

Maddison / *Fags, Hags & Queer Sisters*

# **FAGS, HAGS AND QUEER SISTERS**

**Gender Dissent and Heterosocial Bonds in Gay Culture**

**Stephen Maddison**

*With love and thanks  
to the women who brought  
me up to be a Nice Boy:  
Mary Gibbs, Lil Worrall, Lottie Charlton,  
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*And to AH, who's a very Nice Boy.*

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## CONTENTS

### PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Fags, Female Icons and Stonewall

Fags, Hags, and Queer Sistership

### CHAPTER ONE - FROM PATHOLOGY TO GENDER DISSENT: TENNESSEE

#### WILLIAMS'S A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

##### Part One: Perversion or Great American (Queer) Art ?

Inversion: *Maurice* and Unrequited Desire

Coming Out: Stonewall and Gay Politics

*A Streetcar Named Desire*: A Gay Play?

From Gender to Libido (and back again?)

##### PART TWO: A PLAY WITH GENDER?

Stanley Kowalski: Polack, Stud, Husband

Miss DuBois: Queer Defiance?

### CHAPTER TWO - HETEROSOCIAL TENDENCIES

A Case of Sexuality or Gender? Feminism and Queer Theory

Homosocial Regimes, Male Power and Not Getting Fucked

*Pulp Fiction*: Fucking Butch

Homosocial Dissent, Female Bonding

Mapping Heterosocial Bonds

Straight Talking: Get Some *Attitude*

Slash Fantasies / Heterosocial Bonds

### **CHAPTER THREE - ROSEANNE: DOMESTIC GODDESS AS FAG HEROINE?**

Roseanne and Political Credibility

*Roseanne* and Homosociality: The Queer Challenge

'I Now Pronounce You Men': Queer Marriage and the Domestic Goddess

Mary-Come-Lately or Gay Goddess?

### **CHAPTER FOUR - PEDRO ALMODÓVAR AND *WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN*: THE HETEROSOCIAL SPECTATOR AND MISOGYNY**

A Case of Public or Private?

Liberal Titillation and the Regime of the Couple

Queer Opportunities

Women on the Verge of Queer Sistership?

The Woman's Film as Gay Film?

*Edward II*: Queer Homosociality?

Hysteria and Heterosocial Dissent

### **CONCLUSION**

Fag Hag: A Cautionary Tale?

Fags, Hags and Gender Dissent

## INTRODUCTION

### FAGS, FEMALE ICONS AND STONEWALL

Friday, June 28, 1969. 1:45am. There was a full moon. Judy Garland had been buried that afternoon. And the queers on Christopher Street had had enough.<sup>1</sup>

The riots that took place outside the Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village in June and July 1969 have become understood as the key moment in the emergence of contemporary gay politics. The obstinance and militancy of the Stonewall's mainly black, Hispanic, and drag clientele on those nights has become appreciated by disparate constituencies of queers as an homogenising moment in which a liberatory attitude was birthed. Throughout the intervening thirty years the Stonewall riots have become a queer myth to be drawn upon and recirculated at times when we are in need of empowerment. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the uprising, which came at a time of emergency, during an epidemic when our numbers are continuing to be decimated, and during a period when Western democratic and economic systems seemed to be sliding ever further to the right, was appropriately marked then, with considerable levels of gay and lesbian Pride, expressed not only in commemorative marches and demonstrations, but with scholarly and experiential commentary, and, in keeping with the character of modern gay urban life, a volume of merchandising, produced, distributed and bought by

gay people. The level of investment made in celebrations of Stonewall may be variously understood as the expression of an ever more diverse, sophisticated and confident subculture in touch with its history, or as the commodified, sanitised and nostalgic reminiscences of a modern political movement which has failed to maintain the militancy so briefly expressed in a couple of civic disturbances twenty-five years earlier. Whatever the meaning ascribed to Stonewall, its importance as an identifiable moment of authentic queer activism remains indisputable.

A particularly marvellous elaboration of the Stonewall narrative comes in an eponymously titled film, directed by Nigel Finch and adapted as fiction by Rikki Beadle-Blair from Martin Duberman's historical-experiential account, and was released in 1996.<sup>2</sup> *Stonewall* opens with a close up shot of an Hispanic drag queen applying her lipstick. It cuts to a documentary montage that displays original footage of Greenwich Village queer<sup>3</sup> life in the late sixties, interspersed with sound bites from people present on the scene at this time. One of these participants, with the status of an 'eye-witness', says 'I think [the riot] had to do with Judy Garland's death'. This documentary sequence serves to set an historical context for the narrative, but it is very short: we quickly return to the now fully lip-sticked drag queen, who we later learn is called La Miranda. Her head fills the screen, as she tells us:

See, there's as many Stonewall stories as there's gay queens in  
New York: and that's a shit load of stories, baby. Everywhere

you go in Manhattan or America, or the entire damn world,  
you're gonna hear some new legend. Well, this is my legend,  
honey. Okay? My Stonewall legend.

The film cuts to the fictionalised interior of the Stonewall Inn where three drag queens are lip-synching to the camera, and we understand that the narrative is now structured as a function of La Miranda's perspective on Stonewall. La Miranda's legend follows the experiences of three participants in the riots: La Miranda herself, Matty Dean, the new boy in town with whom the drag queen is in love, but for whose affections she must compete with the assimilationist and respectable Ethan; and Bostonia, a matriarchal black drag queen who is kept by Vinnie, a closeted gangster who runs the Stonewall Inn. We follow our protagonists through their brutalisation by the New York police, who raid the Inn, and by the Government, who call La Miranda to the draft, and by the Ordinances on Fire Island which circumscribe what Ethan promises Matty Dean will be 'heaven on Earth'. We also follow the diverse attempts of these characters to make sense of this brutalisation - physical, cultural and emotional - and their differing attempts to survive and to formulate political resistance. Matty Dean is the outsider through whose eyes these political expressions are tested. The Homophile movement, of which Ethan is a part, stages a ludicrously understated, silent and respectable protest in Philadelphia, whilst the drag queens offer a magical, reverent and celebratory initiation of a new young sister.

It is clear that this complex, fabulous film favours the flagrancy of the drag queens, whose lip-synched, highly choreographed performances of songs by sixties girl groups, such as the Shangri-Las, work as a kind of camp chorus that frames the events of the narrative. These segments underpin queer ownership of the narrative which *Stonewall* unfolds: the outlandish precision of the miming and choreography, and the perfectly balanced tension in these performances between dead-pan camp and sequinned excess, which disrupt and segment the narrative progression, ensure that the film never slips into a ventriloquism of documentary authoritarianism. As a consequence, the rendering of these lives that are ruthlessly mediated by powerful and hostile agencies is always more than a mere elaboration of oppression. The appalling difficulties of queer life are represented without effacing the bravura and distinctiveness of queer culture and resistance.

The script reinforces this celebration of the way in which the drag queens relish their queer expression in the face of authoritarian intervention. When the police first raid the Stonewall, its patrons accept a posture of grudging acquiescence, removing jewellery and keeping their heads down. La Miranda refuses an order to go to the washroom to remove her makeup and has her face pushed into the filthy water in a tub on the bar used for cleaning glasses. But she takes control of this humiliation: after the cops have released her, she shoves her own head back into the water, holding it there whilst her tormentors look on in disbelief. Finally, La Miranda flings her head back out of the water, tossing back the locks

of her coiffure. Then she returns to her seat and takes out her lipstick for a touch up, as the cops move in for further brutality. The queen behind the bar addresses her sister:

PRINCESS ERNESTINE: La Miranda girl, why do you always put  
yourself through this?

LA MIRANDA: Why, Princess Ernestine? Just for the sheer,  
irresistible god-damn glamour of it all.

Much later, La Miranda has confessed to Matty Dean, who is now her lover, that she fears the doctors she has been sent to for assessment by the draft officers, as she once underwent aversion therapy. Matty Dean steps in and impersonates his lover for the interview, wearing her Afro wig and loud makeup:

MATTY DEAN (AS LA MIRANDA): Oh doctor, how fifties you be! Me, I'm  
living in the *other* state, between maleness and femaleness.

DOCTOR: Which is?

MATTY DEAN: Fabulousness!

The need for such fabulousness is great. After a fascinating exchange between Bostonia and her lover Vinnie, who wants the drag queen to have a sex-change operation so that they may acquire respectability, Vinnie seems to accept his non-normative desires and identity. He rushes to Bostonia's apartment the night of Judy Garland's death to comfort his lover, who is bereft. Vinnie insists they go out for ice cream, and the couple end up in an up-market restaurant. When they are asked to leave, Vinnie throws over the table and Bostonia flings money for the bill on the floor. Later, after some tender, revealing moments

between the lovers in bed, seemingly still unable to tell Bostonia that he loves him, Vinnie shoots himself, having scrawled the words in lipstick on a mirror. Meanwhile, Matty Dean has returned to La Miranda, having temporarily deserted her for Ethan's respectability, seeming to understand the limitation of assimilation.

The night of the riot leads our protagonists to the Stonewall, emotionally bruised by personal traumas caused by having to negotiate illegality and cultural and social oppression. Before we join them, dancing through their sorrows, the film interrupts their narrative with some documentary footage of Judy's funeral. As we re-join the Stonewall's queers, our perception of their trauma is heightened by this reference, the knowledge of which is sustained as 'Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart' is playing on the jukebox as the police make their fateful raid. The queens move into a more discretionary mode as the cops barge in, but Bostonia restrains one sister from removing Judy's song from the juke box. Later it is Bostonia who first strikes out against an officer, igniting the repressed fury which leads to the mass uprising.

None of the major accounts of the Stonewall riots and the emergence of Gay Liberation in their aftermath directly attribute the uprising to queer grief at the death of Judy Garland, but it is striking that most, like Michael Bronski's, make an association between them:

Judy Garland is at the pinnacle of the gay male pantheon of idolized women ... By the time of her death she had become so much of a gay institution that many New York City gay bars draped themselves with black crepe in mourning. More than 22,000 people paid their respects at the funeral home. Some attribute the Stonewall Riots to the distress gay people felt at Judy's death.<sup>4</sup>

Bronski makes no explicit judgement about an implied causal relationship between Garland's death and Stonewall, but it is clear that for him the telling of the riots requires an account of Judy's funeral and her importance for gay men.

It isn't going to make much sense politically or historically to reduce the complex circumstances which fuelled the uprising to an event which, of itself, is not related to years of brutal oppression; although we may convincingly argue that Judy's life, work and death are clearly granted a symbolic relationship to that oppression. Her death was hardly necessary as the justification of civil disobedience. Finch's film works the idea of Garland's death into a tapestry of other pains and humiliations so as to give our political struggles dignity, but also to insist on our cultural specificity. The emotional context *Stonewall* offers for the riots, refracted through the idea of Judy, remains quintessentially queer: it's a device which substantiates queer culture and eludes any crude reductionism to mandarin discursiveness. Of course La Miranda was standing up for her rights when she re-applied her lipstick, of course the rioting drag

queens, performing their high-kicks in the face of police batons and riot shields, were defending their rights, but much more than that, these acts of dissent are queer acts: they are never *just* political. Moreover, one of the most satisfying elements of *Stonewall* is the way in which it genders male homosexuality so fabulously. These aren't just men sexually into other men, or men in frocks: they're great, gorgeous pouting *Queens*.

Here then, we can see that this epochal event in the history of homosexual people is associated in a functional, if not causal way, to the death of a woman, and the grief her passing elicited in men who adored her. Yet what about the meaning of this symbolic relationship between the reality of being a homosexual man and the veneration of Judy Garland? Why should a culture apparently founded on same-sex desire be so interested in forming an adoring relationship across sex difference?<sup>5</sup> Dennis Altman notes the symmetry in the synchronism of Garland's funeral and the riots, which the *Stonewall* film so perfectly capitalises upon:

It was amidst the exuberance that followed the riots - they began, almost too perfectly symbolic a coincidence, the day Judy Garland, favorite of so many 'queens', was buried - that the New York Gay Liberation Front was founded.<sup>6</sup>

In the impressive documentary series *Over the Rainbow/The Question of Equality*, produced in America by the Testing the Limits Collective, and screened in the UK by Channel Four in 1995, veteran activist Karla Jay notes that:

I do remember that Judy Garland died, and Judy Garland of course was a great icon, particularly of gay men, so a lot of people thought that there was a lot of added tension because people were upset because Judy Garland had died. Personally I think it was a coincidence.

Altman and Jay are understandably circumspect about emphasising the Garland connection: they wish to stress the historical decisiveness of the uprisings, and the repellent conditions endured by homosexual people which caused them. The effect of this circumspection, however, is to dismiss the importance of Judy as a taste preference, at the same time as it is clearly necessary that both bring Garland's funeral into the discussion. Bronski goes much further than these understandings of Judy and similar iconic women stars as mere *taste* for queens:

Gay men responded emotionally to films and to the men in films through identification with women stars. In film semiotics, women are the vehicle of emotion and sexual passion ... There are hosts of female actors, singers and personalities with whom gay men have strongly identified. Some have been practically deified: Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand.<sup>7</sup>

Here there are two possible explanations for this association gay men have with women film stars: that they are the vehicle through which gay audiences could understand and organise their desire of male film stars, and that women stars embodied emotion and sexual passion. Both sound fairly plausible: straight

women and gay men do share a common sexual interest in men, and women's desire is ascribed cultural legitimation and widespread representation, so desiring men through an identification with similar desires in women would not only give gay men a much wider range of places to locate culturally, but would also provide a potentially greater diversity of narratives with which to make sense of that desire. Yet what about women being the 'vehicle of emotion and sexual passion' for gay men? Is this level of emotional identification a necessary requirement for desiring men? If this is the case, might we not deduce that gay men's interest in women as the 'vehicle of emotion and sexual passion' is merely a function of our interest in *men* and not in women at all? Or is the expression of passion and emotion an end in itself for gay men, and therefore an imperative of our interest in women and what they stand for in and of themselves? If so, why should homosexually oriented men have any more of an investment in emotions and passion than heterosexual men, who after all, do produce passion in their desire for women? Is all that we share with women our common sexual desire for men? If female stardom is a personal taste, why is it one shared by so many queens, and why is this taste represented as being so emblematic, constitutive even, of queer identities and history?

In 1980, in a volume written by members of London's Gay Left Collective, Richard Dyer and Derek Cohen offered terms that widened this understanding of gay men's interest in women. Their chapter is divided into two sections, 'Traditional Gay Male Culture' and 'Radical Gay Culture', with the former being

mainly the work of Dyer, the latter mainly the work of Cohen. It is in Dyer's section, which questions the association between high cultural taste and homosexual expression, that we find a much more discursive and analytical treatment of gay men's apparent interest in women. He says:

But the rightness of being cultured and hence queer, or vice-versa, went further into an area I still have not disentangled. Somehow to me cultural sensitivity was 'feminine'; and being queer was not being a man - that was why the two went together.<sup>8</sup>

Here there is a suggestion that the association gay men make with women, at a level of investment we may see in the ubiquity of Judy Garland's presence in narratives of Stonewall, arises out of something much more fundamental than a subculturally derived, shared *taste* amongst gay men. Whilst for Bronski an identification with women by queers is the opportunity for experiencing sexual and romantic desire of men, for Dyer there is here a much more profound proposal of queerness and its association with women as a gender refusal, 'not being a man'. Dyer goes on to say:

It is clear that, as I experienced it then, the equation of artistic queerness with femininity downgraded both femininity and men. I negate myself by identifying with women (hence refusing my biological sex), and then put myself down by internalising the definition of female qualities as inferior ...<sup>9</sup>

There are complex historical factors at work here: Dyer is referring to attitudes to which he was subject at a point before he became active in gay and women's politics; yet his self-directed criticism also bears the marks of Gay Liberation anti-sexist politics of the late seventies, whose stance on camp is noted by Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty:

In its 'closeted', less overtly political forms, camp has frequently been denigrated and maligned as self-oppressive and misogynistic ever since the Stonewall rebellion of 1969 made gay culture more publicly visible on the evening of Judy Garland's funeral.<sup>10</sup>

Yet it is too easy to reproduce presumptive cultural narratives:

... Yet, with the women's and gay movements, it became possible to turn these values on their heads while preserving that art-gayness-femininity link.<sup>11</sup>

For Dyer, it is the *proximity* of Gay Liberation politics and feminist politics that enables a questioning ownership of gay tastes and practices in which we can see the formulation of gender dissent. This questioning is also characteristic of Dyer's assessment of camp, in an article first published in *Playguy*, where he talks about the gay practice of calling men 'she':

Calling gay men 'she' means I don't think of them, or myself, as straight men (with all that that implies). But given the actual situation of women in society, and given that however hard I try, there's still plenty of male chauvinism about me, there is

something rather suspect about this habit ... I'd rather gay men identified with straight women than with straight men.<sup>12</sup>

Later, in *Heavenly Bodies* published in 1986, Dyer used a variety of first-hand accounts of gay admiration for Judy Garland to set up a complex analysis of how she signified as star, and how queer reading set up a series of empathies through which she was accessible as ordinary, and yet sufficiently stellar and beleaguered to symbolise both the frustration of queerness, and its resilience.<sup>13</sup> Dyer makes a persuasive and influential insistence upon the social and cultural contingency of gay adoration of Judy.

Despite the prevarications in Stonewall narratives, which minimise the constitutive effects of Garland's funeral upon the birth of Gay Liberation, Judy's very ubiquity within these accounts, if only to be dismissed in favour of more weighty considerations, offers us a very substantial marker of the importance of relationships between gay men and women. But what kind of relationship is this? Why has the adoration of strident, emotionally resilient, privileged, tenacious and plucky women become so powerfully understood as a cultural expression of men who sexually desire other men? What does this tell us about gay men? What *is* homosexuality when it is the practice of an identification with women? Dyer's work, and that of Michael Bronski, enables us to situate such questions in a context cleared of pathological debris, where we may draw upon a whole range of negotiations which validate gay practice. Elsewhere however, we may not find that much lucid discussion of gay men's identification with

women that advances on this pioneering work and begins to answer the kinds of question I offer here. This is not to say that much of the work which has been done on this kind of queer iconography is not valuable: for example, during the early 1990s there was considerable, often highly politicised, discussion by gay men on both sides of the Atlantic about the suitability of that Ambitious Blonde, Madonna, as a representative of our identificatory practices in relation to women.<sup>14</sup> Rather than address the issue of gay men's relationships with women, both iconic and fictional, and with real people, many critics and academics have engaged with the complex question of camp, which we may understand as a performance mode for handling hostile cultural conditions, and which often involves some level of female identification.<sup>15</sup> Others have approached the notion of gay male effeminacy or drag performances as a strategic homosexual expression.<sup>16</sup> Both of these approaches gain further discussion in later chapters: they clearly inform a territory that seems to be constituted by gay men's expressions of gender refusal, gender indeterminacy and gender de-naturalisation. Yet we still lack analysis which systematically maps the conditions through which relationships between gay men and women are meaningful, and relates the formation of such relationships to questions about the nature of gender, and the nature of homosexuality itself. As Alex Doty has noted, 'clearly, we need more popular and academic mass culture work that carefully considers feminine gay and other gendered queer reception practices.'<sup>17</sup> This book attempts to address this need.

## FAGS, HAGS AND QUEER SISTERSHIP

The title of this book is provocative on several counts. The reference to sistership appropriates a designation of familial relationships between women, and applies it to relationships conducted by gay men, and in the process exhibits an exercise of power, which is a function of my maleness and intellectual privilege. Similarly, the use of the word fag may upset those gay men who feel that we should always refer to ourselves in respectable or dignified terms. Bollocks to that: as I make clear in this book, our desire for respectability is an assimilationist trap, and I reject it. I'm not a decent homosexual, I'm a flaming fag.

The use of the word hag is more problematic, particularly in the context of fag, and it is not my intention to be insulting towards those women who associate themselves with gay men, far from it. However, in aligning themselves with gay culture, or with feminism, women reject particularly dominant, respectable notions of femininity and femaleness; effectively they are undertaking acts of gender dissent. This is the context in which Mary Daly refers to women as Hags in her *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, as women contesting patriarchal ideas of womanhood, who create Hag-ography or Hag-ology, and this seems to me to be an appropriate use of the word in this context; I will go on to argue that women who bond with gay men do so as a form of political resistance.<sup>18</sup> I am not unaware that my use of the term hag here will solicit

(Radical) feminist dismay. Marginal and oppositional positions across a spectrum of identities and experiences are compelled to jostle for cultural space: different kinds of identities, invoking gender, class and ethnic categories all inhabit similar and overlapping spaces. All of our articulations necessarily invoke the identities and positions of others. We have a responsibility to allow such jostling to challenge our own complicity with the oppressions of others: that is one of the key projects of this book, to examine the ways in which the oppression of women and the oppression of gay men are structurally linked. However, I am never going to be able to articulate myself in a way which will ventriloquise any form of feminism, and I don't want to try. I want to use feminism not to gain the approval of feminist critics, but to assess the ways in which my own practices (and those of other gay men) can be contextualised and understood through the knowledge they produce. My intention in this book is to engage as incisively as possible with the gender politics of both women and men.

Yet this book is about (largely male) gay culture, and terms such as hag and fag have had meaning in this context, and I want to associate my discussions here with those kinds of subcultural discourse, not to necessarily condone them, but to address them. The call to sistership has been an important affirmation in many feminist strategies, as I will go on to discuss in the second chapter; again, this use of the idea of Sistership and queerness is not without precedent or relevance in gay subculture. As we have seen, Richard Dyer has suggested that

the process by which gay men designate each other as 'she' is about expressing an identification against straight men and *with* straight women. Amongst the collegial and formal acknowledgements in Alex Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer* lies one which calls upon the honorary sistership of those two little girls from Littlerock and thanks a friend (queer sister?) who's 'the Lorelei to my Dorothy.'<sup>19</sup>

In his passionate and politically fierce eulogy to Vito Russo, 'Right On, Girlfriend!', Douglas Crimp picks up many of the issues raised by speakers such as Larry Kramer, Arnie Kantrowitz and David Dinkins at Russo's memorial service in 1990 and uses them as the opportunity to assess strategies of activism used by gay people during the AIDS emergency.<sup>20</sup> Crimp reports that Kramer used the memorial as an opportunity to affirm Vito Russo's commitment to AIDS activism by lambasting the decision by AmFAR to hold a benefit screening of the recently released film *Silence of the Lambs*, on the grounds of its representation of the mass-murderer, Jame Gumb as a 'gay man'. Crimp's essay covers a number of issues germane to Kramer's criticism and related to the contemporary context of AIDS activism, but he concludes with an incisive consideration of the differing, and contesting, responses lesbians and gay men have had to *Silence of the Lambs* and its star, the lesbian icon Jodie Foster. Crimp's deliberations return to the cultural context of the memorial service, and several times he marks Vito Russo's 'unashamed worship of Judy Garland'. Crimp does not specify the identity of the girlfriend he salutes in the title of his piece:

by their name, gender or sexual orientation. We may deduce that Crimp's 'girlfriend' is Russo, the adored film critic who 'pointed his finger at queers only to tell us how much he loved us and to praise our courage.'<sup>21</sup> The girlfriend certainly isn't Jodie Foster, nor even Larry Kramer or Mayor Dinkins, but 'she' might be Judy Garland:

...Vito's was a feistier kind of dignity, not Jodie's idea of dignity but Judy's, a survivor's dignity. If we really want to honor Vito's memory - as a film scholar and movie buff, as a queer, an activist, and a friend - we shouldn't forget that he loved Judy, and that his identification with her made *him* queer, not her.<sup>22</sup>

In the kinds of relationships constituted in the use of 'she' by gay men referring to each other, and in Doty's fantasy of he and his friend as the Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell characters from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, as well as in Crimp's designation of Vito Russo as his girlfriend (and/or of Judy Garland as Vito Russo's girlfriend), femininity or womanliness is used as a marker of affiliations which resist heterosexualised manhood. It is my project here to investigate the kinds of representation made by gay men who would reject identifications with straight men. These kinds of representations would seem to call upon a kind of bonding which I initially refer to as queer sistership, in the spirit of gay men's long-standing affirmations of solidarity with one another expressed through feminine designations; in the second chapter I theorise such acts of sistership as heterosocial bonding, a term I introduce to signify how queer sistership resists male homosocial subjectivity. In as far as this designation of sistership is

controversial, this is intentional: these investigations will attempt to be as candid and as self-reflexive as possible about the effects of gay male bonding with women. This enquiry is not conducted through an analysis of sociological relationships between groups of gay audiences and specific star images, but it attempts to uncover some of the structural conditions that shape these relationships by assessing the kinds of knowledge reproduced through specific texts, and the kinds of contests enacted over the meanings of those texts.

The methodological tool used in this investigation is cultural materialism, whereby texts, in the form of literature, television and film, but also reviews, interviews and other cultural artefacts, are themselves seen as instances of cultural reproduction. Textual material offers relatively tangible opportunities for making an assessment of the conditions through which knowledge is being reproduced. Cultural materialism assumes that no text can adequately account for the culture which it represents: that is, its representation of that culture will not be coherent, and will not be able to contain all the possibilities it necessarily brings into play. As the social order reproduces itself it cannot but throw up contradiction and conflict. It is the job of culture to produce knowledge with which to handle that level of complication: more reactionary artefacts may strive to explain away contradiction and abrasive conditions, smoothing away incoherence to attain plausibility; whilst more radical and oppositional interests may attempt to maximise the effect of incoherence and contradiction. It is very important to assess the conditions for interpretation by analysing not only

texts themselves, but the debates they attract, and the criticism with which their meaning is managed. Systems of knowledge in which we make sense of our lives abound with what have been called faultlines, that are a product of abrasion between often competing locations of authority.<sup>23</sup>

This is not a book about star icons, nor is it a history of divas, dames, bitches, martyrs, sirens, victims, bombshells, nymphettes, goddesses, tramps, vamps and tarts beatified by gay men. Rather, what I want to do is to try and understand the nature of gay men's interest in women, and demonstrate the importance of gender in understanding gay identities. I'm not after a big, totalising history, but a more detailed, intimate account of relations and structures. These concerns are pursued through four chapters, each of which works to historically and politically situate its arguments. The first chapter uses the contests enacted by disparate constituencies over the meanings of Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire* to look at the models available for understanding gay men's representation of women. 'From Pathology to Gender Dissent' tracks a number of different reading strategies that have been deployed by hostile dominant critics, feminist critics, queer avant-garde performers, gay academics and gay subcultural audiences in their investments in *Streetcar*. The chapter concludes with a new reading which attempts to exploit gay understandings of the relationship between Williams and his character of Blanche DuBois, by associating them with a de-naturalisation of male power, that facilitates an incisive critique of heterosexuality and an alignment with the interests of

women. The second chapter takes up the questions about male power and the structure of heterosexuality from the first and maps out some of the conceptual and political struggles which have organised our understanding of feminist politics and gay politics. It attempts to understand in detail the structural relationship between straight men, women and gay men by undertaking a detailed consideration of male homosocial narratives and the functionality within them of women and queerness. This chapter uncovers heterosocial tendencies which may offer a model for understanding relationships between women and gay men. The latter half of the book then attempts to apply this model to representations which seem deliberately to make this affiliation as described in 'Heterosocial Tendencies'. Chapter three notes the extent to which straight women attempt to form alliances with gay men, and looks in detail at the representations made of lesbians and gays in the American situation comedy *Roseanne*, which has a considerable queer address. The analysis of *Roseanne* processes the extent to which heterosocial dissent is a function of faultlines within narratives of male homosociality. The fourth and final chapter looks at the work of gay director and writer Pedro Almodóvar in order to judge the extent to which gay male representations of women are able to overcome homosocial narratives (and the inducements these make to gay men to assimilate themselves within patriarchal interests) and make promising and useful heterosocial affiliations.

<sup>1</sup>Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p.2.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994).

<sup>3</sup>Throughout this work I have tried to be historically accurate about the use of terminology with which people attracted to their own sex, and people who publicly identify as such, have labelled themselves, and have been labelled by powerful social institutions, such as the psychiatric profession. The term 'homosexual' has carried with it connotations of the pathologisation by those medical professions that have used it, and has as a result, been used with some caution by gay men and lesbians themselves; however, the term is also useful for references that cover disparate historical moments and political alignments: in these instances I have used it. 'Gay' refers to those formations of identity which arose out of the Gay Liberation Movement that emerged as the subcultural organisation of anger unleashed in the Stonewall riots of 1969. 'Queer' refers either to generally disparaging notions of homosexuality before Stonewall (although, like 'Faggot' and 'Queen', 'Queer' also has a celebratory context for pre-Stonewall homosexuals), or to particular political formations of homosexuality made since the early 1990s. Each of these contexts will be elaborated upon in the relevant chapters.

<sup>4</sup>ibid, p.103.

<sup>5</sup>It is clearly important to note some definitions upon which I am resting these discussions, and the ones that follow. I take sex and sex difference to refer to

the physical and physiological distinctions between different sorts of people that we refer to as men and women. Sexual orientation is the choice of sexual partner, not necessarily a function of sex and gender, but often understood as such. I understand gender to be the manifestation of a role which negotiates the differential access to cultural and social power ascribed to sex difference, usually organised in terms of heterosexual formations of femininity and masculinity, and not necessarily related to sexual orientation, but often understood as such. In as far as each of these terms arises out of a culture which is not inert, then obviously each becomes dependent on the other. Once you shift one term, cultural knowledge - all the knowing that we have - shifts or inverts all the others. I take it as axiomatic that gender is an ideological formation arising out of a contest between powerful narratives that naturalise a hetero-patriarchal relationship between sex, orientation and gender, and resistant, oppositional and dissident arrangements which disrupt, displace and interrogate this naturalisation. Particular enactments of gender roles are not the exclusive purview of either biological physical sex, or of any sexual orientation, although powerful ideological formations would make such as understanding precarious and necessarily an act of dissent against hetero-patriarchal naturalisation.

<sup>6</sup>Dennis Altman, *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Avon, 1971), p.118.

<sup>7</sup>Bronski, *Culture Clash*, p.95.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Dyer & Derek Cohen, 'The Politics of Gay Culture', in Gay Left Collective (eds), *Homosexuality: Power and Politics* (London: Alison & Busby, 1980), p.178.

<sup>9</sup>ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Corey K. Creekmur & Alexander Doty, 'Introduction', in Creekmur & Doty (eds), *Out in Culture: Lesbian, Gay and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp.3-4. Note again how discussion of the Stonewall riots necessitates, for queer commentators, the ubiquitous commentary about Garland's funeral.

<sup>11</sup>Dyer & Cohen, 'The Politics of Gay Culture', p.178.

<sup>12</sup>Richard Dyer, 'It's being so camp as keeps us going', reprinted in Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p.136.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp.141-194.

<sup>14</sup>See Lisa Frank & Paul Smith (eds), *Madonnarama: Essays on Sex and Popular Culture* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1993) and Michael Musto, 'Immaculate Connection', reprinted in Creekmur & Doty (eds), *Out in Culture*, pp.427-436. My own MA dissertation written in 1991 and titled 'Queer Icons: Women, Stardom and Gay Subculture' attempted to investigate gay men's investment in star iconography by situating Madonna in the context of the adoration of earlier icons like Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe.

<sup>15</sup>As indicative, see Andy Medhurst 'Pitching Camp', *City Limits*, May 10-17 1990; Medhurst, 'Batman, Deviance and Camp', in Roberta E. Pearson & William

Uricchio (eds), *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Medhurst, 'Camp', in Medhurst & Sally Munt (eds) *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Cassell, 1997); Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.307-325; Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.1-16; Jack Babuscio, 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility', in Richard Dyer (ed.) *Gays and Film* (London: BFI, 1977); Andrew Britton, 'For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp', *Gay Left*, 7, pp.11-14.

<sup>16</sup>Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994); Roger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonators in the Performing Arts* (London: Cassell, 1994); Kris Kirk & Ed Heath, *Men in Frocks* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1984); Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>Alexander Doty, *Making Things perfectly Queer*, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, pp.14-17.

<sup>19</sup>ibid, p.x.

<sup>20</sup>Douglas Crimp, 'Right On, Girlfriend!', in Michael Warner (ed.) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup>ibid, p.309.

<sup>22</sup>ibid, p.318.

<sup>23</sup>Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).