in the past, assumed that they were white marble—either from age or white-washed, literally, on purpose, the original paint having been removed. Even knowing this fact, it is often difficult for us to think about the sculpture of this era without consciously or unconsciously placing meaning on the whiteness, the marble becoming a kind of skin of its own, the blue veins of some of it seeming to be the real veins of an impossibly white person, the color seeming to be as much an ideal as the shapeliness of the body represented. Even knowing that the free-standing sculptures and friezes that represent gods, demi-gods, and heroes were always painted, we forget to see the bodies represented as having skin tones, hair, eyes that were not only a form of realism but also nonwhite. European culture has created a simulacrum of ancient Greek culture in which we think of it as white, when it was not. Likewise, modernism makes us want to see the Acropolis or sculptures of Hermes or Venus as white because it would make them more abstract, would lessen their realism, which might not be wholly convincing, and make them instead pure forms in their monochromatic state. At the Acropolis Museum in Athens color is being restored to some of the statues. Likewise, it is important to keep in mind that while the representation of the body may have begun with Greek sculpture as a major influence, if only because of the total male

nudity, that bodies were represented in various ways throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and during the post-Enlightenment period and that most of the artists and craftsmen who made them used realism as a way to inject eroticism into the figures. That is, a Medieval reliquary of Christ's semi-naked body or a painting of St. Sebastian or of female saints might have skin tone, rosy cheeks, even hyper-realistic wounds as a way to express the materiality of the body. In this sense, they become stand-ins for the real thing, sometimes uncannily so in the case of three-dimensional sculptures or figures that allow the spectators to imagine the physicality of the suffering or ecstasy more completely, even to hold parts of a mock body as a part of a religious purging of emotions. The original realism of Greek and Roman sculpture has to be seen, then, as a part of a continuous tradition that has tried to represent the body for what it actually is, not just what it might be, even when the body is of a god.²

Clark's approach to the nude is a useful way to continue to think about the nude in classical art and how it might help us in the close reading of the body and its representations. Botticelli's *Venus* (1490) represents one of the most perfect depictions of the human form ever achieved in art. Painted in the 1480s, after the more famous *The Birth of Venus* (1484–6), this version is earthier, subtler, and sexier at the same time. With her young, youthful face and braided hair, Venus stands in the classical position that dates back to Praxiteles with her hands loosely covering herself modestly as though stepping from a bath. Her face floats on shoulders that form a point and then move down to an elongated body, especially the torso and slender legs. The hands, feet, and face are slightly larger in their design. The black background and dramatic position on a ledge add to the emphasis on the corporeal. Botticelli emphasizes her skin using shadows and a skin tone with red undertones, her thighs and the musculature of her stomach setting the erotic intention of the painting and sealing it with the see-through wrap she wears over her shoulders, which emphasizes her nakedness even more. What is remarkable in some ways is the incredible contemporaneity of Botticelli's female nudes—they have become an ideal within the culture and in this way never age. The representation of the female body as youthful, slim, with long hair is a type that is still with us, adding to his paintings' ability to seem timeless. It is difficult to underestimate how much influence art has on our own ability to see the contemporary nude body; the ideals of the classical period, as reimagined through the Renaissance, continue to exert a profound influence on our notion of what bodies should look like even if they rarely do. Artistic bodies are not realistic bodies, and even actual contemporary bodies that are considered attractive deviate from artistic bodies in profound ways. On the one hand, we need to see actual bodies for what they are, to celebrate the bumpy and imperfect realness for what it is and how it is not only sexy but also the only bodies we can touch and feel and really know. On the other hand, we need to remember that artistic representations of bodies are above all else expressions of an idea of the body. No one could really look like the *Venus* nor would want to in real life. Botticelli was painting something linked to real life in its sensuousness, but as with Greek Classical sculpture, it was never meant to be a replacement for the body, or the body come to life.

What the Renaissance set into motion was a desire for a scientific representation of the body that was at one with the attempt at the realistic representation of space. The

reinvention of one-point perspective allowed for the placement not only of the eye in space but the body as well. Three-dimensional architectural space and landscape became the containers and backdrops for bodies, and the appropriate measurements used to obtain a realistic sense of depth were soon applied to bodies as well. That Vitruvius' emphasis on proportion in architecture in the rediscovered *De architectura* (30–15 BC) spurred attempts by artists of the Renaissance to render an ideal body can be seen in the Vitruvian man by Da Vinci (circa 1490) and combined with a new interest not only in continuing classical learning but in adding to it by bringing to representations of the body the new realistic analysis coming from anatomical drawings and vivisection. Yet even Da Vinci, famous for the latter as well, to some extent idealized his drawings, combining several different versions of the same flayed body part in order to find the ideal one, the essence of what was being represented, even in death and dying.³

The world of Western art and literature contained, from at least the Renaissance to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, much of the same fascination with sex acts that we have today. One need only look at the translation into English and French of Friedrich Karl Forberg's *Manual of Classical Erotology* (*De Figuris Veneris*) to see a detailed and objective discussion of not only sexual positions but such topics as masturbation, bestiality, anal sex, and the best way to remove unwanted body hair. Written as an anthology of Greek and Roman writing, it is a commentary on Antonio Beccadelli's poem, *Hermaphroditus* [*Antonii Pandarmitae Hermaphroditus*]. Privately printed, it was, in the Victorian world, parallel to the work of something like *Teleny* (1893)—porn written for a select all-male clientele.⁴ But read today, one is struck by the parallels to a porn site that its chapter titles might have—"Of Copulation," "Pedarastia," "Irrumation," "Cunnilingues," "Tribads"—even if some, but not all, of the names may have changed over time. Held together by the figure of the hermaphrodite, the book makes clear our connection to the ancient world, to the body as a source of knowledge, and to the slipperiness of gender that actually resides in the microcosmic level of details about sex that porn represents.

Of the many ways that we have for explaining the combination of male and female characteristics in one body, androgyny implies a mixing of attributes, while hermaphroditism suggests a placing of male characteristics beside female ones in a way that leaves the two sexes distinct—a map of contrasting desires that confuses the senses or fools the eye depending upon the angle from which one sees the body. The hermaphrodite, in the classical Greek sense, suggests Plato's theory of the combining of the sexes (though for Plato there were three) and preserves the supposed contrast between men and women—the complementarity—that Plato's theory is often reduced to. The often-copied *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* (second century BC) makes the popularity of the form clear, its erotic potential seemingly signaled by the sheer number of versions of the original that are spread out over Italy and France. The popularity of the hermaphrodite, at least in art, can be attributed to the necessity of leaving the sexes distinct yet seeing them combined in one body and forcing a dialogue between the two that suggests both the seeming inevitability of two sexes and the destabilizing suggestion that this is a construct, a fiction, that unsettles the very notion of the materiality of the body itself. An artistic definition is, of course, not a scientific

one, but whether artistic or scientific, the concept seems to suggest an ability to move back and forth between the sexes or a mixing of codes that somehow refuse to define themselves—an ultimate undecidability, a threshold for defining the limits of sex by refusing to find a word for it. In this sense, *hermaphrodite* might always be seen as a definition that is defined only by that which it is not: decidedly one sex or the other, or not a sex at all. It is, as Ferdinand de Saussure might say, a negative definition. Its value is purely situational.

Androgyny, by contrast, is about the blending of the sexes. While this effect, as well, might be one that forces some kind of definitional design, the outcome is often different. If hermaphroditism forces some kind of thinking about biological sex, perhaps a thinking that does remain purposefully unintegrated, that approaches a limit without transgressing it, androgyny seems to force the two sexes to intermingle and produce a third term that seems firmly rooted in either one sex or the other. A purely aesthetic concept, rather than a scientific one, androgyny can, in theory, be anchored to either sex—a man with feminine characteristics or a woman with masculine ones. While the ultimate limit of androgyny may be an undecidability as well—a third term in which male and female characteristics blend into an unknowable fusion—in reality, it often skews one way or the other. That is, androgyny is a template that softens the male form or hardens the female one in such a way as to produce a non-normative response on the part of the viewer, one that suggests the limits to our ideas about what constitutes the sexes. In this sense, then, androgyny seems to always be a value judgment that marks the outer reaches of the socially accepted norms of sexual markers. In fact, as a social construct, androgyny is really about gender, not sex. It is wholly a construct of culture, even if bodies may be described objectively, and materially, as genuinely androgynous. It is also an effect that may be created by a person who manipulates the male and female cultural norms of their environment. In that sense, it is also relational, like hermaphroditism, in that the definitions of masculine and feminine are extremely local and bend more easily than we might think by where one is located—urban or rural, factory or bar, upstate or down, etc. As with the codes of sexuality, gender codes are created to be read, decoded, and understood as a comment on the limits of definition and redefinition. In this sense, it is impossible not to read the Greek statue of the hermaphrodite as a comment on Ancient Greek culture, to have its meaning within it. To the extent to which this culture has influenced the Western world, and global notions of art and beauty worldwide, one has to read the statue in two different ways. Unfortunately, we do not know much about the statue's origins, though we do know a lot about Greek definitions of sex, gender, and sexuality.

From the *Symposium* and elsewhere, K. J. Dover, Michel Foucault, David Halperin, and others have theorized the Greek ideal of male and female sexuality.⁵ The male body in Greek sculpture famously presents the body as a golden mean, but the gender characteristics are culturally specific. The male body is firm and athletic, but also softened somewhat. Though Greek plays by Aeschylus, for example, equate feminine characteristics with the East—with Persia, specifically, or Troy—they exist as well in the statuary, which grew out of Eastern sources, especially Egyptian ones.

While one characteristic of Eastern inspiration was toward geometry or abstraction, another was toward the feminine or androgyny, though of a highly specific sort. Greek statues by Praxiteles and others at the height of the classical period temper this softness to provide some tension between the two poles. A distrust of the feminine, which can be seen in the patriarchy of Athenian culture, which denied women citizenship or even much of a public role outside the house, also kept the representation of the male body from being too static or feminine. Hence the male body is dynamic, in *contrapposto*, and decidedly male overall. The aesthetic of the male body, however, combines both genders, as bodies always do, and even in what is seen as perhaps the primary or originary definition of male beauty, the feminine creeps in to challenge, or change, the formula—even if it is ultimately there to be banished.

Michel Foucault notes in his posthumous *The Use of Pleasure* that while “classical figure sculpture paid more attention to the adult body” (200), it was certainly also clear that in the “sphere of sexual ethics, it was the juvenile body with its peculiar charm that was regularly suggested as the ‘right object’ of pleasure” (200). Foucault goes on to observe that “it would be a mistake to think that its traits were valued because of what they shared with feminine beauty. They were appreciated in themselves or in their juxtaposition with the signs and guarantees of a developing virility” (200). In the high classical period, in other words, “[s]trength, endurance” were seen as protection from “softness and effeminization” (200). It was not until later in the period, that “feminine ambiguity ... would be perceived ... as the secret cause ... of the adolescent’s beauty” (200). Though the seeds of this possibility may already be present in the fourth century, during “the classical period” femininity was “more something from which the boy needed to protect himself and be protected” (200). Masculinity was dominate, though in a nascent form: “Virility as a physical mark should be absent from it; but it should be present as a precocious form and as a promise of future behavior: already to conduct oneself as the man one has not yet become” (200).

While we may not be able to talk about the Greek ideal as hermaphroditic or androgynous, by the time Greek ideas are revived during the Italian Renaissance, the male and female forms have more formally blended. As the first freestanding male nude of the Renaissance, Donatello’s David is striking as an example of Early Renaissance androgyny. While the beauty of young men was a subgenre of Renaissance portraiture, the mixed codes of Donatello’s strikingly epicene rendering—from the curls and helmet to the eagle’s wing that comes up from the bottom of the statue to stroke his thigh—renders the male form in terms that go quite a bit outside the Greek code of masculinity. Donatello’s statue, like all of his major works, is dense with information and detail and is wholly original in its expressiveness. The other great David of the period, by Michelangelo, returns the male form, to some extent, to the ancient Greeks, only with some characteristics changed, ones that were specific to Michelangelo’s rendering of the ideal male form, such as compressed hips, or related to the Renaissance conceptual ideal, such as the enlarged hands of the *David*. The form, overall, fits the function of the subject matter, though with the added definition of Michelangelo’s ideal body type. That his sculptures would ultimately tend toward

the expressionistic, even semi-abstract, is there already in his willingness to bend the rules of realism, even more than the Greeks, to express an idea or overall artistic effect.

Art Films

For all of porn's attempts to represent sex, sex itself, actual sex between people, is stubbornly resistant to some aspects of porn. The privileging of the visual in film, and perhaps porn in particular, reinforces the hierarchy of the senses—of the eyes and ears as superior to smell and taste. Though sex depends on touch, smell, and taste, these senses are difficult to represent on film, though it is also arguable that most directors, of whatever stripe, don't really try very hard to, either. What we are left with is the permanency of the visual (Brinkema 121). The image of the upright body is one of subjectivity and thought. Even in the current vogue of standing upright as a sign of dominance, often male, there is a sense of standing as literally unprimitive, unanimalistic. Yet sex depends, at least in part, upon the lower body, where even then there is the hierarchy of the frontal and the rear, the genital and the excretory. As Freud himself notes, civilization has slowly but surely banned the olfactory, especially, from the realm of knowledge and kept this information separate from the exterior world (Brinkema 121). The senses, however, are not fully functional in film, which cannot really depict the differences in smell between the smegma of the penis and the loamy musk of the anus, or of the mixture of the taste of vaginal fluids that overlap with the smell of underwear and urine. Sex is about fluids and skin, and the pornographic aspects of sex are often reduced to the merely visual, which has to bear the weight of all of the possible information. Snapchat has perhaps replaced the computer, which has replaced the film as the source of the visually pornographic, but the emphasis on seeing is as central as it ever was to the representation of the body. What is perhaps needed is more analysis of our traditions of the body that do represent texture, at least, and touch, such as sculpture, and the body prone or supine, male or female. The parts of the body, and of sex, that have been discarded are slowly having their day in porn and in the bedroom, but the same mechanism that privileges the visual privileges looking, the genital, and the putative normalcy of sex itself.

We should not, in other words, underestimate the role of actual sex in how we watch sex on screen. While porn might be completely fantastical to some, it may also be nostalgic or pointedly specific in terms of memory for others, depending upon the specific sexual act. If the latter, it may be a part of what Susanna Paasonen terms our "somatic archives" (204). Paasonen uses as an example her own gag reflex during "deep-throat fellatio." While she acknowledges that this reaction is not true of everyone, and even for some might be its own turn-on, for her it is not and makes any erotic pleasure in the experience into "an issue of disturbance rather than titillation" (204). Porn is not sex, but it can be tied to sex in any number of ways that add a layer of reaction and complexity to the experience of seeing porn. For people who orgasm from porn, either in the moment of seeing it or later, porn can either provide the

fantasy that completes the loop between mind and body or can contribute to it, perhaps simply as mood-setting. Porn can be both pedagogy and diagnosis, finding buried fetishes and defining moments from our past that we did not know we had. Likewise, porn can exist as a place to explore the strange inversions of sex and gender—the complex interrelationship between subjectivity and objectivity that almost any porn film creates. Perhaps in no other place for most people does there exist a space where they can explore what it means to have a different gender or sexuality. Whatever is representational about porn, however, it is also extremely important to see it as not cut off from life itself. Actual sex, even straight vanilla sex, involves more complexity in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality than we often acknowledge. And, in part thanks to the interaction between internet porn and what we still consider real life, porn acts are increasingly showing up in the bedroom. The increasingly slippery line between BDSM and non-BDSM sex is but the most recent example. As sex acts and sexualities multiply, sex without people, not without interest, but maybe alone with technology, may become the ultimate sexuality, or at least a new one.

Porn as a visual effect on the screen, as a two-dimensional illusion of three-dimensionality, as a classical realism that is privileged for its Hollywood-like verisimilitude, is not the only way, or even the best way, to impress the body on the screen. An entire tradition exists of visual and performance artists who have tried to use the medium of film as a way to imprint the body's surface onto the surface of the film. Techniques to do this can include scratching the surface of the film or allowing it to register overexposure, underexposure, graininess, or focusing too closely or too far away so as to render the image blurry to the point of abstraction. These effects might suggest the hand of the director, in part, by calling attention not only to an "author" of the film but to the materiality of film itself. In this sense, these techniques self-consciously break the illusion of the "fourth wall" to remind the viewer that what they are seeing is a manufactured illusion and to not let them rest comfortably in the space of that illusion, as though film is an extension of our reality or a reality into which we are absorbed. In a general sense, many avant-garde directors who do not work in the Classical Hollywood Cinema style (at least all the time) call attention to the conventions and expectations of film and thereby disrupt them. In that sense, they can be said to make the film itself, or the process of making a film and viewing it, a part of the subject matter of the film. This effect could include the surrealism of a Maya Deren film or the oeuvre of David Lynch, or the subtler effects of more traditional filmmakers who nevertheless use framing, editing, acting, camera movement, writing, lighting, blocking, or some aspect of the film to call the audience's attention to the fact that they are watching a film, that they are embodied, and that the film itself (in whatever technical medium it exists) is being played in space via some sort of technology. Some avant-garde filmmakers call more attention to the materiality of film more completely than others. It is difficult to forget the primitivism of Andy Warhol's films or the almost conscious amateurishness of Stan Brakhage's. Both directors, and many others, emphasized the body and expanded our understanding of how we might put the body on film in all of its nakedness and sexuality. For Warhol, this might mean the sex on display in *Couch* (1964) or *Blue Movie* (1968), for Brakhage, his wife giving

birth in *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959). The works of many filmmakers that we associate with the sexual avant-garde continue to act as reservoirs of themes or images for filmmaking at large, such as Kenneth Anger, whose *Scorpio Rising* (1964) is often copied and referenced.

Films by filmmakers who are primarily visual artists in other media are also often known for their own attempts to extend their interests to the medium of film. One such example is the performance artist Carolee Schneemann and her short film *Fuses* (1965). Known for her filmed performances of *Meat Joy* (1964) and her most famous performance piece *Interior Scroll* (1975), Schneemann made a film that consists mostly of her and her husband, James Tenney, making love. The film is frank in its depiction of sex and in making the point of view of the film her own. She does not shy away, for example, from lingering on her husband's body, especially his penis, or from creating a filmic space that objectifies his body more than her own, as if to balance the equation somewhat with films by male directors.⁶ Layered into these home movie-like images are hand-painted ones that blur the boundaries, reduce the sense of depth in the image, and give the surface of the film a tactile sense. As R. Bruce Elder notes, "All we can say with certainty about the proprioceptive body is that it is felt on the nerves. So its status as a collection of sensa comes to the fore" (249). And this film is nothing if not a collection of sensual objects and moments in which two bodies fuse, make sparks, and come together literally and figuratively. Schneemann's work is a part of the body-centered art of the 1970s, which includes the work of Chris Burden and Vito Acconci, who, along with many others, called attention to the material body and its limits. In *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann unraveled a text written on a roll of paper from her vagina, a sort of manifesto for women artists. In the earlier *Meat Joy*, she and Tenney and others rolled on top of chunks of meat on top of sheets of white paper placed on the floor. To some extent, *Fuses* recreates this blurring of boundaries and identities and eroticizes them in a public performance. According to Ara Osterweil, Schneemann reclaims the notion of "meat" to mean the original porn term "meat shot," which preceded the "money shot" of the 1970s, when stag filmmakers referred to a close-up of the penis entering the vagina as an indication of hard-core authenticity before its replacement with the male ejaculation (*Flesh Cinema* 145).⁷

While *Fuses* includes plenty of female nudity as well, it is unabashed in its representation of oral sex and, many years before *Deep Throat* (1972), it is not afraid to show realistic fellatio. Her film, like those of some other artists, is self-consciously pornographic and unafraid to be. As Schneemann herself said, the film is a "genital landscape film" (qtd. in Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema* 157). Schneemann focuses on the body's curves and spaces, protrusions and natural structure. Filmed in a farmhouse and intercut with images of Schneemann running into the ocean, *Fuses* makes the connection between nature and sex, landscape and the body. In this sense, her film is part of a tradition that includes Willard Maas' *Geography of the Body* (1943). This black-and-white film includes intimate close-up shots of the body that now seem almost classical in their polish and composition, similar to Robert Mapplethorpe's late images collected in the *Black Book* (1986). Beginning with a quote from Plato's *Symposium*, the film could be read as a meditation on the original definition of hermaphroditism

as the merging of bodies in a bisexual being composed of three bodies that are split apart and go looking for their mates—male/female, female/female, and male/male. The film alternates between male and female bodies and a self-conscious Orientalized travel narrative that suggests the body as a journey, or map, with exotic destinations. The privileged port, however, may be the anus, whose cave-like structure seems to be one of the film's main foci (Elder 46). While this emphasis may be an autobiographical subtext in the film, the film's overall meaning seems to suggest a merging of the two sexes (or genders), though body parts are kept separate and, often, filmed so close up as to render them abstract (or gently surreal). Like Schneemann, Maas mixes the gendered parts of the body, but perhaps toward a mostly homoerotic end. Or, at least, in his gaze, the male body appears fetishized but oddly secretive, unabashed but also private—or perhaps textualized. As Elder concludes, “The function of the extreme metonymy, the trope the film rests upon, is to mobilize an agency, desire, which will form a phantasmal image of the whole. The body of desire is an imagined body, an unreal body, a body before fragmentation” (65).

Schneemann's film similarly differs from Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth* (1964), which juxtaposes layers of couples having sex but manages to displace the genital or heterosexual focus. Bodies are arranged like faces, faces are covered in mask-like makeup, and one couple is made up of two men having anal sex. Rubin perhaps suggests that sex roles and genders are themselves already performances (Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema* 36). In this sense, Rubin looks ahead to the pansexuality of something like Warhol's *Couch* or his other films of the 1960s that focus on both homosexual and heterosexual sex. While Warhol was sometimes more forthcoming with nudity than actual sex, he similarly deconstructed our ideas about the naturalness of either.⁸ *Couch*, for example, claims one of the earliest scenes of anal penetration (71) and the first instance of interracial sex on screen (73). Warhol's hard-core sexual scenes are delivered in his characteristic flat affect, which itself becomes problematic in his final major foray into sexual moviemaking—1969's *Blue Movie*, a film devoted to showing heterosexual sex.

What films about sex perhaps tell us is the extent to which we have more of a vocabulary for queer sex than we do for heterosexual sex, which, despite its proliferation, now is also becoming increasingly impossible to see critically (Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema* 163). In this sense, Matthew Barney might represent one performer-auteur who makes clear the necessity to interrogate the nature of heterosexuality itself. Barney makes his own athletic body the subject of much of his work in performance art and film. Like his 1970s avatars, Barney asks questions about the limits of the body, often using the imagery of masculinity as the subject matter for his art. Football players, Harry Houdini, barbells, and gym equipment show up in his sculptures and performance art but are often made to appear like their opposite number, to have their properties transformed. The hard steel of weights is covered in petroleum jelly (*Transsexualis* [1991]), or reassembled as devices of anal penetration. Barney films himself scaling the ceiling of a gallery in an act of genuine physical prowess, but he is naked except for the trail of camalots he wears as a belt (*Mile High Threshold* and *Blind Perineum* [1991]). In his famous *Cremaster Cycle* (1994–2002) of films, Barney is

frequently in disguise, sometimes female, sometimes a human-animal hybrid, always asking questions about the body and its limits. The word *cremaster* refers to a muscle of the scrotum that controls the movement of the testes. The films, shot out of order, tell the story of the testes before they descend to their final form. It is in part a reference, then, to a state before gender, or specifically before maleness, when masculinity is an imminence but not yet a reality. Barney's investigation of the male body, especially his own, is not so much about the lack of specificity of gender—a kind of androgyny or transgender—but how masculinity functions, where it comes from. His more recent work investigates the mythology of the body in a different way, looking at scatology as a mode of creation.

The cycles that Barney investigates are linked to three systems that overlay each other: "situation," "condition," and "production" (Spector 13). The double zeros of the football jersey of Jim Otto suggest the mouth and the anus, at either end of a system of production, or the two testes, or the anus as the vagina or the rectum as the fallopian tubes. The male body is repeatedly exposed in ways that suggest a pornographic scenario, but one in which the straight white male body is porous and penetrable. Transitional states are emphasized, parts of the body that are arguably without gender, the perineum or the anus, are given a special sense of possibility. Stretched above the space of the gallery, it is Barney's perineum that the audience can see even better than his penis. While the mouth and the anus might suggest a kind of polymorphous perversity, a sort of Deleuzian rhizome of lateral differentiation as opposed to an Oedipal hierarchy, it is important to differentiate what Barney is doing from the queer theory notion of "treating polymorphous perversity as an inarguably heroic, subversive, or redemptive force, as some queer theory has to do" (Nelson 24). Rather, it opens up a space where we can question the male body as something other than a closed system, including the notion that it is a contrary reaction to the normative. It is important how "hard to remember, especially in the face of any schema, be it Freudian or queer or otherwise, that would aim to make use of perversity in an instrumental, homogenizing, or redemptive way" (Nelson 25). Barney's work has moved toward production with his opera *River of Fundament* (2006–14), which remakes the penis as a turd in a Lacanian symbolic gesture that perhaps finally surpasses the body to move on to the symbolic and the many substitutions and replacements for it. Based upon Normal Mailer's *Ancient Evenings* (1983), the opera and the works created from it deal with ancient Egyptian culture, reincarnation, and the American car industry. To some extent, metamorphosis and the remaking of the body continue throughout Barney's work, which manages to comment on American culture, especially masculinity, as it morphs and changes and deals with the resistance to change, a rigidity, that comes from sports, capitalism, and narrative structure.

Barney's films fall into a tradition of films not by filmmakers but by artists. The tradition of the filmed body owes a great deal to the visual vocabulary created by this tradition. Barney's work, in particular, takes film back to its origins in "the cinema of attractions" of Coney Island or various early films in which "human bodies simply *did* things, performed acts ranging from muscle-flexing to dancing to sneezing, for no other reason than the sheer delight in seeing them done" (Barker 133). Early cinema

existed to elicit a bodily reaction from the audience—whether the fear of seeing a train pull into a station and appear to be coming toward you or a woman in her underwear. The muscular link to the body was made literal with something like a mutoscope that had to be turned with a crank. Seeing films of women dancing, for example, could be sped up, or slowed down, linking one’s own bodily movements, one’s muscles, with the bodily movements on the screen, the dancing of muscles and the clothes that might reveal what they are supposed to conceal (Barker 134–5). Being able to extend an image, to tease it open, was made literal and film as a body comes as close as possible to being realized.⁹ Many of these films, like those of cinematic auteurs, gaze upon the body as an erotic object.¹⁰ Eroticization is a performance that can be a form of auto-eroticization if performed solo, that includes the tacit gaze of the camera, or it can be seemingly that of a “passive” object that sees the body in close-up views as a landscape to be viewed and explored. This construction is often feminized and sees the supine body as something to be explored but perhaps never understood.¹¹

In representations of the body in film, there is a movement within avant-garde cinema from the parts of the body seen through “assertive editing” (Michelson, *On the Eve of the Future* 294) to the body seen as a whole via the pan or long shot. The next phase is “a cinema tending toward incorporeality” such as the “textuality” of someone like Michael Snow (252). Eisenstein or Kuleshov’s emphasis on editing—of the intricate architecture of discrete data—gives way to the “whole body as erotic object of narrative desire” (Michelson, *On the Eve of the Future* 314) in Warhol and Brakhage. The body’s place within the larger landscape, especially when it is kept whole, is difficult to explain. In a meditation on Eisenstein’s line drawings of the body, Luka Arsenjuk notes that “the Eisensteinian figure seeks ... to install a body where no body existed before, or perhaps even where there can be no body—where a body can have no being. The Eisensteinian figure would in this sense be related to a body that is impossible to place and that for this reason may be considered an impossible body” (41). His figures seem to float in space, to double or flow into themselves, and to be both molded by their space and to contort outward to fill the page, or the compositional space, as well. What defines space for Eisenstein is not movement, which is not unique to cinema, but rather the tension of the dialectic—the act of thinking, of having to put images together to go forward and see both the image and a movement that is separate from “[t]he mobile figure’s sensorial effect” (206). Now that we have digital cinema perhaps all cinema becomes a photograph. The most important element of the image—time—is denied it. Digital images won’t fade or scratch or wear away. By removing them from the photochemical process, we have taken away the agency of the image, which was located in technology (208). All film is now TV.

The New Extremity

While we might now think of all film as intermedial, composed of some kind of integration of film and painting, film and television, or traditional photochemical

processes and digitization, other filmic artists have registered the body in ways that attempt to push the physical reaction of the audience not through an experimentation with film form but by representing the extremes of film content and narrowing the gap between horror and porn, or by pushing art film toward both by foregrounding the body in intense new ways. The gruesome realism of the torture scenes in the horror films of the early part of the twenty-first century like *Hostel* (2005) or *Turista* (2006), which probably reached an apex in the *Saw* franchise (2004–), made the violence on the screen the main subject of the film. The New French Extremity is more an attempt to make sex more realistic, rather than violence, though many of these films insist on mixing the two. The work of Gaspar Noé or Olivier Assayas shares an interest in porn in the stripped-down nature of their films, the strange asymmetrical structure of their plots, while Catherine Breillat's films explore the nature of female sexuality with a lack of romanticism or sentimentality that is refreshing. Her characters are often so true to their age and experience that they make the viewer aware of the extent to which female and male characters are more the result of our ideas about gender—or their representation—than about real girls, women, boys, or men that we might actually meet and who behave in ways quite distinct from narrative. Breillat shares with other French directors (including Michael Haneke) a desire to show the body in a way that defamiliarizes it through the extremes of sex or violence. They want to make the audience aware of the body again, that the audience member has a body. Noé does this by making something like the notorious rape scene of *Irréversible* (2002) seem so painful that you are aware of its horror, while Breillat relies on an actor from the porn industry, Rocco Siffredi, to bring to her films a hypersexuality, or at least a huge penis, to drive home the point of the realistic sexual character of her plots. The films of this movement, however, are arguably limited by their very extremity. Are the large penises in Breillat's films really realistic? Or just desirable to some of her audience? Does the extreme violence in *Irréversible* really justify itself, especially within the thin plot of the film? Does Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997, 2007) really indict the audience, or just seem like an adolescent way to “épater la bourgeoisie”?

As Alexandra West notes, the darkness of the New French Extremity reflects France's own violent past—one not that dissimilar to that of other European nations, perhaps (31). Still, the disturbing aspects of the violence paint a bleak picture of France. If it is an accurate indication of its zeitgeist, then it isn't a happy one. Likewise, the sexual sophistication of France is given a difficult twist in the work of Breillat and her compatriots. The violent end of Bruno Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* (2003) is an example of this. A young Frenchman and his Russian girlfriend, David and Katia, wander the desert landscape of California near a military base. After an hour of watching them make love and hang out, we see two brutal acts: David is raped by men in the desert in front of Katia; David responds, hours later, by killing Katia after bursting from the motel bathroom. The final shot of the film is described by West: “A few paces away from his beloved car lies his naked body, face down. An inverted image of the two lovers' post-coital joy, David's body is now no longer part of a whole, but a fractured piece” (101). Specifically, David is lying prone. He is framed only from afar, having been finally literally and figuratively dwarfed by the American landscape.

In this case, the violence of the French past follows him to the United States, but it is the inherent violence of the American military-industrial complex that destroys him by unlocking what is awful in himself. The sexual and violent once again intertwine to create a horrible pairing, a monstrosity of despair in which a character makes themselves vulnerable and pays for the simple joy of sex.

Twenty-nine Palms illustrates the internal logic common to all of Dumont's films, one in which, according to James S. Williams:

The permanent subject ... is ... the gaze on the object, for it is always gesture through the human figure to an *ailleurs* off-frame that leads, paradoxically, to a private, interior, and "fictional" space. The more externality and exteriority there is, the more possibility there exists for interiorization. This formal double-bind—subjectivizing the immanent world in order to objectivize humans and so hammer home the carnality of human life—seems to enchain not only the characters observing the landscape but also the landscape itself, which is always subordinated to the human gaze and made to express human interiority. (11–12)

As suggested by the title itself, the film focuses not only on the military base and the implied homosociality of it but upon nature as well. Williams claims that the landscape in the film is viewed with a "nonhierarchical and nonappropriative gaze. In a kind of continuous, 'subjectless' gaze, the visible world drifts by freely in and out of the frame of a moving car. No longer simply a setting or refuge, the landscape becomes an autonomous, free-floating space for open appreciation in excess of its narrative function" (18). Nature, in other words, is not just its own character but dwarfs the humans within it—or, at least, the hapless Europeans who become the victims of a deceptively beautiful place that contains an evil hold over them and is not what it seems on the surface. The lack of subjectivity also points to Tim Palmer's argument that the work of the French *cinéma du corps* in general "overhauls the role of the film viewer, rejecting the traditionally passive, entertained onlooker, to demand instead a viscerally engaged experiential participant" (172). Filmmakers like Breillat, Dumont, and Noé "[retain] dramatic and character arcs only in vestigial traces, they prefer effects derived from an innovative composite of perceptual encounters, a raw and occasionally confrontational array of cinematic sensations" (172). The lack of pleasure of these films is precisely the point in that the displeasure might well be zones of active participation on the part of the audience—provoked, one might say, out of a stupor and made not only to complete the meaning but to respond with feeling as well. In their minimal plotting and lack of interiority in the characterizations, the films of many of these directors resemble porn. While Williams sees avant-garde experimentation that reminds him of Brakhage or David Cronenberg, one could just as easily point to the strung-together sensations of pornography—disease mixed with pleasure, a subjectless plot, distance and alienation—as the model for these directors, or, perhaps, as the Ur-text toward which they are moving. How many directors seem to ask, do you make an avant-garde porn film?

According to Damon R. Young, the internal coherence of Breillat's work follows the metonymic logic of Georges Bataille's "Story of the Eye." Her work begins with Bataille's notion that "eroticism is a universal problem" ("Visage/Con" 49). For Breillat, it is a problem for women precisely because of sexual difference. She would like to see sexual liberation, like Wilhelm Reich, as a means of escape, but cannot, in part, because of the metonymic confusion of face and vagina—the latter as a site of pleasure, but one that is never liberated from the face (56). Young makes this point by focusing on *A Real Young Girl* (1976) and the shots of the young protagonist placing objects into her vagina at the kitchen table. By the time we get to *Romance* (1999) or *Anatomy of Hell* (2004) the vagina is explored in ever-greater detail. Marie, in *Romance*, sees penetration in an almost Dworkin-like way, as an either-or category of the one who is penetrating and the one who is used and reduced to objecthood. The use of a porn star underlies this reading.¹² In *Anatomy of Hell*, the female protagonist brings a gay man home with her to have him examine her vagina and confront what he finds most repugnant, or unknowable, only to conclude that it is the penis that is ultimately minor in that it disappears into the vagina and is barely felt, is swallowed up and is nothing once it is inside the woman; it has meaning only outside the female body (63). In Breillat's cinema, women are chained to their bodies in such a way that everything about them is affected by carnality—the eyes in the face see the world as sexual (65). They reproduce, in a sort of reverse trajectory, Laura Mulvey's notion of the cinematic gaze as always male. The difference between men and women isn't "the fact that desire of one defines the gender of both (as MacKinnon would have it), but rather in their projective and differential relation to the shame, fear, and insecurity that the materiality of the body occasions" (60). While Young's description of the logic of Breillat's films is, I think, accurate, his argument here and in other writing presupposes that there is something valuable in Dworkin's notion of the limits of sexual liberation. In a reading of the gay oral sex website Gagthefag.com, Young analyzes the gallery of repeated scenes that focus exclusively on large erect penises penetrating the mouths of men. In these cropped loops, the face of the one who is being penetrated is seen, but the penetrator is visible only as a penis. In Young's reading, this site moves the Dworkin idea of sex as rape to a queer format in which there is a top and a bottom rather than a man and a woman ("*Gag the Fag*" 180). In some ways, the rough sex on display seems to illustrate the anti-porn argument in that it is brutal, hierarchical, and phallic. The bottom becomes a literal object to be fucked. While Young notes that in some ways these scenes also call into question what is really the object since the top is reduced, literally, to his penis while the bottom retains an element of subjectivity, or at least faciality, Young assumes that this type of porn brings into doubt a number of givens about porn: that it is pleasurable (he reads the bottoms as consistently uncomfortable) ("*Gag the Fag*" 182); that the Deleuzian notion of Bodies without Organs, or Guy Hocquenghem's call for a deterritorialization of sexuality, has not happened ("*Gag the Fag*" 177); that Foucault's similar desire for bodies in pleasure as the ultimate political goal, one that could transform the body, seems to have failed as well ("*Gag the Fag*" 181).

Young places this site within a history of gay porn cinema, one in which, he argues, tops and bottoms were much more likely to be interchangeable in the 1970s before a bifurcation of roles began in the 1980s with bottoms often represented as passive but also as receiving a great deal of pleasure from the top. By the 1990s the actors who played bottom roles were more muscular and focused the action of the scene, as the notion of the “power bottom” was born (Young, “*Gag the Fag*” 181). This reading—which connects the dots of much of Young’s other analyses, Dworkin, Mulvey, the notion of the object—seems to miss a couple of important points about the history of gay porn. While it is true that in the 1970s there might have been a more utopian notion of masculinity as reciprocal, there were other paradigms at work, such as the films of Fred Halsted that emphasized a dominant sexual hierarchy in sex between men for purposes of BDSM. One can argue whether or not BDSM removes gender as even the focus of sex, or even bodily pleasure itself. Likewise, the shifting of gendered dominance from male and female to male and male changes how we interpret the power dynamics of the scene. However understandably unpleasurable it might be to some viewers to see rough oral sex between two men, it does not read the same way as the equivalent scene between a man as the top and a woman as the bottom. One might queer that kind of scene, but the queering is perhaps undone by the shift to one gender. It is not clear that the bottom is feminized so much as the bottom is given a more equal agency—he will seem, in this scenario, to choose to be fucked more than a woman might. Finally, it also isn’t clear that the one who is the recipient of the penis in these scenes is never shown having a pleasurable reaction. Some of the so-called bottoms wink at the camera, smile, and in subtle ways either break the fourth wall or seem to enjoy their proximity to penises. The gagging at the end of a video may not be a turn on, but having a dick in your mouth may well be. The large size of most of them seems, likewise, to be something the recipients are ready to handle, as can often be seen when the penis is inserted and the lack of fear on the recipient’s face. Which is all to say, that this is acting. Actors can express fear as easily as they can express pleasure—both are created for the camera. The range of actors here—young and old, of differing races and, it sometimes seems, professions—is much more varied than those in other porn sites and even suggests a kind of interchangeability of the parts the actors play. Bottom and top, after all, are fairly recent roles that are a retro invention of lesbian culture—a parody of male and female, of who plays which gender.

If the mouth is not the anus, it is also not the vagina and it may well be a site of pleasure, like the anus, that is not coded by gender. The objectness of porn, which Bataille understood so well, is ultimately surreal—a set of associations that is ultimately personal, that is, biographical. All porn may be about the object, and the turning of someone into an object is precisely what it does. This may not be a bad thing, however, in that porn cannot function without this transformation. People do not become things so much as parts, fragments of a whole body that are focused on with an intensity that transforms the body into the familiar nodes of lust—the vagina, the lips, the anus, the penis, the breast—in a network of interchangeable parts that keep their difference even as they metamorphose into the next.¹³

Sex and Celebrity

Casual celebrity nudity has now gone well beyond images of female celebrities who allow their cleavage to show one of or both of their breasts or who wear short skirts without underwear. These teasing moments have been surpassed. It is not uncommon for female celebrities to have photo shoots in which they appear nude. More recently, male celebrities, usually minor television or film stars, have combined the sort of attention-getting of their female counterparts with the sex tape to take either “dick pics” or even videos of their erect penises (sometimes being masturbated to orgasm). In some ways, this rush to not only full-frontal male nudity but hyper-attention to the penis itself makes up for decades, if not centuries, of attention to female nudity and sexual body parts. The phenomenon perhaps provides some balance, in that sense, though the male stars who have engaged in this sort of activity—Tyler Posey and Adrian Grenier, for example—have perhaps made the videos for reasons that have to do with publicity, echoing the women who have had to objectify their own bodies. On the other hand, it is also possible that two other aspects of on-line sex have also converged here: the continued rapid development of high-tech cameras and the internet and, perhaps, a rapidly changing sense of what it means to share one’s personal self on social media. For some people, especially, though not limited, to those in show business, the construct of a self on social media is a part of who and what you are. The quick movement from sharing of oneself to filming oneself masturbating, however, arguably constitutes a profound change in cultural attitude—one that it is difficult to see the end to. It is likely that pornography has also, of course, played a role in this rapid change. Specifically, amateur porn, however unlikely an influence in terms of aesthetics, has continued to evolve to the point that people not only film themselves having sex but no longer hide it in the anonymity of a porn site, but post it or blog it as a part of their regular identity—much as one might post one’s photos of the family vacation on Facebook or Instagram. A “vidblog” might record a threesome, or an orgy, that you plan and stage as an event in your life that you want to share with others. Ideally, the vidblog should contain an appealing narrative and be the result of careful work on the creator’s part.¹⁴

The use of new technology to push the envelope on what constitutes acceptable behavior assumes, for women, that making the private a public matter is without the repercussions of gender. While some women might wish to assume that they are in a post-feminist era in which they can display the same abandon as men who post loops of themselves jacking off, the fact remains that we are no more post-feminist than we are post-racial and that the double-standard that punishes women more severely than men for the same behavior is, if anything, magnified through social media where women suffer from revenge porn or from stricter scrutiny of their behavior than do men. Posting nude photos that they or their partners take may seem *de rigueur* by today’s standards but can be used against you if they become public and are placed within a revenge context. As Emma Celeste Bedor concludes, “Ultimately ... a neoliberal world negates the possibility of a truly post-feminist one because the function of punishment under neoliberalism is paradigmatic of a pre-feminist perspective: one

that is always inherently gendered. As a result, the myth of equality which would make post-feminism viable is inherently disproven” (44). Technology has made porn easier to make, including more porn made by women for women, but by enabling porn, technology has also been blamed for environmental degradation—the computers, modems, and other hardware it perpetuates, just through its own popularity, have diminished the planet’s resources.

While true female empowerment in porn may not be here yet, there is definitely a change in how popular culture at large perceives the bodies of men, who take on more and more the role of their own objectification. The new body for Barbie’s companion Ken now allows for some choices on the part of the owner. In the new redesign Ken is sleeker but also more defined. Similarly, women can have their own male sex dolls tailor-made. In addition to penis size, women can choose flaws and imperfections in their bespoke designs—freckles, moles, and specifics about hair on the body’s different parts.¹⁵ But perhaps nothing is more of a barometer for change in the body, especially the male body, than the Summer Olympic Games. When held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the games garnered two articles in the *New York Times* just about the objectification of the men’s bodies at the Olympics—a set of games and events that always expose a lot of skin.¹⁶ The objectification seemed somewhat encouraged by the athletes themselves—the micro-suits of the diving team, the men’s gymnastics team’s saying that they should compete without shirts so that they can show off their ripped torsos. The male athletes seemed to want to take the games back to the original meaning: *gym* means *naked* in Attic Greek. The close-fitting, skin-tight leggings the men wear show off the outline of their penises. The men are naked in all but name anyway. Just as records of physical endurance seem to continually get broken, so, too, does the male body seem to get more and more muscular—seemingly beyond any point other than the aesthetic. The female athletes seem to follow suit—becoming more and more muscular as well. With advances in the technology of athletic wear, female athletes in some sports seem more covered up than ever, but also much less sexy—as though they have turned the objectification of the body over to the men, who perhaps become the more feminized in the process. There may have been nude female wrestlers in Sparta, but perhaps the history of the Olympics is the history of how we see the nude male body. Brazilian gymnasts joined countless rugby players before them to make their own masturbation videos—blurring the line between porn and sport, the gay erotics of athletes brought into public view. More and more of the events of the Olympics seem to contain not just a technical skill but an aesthetic element in the criteria for judging (even though the judges are not themselves experts in aesthetics). Finally, how or what are you consuming when you watch the Olympics? What is being authored? Perhaps the body of the artist and of the athlete, as it has always been, are one and the same.

Notes

- 1 In his book on film, *Signatures of the Visible*, Jameson emphatically notes that “[t]he visual is *essentially* pornographic.” “Pornographic films are thus only the potentiation of films in general, which ask us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body” (1).

- 2 Recent interest in the body in visual art can be seen by several high-profile shows at prominent museums such as “Life Like: Sculpture, Color, and the Body,” which ran at the Met Breuer from March 21 to July 22, 2018, in New York and “The Renaissance Nude” at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, which ran October 30, 2018, to January 27, 2019. The curation for the former show presented a number of different ways the body has changed over time and been represented realistically and erotically in different media—from dolls to cabinets filled with recycled human blood. The show was particularly helpful in highlighting the use of color in ancient sculpture of the human nude, which was never the abstract white that we still see today. Another show at the Met Breuer, “Obsession: Nudes By Klimt, Schiele, and Picasso,” July 3–October 7, 2018, featured the nude as well, especially the bodies of prostitutes and other models in Vienna during the years that Klimt and Schiele worked there.
- 3 As Davide Gasparotto notes, “Leonardo suggests that after practicing drawing from living models, the students would select ‘from the best limbs and best bodies’ (‘delle migliori membrane e migliori corpi’)” (249).
- 4 For more on *Teleny*, see chapter two of my *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie*.
- 5 In volume two of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault notes that Plato discusses the effeminate boy in sections c and d of “Socrates’ First Speech Concluded” in the *Phaedrus*, contrasting the younger boy who is “a weakling” with “a sturdy boy” (44) in a relationship in which the older man is in pursuit of “pleasure” rather than “goodness” and presumably wants someone who is dependent upon him. Plato is speaking here about “the physical type” of “the body” not “the mind.” Foucault also mentions Dover’s discussion of the representation of the male body in vase paintings as suggesting “a sheltered and unathletic life” (72) via the hint of a rounded belly. Eventually, some male poses give in to female ones, which tended to be more “relaxed” (72), which culminates in “hermaphrodites” and “in the fourth-century effeminate boys and youths [who] may have stimulated homosexual desire more often than they would have done a century and a half earlier” (73).
- 6 Perhaps, literally, as an answer to Brakhage (Elder 262).
- 7 See my discussion in the notes to Chapter 3 on the displacement of the female performer and, arguably, the desubjectification of the male performer as well that filmed ejaculation entails.
- 8 The guy on the motorbike in *Couch* seems to be an homage to Anger (Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema* 12).
- 9 It is important to keep in mind that penny arcade peep shows are both public and private and not really immersive: “In the peep show the act of peeping takes place simultaneously inside and outside the body, inviting a corporeal collision between spectator and text” (Herzog 350). In a sense, one is constantly reminded of the limits of film at a peep show, which is more like avant-garde cinema than classical Hollywood cinema (352). The fear of being outted meant that there was a movement toward more privacy, which meant that the viewers were more likely to engage in watching sexual acts that were kinkier (353). Perhaps the best analogy for online porn, the peep show gave the illusion of privacy. Of course, the viewer can become the performer—masturbation and glory holes (354). Loops almost always had narratives and ended with a climax (for the viewer), but the earliest loops, especially with one actor, did not. They have multiple climaxes, or one mid-way, or perhaps none at all, which makes the view of the erotics of the body more important (357).

- 10 In some ways the aestheticizing of art films takes on a new kind of beauty and erotics in the prints and videos by Marilyn Minter. In some of her works, such as the still camera image behind glass of *Orange Crush* (2009) or the sensual video *Green Pink Caviar* of the same year that was included in the film *Destricted* (2006), she combines the swirling movement of a female tongue, bright colors, and pearl-like textures that suggest much more than they actually show, creating imagery that is almost intensely embarrassing to look at precisely because it is so extremely erotic and yet, strictly speaking, non-pornographic at the same time. These works are so beautiful on the surface that they are easy to absorb and react to, yet their sexual nature is unmistakable and de-subjectified. There are no particularities except those of the surface, which is the very definition of the legitimized public display of sexuality. The sexuality, in other words, is all in your mind, and is all the more potent because of that.
- 11 Brenda Kumar notes that Paul McCarthy's life-like and life-size sculptures of his own naked supine body explore "the seeming vitality of an upright (grounded) body in contrast to the ambiguity of a horizontal one" (256).
- 12 Breillat also suggested in an interview that men are rarely fit for "stud service," so she needed a real man (qtd. in Young, "Visage/Con" 59).
- 13 About *The Living End*, Young argues:
- All of these figures demonstrate, we might say, the theatricality of desire, its reliance on formal tropes and (melo)dramatic scripts, which convey the *illusion* of temporality as a way of converging over their essentially stalled, repetitive, meaningless nature. Recall Lacan's comment in *Seminar XI* that without the fantasy scenarios that situate them within a field of erotic significance, the sexual organs would appear, horrifically, as only a "parcel of meat" ... We might think of this as the ironic substrate of the sexed body: the (mere) flesh to which it is always at risk of reverting. ("*The Living End*" 18)
- 14 The most recent fad may well be "bespoke" sex films that cost between 500 and more than 20,000 dollars (Dold 51).
- 15 See "Making the World's First Male Sex Doll."
- 16 See, for example, Trebay.

Part Three

The Space of Sex in Contemporary
Film and Television

Porn as Form and Content

Semipublic Intellectuals

Working with contemporary material means writing about it as it happens. Much of the film and television analysis here can be traced back to a blog I kept or, after I shut down the blog, to a journal that I started, writing in longhand, and occasionally on the computer. I worked inductively rather than deductively. That is, I looked closely at the influence of pornography on film and TV, and vice versa, but held off on defining exactly what the parameters of that relationship might be until I got closer to the end of the writing. I attempted to see the viewing and experiencing of television and film as a process not much different from going to a site—a location—and experiencing it on foot. I have done this type of direct experience as a researcher since the 1990s—whenever I have worked on theme parks, architecture, landscapes, and other built environments. I have tried in this part of the book to capture some of my impressions as they have happened—thoughts about TV shows and film soon after experiencing them. I think this technique is important because consumers of cultural production, even if they are critics, are also a part of the fan network. They are within the loop of reaction, a part of the community of viewers who can now, these days, comment on the cultural production or consume the reactions of other fans as a part of the original text itself. I wanted to capture what I thought, but what other critics did as well as well as some fans. To some extent, it is impossible to think about writing now—especially about pop culture—without thinking about what the role is that the critic plays in an era in which either everyone is a critic or no one is. That is, directors, producers, and writers are no longer the sole “authors” of their work. The internet and social media allow fans to react immediately to the content of popular culture. Authors of works of art become, in a sense, content providers whose work is adapted, commented upon, and reprocessed by fans. The relation between subject and object gets redefined as the aesthetic dimensions of film and television become porous and fragmented in the media-drenched environment of the early twenty-first century.

As Lili Loofburow and Phillip Maciak discuss in a section of the *PMLA* they edited on the rise of the internet, there is a new kind of “semipublic intellectual.” To some extent, any academic who writes for a blog, Tweets, or is on Facebook is

doing a kind of intellectual work that used to be reserved for journalists. Writing something in a timely manner is easier than ever because of internet technology but raises questions about the difference between academic writing and writing meant to be consumed by a larger audience. Questions include, but are not limited to, the complexity of jargon and assumed knowledge of the two audiences; the use of references (like footnotes); the importance of research and originality (especially the possibility of plagiarism in popular periodicals); and the speed at which the writing needs to take place—the slowness of the academic publishing process as opposed to the speed of the instantaneous process of self-publishing on the internet. While academics may welcome the freedom to write and reach an audience outside of their specialty, the problem also remains that any publishing they do in a non-peer-reviewed platform may or may not be counted toward tenure or post-tenure reviews depending upon their institution, department, or other factors that may be out of their own control. The rigor that academics might bring to popular publishing may help raise the standards of the public realm in general, but the opportunity to publish without the layers of editing and vetting associated with academic publishing allows academics to write about topics that interest them with the added real-world pressure of timeliness. While public intellectuals have always existed, and certain journals still act as important conduits between academic and non-academic audiences, the reality is that almost any intellectual that is engaged with commenting on culture as it happens—via the internet or the interview—is semipublic, or a “new public,” intellectual. Which may be the same thing as saying that the role of the intellectual has permanently changed.

While I feel that my books have often attempted to communicate across audiences, this book, in particular, came about as the result of my attempts to engage with televisual events, especially in Chapter 6, as they happened and attempted my own foray into blogging. For TV, this has meant recaps and, in the case of some shows, like *Lost* (2004–10), keeping up with its paratexts. Other parts of the book are written more normally—viewing the film, reviewing it, research, writing, etc. While social media provide an opportunity at self-presentation, and occasional social interaction, blogs are more solitary and stand-alone, even if a post receives numerous comments. Though blogs can be seen as the best of all worlds—freedom for the author, ease of access for the reader—they lack the editorial process that might make them better and the limited social interaction that might take the place of that function is not really like a social network community. As something that requires a great deal of forethought to compose, blogs have few of the problems that one might associate with social media, though the ready access to them contains many of the same risks. Still, new ways of publishing entail new kinds of content and dictates, to some extent, the expression of it. The main point I hope to make is that the way we see TV and film is now changed by the interaction of viewing and reading, or even viewing and writing, and can never again be just a single, solitary experience divorced of the context of fandom.

Film/Television

The places where bodies can be seen now and observed are in contemporary film and prestige television. Both types of media, but the latter in particular, provide opportunities to see the unclothed body in both sexual and other situations. Indeed, it has almost become de rigueur for pay TV to contain representations of nudity not only as a lure for subscriptions but increasingly as a presumed right of the pay-TV subscriber—that you expect to get a certain amount of tasteful skin that you can't see on network television. TV shows on HBO, Showtime, and Starz seem to strike some kind of balance between the infamous “sexposition” of HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–19), where characters explain back stories while sex is going on in the background as a way to make data dumps of plot-telling information while distracting the viewer with titillation, and perhaps more integral uses of sex or nudity that are central to the artistic conceit of the show that also wouldn't be possible without the freedom from self-censorship that only a subscriber-based show can have. By looking at films and television, and to some extent their paratexts on the internet, we can see how quickly concepts of the body have evolved and how they are part of the material aspects of filmed representation and are often the trope around which much of televisual media turns.

While we might think of the twenty-first century as comprising a second Golden Age of television, one that may really have begun during the fin de siècle of the last century, what is fueling this age is, as is often true of artistic periods, a new form of economics. As cable and entertainment companies have combined and the price for cable in the US market has continued to rise through monopoly competition (few households have a choice between terrestrial cable providers in their geographic area), alternative platforms for delivery have arisen as more and more companies have decided that the future of television is not in the delivery system, which will eventually be the internet, but in the content that this delivery system provides. In other words, though the internet is delivered to most homes either by the fiber optics of cable or by satellite, it is the content, not the platform, that customers are paying for. No longer yoked to broadcast networks only, or their myriad cable outgrowths, consumers are looking increasingly at channels that provide new shows that they find worth watching.¹ What defines these shows is, in some cases, high-quality writing, directing, and acting, but in some cases the proliferation of ever more niche channels simply calls for more content to be produced. The overall effect is that more money than ever is being poured into creating new content—hiring writers, fielding concepts from potential showrunners, etc. The demand creates more opportunities for everyone involved with television as the production companies seem to have, at the moment, a seemingly voracious appetite for new content. While the popularity of some shows—critically, if not in other ways—sets new standards for television—*The Wire* (2002–8) or *Mad Men* (2007–15), for example—the addition of new content is, in part, an attempt by television producers to show that their work is not just mass entertainment but something meant to be savored, to be returned to with the understanding that it

will be appreciated far into the future. This effect comes, in part, from the high quality of some domestic dramas, but also, increasingly, from the exposure that American audiences have to British TV and shows from continental Europe as well.

The main engine for this drive to have more and better TV is Netflix, whose phenomenal growth in its online platform mode has made it one of, if not the largest, companies in the United States, quickly catching up with or eclipsing Apple, which has Amazon and Google also breathing down its neck. That a provider of television and film content could rise so quickly shows the economic power that platform-generated television can have. Netflix is the black hole at the center of the television-production universe—eating up huge parcels of shows and almost entire genres in an effort to provide its subscribers with a constant stream of new programming. The strategy seems to be to throw everything at the wall, all the time, to see what might stick. While few shows seem to have staying power, the sheer number creates a feeding frenzy among other content providers—Amazon, HBO, etc.—and the sense that if you don't create new shows or buy options on them that Netflix—or Amazon, Hulu, etc.—will. The next transformation is that other kinds of companies—Apple, for example—will begin to produce content as well, which is currently driving the merger of large media companies such as Time Warner and AT&T, with more surely to follow.

Just what a television show or series is, however, is not that easy to define. Series exist as stand-alone episodes, interlinked continuous storytelling, and frequently as a hybrid of the two. The difference between a film and a television show is perhaps key, with television shows being pushed toward a melodramatic structure and films toward theater, or specifically, the arc of the tragic, as in Greek tragedy. The seriality of the TV show may seem to mitigate against the intensity of the two-hour format that tells (usually) only one central story well. But series TV can, perhaps, be seen in one of two different ways: either as a series of even more intense one-hour mini-movies or as a longer playing form that allows for the building up of a longer movie that has a pay-off that even the best films can never equal. Certainly, in shortening the length of time a series can operate each season—fewer than fifteen, usually—the number of regular one-hour shows that would be produced in a year is almost halved compared to what used to get produced, which was closer to thirty per season. Producers have the opportunity, at least, to create a long movie each season. In the case of *The Wire* this may have happened, with the switch in topic from year-to-year—from schools, for example, to journalism. For this long-play movie idea to work, however, there almost always has to be, at some point in the planning and development of the series, a limit placed on the number of total episodes. It is not enough to have an idea for how the series might end, but one has to have a reason for how most, if not all, episodes work toward one singular effect. The most potent precursor for this model might be the British show *The Prisoner*. Shown from 1967 until 1968 on ITV, it presented one perfect season in which a bureaucratic spy (the genre par excellence of the 1960s), played by Patrick McGoohan (who was also the creator and producer, and at different times, the director and writer as well), finds himself imprisoned in a Disneyland-like world in an unnamed location after he plans to resign from a secret agency. Running for seventeen shows, roughly the number emulated by prestige TV today, each week we saw him

almost escape and often outwit his captors only to be dragged back to his prison. In addition to its high production values, excellent writing, and above-average acting, the show felt all of a piece, with variations on a theme that combined the twists and turns of an action film with the existential paradoxes that were popular in the 1960s—that the government was out to get you, but that you were, finally, your own worst enemy. As with the Vietnam War, we have seen the enemy and it is us. Each week McGoohan's character would interact with the townsfolk, who were never not performing for him. The sense was that the paranoia was real, but also that it couldn't be thought away. That no matter how real, prisons were also a mental state. The surreal touches on the show were important as they made clear the extent to which the prisoner's reality and his subconscious mind had collapsed to become the same thing.

A tough act to follow, but the best of the recent Golden Age of TV (or Peak TV, as it is also called) does have some moments almost equal to McGoohan's achievement. The supreme example of how to make one season a total one would have to be David Lynch's third season of *Twin Peaks* (2017). Subtitled "The Return," it was advertised as a limited event and benefits from its self-limitations. At eighteen hours, it is a long season, and it was often discussed by Lynch as an eighteen-hour movie. Because every episode is directed by Lynch personally, the season has a style and feel to it that is very different from the feel of the first two seasons of the show where Lynch was only the occasional director (1990–1). Lynch indulges himself here and makes a film that is in synch with his best recent work such as *Mulholland Drive* (2001), which was, interestingly, itself a failed series that was reedited and added to. Maybe the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks*, which played with the formulae of TV at the time, were real TV and the third *Twin Peaks* was really just a film released in serial parts. It is difficult to say, though the cumulative effect of shows designed with an overall form places a great deal of weight on the last episode or two, if not the very last scene itself, raising the question, from another angle, of just what a TV show is—something to be added to, or something that is organic in its totality? Does the limited release have the advantage of a film in its ending? Or is it, finally, just a different kind of TV show—one in which the joys are not the journey but the arrival at the destination?

In a review of Linda Williams' book *The Wire*, Agustín Zarzosa argues that seriality itself does not define melodrama as a structure or mode. Williams herself notes that some Greek tragedies may be more properly defined as melodramas and Zarzosa claims that not everything that is serial is melodramatic; some are tragic, such as *Madame Bovary* (100). If "sensationalism and suspense" seem to be the characteristics of melodrama as most people define it (100), Zarzosa sees the difference between tragedy and melodrama as "their respective articulations of suffering. Whereas tragedy explains suffering as the result of a violated ethical order, melodrama puts pressure on reigning moral ideas to eliminate or mitigate suffering" (101). Tragedy, in other words, seeks to make the ethical order (and violations of it) visible; melodrama seeks to make suffering visible (leaving the order invisible or unremarked). In this sense, perhaps, all of David Simon's dramas are melodramas that attempt to show the extreme suffering caused by the failures of institutions. While Williams seeks to separate these institutions from individuals via the family, Zarzosa argues that

the family is itself an institution in which individuals play roles and that one of the hallmarks of melodrama is the extent to which public and private spheres collapse as we see how individuals are unable to fulfill roles chosen and assigned to them at both levels (101). In melodrama we don't place blame on people for this failure, but see it as the inevitable interplay between the suffering caused by institutions and the failures of individuals who take on various roles and fail at them (102). Melodrama asks us to see the whole picture. Perhaps this is why it is a mode that works well with extended television.

Zarzosa concludes his critique of Williams by admitting that *The Wire* may well be seen as a televisual equivalent of Naturalist literature, one in which whatever momentary freedom an individual seems to gain is eventually snuffed out by the grinding institution of which they are part. Characters are replaceable and the "logic" of an institution can't be so easily stopped (103). The utopian potential of melodrama such as *The Wire* is, finally, superseded by the environment, which won't allow for growth at an institutional scale, or for solutions that will last. If the impossibility of utopianism weren't enough, Fredric Jameson bemoans the dystopian as well, fearing that "[w]e ... have ... two converging problems: on the one hand, the repetition of older melodramatic plot forms becomes more and more tiresome, and more difficult to sustain. On the other, the raw material or content of such a practice of form is becoming one-dimensionalized, evil is vanishing socially, and villains are few and far between. Everybody is alike. The utopian writers already had a problem with the possibility of literature in their perfect world; now we have a problem with it in our imperfect one" (*Ancients and Postmoderns* 249). And the problem with villains is that "in mass culture" "villainy ... has been reduced to two lone survivors of the category of evil: these two representations of the truly antisocial are ... serial killers and ... terrorists" (249). These two types, however, "have become as boring as the villains driven by 'greed.' Alas, as with the disappearance of the spy novel after the end of the Cold War, that boredom would seem to betoken an end of melodrama which threatens to become the end of mass culture itself" (249).

Simon has said that his model for *The Wire* was Stanley Kubrick's anti-war film *Paths of Glory* (1957), "a war film that succeeds in combining systemic analysis with more traditional forms of realism and emotional identification" (Kinder 51). The ability to move the "focus from a fascinating individual criminal to a broader analysis of the culture that creates and destroys him" became Simon's forte (51). Kubrick's own misgivings about *Paths of Glory* (and, surely, his even more abstract first film, *Fear and Desire* [1953]) are that the anti-war message didn't allow for enough balance and ended up being too much a polemical screed, while *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) allowed for real tragedy, which might have meant, for Kubrick, ambiguity, the light and the dark aspects of his protagonists fitting uneasily together until the last frame of the film. Joker (Matthew Modine) is, at the end of the movie, able to move from man to Marine by killing the young Vietcong sniper (Ngoc Le), but the transformation is a combination of revenge for the death of his friend, Cowboy (Arliss Howard); mercy at the behest of the wounded, dying girl; and the culmination of the combined rape/circle jerk that is the spectacle of men looking down on someone dead or dying. All that he

knows is that he is “alive” and that that is better than its opposite, but he is, as Thomas Hardy might say, the “deadeast thing/Alive enough to have strength to die” (“Neutral Tones”). He has survived, but that is all.

While television may seem to have attempted to catch up with the quality of the best filmmaking—and perhaps even to have overtaken it—it is important to keep in mind the essential differences between them. In essence, a long-form film is Aristotelian. It is structured as a dramatic arc that often follows the classical theatrical conventions of an exposition followed by complication, crisis (with anagnorisis), and denouement. A television series, however, is more like a Dickens novel, with numerous crises and eddies, major and minor characters, that can populate a sprawling landscape of emotions and events. A successful television show can often be, like Dickens, baggy but inventive, entertaining but fleeting (at least in part). As the stakes rise for television, however, in terms of critical expectation, we seem increasingly to expect television series to contain their own overall dramatic arc, despite the fact that such a structure is extremely difficult to pull off. In a serious, high-minded dramatic show, each hour might mirror this structure itself, but the overall structure of the entire series might as well, only on a larger scale. Few television shows have successfully pulled this off. How do you plan for something as complex as five or even seven seasons? How do you sustain interest? Or perhaps more importantly, how do you make a story line that will continue to build, to possess architecture, well past the point of any sort of dramatic arc? The difficulty of doing this points to the fact that television is essentially the telling of tales, the linear spinning out of one story added onto the next. Perhaps it works best as an art form when it is thought of as an Eastern structure—an Arabian nights of the modern age. Or perhaps television is one of the ultimate postmodern forms, something that can be added onto because each part is not part of some sort of temporal structure but spatial form—a collage of seemingly equal parts. But in constantly comparing television to film, we actually shift the critical expectations away from what television can do well—endless invention—and toward the structure of the dramatic film. Hence, there is increasingly more weight given to the auteuristic notions in regard to TV. A series is now supposed to have a “showrunner,” who keeps everything aligned so that a series builds its consistent dramatic arc across seasons—the director on steroids. Likewise, there is some deference given to shows that have one director for each season. *True Detective* was considered much more competent in its first season (2014) as opposed to its second (2015) in part because the first was directed in its entirety by Cary Joji Fukunaga. The critical fascination with David Lynch’s return to *Twin Peaks* in 2017 was the doubling-down of the auteur theory—a film auteur who had become a television auteur who was returning to TV at the beginning of the height of television aueteurism. While it is unlikely that most shows can sustain dramatic cohesion within even one season, the expectation that they can seems to grow each year that we proclaim we are in a new golden age of television.

Even as we expect TV to somehow adapt itself to film, we also see directors, producers, and networks choose between two ways of delivering their product to an audience. Since most so-called prestige television, at least in the United States, is delivered with little or no commercial interruption, the delivery system is either the

traditional weekly show or the all-at-once drop. The former benefits from the weekly build-up of buzz, making the silence, tension, and wait between shows an important part of the experience of watching it. While this experience is ultimately a solitary one, it benefits from creating a community of viewers who can magnify their feelings about and thoughts on a show, forming a shared experience. The internet and social media, despite their many criticisms, are perfect for reinforcing this common conversation. For television shows that produce discussion, this conversation is as important as the content of the shows themselves. In some cases, such as *Lost* and *Westworld* (2016–), probably more so. In the other delivery system, the drop, the advantages are binge-worthiness and the satisfaction of having control over how you experience the show. The former seems still patterned after the original television experience, which is most like a serially published novel. The latter is more like a record album, or the internet itself, where the individual has the power to assemble the final product at their own speed. Both forms, however, assume linear storytelling and a dramatic arc of narrative, whether a short season (currently a minimum of eight) or perhaps a stand-alone mini-series. The movement toward quality over quantity, however, seems to increasingly put pressure on making series ever shorter, as though the director or showrunner has to know everything in advance, which means having control over the entire story—something perhaps more easily done with a shorter season. Thus, while the first model suggests the idea that a show might grow organically and perhaps unfold as the seasons, at least, pile up, or as new directors and writers, perhaps, try new things with the basic formula of characters and ideas, the latter structure perhaps suggests more unity or at least finiteness, though also, in releasing everything at once, disposability as well.

The latest turn in mass televisual culture is toward meta-television—television shows that are about the telling of stories. Historically, some of the best TV shows have always been about the medium itself, finding ways to have at least one episode or two in an overall run of shows that could be about the genre formula, if not the medium, of the series. Few shows, however, played with the notion of realist fiction itself. TV aesthetics have been as embedded in realism as Hollywood in Classical Narrative Cinema. With Lynch's *Twin Peaks* and the original run of *The X-Files* (1993–2001) this gridlock finally began to change and ultimately accelerate with *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) and *Lost*. The last created perhaps the most opportunities for self-consciousness about the form itself, inventing the flash-forward and trying, spectacularly unsuccessfully, to go further with the flash-sideways. With the second season of HBO's *Westworld* we see a similar experimentation with multiple timelines but added to the meta-ness is the notion of theme parks as narrative.² In this futuristic theme park of robots-come-to-life, the “loops” or stories that are told via the coding are a constant reminder of the limits of free choice and the extent to which it is never not an illusion, not only in this plotline but in reality itself. The meta-ness of recent TV comes at a time when the platforms for delivering TV have changed. The primary technology for delivering content is increasingly no longer linear, but fragmented and digital, especially in the notion of TV shows delivered all at once to be binge watched, or at least, be seen on the viewer's (i.e., subscriber's) schedule. This form of

consumption might now be described as a form of “efficient laziness: it simultaneously draws on the pleasure of media consumption and the notorious anxiety of [the] fear of missing out” (Alexander 21).

Pornography as a reference point for TV shows up most in the representation of the naked body, though increasingly in terms of actual sex as well. On the *Girlfriend Experience* season one (2016), episode two, we have the first actual blowjob shown on cable TV; though we don’t see an erect penis or actual penetration, what is happening is clear. The sudden appearance of male frontal nudity on “prestige” TV from Spring 2017 onward is mainly about showing the flaccid penis. Starz, whose series have perhaps usually been male-centered in terms of bodies, have two CGI erections in season one (2017), episode two of *American Gods*, “The Secret of Spoons,” and a real penis in a gay sex scene in episode three, “Head Full of Snow.” Episode five of the third and final season (2017) of *The Leftovers* on HBO (“It’s a Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt World”) opens with a French sailor aboard a submarine who strips completely naked while going quietly insane and then spends the rest of the episode aboard a ship at an orgy in which people are dressed as lions that vaguely references *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Sex is made to look especially sleazy here, though the penises, again, are on display.³ American TV seems finally—and suddenly—to be getting over the taboo of male nudity, though it is interesting that the penis is so easily fabricated—the fake ones on *Big Little Lies* (season one [2017], episode six, “Burning Love”) and *Girls* (season six [2017], episode three, “American Bitch”). When is a penis in film or TV ever real? It is about illusion; still, not knowing that it is a real penis on a real body also changes the meaning, to some extent. Though the tradition for actresses who use body doubles or parts of body doubles’ bodies is more common than people think.

While the *Girlfriend Experience* is actually about sex, most TV that deals with nudity or the body doesn’t actually deal with the topic of sex or porn. There are exceptions, such as *The Deuce* (2017–19), on HBO, which tracked the rise of the porn industry in and around 42nd Street in New York in the 1970s and had, by the second season, done its part to make visible not only the male body but the male body of color, in particular. But by and large you would have to look at film to see sustained examples of how porn can either be treated as its own subject matter or utilized as a platform for telling a story primarily through sex, that is, via the representation of acts of sex on screen.

Don Jon (2013)

An example of a film that takes porn as its subject matter is *Don Jon*. In an impressive directorial debut, Joseph Gordon-Levitt plays a generic New Jersey boy who is, as his name would suggest, a local Don Juan who carries a dirty little secret: despite his success with bedding women, he doesn’t enjoy sex in any form other than internet porn. Gordon-Levitt’s thesis is that men of a certain age, raised on endless amounts of visual sexual stimulation via VHS tapes, DVDs, and, more recently, the commercialization of the internet, have lost their ability to be intimate with women. That is, though they

fuck, they don't have sex. Indeed, the Jon/John of this film has never actually enjoyed sex with a woman.

While the film posits his generational conundrum as a problem, the film never makes clear exactly what this might mean for younger men. For Jon it is not a lack of emotional fulfillment but a lack of physical fulfillment in that sex with an actual woman, while resulting in orgasm, is sex that seems to him to be physically inferior to what he can achieve via masturbation to pornography. Yet what his problem may be instead is that sex for the sexually inundated consists of a constant battle of bored sex versus exciting sex, which may be another problem altogether. Within the realm of the film, New Jersey seems to be troped as a way to provide instant authenticity. Jersey stands in for the East Coast, a place that is supposed to have placeness about it. That Gordon-Levitt and Tony Danza (as his father) do a good job of acting "Jersey" is not in doubt, but it is also now so stylized a look that it is difficult not to see Jersey accents, gestures, ticks, interiors, etc., as little more than a quotation of other works of art—from *The Sopranos* to the horrible haircut Gordon-Levitt sports à la *Jersey Shore* (2009–12). Setting something in New Jersey is now more self-conscious than setting something in Shakespearean England, the Old South, or any one of a number of other contexts in which the conventions of place and time can only ever overwhelm the best of authorial intentions. Setting, in other words, has to be ignored as little more than a joke. The one helpful aspect is the supposed gender extreme of the New Jersey working-class environment: girls are girls and boys are boys.

It is only in terms of gender that the New Jersey setting seems to work. Jon falls for "a 10," Barbara, played by seemingly every one's girl-next-door, Scarlett Johansson. After playing epically hard to get, Barbara Sugarman finally gives her man some sugar (or vice versa) and the inevitable let-down is yet another station of the cross that Jon must check off. Even sex with the world's most perfect woman is not enough. He resumes his internet habit, only to be discovered by Barbara, who warns him and then, finally, ends their relationship out of disgust for his "addiction."

Barbara's reaction to his interest in internet sex might be enough of a warning that she is not the girl for him, but the problem turns out not to be porn but gender. Johansson's character finally rejects porn because she believes not so much that it demeans women as it suggests that the men who watch it are unhappy with them—that they are somehow less than men themselves. In this Jersey-esque world of hyper-masculinity and femininity, this is a crucial distinction. Barbara at times bristles at Jon's calling her "baby," though at the height of their relationship they refer to each other with that pet name. Likewise, Jon nearly gets into a fistfight with his father when he refers to him as "kid." Any suggestion that you are less than fully grown—less than a man or a woman—is grounds for a fight. The problem that Barbara has with Jon's interest in porn is finally a problem she has with any gender flexibility in their relationship. Gender is, for her, scripted. She pushes Jon to take a college night class so that he can get a job that is not in the service industry so that he can be more of a real man. While Jon is hardly an example of gender fluidity, his clichéd interest in the things in his world he values the most—his pad, his ride, his pals—is partly a pride in

the attention he lavishes on them. At several points during the film we see Jon taking pride in his daily routine, which means always washing and changing the sheets of his bed after every evening's conquest; taking pride in his clothes and appearance; keeping his car spotless; and obsessively cleaning his apartment—washing and rewashing mirrors, vacuuming, etc. While shopping for curtain rods for Barbara's apartment, Jon tries to excuse himself to go and buy replacements for his Swiffer mop. Barbara resists his leaving her side, presumably because she thinks that it is just an excuse to surf porn on his phone, but the real reason, which is finally revealed, is that she just finds it too unmanly for him to buy a mop—"embarrassing." A "grown man" should have a maid, she tells him. He relents, and they leave the store with her clinging, literally, to his arm.

The cleverness of this scene is in the pivot the film makes away from the romantic ending and toward yet another problem for poor Jon. The love of his life will never let him be himself, and while their relationship quickly and inevitably ends, he is still left with the problem of his supposed lack of intimacy. The problem is solved unconvincingly by the arrival of an older woman in his life, Esther, a recent widow, played by Julianne Moore. In something out of an Isherwood novel, Moore teaches Jon how to really make love to a woman, to achieve intimacy through lovemaking, not sex. This portion of the film feels rushed and incomplete, with inadequate time given both to Moore's back story and to the believability that Jon would suddenly be attracted to her, even as rebound for Johanson. While the film makes the viewer aware of the titillation of porn, it never really explains what should go in its place or why it is a problem at all. For Moore's character to be the answer to a riddle, the riddle needs to be discernable. Instead, we are given a series of coincidences about Jon's character that are a bit hard to understand. One, that he never realizes, until Moore points it out, is that he cannot masturbate without porn; two, that he doesn't realize that porn is faked; three, that he has never really thoughtfully considered why sex with actual women is not as pleasurable to him as sex with himself. Why he bothers to have sex with other people, in other words, is never completely clear. The only thing missing from his life is the fact that real people do not fulfill him as completely as porn. Moore says that the answer to this is to "lose yourself in another person," which he claims also to want, though something like that does happen to him when the porn is good.

The film seems to take for granted the idea that Jon has an addiction. Porn, but maybe not sex, is an addiction for him. But what, exactly, is he addicted to other than pleasure? Or other than harmless masturbation? What is it about him that needs to be fixed? His sense of gendered self is arguably healthy and complete. Where the movie would seem to fill in the movie-of-the-week theme—that men must not have unrealistic expectations about sex, ones fed by the unrealistic poses, activities, bodies, and faked desire of mainstream heterosexual porn—becomes instead that men who are into porn can't really have sex at all because it is always a disappointment to them; therefore, they can't really know another person. Early in the film Jon says that he doesn't like actual sex because it usually does not involve what he wants the most in sex—namely, more oral sex (performed on him) and more rear entry. He is bored by

the missionary position and by what he sees as women who don't want to experiment with positions or with what is defined as sex. Yet the answer to this problem is to find an older woman who initiates sex with him by being on top, where she can have the most pleasure and control for herself. What Jon must learn is to be a giver, not just a receiver, or to see human sexuality as about communication and mutual pleasure rather than scripted physical activity. If it is the latter, then the film risks becoming yet another humanist cliché, making porn into a potentially harmful activity, giving it a power that it doesn't really have. If the former, then what Jon needs is not a lesson in tantric sex but a lover who is open to making at least some of his desires a reality. The problem, in other words, is not with what one wants, or necessarily with how one gets it, but with knowing what it is that you really want. If for Jon that is emotion, then he is probably going about sex the wrong way. If it is sexual pleasure, then it is not necessarily the case that he does not know himself. The film risks being anti-sex, of demonizing porn, by glibly suggesting that it is dangerous, an addictive substance that can easily make men immune to reality and in need of someone a generation older to show them that sex is not eroticism and love is not great sex. Yet whether or not those dichotomies are really at work here—or in the culture at large—is debatable. Gordon-Levitt asks a lot of the right questions, but he should have taken some time to make sure that the answers aren't themselves more troubling than the questions.

Bang Gang (A Modern Love Story) (2015)

Bang Gang is a French-language film that falls somewhere between *Kids* (1995) and *Don Jon* in its treatment of sex in terms of generational markers in the age of media saturation. Much like the latter, it seems to offer a cautionary tale about how access to too much porn and social media results in the pornification of culture. Most of the film tracks the origins of a sex club that forms nonchalantly when a group of French high-school students get bored during the summer vacation. The school stud, Alex (Finnegan Oldfield), has his archeologist mother's house and pool conveniently available for the summer as she works at a dig in Morocco. He and his exhibitionist best friend form the core of the group, though the action is George's (Marilyn Lima) idea—a game of Dare or Dare—probably meant to get Alex to sleep with her. While the orgy scenes are meant to be titillating, they are filmed as strictly soft porn—that is, we know what the actors are doing but there are no hard-core scenes. There are always more girls than guys, though the director, Eva Husson, seems to enjoy focusing on the male bodies, to create her own female gaze. The boys are shown surfing, removing their wet suits, and the only full nudity is of Nikita (Fred Hotier), a friend of Alex's. The teens' bodies never really suffer any of the ill effects of the sex, drugs, and general decadence of the summer—protected, it seems, by youth or simple bourgeoisie. The pregnancy, gonorrhea, and syphilis at the end of the film are all reversed. When deflowering George's friend, Laetitia (Daisy Broom), Alex says, "Don't worry, we're not

a high-risk population.” This is true if that demographic is straight white people, but far from guaranteed.

While the acting by the young people in the film is believable in a naturalistic way, the film fails to shock the audience in the same way as *Kids*. That film, like all of Larry Clark’s creations, also objectified the young, but it showed the seamy sordidness of kids aping adults—involved with sex that they did not understand and that was an example of a new level of hollowness—“kids.” Except for Telly (Leo Fitzpatrick), who was a young wolf among chicks, preying on girls, the two male leads in *Bang Gang* seem self-satisfied but never scary. They are too self-absorbed to care. Chloë Sevigny’s positive HIV diagnosis in *Kids* is the tragedy in the film and lends a weight to the sex that is never felt in *Bang Gang*. When the orgy club is exposed via a YouTube post, and the youths are brought in for testing, Nikita and Laetitia talk about syphilis as something they didn’t know anything about: “Apparently lots of nineteenth-century writers died from it.” Of course, they look the information up on their phones. They are linked to the romantic past, but via twenty-first-century technology. They suffer no real consequences—and even get closer to their parents as a result of the experience—but the film does update *Kids* by showing the role that porn and social media play now in teen sex. The gang watches porn together, even projecting it onto the walls of Alex’s mother’s house—as though they wanted to enter into the scenarios it depicts. Everyone wants to be filmed, and Alex even captures the deflowering of Laetitia on his phone for her to keep—or post. The only exception is Gabriel (Lorenzo Lefebvre), the lonely neighbor whom George is really in love with. He moshes, too, and she probably thinks he is gay. She tries to convince him to join the club and eventually succeeds in getting him there, though he only wants to have sex with her. She deflowers him, but Gabriel resists the culture of the sex club. It is his father (Manuel Husson), who is disabled and dependent upon Gilbert to bathe him and care for him, who voices the film’s conscience, telling Gabriel, once George’s literal gang bang is released: “The orgies in themselves aren’t so shocking. You’re fucking, so what? But it’s so profoundly mediocre. Is that any way to relate to one another? You’re all interchangeable? ... That’s what you call freedom? Some kids fight for revolution. You fight to fuck anything that moves? Don’t you have anything better to do?”

The film is based on actual events that took place in Atlanta in 1996. In the background of the film are post-apocalyptic suggestions—extreme heat, train derailments, ominous clouds. In interviews Husson has said that she saw the 1990s as a dangerous time for young sex. Though she thinks some teens really did do the things she depicts in her film, that this was their sexual reality, she wanted to show another side of teens—the opposite of what she sees as the bleakness of *Kids*. As the film comes to an end, the teens mature—à la the British ending to *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)—and realize the error of their ways, narrowly escaping the consequences of sex. In fact, the film ends with what become the primary characters—George and Gabriel—living as a couple and having meaningful, emotional, love-drenched sex. Husson sees the film as parallel to her own youth. In this sense, the film is nostalgic, though for a time when sex was darker, if still impermanent, for a privileged population.

The Canyons (2013)

Almost more famous as a potential disaster than it ever could be as a success, Paul Schrader's *The Canyons* is a strange echo of Schrader's own *American Gigolo* from 1980. As in that film, sex is presented as a code that is used to unravel contemporary culture. While this idea is certainly common to the 1970s and early 1980s—whether *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977) or *Cruising* (1980)—Schrader's own earlier films likewise contained male characters whose sexuality seemed, at best, complicated.

Schrader's *The Canyons* applies the nominal generic characteristics of a thriller to the outward feel of an analysis of contemporary culture. It is only in terms of the latter that the film has any interest, but here the film captures, perhaps partly by accident, some sort of zeitgeist that illustrates the pornification of American society. As played by a male porn star seeking cross-over status, James Deen is the male equivalent of Sasha Grey. Deen plays bored rich-boy Christian as someone obsessed with the minutiae of everyday life. While in author Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (2000) this obsession might have been men's facial products or business cards, in the present it is cell phone messages and internet-planned threesomes. A familiar type for Ellis, Christian exists as something of a parody of both Deen's role in porn and Ellis' own fiction: a playboy who is obsessed with sex and materialism. Deen nails the cocky attitude, though fails in most scenes where he is supposed to reveal himself—either purposefully or accidentally—to other characters. Like Richard Gere in *Gigolo*, Deen's Christian is supposed to obliquely suggest sexual ambiguity. His threesomes and couples have recently emphasized “dudes,” and the one sexual scene we see with him and Tara (Lindsay Lohan) involves her insisting that he kiss the male half of the arranged couple before receiving a blow job from him. As he later tells his therapist, this was supposed to then lead to anal penetration by him, but he stopped at that point. Christian seems to insist on male partners for him and Tara, but he is at the same time jealous of her lover, Ryan (Nolan Funk), who is one of several men in the film who look alike and who are menaced by Deen's character. In fact, Christian's jealousy over a former affair that he had with Tara leads him to arrange that Ryan be blackmailed into having sex with a gay producer on the film and, eventually, the murder of Ryan's girlfriend, Gina (Amanda Brooks).

While all of the major characters have some sort of relationship to the film industry, movies are referenced only obliquely. Schrader interjects images of old closed movie theaters throughout his film as seemingly a reminder of the way things used to be. While the meaning is never clear, he could be commenting on his own earlier career as well as the fact that, in the world of smartphones and the internet, everyone is in pictures—specifically, everyone is in porn. The only film that we actually see getting made is a surreptitious one that Christian creates using his phone. Significantly, it records him giving Lohan oral sex as one of their internet friends masturbates, with the friend mainly in focus. As Christian tells one character, “Everyone in this town is a producer.” Everyone wants to feel important, and what better way than to say it is film that you do?

Schrader is also slyly commenting on the circumstances of the making of his own film. A *New York Times* article on the film called advanced attention to the film's use of

microbudgeting and the equivalent of Kickstarter to get the project made (Rodrick). Lohan is herself a producer of the film, and the film obviously plays with the thin line between life and art: Deen essentially plays someone who would like to be a star of porn films like Deen is himself, appearing in films with both women and men, and Lohan, who actually gives a moving performance at times, seems genuinely distraught in some scenes which, even if acting, recall Lohan's own real-life problems with substance abuse and self-control. The film is the life that it pretends to represent.

"Who knows anyone these days?" Christian asks in the film's first scene, when Ryan is meeting him and Tara for the first time and Christian talks about having just returned from Vegas. When asked where he likes to stay, he says at the Four Seasons because it is at the end of the Strip and he can watch planes land at McCarran. Vegas becomes for him a nonplace, like an airport waiting area, where one is neither here nor there—neither arriving nor departing in time or space. While having this conversation, Christian idly surfs his phone, actually looking for the man that he will invite over for that night's threesome and settling on one who looks a lot like Ryan, who has been cast in his "low-budget slasher movie." Explaining to Ryan and his girlfriend, formerly Christian's lover, that he likes to keep things "complicated," he talks about making hookups using a phone app that makes hookups easy—whether girlfriends or couples. "Couples? Really?" asks Ryan, who claims, "I'm just a more conventional guy." Christian has to explain that he does not mind his girlfriend with other women and that it is "mostly girls," though Tara asks, "what's with all the dudes lately?" "It's a phase."

Deen's performance embodies the broad overacting of porn films, though he finds himself in scenes that must be somewhat close to real life—maneuvering people into bed or deflecting the adulation of Ryan in the first scene when he plays the novice who is thrilled to be the lead in a new picture. Deen also provides the real film's money shot: his flaccid but pendular genitalia swinging back and forth as he walks up the stairs for the couple's foursome.

The film begins and ends with close-ups of Ryan's face. Is he the one to whom Christian is secretly attracted? Does Christian remove Gina because she is sleeping with him? He learns that Gina slept with Ryan before him. Indeed, both women had been with Ryan and Christian and both cheated on Christian. Yet he is the one who wants an open relationship. Why? What does Ryan realize at the end of the movie when his female friend says that Christian is still at large? As Ryan, who is from Ann Arbor, says about Los Angeles: "It's a pretty fucked up town."⁴

Savages (2012)

Schrader is not the only director to make a film that deals explicitly with threesomes. Less remarked but just as suggestive was Oliver Stone's *Savages* from the same year. The characters in this film break into two groups: the Mexicans, played by Benicio Del Toro as Lado and Selma Hayek as Elena, and the Americans, played by Blake Lively

as O, Taylor Kitsch as Chon, and Aaron Taylor-Johnson as Ben. The plot involves a flourishing pot business that the two men have developed, in part from a strain brought back by Chon from the war in Afghanistan, and the Mexican drug dealers who want to get in on their action. The latter ultimately kidnap O and the two men have to help rescue her. The film's title is an epithet first mentioned in the film in reference to an internet murder involving multiple chainsaw decapitations by a Mexican drug cartel located in Baja. The same term is later used by the Mexican characters in the film in reference to the American protagonists' sex lives: "Maybe they're faggots?" "Maybe she does them both. Savages." It is finally embraced in a voice-over by one of the protagonists at the end of the film as a moniker for them as noble savages living in a primal state. They are associated, finally, with the noir voiceover of O and some type of slippery amorality such as one would find in a noir film of the 1940s, but one that is related not to violence but to sex. They are outsiders, savages, because of their unconventional partnering arrangement. Enough cannot be said about how rare and unusual it is for a filmmaker—a contemporary artist of any type—to portray an alternative to the binary couple (or the orgy or multiple partners for one person, both of which amount to the same thing). Genuinely polyamorous, the relationship may or may not involve sex between the two men, but it is clear that sex with the woman is a form of relationship between the two men—a fact that is called attention to in multiple ways. O is frequently the odd "man" out in the relationship—a fact that is possibly understood by the men much earlier than it is by her. In her own naïve way, she thinks that they are together because of her—that she represents the "home" or "family" that they never had, that they are home to her, that they are the two "loves" of her life. The reality is more complicated. The relationship between the two men dates back to high school and predates her. In an early scene when Ben has arrived home to the house she shares (and bought) with Chon, he and Chon are sitting together on the deck when O comes to sit between them. "Close your legs. It's showin'," Chon says. "Oh, sorry," says O. "I was talkin' to him," says Chon. Awkwardly placed between them, O has the freedom to move between them, to make love to both of them (she describes sex with them as "earth" versus "spirit"), but she may not take up the emotional space between them in the way that she thinks. Indeed, though they are willing to risk everything to regain O, especially Ben, there is a desperation about finding her that may be based not so much upon their mutual love for her as for her role in allowing for their love for each other—especially in its physical expression.

While this homoerotic subtext is foregrounded and fully self-consciously present throughout the film, what is more interesting or edgy about the sexuality of the three characters is their desire to stay together and keep it functioning as it is. Chon and Ben want O back; O wants them. The three of them are faithful to each other and tied together via an emotional and sexual bond that, while in some ways idealistically or romantically balanced, is also meant to be an example of solidity and self-sufficiency. There is never any trace of jealousy. There is never the suggestion that one of them may get tired of the relationship. It may not even be a triangle of the type that Rene Girard or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (in *Between Men*, 1985) discuss where the woman

is an excuse for the men to interact with each other. For all of their pot and money, they ultimately just want to be left alone to live together and fuck together—endlessly and forever. The opening and closing of the movie, the images of O's blonder-than-blond hair twisting in the breeze, suggest this. They have found their utopia and it is, finally, outside of both time and place, and it is a permanent ménage à trois, not as an "experiment" but as a happy choice. They are, in that sense, quite conventional. They are the happiest stable couple in any recent film, their life totally lacking in discord (the great weed probably helps).

The Mexican characters, by contrast, deal with bourgeois issues. More three-dimensional than their American counterparts, they seem more like types at first—the gardener who isn't; the mother with children who hate her, but whom she would kill. Hayek and Del Toro are both great at playing with masks—Hayek, especially, whose complexity perhaps first manifests itself when she appears to us rubbing cold cream on her face, an effect that, along with her long black-banded wig, suggests the Greek tragic figure that she is—Medea, perhaps, or more likely Clytemnestra as, in her husband's absence, she has "inherited" the family business and become a ruthless leader. Their contrast to the sexuality of the Americans can be seen in Del Toro's ruthless killing of a boy for being "too sensitive" when he subtly refuses to judge him for a drug-induced rape. Hayek tells O, "I'm not so sure there can ever be three people equally in love. It just doesn't work that way." The Mexican response to their love life is both conventional in its starkly gendered assumptions and wise as well in terms of the emotional complexity and possible pitfalls of what they are trying. As Hayek tells O: "They may love you but they will never love you as much as they love each other, otherwise they wouldn't share you, would they?"

The film contains an image of two men on the beach with O that is actually from the future. Later, another woman on the beach reminds the two men of O, another classic Southern California blonde—seemingly an image of nature itself. In this sense, O is infinitely replaceable. What is their extreme desire for her? Do they have to replace it to have each other? "O," therefore, means Ophelia, but also, perhaps the feminine, circularity, orgasm, a public symbol that is really a private symbol of their lust. It is her reality, or fantasy, of two men, yet she is contrasted to Hayek, who has most of the power (and many of her own secrets). In the end the film splits reality into two parts but manages to allow the audience both the satisfaction of the Tarantino-esque violence of revenge and the implausible, almost jokey happy ending. The film splits as well along axes of gender and race, juggling the two in complicated ways, feinting and misdirecting between them.

Magic Mike (2012)

While one day we may call 2012 the year of Channing Tatum, it is clear that the film *Magic Mike* is definitely a part of director Steven Soderbergh's interest in the pornography

industry, though in this case from the standpoint of an objectified male body. Since his breakthrough with *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989), Soderbergh has kept a hand in this particular area of entertainment—most clearly with his thinly veiled biopic with porn actress Sasha Grey, *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009), which manages simultaneously to be a metaphor for rough economic times, an expose of the porn industry's cross-over appeal, and a frustratingly unsuccessful film that mostly split critics. His later film covers some of the same ground and makes clear that the male stripping industry has a lot more in common with the female porn industry than one might realize—especially in terms of the fluidity of sexual identity. The film opens with our star rising from a threesome with the woman he thinks is his girlfriend (Joanna, played by Olivia Munn). They both refer to the woman on Mike's bed, who remains asleep with her face buried in the bed's sheets. It is clear from this comment and others that the girlfriend, whom Tatum's character ultimately has a sentimentally old-fashioned romantic attachment with, is more interested in him as bait for the women they bed together—or, at any rate, does not feel for him as strongly as he does for her and ultimately drops him after she graduates with her psych degree. Mike, meanwhile, becomes attached to an ingenue, Adam (played by Alex Pettyfer), whom he recruits and introduces to the male stripping industry but whom he meets initially through the manly industry of home roofing. It turns out that this is one of several business industries to which Mike is connected—stripping is supposed to be a means to an end, in this case, to have his own furniture design business. He cannot overcome his own credit score, however, and finds himself in a complex attempt to outrun his past, which is catching up with him in the form of his own body's aging—something pointed out to him by the literal embodiment of the future that Adam represents.

Matthew McConaughey (Dallas) plays the part of the owner of the club whose own dream of a franchise is as much a pipe dream as that of all of the men he has brought under his control. Mike is simply repeating the pattern by acquiring Adam. While the sexual energy between each of the men is never allowed to become explicit, it is kept visible on the screen through self-conscious moments of touching, of men grabbing and hugging each other in stylized ways—as though the very limits of how heterosexual men can interact physically with each other are called attention to by patterns and details. The closest the film gets to acknowledging this tension is when Adam, high at a party with one of the fellow dance partners, Ken (Matt Bomer), responds positively when the partner offers him his wife (Mircea Monroe) for sex, to which the two men respond with a version of “You're the greatest” “No, you're the greatest”—their exaggerated one-upmanship finally becoming something more than a mere joke, especially in their inebriated state. The women in the film, at this point, are little more than the way the men communicate with each other, and Soderbergh allows the scene merely to resonate much the way that the film as a whole allows the viewer to watch the men's bodies on stage and off in a way that assumes nothing about the viewer's own sexual interest in them. All of the signification is finally on the stage anyway, especially in the way that the individual numbers cycle through clichés about men—from firemen to Tarzan, from construction workers to hip-hop artists. These numbers, while always winking and self-parodic, keep the focus on the

men as opposed to the audience (who are, after all, the audience of the film as well). Tatum, in particular, does a fine job with his numbers. While one might wish that the film was more a twenty-first-century update of *Cabaret* (1972), where the action on the stage commented on that off the stage, the off-stage reality is kept fairly separate. The off-stage action morphs from a focus on Adam as the innocent corrupted first by stripping and then, predictably, by drugs, back to Mike, who falls for Adam's sister, Brooke (Cody Horn).

While much could be done in the film with the sister's obvious replacement for Adam, Tatum's character changes roles with Adam by going from knowing older man to romantic innocent—falling in love with Brooke and, unfortunately for the film, the audience realizing it long before the character does. The film ends with the generic machinations of a standard love plot. But how could the standard love plot not be the most shocking one for a somewhat bedraggled male stripper living in the Tampa Bay area? He has, after all, seen everything and, presumably, done everything. Waking up with two women before he goes off to his construction job before he strips at night is only something you can do for a finite number of years. Brooke is his real chance at a new life, even though it is really a filmic way out of an economic reality that has trapped men of his generation as surely as it did the women who came before them—on the stage and in the world. The construction workers that they were takes on a parodic meaning on the stage, where they play at being the reality that they really are not. They are actors playing actors, and the film suggests that if male identity is so fragile, then men's lives are as well, as what makes them desirable is only the image they live up to. The business, finally, of being male is to strip—the clothes, all being the same disguise, are optional. The men are objects and subjects, embodying the fluid identity of the porn industry, not the core reality of some long-forgotten profession in which their lives were supposed to be identified not with who they were but what they did. The lesson that they learn in the course of the film is that they have no mobility. They are unable to franchise their business (Dallas); unable to start a new business (Magic Mike); and, finally, unable to stay afloat at all without a recourse to crime (Adam). Three generations are linked by the same lack of skills, except to be looked at, to perform, in a different way, for women, for each other, and for the audience who sees through them and their clothes to the flesh beneath, to the last identity they have left.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (2011)

Male identity in a homosocial milieu has been analyzed in recent period films as well, often with a similar attempt to understand how masculinity is linked to jobs, especially those that are gendered in one way or another. In the case of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* the job is secrecy and the resulting paranoia, which is heightened by the faux-military same-sex situation of the Cold War, is another study in how sexuality permeates identity by hiding in plain sight. In this age of rabid remakes of films that

seem not to need them, it's good to see one instance in which the remake may have a reason to exist: Tomas Alfredson's film version of John le Carré's (David Cornwall) classic novel of the post-Cold War era. The film takes on both the novel and its expert treatment in the BBC/PBS seven-part series from 1974 starring Alec Guinness in one of his signature roles. The film manages to update the series by not only streamlining it for a two-hour running time (all the while keeping the complex plot linear and lucid) but also teasing out certain themes, such as the homoerotic undercurrent of the Guy Burgess case, on which the novel is based but upon which neither the novel nor the television series spend much time.

The film recreates a version of the 1970s (like the novel, it's set in 1973) that owes its design to the 1960s and the era of *Mad Men*: the 1970s as drained of color, with shots frequently composed in shallow rectangular spaces that force the viewer to notice the extreme foreground where even the subtlest actions—a character swallowing or moving their eyes without moving their head—speak volumes about psychological nuance and create some of the film's major plot turns. *Tinker Tailor* remains a story about the "Circus," the MI5/6 organization that is the British version of the CIA and/or NSA. The Circus is shown to be not only about cloak-and-dagger high jinx—leaving a "wedge" in the door to see if anyone has come into your rooms while you are away but also the backbiting and petty turf battles of underpaid civil servants. And the Circus is very much a boy's club. Agents and analysts fight each other as if they were upperclassmen at Eton fighting over the new first-years, hazing and flirting with each other in an attempt to gain power and curry favor.

Thrown into the middle of this already highly charged atmosphere is the paranoia of "Control," as played by John Hurt, the head of the agency who is forced out in an attempt to uncover the name of a mole that results in a foreign mission that compromises one of his agents. The perceived bungling of this operation forces him, Smiley, and others into early retirement. Smiley is brought out of moth balls when it becomes clear to a senior minister that the mole may be real and is still at large.

With the task of playing Smiley, one of the most beloved characters in all of spy fiction, Gary Oldman makes the wise decision to build upon Guinness' portrayal rather than reinvent it. Guinness was famous for taking a part (whether Smiley or Obi-Wan Kenobi) and paring his performance down more and more, removing as much expressivity as possible. What is somewhat amazing about Oldman's performance is that he is able to make Smiley even more stately, even more minimal than Guinness. His slow, quiet, terse movements and speech set the tone for the rest of the film, which allows major twists and turns to be communicated via subtle touches. For example, the changes in Smiley's eyewear are sometimes the only clue we have to flashbacks. Everything is as buttoned up and controlled as Smiley—or Oldman's performance of him.

Smiley, however, like the Circus itself, is not what he seems and the conceit of the film is that the paranoia brought about by a mole is always already embedded in the very fabric of spying itself. The spies monitor not only the Russians (and everyone else in the Eastern Bloc) but each other as well. The British are caught between the glare of the American cousins, whom they despise and want to impress at the same

time, and the Russian counterparts, symbolized by their infamous leader, Karla, who dogs their every movement. Everyone looks for everyone else's weakness, and the specter of a mole simply further personalizes the search. That is, spies are not just human, but more so. Their very humanity makes them vulnerable. At the historical heart of the Guy Burgess case was the idea that to be gay and a spy was a dangerous combination precisely because it meant that you were especially vulnerable to blackmail. Burgess and the other members of the Cambridge Five were supposed to represent the best and brightest of their country. Their roles as double agents were astonishing not simply because they seemed to have all of the best that Britain had to offer but because they chose communism over capitalism as a superior system. They hated the West, or what it had become. As Bill Haydon (Colin Firth) says in the film, the choice was "aesthetic." While this pronouncement undercuts the historical refusal of the ethics of the West that the real Burgess argued, it does point to the refusal by Blount and Burgess to acknowledge Stalin or the realities of the post-Stalin Soviet Union, realities that would ultimately imprison Burgess when he defected to Moscow and found that life there was not to his taste. The reality of espionage, however, was made all the easier by the double life that both men lived and the doubleness of being a spy—a secret agent among the civilians—was echoed not only in the (sometimes barely concealed) double life of their homosexuality but in their actual roles as double agents for Mother Russia. Their secrets within secrets become a perfect metaphor for the security agency itself—who better to pretend than people who had to pretend all the time? In the film as in the novel, the real danger for the agents is human relationships. In the novel, Le Carré makes it clear that it is personal relationships that the British secret service is good at, while the Americans, weak on this front, are good at technology. Yet it is in the supposed superiority of their contacts and their sources that leaves the British vulnerable as it is false intelligence that ultimately causes the British to fall for a trap that convinces the Americans that they are receiving invaluable information on the Soviets and thus should entrust the British with their secrets. The mole, however, takes the American information and passes it on to Moscow, which gives back only a sprinkling of information in return—just enough to make their false data seem reliable. This fool's gold that the British mistake for "treasure" not only makes them seem sloppy and endangers their operatives but opens the Americans up to danger as well. Unwittingly, the British have harmed Western intelligence by their attempt to seem superior to the Russians and to seek favor with the Americans. Their "feminine" position between the two super powers—trying to make a strength out of a weakness—opens them up to instability, no longer knowing what or who they are.

Le Carré's genius is to make this seeming personal weakness resonate not only with the Circus as a whole, but with Smiley's personal life as well. Deeply in love with his wife, Ann, the film flashes back to a drunken Christmas office party in which Smiley sees Haydon smile at his wife. Later, outside, he sees her in his embrace. To his coworkers, Smiley is not only Control's right-hand man but a cuckold whose personal life is a tragedy. Haydon assumes that it can be Smiley's distraction, his blind spot, that will keep him from ever seeing the mole. That Smiley is able to see through this

occlusion, even use the knowledge of his wife's affair to his advantage in capturing the mole, is a testament to Smiley's control of his own emotions as well as his ability to rationalize the elaborate covert operation that has ensnared his agency in a deception that is so difficult to unravel.

The attempt to use Ann as an aporia within Smiley's own thought process becomes one of many metaphors employed by Le Carré to suggest that the spy business itself is one gigantic game—a ludic postmodern system in which no one ever does, or can, know the truth about anyone or anything. All sign systems are ultimately unstable, and the attempt by either Control or Karla ever to know what is really going on is doomed to failure, to create even more unstable layers of unknowingness. Smiley, almost unwittingly, manages to restore some stability, but at so high a price that one wonders what sort of a reputation the Circus has after he susses out his enemy.

Indeed, the danger in the British system is inherent in its most cultured social layer: an indifference to or tacit acceptance of bisexuality, which gives to the film a sense that the homoerotic Etonian world of Haydon, especially, becomes both a strength and a liability. Haydon is able to seduce anyone he wants, which ultimately becomes his *modus operandi* as an operative. Sex and/or love for him are part of his job, his arsenal of tricks. Seduction is not a perk of his trade but an essential part of it. Only in a culture that takes itself seriously enough to be sophisticated about sexuality could a mole function with such under-the-radar abandon. Late in the film, we also see Haydon catch the eye of Jim Prideaux (Mark Strong), the connection that will have the most impact in the film's axis of events. Not surprisingly, it goes unnoticed. The male world of the spies is one in which female agency seems to have been removed only to reassert itself in a myriad of ways. Ricki Tarr (Tom Hardy) is the lone character who desires a "family," and fears ending up otherwise without female companionship like the men who run the Circus. At one point the camera pans across a graffito in the background that says "The Future is Female." Feminism has yet to make a mark in the world we see in the film where women act as support—constantly loading and unloading dumb waiters full of paper, files, transcriptions that flow through this factory of paper. Women are seen listening, scanning microfilm, taking notes, but rarely talking, interacting, or overtly spying. The men are in charge but are themselves taking the role of the feminine as well away from women. What other than a revolution could be on hand? What other than the truth that will undo the lies that have been told?

Alfredson's version of the story brings out Le Carré's text via a variety of techniques. Not only is London rendered in stark tones, seemingly in decay much like a version of the future as Orwell might have imagined it, but portions of the novel are referred to without being spelled out. Smiley talks about his encounter with Karla, which is shown in detail in the novel, by reenacting a conversation with him for Peter Guillam (Benedict Cumberbatch). Likewise, Smiley mentions giving Karla a pack of cigarettes, which Karla takes but then returns unused when he returns to Moscow, without mentioning that Smiley hated American cigarettes, especially Karla's favorite, Camels. The film, in other words, references much more than it shows, leaving many subtle hints to the novel's fans that appear in the film as depth and fullness, fleshing out a

world that is much more than merely another spy tale, but a deconstruction of the genre itself—a sort of meta-story in which the inner workings of a secret world become a metaphor for life as we live it, and die from it, and can never tell ourselves what is really happening.

In many ways Ian Fleming's creation of the character James Bond was itself a reaction to the Burgess scandal and the creation of a straight version of the double agent as a secret agent with the blandest name that Fleming could think of, borrowed from an American ornithologist. Despite the fact that his character is a lowly civil servant, Fleming manages to turn him into a sexy world traveler who becomes synonymous with the twentieth century. As Umberto Eco notes, Fleming's technique is to mix detailed consumerism with fantasy—to catalog what Bond buys for lunch or does at cards as a way to make us believe the conversation between Bond and the inevitably erudite villain in another scene. The "Fleming effect" creates a character who is a living embodiment of the notion of masculinity as being what you do, which in Bond's case, is, paradoxically, what you consume. The iconicity of Fleming's fictional technique makes Le Carré's all the more startling in that he avoids almost completely this approach even though he deals with many of the same subjects. Le Carré's characters couldn't be further from the realm of James Bond, devoid, as they are, almost completely of the world of consumerism, or indeed, of any of the many colorful perks that make Bond's supposedly drab job worth his while.

Alfredson seems to understand Le Carré's anti-Fleming vibe but also manages to turn his *Tinker Tailor* into a sequel of sorts to his earlier *Let the Right One In* (2008, *Låt den rätte komma in*), another film about gender confusion (or homoeroticism) set in a similarly stark version of Sweden in 1982. A remake of the vampire genre, the film deals with a twelve-year-old boy who is befriended by a girl he meets in his apartment complex who seems to be his own age, but who is much older and much stranger than he can at first imagine. The resulting relationship mirrors the complexities of an adolescent romance or coming-of-age picture, but with the added twist brought about by the fact that the "girl" is not only a vampire but a castrato. The resulting attraction between them raises questions, as in *Tinker Tailor*, about whether what we are seeing is based upon sex, friendship, or gender. Who is who (or what)? And why is the past always alive, living, like a vampire, on the experiences of those in the present? Another type of Cold War, perhaps, and like the historical one, it is both external and internal, and never really ends.

Avatar (2009)

The notion that the outside of the male body may or may not comport with the inside is a central theme in the work of James Cameron and, to some extent, his former wife and fellow director, Kathryn Bigelow, both of whom made important films about the male body in 2008 and 2009, respectively. At least since *The Terminator* (1984),

James Cameron has played with the notion of anthropomorphic technology as both a prosthetic extension of the body and a negation of it. In *Terminator*, the Governator's nude body is on rich display in all of its real-life existence as the world's greatest pumped-up body—one made to signify an immaculate combination of Austrian blondness and Southern California tan, the body of Schwarzenegger having been made public first via a documentary, *Pumping Iron* (1977), in which Mr. Universe tried to redeem a sport in the name of heterosexual males and attempt to quell camp attitude and homoerotic innuendo by goading audiences in the film to ask him about his sexuality.

In *Terminator* it is perhaps easy to forget that Schwarzenegger's body is put in contrast with his human counterpart, Kyle Reese, who, as played by Michael Biehn, represents a soft-spoken, empathetic, normally proportioned male. He is also born nude in the film, teleported via an electrified egg to the past that forms the film's present. By the end of the movie, his body is battered and bruised, like Schwarzenegger's, but remains human while Schwarzenegger's body slowly morphs into a metallic exoskeleton, as he sheds his human characteristics to take on ever more uncanniness.

The other body in the film is that of Sarah Connor, played by Linda Hamilton, Cameron's future wife. She morphs as well, from a slightly batty 1980s party girl into the future mother of the human race's greatest hero and savior. Her transformation is not only physical but mental. By *Terminator 2* (1991) she is buffer than Reese himself and psychologically his equal. To be a resistance fighter, a terrorist, one has to learn to be even stronger internally than externally. Bodies in Cameron's films are always important, but they aren't always what they appear to be. Epiphanies in Cameron's films seem to require a bodily change, not just a mental one. The outside always expresses the inside, and vice versa, eventually.

One only has to think about the way in which the original *Alien* film from 1979 (dir. Ridley Scott) brought the outside to the inside of the body and then outside again, literally, to see why Cameron might have been interested in directing the film's sequel. In his version (*Aliens*, 1986), not only is the bodily element emphasized further in the monstrosity of the female alien queen but Ripley is turned into one of the iconic female warriors of 1980s TV and film when she dons the cargo loader to battle the queen by using human technology to enhance her own body and turn their fight over a child into a fair one—i.e., one between extremely tough but agitated mothers. As in *The Terminator*, there are two bodies: Ripley's normal one, and that of her temporary avatar.

Terminator 2 further blurs the theme of the body as technology by adding a second terminator. As played by Robert Patrick, he appears to be a normal human male in his camouflaged state as a police officer, but when he is in his liquid alloy form, his main power comes from his cunning, his mechanical lack of conscience—the mental again as the source of strength. His ability to change and modify his shape gives him an almost feminine identity, suggesting an exaggeration of the moment in *The Terminator* when Schwarzenegger mimics the female voice of Sarah Connor's mother. Patrick is literally, if not metaphorically, soft: the feminine as dialectically superior to the hard, male, talk-light body of Schwarzenegger. If *The Terminator* acted as a primary example

of the right-wing Reagan-like creation of the male body as broad shoulders, ripped chest, and exaggerated proportions in general—an unrealistic template perhaps as damaging to the psyches of young men and boys as Barbie's waist-line was to young girls of her generation—the second terminator film both provides the original version and softens him, too, into a child-friendly protector, a sort of fantasy substitute dad. The transformation away from this 1980s paradigm is finally completed not by Cameron himself but by the terminator franchise in *Terminator 3* (2003), where the female-gendered terminator is the one who is menacing and all-powerful, though in a way that, oddly, makes her more mechanical and doll-like (and hence less Cameronesque).

Titanic (1997), the global box-office juggernaut, might at first seem like something else: a non-sci-fi tween film, the precursor of the *Twilight* (2008–12) series, perhaps. Even here, however, we have a meditation on the body and its limits: Leonardo DiCaprio's classed body; Kate Winslet's eroticized, aestheticized, and ultimately aged body. The boyishness of DiCaprio is used to give him a timeless feel, as if he is, indeed, frozen in time and space: literally, in terms of the North Atlantic, and metaphorically, in terms of his final existence only in the memory of Rose. *Titanic* is nothing if not a chic flick, a romance that actually blows up to gigantic proportions the romantic dyad at the heart of all of his films (Kyle and Sarah, Ripley and Cpl. Dwayne Hicks, et al.), but adds the element of spectacle. *Titanic* promises to give you something that other films can't or won't: everyday people in extraordinary circumstances whose emotions are further amplified by the tectonics of the film, the way the film is made. In the case of *Titanic*, the boat's name seems more appropriate for the film itself: everything is bigger, larger, simply grander.

Hence, *Avatar* (2009), a melding of *Titanic*, *Aliens*, and the terminator films, and the logical summation of many of the interests and obsessions in Cameron's run of successful blockbuster films. The body, science fiction, romance, and old-fashioned Hollywood spectacle are brought together in service of a meta-film: a film about Cameron films, perhaps even more than a film about ecology, nativist spirituality, and able-bodiedness, all of which it is as well. In the same way that *Terminator 2* is in many ways a reversal of *Terminator*, *Avatar* slowly turns inside out many of the elements of Cameron's earlier films. *Avatar* seems to begin in the same pro-military spirit as *Aliens*, but slowly reverses this stance, driving home more and more pointedly the fact that the military is the problem, that it constitutes the extreme example of the worst aspects of the anti-environmental, anti-humane, pro-capitalist, pro-exploitative future that we seem to be creating. As all examples of futurity do, the film exists mainly to make an argument about the present as Cameron clearly attacks the George W. Bush doctrine, especially in regard to Iraq ("shock and awe"). Alien life forms that were so easy to dismiss and kill in former films are now embodied with a subjectivity that is significant, in part, because it is different—in this case, it represents almost everything that our country and culture no longer is.

In *Alien*, Scott transformed the bureaucratic PhDs in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Dr. Haywood Floyd, Dr. Bowman; 1968) into factory workers in space; the ship, the *Nostramo*, became a neo-Victorian Steampunk fantasy that suggested that

the future will be a return to the past. In *Aliens*, Cameron continues the class analysis by transforming the crew into underpaid Marines who are equally unprepared for the challenges they meet. In *Avatar*, the grunt is still underpaid: Jake Sully can't afford new legs and adequate health care is dangled in front of him by Col. Quaritch (Stephen Lang), the evil military commander who later refers to the Na'vi as "roaches," as a way to buy him off (Figure 5.1).

Set against the homogeneity of the military is an alliance of which Jake becomes a part: a differently-abled soldier, scientists (Sigourney Weaver plays one in a nod to her former role with Cameron), and a rogue lesbian pilot (Michelle Rodriguez as Trudy Chacon, who gets to echo Ripley's famous sentiment when she yells "bitch"). They come to the aid of the Na'vi, a culture whose primary deity, Eywa, is gendered female. Indeed, it is she who first recognizes something special in Jake, which is acknowledged by Neytiri's mother, Mo'at (C. C. H. Pounder), who not only saves his life but paves the way for him to marry Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) and, ultimately, join their clan. The notion of "Mother Earth" is given a nativist spiritual twist but could also be seen as quasi-Deleuzian: a neural net that, while it is certainly recognizable in its arboreal form as the Tree of Voices, appears to be mostly rhizomatic, existing underground as so many multilinear linkages, a point brought home when the other peoples of the planet unite and are later joined by the planet's nonhumanoid creatures. The word gets out, via a sort of biological internet, a power that has the ability to transport the bodies of humans into the bodies of avatars—an equivalent to Western technology itself, or one might argue, what one would have if our technology were conscious and could make decisions.

The idea that everything is connected is emphasized in the necessity for physical contact—especially in the various neural connections between the Na'vi and the creatures that they ride. To know is to touch. Jake and Neytiri's brother, Tsu'Tey (Laz Alonso), must touch in order to bring their differences to an end. The physicality and

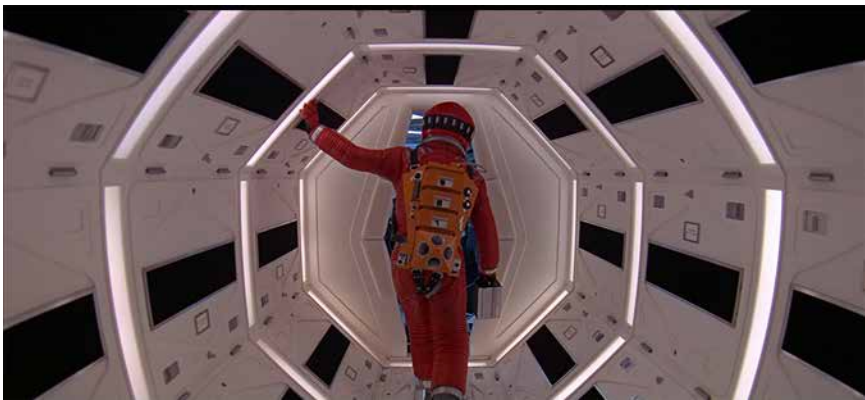


Figure 5.1 Dave Bowman. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

sexuality of the film is heightened not only by Cameron's use of extremely disorienting 3D effects that parallel the spatial inversion of the space station, the jungle, and the mountains but also in the underwater feel of the planet itself, the bio-luminescence that allows the viewer to see the flow, the interconnectedness, the fragility of the environment. The film is designed in such a way as to remind us of various cultures—the androgynous blue gods of Hindu mythology, the landscapes of China, Native American vision quests, etc.—but also to make us think about the foreignness of our own planetary environment, to defamiliarize it. The only concept of dystopia in the film is reserved for the Earth itself, an environment that humans have destroyed and from which they are essentially expelled. Jake, like his original home planet, is damaged and is trying to find some way to become whole.

Avatar, like *The Hurt Locker* (2008), is ultimately about the combat body. Whereas *Hurt Locker* displaces disembodiment onto the Iraqi boy named “Beckham” (Christopher Sayegh), the film's protagonist, Sgt. James (Jeremy Renner), seems to desire the same thing and is, arguably, already hopelessly fragmented mentally. The film, like him, is a series of repetitions, death wishes, meant to take him out of the present, out of his body. The reiteration of the homoerotic play with his teammates in the barracks focuses on the physical pain of the body, in terms of not just the hiding of physical intimacy through games (wrestling, etc.) but the breaking down of the body into zones that can be attacked, parts that can be sacrificed while still remaining whole. The men live through their bodies, yet somehow are not of them. In this sense, *Avatar* and *Hurt Locker* are the same film. Cameron has done nothing if not remake the Vietnam scenario over and over again, a paradigm also controlling much of *The Hurt Locker* as well. Slowly but surely that filmic trope, however, has moved from the superiority of the American body—with its powerful prosthetics of air support, deforestation, and tanks that, in its god-like power, destroy the technologically primitive soldiers of Vietnam—to the internalized suffering of Iraq.

The movement from abuse to hyper-consciousness is first shown in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, which rewrites the war genre as an exercise in contradiction. In the first half of the film we see how Marines are made into superior killing machines that will ultimately destroy not only the enemies' soldiers but innocent civilians as well—that the Marines don't have any other choice than to kill. In the second half we are shown the other possibility of that training: that the soldiers are vulnerable to their own doubt, which is exacerbated by urban warfare and the claustrophobia it brings—fear of spaces, of otherness, of new definitions of gender and sexuality.

Cameron's film updates this scenario (the screenplay was originally written by him over fifteen years ago) and seems to work well with the new kind of battle situations we have now in which American soldiers are less likely to die but more likely to live the rest of their lives physically incomplete. Significantly, the hero of *Avatar* is never whole except when he is living his life through the avatar. Current battlefield medicine, which can save your life and restore your limbs, is here carried further into a science-fiction future where it can give you a new body—one that is taller, stronger, faster. The ending of the film, where the two worlds finally come together—that of the Na'vi and that of Jake's body's reality—mirrors Jake's physical predicament. Both the planet and the

space station exist in the same space, but until this point, they have been kept separate as the Na'vi have seemed to constitute the past of the film's present, or the audience's, the primal scene beyond which we have supposedly grown.

The sense of anachronism might be akin to what happens at the conclusion of the first leg of Kubrick's *2001* when the monolith appears within the environment of the proto-human apes or at the end of the film when the fetus appears within the confines of Bowman's bedroom. The point Cameron is trying to make is that two worlds have intersected, but they are also two realities, two different futures. One can't exist without the other, but more importantly, one will make the other obsolete. How can they both be possible? What is ultimately a personal tragedy for *The Hurt Locker*, one for the protagonist's family, one faceless soldier who is as much machine as human, is species-based for *Avatar*. Or, perhaps even more importantly, gendered. When Jake finally intersects with Neytiri's world, it is toxic to him, and one of the most striking images in the film is the pietà of Neytiri holding Jake, towering above him, as the giantess that she is, protecting and loving his broken body—a mother figure as much as a lover, a morally superior being that, at the moment of her planet's destruction, gives her attention to him. Cameron has, in a sense, combined the strength of Ripley with the romance of *Titanic*.

The film's admonition to "see" is not meant lightly and has as much to do with the film's technology as its theme. Neytiri must see Jake for who and what he actually is. Likewise, Jake must understand what he has been able to see about himself and his people through the experiences he has had on the planet. Ultimately, Cameron's film is about identity: the reality of who we are and what we might become. Cameron attempts to raise the stakes for what mainstream films might aspire to be and do by fashioning for his viewers not a representation but an experience. Rather than removing the fourth wall and inviting the audience to look over the proscenium arch at a continuation of their own reality, *Avatar* and its unsettling technology immerse the viewer in a somewhat open-ended storyline. Like *Star Wars* in 1977 or *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, *Avatar* seems to be constituted of layers of collective unconscious and popular myths, political and otherwise, that represent the audience's beliefs at the moment of the film's release. Whatever else one may think about Cameron's achievements, his film is a masterpiece of design: a hollow vessel into which the viewer may bring multiple interpretations and a form of new technology that is itself waiting to be filled with content by other directors. That we will one day look upon *Avatar* as quaint is probably likely; that we will also look back upon it as the pinnacle of a certain kind of zeitgeist at the end of a tumultuously political decade in which our greatest external threat became an internal one, in which the outside became the inside, is as well.

District 9 (2009) and *Entre les murs* (2008)

Two seemingly different films—the French film *Entre les murs*, translated as *The Class*, and the South African film *District 9*—take as their theme the vexed relationship

between refugee and colonial identities. Like *Avatar*, they are really dealing with the notion of the alien, with difference as it is imprinted on the body. More specifically, both films present the issue of a multicultural, multiracial society as one that is fraught with challenges for which the twenty-first century is only beginning to deal. *The Class* is filmed in a modified documentary style in which a teacher (François Bégaudeau) and his eighth-grade students allowed three cameras into their classroom over the course of a year. The filmmaker was able to capture the quotidian aspects of a typical middle-school classroom in almost maddening detail—the students who sleep in class, ask aggressive questions, giggle, talk, grow bored and then interested and engaged. For those in the field of education these details force you to relive similar moments you have had in the classroom only without the effect that hindsight has to edit out the pauses, false starts, and frustrations. While the film seems to create an overall arc that is related to the changes that overcome students and faculty during a typical school year, there are numerous surprises. The students, for example, often have insights into the teacher's behavior that he himself doesn't seem to have. On his side, the instructor is obviously deeply involved in a profession that could seem, from the evidence here, a titanic struggle. The final scene of students and faculty playing together in the courtyard has its own kind of catharsis. What is most striking about the film is not just the realistic representation of the challenges of teaching and of learning, of the dirty inner workings of the classroom, but the spectacle of a middle-aged white male French teacher's interactions with a diverse classroom of students whose backgrounds range across a vast array of African and Asian identities. Many of the students don't identify as French, which to them is synonymous with "white" identity. The French republic's belief in a nationalistic identity in which everyone is equal yet also socially a part of the secular society (i.e., French identity trumps others as a part of the process of equality) is sorely tested in some of these scenes where the instructor has to handle questions and comments that explicitly refute his authority, and by extension, that of the French state and European identity in general. In this sense, especially, the film chronicles the changes overcoming France. The school is located in the twentieth arrondissement—one of the outer neighborhoods that is at the forefront of refugee immigration in Paris. The classroom setting and pedagogic rituals, while familiar, sometimes feel uncanny. The establishment of a multicultural common ground in this space is difficult. The students at times seem to be as disoriented by the classroom (and French grammar) as the instructor is by the students' unexpected reactions to instruction and even to the content of well-received facts. The audience is left in an uncomfortable limbo, seeing the train wreck that will be the future in the present. A genuinely painful movie, *The Class* might make one pine for even the little bit of fictive patina provided by the television show *The Wire* when, in its fourth season, its writers spent much of its plot on the question of education and how it is a microcosm for society as a whole.

A different kind of future is posited in another film about a standoff with refugees, *District 9*. Set in an alternative past and present that, in a sci-fi way, serves as a portent for the future, aliens who visited our planet in 1982 have been held in a prison camp in Johannesburg ever since. If *The Class* uses real children who helped to write their own dialogue and to share their own experiences, *District 9* creates a

fictional documentary feel in which the camera has the handheld shakiness of post-*Blair Witch* (1999) pseudo-authenticity. Composed mainly of footage supposedly filmed by the true villain of the movie, MNU (Multi-National United), this footage is slowly intercut with regular Hollywood filmic narrative that fills in some of the off-camera moments without, however, calling attention to itself. The film as a whole, in other words, purports to be a documentary, but one that is structured in such a way as to make clear its own constructedness—that it is a film about bad conscience, or the lack of one, on the part of a company that is hired, à la Blackwater, to move innocent beings from one shanty town to another one farther away from South Africa's capital. The company stands in for the people of South Africa, white and Black, who are united in one thing: their racial hatred for the nonhuman visitors who were unlucky enough to stall over their country and get exploited by the populace once their mother ship was breached. While stronger than humans and in possession of superior technology, they are outnumbered. The humans, not the aliens, seem to be insects who exert control over them simply through the size of their population and the brutality of their tactics. Enter another well-meaning, if complex, civil servant (Sharlto Copley), in this case a sort of “everyman” who has the unhappy job of overseeing the transfer of the aliens to their new company-run camp. His approach to the situation is ludicrously bureaucratic as he attempts to get voluntary signatures from each of the aliens prior to deportation. The situation, of course, quickly devolves into chaos and genocide, with our erstwhile human representative showing his own brutality in a scene where he gleefully destroys alien eggs. The plot slowly shifts the audience's sympathies to the aliens not only by showing their inhumane treatment but also by establishing a parallel between the bureaucrat and his family and one particular alien (Jason Cope). This highly intelligent loner has devised a plan to get back up to the mother ship and go home in order to bring other ships to rescue the stranded members of his species.

What the two films have in common is the representation of refugees as a problem—an equation to be solved. A conundrum, perhaps, for the host, the empire. The challenge to identity is a challenge, initially, to national identity, which quickly slides into race and ethnicity, or, if you will, international identity. *District 9* solves the problem by leaving the realm of speculative documentary to become a conventional melodrama: the civil servant, inadvertently altered by contact with an alien fuel source, slowly begins to morph into an alien; he has to help the good alien break into a company facility to retrieve the fuel. He sacrifices himself, etc. What begins as a metaphor, the alien as the foreigner, becomes literal as the political dimension of the film is replaced with a generic mashup of familiar science-fiction action motifs. Still, in its earlier scenes, especially, the film has the power to place the viewer in a the truly alien world of refugee camps, of the history of African states, and of the mismatch between European colonial power and people who are incapable of mounting a sustained reaction to it because they lack the connection to any kind of infrastructure that can resist the privatized Repressive State Apparatuses that suppress them (or, in the case of the children in *The Class*, the Ideological State Apparatus of education). While the aliens themselves seem complacent until their own organic intellectual

completes his twenty-year-old plan to launch the small spacecraft to the mother ship, he is supposed to represent the aspirations of the aliens he calls “brothers.” The film places the Western viewer in a disorienting other land not because of its sci-fi elements, which are ultimately weak and conventional, but because of the specificity of its real-world context: i.e., the history of South Africa and the many other situations around the world that parallel its refugee situation especially. The original settlement is ultimately a battleground for both the company and Black Nigerian gangs who also exploit the aliens. The company wants the aliens’ biotechnology, while the gangs want any money they might have. Over the course of the film it also becomes clear that the wheelchair-bound leader of the gang (Eugene Knumbanyiwa) believes that if he cannibalizes our half-alien hero he will take on the physical strength of an alien. Both entities want literally to consume the aliens. The decision to provide not one but two enemies seems to be an attempt to deflect some of the guilt away from the protagonist, who is ultimately a victim of both, but perhaps reminds us even more that what we are seeing is not an allegory for human nature but for the systematic exploitation of organizations. T. S. Eliot warned that “humankind cannot bear too much reality.” While there are symbolic objections to the mistreatment of the aliens, it is still the company and the gangs who are left in charge of the situation. In this scenario, the humans seem to have abandoned their own humanity and left the “problem” of the future to someone else to solve. Both films present an alternative present made up of aliens demanding rights and refugees who look different, have different tastes, and question the foundation of the preconceived identities of the people who currently make up the majorities in their countries. Both films probably offer as an answer the liberal notion of inclusion, understanding, communication. In their more radical moments, however, they acknowledge the frightening possibility that there is none.

Love (2015)

While some major directors have dealt with questions of the body that embed it in within complex markers of cultural identity, other directors have taken it upon themselves to try to fuse mainstream film with the pornographic form itself, doing for the present what had been attempted in the 1970s when porn directors and producers hoped to make films that would be received by mainstream audiences as something more than mere porn—something more artful than the grindhouse product. With the advent of porn on the internet and the widespread influence it now has as a cultural marker, it is not surprising that a variety of mainstream directors have tried their hand at making porn films or using the subject matter and even structure of porn films as the backbone for one of their own auteuristic projects. We have seen that approach in Vincent Gallo’s *The Brown Bunny* (2003), Michael Winterbottom’s *9 Songs* (2004), and Steve McQueen’s *Shame* (2011), just to name a few. Each of these films has, to some extent, borrowed from porn in the explicitness of the sex on display, often seemingly unsimulated, though that is a difficult illusion to parse in mainstream films, where

camera tricks, body-doubles, CGI, and prosthetics create their own reality for sex scenes, especially. The freedom that porn has to express the body and to represent sex frankly without much of a context for it, or excuse to show it, is something that has drawn directors at least since Stanley Kubrick and his desire to make an expensive “blue movie.” Other than the level of explicitness, what might be said to structure porn films is the linear plot as an excuse to string together sex scenes that show variety in positions and/or participants but that also build in some way toward a nominal conclusion. With *9 Songs* this structure was, as the title suggests, built upon a series of concerts that a young couple attend in which each song mirrors their relationship, which slowly comes apart over the course of the film, though it is not clear that this doesn’t happen mainly because the male protagonist, played by Kiernan O’Brien, feels insecure about his ability to please his girlfriend, Margo Stilley. In *Brown Bunny*, the film ends with the protagonist, played by Gallo, receiving a real-time blowjob from an actual former girlfriend, Chloë Sevigny, in what turns out to be a fantasy or memory of the protagonist who has searched throughout the course of the film for his girlfriend, who was killed before the events of the film began. In this case, the ending is something of a trick as it is the first time the audience knows she is dead, but the sex emphasizes the poignance of the protagonist’s mental landscape. *Shame* deals with a character who suffers as a sex addict, a disease that he is unable to hide when his sister decides to stay with him. In the case of each of these films, and the subgenre of the adult film as template, sex is an integral part of the film’s themes even if it is portrayed, in part, to purposefully call to mind hard-core sex films. This explicitness can be distracting for some viewers, as the extent to which the titillation is integrated into the storyline is always to some extent subjective or, at the very least, is a point of extreme tension in which the film seems to need to justify in an artistic way the right to earn the explicit sex scenes, which means that the film has to be dramatically very good—a tall order for any film. In the case of most of these films, they are linked to porn as well by starring male leads who are extremely well-endowed, which also reminds the audience of porn and further erodes the difference between porn and the mainstream or indie film that one is watching.

A film that definitely takes the notion of unsimulated sex to a new level in a mainstream film is controversial director Gaspar Noé’s *Love*. Like *9 Songs*, the plot seems little more than an excuse to string together even more sex scenes—the interstitial moments not quite as flimsy as *9 Songs*, but still not very substantial (and many of them focus on sex and the body as the topic of discussion by the characters). The film is told mostly in flashback by a young American in Paris, Murphy (Karl Glusman), who has a young wife, Omi (Klara Kristin), and a two-year-old son but who becomes obsessed with an old lover, Electra (Aomi Muyock), when her mother tells him she is missing. The titular plot allows for a great deal of sex, in the past and present, which is almost a porn premise. Unfortunately, or not, the sex at least distracts from the real problem of the film, which is the terrible dialogue—much of it in voiceover—and even worse acting by Glusman, a baby-faced actor with a lanky man-sized body. He seems to have the role by virtue of his large picturesque genitals, but his range otherwise vacillates between inexpressiveness and whininess.

Noé's films often tell their stories out of sequence, though the timeline is, finally, quite linear, even a bit thin. This characteristic becomes an especial liability here because the porn plot is so similar in structure. *Love* might also remind one of *9 Songs* in the way the male protagonist reacts to the women in his life and their sexuality. Murphy mostly ignores his current wife—"trapped" in the marriage by her pregnancy—but he is also threatened by the former girlfriend. When he is talked into attending a sex club with her, he criticizes her for having sex with women there even though he does as well. Later, when she tries to convince him to have sex with a trans woman, he has a homophobic reaction. When he finally relents to a blow job, he asks Electra later not to tell anyone. Omi consistently points out his hangups and hypocrisy. Male friends who convince him to go to the sex club criticize him for his "American" possessiveness. Yet over the course of the film, he never changes. Just like the protagonist in *9 Songs* who was threatened by his girlfriend's orgasms using a vibrator, *Love* seems to expect us to care about this protagonist/narrator's insecurities. If there is some point about modern relationships here, it is neither subtle nor profound.

The sex is very much focused on Murphy's erections, which we see often, but the sex itself is rendered unrealistically—it is a bit aestheticized or dispassionate. No one ever really sweats or strains. The women don't seem to come—they act like they are going through the routine of sex as a choreographed routine of busy genitals and kempt hair. Noé does emphasize women having sex with women. Electra, for example, joins Murphy and Omi in bed where the protagonist is not the object of either woman's interest—their interest is each other. The protagonist himself mainly sees sex as frenzied fucking, which he does as often as he can. The adolescent nature of it is emphasized in a series of rear-entry scenes with Electra (and during the threesome), where he seems to thrust with the mechanical energy of a wind-up toy. None of the heterosexual sex is particularly interesting. Like the protagonist, it is almost old-fashioned, or naïve.

In 1998, Noé wanted to make this film before *Irréversible* (2002) and asked a husband-and-wife team, Monica Bellucci and Vincent Cassel, to star. They refused because they didn't want to have sex on screen precisely *because* they were married. In a sense, Noé had the same idea that Kubrick had for *Eyes Wide Shut*—to try to show the inner sex life of a married couple played by an actual married couple. For all of his bravado as one of the members of the New Extremity, as he and Catherine Breillat and other directors have been called because of their willingness to show sex and violence on the screen that has normally been off-limits, Noé's film lacks the weight of Kubrick's film and becomes yet another one of the now many films by major directors that try to use sex as the subject matter and to represent it with all of the explicitness that our current age of porn would seem to allow, but fails. As the reviewer for the *New York Times* noted: "As if all its artistic energy has been gobbled up by fornication, 'Love' has nothing left with which to build its characters or set them in motion" (Catsoulis C13). This is the problem with the films of many directors who have artistic ambitions to make a film centered on sex. All ultimately wear a "caul of despair" as the sex itself seems to overwhelm the other filmic elements there to sustain it—or that it is there to sustain.

Nymphomaniac, Volumes One and Two (2013)

By far the most elaborate and ambitious mainstream film about and with explicit sex is Lars von Trier's encyclopedic two-part film, *Nymphomaniac*. First released in the United States in a version that edited out or replaced some of the more explicit nudity and sexuality with footage made with porn stars (including that of one of the film's key stars, Shia LaBeouf, who lobbied von Trier to include him in the film, even sending von Trier homemade sex tapes), it was released later in an uncut version that was much better without the distractions of the doctored footage. In all of its imperfections, the film is, like *Shortbus*, *Romance* (1999), and some lesbian films like *Blue Is the Warmest Color* (2013), an attempt to look specifically at female sexuality.

If nothing else, Lars von Trier's film will live on as a meditation on the pornification of the mainstream, or perhaps the mainstreaming of porn. It seems self-consciously to set itself up as a station of one of those two crosses. Much like Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, von Trier's film advertised itself as sexy and scandalous, but the experience of seeing it is in many ways not only unerotic but even anti-erotic. Von Trier's dark vision of humankind often pays off in his view of the human body as unimpeachably materialistic—from the dog-like treatment of Nicole Kidman in his masterpiece, *Dogville* (2003), to his literalization of the power of self-loathing in the emasculation of Willem Defoe in *Anti-Christ* (2009). The world can't just end in *Melancholia* (2011), but it has to be obliterated by a gigantic rock. Those who think that *Nymphomaniac* is about porn miss the point that the film's matter-of-fact nature is in how it deals with female sexuality, which is its actual subject. The teenage version of the film's female protagonist, Joe, is played by British newcomer Stacy Martin. In a long scene played as a flashback, Joe seduces men on a train in a game with a friend to see who can come up with the largest number of conquests in one evening. The styling of Joe and her friend in these scenes is as heavily made-up young girls who, when shot with von Trier's already unflattering Dogme style, look less than enticing, which is to say, they look realistic—like two girls who don't really know what they are doing trying to look older (and prettier) than they are. Everyone can see through them but them. Von Trier stays with this aesthetic for most of the film. Though Charlotte Gainsborough, as the Joe of the present, is a much better actress, her Joe remains, to a large extent, similarly rough around the edges—so consumed with her fascination with her own orgasm that she ultimately ruins many of the things she holds dear. She isn't presented as a victim of sex addiction, but as a woman who has explored, more than most, the outer reaches of female sexuality. In many ways, however, her exploration has only been an exaggeration of female sexuality in general. The fluidity of female sexuality, while for Joe mono-dimensional in its fixation, is laudable as a study in the possibilities of sexual exploration (at least until the unconvincing conclusion of the film). As von Trier makes clear toward the end, only a woman who isn't a man (a Joe) would be criticized for the amount of sex that Joe has had. While the point of view of the film may be inevitably male, i.e., von Trier's, the film also asks the viewer to question his assumptions as well. Is the emphasis on Joe's sexuality prurient and pornographic? Or is it an honest attempt to represent the seemingly unrepresentable—i.e., the total sexuality of one woman?

The film moves from Joe's many conquests of men toward an extended sequence with a dominant SM instructor (Jamie Bell). In many ways these scenes are among the most sexually convincing in the movie. Not only does Joe's obsession with sex become especially clear as a type of pathology but she is able to extend her sexuality almost infinitely through the experience of pain. The multiplication of sexual stimuli is simultaneously enhanced, concentrated, and let free to inflict even more trouble in her life as she encounters a new sexual barrier to breach. She becomes, in these scenes, a pure addict, if you will, someone for whom the obsession with pleasure is almost drug-like but also very human and moving. The final sexual adventure, therefore, is a sort of coda to this one. Joe engages in a lesbian affair with a young school girl who has a cauliflower ear and is, thus, ostracized at a particularly vulnerable age. While it might seem that lesbianism is the one area that the penis-obsessed Joe has not gone to, it is also again perhaps not quite the point. In her interest in P (Mia Goth) she is to some extent coming full circle and seeing her own younger self—or rather the self whose disability was sex itself, a psychological rather than physical deformity. What is shocking about the relationship isn't, finally, that it is same-sex, but that it is a form of pedophilia. In that sense, Joe is carrying her sexuality one step further—or one step too far for many viewers—in seeing an actual sexual illness, preying on young people, as normal or at least understandable. Joe makes this point literal when, as a thief, she is hired to humiliate a male pedophile whom she ends up helping—and correctly diagnosing—instead. Joe's sexual exploration finally goes beyond BDSM into areas of extreme identification with the true outsiders of sexuality, a frequent theme in much of von Trier's work.

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Any attempt at a survey of films in the twenty-first century that deal with sex, the body, and pornography would fall short. There are simply too many films to note and they are being produced and premiered all the time. Films that deal with porn could be thought to constitute separate categories now, some of which, such as lesbian or gay male coming-out stories, have existed for decades, others, such as *The Fifty Shades of Grey* film series (2015–18), perhaps constitute a new subgenre: the mass-cultural BDSM film. The *Grey* film series is less pornographic than the novels, where we have, for example, elaborate descriptions of Christian Grey's large penis. At its core the films are a romance in which Anastasia rejects BDSM, which Christian accepts is a part of himself that indicates damage, an inability to be normative. BDSM is never a choice, then, for either character. BDSM resonates as the classic Romance plot made literal—the threat of physical force from the male lover that is ultimately resolved. The plot is a cloaked beauty and the beast tale. The films retain many of the novels' online qualities as fanzine porn—multiple excuses for sex, little plot, minimal backstory, only enough development to create a barebones story, etc. Still, the novels and the films have given voice to a type of sexuality kept in the shadows before.

While BDSM might represent one of the newer mainstream treatments of sex and sexuality, horror and science-fiction films have long been staples of body horror and been used as a way to imagine alternatives to what we think of as seemingly normal sexuality. While not as good as *Let the Right One In, Thirst* (2009) is a Korean film that carries the notion of the vampire as erotic figure to a new level. A seemingly conventional heterosexual couple (though one is a priest) experience their emerging vampirism as a form of sexual desire that they feel compelled to pursue in increasingly more physical forms that begin to seem more and more like a secret “perversion.” Eventually they come to resemble characters in Luis Buñuel’s *Viridiana* (1961) or *Belle de Jour* (1967) as they act out steadily more fetishistic sexual scenarios before passing on to a version of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), trapped in ennui like one of Anne Rice’s vampires growing steadily more bored but unable either to die or stop their sexual scenario. In the end they are junkies who can’t kick a habit that has consumed them. One of the better examples of a more recent horror film that deals with sex and the body is *It Follows* (2014), a variation on sex as death for teenagers. Set in an indeterminate time—no social media, retro TVs and cars, printed porn magazines, a futuristic Kindle—it features nudity, incest, and trauma and uses sex as a way not only to link the past, present, and future in one continuous loop but to literalize this connection through actual sex. Once someone has been “infected” by the dangerous specter of the title, it will follow you relentlessly until you can pass it on to someone else through the sexual act.⁵

Drag Me to Hell (2009)

When it was first released, Sam Raimi’s film wasn’t so much a new venture, his first post-*Spider-Man* (2002), as it was a return to his previous job as one of America’s most interesting directors of horror films, one who has consistently linked the genre to an examination of the sexualized body. *Drag Me to Hell* is a self-conscious homage to his own work in the 1980s, acknowledging that he had established his own opus. It is, in that sense, a remake of his earlier subgenre of horror, one that mixes humor with an overtly literal representation of the body. The template is Raimi’s landmark *Evil Dead* (1981), which mixes the special effects of Hammer-style horror with bits of Ray Harryhausen. Made with fellow college students from Michigan State, the film is, among other things, a commentary on the instability of bodily identity. Girlfriends become ghouls. Bodies of friends are treated like punching bags. Amid the gore, there are also moments of subtle scariness that manage to suggest forces that are beyond human scale such as the famous perspective shots as something, or someone, rushes toward the cabin. After an outcry against an all-too-suggestive rape scene of one of the female victims by the evil spirits using vines and tree limbs as ropes, groping hands, and even a prosthetic penis, Raimi seemed to become more conscious of gender dynamics in subsequent films with his muse and alter ego, Bruce Campbell, playing the main character in the two sequels, *Evil Dead II* (1987) and *Army of Darkness* (1992), in an increasingly campy manner that suggests that he is performing masculinity as well.

By the time we get to *Spider-Man 2* (2004), Raimi's has linked the identity crisis of the protagonist of that series to Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Peter Parker's (Tobey Maguire) long-suffering girlfriend, Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst), has a role in the play and Parker's own double identity as both a geeky college student and a secretive super hero is mirrored in the play's various references to living a double life. This theme, some critics have argued, reflects Wilde's own life as both a successful playwright and married man, on the one hand, and, on the other, the lover of Lord Alfred Douglas and frequenter of London's proto-gay demimonde. While Raimi's newer film avoids such classical references, it does place its heroine in a similar position vis-à-vis a secret identity. Our protagonist, Christine Brown (Alison Lohman), is a former Southerner who has escaped to Los Angeles to create another life for herself with a different accent and a much slimmer body. She is attempting to advance in the dog-eat-dog world of a local bank where she is battling for a spot on the corporate ladder with an equally desperate male coworker (Reggie Lee) who refuses to play by the rules. The irony of her gendered situation is underscored by the opportunity she has to get ahead by denying an extension on mortgage payments to an old gypsy woman (Lorna Raver) who comes into the office, dentures in hand, trying to avoid a foreclosure. The cold refusal that our heroine offers instead brings onto her a curse that results in her being stalked not only by a highly phallic goat figure but also by the body of the old woman herself.

The old woman first attacks our heroine in the disorienting space of a parking garage in what turns into an *Evil Dead*-like battle of body parts with an emphasis on the old woman's mouth, which is, in its toothless state, at one point literally fistled by our heroine. As even the poster for the movie suggests, the mouth seems to be the locus of identity in the film, not only the conveyor of accents but also the entrance to the soul. Though our heroine has attempted to hide her Southern identity, to internalize it, it continues to return in the form of vomiting blood and buzzing flies. In *Evil Dead* the cabin in which the students are vacationing is located in the mountains of Tennessee, a place exterior to the self. In the new film the South is again a place to escape, but it is internal, a past you work out of with your books-on-tape elocution exercise and handsome, rich boyfriend. The endless return of the woman's body—our heroine falls on it at her funeral and battles it in the rain in the old woman's muddy grave—suggests the difficulty of escaping the materiality of the body as she fights to throw off a mistake, a past that is both the old country, the old identity, but also identity itself, the part of the self that you don't want to acknowledge. The heroine of horror films is often accompanied by an ineffectual hero. In the case of this film it is a psychology professor, played by actor Justin Long, who has himself been objectified—metaphorically and ultimately literally—in the horror film *Jeepers Creepers* (2001), where his large, expressive eyes are stolen by an ancient demon. As the spokesperson for Apple computers, he is the very definition of sleek design—seemingly the real California that is put in opposition to the South, California's supposed other. The California we have represented in the film, however, is ultimately not the Los Angeles of theme park Americanism but a version of the grand guignol Southern California of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). The large house that functions as the setting for the climatic seance scene is located in Pasadena and is a symbol for the sham of Los Angeles living—a house

haunted much like the ballroom party staged at Disneyland's Haunted Mansion, which is, not surprisingly, in the section of the park entitled New Orleans Square. The scene, one of the most effective in the film, seems to exist mainly as a commentary on the making of movies themselves—the self-conscious postmodern situation in which Hollywood film now finds itself with a past that continually haunts it.

Ex Machina (2014)

If horror films are a form of body horror that has much in common with porn, then science-fiction films, which are adjacent to the horror genre, often cross over into some of the same themes as porn as well. In the science-fiction genre, *Ex Machina*, for example, could be seen as a meditation on the robot as sex doll. The plot involves a Google genius, Nathan (Oscar Isaac), who chooses a millennial guy, Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), for an experiment based upon Caleb's online preferences—especially in terms of porn. Nathan is perfecting a robot, Ava (Alicia Vikander), and wants Caleb to administer a Turing test to see if the robot possesses true self-consciousness. The robot's mechanical brain literally runs off Nathan's search engine. In that sense, Ava is an extension of porn into three dimensions. But the robot yearns to be free—perhaps human—and she possesses the capacity to kill.

The film seems to be, at least at one level, a critique of porn. Taking one's internet preferences into account results, in this case, in a robot that is literally Caleb's physical "type." Porn becomes a reality, suggesting, among other things, that the internet really is finally all about porn and that an evil genius could use the internet to create 3D porn that would then become self-aware. Interestingly, within the film, there are actually two robots—Ava and a Japanese sex-mate named Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno). Released from confinement by Caleb, the two robots meet for the first time, which allows them to cooperate in resisting Nathan. Each robot prototype is a different ethnic type signaled by their name ("Lily," "Jasmine," "Jade," et al.). "Ava" suggests a new Eve, though, perhaps, a new Adam as well. She crosses from object to subject. Caleb, as a nice boy, is chosen for that reason and is not happy with Nathan's treatment of the robots that he discovers recorded on Nathan's computer. Is his outrage the outrage of anti-porn? Or does he realize that he, too, does have a type in his attraction to Ava? He is, after all, as powered by his own sexual feelings for her as he is by his dislike of the toxic masculinity of Nathan. The film leaves open the possibility that we are as much programmed by our technology, literally inscribed into it, as it is by us. The dangerous vulnerability, as perhaps it has been since Kubrick's own human/computer space tragedy, *2001*, is sexual desire.

Call Me By Your Name and *Beach Rats* (2017)

The tradition of New Queer Cinema provides another parallel genre or movement that deals with the encoding of sexuality in the body. Two films that provide especially potent critiques of the normalization of heterosexuality are from 2017, *Call Me By*

Your Name and *Beach Rats*, both of which emphasize not only the sensuousness of the young male body but the slipperiness of sexuality as well. The opening credits of *Call Me By Your Name* appear alongside ancient Greek statues and, later in the film, there is a reference to Praxiteles. These references pertain at first to the fact that the film is about an archeology professor (Michael Stuhlbarg) who is working in Italy, living with his wife and seventeen-year-old son, Elio (Timothée Chalamet). They are joined one summer by a graduate student, Oliver (Armie Hammer), who looks like a living version of one of the Greek statues. His physique is a contrast to Elio, who is a classic Greek youth—a twink, in other words. Their relationship, which eventually becomes a sexual one, seems to parallel ancient Greek culture, which accepted the fact that young men could be the receptive lovers of adult men until the point at which they begin to shave, after which they are to become adult men and cease to play a passive role. In the film, we see Elio just starting to shave—not quite there yet but in transition. This is the last summer this relationship could happen.

Their physical intimacy gradually crosses different lines, emphasized by a mingling of bodily fluids that we see on the screen—semen, vomit, saliva. Their bodies blurring, inside and outside, completes the bonding between them. But after a short trip out of town, Oliver realizes that their idyll must end. The film concludes with a final devastating scene by the family fireplace. Oliver calls to tell Elio that he is getting married. Earlier, Elio had told his own girlfriend that they should just be friends, perhaps his own kind of coming out. Now it is winter; summer is over, but Elio has been left changed. He doesn't notice his family around him as he stares into the fire, which allows him to look at the audience but not seem to (à la *The 400 Blows*, 1959). He cries quietly to himself. When he finally turns his head away from us, he leaves his thoughts and reenters the world, or the bubble of a world that is his family's safety and acceptance.

Beach Rats is another film about a young man on the brink of his sexuality. In this case, it is a Brooklyn teen, Frankie (Harris Dickinson), who is attracted to male chatrooms and has begun to have internet hookups in the park. Frankie spends most of his day with his fellow male friends, or rats, with their nearly naked bodies always on display. The mirror is used throughout the film as both a metaphor for Frankie's doubling and to help construct the film's structure. The screen of Frankie's computer is as real to him, if not more so, than reality itself and becomes another type of mirror. The film opens with a dark screen illuminated by the strobe of his smart phone as it goes off and he poses for selfies. He tries on a black cap—a new identity as a gay man. His face, as captured in a mirror, is doubled: two identities—a man who does not identify as gay but who sleeps with men.

Throughout the film Frankie struggles with the confusion of his sexual awakening as shown in parallel scenes with his young girlfriend (Madeline Weinstein) and an older married man he sleeps with (Douglas Everett Davis). Frankie can't get hard for his girlfriend the first time he sleeps with her. She admires the beauty of his face, but he mocks her. With the man, a bartender on a ferry, he is passionate and has a full erection. In contrast to the earlier scene with his girlfriend, he is bashful as his beauty is admired.

The film expresses Frankie's ambivalence, or the fact that he is on the crux of coming out in a culture that has no place for it. In its emphasis on how technology has

in some ways transformed sex and made the process of coming out both deeply private and inevitably public as well, *Beach Rats* could not be more different from *Call Me By Your Name*, which emphasizes a walled-off world in which people read books, play piano after dinner, and don't have cell phones. Yet both films feature lanky young male bodies that are both timeless in their beauty and vulnerable to the emotional weight of sexuality and the eternal process of finding a place to fit into society while attempting to avoid the damage caused by rejection (Figures 5.2 and 5.3).



Figure 5.2 Taking a selfie. *Beach Rats*. Eliza Hittlman. 2017. Neon.



Figure 5.3 Double portrait. *Beach Rats*. Eliza Hittlman. 2017. Neon.

Garçon Stupide (2004)

In many ways *Beach Rats* seems a remake of *Garçon Stupide* (2004), a French-Swiss film about a young man in Paris who works his way through a series of hookups that both test and expand his sense of being a young gay man. While *Garçon Stupide* is more about finding true love, rather than the confusion of knowing your own sexuality in an environment that does not have a place for it, both films emphasize the strange mixture of experience and naivete of youth, how we are all “stupid” at that point in our lives, and easily influenced even as we stumble desperately toward some sort of passion or obsession. *Garçon* also uses the mobile phone as a way to photograph the self and record one’s struggles, and both end in amusement parks where the oversaturated colors of the artificial night’s sky seem to stand in for the heightened emotions and disorientation of a certain period in one’s life. In *Garçon* we don’t have the computer screen of the internet, but the director, Lionel Baier, employs split-screen technique to sometimes give us two views of an event as it is taking place, sometimes from different points in time, forcing the audience to have some distance on the protagonist while at the same time allowing us a better sense of what the character might have been experiencing, immersing us more completely in his own reality. The film’s most arresting scene may be one where Loic (Pierre Chatagny) hooks up with a video store clerk (Jean-Stéphane Bron) who fascinates Loic because of his interest in fetishes. In some ways, this scene dates the film to the early twenty-first century because two of the fetishes, tattoos and genital piercings, are now more common, but the friend is also into fisting, which he describes, and very large dildos, which he demonstrates. Loic is distanced from his friend’s pleasure, which doesn’t involve him or mesh with his own desires. He is displaced from gay sexuality itself as it edges into something else—BDSM or simply self-satisfaction.

Mysterious Skin (2004)

One of the more controversial films about the coming to knowledge of a gay or queer identity, Gregg Araki’s take on Scott Heim’s novel of the same title, goes even further in questioning the extent to which we can even define sexual identity as being about sex at all. Like Dennis Cooper in his fiction or Monique Wittig in her essays, Araki explores the actual physical limits of the body, especially the erosion of the distinction between the inside and the outside. As Carol Siegel argues, the film turns on its head the notion of the simple story that if you can’t figure out what is wrong with yourself, especially in terms of sexuality, it is “because our original innocence was destroyed by an evil adult” (63). What this handy formulation depends upon, as Michel Foucault predicted, was the notion that all childhood sexuality is innocent until corrupted. The film shows us two possibilities instead: Brian (Brady Corbet), who is shattered, or perhaps more importantly, whose sexuality is stopped by his partially hidden

memories of sexual abuse at the hands of his little-league baseball coach and a teammate when he was eight, and Neil's (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) opposite memory, one in which he was not only sexually awakened by the encounter but spends the rest of his life attempting to reenact it. His ideal romantic object was always a handsome older man, one like his mother often dated, and the coach fit the bill perfectly. While Neil's later hyper-sexualization as a male prostitute might have been triggered by the encounter, suggesting an unnatural trauma that leads to risky behavior on his part, the fact that Neil's sexuality was shaped by the encounter may also suggest that the film's real question concerns what forms our sexuality. Without the abuse, would Neil have ended up gay? Would Brian? It seems logical to conclude that the answers are "yes" and "no," respectively, but by paralleling all of the sexual imagery with repeating substitutions—fisting with the coach becomes a hand put into a dead cow on a Midwestern farm, homosexuality morphs into alien abduction, a baseball bat becomes a boy's arm, etc.—the film asks whether or not sexuality is really the correct question to ask. What if you have queerness that is beyond queerness? Which identity is paramount? Maybe it doesn't matter to Brian, who is asexual. Maybe both boys are damaged at their core, or maybe they are complete at the end of the film once they have found each other and shared information. Neil's one sin was not helping Brian, or aiding the coach, because Neil could only imagine the attention, if not the acts, as positive ones to share with someone else. Sex, for him, as a hustler, is to be celebrated. For Brian, it is a mysterious skin.

Neil's own "nadir" comes when he finally escapes their Kansas town to hustle in New York, where he learns his own limits of the flesh. He is hired by a gentle older man with Kaposi sarcoma to massage his skin—to touch it safely, not sexually—in a tender scene about another limit to the surface of the skin. This scene is later contrasted with Neil's brutal rape by a closeted john, who beats him unmercifully in the shower of an anonymous suburban apartment he takes him to. Neil's story, like the movie itself, is the opposite of what sex should be in "a sentimental story of therapeutic remediation." The film is instead about sex as thingification" (Young, "*Gag the Gag*" 177). The plot papers over the objectness of sex or pornography. Or, rather, the objects are made equal—cow, alien, etc.—as stand-ins for each other in a Lacanian way. The film's symbols work on several levels at once as patterns that self-consciously repeat themselves—Halloween becomes Christmas, and cheerios cereal becomes the stars raining down or lights on a rainy night. Memory becomes a blurring of fantasy and reality; fulfillment for some is a nightmare for someone else. Truth is both magnified and indistinct and may lie where it is least expected.

(500) Days of Summer (2009)

Film embodies the aesthetic of the body in ways that are less obviously marked than many of these examples. The design of the body can be expressed in the design in

films as well—actors in their costumes and hair styles fitting in and mirroring the period sets and camera angles used to frame them. As film and television increasingly merge, the aesthetics of one carries over into the other. Early twenty-first-century TV has been marked by its recreation of the body not only in the contemporary period but in the past (*Rome* [2005–7], *Spartacus* [2010–13], *Mad Men*), future (*Westworld*), and fantasy realms as well (*Game of Thrones*). The sometimes more oblique questioning of the body that appears on television is in part the result of the limited ability to be quite as explicit as movies but also the context and design elements necessary for a long-form show require a longer, more sustained approach to the dramatic use to which the body is put, one in which the body clearly becomes a theme or problem of some sort. These often subtler or more narrative-driven versions of the analysis of the body can occur in film as well, as can be witnessed in something like *(500) Days of Summer*, which we can examine in preparation for turning our attention to the medium of television.

Told out of sequence in a series of “days” that correspond roughly to a relationship, the film uses a meditation on architecture, design, and gender to playfully deconstruct the typical young-love romance plot. Its main twist is the alternative design of its male protagonist, Tom (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), who is the film’s Annie Hall: he’s the romantic; his female co-star, Summer (Zooey Deschanel), is the tough pragmatist. She plays the male role in the plot, which repeatedly plays on the gender inversion of their relationship. One of many ironies is that Tom’s romanticism is from an era that he has never experienced but idolizes. He works as a writer of greeting cards—hence, perhaps, his romanticism—but he longs to be an architect. The Los Angeles of the film is the Los Angeles of the past, indeed, one that has never really existed, or is, in fact, a simulacrum. His favorite spot in the city is one where he can sit and stare at buildings from the past, from the era of the early skyscrapers (Chicago, not New York), which would work well together in relationship to one another, he notes, if you could only bring them closer together, “integrating them.” He tries to stitch together an identity not spatially but through time. While on a date with Summer at a retro martini bar, he opines, “London 1964. Those girls knew how to dress. Nowadays it’s all giant sunglasses, tattoos, handbags with little dogs in them. Who okayed this?” The reality of gender comes crashing through the scene, however, when a drunk, obnoxious older man (Ian Reed Kesler) at the bar begins to hit on Summer and mock Tom (“This is a man?”). Tom’s design aesthetic permeates his life, but he is still in the process of growing up. A true millennial, he and Summer initially bond over The Smiths, which are themselves based on Wilde via Warhol. His present is made up of bits of the past. Writing greeting cards suggests his innocence, that he is stuck in time. He has to graduate from the temporal to the spatial, hence, to architecture, in order to become a man. He slowly begins to dress in darker and more formal clothing. The Summer of youth is being replaced with the Autumn of maturity, and the beginning of death. This time is over; yet the most striking aspect of the film is that the time is rendered as painful and doesn’t end happily. Life isn’t *The Graduate* (1967), a film he claims at the beginning of this film to have misunderstood. *Summer* is perhaps the first film of the twenty-first century to

see the twentieth century mainly as a collection of decades, each of which exists for the young as a series of influences: 1930s architecture, 1960s fashion and drinks, 1970s films, 1980s music, 1990s attitude, etc. To be young is to be unable to access this time and to find yourself in an ironic and very confusing present haunted by the ghosts of things when they were better, wanting to live in the past but not wanting to. Before you know it, you turn thirty and become that past, move into a decade as an adult and mark the decade of your teens and twenties as your own, one that the next young people will historicize and fight for and with.

The film has a narrator throughout, Richard McGonagle, who sounds like the narrator of *Frontline* (1983–), Will Lyman, and therefore brings an aura of inevitability to everything that he says. “There’s only two kinds of people in the world. There’s women and there’s men,” he says near the beginning. This simple formula fits the retro-aesthetic of the film, however much the reality might be more complicated, especially for Tom. Summer proclaims early on her reluctance to attachment of any kind, which elicits the remark from Tom’s male colleague (Geoffrey Arend), “She’s a dude!” Tom asks her, “What happens if you fall in love?” To which she responds, “There’s no such thing as love. It’s fantasy.” Later, Summer says she wants to break up before they become like Sid and Nancy. Tom is shocked, assuring her that he would never stab her seven times the way Sid did Nancy, to which Summer responds, “No, I’m Sid.” “So, I am Nancy?”

The many themes of the film come together in the notion of seasons that, like greeting cards, seem to have their temporary moments. The film stages a battle between sentiment and sentimentality, but with the genders seemingly reversed. In the end, though, Tom does become an architect, and he finds the real girl of his dreams, another architect, appropriately named Autumn (Minka Kelly). His belief in fate is borne out. Summer ends up married before him, in another act of meaningful coincidence: “I was sitting in a deli reading *Dorian Gray*. A guy came up to me and asks me about it. Now he’s my husband.” In the end, Summer was not right for him rather than he not being right for her. As she tells him, “You have to feel it.” The film, finally, is about the design of gender.

Summer was one of several films from the early twenty-first century that placed sex within coupledness, as though the drive for sex was, in fact, a drive to procreate, something literalized in the film *Splice* (2009). This strange seeming return to the 1950s suggested the desire on the part of directors to explore sex and gender and sexuality in the past and to see it with new eyes from the perspective of the present in order to understand not only our origins but the complexity of a different cultural context as well.

Coda: *The Other Side of the Wind* (2018)

In some ways the roughly twenty-year period that I discuss in this book that begins with *Eyes Wide Shut* is bookended by Orson Welles’ own posthumous work on sex and sexuality, *The Other Side of the Wind*. It is striking that both auteurs conceived

of projects that dealt with pornography in the 1960s only to come back to them after long hiatuses—especially in Kubrick’s case—only for both films to remain, ultimately, unfinished. Welles’ film is an attempt to narrate the final days of a Hemmingway-esque director, Jake Hannaford, played by John Huston, who has an epochal birthday party, at which a few scenes from his current film are shown. Welles designs his film as a mock documentary with rapid cutting, frequent changes in film stock and point of view, and liberal use of his trademark overlapping dialogue. The witty banter of the party belies several layers of anxiety, especially on the part of our hero, who becomes, by the end of the night, drunk, disorderly, and disdainful of his guests. His own film within the film is, in contrast, a highly stylized, even pristine film in color that acts as a send-up of the 1970s mixing of high-art pretension and seemingly low-brow subject matter—i.e., pornography. Beginning with a lesbian scene in a steam room, the film-within-a-film, which has the same title as the film we are watching, moves on into a loose narrative about a young man, Johnny Dale (Bob Random), and a woman, played by Welles’ cocreator, Oja Kodar, who meet, have sex in a car, and ultimately get involved in a Freudian sexual duel that involves the near-castration of the male lead. There may also be a plot about a doll and a bomb, but while the overall story remains vague, in the scenes that we see, Welles makes liberal use of sex as subject matter. He films sex scenes in the bathroom of a nightclub, between Dale and the mysterious woman on a Hollywood back lot, and ends the last scene with Kodar ripping apart a phallic balloon in the desert—an obvious, though dramatic, diminishment of all the testosterone that is spewed in the outer film by Huston’s Hannaford character.

Indeed, the joke at the center of the film is that the real source of Hannaford’s anxiety is his own homoerotic attraction to his androgynous male lead, who walks off the set after the chiding that accompanies the scene being shot in the Hollywood back lot. At the beginning of the film as a whole, we know that Hannaford kills himself by driving too fast in a Porsche he had bought for Dale. We finally see that scene, at the end of the film, when Dale shows up late at the desert location for the party only to refuse an early-morning ride with Hannaford, which apparently sets him off on his death spiral. Dale never speaks in the film, but we know, from Hannaford’s cruel taunting of one of Dale’s former teachers at the party (Dan Tobin), a gay man who himself alludes to homosexual activity on the part of Dale, that Hannaford’s homophobia might be a mask for his own insecurities. Director Peter Bogdanovich, who helped recreate the film, plays Brooks Otterlake, an acolyte who is now a potential rival. The “daddy” issues that circulate throughout the film have their own complex side that is first suspected by the character Juliette Riche (Susan Strasberg), a famous film critic attending the party.

That the secret of Hannaford is that he is not what he pretends to be is at the center of Welles’ critique of the industry as a whole. While various people are parodied, the film-within-the-film makes clear that one of the many strands that runs throughout the film is the notion of sexual insecurity and that “art” films can in and of themselves often be excuses for objectification of the naked body. Hannaford is using the film as an attempt to get close to another man—to see Dale naked and to torment him via the Kodar character at the same time. Kodar’s ripping of the phallus at the end could

be an end to both movies—the epitome of the violence that her character seems to evince in the “art” film as well as the impatience that Welles and Kodar have for the myth of the macho director. With the notion of turning sex into art, or art into sex, Welles comments on the cultural moment of the 1970s even before it really happens. He makes his own version of an art-house porn film like *Deep Throat* (1972) or *Boys in the Sand* (1971) while also commenting on the films of European masters that explore sex and sexuality, or at least reference both with an ease that was never possible by Welles before. In the scene that Welles filmed and edited of Kodar and Random having sex in the backseat of a Mustang, Welles created one of the most erotic scenes ever put into a mainstream film. Kodar straddles the Dale character, slowly undresses him, and then has intercourse with him in a hallucinatory sequence that blends the movement of the two lovers with the car’s wipers and the streaking of colors coming from the rain outside. The jewelry around Kodar’s neck bumps rhythmically against Dale’s chest and the entire universe of the film, for a few minutes, combines into one intense effect. Welles seems deadly serious here, and sex between the two characters, while never completely consummated, seems linked, however obliquely, to violence on the part of Kodar and the Hannaford character, even if it is deflected in both instances toward the inanimate (in the first case) and self-harm (in the latter).

Welles’ documentary style in the outer film is similar to the documentary style used by Kubrick throughout his career.⁶ In Welles’ case, one can see this style in evidence not only in the use of mostly black-and-white film stock for the main movie but also in the fact that it is supposed to be made up of found footage. In one instance there is even an anonymous off-screen interview voiced by Welles himself of one of the characters being interviewed about Hannaford. Welles purportedly entertained the idea of making the footage into a documentary of the attempted making of the film rather than the film itself. Kubrick, as discussed in Chapter 1, carried over emphases and techniques from his early career as a still photographer into his role as a director. Both men saw porn as a way to explain and represent the world that they lived in at the end of their lives. In Welles’ case, that was the United States and Europe of the 1970s; in Kubrick’s case, London substituting for New York in the 1990s. Both filmmakers, however, saw attitudes toward sex as somewhat timeless. For Kubrick, 1990s New York was fin-de-siècle Vienna, where Freud’s ideas were first being tested and inventoried. For Welles, the Falstaffian core of the film showed the homosocial role at the center of much of his own art but also of much of the theater that interested him. In both instances, their long-simmering desire to comment on sexual relations took a long time to come to fruition, yet both men thought that their respective films were their greatest contributions to cinematic art.

Welles knew that the European art film had changed our attitude toward the body and its representation and that sex and sexuality were now a permanent part of film language. The demise of the Hays code and its replacement by the MPAA rating system, which we still have with us today, meant that films could more closely track changes in popular culture. His film stages a debate between Old and New

Hollywood by putting the actual representatives of each—actors, directors, friends, and acquaintances of Welles—into the virtual room of Hannaford’s birthday party and having them comment on the frisson of the cultural zeitgeist as it was happening. The macho myth that Welles was questioning went hand-in-hand with the female protagonist as played by Kodar. Though mute, she is parallel with Random’s character, who is even more an object of desire—both of them appearing naked though most of their scenes. Kodar’s character is the one who initiates sex in the car and comes to climax. She is also the object of Hannaford’s contempt at the party, but is silently present, glaring at him, and, finally, hers is the last character we see at the drive-in theater to which the guests decamp to view the final scene of the film-within-the-film after the power fails at the party. The only one who stays to witness it to the end is Kodar, who seems satisfied with the ending and her role in literally demasculinizing Hannaford’s overblown phallus.

The first use of porn by Welles, in other words, is also the first proto-feminist film he ever made, and his deconstruction of the male ego is connected to his strengthening of the female one. Porn seems liberating to Welles, even if it is employed in a film that is itself about ambivalence. Kubrick, likewise, makes his own late film with a strong female protagonist. Nicole Kidman’s Alice acts as a stinging rebuttal to Tom Cruise’s often clueless “Dr. Bill,” whose smug objectification of his wife’s beauty, and his assumptions about female sexuality, almost ruin his marriage, threaten his family’s safety, and may get at least one person killed. Kubrick has his own ambivalence about sex, especially outside of marriage, and may be critiquing it here by showing the freedom of modern sex as mechanical and creepy, but he also suggests that it is darkly powerful and difficult to control. Even more than Welles, he makes clear that it is Alice who is firmly in charge of the gaze. From her eyeglasses, which she peers over, to her efficient derailing of a Hungarian lothario at the Zieglers’ party (Sky du Mont), to her recounting of her dream of a personal orgy with too many men to count, she sees through Bill from the very beginning. He is only able to understand his role in his own marriage, and in the mystery seemingly at the heart of the film and its actual orgy (which might have been staged), at the very end of the film, and even then only, completely, with his wife’s help.

In her essay “Gender, Genre, and Excess” from 1991, Linda Williams identified early on that women were already becoming more frequent viewers of porn and that the assumption that heterosexual men are the only consumers of porn needs to be questioned as “the subject positions that appear to be constructed by each of the genres are not as gender-linked and as gender-fixed as has often been thought” (8). Specifically, the assumption of a dichotomy between porn, as the male genre, and what we might now call the tearjerker, and that Williams calls the weepie, are not as polarized as one might think (7). Each is related, she notes, to the simplistic notion that pornography is about “sadism for men” and the weepie is “masochism for women—how power and pleasure operate in fantasies of domination which appeal to women” (7). While we lack a full understanding of either, what they have in common is that they both center on “the female body in the grips of an out-of-control ecstasy” (4). The bodies of women, therefore, are constructed

“as both the *moved* and the *moving*” (4). Since at least the eighteenth century, we live in a time, as Foucault notes, of “the sexual saturation of the female body” (4).

What Welles and Kubrick both presciently understood was the importance that the representation of sex would have for film in general. The representation of the body on screen would have implications for how films were shot, their subject matter, and how the notion of outsider culture—from youth culture to revolutions in race, gender, and sexuality—would necessarily be reflected in how film and, ultimately, television would change. In a sense, Welles made a film about the 1970s that was only, finally, released during our own time, but that, in retrospect, fits within the decade of the 1970s quite well and seems to presage not only the turn by porn toward the mainstream but the ultimately concomitant complement to this—the embracing of sex and sexuality by Hollywood. Welles’ independent filmmaking, while perhaps forced upon him by economic need, also became one of the defining paradigms to come out of the 1970s. Kubrick was to update this moment in the late 1990s when he made a film that signaled the final acceptance of what Welles and others began in the 1970s: the effective canonization of the filmic representation of sex and the body as a high-art exercise. Sex could be presented in mainstream film with the same forthrightness as porn, without filters and without the need to hold back. Nudity and sexual acts no longer had to be something only to be hinted at or shown obliquely. Welles presciently saw the coming importance of this change just as surely as he did the idea that a film could be made up of younger people bringing cameras to a party and filming its events. In form as well as content, Welles and Kubrick saw porn as a documentary of the future.

Notes

- 1 To give you some idea of the scale, Netflix spends 6 billion dollars on content; Amazon 3 billion and HBO and Hulu 2 billion each, and these numbers are rising.
- 2 For more on the relationship between theme parks and narrative, see my chapter “Story Time” in *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*.
- 3 Other connections to *Eyes Wide Shut* include the lion masks; the walls of the ship that are decorated with light curtains like those at Ziegler’s party; the sex between a man who is standing and a woman who is bent over, which echoes similar couples at the Somerton orgy (that are themselves a reference to the female sculptures at the Korova Milk Bar in *A Clockwork Orange* [1971]).
- 4 Ellis, the master of the 1980s social novel of dread such as *American Psycho*, has often written porn scenes into his work. He has come out as gay. Parallel with his writing for *The Canyons*, he was working on his own online fictional series, *The Deleted* (2016), a thriller as (soft) porn.
- 5 As a genre, horror is coming more and more to be dominated by African American directors and producers, whether *Lovecraft Country* (2020–) on TV or *Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019), or the sequel to *Candyman* (2021) in film. Linking the literal

with the metaphysical, the embodied nature of the horror genre seems to resonate with the current experience of many African American media artists. For more, see Agard.

- 6 As Linda Williams notes about the first filmed sex scene, Edison's short, "The Kiss" (1896), "The problem, of course, is that every kiss in every film is already a kind of documentary of that particular, intimate, and yet still publicly acceptable sex act in a way that an act of violence, which is usually faked, is not" (*Screening Sex* 66).

Spatializing Desire

The televisual landscape of the twenty-first century is intertwined with that of film, though it doesn't mirror it, quite. The serial nature of television means that while nudity can be just as prevalent, sex, as a topic, is less so. That is, the porn film is not as much a generic model for TV as it might be for film, but that doesn't mean that contemporary television remains unaffected by pornography in its many different forms and formats. Film has, in some ways, remained fairly stable in terms of content and form because of economic pressure. Films are so expensive to make that they tend to follow the most conservative formula possible, using remakes, reboots, and, especially, sequels of material that has proven marketable in the past and/or nostalgic for some segment of the ticket-buying audience. While the pattern of sequels within sequels pushes film toward seriality to some extent, films remain one-off affairs, at least structurally. Having an overarching theme, in other words, is important to the aesthetics. Television can be equally as commercial as film, of course, but the sheer amount of new content that television platforms feed means that there is some room for experimentation. Unfortunately, that experimentation is potentially stifled by the serial format of TV, though not always. Independent films take the most risks with sexual subject matter; for-pay cable TV is more likely to offer opportunities to present the nude body, or sex, as a distraction or background atmosphere for its stories generally.

Significantly, both film and television are poised to change. Netflix creates new films at a high rate and releases them immediately, bypassing the theater system. Organizations that award films have been resistant to acknowledge these films and sometimes refuse to treat them like new-release films, though that resistance may be weakening. On the other hand, there are signs that the economic model that Netflix represents may also be weakening—that is, Netflix's size and influence may have peaked. Netflix may begin to have much more competition from companies like Disney and Apple that aim to be major players in streaming film and television content and distribution.

Television, as a medium, may be changing as well as the genres that comprise it become more and more hybridized, mixing tones that would normally be kept distinct, or combining parts of different genres to fashion difficult-to-define new genres for which we may yet to have a name. While it is difficult to foretell what the dynamism of television will bring about, it is a safe bet that for the immediate future it will be

anchored in part by the physical body, the limits of which we have yet to breach culturally, morally, or representationally despite literally millennia of trying. In this chapter, I attempt to provide some case studies of shows that have attempted to take seriously the exploration of the body in space. The places where the impact of the pornification of the mainstream can be seen are in the domestic interiors of TV shows, which both are a reflection of and reside in the domestic interior of the home.

Mad Men (2007–15)

The ultimate drama of domesticity, and one that, like *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), also harkens back to a seemingly earlier time, *Mad Men* single-handedly forced viewers to reconsider the period of time between the late 1950s and the early 1960s that had seemed, in retrospect, to be one of the most abject in recent history. Sexism, racism, and homophobia might indeed be the most likely associations that we have with a period that might well be the height of straight white male privilege. The creator, Matthew Weiner, was cannily correct to examine this age again, which might seem easy to dismiss until you realize the extent to which many people have a secret attraction to the way of life of that period—the design of interiors and objects, the feeling of being in a time when everyone thought they could drink and smoke and have sex because the consequences were fewer or simply unknown. In that sense, *Mad Men* represents a sort of guilty pleasure, but it is also, at a more serious thematic level, the birthplace of the contemporary period, the origins of our own age. It is not by accident that the series ends right at the literal dawn of the 1970s with our protagonist thinking up the idea for a Coke campaign while meditating on the California coast, the marker of the idealism of the next decade that gets commercialized as well. The sexual revolution is on the way, and the transformations that will mark the 1970s and beyond in terms of civil rights, women's rights, and gay and lesbian rights are just beginning. The body will become a literal battleground.

The first episode of the third season (2009) picks up several months after the series ended the year before on a note of pregnant pause—the Cuban Missile Crisis brought Don (Jon Hamm) home and sent other characters, like Pete Campbell (Vincent Kartheiser), on a mission to find their true selves. We last see him holed up in his Manhattan office with a shot gun. The new season begins seemingly without any reference to that historical event. Time is instead marked by the literal pregnancy that also ended season two (2008). Don's wife Betty (January Jones) is now well on her way to having their third child. During the opening scenes, Don visits his own birth via a series of what appear to be flashbacks while standing in the kitchen heating milk for Betty. We see a montage from his early life—his mother, a prostitute, meeting the john who will become his father; Don's harsh birth and quick disposal at the home of a couple who have just endured the birth of a still-born baby girl. These moments are rendered like scenes from a play, vignettes that appear in different rooms of Don's suburban home. His home becomes an actual house of memory, the original

mnemonic device that here suggests the quasi-expressionistic moments of plays by Tennessee Williams (the “dumb shows” of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951) or, more pointedly, of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949), especially when Loman sees the scenes of his earlier life. Realism dissolves into the unconscious mind. Don, after all, cannot remember or know any of the scenes he sees. If not supernatural, at best these scenes represent imagination based upon stories, maybe some early memories of some of the people involved, but not recreations of reality. Nothing here is quite history. Don does not deal with history, or reality, as we are reminded continually that his life is a deception (or that of a “self-made man”) and that his career, like his personal life, is based upon the con. He is at the center of the show, but he also does not know himself. He can’t. His life is a play—one filled with artifice and theatricality. What he may not understand is that he is also an everyman who really doesn’t know what will happen next—how fate might manipulate him.

The first episode of the third season proceeds to take us on a business trip that pairs Don with Sal (Bryan Batt), a closeted character who strains, like Don, to live the life of a suburban husband but who has his own secret life. Unlike Don (and even Betty), Sal does not act on his desires. Fully aware of the context of gay life—we have seen him deal with a proposition over drinks, an out German colleague, and even Jackie Kennedy’s re-decorated White House—he does not submit to the temptation that is the reality behind the cultural stereotype. Like Don, he thinks he is in a unique position to know what is real and what is false, that he is not a dupe because he is an ad man. The reality is different. As soon as they are out of New York airspace Sal and Don are propositioned by a blonde airline stewardess. Not only is this trope one of the show’s typical signature comments on the fantasy of male privilege prior to the 1970s (along with getting to drink in your office all day, flight attendants were all beautiful and single, etc.) but it is also a test for Sal and Don as they can assume whatever identities they want while on the trip. And they do. A misplaced name tag on Don’s luggage causes the flight attendant to mistake Don for someone else. Whether to protect themselves, have some fun, or simply as a shared joke, Don and Sal both assume aliases for their new fan. Don, therefore, is two names removed from his given name, while Sal is a gay man impersonating a straight man impersonating another straight man. The true tension in the episode, however, is what will Don and Sal do with this temptation? The two multidimensional men end up dining in their hotel restaurant in Baltimore with a second flight attendant and an equally drunk pilot.

The pilot seems superfluous but is possibly a reminder that the sexual dynamics of this frankly sexual scene don’t quite make sense. Does Sal really want the second stewardess, or would he prefer the blond pilot? The second flight attendant and the pilot soon peel off and Don and Sal, typically inebriated, find themselves not only alone with the first woman but on a long elevator ride with her. Sal gets off on his floor. Don and his friend get off on the same floor. Don’s seductress is aggressive and, though Don shows some signs of resistance, he ultimately relents. Sal never competes with Don and, indeed, seems to some extent to be the gentleman to Don’s cad. Upon entering his own hotel room, however, Sal notices that it’s uncomfortably warm. He calls down to the front desk to request assistance and at some point parallel to Don’s

adventure in his own room the bell hop (Patrick Fischler) appears in Sal's and fixes the thermostat. He then proceeds to kiss Sal, who, like Don, repays in kind. Sal, whose name, Salvatore Romano, always reminds the viewer of his ethnicity, is finally seduced by another "dark" man who knows who and what Sal is. Just as Don has given in to the forwardness of the sexually liberated woman, so Sal has relented to the confident proto-gay type. Perhaps it is just something about Baltimore, but the hotel, even more than the airplane, becomes a zone of marginality in which our well-heeled New York businessmen give in to strangers who seem to know them better than they know themselves.

As important as these scenes may be in their establishment of a new theme in the series, i.e., that sex is increasingly entering a realm of guilt-free pleasure, is the further complication of the notion of the double. Sal is obviously now connected to Don as yet another parallel identity. Significantly, neither seduction ends with a consummation. The fire alarm goes off in the hotel and Don wisely makes sure that he and his drunk companion head for the nearest fire escape. While descending to street level they happen to pass by Sal's window where Don notices quite clearly what is about to happen. Don and Sal now share a double secret. Don sees in Sal, or at least the audience does, someone who leads as much of a double life as he does. By now it should be clear that almost everyone on the show does: Betty's unhappiness with Don and revenge sex in the city, Peggy's (Elizabeth Moss) complicated personal life, Pete's infidelity and obsession with status, the various ad men who are artists, etc. But in a sense Don and Sal are the real things. They both know that they are in the perfect career for their talents—fabrication. For Sal it is with paint brushes and paper; for Don it is painting images and impressions with words in other people's minds. Sal and Don are twins. On the elevator the second flight attendant is briefly replaced with the bell hop. For Don, the two women are mirror images of his beautiful blonde wife Betty—everywhere he goes he finds the same woman waiting to seduce him. And even with a pregnant wife back home, he gives in to the desire. For Sal, the bell hop is a reflection of himself, a clone of his desire. Sal and Don are both willing to take risks for sex, but fate intervenes to stop them. Their trysts are interrupted by the fire alarm—a causal occurrence whose coincidence and irony call attention to it. Who is stopping them? Betty and Kitty (Sarah Drew), their wives back home? Or their own guilty consciences? Stanley Kubrick uses the same device in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999)—the cell phone rings just before Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) is about to have sex with different women throughout the film, all of whom look like his wife, are sexually forward, and who represent (in his mind) an attempt to seek revenge against his wife and restore his masculinity. Freudian psychosexual desires, which not only run throughout the series but are a key component of advertising, are here made explicit.

On the plane back, Don and Sal finally confront the secret that they both know they have to talk about. "Limit your exposure," Don says, seemingly in reference to a discussion about a new London Fog ad that is supposed to involve a woman on a subway and a "handsome" stranger. During this episode much is made of the mystery of London Fog, the client discussed during this episode and given much thematic attention (like Kodak in the series' most famous episode or American Airlines in

another). The name London Fog, we are told, is a simulacrum. London was never foggy; it just suffered from the smog of burning coal in the nineteenth century. Charles Dickens, we can perhaps assume, invented it. Or, as Oscar Wilde says in "The Decay of Lying," the fog was invented by Whistler once he painted a foggy, impressionistic London. Nature always imitates art. What is it that we see? What power do we give to the notion of a brand? Don and Sal are in not just Baltimore but also 1963—the year of the release of the first Bond film. At the end of season two a British firm bought their ad agency, Sterling Cooper, in what was meant to be a takeover that would net the principal American shareholders in the company a neat profit. What happened instead is that the British invaded the company and are now taking it over and downsizing its population of overpaid, underworked young men. For a series that seems to be a subtle analysis of the rise of a peculiarly American enterprise, the Madison Avenue advertising executive, the interpellation of British history might seem odd. But if the series is at this point looking ahead to the sexual revolution it certainly comes from the swinging 1960s of London, of Carnaby Street and Kings Road—places that invent the notion of sex as fashion that reaches its apex with Malcom McLaren and the Sex Pistols in the mid-1970s. The most shocking import from British culture for the secretarial staff at the company is the presence of a male secretary, a sort of executive secretary that the new British boss brings with him from London. How can a man be a secretary? He is nicknamed "Money Penny," gendered female, and, we might assume, further put in his American place by being considered, like the original, hopelessly caught in an unrequited love relationship. The character of Miss Money Penny would be introduced to an American film audience in the second Bond film, *From Russia with Love* in 1964, though perhaps people knew that it was one of President Kennedy's favorite novels. The Money Penny we see, however, is mostly concerned with his status, securing an office for himself only to have it taken from him by his British boss. "Presumptuous," he admits. In an episode that makes much of the comedy of manners that is the relationship between Britain and the United States, it is never quite clear if he is seeking to carve out space for his identity in terms of gender, class, or nationality—all three, one presumes, under threat from his American cousins. If the Bond franchise was about the new sexuality that comes with the dawning of the 1960s—not just men who sleep with women outside of marriage but women who do the looking, too—then this episode also reminds us the extent to which in the Bond franchise that new form of sexual openness belonged to an individual who was outside of the class system. James Bond represented someone who had worked his way up in government and represented class fluidity. He defined himself by what he consumed—the clothes, women, cars, food, wine, etc. Ian Fleming litters his novels with the details that only exist in current popular consciousness in brief, fragmented form (vodka martinis, for example, are not only shaken but have a pepper rim, which has its own important backstory). The details in the novels, the mixture of minutiae and fantasy that Umberto Eco has dubbed "the Fleming effect," make clear that Bond represents the anti-thesis to class, to the past. He uses the accoutrement of the commercial world to form an identity. At the end of the episode both Stoli and Cuban cigars are offered to Don. Perhaps Don Draper has yet another identity, that of the spy, the British new man, the

Cold-War stealth, the Bondian hero. He certainly acts like him. Or maybe Bond is the double of Draper. In any case, they both cast off their coats to be themselves and to enter the realm of the visual, the filmic, the fictitious hero of a new age that will take away all that other men of their late-modernist era hold dear.

Mad Men continues its cultural topicality in the second episode not by referencing film, as in the first show, but architecture. If the Bond franchise was arguably the key to the premiere episode—especially in terms of suggesting the sense of a brave new world of sexuality, class mobility, and gender—then the second episode continues the notion of change and commercialization by injecting *Mad Men* into the decades-old debate about the original Penn Station. Architectural critics and historians of New York City have never gotten over the demolition of the original Penn Station structure, which is referred to in this episode as a “Beaux-Arts masterpiece.” Opening in 1910, the original building was hailed as a landmark because of its functionality—at the crossing of the city’s national, regional, and commuter lines, it was literally the city’s gateway—and its aesthetics: the giant glass-enclosed interior courtyard was larger than St. Peter’s in Rome. The destruction of the space, which is just about to happen in this episode, will be consistently decried by historians for decades to come. The demolition of Penn Station helps to usher in the replacement of train depots with the non-spaces of airports—places where one is between zones, in the ultimate liminally anonymous position. That is, Don Draper. The deal to advertise Madison Square Garden, the structure and two towers that take over most of Penn Station (whose functions are moved underground to its current non-place), is sealed by him. He explains the need to move ahead because “New York is in decay.” New York has to be more like California—new, clean, no longer a ruin. The future he is advocating, of course, is one that not only has to forget its past but has to destroy it by lobotomizing itself. When talking to Peggy, the quintessential modern woman who has worked her way up from the typist pool to handling accounts, Don cautions her, “Leave some tools in your toolbox.” That is, sometimes you have to lay your morals, scruples, aesthetics aside: “You’re not an artist, Peggy; you solve problems.” Madison Square Garden is one complex equation, not art. But it is the future: “hotels, concerts, sports.” It will take a long time to build (it doesn’t finally open until 1968), but it will redefine what New York City is.

The outcry over the destruction of Penn Station created the first preservation movement in New York and galvanized a city into caring about its immediate past. In *Mad Men*, the representative for Madison Square Garden refers to the one ad executive who objects to the destruction of Penn Station as “the Communist, the radical.” Don is perhaps not so much his opposite as a pragmatist—someone who is willing not only to take on his client’s fight but to find the most compelling argument for it. Don wins the client’s confidence only to have the account rejected by the British holding company that owns Sterling Cooper—laying waste to Don’s work, but also excising the company from the guilt of Penn Station’s demise. The British reject the destruction of the past because they can’t see the money in it. They are wrong economically but inadvertently right historically. Don is neutral (“change is neither good nor bad; it simply is”), though one suspects that, as always, he knows more than he pretends. Not

surprisingly, Penn Station is used as the background in a number of films, not the least of which is Kubrick's first full-length movie, the late-noir classic *Killer's Kiss* (1955). In Kubrick's film the city is a maze of dark alleys and poorly lit interiors that culminate in a famous battle fought in a claustrophobic mannequin factory in which the hero and his would-be assassin find themselves duplicated by the genderless heads, hands, legs, and torsos of the uncanny automatons that their strenuous fighting bring to life. The headless space helmet hanging in the pod bay in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is foreshadowed in this great scene as is the irony and God's-eye-view of all of Kubrick's subsequent films. Penn Station, however, represents a light-filled space of escape where the protagonist gets to leave the city in the film's optimistic conclusion. For Don, space itself becomes something to sell, or to try to, even if mortgaging the future means destroying the past. After all, the past doesn't really exist for Don—it's in the twilight zone somewhere between memory and fantasy. "Madison Square Garden: it's a new city on a hill": this is what he invents, the lie that tells the truth. In response to the preservationists who are horrified, Don suggests to the planners of Madison Square Gardens, "If you don't like what is being said, change the conversation." They do; Penn Station is removed, and henceforth the future belongs to those who learn to ignore all but their own shrill lies.

Mad Men continues its march through the vicissitudes of history with two long, complex episodes, numbers three and four, though history becomes something of a backstory to the continued development of the characters. Don searches for his own secret history as the season spotlights aspects of the dense history of the late spring and early summer of 1963. Episode two of this season gave us the date of Roger Sterling's (John Slattery) daughter's wedding: November 23, the day after President Kennedy's assassination. We might assume that the series this season would build toward that now tragic moment. In the meantime, in the third episode, entitled "My Old Kentucky Home," we have moved up to May 4, Derby Day, to a party that includes, among other Republican horrors, the spectacle of Roger singing in blackface to his secretary-turned-anorexic wife. The image reminds viewers of what was considered, at least at some white country clubs like the one represented here, to be acceptable. Some characters are visibly uncomfortable—Don and Pete, for example. The scene does not seem, however, redeemable and one wonders if Roger, as a character, can ever recover from what he has done. The elitism, racism, and exclusivity shown in the long party is actually itself a kind of simulacrum of the South, retaining the ugliness of Southern racism, for which the South only seems to function as another excuse to drink. Don quickly exits Roger's performance and goes to the bar to mix his own drink and express his solidarity with the bartender who tells him "there's no bourbon." How Southern could it really be pretending to be? Before the party, Don and Betty dress while the radio provides non-diegetic commentary for the scene, much like the tape player in Bill and Alice's (Nicole Kidman) bedroom at the beginning of *Eyes Wide Shut*. Here, instead of a waltz, we hear news about trouble in Alabama; one assumes (though it's difficult to make out) that it is a reference to Bull Connor's unleashing of dogs and water cannon on marchers in Birmingham the day before. To put it mildly, The Derby Party could not be more ill-timed.

While the older characters celebrate the past with a party about the Old South, the younger crowd spends its Saturday working at the office. This gathering turns into a party of sorts with the unexpected introduction of some marijuana by a friend. Meanwhile, across town, Joan (Christina Hendricks) and her rapist fiancé entertain doctor friends at their apartment at what is a third party, one that turns into yet more shame and embarrassment for Joan. Episode number four returns us to a former ad pitch, the *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963) “homage” that was requested by the makers of a diet drink, Patio. Don recommends Sal for this job since his storyboards for the project are so detailed and spot-on. Prior to the unveiling of the new commercial we watch Sal describe it to his wife in a shot-by-shot recreation in which it becomes clear to her, perhaps for the first time, that he is gay. This revelation sets up the final unveiling of the spot to the executives who ordered it. Though Sal creates an exact duplicate of the Ann-Margaret opening to the film, the clip bombs. When pressed to explain why it doesn’t work, both clients say that they don’t know exactly what it is, but that “something’s not right about it.” It should work, it is exactly what was asked for, but “[i]t’s not what I thought it was going to be.” Like Sal, of course, the film seems like a copy of heterosexual eroticism, and yet something is missing. Like Don, Sal’s double life is magnified through his creation of a false copy. The commercial he delivers is of an actress playing a straight woman mimicking a gay man who is copying Ann-Margaret. At some subtle level the short film illustrates the logic of camp. In response to the drubbing, Sal delivers himself to Don for further punishment, but Don refuses to blame him or remove him as a director from future projects. Sal’s position is secured even though the department he is in, hand-drawn illustrations, is doomed to extinction by the popularity of photography and film.

Sal’s recreation of Ann-Margaret’s signature tune is not only a gay man’s dream but the clip itself, of Ann-Margaret acting like a naïve girl whose boyfriend is being shipped off to war, comes originally from a film version of a 1950s play that satirizes 1950s culture in general and the rise of rock music in particular. Ann-Margaret’s reprise at the end of the film shows how much her character has grown up in the meantime. While popular, the film strikes many viewers now as the last gasp of the 1950s, or the last time the 1960s could fool itself into believing that sexual culture hadn’t changed. Ann-Margaret’s signature tune, a paean to her boyfriend’s absence, is more 1940s, perhaps, than anything else and helps to emphasize the essentially martial theme of this episode, one that finds Betty’s father (Ryan Cutrona) preparing for his death by not only executing his will and funeral arrangements but also giving away his most cherished items, including a First World War Prussian pith helmet, to Bobby (Mason Vale Cotton), the Drapers’ son. Don disapproves; the helmet, which was taken by Gene as a war souvenir off the body of a soldier he shot in the head, perhaps reminds Don of his own military experience, one in which he attained his current identity. Like Sal, his life exists only by mimicking the actions of something he is not.

Betty’s father suffers from strange smells in what seems to be a symptom of an undiagnosed brain tumor. He dies soon after. His granddaughter, Sally (Kiernan Shipka), who befriended her grandfather in part because he provided her with the

support and attention her mother didn't, is the only one who really understands the significance of his death. Don does as well, perhaps as one soldier to another, as he closes up the folded bed in the attic where his father-in-law bivouacked in their house during his last days. These two episodes make clear, in ways perhaps never before in the series, that the era is about to change and new generations will come onto the scene. The 1960s are over before they have begun.

Hilton Hotels

*"The Bible is a goodly book
I always can peruse with zest,
But really cannot say the same
For Hilton's Be My Guest."*

—W. H. Auden, "On the Circuit"

The second half of the third season of *Mad Men* introduces an arc in which our burgeoning anti-hero, Don Draper, meets an equally shadowy figure, Conrad Hilton (Chelcie Ross), founder of the hotel empire that bears his name. Hilton comes into Don's life almost as mysteriously as Don does into those of others: by being mistaken as a bartender by Don at the infamous Kentucky Derby party in episode three. Hilton shares with Don a hardscrabble past and a penchant for cutting to the chase. Over the course of several episodes he slowly pulls Don into his empire, allowing him to take over more and more of his advertising revenue until Don finally reaches the point where Hilton asks for one thing too many: help with plans for building a hotel on the Moon. Don instead comes up with a brilliant advertising campaign—"Hilton. The same in any language."—as a way to get across the idea of the ubiquity of Hilton design and standards of comfort worldwide. Despite being an alternately caring and demanding father figure for Don, the unhinged aspects of Hilton's psyche slowly become clear to Don after Hilton rejects him for not delivering him the Moon.

The architectural metaphors that abound in season three come together around Don's experience with Hilton as Hilton's vision, at least initially, seems similar to Don's. Both men see their respective businesses as capitalist in an essential way. That is, advertising, like hotels, can be translated into anyone's consciousness, or become the standard in any country. There is, if you will, a colonizing function to both: advertising influences your mind to buy new products, specific products that you perhaps didn't even know you wanted; Hilton Hotels make the world safe for Americans and insert just a bit of American idealism and design into the landscape of major cities all over the world. Connie Hilton's desire to go to the Moon is just an extension of how he sees this process working out: he doesn't see the expansion of the Hilton empire in primarily practical business terms, but rather believes that it is part of an attempt to bring "God" to the "Communists": "It's my purpose in life to bring America to the world. We are a force of good, Don. Because we have God." The cultural role the hotels play as ambassadors for America in a time of Cold War is secondary to the evangelic role

they have as spokespersons for the American way of life, but one that is particularly Christian, conservative, and ambitious in an almost manic way.

In her book *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture*, Annabel Wharton analyzes the important role that the Hilton hotel chain had in spreading and codifying not only a certain brand of corporate modernism but also a certain notion of what American identity is—a paradigm for what the United States is supposed to be like that can be experienced by anyone who stays in one of the hotels. The Hilton brand becomes synonymous with luxury and the default base camp for Westerners when they are in a foreign city to work or play. Conrad Hilton's ambitions are finally greater than Don's because Hilton's project is ideological. He wants to make not only the planet but the universe safe for capitalism and Christianity. He wants to extend the Marshall Plan into a total acceptance of the American way of life that will lead to a literal Americanization of the global world. His hotels are meant to be examples to the non-American masses of what life could be like and what they should copy. It is a DNA sequence or a hologram of perfection, or at least the future, that they should replicate throughout their built environment in order to achieve that which is thoroughly and truly American. This process has no end point. It is utopian and, unlike capitalism, has no crisis it cannot overcome.

The colonialist backdrop of the show in season three is clearly the American engagement in Vietnam, which is slowly escalating, though it has yet to reach the major tipping point of the Tet Offensive and the beginning of the end of the war for the United States, both domestically and in terms of US foreign strategy. As the United States emerges from the post-Second World War era, one that Roger rhapsodizes about in episode ten, the United States becomes the colonizer, stretching its arms into Vietnam as a test, after Korea (the genesis of Don) in order to see just how far it can take its global meddling, its claim to a new kind of post-European empire. Advertising as propaganda is clearly a part of this process, and Don's expert manipulation of words and images is as much a part of the new American era's colonizing of the global mind as is the military. The United States is finally coming out from the yoke of the Europeans, symbolized by the British firm that controls Sterling Cooper and stays around as a constant reminder of the old form of empire. Ironically, the British sell the company after they have made it more efficient—prefiguring the way corporations will work when they become truly international in the globalization of the world business economy that we have today.

Connie Hilton, to some extent, is right that the expansion of his chain is as much about the mind as it is actual capital, or glass and concrete architecture. In imagining how the future might actually look for his film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Kubrick spent years in consultation with private companies to create a realistic extension of the present into the future as opposed to a stylized or retro version of the future as some form of the past. The design of his film is populated with new phrases (“Let me have the hard copy on it, please.”), picture phones, tablet computers, and realistic solutions to working, eating, and living without gravity. Interstellar space is seen as an extension of the planet Earth. We move from the opening sequence 3 million years in the past to the present of the film, in which bones used as weapons become orbiting nuclear

platforms. The film represents, in a sense, the continuation of the Cold War in space—as though the situation in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) had never been resolved. Our first contemporary protagonist in the film, Dr. Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester), lies to the Soviets, to his fellow scientists, and ultimately to Bowman (Keir Dullea) and Poole (Gary Lockwood) aboard the *Discovery* spacecraft that is on its way to Jupiter about just what exactly is happening. The nationalist aspect of even so globally significant a discovery as an alien monolith on the Moon is used solely for local gain. The Americans use knowledge (and technology) to push their agenda in space and to further their own tactical advantage. Their plan is almost foiled by their own computer, who seems either unable or unwilling to deal with the lie he is either programmed to execute or discovers on his own. Bowman survives, but only to be forced by some sort of alien intelligence to move beyond the competitive system of territorial gain, of fighting over the water hole and using new technology to kill ever more efficiently.

Part of Kubrick's attempt to render a future that is science fiction as opposed to science fantasy is to populate it with brand names that he thought might still inhabit the spaces of the near future. Floyd places a call with AT&T, travels aboard a Pan Am shuttle, and walks toward a Howard Johnson's for breakfast. While some of these brands, such as Pan American World Airlines, the first transatlantic carrier, don't exist anymore, clearly displayed in the background of one shot is Hilton Hotel. Perhaps via Kubrick, Connie has gotten his wish that his hotels might make it to the Moon—or at least to an orbiting space station above it. Kubrick didn't see the future in naïve terms. It would not be, he speculated, a sort of United Nations in space à la *Star Trek* (1966–9) in which money is done away with and the planet is united through the celebration of difference. The future of Kubrick was either realistic or dystopic, but one that definitely posits the idea that space itself will be commercialized, will form another barrier that capitalism will slosh up against and need to transcend, and that the space immediately above the Earth would become a political extension of the battles on the planet for control, advantage, and power between and for men (Figure 6.1).

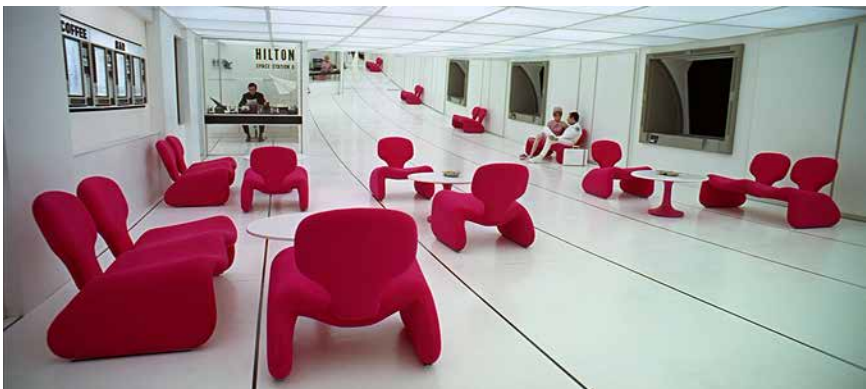


Figure 6.1 Hilton Hotel. 2001: A Space Odyssey. Stanley Kubrick. 1968. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

In *Mad Men* the Cold War is just beginning and its potential personal, not just globally political, dimensions are everywhere made clear. The characters on the show go through their own marriages, divorces, flirtations, and affairs against the backdrop of not only the Vietnam War, which they cannot see in perspective yet, but also the equally dramatic and even more immediate timeline of American Civil Rights: the killing of Medgar Evers, the Birmingham church bombing, and, of course, the assassination of President Kennedy. In this season, especially, the writers of the show establish a strict sense of time, cuing us as to the day in which every episode takes place and reminding us of just how dense and dramatic the times were: the sense of the 1960s as a period when no one ever seemed to know what would happen next. Against this background, Don and Betty's marriage disintegrates also under the pressure of lies. Don and Betty lie to each other about their infidelities, but most significantly, in episode eleven, Betty finally finds out about Don's secret identity, not surprisingly, on Halloween, ripping a literal and existential hole in Don's life, leaving him to float in a kind of limbo. At the end of the episode, when Don accompanies his family to trick or treat, his children are dressed, appropriately, as a gypsy and a hobo, symbolic of his own personal life as a transient without an identity, just a gender. Upon getting to one house, the neighbor opens the door to say to Don, "And what are you supposed to be?"

Don's lack of an identity, or his secret identity, functions to make him a double agent in his own life—someone who is never comfortable with the people he is supposed to know best because around them he is made aware of the lack of truthfulness of his guise. Betty is, in a sense, never his wife because he is never really who he is: Dick Whitman, not Don Draper. He is a skillful Cold War secret agent, someone who infiltrates her life, and the life of Sterling Cooper, and finally, to some extent, gets flushed out. When Betty learns the truth, she uses it as the basis for the divorce. It is never clear if this reaction is for the sake of convenience on her part, as she has another man she prefers, Henry Francis (Christopher Stanley), or due to shock upon the realization of the extent of Don's lying. But by exposing a weak spot, Don can do nothing but accept her terms—something that he does willingly, in the end. Like Sal, the closeted gay married man to whom Don has been paralleled before, Don is open to legal blackmail. Bert Cooper (Robert Morse), a founding partner in the firm, does use Don's secret to blackmail Don by forcing him to sign a three-year contract that he doesn't want to sign under threat of revealing his true identity. Yet Don's true self, whatever it might be, is never completely defined. He is a part of his own fictitious identity, unable to extricate himself from either the past or the present. The beautiful blonde Betty may not even be his ideal of feminine beauty given his affairs with both the Jewish heiress of a department store fortune, Rachel Menken (Maggie Siff), and his more recent affair with "Miss Farrell" (Abigail Spencer), his daughter's teacher. The latter is first seen by Don in episode five and then at an outdoor school function in episode seven in which, barefoot in the grass, she comes across as almost too earthy for Don: a sort of late-1960s type in formation. Later her sexual openness to Don and her seemingly dramatically different lifestyle from the other women on the show—Don sees her in episode nine jogging while wearing a Bowdoin shirt—suggest a nascent

feminism to which Don, despite his conservatism in many arenas, might be attracted. Smart brunettes seem to be his cup of tea, but like Sal, he can never really be himself, especially where lovers are concerned.

The public and the private selves with which both men struggle mightily are brought together for Don, when he takes Betty to Rome for a week—an experience that renews their marriage, however briefly. For the second time on the show, we see Don and Betty in a hotel, in this case an average Hilton room, which Conrad wants Don to experience, as opposed to a suite, in order to understand what the average American feels when he stays there. Unable to sleep from jet lag, Don gets up and Betty makes an appointment at a beauty salon. When next they meet, at an outdoor café, Betty has transformed her hair into an up-do of amazing architectonic proportions. Her face is also made up in high-Fellini style that is further amplified by the Bryn Mawr Italian that she speaks throughout these scenes. Rome shows us another Betty, one that we did not know about and amplifies the sense on the show that no one is who they seem to be—that Betty, too, is playing a part as the dour, but pretty, housewife in the suburbs. This episode, entitled “Souvenir” (number eight), suggests what she has repressed for Don, or what her younger life might have been. Don knows as little about her as she does about him. When Don finally sees Betty, she is being hit upon by two Italian men. Don sits at another table and pretends to be a stranger, an American stranger. He is, of course, the one she chooses, and their date for the evening begins by their pretending to be, or actually being, people that they are not to each other.

Hotels are the domestic as public; like advertising, they are both highly personal and completely on the surface. Both allow you to see who you really are: Sal almost has an affair with a bellhop in a hotel in Baltimore; Peggy sleeps with Duck (Mark Moses) at a hotel; Don and Betty have an affair with each other at the Hilton in Rome; in another season, Don gets rolled by a hitchhiking couple who give him drugs and take him to a motel. The season ends with Don and his team exchanging the high-rise office building for a high-rise hotel. Sterling Cooper is closed and Don's team encamps to the Pierre. Don leaves his suburban house for an apartment at the Roosevelt. At the hotel suite, everyone takes on a domestic role as the principal characters happily exchange their past lives for their new jobs in order to gain a family. The television division ends up with the Media Department, appropriately, setting up their new space in the former bedroom. After leaving the hotel the mad men team ultimately move into new offices in a space described by Roger as “like a hospital designed by Fellini.” Their new modernist offices emphasize the interchangeability of modernist architecture—that, pace Bauhaus, the style remains the same, despite the function—but also how much everything in the show, and in the advertising business generally, emphasizes product, desire, and type, whether people, cars, airlines, or something else. The inside and the outside are the same, or rather, it is all outside. Richard J. Williams notes that on the show architecture is important in the way that it is eroticized. There are public and private divisions of space but also male and female ones. Public spaces like the outside of offices are female, as are suburban homes, but the interiors of offices are often coded as male, as are the commuter train, Oyster Bar, the washrooms (101). It is assumed that offices will be used for sex—couches, alcohol,

and cigarettes abound. When Joan is raped by her husband, it is not by accident that it happens in Don's office (104). Mid-century modernism is played up and exaggerated through textures, the props of masculinity, and architectural details copied from Corbusier and other architects.¹

If a hospital designed by Fellini sounds like someone's idea of hell, the sixth season of *Mad Men* explores Don Draper's own Dante-esque trip through a personal hell. Along the way, Don suffers through a series of emotional pitfalls as Sally makes clear in the last episode, when she tells her father sarcastically, "Well, I wouldn't want to do anything immoral." Don's sins, as in Dante, became more abstract, cold, and intellectual. He moves from the passionate affair of the body with Sylvia (Linda Cardellini) to the stealing of Peggy's idea in order to begin a new life (and satellite business office for Sterling, Cooper, and Price) in Los Angeles—the Los Angeles of Nathaniel West and Manson, in particular. Don's solution to his damnation, interestingly, is to save his own soul by coming clean. This change is literalized in his alcoholism, which gets as far as drunk tanks and subsequent DTs, but which he leaves behind after he "shits in the bed," metaphorically, if not literally, with a sales pitch to a client known equally well for its sweetness and its scatology, the Hershey bar. Don's own associations with this product suggest the passage in Truman Capote's *Answered Prayers* (1987), where the novelist's doppelgänger, P. B. Jones, describes himself as a "Hershey-bar whore": "In fact, I was a kind of Hershey Bar whore—there wasn't much I wouldn't do for a nickel's worth of chocolate" (5). Don, likewise, associates the candy with whoredom and maybe with the only pleasure he ever received as a child when he would take the change from the johns' pockets and, if he got over a dollar, receiving, one presumes, 10 cents (or 10 percent) to purchase his own pleasure in the form of the chocolate bar. Don admits this in front of a client, in a riveting scene that finally shows Don showing himself to the world. He moves from a typically brilliant fiction of the Hershey bar—childhood pleasure, being given a bar by the father who tousled his hair, Hershey bars as the very coinage of love—to the truth that Hershey bars meant the only pleasure to a boy who had little of it. The definition of love that the Hershey bar represents for Don is roughly the same as the one that Don presents, but Don's version of the American dream, the American childhood, is one that cannot be put on display. The simulacrum is what advertising is trying to sell instead.

This coming out by Don is all the more effective, then, when Don takes his children on Thanksgiving Day to see his real childhood home—a dilapidated Victorian house in a "bad neighborhood," as Bobby observes, of Hershey, Pennsylvania: a city, as Don explains, built on the chocolate bar. They find there the truth, which impresses Sally, who gives Don a look that seems to suggest some of the reversal of Don's earlier soul-destroying lie to her about his affair with Sylvia Rosen, surely his City of Dis moment, but also makes Don's movement back to the surface, back at least to purgatory, seem plausible as we see a man not only descend and reappear but reappear as something, or someone, different. This scene parallels Don's revelation of his identity to Betty on Halloween in season two. This holiday is marked instead by an attempt by Don to expose his identity, not as shame, but as a source of strength. Standing on the porch of his old house is a young African American boy who is enjoying a popsicle on this

nippy, windy fall day: perhaps his idea of pleasure on a special day, one in which he indulges so as not to notice that the house and its environment do not match up with the dreams that Americans tell themselves.

Parallel to the end of the sixth season, the last shot of season five completes the notion of Don as a James Bond metaphor with a brilliant use of the title song “You Only Live Twice” as sung by Nancy Sinatra.² Dated in a way that makes the reference period-perfect—the old-fashionedness of Don, the coolness of Nancy Sinatra in the pre-1968 era—also gives the moment a startling poignancy. Don is now married to his second wife, Megan (Jessica Paré), and is the older husband of a younger wife. He has used up the two lives allotted to him. Throughout the final seasons Don is certainly humanized, but it may be that what people respond to in the show is Don’s combination of mystery and museum-quality periodicity—like our desires seen under glass, enjoyable but no longer threatening in any way because not a part of our time. In this closing scene, though, we see some of his specialness evaporate. He is just a misogynist, a man who is beginning to feel old. He once seemed ahead of his times because of his mysterious past, but in fact, he is a product of the moment in history that created him.

The series doesn’t end there, however, but with the epiphany Don has in the final moments of season seven and perhaps a return to his former success in advertising when he thinks of the idea for an iconic Coke commercial while meditating in California. The ding we hear is the inauguration of the decade of the 1970s. Don is changed, and the times are about to as well, though in ways only hinted at by the last half of the final season. It is pertinent that Don’s journey ends in California, a place, and a state of mind, that plays a large part in Don’s secret life. Throughout the series there are repeated references not just to California—“we were happy there”—but to Tomorrowland, the section of Disneyland and the title of the episode where Don and Megan go with his kids after their spontaneous marriage in season four. They want to return to something that never existed in the first place, a child-like entertainment that says more about the present than the future. They never get back there, but Don, at least, does make it to the future.

Entourage (2004–11)

*“I think I fell in love with a porn star
and got married in the bathroom
honeymoon on the dance floor
and got divorced by the end of the night
that’s one hell of a life.”*

–Kanye West, “Hell of a Life”

Since its inception as a sort of idealized history of Mark Wahlberg’s early years in Hollywood, the HBO hit show *Entourage* functioned as not only a series of in-jokes about the ups and downs of film and TV stardom but also a discussion about sex

between men and women in an era of uncertainty about their gendered roles. Concerns about the latter have often been put in the mouth of one of the show's bright spots, Johnny "Drama" Chase (Kevin Dillon), an aging, vain, but loyal older brother of the star, Vincent Chase (Adrian Grenier), a New York pretty boy who has made it big in Hollywood playing a mixture of indie films and big-budget pictures. Left to themselves in a nearly permanent state of adolescence, the brothers, with their two Queens hangers-on, Turtle (Jerry Ferrara) and Eric (Kevin Connolly), live Hollywood as a fantasy guys' dorm with few responsibilities and, thanks to Vince's star roles, an endless supply of cash. Johnny frequently plays the feminine role in the group as he gossips and facilitates discussion about two of his favorite topics, grooming and sex. The latter subject has included, among other things, numerous references to anal play over the course of the series, especially heterosexual male and female rimming. It is probably fair to say that the show has been fairly open about equating its fantasy of bachelorhood with an open-mindedness toward sexual experimentation, an openness not restricted to Johnny Drama but also hinted at by Vince, who is shown in his many sexual conquests to indulge in a range of physical types and positions, such as the "reverse cowgirl." The show suggests that part of the fantasy of Southern California stardom is bringing porn scenarios to life—enacting the sexual positions, activities, and attitudes exhibited in porn. In its own way, *Entourage* tracked the mainstreaming of porn, which has arguably intensified during the time that the series was on the air. Actresses and models who are photographed by paparazzi topless or nude at the beach or entering or exiting limos with little or no underwear are part of the porous membrane that separates celebrity from pornography. The inevitable merging of California culture with porn culture, Los Angeles with Las Vegas, finally seemed to cross over on the series with the introduction of porn star Sasha Grey, who appears for a long narrative arc over the course of most of season six in which her role is something more than the usual star cameo. Her guest role suggested, however, that far from licensing sex, this, the final full season of the series, was about finding the limitations in the show's attitude toward sex and perhaps excess in general.

Season seven has as its primary narrative the idea that Vince, in a desperate attempt to please a bullying director, insists on driving a car during a dangerous stunt. With the director in the car operating the camera, Vince misjudges the stunt and ends up with a blow to the head that has repercussions for the rest of the season. In an attempt not to appear to be weak—in the argot of the show, a "pussy"—Vince ends up damaging himself and subsequently acting out for the rest of the season. His actions slowly become more reckless, beginning with skydiving and motorcycle driving and ending up, by the conclusion of the season, with cocaine and, in the cliff hanger, an arrest for possession. Falling within this narrative is Vince's relationship with a real-life porn star, Sasha Grey playing herself (or a version of herself), as Vince's new girlfriend. Dating a porn star is equated with recklessness, with some type of danger to either Vince's health or, more likely, his career. The arc of the porn narrative suggests that Grey either leads him to drugs or is a symptom herself of the edginess that he is exploring away from the sway of his buddies, who appear, by contrast, suspicious of Grey's presence and appalled, at the end of the season, by Vincent's drug habit.

Grey is introduced in the fifth show of the season in an episode entitled “Bottoms Up.” Our male squad is out for a night on the town with one of the agents at Eric’s firm, Scott Lavin (Scott Caan). Vince’s friend and gopher, Turtle, is the first to spot Grey. He reassures Drama, “She did Soderbergh’s movie, so she’s legit now.” The Soderbergh reference is to his film *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009), which stars Grey as an expensive prostitute who provides, for wealthy clients, something more than mere sex, but something less than an actual emotional relationship. Receiving mixed reviews, the film emphasizes the economic side of the job while perhaps reveling too much in the quotidian aspects of the service industry it discusses. By featuring Grey, it literalizes ideas about whether or not porn stars are actors who can cross into (and out of) mainstream film. *Entourage* takes up that challenge and puts Grey into a parallel situation in television, though here she is more clearly playing herself than she was in Soderbergh’s picture.

As the scene unfolds, Scott further identifies Grey as “the anal specialist”: “I bet her ass sings opera.” This conversation leads into the general area of anal sex, with Turtle admitting, “I’ve never done the ass,” and Drama retorting, in what has to be the most infamous line of the season, “The vagina is my third-favorite hole.” This revelation forces Eric to admit that he, too, as Scott says, is “an ass-virgin.” Heterosexual anal penetration is set up as the last frontier, at least on *Entourage*, as the show’s usual pro-sex stance seems to meet a wall of resistance in Turtle and Eric, the latter acting defensively uninterested. When the friends finally get to meet Grey and to discuss her with Vince, he makes a point of saying, “And she reads: her porn name came from Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). How hot is that?” No sooner is anal sex raised as an issue than it is given a gay male association. While putatively this reference goes with a later conversation that Grey has with Vince in which she wants to take him to “a Godard double-feature” because, as she puts it, she’s a “cool chick who likes art and sex,” the high-art legitimization of Grey that is similar to her inclusion in a film by Soderbergh is not the only function of the reference to Wilde. While in Vince’s mind it is perhaps a sexual turn-on for her to embody both high art and, with the porn connection, supposedly low, the reference to Wilde’s novel also suggests both the implications made about the novel at the time that it was thinly disguised gay pornography (made a persistent permanent rumor in the form of *Teleny*, 1893) but also within the novel’s plot, drug abuse is one of several “sins” committed by Dorian Gray that seem either to disguise, displace, replace, or metaphorize the actions or identities that are obviously homoerotic and connected to him (though not exclusively among the characters in the book) and his secret. By the end of the episode, Vince is shown to have begun to unravel, though at this point, not from drugs but from alcohol and the general nonstop party that his initial relationship with Grey portends.

Grey’s more subtle effects on Vince are less easy to detect. At one point she redresses him before an interview with an important director by taking him out of a skater-boy T-shirt and placing him in a stylishly coordinated striped shirt and jeans: dapper, but with gay undertones. Vince brags that his new girlfriend reads a book a week, but she also likes to do tequila shots with him in the middle of the day. While it is unclear whether or not Vince’s attraction to her is because she is a willing

companion at a time when he is clearly trying to retreat to the edge, or whether he genuinely has feelings for her, it is clear that her presence has a subtle effect on the dynamics of the series as a whole and brings into focus the many ways that women in the show are not merely objectified but done so in ways scripted by pornography. At the same time, by showing resistance to anal sex, which has become more popular in straight porn, the show also suggests a limit to what might be considered acceptable to the men on the show. Johnny Drama's pronouncements on sex and the body (on the virtues of "smooth balls" or that the "landing strip went out in the mid-90s") signal the importance that the show places on film and television as barometers for sexual taste even as Drama's observations are often cued to porn film. Director Larry Clark's section of the art porn sampler *Destricted* (2006), in which he interviews young men for a porn short and then films it, is notable for the fact that all of the young men photographed have shaved their pubic hair—a fact that shocks Clark and that the young men attribute specifically to porn. The young man Clark ultimately chooses to film requests anal sex as his sexual act. Many of the young men actually admit to preferring to orgasm outside of their partners, arguing that, because that is what they see in porn, it must be better. The extent to which porn has scripted the narrative of private sexual function suggests an interweaving of public and private that *Entourage* lets resonate within its own world of self-conscious fantasy. The show also suggests the extent to which people's actual fantasies are created out of scripts given to them by film and television, even to the extent that it represents actions and scenarios that might be pleasing only to them and not their partners. In essence, not only are these scenarios not real but the artificial nature of their conventions is supposed to be seen as precisely that. Instead, they are acted out by young men and, in Vince's case, the fantasy of dating a porn star becomes the next step—that is, to live inside the fantasy of the porn film by seeming to make it literal by having sex with a porn star and making your own fantasies real, i.e., filmic.

The season of *Entourage* plays with this inverted fantasy by having not only Vince's fantasies enacted with Grey but also by Vince's agent, Ari (Jeremy Piven) and his wife (Perrey Reeves). Knowing that his wife has long suffered from her second-class status in relation to his career, Ari finally tries to make up for his lack of attention with a bit of spontaneous afternoon sex. His wife surprises him by being more than ready for the encounter as she drops her clothes to reveal sexy lingerie that looks like an expensive version of a porn fetish outfit—one that emphasizes her ass. (In an episode from an earlier season, Ari had made a point of being home with his wife on "anal sex night.") As they begin to have sex, Ari kisses her on the ass before he reluctantly answers his phone to receive a call from the office that spoils the mood, a mistake that ends up having grave consequences for Ari and his marriage. Likewise, Vince's relationship with Sasha becomes rocky when Vince reacts negatively to her announcement that she is going to star in a porn film, a "five-guy gang bang," that will include her ex-fiancé, who also happens to be named "Vince." The reaction to this announcement on the part of Vince leaves them, like Ari and his wife, on the outs with each other at the season's end. Grey is appalled by, among other things, her

sense of a sexual double-standard: it is okay for him to sleep with a lot of women, but not for her to have sex with other men when it is actually a part of her job, of who she is. He tries to buy her off by giving her the salary that she would earn on the film. She tells him that "I've been taking care of myself since I was 14." To some extent, Grey's autobiographical elements lend the narrative porn arc a sense of familiarity: the porn star who has had a difficult life and who has established a hard-won career independent of anyone else. On the other hand, the continued presence of Grey as a major arc in the season forces Vince to deal with the inevitable question of how he feels about their relationship once she accepts an offer to do another porn film while dating him. They break up at a restaurant after fighting in a bathroom.

The season's multiple references to anality are often placed in the mouth of the nakedly ambitious Scott, who makes the connection, in episode three, between being an agent and doing anything for a famous client ("I'd suck herpes out of a girl's ass for you"). The connection between servicing clients and servicing men on camera is made explicit and linked throughout the season with sex-for-pay. In a sense this season finally deals realistically with the idea that acting is pornography and with the fact that Vince's career is based to a large extent upon his own objectification by women and the power that this gives him to objectify them. The inherent gender instability of this two-way street creates a tension at the heart of the series that is played up by the coddling Vince receives from his three male friends. Turtle chauffeurs him; Drama cooks for him; Eric manages him. All three exist for and through him and his career. As the series concludes, only Eric seems to have begun the process of true separation from Vince, having finally asked his perfect dream girlfriend, Sloan (Emmanuelle Chriqui), to marry him. As "Bottoms Up" concludes, they are experimenting with anal sex and the episode ends with a blow-by-blow by the two of them attempting it for the second time after apparently stopping one time before. With that first time in mind, Eric seems to be penetrating so cautiously that Sloan says to him, "Don't be a pussy"—the one phrase that is bound to set him off. He penetrates farther, which has a negative reaction from Sloan. Finally, Sloan asks, "What are we doing?" To which Eric replies, "I don't know. I like your vagina. Is that so bad?" The episode ends, then, with a rejection of anal sex, at least by the one successful romantic couple left standing in the show by the season's end, and the prohibitions that are hinted about by the gaying of anal sex at the beginning of the episode are given the last word. Anal sex seems to be the one barrier that the show will not breach in its search for sexual faddishness. Sasha Grey, as the representation not only of porn but of anal sex, is seen as a dangerous influence who directly or indirectly contributes to Vince's dissolution. The most important moment in the series might be the conclusion to episode six, when we see the two of them naked and debauched beside Vince's pool. The episode ends with a camera pan to his naked ass, which it lingers on after the music for the end credits begins. Not only is the scene important because of what it foreshadows about Vince's ultimate arrest for drugs, but it shows us Grey's body, full frontally nude, and Vincent Chase, too drunk to respond to Ari, in a clearly objectified form: no longer in control, his ass exposed, ready to take it like a man.

True Blood (2008–14) and *Lost* (2004–10)

Both *True Blood* and *Lost* deal with eschatological moments, which they symbolize through the supernatural, though it is never called that in *Lost*. In both shows the dead walk among us, though that phenomenon seems to be a fairly quotidian and uncomplicated aspect of the worlds presented in each show. Monsters seem much scarier in comparison, and though both shows have them—the maenad (Michelle Forbes) on *True Blood*, for example, and the smoke monster on *Lost*—it is not clear whether or not monstrosity may just be a matter of degree. The world is filled with monsters, and finding out what they mean is the real mystery.

The putative monsters of *True Blood* are, of course, mainly dangerous because they are sexy. By the time the events of the series have begun in the sleepy little town of Bontemps, Louisiana, everyone there has heard about the allure of vampires who are becoming, for the first time, more visible in society thanks to a Japanese-made synthetic blood that gives the show its name. The first of many metaphors or meanings that the series places onto vampires is as forbidden or kinky sex. To bed a vampire is thought to be not only unsafe but also unnatural and is linked to the notion of modern primitivism, neo-Goth cults that act out scenes from vampire novels, and the idea of altering the body to make it line up with the fusion of animal and human identities. The frisson of the sexual unknown, or even unknowable, seems at least initially to be the show's *modus operandi*. This central metaphor, however, is apparently not quite complicated enough for the creators behind the show, and human-vampire relations are soon made to signify both race, especially interracial dating, and also gay identity. We have seen the latter before in Alan Ball's *American Beauty* (1999) and *Six Feet Under* (2001–5) as located within particular characters. Here it is made into discourse itself. That is, all aspects of identity in the show are suffused with the notion of queerness. Everything is a metaphor for gay male identity (lesbians, until later on in on the show, are mostly invisible). All sex on the show is transformed into queer sex, which is perhaps a suggestion that straight sex has been queered. But it is difficult to know exactly what the audience is supposed to do with this metaphor. The narrow-mindedness of the townspeople toward vampires certainly mirrors the attitude toward gay marriage rights in much of the country, but the series never really seems to do very much with this idea, especially given the acuteness of the situation for many gay and lesbian men and women whose fragile right to marry is left to the whims of an ever-more-conservative Supreme Court. Plot threads involving the torture of a gay man and of a religious cult that is out to stop vampire integration into society evoke sympathy but hardly act as an analysis of the current situation.

The American South, likewise, is everywhere in the show but rarely used effectively. The South that is created is in some ways true to the geography and cultural landscape of Louisiana, with references to Monroe or signs advertising Abita beer, but the series nudges the physical environment toward a type of unreality—too much Spanish moss, too many moonlit lakes. In terms of architecture and topography, the South represented here could fit within New Orleans Square in Disneyland. The scariness of Southern culture—the ultimate refusal to accept the notion of difference when it is

exercised in the public sphere—is never really represented. Instead, we get bumbling sheriffs, sweet ex-quarterbacks, and slightly ditsy barmaids—the South as harmless and about as threatening as Barney Fife. Relationships between Black and white people are shown to be little more than extensive family arguments. While the representation of African American culture on television is certainly welcome, the true stresses of racial relations are discounted as a generational problem, no longer significant and hardly present at all. Such an optimistic vision of life in the South would be pleasant if it weren't a lie. The epicenter of the nation's right-wing agenda, domestic terrorism, and general irrationality is far from the relatively harmonious society featured here, which becomes all the more artificial for seeming to be a Hollywood version of itself. Despite the fact that Ball is himself a gay Southerner, he presents the South as a simulacrum. Non-threatening to outsiders, yet somewhat familiar to insiders, the South that is created seems mainly a reflection of its HBO demographic. Defined by class if not region, the channel does not get its message of tolerance to the people who need to hear it most; rather, it preaches too heartily to the choir.

The one way in which the South could, perhaps, be said to represent both metaphor and reality effectively is in the notion that this particular Southern town is filled not just with vampires but with other supernatural beings as well. If the first season was about the preference of vampire love over human love, complete with an all-too-human psychopathic killer, this season moves on to the notion that the world is much more complex than the dichotomy dead/undead and includes a whole panoply of other types—from shape-shifters, to werewolves, to maenads. In this show, a maenad is not just a follower of Bacchus but one who can turn into a horned and clawed human-bull combo much like a minotaur. Season two begins promisingly with a trip to Texas and a stay at a vampire-friendly hotel, a section that plays with the notion of vampires as materialistic hedonists who also have their own limitations and needs. But the early part of the season also builds in a tedious and obvious subplot involving Jason (Ryan Kwanten) as a born-again vampire killer, ultimately betrayed by his hypocritical moral leaders. These two subplots are juggled with a third: the story of Maryann, the evil maenad who comes to Bontemps in search of Sam (Sam Trammell) and turns most of the town's population into raving, sex-starved toddlers who find everything funny and remember nothing. By the midpoint in the season, the first two subplots have been completed and the season continues with a long and very drawn-out version of the third strand, one in which Maryann is killed, finally, by Sam himself. On the plus side, Ball and his writers seem finally to raise the idea that the South is not what it seems, that beyond Bill (Stephen Moyer) and Sookie's (Anna Paquin) happiness together as a couple is a South that contains monsters, ones that literally demand blood sacrifices and that all of the good times partying, drinking, having sex, and not remembering the past have consequences. The bad news is that we spend an awful lot of this season with dull plots that we can see coming a mile away and that act as so much padding to the series as a whole. What finally mattered in *True Blood* were the vampires and the humans that loved them. The central relationships and the ultimately human problems that they involve are what made the series watchable. The love of Eric (Alexander Skarsgård) for his young "maker," Godric (Alan Hyde), was promising and ended too

early with the fiery self-immolation of Godric on a roof top. This plot thread contained the idea that some vampires don't believe in their own superiority and represented the logical conclusion to Bill's experiment with Sookie. Lurking within much of Southern Gothic literature, whether Carson McCullers or early Truman Capote, is the sexual side of the grotesque. The series tried to find a way to expand on its original season while also staying true to its seeming promise of novelty. The primary problem, however, was the proliferation of metaphors that plagued the show at its core. If every age gets the vampires that it deserves, then *True Blood* seemed to generate an image of the vampire as the ultimate jaded scion. As we move up the vampire chain of command, we seem to get closer and closer to the truth of what they are: for Bill, doomed to walk between worlds; for the older Eric, doomed to watch the world change while he can do nothing about it; and in the last two episodes of the second season, we see the queen of their district (Sophie-Ann Leclercq), doomed to feeding alternately off men and women while playing an endless game of Yahtzee—the same sort of bisexual purgatory represented in Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983). In this scenario vampires are power and humans are the innocent victims who get too close to them. But we don't need a return to the 1980s or to sexuality as death. We don't need to be attracted to sexuality as the thing that kills us. We need to be attracted to it as that which makes us live.³

The monsters that appear in the form of comely vampires and shape-shifters on *True Blood* announce themselves quite differently on *Lost*. Ever since its first season this much-theorized show has placed its own monsters front and center—a smoke monster and polar bear competed for attention soon after the initial plane wreck; Ben Linus (Michael Emerson), a human monster, in later seasons; and Esau (Titus Welliver), or the new Man in Black, for the end of season five. The many monsters that haunt the hapless travelers seem to function in a reciprocal relationship to those on *True Blood*, who always seem to be a symbol of something else outside the supernatural, in the culture at large or the body politic. By contrast, the monsters of *Lost* always reflect the hermetically sealed atmosphere of the series itself, one in which it took several seasons even to suggest that there was a reality “off island.” The creators of *Lost* always played a dangerous game in which the events on the island only seem able to exist within the fragile environment of the show itself. Plot twists and turns continuously escalate and almost always end as puzzles whose ultimate meanings can be infinitely deferred. The problem is that this fact infects every aspect of the show and suggests that if key plot points can't or won't be answered, then the whole show itself is finally only a process of infinite deferral. The cumulative effect is that of a series that slowly erodes its own sense of reality. The carefully constructed character development that the audience receives in the first two seasons is undone by the pyrotechnics of the next three. By the time we get to the frantic, fragmented hopping around in time that is season five, the show seems to have left its human characters far behind, their back stories, constructed out of old-fashioned flashbacks, ignored for the possibility of bending the rules of television to the breaking point with a sense of novelty and showy invention. By the end of this season, it is no longer possible to decide whether *Lost* is science fiction cloaked as drama or drama that has allowed an element of science fiction to devour it like a black hole.

The last two seasons of *Lost* left fans with the general feeling of constant movement toward no discernable end as the central characters seemed to be always wandering around the island, endlessly trekking, repositioning, splitting apart, and coming back together. Few scenes of note really occur after the second season, but in retrospect, season six seems by far the thinnest with almost no significant plot development. Season five seems like the last season with interesting development with the story of Faraday (Jeremy Davies) and his attempts to understand time. Season six, as commentators have said, seemed to waste time rather than make use of it, frustrating fans with the answers to some mysteries, the “whispers,” for example, and wasting both Richard’s (Nestor Carbonell) backstory and the scenes at the Temple in which fine actors were put to little use. All fans have mysteries that they hoped would be answered, but nothing really makes sense in either of these stories, both of which should have been season highlights. Likewise, everyone probably has a moment or an episode where they feel that *Lost* jumped the shark. Certainly, the episode where a great deal changed was the moment in “Dr. Linus” when the dynamite refused to ignite and the fuse went out while Richard and Jack (Matthew Fox) sat in the hold of the *Black Rock*. At this point viewers seemed to see something they never really had before: an unambiguous moment of the supernatural, much like the one when the Man in Black (Terry O’Quinn) released Ilana’s (Zuleikha Robinson) shackles with a wave of his hand. In those two moments, *Lost* became another show altogether, with a sense that anything could happen, that rules weren’t real. Is it the island itself that prevents the fuse from igniting? Or the timeline? If the Man in Black can manipulate matter, then why doesn’t he do much more? The sloppiness of these moments suggests, more depressingly, the conventionality of the show’s ending, or if you will, how hard the writers and producers had resisted easy outs until the final season. In either case, the release of supernatural meaning dovetailed with the notion of spirituality, but also reduced it to mumbo-jumbo, to a belief that uses science to define reality but not really to enclose it. The thin strand that linked all of *Lost* up until season six to some kind of possibly real explanation was not only completely abandoned but parodied by the final ending in the church—a scene that many who have watched every episode of *Lost* would never have dreamed possible. In retrospect it was foreshadowed by the dynamite scene with Richard. The reversal of Jack’s role not only is melodrama of the worst kind but seems to be belied by the fact that dynamite doesn’t go out on its own; faith doesn’t “do” something in this way—it’s not verifiable or quantifiable. The island, it turns out, was a church all along: a place where people go to find faith.

The season’s only good episode complicates this theme, which will forever always have to be ignored much like the ending (and final demi-season) of *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) in order for many of *Lost*’s fans ever to enjoy the show as a whole. The much-maligned mythology backstory episode, “Across the Sea,” actually came as close as any other episode in the last season to making *Lost* interesting again. An episode that seems to have split bloggers straight down the middle, in retrospect, it was a foreshadowing of the schizoid ending to the series in which viewers were given one scientific, psychological explanation of the story (the epilogue, “The New Man

in Charge”) and one spiritual, faith-based nonanswer (“The End”). “Across the Sea” seemed to fit with the former and in fact may well have been the largest download of mythological information that the *Lost* producers ever gave us. In that sense, the episode provided fans of the show’s original Jack-centric point of view one discrete episode of pure conceptualization. There were elements that didn’t work, such as the cave of light, but the episode’s story also provides a complex explanation for the psychology of the Jacob/Man in Black dichotomy that finds a plausible way to make neither character wholly good or bad. As always, more questions are raised than answered, and, in the form of “Mother” (Allison Janey), fans of the show get yet another major character introduced, though how we interpret the machinations of Jacob (Mark Pellegrino) and his brother are changed, not just in the future but in the past, and a template for the history of the island is established that emphasizes the human, the notion of individual choice, in an interesting way.

This episode provides a psychological backstory that parallels those for other characters we have seen—Kate (Evangeline Lilly), Sawyer (Josh Holloway), and others—and the first really believable complication of the notion of good and evil that the show had provided in some time (though there have been plenty of hints: Dogen’s [Hiroyuki Sanada] back story, for example). The main characters are, with this episode, replicating the outlines of a family drama of which they are not really a part and, once again, the origin of the island shifts: now, to a false mother figure. Her manipulation of the two boys under her sway is like having squirrel-haired Claire (Emilie de Ravin) or gun-toting Rousseau (Mira Farlay) as the shaper of your consciousness. At one level, the irrationality of the island finally, now, makes sense. “Across the Sea” works because it is real, not metaphorical, and provides the best twist of the latter half of the show, the introduction of Jacob and his nemesis, with an actual psychological basis for their obsessions that shows that they are equally flawed and far from divine, which successfully complicates the mythology of the show by blurring the good-versus-evil, or science-versus-faith, explanation and by suggesting that the island has been home to not a simple pattern but a complex one consisting of parents, children, “Others,” choices, the desire to get off the island, and the consequences of actions. All of this complexity is eradicated by the finale, which not only chooses one path over the other (i.e., faith over reason) but does so with a vengeance.⁴ The light in the cave that is the source of the island, and that turns the twin of Jacob into the Man in Black, suggests that the twin boys were raised by a smoke monster. The disconnect between the spiritual and the physical, a soul separated from its body becomes a body without a soul, is linked quite explicitly in an earlier episode in which members of the Dharma Initiative are brainwashed by being forced to spend endless hours in a room while wearing virtual reality goggles. This scene is obviously an homage to Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), particularly when Alex (Malcolm McDowell) is forced to watch films filled with violence and rape as a way to condition him to become unable to carry out similar actions again. The problem, as the chaplain in the film makes clear, is that he also loses his soul. He is no longer able to make moral choices. The “Holy Ghost,” according to Anthony Burgess, is needed for the body to have meaning, but that is predicated upon choice. The entire *Lost* series is a working out of a Christian

allegory. The “tika-tika” sound of the Smoke Monster is pure machine—the crank of the Deus Ex Machina, a plot device, but also the first of many zombies—a kind of clockwork orange.

Ultimately, the most important aspect of *Lost* is the way that the show deconstructs the bare bones aspect of most television shows—namely, that scenes are supposed to happen at the same time and also in a linear fashion. It is important to note the many kinds of reality on *Lost*, all of them structurally connected to the medium of television and to the blurring of space and time. One way to think of them is cubistically: different points in time that are rendered spatially. The flashback of the first two seasons, the flashforward of the seasons three and four, the science-fiction time jumping of season five, and the sideways flash of season six. What is most interesting, however, is not only the ways that these different references mix with each other but how they represent the revisiting of one spatial point, the island, and one temporal one, the crash. In the roughly middle point of the series we begin to revisit points in the show that we have seen before, getting a bit more information each time. This process begins to escalate in seasons five and six, where we keep going back to key moments and expanding on them—finally, in season six, the moments before and after the crash itself in the sideways shuffle in which we see a parallel reality in which the plane didn’t crash (as opposed to the made-up reality by Widmore [Alan Dale] in which the plane crashed but only the Oceanic Six survived). The peak of this complex method comes in season five in the episode “Because You Left” when Locke (Terry O’Quinn) sees himself get shot and then saved by Richard and then shows this moment to Ben. There is a chiasmic structure to the show overall, where the first and last seasons mirror each other, but in the middle of the series, especially in the otherwise unsatisfying season five, the time jumping timeline allows us to see scenes repeat from different perspectives. This method for creating meaning seems central to the show’s modus operandi. Buffered time, no longer experiencing TV as linear time—the ability to speed things up and slow things down, to experience time in packets—came about through new technologies, but *Lost* may have been the first show to really echo these changes and make them a part of the show’s experience.⁵ It was assumed by the producers that fans would record the show and decode images, and especially, sounds, to hunt for clues. The nonlinearity of the show seemed to call attention to the idea that narratives could themselves be a new kind of technology for traveling through time and space. This idea may seem dated now, but it was central to how we experienced *Lost* at the time it aired.

In the end, *Lost* allowed geeks and people not the least bit interested in the interests of geeks—time travel, monsters, demons, and theories about them—to exist on the same plane. In the last couple of seasons, the community that was created seemed to harken back to the original *Star Trek* series of the 1960s, a show that essentially bifurcated into two fan bases in the 1970s: the original broad, general audience who saw it air and then the younger viewers who discovered it in reruns only or mainly in the 1970s. The former audience included fans of the science-fiction formula who kept the show going during its third season when NBC had decided to cancel it, but the 1970s fan were also hardcore and the notion of a “con,” of a sci-fi convention and of proto-‘zines (or early media ‘zines) to announce and detail their activities, was arguably

born around this new subculture. The old-fashioned sense of being in a room together with fans, while regularized to some extent with Comic-Con, seems to be close to what Lindelof and Cuse (and J. J. Abrams with the new *Star Trek* movie, 2009) seem to aim: a sense of shared desire, of getting all of the references, of enjoying something that seems to be made for you and people like you, of being united in your love of something that is an obsession, that means more to you than perhaps it should, that you see something special in and understand personally. To be a fan, in other words, not just a casual observer. But in this special relationship *Lost* also has had to sound a cautionary note to avoid making the show be a geek-fest entirely. And while some television shows, especially science-fiction ones, perhaps try to troll for hard-core fans, there are obvious down sides when a show can go so far into its own mythology that serious nonfans are left behind. The triumph of *Lost* has been, to some extent, in stretching the geekdom of the world to put up with a show that is ultimately so very preposterous—to make it, to some extent, not cool to not to at least put up with *Lost*'s existence and the possibility that it might be something that almost anyone could, in the right time and place, have an interest in. The dangerous cultural knife-edge that the *Lost* creators or producers walked was to keep that interest constantly generated (the changes each season; the very, very slow reveals) and keep *Lost* from slipping completely into self-parody or into total irrelevance (though some would say that those lines were crossed).

The show really ends where it began, in the bamboo field where Jack lay after inexplicably surviving the crash. The cave of light lies nearby, though Jack doesn't know that. The show actually, however, doesn't really begin there, but earlier, as shown in mobisode number 13, "And So It Began," filmed by the same director, Jack Bender, and starring Vincent and Christian Shepard (John Terry), who tells Vincent, "Go and find my son. He has a lot of work to do." That "work," we now know, was the next 140 hours of the show in which Jack must grope his way toward the acceptance of his own death. That he also saves the world, if not the universe, by first unplugging the stone in the well, killing the Man in Black, and then replugging it and dying, is made to seem almost unimportant by the way the final season in general and the finale in particular are structured.

The sixth season quotes from the past but in a way that is a ghostly memory of the first season, and all in the service of a heavy-handed spiritual theme that is trite not only because of its ending in heaven but because of its love-conquers-all belief in the power of soul mates. The physical simply does not end up being able in any way to balance the spiritual here—much as neither Eko (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) nor anyone else can ever defeat the smoke monster. The spiritual is made the supernatural without ever explaining how it is different. In a true holy trinity, the spirit must be made manifest in flesh, which is the true uncanny. *Lost* never tries and therefore never succeeds at doing that. What we are finally left with is a rich series of tropes and cross-references that foreshadow and echo each other in a distinctly literary way, but which, finally, don't add up. It is as though the entire show is an Easter egg that doesn't open into anything other than a void that is composed of a baroque structure that is elaborate purely for the sake of complexity itself: all structure with no meaning. Everything repeats: the stone in the fountain is the key in the fail-safe device that Desmond turns at the end of season

two is the drain that Ben uncovered to contact the smoke monster in season three, the light in the fountain is the light of the shaft is the light we see at the back of the church when Christian opens the doors, the resetting of the computer in the Swan station back to 108 minutes is the constant resetting that Jacob creates for the island every time he brings another group of people there, etc. All of the major visual and auditory elements of the show repeat and create a metaphorical richness that is intriguing if never actually solidly anything more than that. The really frustrating aspect of the conclusion is the fact that the repeating patterns in the show aren't cyclical; indeed, the finale suggests that everything we have seen actually supports a linear development. Not only is Jack now dead but he wasn't in the past. Not only is the Jacob/Man in Black duo broken up but the pattern they represent won't happen again under the tutelage and leadership of an even more enlightened Hurley (Jorge Garcia); the universe, we assume, is safer because of the improved leadership, and hence protection, of the island. There are suggestions of the cyclical patterns that undermine these aspects—Jack's body washing out of the cave just as the Man in Black's did and, of course, lying in the spot where he "died" the first time, etc.—but ultimately by making the plot linear, the producers negated the real; they took away the idea that the situation on the island could grow with productive ambiguity by suggesting that one major paradigm trumped all the others and that that paradigm controls the machine of interpretation. It wasn't all a dream, but it might as well have been. It was all real, but only toward a spiritual end. Finally, the show suggests linearity in search of a telos with various incidents along the way—mainly, the electromagnetism released by the Swan, the "incident" (either the nuclear device or the release of more energy, or both), and the uncorking of the light that begins the earthquake.

Despite the ending, *Lost* has the most complex and subtle mythos that has been developed on TV (over a six-year period, and the show could have gone on longer if the producers had allowed it to). In the end, the mysteries diverged from the characters, which is when the show went off the rails for many series TV aesthetes, but for some (including many critical, not just noncritical, fans), the mysteries themselves got more complicated and interesting and took on a life of their own, one in which the characters became mannequins, mouthpieces for bits of the mysteries—time shifting, moving people around on the island (or off it)—but also suggesting interconnectedness of a community of fans taken to a new level, which is a much more tangible reality than the supernatural.

Spartacus (2010–13)

If science fiction provides a way of exploring the link between the body and spirit and the body's connections to time and space, one subgenre of film and television that has always placed the literal body on view, especially the male body, is the sword-and-sandals epic. While Starz's *Spartacus* goes further than any other show in making this point clear, HBO actually begins the televisual revival of this subgenre with *Rome*

(2005–7), a show that took advantage of the way that placing a storyline in ancient Greece or Rome can also mean an opportunity for representations of the nude body and of sexual situations that lie outside the bounds of Judeo-Christian morality. In the two-season arc we get two narratives—the death of Caesar (at the end of the first season, with the wonderful Ciaran Hinds) and the rise of Augustus (which ends the second season, with the fall of Cleopatra as well). The show pushed some buttons in terms of sex. Some of this was sometimes gratuitous (“A large penis is always welcome.”), but perhaps the most historically accurate, and probably a first for TV, was Mark Antony (James Purefoy) waking up in bed one morning and asking to be brought a boy for sex (one assumes a slave). The polymorphic perversity of the ancient world is made concrete in the form of one adult male’s desires.

While frontal male nudity has become more common on pay-per-view television, no show has shown quite as much comfort with it as the New Zealand series *Spartacus*, which aired on Starz/Encore from 2010 to 2013.⁶ A retelling of the Spartacus story about a slave who rose to challenge, briefly, the might of the Roman Empire, the historical character has long been a socialist hero who represented the revolt of the masses against a powerful government. In Kubrick’s beloved version, Spartacus is a Christ-like figure, who ultimately sacrifices himself for the principles of equality and fairness. In this twenty-first-century update he is hardly that, though he is portrayed as a selfless leader though the show’s emphasis is on his warrior abilities more than his principles of justice and freedom. The production itself had a complex history. The star of the show, Andy Whitfield, completed season one but was then diagnosed with lymphoma. Season two was a prequel that focused on Spartacus’ first real enemy, Batiatus, played by veteran actor John Hannah, who is the general in charge of the *ludus* where Spartacus trains as a slave for the gladiatorial games. Whitfield died, at the age of 39, and was replaced in seasons three and four by newcomer Liam McIntyre. While production values rose by the third season, the series was never quite as good as in the first two. The show’s comfort with nudity, male and female, seemed to be a comment on the attitude toward the same in ancient Rome, but was really a comment on our own time. The comfort with nudity is perhaps also related to the New Zealand production, where the cultural attitudes toward nudity are much more Continental than American or was perhaps a conscious choice. Certainly, even by today’s standards, the show was ahead of its time, or ahead of other pay networks in presenting so much primetime nudity.⁷ The producers made this point clear in the second episode of the first season. Entitled “Sanctamentum Gladiatorum,” the episode provided some of the everyday backstory to Spartacus’ time in the *ludus*, part of which is spent standing around naked with various big, burly men who scrape oil off each other’s bodies and preen, fight, and flirt while they are in training. The sheer number of nude men that are seen, languorously, goes far beyond anything ever shown on television. Indeed, these scenes have been shortened, censored of their penis shots, in the version of the episode later shown on Starz on-demand.

This unusually generous emphasis on the male body can be seen in Zack Snyder’s *300* (2006) as well. Both the series and the film share a similar color palette that emphasizes stylized violence, especially the slow-motion splattering of blood that

seems almost to drench the screen. Where the two works part ways, however, is in the attitude toward the male body. While Snyder's film gives you much of it, the Spartans, however brave, also separate themselves from both the "boy lovers" of Athens and the implied pan-sexuality of the Orientalized Persians who they fight in the film in a very creative interpretation of the Battle of Thermopylae. The hyper-male world of the Spartans is constantly placed under attack by men who are less manly than they. And while it is true that Spartan women trained much as men did in the gymnasium, the implication is that real men are heterosexual and gay men are the Other.

Spartacus takes a different approach, at least at first, by emphasizing the male body but not limiting the context. In episode nine, entitled "Whore," there is a sex party using masks as in *Eyes Wide Shut* at which Spartacus is very much used as an object of lust by the Roman women in attendance. By the third and fourth seasons there are more actresses involved, though the issue of the male body as an object of the female, not the male, gaze is continued. In the episode "Monsters" in season three (the ninth, or twenty-second overall), Gaius Claudius Glaber (Craig Parker) is shown naked and without body hair, presumably also using a Greek oil scraper. That season also begins the story of Agron (Dan Feurriegel), a German gladiator who has a two-season arc as the lover of Syrian Nasir (Pana Herma Taylor). To some extent, the emphasis on the male body is displaced toward the end of the series by this gay male relationship, which brings the series back to the initial homosocial, if not homoerotic, first season in the *ludus*. The main point to be made about male nudity on television, however, is the importance of normalizing it. Straight female viewers have long had to see female nudity, or at least the sexualizing of female bodies and body parts, on television since the dawn of the medium. HBO and Showtime have only begun to re balance the discrepancy between the two sexualized gazes, though Starz, arguably, beat them to the punch.

The subgenre of film to which *Spartacus* belongs is the sword and sandal epic, though our more recent examples tend to be big-budget and mainstream—from *Conan* (1982) to *Gladiator* (2000) to the recent remake of *Ben-Hur* (2016). In its borderline cheesiness and sometimes extreme emphasis on the surface of the male body, *Spartacus* perhaps fits better into what Robert A. Rushing calls the "peplum" tradition of European filmmaking that we associate with dubbed Italian films starring body-builders that mostly appeared from 1957–65 (90). *Spartacus* also fits into his theory that these films often emphasized the vulnerability of the male body, its interiority, that, eventually, is brought to the surface by the actor as a form of emotional fragility (91). This process is probably mirrored by the series as a whole, which begins by emphasizing the penetration of the surface of the skin but ends up, in *Spartacus*' selflessness and leadership, to be an emotional vulnerability. The surface of the body is the surface of the screen itself—immaculate, oily, sweaty—and is often contrasted with that of the enemy—dark, unnaturally white, or extremely hairy (92). While the latter can often result in a racist aspect to this subgenre, in *Spartacus* the fellow gladiators who are marked as devious are othered by having some sort of disability (such as Ashur, played by Nick E. Tarabay) instead. Race is not a primary issue, as can be seen in the high status given to the teacher at the *ludus*, the *doctore* Oenomaus (Peter Mensah). His body is slowly scarred in a

process that suggests his experience, resulting, ultimately, in his losing an eye. The same fascination with the smoothness of the skin of the male actors can also take the form of a fascination with its deterioration as the viewer's obsessive looking at the body shifts from the erotic to the horrific, the inside and the outside of the body combining in dramatic ways (94). The emphasis on the chest, especially, of men and women, is a place of both fascination and repulsion as the body is repeatedly attacked (93).

Ultimately, the physical abuse that the male body in particular receives is a sign of the failure of masculinity itself. What lurks in the body's interior is the hollowness of the modern definition of masculinity, some sort of "inner trauma" (Rushing 96) that mirrors the diminishment of masculinity in the present. It will never be the same again, for better or worse, and films about masculinity can only ever be, as they are for Kubrick, melancholic (97). Ideologically, modern peplum films are conservative—*Rambo* (1982) and the failure of Vietnam, for example, or the more recent *300*, which carries the physical suffering of the body to an extreme, back into childhood where we see the young Leonidas (Eli Snyder) repeatedly beaten or physically scarred as a boy in an almost ritualistic way (97). Perhaps no other film makes quite as clear the extent to which the skin of a boy or a man is meant to be a hard surface that is impenetrable at the same time that it is constantly exposed. Greek warriors battle nearly naked, almost like statues come to life. They have only their shields and their skin to protect them. As Rushing notes, in a pivotal moment in the film, Leonidas' father (Tim Connolly) shows his shield to his son, who runs his fingers over its scarred surface, the connection becoming clear that in a world where warriors all have swords, it is the shield that distinguishes Spartan warriors from their contemporaries (98). "Man is loss" (99). Leonidas will never really know his father, and neither of them will live to understand anything else.

The peplum film fits most closely under the larger rubric of the action film and, more than most films of that genre, the peplum emphasizes "muscular empathy" (Rushing 100), the feeling that the viewer is having the vicarious physical experiences of the title character. If *Spartacus* is an object of the viewer's gaze, he is also its subject, a stand-in for the balletic physicality for which the genre is known. The emphasis on the body, usually clothed in other mainstays of the genre, like the Bond franchise, is here put on display in such a way that we become aware of the musculature itself, how it moves through space, and how it manages to seem realer than our own body. The choreographed movement that we expect in contemporary action films is strikingly different from peplum films of the middle of the twentieth century, which tended to emphasize the static nature of strength, the body-builder who, like Goliath, destroys things by standing in one place and using his unusual strength from a stationary position (101). The actors of *Spartacus*, in contrast, eschew some of the top-heavy 1980s musculature for chiseled abs and a sinewy body overall. The relative aesthetic and physical lightness that results allows for more movement and perhaps helps to bridge the gap between the unrealistic movements through space of the comic book hero and the only slightly more realistic scenarios of the action hero on film. Indeed, by copying the digital blood splattering of *300*, *Spartacus* emphasizes the artificiality of the action sequences of the film, possibly downplaying the realism

and the sense of real bodies with which we might momentarily identify. As viewers, we are reminded too much that what we are seeing is an artificial construct meant to mirror a comic book panel.

Action films, like video games, attempt to involve the audience's or the player's own body. The emphasis on feeling over cognition is key to the sense of a body moving through space and encountering obstacles against which to move and overcome. This haptic effect is arguably a convention that is learned from watching action films (or playing lots of video games) (Rushing 107) and is akin to a kind of muscle memory, only one that never actually involves what the heroes do, since they are fictional characters and few viewers actually run around naked wielding a sword or swinging through the jungle on vines. In *Spartacus*, at least, the body is mutable. It is never monochromatic, homophobic, or xenophobic the way it is in *300*. Indeed, the body of the lead actor even changes from the muscular but compact Whitfield to the tall, almost lanky McIntyre. The only thing all muscled men seem to have in common, as these films and television shows make clear, is the difference between the outside and the inside, and ultimately how thin the armature of the body is—an illusion of strength that, once exposed, like the male body, begs the question, what are you hiding?

Treme (2010–14)

Named after a primarily African American neighborhood in New Orleans, Faubourg-Tremé, this show was an eagerly awaited creation by David Simon who had helmed *The Wire* (2002–8). The first season follows several characters, Black and white, post-Katrina, up to Mardi Gras and just after. In many ways *Treme* is the obverse of *The Wire*: a rich stew of characters followed by a camera that seems to be everywhere, constantly picking up on different threads, subplots, ingredients, but never sticking with one long enough to develop. What *The Wire* did well was develop specific scenes within specific episodes within specific seasons that each had its own unique theme (the docks, the public-school system, the newspaper business, etc.). Baltimore was the metaphor for the inner-city or for the United States as a whole (in terms of dysfunction, race, values, etc.), but New Orleans is by definition about uniqueness, exceptionalism, and cultural apartness. It is biracial, but also largely segregated. Baltimore, by contrast, is primarily a Black city—like downtown Atlanta or parts of other cities, only more so. Black culture dominates the city. Unlike Washington, its regional sibling, Baltimore does not have a white-dominated Federal zone at its center. Its soul is Black. New Orleans may be as well, but the chafing at the center is all about the stress of the racially segregated past that has not gone away. What people love about New Orleans is its past, its identity, which is not exactly what any character ever says about Baltimore. The white characters of *Treme* are almost all transplants (a cook from Alabama; a professor, one can probably assume, from someplace else; a former DJ who idolizes Black culture until he is beaten up by a Black man in a bar; etc.). Their relationship to the region

is as interpreters (and fans) of African American culture in general, New Orleans in particular. The Black characters (played especially well by veterans of *The Wire* such as Wendell Pierce as Antoine Batiste) are cast as the indigenous natives whose cultures and way of life rarely actually connect to that of their white counterparts. The main link, one might say, is as common victims: everyone has suffered because of Katrina and everyone, to some extent, suffers from post-traumatic stress. Unlike the denizens of Baltimore, which suffers from a long, ongoing erosion of services, mounting neglect, and increased drug trafficking, they are linked by a specific trauma that is defined by spatial and temporal borders. *Treme*, in other words, is about the real materiality of living on the edge—how not enough money affects immediate emotional relationships. The unforeseen consequences of the poverty brought about by disaster. Many of the characters on *Treme*, Black and white, want to work, but the chaos of the flood prevents it. Marginality is exaggerated. The characters are different from the underpaid bureaucrats of Baltimore, or the drug dealers whose jobs involved alliances and healthy paranoias. Characters in *Treme* have lost their cars, their homes, their basic utilities, and are trying to hold on to what they still have—a trombone, an overindebted restaurant, the hope that a missing brother is still alive.

While *Treme* often focuses on the musical heritage of the city, spending much of each episode allowing the viewer simply to enjoy extended performances or cueing viewers in to other traditions such as the Second Line (impromptu neighborhood parades on Sunday), the most surprising subculture that the show focuses on is the African American tradition of the Mardi Gras Indians: African American parallels to Krewes that contain a chief, a medicine man, and a “Spy Boy” who scouts ahead for other Indians as they parade through neighborhoods. The tradition was created during the nineteenth century when Africans and American Indians inhabited the same neighborhoods and African slaves took on the racialized identity of American Indians as a form of resistance to white hegemony. The tradition has continued, and the tension between the Indians and the police, or the Indians of one tribe and another, is pointed up in the first season and shown through the friction of encounters between different groups when they go on parade. Joseph Roach has studied this phenomenon and discussed it as a metaphor for America, or at least American racial attitudes, toward sex and the Black body. The most striking aspect of the Mardi Gras Indian tradition is not only the elaborate costume made for the “Big Chief,” but the lack of a mask, perhaps the most common feature of the typical Mardi Gras costume. As Roach explains, at the time that the New Orleans Indian clubs came about “masking was illegal in the city of New Orleans, and although the law may have ignored the violations of the white krewes, there is no reason to suppose it would have overlooked a black Indian who crossed the line” (197). The refusal to don a mask, therefore, “accomplished a carnivalesque inversion of the ordinary experience of working-class blacks in post-Reconstruction Louisiana, in which the laboring body was exposed while the facial expression remained masked. That today’s Mardi Gras Indians expose their faces should be understood ... not merely as a literal unmasking but as self-fashioning revelation” (197–8). In much the same way that the faux-royal titles of Mardi Gras

Krewes parody actual royalty, Mardi Gras Indians function as a commentary on white power and its history of cruelty and erasure. As Roach notes:

The slave-holding propensities of the Five Civilized Tribes (so-called by whites in part *because* they held slaves) emphasize the double, inverted nature of the Indian as a symbol for African Americans: the nonwhite sign of both power and disinheritance. The theme of frontier space—and its control by nomads—illuminates ... the importance of the border skirmishes and alarms enacted by Mardi Gras Indians. On Mardi Gras day Indian gangs claim the space through which they move, like a passing renegade band, and the broad arm's-length gestures they make show off more than just their costumes. They occupy the constantly shifting borderlands ... as they migrate from block to block, from bar to bar. They perform a rite of territory repossessed to assert not sole ownership ... but certainly collective entitlement to fair use. (205)

On *Treme*, the center of this culture is inhabited by Albert Lambreaux played by Clarke Peters, another veteran of *The Wire*, who works singlehandedly to finish his costume in time, no matter that his displacement from New Orleans has been significantly harsh and severe. His own work on his costume becomes a metonymy for community as he tries also to stitch together the remnants of his tribe and to help restore his neighborhood's pride. The trials and tribulations that he encounters, however, have a dark side in both his own propensity for stubbornness and even violence, which sit uneasily with his interests in sewing and design. As Roach argues,

It is no accident that competitive stitchery, beadwork, and opulent adornment have edged out violence in the confrontation between rival gangs. At carnival everyone wants to be seen in acts of conspicuous consumption and expenditure. For the urban underclasses in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, violence is one of the few forms of excess expenditure available in the absence of money. People spend their own and one another's blood. (206)

When tribes encounter each other now, they compete not for blood but for prestige, reclaiming space through the act of material display. The tradition of African American (and Native American, Caribbean, and other) resistance to dominant white culture in New Orleans is expressed in this display. In a city with a complex history of racial, ethnic, and religious identities, the Mardi Gras Indians are shown not only to negotiate identities but to deploy them as a way to endure. As Roach concludes, "In the postmodern circum-Atlantic world of late capitalism, what Paul Gilroy calls 'the sound system culture' both symbolises and embodies the syncretism whereby African, North American, Caribbean, and European forms circulate together in a plagiarized interculture" (206). What *Treme* makes uncertain is the extent to which the Black body is still controlled by white culture—a material body that puts itself on display to compete via a system of consumption, what might now be called the neoliberal system—or whether Albert Lambreaux has achieved his own subjectivity in spite of

white culture or even the wrath of nature itself. The many feathers that make up his costume can't help but recall the elaborate plumage of an exotic bird and the gendered aspect of the display, especially its link to territoriality, is both undercut and propped up by the feminine act of putting the costume together. Its lack of utilitarian function, of everyday use, suggests the space of male privilege that the time it takes to make occupies. Yet in his desperation to make the costume in time for next year's event in order to show his culture's continuation, the audience learns that Lambreaux has terminal cancer and that the temporal aspects of gathering material, designing, and sewing also track the suspense of a completely different timeline. All of the characters on *Treme* seem to suffer this same fate as they fight demons that attempt to erase their past, deny their future, and force them to focus on a present that has been weakened, if not destroyed, by what the character Creighton (John Goodman) calls "a fucking man-made disaster"—the flood that could have been prevented, and the rescue from it that never came. Perhaps in this sense the characters are like those on *The Wire* after all in that they have no one to turn to but themselves, and within the culture of late-capitalist disenfranchisement, no identities to cling to except those historical ones that now create only a simulacrum of resistance.

Game of Thrones (2011–19)

The series that gave us the term "sexposition" has often been at the forefront of the argument over nudity on subscription TV. The term was first used to describe scenes with "Littlefinger" in his brothel where the audience receives information dumps with nude female bodies in the background. The attention to female bodies has caused some commentators to quantify the female body parts against the male to show the disparity. And, indeed, for whatever reason, the male stars by and large don't disrobe. Kit Harrington, the popular twenty-something lead, complained about being treated as an object, while the actress Emilia Clarke said toward the end of the show's run that she would appear nude less often on the show. Season six provided ample opportunity for the showrunners to play with this controversy. Though hardly at the vanguard of nudity or sexuality (or sex) for TV, it is, in its global popularity, a show that people looked to to see what is happening—or not—in the representation of the nude body. Season six was the first one not based primarily on George Martin's novels. The most anticipated moment in the season—the resurrection of Jon Snow—provided an opportunity to address some of the imbalance in the nudity wars, but as the episode "Oathbreaker" unfolds, Snow, who rises naked from the dead, is shown from behind and from the side but not from the front. Even though the end of the previous episode, "Home," lavished a long scene on the washing and attempted zombification of his body, his genitalia remain a mystery. Denary's fireproof breasts come back, however, in the next episode (four), "Book of the Stranger," in a concluding scene that parallels her walk into the fire to retrieve the dragon eggs. The very next episode, "The Door," seems further to comment on the nudity controversy by having an actor in a troupe that has

been retelling the story of the Stark family reveal his penis in close-up to another cast member to point out a wart. Perhaps this moment is a self-conscious joke—beware what you wish for—but it is certainly not what the penis-lookers have asked for. Maybe it is an insult to them. The actor, after all, was playing Joffrey, the most-detested character for most viewers. The season ends with Snow bedding Denarys and another view of Snow's ass. This act of seeming incest, while sexy to watch, further evades the search for the full-frontal nudity that the Snow role would require if the representation of nudity were to be made equal. With its faux-Medieval atmosphere of extreme violence, especially toward women, children, and male genitalia, the show functions as a sort of modern peplum sub-subgenre that comments on the dark world that our own culture has become. The studied extremes of Westeros and the *Game of Thrones* universe seem to be a comment on our own: if you create a world in which children are frequently sacrificed, families interbreed, and humanity is beset by ice zombies, you are creating the circumstances to show a level of extreme violence that is normal for a context like that. That so many viewers are fascinated and turned on by these spectacles raises questions about just how complicit the show is in normalizing ideas that we like to think of as incompatible with civilization.

Westworld (2016–)

Many of the traits of the contemporary media that we have been tracking come together in HBO's *Westworld*, another show that seems to encourage a link between violence and sex. The show is a perfect example of the notion of *transmedia*: bringing together different platforms, such as television and fan theory, to create one complete product. In terms of narrative, it also pushes writing for television toward meta-writing—in this case, writing about writing, or storylines that deal self-consciously with how we tell stories. Finally, it is a sustained critique of the human body, providing not only copious nudity, but dealing directly with the notion of how bodies are constructed and the uncanniness of the attempt to create a mechanized duplicate of the body that can exist separate from the human.

For Kenneth Clark, to understand the modern nude you have to return to the past, to the academic study of the nude in the fifteenth century, where you were supposed to go from the bones to the muscles to the flesh—a nude is, in this sense, what cannot be seen (351). In this sense, *Westworld* represents the future by looking to the past—the Vitruvian Man that is a symbol of the show and the three-dimensional printing of the robots that uses the same process as the academic approach to the nude that reaches its peak in the nineteenth century. There is a sense in which wax models or the modern technique of plastination are being purposefully alluded to. We don't know yet on the show how the robot technology works, but only that it is cheaper, if less elegant, than the wires and switches of the original creations from around the time of the original movie's premiere in 1973, which acts as the temporal origin for most of the series.⁸ The original movie is also updated in that the theme park motif of the original film,

which was based upon Walt Disney World, is here replaced by the motif of the video game—at least in season one. The metaphor of solving the show’s puzzling mysteries is made literal when the viewer discovers that a child’s maze is at the center of the show. The Man in Black character (Ed Harris) may be a parody of an obsessed gamer. The show itself is in a loop with fans (the Reddit boys)—a process begun with *Lost* and here, also, taken to extremes as the contest of the debate (the offline theorizing) is more interesting than the show itself. Unlike *Lost*, there is an attempt to make the writing add up (at least, as a puzzle, if not as art). The fans were right about all of the plot twists in the first season. The showrunners have placed breadcrumbs that have been picked up—just like a game.

If the notion of gaming is used as an update to the original movie, one thing that is kept is the materiality of the robots—their ability to be used for sex or violence. One could argue that a true update of the film would place the park’s users in a virtual space, or, at the very least, the robots’ consciousnesses would exist in a sort of cloud with their physical bodies as mere receptors (Robbins). To some extent, both happen on the show in that the robots are both backed up and have a central physical core in their heads that can be taken out. The lines between the two forms of representation of AI, the virtual and real, blur. Both can be uncanny. In this series, there is a desire to embody the AI, though much of the attitude toward the body is oddly uncomfortable or contradictory—as though the lessons from *Eyes Wide Shut* were too well learned or copied. There is much nudity, but often in a (literally) clinical setting. An orgy taken out of *Eyes Wide Shut* apes the film’s orgy in many ways—including sex that seems almost mechanical in its simulation.⁹ Unlike the original film, there is rarely the sense that sex happens except as exploitation—mainly a form of rape. The only kind of relationship that can be had between “Host” and “Guest,” therefore, is one of violence. By flipping the original conceit so that our sympathies are with the androids, the show removes much of their uncanniness and unknowability to actively seek our sympathy or identification with them and their search for consciousness. The usual dramatic conceit that robots and computers should be scary because they seem human and may in fact compete with us is mostly avoided until the second season. Though *Westworld* might turn the tables, the world established seems created as an intellectual exercise devoid of any real emotional dimension for the audience—the violence is unsettling, but never scary or thrilling; the sex or nudity never erotic. We seem to be told to enjoy these pleasures only in a perverse or guilty way.

The abundant nudity outdoes everything that HBO has ever done before. For once, one can’t say that male nudity—especially the flaccid penis—is underrepresented.¹⁰ Different male and female body types are shown with a concerted attempt at variety, though there is a plethora of large penises. While average penises are certainly shown, there are some so large that they seem self-consciously to reference porn. This recurring fact could be because some models of the robot are supposed to be mainly sexual in function, but the extreme size goes beyond functionality toward fetish or visual stimulation. There does not seem to be a concomitant emphasis on the female body—or certainly not in regard to one part of the body. In season two there is a conscious attempt to have male nudity tied to the human male characters, not the

robots. This process begins with the disrobing of Sizemore (Simon Quarterman), the park's resident writer. Much of the season deals with narratives—especially episode five, within Shogun World, where entire plotlines from the Westworld section of the park are replayed with Japanese characters. The stories about stories, however, seem like another puzzle rather than a real development since the robots—and the attempts at encoding human consciousness onto robots to achieve immortality (explored in episode four)—suggests endless loops with no way out. The tension between linear narrative and recurring narrative is a part of the series' own DNA, but the show, for all its failures as art, does advance the *Lost*-like agenda of trying to find new ways to tell stories on TV, using science fiction as a way to continue to complexify the meta-ness of TV in the twenty-first century.

Watchmen (2019)

Damon Lindelof's work on *Lost* obviously influences television timelines and is given a new twist in his remake of the 1980s graphic novel, *Watchmen*, long considered the most ambitious and complex novelistic contribution to the comic book genre. In Lindelof's creation it is reimagined as a different kind of story. While he maintains the idea from the original book that the superhero genre needs to be de-glorified, if not deconstructed, he adds a key backstory in which a new character, Sister Night (Regina King), explores her African American heritage when she attempts to solve the mystery of how her police chief (Don Johnson) is killed by what she suspects are members of a new iteration of the KKK, the Seventh Cavalry. What she eventually finds is that she is the granddaughter of a survivor of the Tulsa race riots of 1921, in which 150 African Americans lost their lives at the hands of white vigilantes. While her life and many of the plots and the subplots of the series touch on aspects of the original novel, the idea that super-heroes are a suspect bunch who use their masks to allow them to pretend to have super powers when they don't is complicated by the notion of race. Sister Night is really Angela Abar. She pretends to have a bakery but she really works for the police but then she is actually a masked character as well. Her grandfather became a masked superhero in response to racial harassment that nearly led to his being lynched and was himself married and involved with another male superhero. He is now in league with a Vietnamese trillionaire, Lady Trieu (Hong Chau), who is attempting to save the world, she thinks, by taking on the powers of the novel's only real superhero, Dr. Manhattan, who, we discover, in Lindelof's remixing, is actually married to Angela and is her husband, Cal, who has been implanted with a device that allows him to suppress his awareness that he is Dr. Manhattan in order to live a normal life with Angela.

Masks and multiple layers of identity are, then, made more complex by Lindelof by adding the notion that race and sexual identity themselves as masks that are either hidden behind or in need of exposure, which tweaks the story of the novel toward a different confrontation with America's past. Rather than just imagining a different version of the 1980s, one where Richard Nixon remains president after Dr. Manhattan,

a giant blue man who gets his powers from accidental exposure to radiation in 1959 and wins the Vietnam War, we go back even further in the past to see that America's original sin of slavery and the racism that has always supported it is also intertwined with the notion of a hero that can offer deliverance. By making the only real superhero into a Black man, Lindelof is also suggesting both a different way to imagine that deliverance and complex ideas about complicity in the notion of heroism, which brings the series back around to the concept at the heart of the book and expands it in a different way.

Making Dr. Manhattan African American also allows Lindelof to tie Dr. Manhattan's famously oversized, usually nude body to the tradition of seeing the nude African American body as a sexual one. The reveal of Dr. Manhattan, and the reveal of his naked body especially, is teased throughout the series. In episode three, Laurie Blake, aka Silk Spectre II (Jean Smart), takes out and assembles what looks like a large, blue vibrator at the end of a tough day of crime fighting. In the novel, she was Dr. Manhattan's lover for a time. In episode eight, a mural of Dr. Manhattan painted on the side of a building in Saigon, which Dr. Manhattan helped to become the fifty-first state, is despoiled with a graffito of a large penis—the first hint that we may soon see Dr. Manhattan and what he might, at least in part, represent. When he finally does appear in this episode, played by Yaha Abdul-Mateen II, he is indeed found to have a large penis on a muscled, hairless body and to embody both the sweetness of Cal and the soft-spoken intelligence of Dr. Jon Osterman, who he was originally. In the final episode, his powers, like his body, are coveted by both the leader of the Seventh Cavalry, a senator (James Wolk) who has helped to capture Dr. Manhattan in an attempt to transfer his powers to him, and Madam Trieu, who has created a gigantic temporal machine to transfer his powers into her, instead, after she incinerates the Cavalry and their ilk.¹¹ Both fail thanks to the fact that Dr. Manhattan transports some of the characters whose feet are touching the pool of ooze that was Senator Keene to the Antarctic headquarters of Adrian Veidt (Jeremy Irons), a brilliant mastermind who, Manhattan knows, is the only person who might be able to stop Trieu. He does, at the expense of Dr. Manhattan's life, though his powers may live on in another way. His last gesture, while sitting in his cage, is to touch the liquefied pool with his finger which, next to his penis, symbolizes an insemination of a sort, much like Michelangelo's finger of God touching that of Adam. Larger than life, Dr. Manhattan redefines his god-like body as not only divine but Black.¹² By inserting race, and the history it represents, into the storyline, Lindelof provides context to the body of Cal/Dr. Manhattan, allowing it to reverberate through time, representing both a universal and a particular body at once.

Coda: Graphic Novels

A meditation on the body in television is not restricted to subgenres where it might be expected, such as science fiction shows about androids or sword-and-sandal epics. Bodies are conveyers of meaning in police procedurals, musical comedies,

tales of Gothic horror, and dark dystopias of the future, just to name a few. It may no longer be possible to talk about television without talking about how these genres and intermedial effects are brought together in graphic novels, another portable medium that is based on serial storytelling. As Dana Polan argues:

In fact, if we're to think about the intermediality of comics, perhaps serial longform television needs to be brought into the mix as much as cinema. Think, for instance, in Adorno's terms, of the material phenomenology of reception: although comics and television can have portability, newly so for the latter in an age of mobile devices, they historically have also been emphatically domestic forms and ones for which the consumer ... often decides on the time and place of the reading or viewing (we probably don't randomly start reading any comic whatsoever and at any page whatsoever; much TV viewing, especially in an age of time shifting and appointment viewing, starts with the beginning of episodes and with viewer choice). If we think of comics and TV sociologically, it might be worth reflecting in this respect on the effect of ownership of the cultural product by the reader or the spectator: where theatrical exhibition of movies in the classic studio days meant that one had to venture out to an experience that one paid for but didn't really possess, comic books can be owned and collected, and from the VCR on, TV shows can be owned and collected. (147)

Y: The Last Man

Written as sixty issues of a comic book from 2002 to 2008, Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra's *Y: The Last Man* is an elaborate thought experiment that attempts to explore what we really mean by sex (as in chromosomal) and gender (as in cultural constructions of). Vaughan and Guerra imagine a world in which all mammals with the Y chromosome suddenly die somewhat violent deaths. The sole survivors appear to be a twenty-something English major and amateur magician/escape artist, Yorick Brown, and his pet Capuchin monkey, Ampersand. As the novel develops, we go on a peripatetic cross-country trek with Yorick as he tries to find his girlfriend, Beth (number one), who was last seen in the Australian Outback. Under the protection of a special agent, known only as 355, and a geneticist, Dr. Alison Mann, Yorick is drawn into their search for the cause of death of half the population. Our unlikely trio journey from the East Coast across the Midwest to California and then farther westward to Japan and then to China, ending up, finally, in Paris sixty years in the future. Time and space are united in a broad attempt to show both the devastation of what is referred to as the "gendercide" or "Le Grand Départ" and the struggle by society, post-male, to reconstruct itself in a new form.

The push around the globe, rather than offering an encyclopedic view of the situation, simply repeats aspects of it that don't really carry the plot further. One of the especially weak points of the series is the representation of the various foreign cultures that track Yorick—the Israelis, Russians, ninjas, who never really become more than

types. The series as a whole drags some between books three and six, but then picks up some momentum. Book ten is a case study in fluid action sequences that move quickly and even realistically and contain details based upon actual places. Paris, especially, is rendered accurately (we see the lions at Place Richelieu, for example, before we see the entrance to the catacombs). The first lesson we learn about this new world is that the loss of men creates chaos on the physical level—airplanes crash, construction stops, the infrastructure of mass movement and communication essentially crumbles. The one typically male arena that does keep working is the military, especially those, like the Israeli defense force, in which women already have a sizable combat presence. Indeed, we discover that many women have long been involved in various secret paramilitary organizations and are, within the novel, central to plots and counterplots linked to espionage and terror. At least initially, women do not come together but instead replicate the nationalistic and ideological differences that existed before; some cultures perhaps become even more tribal. The devastation of men necessarily makes available new careers and opportunities for women as leaders, but it also points up the fact that women now have the responsibility to right the wrongs of the past and that reimagining the future, at least at the more impersonal levels of the political, is neither simple nor inevitable.

The book ultimately succeeds or fails in its examination of the sex/gender system and the novel focuses on how gender must be reimagined both for the women who survive and for Yorick, who finds himself in a seemingly unique new position. While many women celebrate the removal of men, for most women there is a sense of loss both of culture generally and of individual men (brothers, fathers, husbands) as well. Everyone in the novel suffers from post-traumatic stress and in this sense the novel seems to be very much about the post-9/11 era. Women divide into “Daughters of the Amazon,” who seek to remove anything still genetically male and to prevent their repopulation, and women who try to find a solution to the crisis (though in very different ways and for reasons that are often kept secret). In the novel’s futuristic coda men are eventually replaced by clones, all of which are based on Yorick. He becomes both the last man that ever was and that ever will be. The world, in other words, is permanently altered by what happens and the cause of the devastation is never determined. In this last section we see Yorick’s maturation at two different phases of his life—middle age, in which he has shaved his thinning hair and taken to wearing glasses and is coming to terms with the two great loves of his life, Agent 355 and Ampersand, and old age, when he has gone nearly insane from accumulated grief and stress. He meets his male progeny, a clone, and escapes from a straitjacket in a prison in the Élysée Palace, bringing the series full circle (he is first seen practicing an escape trick). His life ends ironically: he never really confronts his murderous sister, Hero; he spends five years and crosses 25,000 miles to be reunited with Beth (number one) only to have her break up with him and to become Hero’s lover. Yorick beds Beth (number two), who is like a damaged twin of Beth (one), and they have a baby girl (who eventually becomes President of France), but he pines for 355, who sleeps instead with Dr. Mann, not him. After all of the time Yorick spends with 355, they never express their love for each other until, literally, the moment before

she dies. The future seems bleak; the male and female clones are a substitute for the way things once were but will never really be again. Yorick specifically requests that 355 not be cloned. In some ways, the series seems nostalgic for a time when men mattered. In that sense, perhaps, it seems like a desire for the present as a past for a future that it fears to come.

The objectification of the female body that is a part of the tradition of the comic book form adds another layer to the novel's analysis of gender. Conveniently, in terms of the story, almost all women become situational lesbians, and though there is a big market in male robots and transgendered prostitutes, it is also clear that women don't allow the lack of men to stem their sex drive. The novel therefore presents ample opportunity to objectify women's bodies and to titillate readers with frequent scenes of girl-on-girl action. Whether or not the reader or viewer is supposed to be straight men or lesbians is left open, but the ambiguity of the representation of the female body threatens at times to undermine whatever the novel attempts to say about its progressive motives via sex and sexuality. The main female characters, in other words, are almost inevitably attractively drawn with the lack of realistic detail that we come to expect in comic books. The one interesting way in which this one-handedness is balanced is the objectification of Yorick himself. Yorick is shown nude in books seven and ten, in the first instance purposefully to objectify him and literally expose him. He is pointedly shown to have an average-sized penis, which he comments upon ("I'm a grower, not a shower."). But though he is often put in sexual situations, his body, unlike those of the female characters, isn't exaggerated—indeed, just the opposite. Existing as he does now in a world literally made of women, it is often hinted at that they have quickly taken over the masculine role. His life is frequently saved by 355, and it is only through training with her over the course of five years that he can ever really defend himself without a gun (in book ten). While he never ceases to be male, the novel tries to suggest that men have to find an identity based, in part, upon something other than masculinity. Yorick himself admits that that necessity is probably a good thing.

One other result of this entirely female world is that Yorick no longer has to worry about the possibility of male homoeroticism. That anxiety can be avoided entirely for the straight male reader—or, perhaps, get displaced to some extent upon the masculinity that almost all of the major female characters show at some point. That is, sexuality gets expressed onto gender. By becoming more masculine, women as a whole take on the ability to be both straight and gay at once. This fact frees Yorick from sexuality but makes him a permanent prisoner of gender. Women (in the world of the novel) express themselves through the medium of masculinity (they are constantly fighting, running, hiding—at war). Their femininity is expressed only occasionally, more often, toward the end of the saga, via motherhood. From one standpoint, Yorick's world becomes an all-male one in which the women have been replaced by lesbians; all the women have become men. He is free to sleep with them, but he is also in competition with most of them for the sexual partnering of other women.

The authors constantly remind us that what should be a sexual paradise for Yorick usually isn't. At first, he resists sleeping with women (the few who aren't sleeping with

each other) because of his relationship with Beth (one), who he was going to ask to marry and who was the first girl he ever slept with; interestingly he never comes inside her, but on her chest. While a convenient way to avoid her becoming pregnant for the sake of the plot, it also suggests a porn film and an arguably incomplete first sexual experience. When he finally gets around to having casual sex with three other women, it is repeatedly pointed out that he doesn't seem to be making much out of his unique status in the world. In some ways, Yorick's female problems humanize him, but on the other hand, his ambivalence suggests something at work at an emotional level that itself references either an overdeveloped conscience or an ambivalence about women in general. While undergoing an anti-suicide prevention program forced upon him in volume four, he is bullied by a dominatrix who forces him to reveal any homoerotic experiences he might have had, and he recounts sexual abuse at the hands of an older boy who tied him to a tree. This revelation is treated as his ultimate dark secret, but also as necessary confession in an artificial situation—i.e., any proof he may have of some sort of same-sex experience. That the situation actually vindicates his heterosexuality seemingly paves the way for his growing role as a situational Lothario that he never naturally adopts. He remains the good boyfriend until the end, valuing emotion over everything else—sensitive and, in his devotion to Beth (one), finally, tragic in that he misses the real love of his life, Agent 355. The only relationships that end happily in the novel are between women.

Ultimately one might wonder how the *Y* series updates lesbian-feminist utopias of the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps especially Monique Wittig's massively erotic, experimental take on lesbian empowerment, *Les Guérillères* (1969). The women in that novel transform into non-women and non-men in an attempt to undo the oppression of women as a class by undoing sex itself. For Wittig, it is only by removing the binary that one can remove women as a subordinate term. As she makes clear in her essays collected in *The Straight Mind*, sexual dimorphism is explained as biology, but only because this explanation masks the true political reality behind sexual difference: the oppression of women. In her fantasy of a changed planet, Wittig imagines the Amazon as a warrior in a battle for liberation. As in *Y*, the Amazons hunt with bows and arrows and cut one of their breasts off to maintain their perfect aim. They are both the fierce warriors of ancient Greece and the wave of the future—a necessary link in a battle to change the world. In *Y* the Amazon warrior is both the vanguard and the enemy, as unchecked violence that threatens to keep the world from ever completely rebuilding. This negative valence seems to suggest both what the other women get from these women—i.e., independence and ideas about female empowerment—but also what they are not—i.e., “man haters” or supporters of gendered violence. The extreme is rejected even as most women take on some of the Amazons' traits—mainly, lesbian sex, the ability to fight in combat, etc. While not as psychologically engaging or realistically rendered as other graphic novels on the theme of sexuality such as Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) or Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby* (1995), Vaughan and Guerra's novel does attempt the ambitious project of imagining gender in new ways and the speculative recreation of the world as a postapocalyptic future. One

could argue that the novel does not really belong to the science-fiction or fantasy genres but is closer in form to the dystopian novel—*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) gets name-checked, for example. While eschewing the mixture of theory and poetry that Wittig employs in her novel, the mostly realistic (by graphic novel standards) *Y* has a couple of short meta-moments that are among the many literary in-jokes that call attention to Yorick's literary interests and also play with the book's naturalism. One occurs in volume three when a set of traveling actors create a play based upon the idea of a last man on Earth. Entitled *The Last Man*, it is partially in homage to Marry Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), one of the many precedents for the book, like *Herland*, 1915. This section suggests, among other things, not only a play-within-a-play as in *Hamlet* but that the Black Death in London was caused when women were barred from the stage. The chapter does a good job of playing with the reverse idea of women now trying to appear like men while on stage. The other meta-moment takes place in book nine when one of the female characters writes her own graphic novel about a worldwide apocalypse via gender that is described as "quasi-feminist po-mo" in obvious reference to what we are reading. The second sequence deals with the aforementioned comic book within a comic book, during the discussion of which Yorick makes the argument that comic books can do what films can, only with paper and pens. The pliability of the medium, in other words, expresses itself as a combination of genres, a medium for expressing ideas (even if not, perhaps, answers), and with the ability, like novels and plays, to develop plot, character, and intricate symbolism. Comic books, in other words, become the repository of the content of the past placed within the form of the future.

Y is only one of many graphic novel series that have dealt explicitly with sex and gender, topics that have become increasingly common within this genre or medium. The series *Bitch Planet* (2014–17) and *Sex* (2013–), for example, deal with various ways in which same-sex worlds or heightened sexuality can create fictional universes that allow for both realism and experimentation with issues that affect society but also have long been the purview of comic books whose illustrations of exaggeratedly gendered bodies—both male and female—hint at the adolescent sexuality they depend on but fail to explore directly. Crossing the line from gender to sex is a turning point in comics of the twenty-first century and allows for the expression of the sexuality that was always inherent and has, perhaps, grown into full adult sexuality as the age of comic-book readers has matured. As more and more adults read comics and young adult fiction, the line between adolescence and adulthood has blurred. Whether children are getting to be older at a younger age, or adults are failing to leave their childhood, is debatable, but the content, if not the form, of graphic novels has changed and the range of subject matter often deals with adult sexuality in a direct way. One example would be the excellent series *Saga* (2012–), which chronicles a heterosexual couple and their interracial child. The futuristic or fantasy universe of the series consists of creatures from wildly disparate fictional worlds—*Alice in Wonderland*, for example—mixed with lizard creatures or angel-like beings that seem borrowed from other comics, TV, or film. There is also a race of robots who form a type of royalty and who have the narratively convenient tendency to display their thoughts on the screens of the televisions that

form their heads. The notion of a world of extreme dimorphism is grounded in the very believable daily struggles of a young couple raising a child. The diversity also points up the fact that the couple are of two distinct races that, in a *Romeo and Juliet* sort of way, they are literally star-crossed and forbidden to be together. In this series, the scenes of a sexual nature occur quite naturally as a part of the narrative. Scenes that might have been hinted at but not shown in comic books of the silver age are here explicitly rendered, though not dwelt upon. There are gay and transgender characters and discussions of interspecies sex of an interestingly kinky kind, though the sexuality at the heart of the series, which at this time is still ongoing, does not take full advantage of the diverse possibilities of the imagined universe created.

The writers and illustrators of comic books, and their graphic novel offspring, can easily create universes in which almost anything can be imagined, yet few of the creators actually provide alternatives to the ones that have almost always been provided in mass cultural forms. While the nudity and sex have increased, the best one may be able to say is that there is an attempt to portray average-sized bodies rather than super-heroes with amazing physiques and the physical equipment that can go with them. The experimentation with sex and gender remains tasteful and mildly conservative, perhaps keyed to the commercial sales of graphic novels and the types of wholesome shops that specialize in them. All of this might change, but what is typical, at least with American culture, is the extent to which violence, in something like the *Walking Dead* series (2003–), say, is so far ahead of the representation of nudity or sexuality. Of the comics that do focus on sex, such as *Sex Criminals* (2013–), there is an attempt to bring in many of the topics that are related to narratives of sex and sexuality such as pornographic bookstores, filmmaking, and even gynecology. Because the series is firmly rooted in the world of comics, however, we also have the fact that the protagonists, Jon and Susie, have the ability to stop time when they have sex and a main part of the plot has to do with a literal squad of sex police that they have to deal with. That is, comic books, no matter how well done, often have to link their narratives to fantastical elements, which tend to squelch the more realistic or complex possibilities for plot and character development. Simply removing the world of the comics from a real one has major aesthetic implications that place limits on what can be done by the authors. The self-imposed limitations of the fantasy genre, in other words, are really what dictate the conservative ethos of the world of graphic novels. This fantasy background can, at best, act as a foil for the more realistic elements, including the depiction of sex. Some comics creators have, of course, attempted to go beyond these dictates, such as Alan Moore's questionable faux-Victorian pornography. And it is also clear that I am mainly talking here about those books created by Image Comics. I know full well that there are comic books being produced that would probably be an exception to these generalizations. The best comics authors may be the best writers. If so, Neil Gaiman's impressive *Sandman* (1989–96) series works well precisely because it embraces the fantasy genre so completely that the plot, illustrations, and characters morph and change in such dramatic ways that you feel you are genuinely inside a uniquely interdisciplinary medium—not only one that combines movement, image, and text but that transcends them and is more than the sum of its parts.

* * *

As our lives blur more and more with the virtual, it is important for us to remember that there is a difference between the real and the represented. Porn links the two, but actually the story that it tells is that the body is real—it has a physical reality that can never be duplicated in film, television, or the internet. We need to beware the loss of the contingency of imagery. It is just not possible to have a moment now, in the digital age, of something like Jacob Bronowski's putting his hand in the muck of the ground at Auschwitz in the television series *Ascent of Man* in 1973. By breaking the fourth wall, Bronowski reminds viewers that what they are seeing on the screen isn't reality. His series is an argument about history and an attempt at education, but it is an illusion. As Karen Lury notes, "By reminding the audience of the limitations of the image (its fragility, its constructed nature) and its materiality (as a film image, it has tangibility and an indexical quality), these stilted images expose their potential for contingency" (201). We should all keep this limit in mind as we surrender more and more of our identity, and our bodily limits, to social media and the visual world. The intermedial is inevitable; the inhuman is not.

Notes

- 1 For more on Corbusier and links between his design and film, see the first chapter in my *The Dissolution of Place: Architecture, Identity, and the Body*.
- 2 Note the use of her "These Boots Were Made For Walking" in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) as a temporal and cultural marker before the invasion of Hue, after which the music is replaced with the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black."
- 3 For more on how *True Blood* is best when it is darkest about the link between sex and death, see Tyree.
- 4 It is sad to see long-time re-cappers of the show twist and turn to make the ending work, or more importantly, to minimize the obviously insulting aspects of taking the castaways out of reality and into a dream-commercial for the afterlife. Suddenly, bloggers such as "Doc" Jensen of *Entertainment Weekly*, after minutely detailing every possible twist and turn of the series, said disingenuously that the ending just comes down to personal interpretation. In other words, nothing really matters (including, then, his millions of words of recap?) and, surprise, he just happens to be a devout Christian who just happens to share the basic beliefs of the similarly Christian producers.
- 5 As Neta Alexander argues, "These different forms of fragmentation gave birth to new modes of temporality." "Binge watching is thus a nascent form of what may be called efficient laziness: it simultaneously draws on the pleasure of media consumption and the notorious anxiety of ... fear of missing out ..." (21).
- 6 The Starz series *Outlander* (2014–) was the first prestige show with more female viewers than male. This show, along with *The White Queen* (2013), allowed Starz to move into second place after HBO. Starz now considers its core viewership to be women.

- 7 Starz has now even begun to parody its own groundbreaking attitude toward sex by airing Gregg Araki's first television series, *Now Apocalypse* (2019). While it is a mashup of the tropes from his usual stoner films such as *The Doom Generation* (1995) and *Nowhere* (1997), it lacks the seriousness of his best films such as *The Living End* (1992) and, especially, *Mysterious Skin* (2004). At ten episodes, it is different from his films, however, in its ability to include more sex. Indeed, despite his usual themes of Southern California aimlessness, pot culture, bisexuality, aliens, and apocalyptic foreboding, the real subject that seems to interest him in the series is sex, in as many variations as he can muster. As an essay on sex, Araki inevitably references *Eyes Wide Shut* when the usually naïve stud, Ford (Beau Mirchoff), is taken to a party at a mansion by his mysterious and sexually adventurous French girlfriend, Severine (Roxane Mesquida). She leads him into the party blindfolded. When he can see, he smiles and says, "I'm not a moran, Sev. I know an Illuminati sex party when I see one" (episode 7). As if the topless women weren't enough of a giveaway, this reference makes clear that Araki has Kubrick's film in mind since the film has been seen as an allegory for the illuminati on several internet sites that make misguided attempts to find the key to the film's meaning by seeing occult references in the film that are not there.
- 8 O' Toole reminds us that there was also "Sex World in 1978, the duly extoled porn version of Michael Crichton's *Westworld*, set within a futuristic theme-parked holiday resort which caters to the guests' every erotic fantasy" (77).
- 9 Season three of the show contains yet another version of the masked orgy from *Eyes Wide Shut* in episode number four when the action plays out at a charity auction featuring nude prostitutes arrayed on pedestals to be bid on. The parallels between this approach to sex and the use of androids as sex slaves in the first two seasons are underscored when Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) notes, upon entering the party, "Thought your world would be so different from mine, but there isn't any difference at all." This season, unlike the first, is more oriented to the action drama than science fiction and seems more indebted to the sequel film, *Futureworld* (1976), which was similarly about life outside of the futuristic amusement park.
- 10 HBO has now outdone *Westworld* in its attempt to represent the penis in its new show *Euphoria* (2019–), a controversial look at teen culture as dominated by dick pics, drugs, and gender fluidity. The second episode features a locker room scene that, according to *Fleshbot.com*, shows twenty-one separate penises. For more information, see Brennan.
- 11 It is important to note that the Senator strips down to the same futuristic jock strap that Dr. Manhattan sometimes wears as a note of modesty when he is out in public. The Senator's eagerness to be Dr. Manhattan, or to have his body, is made palpable.
- 12 In an interview for *New York* magazine, Yayha Abdul-Mateen II eloquently argued why he elected to play Cal/Dr. Manhattan in the nude:

But I said, "Hey look, Black Panther had a suit and Dr. Manhattan has his birthday suit." I figured I'm going to do it, I might as well do it when I'm young and I'm also playing a character that is really above any notions of shame. For me it was really liberating to play inside of that, you know, to play naked. I guess there's no other way to say it. (McHenry)

Bibliography

Resources

Like a number of scholars in adult film studies, I see adult film as an exciting field that is producing a wealth of new publications that are beginning to map the diverse array of influences porn has had in many areas of our cultural life—from aesthetics and marketing to architecture and morality. The study of porn involves both the extremely local—how porn is consumed in a specific city, say, or geographic area—and also broadly national or even international as well, cutting across genres, media, and borders.

Several publications contain information on archives and museums with collections of pornographic materials (see, for example, Tim Dean, et al., editors, *The Porn Archives*). Porn lives most obviously on the internet, and an essential resource is Fleshbot.com, a commercial blog that tracks not only the porn industry but nudity in mainstream film and television as well as the fine arts. It acts as a useful guide through the well-known commercial sites such as the Montreal-based Pornhub and its many subsidiaries.

Kubrick Archive

The late, great Stanley Kubrick left his papers at the University of the Arts in London, in the city where he raised his family and made all of his films from *Lolita* (1962) onward. Unfortunately, the archive is poorly managed, organized, and staffed. Scholars must apply to access materials, and all book projects, no matter how academic or specialized, are considered a commercial product and may or may not be granted approval. This monitoring of access by scholars on the part of the Kubrick estate makes the archive partially inaccessible and is a sad comment on Kubrick's legacy. Though the archive consists of 400 boxes, much of the material is redundant or trivial, mainly reflecting Kubrick's desire not to throw anything away. The paranoid aspects of Kubrick's controlling temperament have had an unfortunate afterlife that makes working on his films more difficult than it has to be. It doesn't help that there have been repeated controversies about the technical specifications in the way that his films have been transferred to new formats, and that he left behind virtually no alternate takes, changes, or instructions. Dying in 1999, on the cusp of the digital age, film as a medium seems to have died with him.

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Index

- 0–9
- 1950s 34, 68, 106, 216, 222
- 1960s 222, 223, 256. *See also Mad Men*;
sexual revolution
architecture 63–4
culture 168–9, 216, 226
films 102, 106, 109
and pornography 107
- 1970s 158, 212, 216, 219. *See also*
pornography; Golden Age
Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy
- 2001: *A Space Odyssey* 17, 19, 58, 190, 225
freeze frames 30
HAL 41, 77
human body in 43, 45
monolith 10, 49 n.6, 56, 66, 192
and notion of time 58
photographic influence 19
rating 34
set design 224–5
sexual content 37
similarities to Kubrick films 16, 17,
28, 221
- 300 (film) 242–5
- (500) *Days of Summer* 207–8, 216
- 9 *Songs* 195–7
- A
- Abdul-Mateen, Yaha II 252
- Abrams, J. J. 240
- academic writing 165–6
- Acconci, Vito 151
- action film 79–80 n.23, 169, 244–5
- Adam, Ken 56, 58–64, 66
- Adorno, Theodor 118–23
- advertisement 68, 218–19, 223, 227. *See also Mad Men*
- African-American culture 245–8
- AIDS 7, 26, 33, 93–4, 96
- Akinnuoye-Agbaje, Adewale 240
- Alfredson, Tomas 184, 186–7
- Alien* 188, 189
- Aliens* 188, 189–90
- Amazon (company) 168
- Amazon (warrior) 256
- American Beauty* 234
- American Gigolo* 178
- American Gods* (TV series) 173
- American Psycho* 178
- American South 201, 221–2, 234–6
- Americanization 223–4
- Anatomy of Hell* 157
- androgyny 146–8, 153, 209
- Anger, Kenneth 110, 151
- Ann-Margaret 222
- anti-art 122–3
- Anti-Christ* 198
- anus 5, 152–3, 158. *See also sex: anal*
- Apple (company) 168, 215
- Arabian Nights* (1974 film) 106, 107–8
- Araki, Gregg 205–6, 260 n.7
- Arbus, Diane 15
- architecture. *See also Hilton Hotels*;
Penn Station;
set design
- action film 79–80 n.23
- Archigram 63–4
- in art 135, 145–6
- Bond franchise 59–66, 79–80 n.23
- eighteenth century 60, 66
- eroticized 63–4
- in *Eyes Wide Shut* 19
- fantasy 59–63, 68–9
- in *Mad Men* 220–1, 223–4, 227–8
- modern 60–4, 79–80 n.23, 227–8
- Playboy* 68–71
- Arend, Geoffrey 208
- Army of Darkness* 200
- art, Egyptian 143–4, 147–8
- Ascent of Man* 259
- aspect ratios 15, 48–9 n.1
- Assayas, Olivier 155

- Augé, Marc 69
 auteur theory 56, 106, 171
 automatons 95, 124, 221
Avatar 187–92
- B**
 bachelor lifestyle 63–4, 68–70, 73–4, 230
 Badiou, Alain 66, 68, 101
 Baier, Lionel 205
 Ball, Alan 234–5
 Ballard, J. G. (James Graham) 69
 Baltimore 245–6
Bang Gang (A Modern Love Story) 176–7
Barbara Broadcast 103
 Barney, Matthew 152–3
Barry Lyndon 57, 67
 human body in 43, 45
 masculinity 75
 narration 31
 screenplays 34–7
 set design 56–8, 66
 sexual content 35–7
 still images 15, 30, 48, 55, 57
 Bartlett School 61
 Bataille, George 112, 117, 118–20, 157, 158
 Batt, Bryan 217–19, 222, 226, 227
 Bauhaus 61
 Bazin, André 57, 101
 BDSM 5
 in film 199–200, 205
 and gender 158
 mainstreaming 150, 199–200
 in porn 6, 43, 85, 99, 109–11, 115
Beach Rats 202–04, 204
 Bechdel, Alison 256
 Beddoes, Ivor 36
 Bégaudeau, François 193
Behind the Green Door 7, 103–6, 110, 125
 Bell, Jamie 199
Belle de Jour 200
 Bellucci, Monica 197
 Bender, Jack 240
 Bergman, Ingmar 29, 38, 102, 106
 Biehn, Michael 188
Big Little Lies 173
 Bigelow, Kathryn 187
 Binder, Maurice 73
Black Book 105, 151–2
 Blanchett, Cate 33
 blogs 9, 159, 165–6
Blue Movie (film) 150, 152
Blue Movie (novel) 38–40
 body horror 200, 202
 Bogdanovich, Peter 209
 Bomer, Matt 182
 Bond franchise 59–68, 73, 76, 187, 219–20, 244
Bonnie and Clyde 106
 Botticelli, Sandro 145
 bottom (sexual partner) 157–8
 Bouleé, Étienne-Louis 59
Boys Don't Cry 99–100
Boys in the Sand 110–11, 210
 Brakhage, Stan 150–1, 154, 156
Brave New World 118
 Breillat, Catherine 155–7, 197
 Bresson, Robert 91
 Bridle, Sam 87–9, 88
 Bron, Jean-Stéphane 205
 Bronowski, Jacob 259
 Brooks, Amanda 178–9
 Broom, Daisy 176–7
Brown Bunny, The 8, 195–6
 Brownjohn, Robert 73
 Buñuel, Luis 200
 Burden, Chris 151
 Burgess, Guy 184, 185, 187
Burning Secret (screenplay) 34
 Burroughs, William S. 110
 Butler, Judith 95, 99
- C**
 Caan, Scott 231, 233
Cabaret 110, 183
Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The 60–1
 Califa, Patrick 95
Call Me By Your Name 202–4
 Cameron, James 187–92
 camp aesthetic 65, 188, 20, 222
Candy (novel) 40
Canterbury Tales (1972 film) 106–8
Canyons, The 178–9
 capitalism 44, 68, 223–5, 247–8
 Carbonell, Nestor 237, 239
 Cardellini, Linda 228

- Cartier, Walter 16, 29
 Cassel, Vincent 197
 Chalamet, Timothée 203
 Chambers, Marilyn 6, 103–5, 108
 Chatagny, Pierre 205
 Chau, Hong 251
 Chriqui, Emmanuelle 233
 Christ, Jesus 133–5, 140, 145, 242
Christmas on Earth 152
 cinema 68, 135, 154. *See also* film: medium;
 Kubrick, Stanley: “pure cinema”
 Civil Rights movement 226
 Clark, Kenneth 136–43, 145
 Clark, Larry 177, 232
 Clarke, Arthur C. 19
 Clarke, Emilia 248–9
 class system 219–20
Clockwork Orange, A (film) 22, 116, 238
 human body in 19, 21
 Korova milk bar 48, 115
 rating 34, 38
 sexual content 37, 106
 voiceover narration 31
Clockwork Orange, A (novel) 177
 Cold War 183–4, 187, 223–6
 colonialism 36, 192–5, 224
 commercialization 44, 70, 219–20, 225
 Connolly, Kevin 230–1, 233
 Connolly, Tim 244
 consumerism 63, 69, 91, 108, 187, 219
 Cope, Jason 194–5
 Copley, Sharlot 194
 Corbet, Brady 205–6
 Cotton, Mason Vale 222
Couch (film) 150, 152
 Courbet, Gustave 100–1
Cremaster Cycle 152–3
 Cronenberg, David 156
 Cruise, Tom 20, 23, 23–7, 33–4, 115, 211,
 218, 221. *See also* *Eyes Wide Shut*
 Cruse, Howard 256
 Cubism 91, 239
 Cutrona, Ryan 222
- D**
 da Vinci, Leonardo 135–6, 146
 Dale, Alan 239
David (Donatello) 136–7, 137, 148
David (Michelangelo) 138, 148–9
 Davies, Jeremy 237
 Davis, Brad 91, 110
 Davis, Douglas Everett 203
 Davis, Julianne 23, 25–7, 33, 115, 120
Day of the Fight 16–19
 de Ravin, Emilie 238
Decameron (1971 film) 106–8
 Deen, James 178–9
Deep Throat 102–3, 109, 110, 151, 210
 del Toro, Benicio 179–81
 Deren, Maya 150
 Deschanel, Zooey 207–8
Destricted 232
Deuce, The 173
Devil in Miss Jones, The 103, 106
Diamonds Are Forever 76
 DiCaprio, Leonardo 189
 Dickinson, Harris 203
 Dillon, Kevin 230, 232
 Disney World 249–50
 Disneyland 68, 201, 229, 234
District 9, 192–5
 documentary 52 n.47, 90, 109, 193–4,
 209–10, 212. *See also* Kubrick,
 Stanley: documentary aspect
 Dogme 198
Dogville 198
 domesticity 65, 69–71, 216, 227
Don Jon 173–6
 Donovan, Casey 110–11
Dr. No 59, 60, 62, 65, 66, 73
Dr. Strangelove 18, 59
 Cold War 225
 documentary aspect 28, 56
 Dr. Strangelove (character) 65
 masculinity in 74–5
 script 38
 still frames 19
 tableaux in 39
 war room 39, 56, 59, 66
Drag Me to Hell 200–2
 dream imagery 115, 118. *See also* *Eyes*
 Wide Shut: dream imagery in
 Drew, Sarah 218
 Dullea, Keir 225. *See also* 2001: *A Space*
 Odyssey
 Dunst, Kirsten 201

- Dumont, Bruno 8, 155–6
 Duvall, Shelley 30
 Dworkin, Andrea 92, 157
 dystopias 7, 108–9, 170, 191, 257. *See also*
 utopias
- E
- edging (sexual practice) 87–9, 88, 130 n.25
 Eisenstein, Sergei 29, 55, 62, 154
 Ellis, Bret Easton 178, 212 n.4
 Emerson, Michael 236
Entourage 229–33
Entre les murs (The Class) 192–5
 EON Productions 59
 Eros 27, 45, 116
 eroticism. *See also* Pornography;
 Sade, Marquis de
 in art 84, 145
 in film 40–1, 64, 101, 119–21, 154, 198
 and porn 84, 126 n.6, 135
Evil Dead 200, 201
Evil Dead II 200
Ex Machina 202
 Expressionism, German 60–1, 143
Eyes Wide Shut 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 44, 45,
 116
 dream imagery in 23–5, 41, 47, 115,
 117
 female body in 19–22, 24–6, 33–4, 43,
 45–8, 115, 119–20
 gender in 48
 homosexual references in 31–3
 human body in 15, 143
 marriage in 20, 30, 32, 41, 46, 197, 211
 orgy 24–6, 33–4, 39, 41–4, 46, 105, 115,
 119–20, 173, 211, 250
 and pornography 27, 83, 110, 117, 121
 scripts of 27, 31–4
 sex and sexuality in 23–6, 32–4, 44, 46
 similarities in other media 173, 198,
 218, 221, 243
- F
- Facebook 165–6
 fandom 165, 239–41, 250
 fantasy (genre) 103, 114, 117, 207, 225,
 257–8
 Farlay, Mira 238
 Farnsworth House 71
 Fassbinder, Rainer Werner 90–1
Fear and Desire 16–17, 43, 170
 female gaze 176, 243. *See also* male gaze
 femininity. *See also* androgyny;
 gender: binary;
 masculinity
 in comics 255
 in film 18, 73, 174, 186, 188
 in *Playboy* 69, 71
 in porn 94–5
 on television 230, 248
 feminism 92–7, 99, 159–60, 186, 211
 Ferrara, Jerry 230–1, 233
 fetishes 85, 101, 205
 fetishization 126–7 n.10, 152, 250
 Feurriegel, Dan 243
Fifty Shades of Grey (film series) 199
Fifty Shades of Grey (novel) 85
 film. *See also* Pornography: as film
 art films 106–9, 149–56, 210–11
 avant-garde 110, 150–1, 154
 black-and-white 27–8, 60, 62, 210
 filmmaking 56
 history 62
 medium 3–4, 30, 55–7, 71, 90, 92, 101,
 149–51 153–5, 168–9, 171, 206–7,
 212, 215
 ratings 34, 37, 38, 210
 “filmed photo” 19, 55
 Firth, Colin 185–6
 Fisher, Gary 4–5
 fisting (sexual practice) 95, 128 n.14, 205, 206
 Fitzpatrick, Leo 177
 flagellation literature 114
 Fleming, Ian 61–2, 187, 219. *See also* Bond
 franchise
 Forberg, Friedrich Karl 146
 Forbes, Michelle 234
 Foucault, Michel 69, 83, 114, 125 n.3,
 128–9 n.20, 157, 205
 Fox, Matthew 237, 238, 240–1
 France 193
 Frankfurt School 122–3
 freeze frames 30, 55, 133, 140
 French cinema 155–7
 Freud, Sigmund 97, 111–12, 149, 210
From Russia with Love 219

- front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR) 96–8, 127 n.13
- Fukanaga, Cary Joji 171
- Full Metal Jacket* 15, 18–19, 20, 27, 34, 37, 45, 170–1, 191
- Fuller, Buckminster 64
- Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* 256
- Funk, Nolan 178–9
- Funny Games* 155
- Fuses* 151–2
- G
- Gagthefag.com 157–8
- Gaiman, Neil 258
- Gainsborough, Charlotte 198–9
- Gallo, Vincent 195–6
- Game of Thrones* (TV series) 167, 248–9
- Garcia, Jorge 241
- Garçon Stupide* 205
- gender 11 n.5. *See also* androgyny; Barney, Matthew; femininity; hermaphroditism; *Let the Right One In*; masculinity; *Y: The Last Man*
- binary 96–8, 99, 256
- defining 95–8
- double standard 159–60
- Greek 147–8
- in *Playboy* 69
- in porn 92, 93, 99–100, 103, 118, 150, 158, 211–12
- roles 43, 174–5, 207–8, 229–30, 233
- in Sade 121
- trans 96, 99–100
- Geography of the Body* 151–2
- girl-next-door aesthetic 70, 76
- Girlfriend Experience, The* 173, 182, 231
- Girls* 173
- Glass House (Johnson) 64, 65, 71, 72
- Gleeson, Domhnall 202
- Glusman, Karl 196–7
- Godard, Jean–Luc 101
- Goldfinger* 4, 60–2, 73, 74
- Goldfinger, Ernö 62
- Good, Abigail 33
- Goodman, John 248
- Gordon-Levitt, Joseph 173–6, 206–8
- Gospel According to St. Matthew, The* (Pasolini film) 108
- Goth, Mia 199
- Gothic art 140–4
- graphic novels 252–8
- Greece
- art and sculpture 84, 136–40, 141–5, 147–9, 203
- bodily ideal 83–4, 141–4, 147–8
- sexuality 83–4
- Grenier, Adrian 159, 230–3
- Grey, Sasha 182, 230–3
- Guerra, Pia 253
- Guinness, Alec 184
- H
- Halsted, Fred 109–11, 158
- Hamilton, Linda 188
- Hamm, Jon 216–24, 226–9
- Hammer, Armie 203
- Haneke, Michael 155
- Hannah, John 242
- Harrington, Kit 248–9
- Harris, Ed 250
- Hayek, Selma 179–81
- HBO 167, 168, 173, 235, 243, 250
- Hefner, Hugh 68–76
- Hefner, Scott 76
- Hendricks, Christina 222, 228
- hermaphroditism 146–8, 151–2
- high art 103, 106–7, 209, 212, 231
- Hilton, Conrad 223–5, 227
- Hilton Hotels 223–5, 227
- Histoire de l'oeil* 120
- HIV 2, 9, 177. *See also* AIDS
- Hockney, David 69
- Hocquenghem, Guy 96–7, 127–8 n.13, 157
- Holloway, Josh 238
- Hollywood 172, 194, 202, 210–11, 212
- homeroeticism 18, 37, 114, 186, 209, 255
- homophobia 98, 209, 216, 245
- homosexuality. *See* sexuality; homosexuality
- homosociality 183–7, 242–3
- Horn, Cody 183
- horror 41, 60, 90, 155, 200–2, 212–13 n.5
- Hotier, Fred 176–7

- How to Murder Your Wife* 64
 human body. *See also Eyes Wide Shut*:
 female body in;
 Greece: bodily ideal;
 Last Year at Marienbad;
 nude (art)
 in action film 80, 244–5
 in art 133–49
 Black 5–6, 105, 246–8, 252
 in comics 257, 258
 defining 2–6, 96
 on film 92, 106–8, 149–59, 187–92,
 202–3, 207, 212
 fragmentation 3, 77, 90–2, 130–1 n.25,
 136, 152, 158, 191
 and gender 95–6
 in Kubrick 15, 18–19, 43, 44–5, 92
 limits of 205, 259
 objectification 108, 209, 233
 of men 18, 105–6, 151, 160, 182–3,
 243, 255
 of transgender people 99–100
 of women 9, 46, 70, 73, 76, 94, 108,
 159–60, 232, 255
 in porn 99–100, 196
 in Sade 121–4
 and technology 4, 188, 190–1
 on television 167, 173, 241–5,
 248–52
 transgender 99–100
Hunger, The 236
 Hurricane Katrina 245–6
Hurt Locker, The 191–2
 Husson, Eva 176–7
 Husson, Manuel 177
Hustler 76, 93
 Huston, John 209–12
 Hyde, Alan 235–6
- I
- I Am Curious (Blue)* 102
I Am Curious (Yellow) 102, 106
Iliad, The 29
Importance of Being Earnest, The 201
In the Realm of the Senses 91–2, 110,
 127 n.11
 incest 200, 249
Insatiable 108
- intellectuals 165–6
Interior Scroll 151
 intermediality 12 n.8, 55, 59, 75, 154–5,
 253, 259
 internet 42, 72, 85, 159, 165–7, 172.
 See also Pornography: internet
- Interstellar* 66
 Iraq War 189, 191
 Irish Republican Army (IRA) 36
 Irons, Jeremy 252
Irréversible 155, 197
 Isaac, Oscar 202
It Follows 200
- J
- Jameson, Fredric 133–4, 170
 Janey, Allison 238
 Johansson, Scarlett 174–5
 Johnson, Don 251
 Johnson, Philip 64, 65, 71
 Jones, January 216–18, 221–2, 226–7
 Jürgens, Curd 62
- K
- Kartheiser, Vincent 216, 218, 221
 Keen, Marie 37
 Kelly, Minka 208
 Keyes, Johnnie 6, 104–6
 Kidman, Nicole 19–27, 21, 23, 41, 44–8,
 115, 198, 211, 221. *See also Eyes
 Wide Shut*
- Kids* (film) 176, 177
Killer's Kiss 15, 16, 17, 17, 18, 19, 221
Killing, The 28, 30, 43
 King, Regina 251
 Kink.com 43, 125–6 n.5, 85
 Kinsey, Alfred 99
 Kinsey scale 32, 98
 Kipnis, Laura 93
 Kitsch, Taylor 179–80
 Klimt, Gustave 23, 49 n.9, 143
 Knumbanyiwa, Eugene 195
 Kodar, Oja 209–11
 Kristin, Klara 196–7
 Kubrick, Christiane Harlan 38
 Kubrick, Stanley 73–7, 244. *See also
 individual films: 2001: A Space
 Odyssey;*

- A Clockwork Orange*;
Day of the Fight;
Eyes Wide Shut;
Full Metal Jacket;
Killer's Kiss;
The Killing;
Lolita;
Paths of Glory;
The Shining;
Spartacus
aesthetics 15–16, 30, 55–8
architecture 79–80 n.23
boxing motif 18, 50 n.12
camerawork 50 n.22
documentary aspect 28–30, 43, 55–7,
66, 210
eighteenth century influence 57–8
and *Eyes Wide Shut* 31–4
“humanness” 76–7
influences of 29–30
lighting 28, 30, 55–7, 75
and pornography 38–42, 46, 83, 117,
212
“pure cinema” 47, 66–8
self-referencing 28–9
sexual subject matter 34–5, 37, 211–12
still photography 15–17, 19, 22, 28–30,
55–6, 210
tableau imagery 15, 17, 39, 48, 55, 57,
75, 120, 128–9 n.20
use of paintings 15–16, 28, 55–9, 75,
143
voiceover narration 31
Kwanten, Ryan 235
- L
- LA Plays Itself* 109–10
LaBeouf, Shia 198
Last Supper (da Vinci) 134–5
Last Tango in Paris 106
Last Year at Marienbad 47–8
le Carré, John (David Cornwall) 184–7
Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeannere)
62, 64, 71, 228
Leclercq, Sophie-Ann 236
Lee, Lorelei 93
Lee, Reggie 201
Lefebvre, Lorenzo 177
- Leftovers, The* 173
Les Guérillères 256
Let the Right One In (*Låt den rätte komma in*) 187
libertinism 37, 75, 110, 123, 124, 132 n.42.
See also Sade, Marquis de
Life (magazine) 28, 29, 55
Lilly, Evangeline 238
Lima, Marilyn 176–7
Lindelof, Damon 251–2
Lively, Blake 179–81
Lockwood, Gary 225
Lohan, Lindsay 178–9
Lohman, Alison 201
Lolita (Kubrick film) 19, 28, 34, 35, 38
Long, Justin 201–2
Look (magazine) 15, 17–18, 28–30, 55
looking 19, 28, 33, 42, 70, 149, 244
Los Angeles 51 n.39, 68, 111, 201–2, 207, 228
Lost 166, 172, 234, 236–41, 250–1
Love (film) 196–7
Lovelace, Linda (Linda Boreman) 102–3
Lynch, David 150, 169, 171
- M
- Maas, Willard 151–2
Macho Sluts 95
Mad Men 216–29
Madame Bovary 169
Madison Square Garden 220–1
Magic Mike 181–3
Maguire, Toby 201
male gaze 15, 18, 41, 43, 45–6, 63, 107,
157, 243. See also female gaze
Man Who Fell to Earth, The 200
Mandingo 105
Manet, Édouard 101, 128–9 n.20, 139
Manual of Classic Erotology (*De Figures Veneris*) 146
Mapplethorpe, Robert 105, 151
Marcus, Stephen 73, 111–14
Mardi Gras 245–7
marriage 68, 69, 70, 125 n.3, 197, 234. See
also *Eyes Wide Shut*: marriage in
Martin, Stacy 198
Marx, Karl 2
masculinity. See also supineness;
verticality

- and architecture 227–8
- and Bond franchise 187
- in comics 255
- in film 152–3, 174, 183, 200, 211
- gay 95, 97–8, 158
- Greek 148
- in Kubrick 74–5
- in *Playboy* 69–73, 76
- and pornography 91, 92–3, 102, 130–1 n.25
- on television 243–4
- masks. *See also* Mardi Gras
 - in *Behind the Green Door* 104, 105
 - in *Eyes Wide Shut* 25–27, 33, 35, 41, 47, 105, 115, 120
 - in *Spartacus* 243
 - in *Watchmen* 251
- Masterson, Fay 26, 26
- masturbation 87, 130–1 n.25, 159
- McConaughey, Matthew 182–3
- McDonald, George S. 103
- McGinnis, Robert 49 n.8
- McGonagle, Richard 208
- McGoohan, Patrick 168–9
- McIntyre, Liam 242, 245
- McLuhan, Marshall 77
- Meat Joy* 151
- Melancholia* 47, 198
- melodrama 168, 169–70
- Mensah, Peter 243–4
- Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* 91
- metonymy 5, 71, 87, 120, 136, 157
- Mich, Daniel D. 29–30
- Michelangelo 136, 138–42, 252
- Midnight Cowboy* 106
- Midnight Express* 110
- militarism 189, 254
- minimalism 64, 105, 143
- Minter, Marilyn 162 n.10
- mirror imagery 22, 28, 203
- Mishima Yukio 92
- Mizuno, Sonoya 202
- mobile phones 9
- “money shot” 5, 87, 104, 108, 130–1 n.25, 151, 179
- Monroe, Mircea 182
- “Monster dick cums 3 times” 87–9
- montage 55, 62
- Moonraker* 60–1
- Moore, Alan 258
- Moore, Charles 65
- Moore, Julianne 175
- Moore, Tommy 111
- Morse, Robert 226
- Moses, Mark 227
- Moss, Elizabeth 218, 220, 227, 228
- Moyer, Stephen 235–6
- Mulholland Drive* 169, 201
- multimedia 68, 69–70, 71
- Munch, Edvard 15, 57, 77 n.4
- Munn, Olivia 182
- Muyock, Aomi 196–7
- Mysterious Skin* 205–6
- N
- narrative
 - in art 134–5, 139, 143–4
 - in film 16, 19, 56, 120, 207
 - in pornography 7, 44, 87, 100, 103, 161 n.9
 - in Sade 122, 124
 - in television 172, 239, 249, 251
- Netflix 168, 215
- New French Extremity 8, 155, 197
- New Jersey 174
- New Orleans 245–8
- New Queer Cinema 202–4
- New York City 32, 41–2, 210, 220–1
- New Zealand 242
- naturalism 28–9, 56, 59, 101–2, 139, 143–4
- Naturalist literature 170
- Noé, Gaspar 155–6, 196–7
- Nolan, Christopher 66
- non-monogamy 42–3, 76, 180
- nude (art) 136–43, 145, 148, 249
- nudity
 - celebrity 159
 - in comics 259
 - in film 101–2, 109, 151–2, 212
 - in Kubrick 30, 34, 36, 41
 - versus nakedness 141
 - in *Playboy* 70, 76
 - in pornography 135
 - in television 86, 167, 173, 215, 242–3, 248–51

NXIVM 12 n.9, 52 n.43

Nymphomaniac 198–9

O

objectification. *See* human body:

objectification

O'Brien, Kiernan 196

Oldfield, Finnegan 176–7

Oldman, Gary 184–6

Olympia (Manet painting) 77 n.4, 139

On Her Majesty's Secret Service 76

Opening of Misty Beethoven, The 7, 103–4, 109, 117

O'Quinn, Terry 237, 239

orgasm 87, 89, 104, 124, 130–1 n.25

orgies 37, 40, 42, 104, 173. *See also* *Eyes*

Wide Shut: orgy

Origin of the World, The 100–1

Oshima Nagisa 91–2, 102, 110

Other Side of the Wind, The 208–12

P

Paasonen, Susanna 149

painting 61–2, 69, 101, 124, 128–9 n.20, 133–5, 139. *See also* Kubrick, Stanley: use of paintings;

Manet, Eduoard;

Renaissance;

tableaux

Paquin, Anna 235–6

Paré, Jessica 229

Parker, Craig 243

Pasolini, Pier Paolo 39, 106–8

Paths of Glory 28, 34, 58, 58, 170

patriarchy 41, 97, 148

Patrick, Robert 188–9

pederasty 203

pedophilia 199

peep shows 161 n.9

Pellegrino, Mark 238, 241

penetration 95, 157

penis. *See also* phallicism; phallus

in art 83–4

in film 92, 155

in pornography 43, 85–9, 103, 125–6

n.5, 126–7 n.10, 157–8

in television 173, 249, 250, 252, 260 n.10

penis shame 86

Penley, Constance 93

Penn Station 220–1

Penthouse 76, 93

peplum films 243–4, 249

Peters, Clarke 247–8

Pettyfer, Alex 182–3

phallicism 18, 73, 94–5, 157

phallus 84, 86, 97, 126–7 n.10, 209–10, 211

photography 62, 71, 79 n.22, 100–1, 143, 154. *See also* Kubrick, Stanley: still photography

Pierce, Wendell 246

pietà 133, 192

Pinewood Studios 59

Piven, Jeremy 232–3

Plato 83, 146, 161 n.5

Playboy (magazine) 63–5, 68–71, 76. *See also* Hugh Hefner

Playboy after Dark 68

Playboy clubs 68, 75–6

Playboy mansion 63, 68, 70–1, 75

Playboy's Penthouse 68

Pollack, Sydney 22, 26–7, 31, 41, 44, 46, 115

Polykleitos 136, 139, 144

Poole, Wakefield 110–11

pop art 69

pornification 1, 41, 73, 98, 176, 178, 198, 216

Pornography 42, 49, 70, 250, 255

addiction 92–3, 174–5

amateur 76, 84, 87–8, 159–60

anti-porn 92–4, 157

and art 39, 84, 93, 114

art house 41, 103, 106–7, 109–11

cuckold 6

defining 83–5, 89–96, 99, 109, 111–15, 117, 121, 149–50

as fantasy 89, 98–9, 105, 113, 117, 149–50, 232

as film 84–7, 90, 92, 112, 130, 135, 139, 149–50

gay 93–5, 109–11, 157–8

genre conventions of 85–7, 90, 99, 102, 109, 114–15

- Golden Age 100–11, 129 n.21, 151, 173, 195, 209
 internet 69, 76, 84–5, 90, 92, 98, 129 n.21, 150, 173–4, 202
 interracial 6, 104–6, 111, 130 n.24, 152
 lesbian 126–7 n.10
 and mainstream media 10, 11 n.7, 85, 90, 101–2, 106, 110–11, 195–6, 198–9, 212, 230–3
 methodology 111–13, 121, 158
 as object of study 131–2 n.37
 objectification in 100, 110, 157–8, 232
 “pornotopia” 113–14
 revenge 6, 159
 and technology 84–5, 101, 160
 and television 173, 215
 transgender 99–100
 viewership 85, 93–4, 98, 211
 postmodernism 63, 69, 171
 power structures 44, 68, 91–2, 158, 247
 Praxiteles 136, 144, 145, 148, 203
Prisoner, The (TV series) 168–9
 prostitution 73, 119
 public and private 69–73, 79–80 n.23, 134, 159–60, 161 n.9, 170, 227, 232
 Pudovkin, Vsevolod 29
Pumping Iron 188
- Q
- Quaterman, Simon 251
 queer theory 93, 95–6, 153, 157
 queerness 5–6, 65, 100, 158, 206, 234
Querelle 90–1
 Quine, Richard 64
- R
- race 234–5, 243, 245–8, 251–2
 racism 105, 221, 243, 252
 Raimi, Sam 200–2
Rambo 244
 Random, Bob 209–11
 rape 18, 92, 99–100, 155, 157, 206, 250
 Raphael, Frederic 26, 31–4, 40, 42, 44
 Raver, Lorna 201
Real Young Girl, A 157
 realism
 art 135, 144–6, 149, 155
 film 47, 55, 57, 155, 244–5
 graphic novels 255, 257–8
 porn 77 n.4, 87, 101, 105, 150
 television 172
- Reems, Harry 102–3
 Reeves, Perrey 232
 Renaissance 133–41, 144–9
 Resnais, Alain 47–8
 rhizome (philosophy) 90, 98, 121, 153, 190
 Richardson, Marie 23, 24, 41, 46
River of Fundament 153
 Roach, Joseph 246–7
 Robbe-Grillet, Alain 47–8
 Robinson, Zuleikha 237
 robots 202, 249–51
 Rococo 77 n.4, 139
 Rohe, Mies van der 66, 71
Romance (film) 157
 Rome 40, 73, 84, 136, 107, 242
Rome (TV series) 241–2
 Ross, Chelcie 223
 Rothstein, Arthur 29
 Rubens, Peter Paul 133–4, 139–41
 Rubin, Barbara 152
- S
- Sade, Marquis de (Donatien Alphonse François) 92, 112, 116–25
 Safdie, Moshe 64
Saga (comic series) 257–8
 Saldana, Zoe 190–2
Salò 108
 San Francisco 42–3, 99, 105
 Sanada Hiroyuki 238
Sandman (comic series) 258
 Sarris, Andrew 106
Savages 179–81
 Schiele, Egon 143
 Schneemann, Carolee 151–2
 Schnitzler, Arthur 32, 47
 Schrader, Paul 178–9
 Schwarzenegger, Arnold 188
 science fiction 10, 41, 202, 225, 236, 239–40, 251
Scorpio Rising 110, 151
 Scott, Ridley 188–9
 Scott, Tony 236

- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky 4–5, 127–8 n.13, 133, 180
- set design 59–66
- Sevigny, Chloë 99, 177, 196
- sex. *See also* Pornography; sexuality
- addiction 199–200
 - anal 5, 40, 103, 110, 152, 230–3 (see also *Cremaster Cycle*; fisting)
 - biological 94, 99, 146–7, 256
 - oral 102–5, 109, 100, 149, 151
 - and pornography 149–50
 - representation on screen 7, 39–40, 101, 106–7, 149, 173, 195–6, 197, 212, 242
 - as subject matter 42, 209–12, 215, 218, 256–8
- Sex Criminals* 258
- sex parties 42
- sexual revolution 69, 102, 130 n.22, 216, 219
- sexuality 93–6, 98–9
- ancient Greek 83–4
 - bisexuality 109–10, 186, 236
 - fluidity 31–2, 42, 182, 198, 203
 - heterosexuality 69, 100, 103, 107, 114, 152, 182, 202–4
 - homosexuality 70, 98, 114, 255, 258
 - lesbian 94–7, 126–7 n.10, 158, 198–9, 234, 255–6
 - male 39, 43, 95, 133, 185, 203–6, 217–18, 231, 234, 243, 255
 - Victorian 70, 114, 146
- Shame* 195–6
- Shaw, Vinessa 23, 24, 26–7, 33–4, 46, 120
- Shining, The* 16, 22, 47
- ending 41, 55
 - human body in 21–2
 - and photography 15, 28–9, 30, 55
 - rating 34
 - sexual content 37
 - supernatural elements 47
- Shipka, Kiernan 222–3
- Showtime 167, 243
- Siff, Maggie 226
- Siffredi, Rocco 155
- Silicon Valley 42
- Simon, David 169, 245
- Singer, Alexander 29
- Sitney, P. Adams 30
- Six Feet Under* 234
- Skarsgård, Alexander 235–6
- Slattery, John 221
- Smart, Jean 252
- Snapchat 42, 149
- Snyder, Eli 244
- social media 8, 159, 165, 166, 172, 176–7
- Socrates 83
- Soderbergh, Steven 181–2, 231
- Soleri, Paolo 64
- Sontag, Susan 114, 117–18
- Sopranos, The* 172, 174, 237
- Southern, Terry 38–40, 110
- Spartacus* (film) 34, 242
- Spartacus* (TV series) 241–5
- Spelvin, Georgina 103
- Spencer, Abigail 226–7
- Spider-Man* 200
- Spider-Man 2* 201
- spirituality 237–41
- Spy Who Loved Me, The* 59, 61, 62
- Stag films 39
- stag parties 70
- Stanley, Christopher 226
- Star Trek* (film) 240
- Star Trek* (TV series) 239–40
- Starz 167, 172, 241–3, 259 n.6
- Stilley, Margo 196
- Stone, Oliver 179
- Stone, Philip 59
- Story of Joanna, The* 117–18
- Story of O* 115–17
- Strasberg, Susan 209
- Stuck Rubber Baby* 256
- Stuhlbarg, Michael 203
- superheroes 251–2
- supernatural 47, 217, 234–7, 240–1. *See also* vampirism
- supineness 15, 18, 20, 26–7, 71–3, 149, 154
- surrealism 43, 47, 73, 103, 122, 150, 158, 169
- Swank, Hilary 99–100
- Sweden 107, 109
- Sylvester, William 225
- symmetry 30, 46, 56, 107, 108, 135
- syphilis 9, 176–7

T

tableaux 124, 133. *See also* Kubrick, Stanley: tableau imagery

Tatum, Channing 181–3

Taylor, Pana Herma 243

Taylor-Johnson, Aaron 180

technology. *See also* social media
 and architecture 63
 in Bond franchise 66
 and the body 3, 4, 9, 30–1, 77, 188, 190, 202
 film 154, 192
Playboy 69–70, 71
 and porn 10, 84–5, 98, 101, 159–60
 and sex 125 n.3, 150, 203–4
 television 239

Teena, Brandon 99–100

television 108, 154, 253
 defining shows/series 168–9, 171
 delivery systems 171–3, 215
 economics 167–8
 and film 171, 215
 meta-television 172, 251
 second Golden Age 167, 169, 171
 structure of shows 171, 239

Terminator, The 187–9

Terminator 2 188–9

Terminator 3 189

Terry, John 240–1

Terry-Thomas (Thomas Terry Hoar Stephens) 64

Thanatos 27, 116

theater 101, 168

theatricality 28, 62, 89, 124, 133, 135, 171

Thirst 200

threesomes 42, 178–9, 197

Thunderball 66, 66, 67

time 58–9, 133–5, 207–8, 239, 253

Time Machine, The (novel) 73

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (film) 183–7

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (novel) 184, 185, 186

Titanic (film) 189

Tobin, Dan 209

Tom Jones (film) 34

tragedy 136, 168–9, 170, 181, 256

Trammell, Sam 235

transmedia 249

Traumnovelle 32

Treme 245–8

Trilogy of Life (Pasolini film series). *See* individual films: *Arabian Nights*; *Canterbury Tales*; *Decameron*

True Blood 234–6

True Detective 171

Twentynine Palms 8, 155–6

Twin Peaks 169, 171–2

U

United Kingdom 219

United States of America 224, 246, 251–2

utopias
 on film 181
 lesbian 256
 porn 7, 43, 91, 108–9, 113–14, 126 n.7
 in Sade 124
 sexual 107
 and television 170, 224

V

vagina 99–100, 157

vampirism 8, 187, 200, 234–6

Vaughan, Brian K. 253

Venturi, Robert 65

Venus 139, 144, 145

Venus (Botticelli) 145

verticality 18, 44, 49 n.6, 71, 149. *See also* supineness

Victorian era. *See* sexuality: Victorian

video games 245, 250

Vienna 32, 41, 210

Vietnam War 191, 224, 226, 244, 252

viewer 156, 255

Vikander, Alicia 202

Villa Savoye 62, 63, 71, 72

violence 247. *See also* New French
 Extremity;
 Sade, Marquis de
 in film 106, 155, 242–3
 and pornography 112
 representation of 258
 and sex 5–6, 37, 43, 45, 90–1, 100, 108, 119, 156, 249–50

- and technology 77
 on television 249
Virgin Spring, The 106
Viridiana 200
 Vitali, Leon 26
 voiceover narration 28, 31, 35, 56, 208
 von Trier, Lars 47, 198–9
 voyeurism 15, 28, 71, 89, 91, 105
- W
- Walking Dead* (comic series) 258
 Warhol, Andy 39, 110, 150, 152, 154, 207
Watchmen 251–2
 Waters, John 106
 Watney, Simon 93
 Weiner, Matthew 216
 Weinstein, Madeline 203
 Welles, Orson 29, 56, 208–12
 Welliver, Titus 236
 Wesselmann, Tom 69
Westworld 172, 207, 249–51
 white power 246–8
 Whitfield, Andy 242, 245
- Wild Boys, The* 110
 Wilde, Oscar 114, 133, 201, 207, 219, 231
 Williams, Linda 105, 108–9, 126–7 n.10,
 130–1 n.25, 169–70, 211–12
Window Water Baby Moving 151
 Winslet, Kate 189
Wire, The 167–70, 193, 245, 248
 Wittig, Monique 97, 205, 256–7
 Wolk, James 252
 Wright, Frank Lloyd 61
- X
- X-Files, The* 172
- Y
- Y: The Last Man* 253–7
You Only Live Twice 61
 Young, Damon R. 157–8
- Z
- Zarzosa, Agustin 169–70
 Ziv, Amalia 94–5
 Zweig, Stefan 34

