

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **HETEROSOCIAL TENDENCIES**

#### **A Case of Sexuality or Gender? Feminism and Queer theory**

In order to understand more fully the nature of the fascination much gay male culture has with women, I want to explore the relationship between homosexuality and gender, and the conditions through which discourses of sex and sexuality relate to discourses of gender and feminism. Although the rhetoric and ideology of gay liberation has been deeply indebted to that of the developing women's movement during the late sixties and seventies, and indeed, continues to be influenced by feminist agendas, there is something of a discontinuity between epistemologies of gender and those of sexuality. This discontinuity is itself played out in conflicts amongst diversely situated feminists, many of whom have themselves been influenced by the political and cultural trajectories of gay politics: this is particularly the case in the area of lesbian feminism, which from the birth of the contemporary women's movement has been positioned ambiguously in relation to heterosexual feminism and gay male politics; of late this ambiguity has become manifest as tensions between so-called libertarian and radical feminists, which have become polarised around differing agendas: one which privileges sexuality and the other which privileges gender.<sup>1</sup>

All politics of sexuality, whether they be radical or libertarian, feminist, Foucauldian, feminist-Foucauldian, queer, essentialist or constructionist privilege some system of erotic desire and sexual practice and pleasure (whether strategically, historically, theoretically, biologically or culturally instated) as the terms through which identities and individuals are controlled and constituted within discourse, or through which individuals, subcultures and dissident activities may re-constitute or transgress social organisation. Such a politics of sexuality came into an ascendancy through the feminist 'sex wars' of the 1970s and 80s and has of late gained institutional authority through the virtual ubiquity of the work of Foucault, himself a gay male s/m practitioner. These developments have enriched the field of radical politics, but have had the effect of throwing feminism into a series of theoretical deadlocks that have precipitated activist stasis, and enabled the dispersed Queer politics to become a somewhat aimless prescription of radical individualism and apolitical pleasure-seeking, because it has not been able to address the tensions of which it is a product.

Gayle Rubin's essay 'Thinking Sex' has become something of a landmark in the evolution of these debates, particularly as it has been interpreted as a retraction of her earlier, and seminal, work, 'The Traffic in Women'.<sup>2</sup> In the later work Rubin writes: 'feminist thought simply lacks angles of vision which can encompass the social organizations of sexuality.'<sup>3</sup> This later position Teresa de Lauretis characterises as one concerned with a *non-gendered* notion of sexuality, centred

around 'the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions.'<sup>4</sup> Such work has found expression in debates that cut across earlier allegiances of gender and sexual preference: in work on pornography, sadomasochism, perversion, drag, performativity, promiscuity, trans-gender, camp, role-playing, bisexuality, and gay and lesbian history, so-called libertarian and radical positions have become entrenched, but all the while foregrounding sexuality - desire - based analysis.<sup>5</sup> There is, as ever, a problem with making assertions about such culturally-loaded terms. The notion of desire that has arisen through the ascendancy of a politics of sexuality is one specifically concerned with desire as pleasure, rather than desire as the means for reproduction; it is a politics which sees, in other words, pleasure as the *point* of desire, rather than reproduction - which is perhaps the governing principle of Freudian accounts of sexuality: reproduction is the purpose, pleasure the perversion. Multi-gender, diversely practising, diversely identified constituencies that emerged out of these debates coalesced for what now appears to be a brief (and highly mythologised) time in the activist Queer politics of the early 1990s, which emerged, particularly in America, as the second wave of gay cultural responses to the urgency of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.<sup>6</sup>

Even those feminists for whom Foucault is a fruitful, but *carefully* deployed theorist, the terms of discussion remain embedded in eroticism and sexual practice,<sup>7</sup> or lead to assertions of the body as but a function of the axes along and through which

sexuality and sex are theorised: 'Bodies are understood in relation to the production, transmission, reception and legitimation of knowledge about sexuality and sex.'<sup>8</sup> This seems somewhat at odds with Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland's assertion of the body as the site of feminism's struggle to attain some measure of control for women (from men) - a gender based struggle encompassing a range of conflicts upon material grounds where women are oppressed, including (but not encompassing) their sexual desire.<sup>9</sup> Feminist theorists such as Ramazanoglu and Holland, Jana Sawicki, and others<sup>10</sup> identify Foucault's usefulness in conceiving of power in sophisticated ways that transcend totalising notions of patriarchy or capital. Foucauldian conceptualisations have facilitated analyses of how identities and bodies are effects of power, of discourse; but as Sandra Lee Bartky points out:

Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines which produce a modality of embodiment which is peculiarly feminine.<sup>11</sup>

For all the familiarity, even ubiquity, of such criticism of Foucault, that gender blindness has nevertheless continued to influence the trajectory of sexual and gender politics and theory. Domna Stanton's introduction to the collection *Discourses of Sexuality* sets out pretty comprehensively the emergence and evolution of studies of sexuality, and its relation to feminism, history and literary studies.<sup>12</sup> In a discursive terrain which does not facilitate differentiation of the category of woman - in order to identify clusters of power through which that category is experienced as oppressive - gender becomes meaningless, and it is thus understandable how sexual politics has become sublimated to the politics of sexuality - of *desires*, perverse or otherwise. Yet clearly it is insufficient to ascribe the material oppression of women to the results of their perverseness *as women*. This is the epistemological tendency endemic in the drive towards privileging sexuality as the pre-eminent genealogical frame of reference in work on power, identity and the body.<sup>13</sup> Reinscribing authoritative structures within camp rhetoric, flouting the category of normality by reversing its terms and celebrating perversity, has very different effects for gay men than for lesbians or heterosexual women; even for gay men, such strategies of transgression limit the scope of our potential political effectiveness. If we want to understand the attraction women and female identification hold for gay men, categories of knowledge that are limited to sexuality and desire as eroticism and the concomitant idea of perversity, are insufficient; what such relationships express are the formation of subcultural understanding, history and identities through patterns of bonding, association and

identification that are, of course, structured by the terms of sexual practice (and are in turn constrained and controlled through them), but are not entirely circumscribed in terms of that sexual practice alone, whether deviant, celebrated or perverse.

It is my contention that the extent to which the very plausibility of gay male identity has become utterly dependent on these diverse politics of sexuality as eroticism is inhibiting to the continuing dissident potential of those possible gay male identities. In his recent book, *Homos*, Leo Bersani assesses the radical possibilities in gay identity. He asks:

Should a homosexual be a good citizen? It would be difficult to imagine a less gay-affirmative question at a time when gay men and lesbians have been strenuously trying to persuade straight society that they can be good parents, good soldiers, good priests.<sup>14</sup>

Bersani cruises through an emerging alternative canon of gay male literary immoralists in a search for figures to inspire and question gay identity: Gide, Proust, Genet.<sup>15</sup> It is in Genet that Bersani's search culminates, in a fascinating and subtle analysis of Nazi erotics, aestheticism, rimming and anal intercourse in the novel *Funeral Rites*. The figures in whom Genet symbolises the radical nihilism that Bersani celebrates in *Funeral Rites*, a couple who apparently renounce intimacy as the precondition for an identity between the penetrator and the penetrated,

uncover 'a fundamental sameness between them - as if they were relay points in a single burst of erotic energy toward the world. Relationality here takes place only within sameness' (p.170). This is an idea not dissimilar to Sue Ellen Case's butch-femme lesbian couple who, she argues, inhabit the same subject position. Bersani offers the symmetry of gay sex as what Jonathan Dollimore would call a 'transgressive reinscription' of fertility and reproduction, as the German soldier Erik fucks the young collaborator Riton from behind (crucially not completing the 'perfect oval of a merely copulative or familial intimacy' p.165), they come 'not with each other but, as it were, *to the world*, and in so doing they have the strange yet empowering impression of looking at the night as one looks at the future.' (p.166) as, Bersani notes, does Genet's Hitler, discharging onto his enemies' territory millions of young German males, 'with his stomach striking their backs and his knees in the hollows of theirs.' (p.167) For Bersani, the radicalism of Genet's text is that in the solipsistic circulation of *jouissance* through the medium of a Führer, absolute narcissism ... opens a path onto the world, a world emptied of relations but where relationality has to be reinvented if the dangerously overloaded self is to escape the fatally orgasmic implosions of Hitler's soldiers. (p.171)

As Bersani acknowledges, this is territory which is politically precarious, at the very least.<sup>16</sup> In terms of the particular concerns under discussion here, it is the vision of the bugging couple as an undifferentiated sameness, a symbolisation of potential mutuality, that I am concerned with. This sameness, a very phallic

sameness, could be said to embody the realm of those very authorities beyond which transgression seeks to articulate, to imagine. The reinforcement of such sameness represents the same terms through which the security of gender hierarchies are maintained. Genet's transgressive buggers, Erik and Riton, are exalted through phallic terms (emissions, penetrations, ejaculations) which identify Erik's penis, the *penetrator*, as symbolically central and not the *penetrated* anus of Riton: whatever nihilistic reimaginings the couple enable are represented through Riton's subjection to Erik's penetration: it is from this point of masculinity that 'absolute narcissism' offers a doubling that will 'open a path onto the world...emptied of relations'. However glorified the intercourse, it is still intelligible - for Bersani, radical even - in phallic terms; the value of the buggery lies in the penetrating activity of the penis: the buggered arse is merely a vehicle for the performance of that penetration.

It seems that the kind of gay man Bersani wishes to constitute, and wishes to celebrate as transgressive resistance lines up with what Teresa de Lauretis, borrowing from Irigaray, has described as the *hommo-sexual*.<sup>17</sup> In her authoritative essay 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation' de Lauretis attempts to constitute the discursive knots which inhibit the elaboration of lesbian representation. In order to facilitate this project she takes up Luce Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference as a patriarchal formulation. Sexual difference, she argues, does not describe or constitute gender, but rather inscribes maleness

and measures womanhood as the distance from that maleness, and as a function of it. De Lauretis posits hommo-sexuality as the representation made of unified phallic power by this system of sexual (in)difference. She wants to

remark the conceptual distance between the former term, homosexuality, by which I mean lesbian (or gay) sexuality, and the diacritically marked hommo-sexuality, which is the term of sexual indifference, the term (in fact) of heterosexuality.<sup>18</sup>

For all Bersani's resistance of good citizenship, his notion of a political male homosexuality ('absolute narcissism') elides the kinds of understandings of gender and homosexuality lesbian feminists like de Lauretis offer, and in doing so he posits that resistance as both masculinist (hommo-sexual) in its phallicism, and counter-intuitive, oppositional even, to feminist agendas apparently adjacent to our own. Bersani's refusal of good citizenship is in principle highly laudable, but the terms of this refusal collapse the distance de Lauretis opens between hommo-sexuality and homosexuality: the path to sameness and equivalence is one forged through an even more intense fixation upon our masculinity, our ability to penetrate. Queerness is no longer a dissident negotiation of hetero-patriarchal representational systems, but a virile embracing of them. These kinds of celebratedly penile, penetrating formulations which Bersani makes are at odds with the many gay male identities which make the performance of effeminacy the basis for a refusal of good citizenship, and which make that refusal a gender dissent. Whilst Bersani's version of the gay man clearly has strong currency in the

iconography and practice of much gay male sexuality and identification, that currency is a function of his figure's incorporative manifestation of hommo-sexuality: as the ventriloquism of a powerful, patriarchal formation we should expect such practices to remain residual and attractive. As a radical sex terrorist Bersani's hommo-sexual queer is not only elusive because of his alignment with the very centres of Western political authority (militarism, phallicism, Fascism) but is an obstacle to the opportunities gay men have for engaging with political projects, such as feminism, symmetrical to our own in their diverse attempts to resist good citizenship.

One of the central problems contemporary feminist theory has returned to is a post-Foucauldian tendency for models of power and ideology to become so elaborate as to inhibit the possibility of being able to imagine resistant subject positions. Sue-Ellen Case cites de Lauretis's essay 'The Technology of Gender' as a perceptive illumination of the entrapment dilemma. Case suggests that the lesbian butch-femme couple is a resistant position that eludes entrapment in both theoretical and practical terms; her principle example being the theatrical work of Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw in *Split Britches*, whose collaboration with Bloodlips in *Belle Reprise*, was discussed in the previous chapter.

Case argues that the lesbian butch-femme couple inhabit one subject position. Her intervention, characterised by a kind of performative campy panache, attempts to

imagine gender roles in lesbian relations as eluding the structural iniquity of heterosexual ones. Case asserts that lesbian butch-femme is outside ideology, but however daring such a strategic announcement is, it ultimately re-anticipates the entrapment it attempts to circumvent. None of us can conceive of ourselves outside ideology. Indeed, we might suggest that all subject positions are relational; for example, as depicted in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, heterosexual femininity is a function of masculine authority and the need to illicit male desire and to signal an appropriate passivity so as to gain affirmation and heterosexual privilege. This is something that de Lauretis's term sexual (in)difference recognises, that cultural authorities produce one kind of identity, in relation to which all others are complementary, supplementary, functional. Yet clearly Case has a point: lesbianism has a fundamentally ambiguous relationship to phallic patriarchal authority, where that authority is often symbolically valuable (erotically and emotionally) whilst remaining structurally absent. As with any other dissident arrangement the possibilities of breakthrough are momentary, precarious - not all butch-femme arrangements can be radical in their effect - particularly given the weight of *internal* and external homophobia they must bear; that homophobia itself being an instrument of the patriarchal constitution of gender roles.<sup>19</sup>

Bersani's attempts to develop a gay identity that refuses good citizenship fail because his sense of queerness collapses back into hommo-sexuality. His opportunity for imagining oppositional gay maleness is already foreclosed by his

naturalisation of that maleness as a function of a very penile-centred, penetrating subjectivity. It would seem that we need an alternative model through which to appreciate gay men's place within wider systems of gender, and with which we can find political promise. Despite the potential Bersani reveals for gay male identities to merely reproduce sexual indifference, gay male gender identifications do seem to have a potential to align themselves with women against hommo-sexual authority. Tennessee Williams's work in *A Streetcar Named Desire* illuminates that potential. Yet we lack a model for understanding the conditions through which such identification may take place, and with which we may judge the effectiveness of such a relation.

In the critical culture with which Williams's work has been surrounded we can see how far gay male interventions rest on a terrain vigorously policed by ideological mechanisms whose effect is continually to fragment marginal affiliations or reposition them in order to reproduce already powerful formations. Whilst many representations effected by gay men are misogynistic, the recuperative way in which many critics have shielded their patriarchal interests and displaced their own misogynistic agendas by hurling such accusations at gay material, such as *Streetcar*, makes the concept an insufficiently sophisticated tool with which to gain critical access to the axes of gender (sexual indifference) and sexuality at the same time. Sue-Ellen Case's work shows us how crucial it is that we resist slippage into entrapment, but it also shows us that we cannot escape ideology, however difficult

it may be to simultaneously come to terms with the complexity and contradiction of cultural formation, and maintain a commitment to uncovering dissident potential in the midst of such an imbroglio.

As indicated in the title of this book, I want to introduce the notion of *heterosocial* bonding to describe gay male<sup>20</sup> gender identification; that heterosociality constituting a strategic negotiation of hetero-patriarchal male *homosociality* as theorised by Eve Sedgwick. In choosing such a term I want to recognise the structural nature of affiliations made between women and gay men so as to foreclose purely frivolous understandings of our relations, and to validate the institutional difficulties such bonds endure, as well as the dissent potential they hold. The distinction of *heterosocial* is intended not only to indicate that such bonds are operative between different sexes, but that for each party they take place under literally heterogeneous conditions, produced as these bonds are formed across the opposed axes of sexuality and gender. As I shall discuss in some detail, male homosocial relationships exist as a function of what de Lauretis calls sexual indifference, and they serve to uphold the integrity of homo-sexuality, the identification with masculinity as sameness, unity, subjectivity. Bonds between women and gay men not only work to offset the authority of such patriarchal sameness, but in their very enaction they make negotiations of difference. The choice of the term *heterosocial* is important in part because it enables a differentiation between the role of women in the arrangement of hetero-

normative male bonds (which are an expression of hommo-sexuality and work to enforce sexual indifference) and the role of women in gay male female identifications, the circulation of which may embody hommo-sexual potential, but which attempt a resistance of the phallic unification of sexual indifference and which enact dissent upon the inevitability of hommo-sexual maleness. Would it be fair to say that all men circulate images of women and associate with them in the same way? Are the purposes of each transaction the same? How are gay male identities embedded in patriarchal power, and how can we disrupt such relations? In order to begin to propose the possibility of heterosocial bonding, it is clearly crucial to first examine in detail the constitution of homosocial bonds, and how these may relate to notions of gay male identity, 'hommo-sexuality', penetration and sameness.

### **Homosocial Regimes, Male Power and Not Getting Fucked**

In her ground breaking work *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick suggests ways of understanding the proximity between sexual and social desire between men. She offers a model in the form of a continuum with men loving men at one end and men promoting the interests of men at the other. In her approach gay men, and the possibility of homosexual desire, lie at the heart of male patriarchal authority: the proximity of homosexual desire acting as a constantly invoked abjection from which men must flee at all

costs. This desire acts as a 'prohibitive structural obstacle' that is strenuously suppressed through the demonisation of faggotry, and the exchange of women: which is the object of such structures. Sedgwick goes on to assert that, 'homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage.'<sup>21</sup> Part of Sedgwick's breakthrough is her suggestion that the homophobia of patriarchy does not merely have a regulatory imperative for homosexual desires, but that it potentially facilitates dominant 'definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution.' (BM p.86) Homophobic anxieties about where particular men may have cause to position their bonds on the homosocial continuum render them vulnerable and bind them into structures of patriarchal authority.

Informed by the work of Foucault, and emerging at a point of intersection between academic feminism and gay politics, Sedgwick's work suggests terms through which the structural importance of male homosexuality within patriarchal authority lies not in the fact of homosexual desire itself, but in the terms through which the meanings of such desire are embedded in the functioning of gender authority. Sedgwick's point is that male heterosexuality is produced through discursive mechanisms that are inherently paradoxical, in that they express a double bind: 'For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being "interested in men."' (BM p.89) In other words, men's relationships with each other are enacted from within an

understanding of the proximity of the dangerous realm of same-sex passion - the negotiations, suppressions and disavowals of that understanding are constitutive of men's mannish relations with other mannish men.

Sedgwick's thesis is useful not only for the conceptualisation of masculinity that it offers (as has been pointed out, its conceptualisation of a female continuum is much less satisfying<sup>22</sup>) but for the strategic importance it credits to gay male negotiation and intervention, for the confidence with which she is able to suggest that the material effects of such dominant discursive processes are not inevitable, but sites of struggle (BM p.90). Sedgwick's further innovation, of course, was to show how homophobic structures work to police, and to *constitute*, the entire spectrum of male relations, and not merely those of an apparent sexual minority. Women are instruments of male power, and functional in allaying homosocial anxiety: the sharing of, or competition for, sexual conquest of women, the sharing of the action of subordinating, being the glue of homosociality at the same time as procuring homophobic reassurance that the crossing of the always-already crossed line has been resisted. In this she rendered new terms to connect anti-homophobia and feminism - not as a corollary, but as an alliance 'most fruitful if it is analytic and unpresuming' (BM p.20).

This progression has historically been a key intervention. As Craig Owens argues, work by some second wave heterosexual feminists - such as Elaine Showalter and

Luce Irigaray, amongst others - before the emergence of contemporary lesbian and gay theoretical work, has been repositioned and represented to form a trend that can be interpreted as suggesting that philosophy, fascism and capitalism itself are driven through homoerotic formations.<sup>23</sup> This proposition was clearly a strategically attractive one, in that it identifies the strength of the bonds through which men act in the interests of men, to the exclusion of women; however such suggestions collapse all men's bonds with each other into structural transactions, and efface the particularity of homosexual desire or cultural dissent: they cannot account for the possibility of male same-sex passion, or the production of homophobia (which would be unnecessary if men acting in the interests of men was functionally secure) nor can they theorise the importance of *exchanging*, rather than merely excluding, women.<sup>24</sup> Owens credits Sedgwick with a definitive insistence against the tendency to assume patriarchal institutions to be hotbeds of homosexuality; actually they are mechanisms for the production of *homophobia*. (p.230) Such mechanisms require the suppression of male same-sex passion through the material exchange, the exploitation, of women. Owens argues that the Freudian proposition that homophobia is caused by the repression of homosexuality elides the active production of homophobia, the fear of homosexuality which necessitates the control of relations with women as the mediation of such fear. Sedgwick's work has also enabled formulations which resist the post-Freudian tendency to collapse the blame for homophobia into (repressed) homosexuality.

Thus we can see that within homosocial structures (heterosexual) women and homosexual men are instruments that enable the constitution of a powerful, homogenous male heterosexuality. Power is retained within the structure by securing bonds of common interest between men, whilst the whole matrix serves the necessity of economic reproduction through the importance of fatherhood and heterosexual procreation. Masculine homosociality is then a coercive mechanism through which men acquire cultural and social power and the patriarchy is reproduced in the interests of capital. The threat of breaking ranks is managed through the active production of misogyny, and the requirement of constant *display*. In order to participate in dominant power men must continuously represent their credentials, and more importantly, represent distance between themselves and the always already present possibility that they will act discontinuously with their own gender interests, and not display their dominance over women. Just in case the impediment of dominant faction membership isn't sufficient motivation, *not* continuously displaying power over women, not re-demonstrating the already implicit understanding of male authority, is continuously conjured as latent homosexuality.

One can then imagine how the vicissitudes of the closet and the coercive power of homosociality conspire to make many homosexual men behave in ways that attempt to display *their* dominance over women. Retreating from the abjection of

public homosexuality and aspiring towards the authority of homosociality necessarily demands the reinforcement of misogyny, for such retreat and aspiration is never secure, even in apparently heterosexual men, never mind co-opted homosexuals: the need for reiteration, for reassurance that can never be absolute, is the strength of homosocial mechanisms. Men who are not *seen* to act in the interests of men are the always ever-present faggot-other, the shadow cast over all male-male bonding. One of Sedgwick's strengths is her theoretical insistence that male heterosexuality is a site of instability, panic and constant reproduction.

However, before going on to assess the extent to which gay male subcultural practice may offer the opportunity to resist homosociality by exploiting and amplifying these instabilities, it seems important to examine more closely the fabric of institutional fantasy upon which homosocial narratives rest. What is it that actually constitutes Sedgwick's 'always-already crossed line' - this circumscription of maleness by a continually conjured abhorrence that is homosexuality? Leo Bersani famously offers an answer when he conjures 'the infinitely...seductive and intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman.'<sup>25</sup> The always-already crossed line is the blurring of fantasy scenarios with which male power eroticises itself - in effect seduces itself into reproducing. Men are encouraged to identify with masculinity - with the ideal homosocial subject, one to whom the display of attractiveness to women is

evident, even hyperbolised; a display through which the potential to subordinate and control women through sexual desire is made apparent. This display, the characteristics which manifest this display, are a man's thing for other men - as a generation of feminist writers have pointed out (unlike femininity, which is for others). Bersani recognises this:

Unfortunately, the dismissal of penis envy as a male fantasy rather than a psychological truth about women doesn't really do anything to change the assumptions behind that fantasy. For the idea of penis envy describes how men feel about having one, and, as long as there are sexual relations between men and women, this can't help but be an important fact *for women*. (p.216)

The gap produced in homosocial formations between the necessity of continually conjuring and aspiring to the efficacy of masculinity, to the trappings of its power, and between over-investing in this fantasy, is the gap in which homosexual-as-subject becomes deeply functional. The difference, for example, between admiring another man because of the largeness of his penis (penis envy) which more fully lives up to the authority of phallicism, and desiring his large penis for yourself so that you may make a more powerful symbolisation of male power and therefore more powerfully dominate women, is conceptually slight for homosocially constituted insiders (straight men) and outsiders (gay man) alike. The ever-present, ever needing to be repressed erotic-subject of male penetration is a consequence of the reliance on the notion of men acquiring power through penetrating others,

and of the need to make an identification with the body image with which that penetration can be effected. Bersani concludes that the transgressive potential of gay sexuality is that it makes material this erotic-object that he calls a 'self-shattering *jouissance*', male penetration. It is this loss of self that men fear, and for which gay men are punished through an association embedded in phallocentrism.

Yet, as Tania Modleski has pointed out, this transgression, the self-shattering sexual moment is 'surprisingly individualistic.'<sup>26</sup> As Modleski shows in her reading of *Lethal Weapon*, much mainstream male culture flirts with the notion of masochistic release: in terms of gender power it isn't much of a transgressive manoeuvre. As part of its ideological matrix, 'phallocentrism has, of course, sought *continually* to instil in women a sense of the value - for them - of powerlessness and of masochism' (p.148-149); furthermore, 'masochism in the *guise* of powerlessness is ... frequently the luxury of empowered beings ... social power and sexual humiliation may coexist quite easily.' (p.149) What Modleski is suggesting is that homosocial structures fracture no more easily around the image of a man with his legs in the air waiting for his self-shattering penetration by another man's penis, than they do when faced with a parodic performance of leather motorcycle drag, as Bersani himself points out (p.207). Bersani's argument, following a Freudian paradigm, carries an ahistorical notion of processes and fears - it offers male behaviour and fantasy as a developmental given, a move that is ultimately inappropriate for the purposes of my argument here. Nevertheless, Bersani's contention about the fear

of anal penetration for men is clearly an insight into a significant point of rupture and disquiet for homosocial structures. The particular processes through which the fear of penetration is conjured as a consequence of male homosocial activity, and managed through the exchange and positioning of others, remains a fertile ground for the exploitation of faultlines available for subcultural manipulation.

### ***Pulp Fiction* : Fucking Butch**

This obsessive return to the dangerous possibility of male anal penetration that is a consequence of clashing dominant fantasies of homosociality remains operative in contemporary popular culture, and is nowhere more dramatically apparent than in the massive commercial cult-crossover hit that is Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. What is extraordinary about the reception and discussion of this film, aside from a lemming-like consensus over its apparent brilliance, is the hegemonic way in which its obsessive return to the motif of male anal penetration has remained unidentified. This is all the more notable when, as we shall see, these motifs are not exactly represented half-heartedly.

There are two scenes in *Pulp Fiction* when the hectic, cartoonish pace of the breakneck dialogue and grotesque black comic violence becomes fractured. The first is the flashback scene when Captain Koons (Christopher Walken) visits a small child, who transpires later to be the boxer, Butch (Bruce Willis). Koons' lengthy

monologue deliberately slows the narrative pace, and acts as a disconcerting segue between two of the four disparate dramas that comprise the film's construction. Koons is returning a gold watch to the child, Butch, which belonged to his father and grand-father. Koons fought in Vietnam with Butch's father, and was later imprisoned in the same POW camp with him. Butch's father held on to the gold watch, a present from his own father, by keeping it in his anus, despite, Koons tells the boy, having dysentery. When Butch's father died he entreated Koons to keep the watch and after the war to find his son and give it to him. Koons was able to hang on to the watch himself, and deliver it, despite being held a prisoner of war, by putting it up his arse. Thus the anus of his father and that of his father's closest friend proves to be the medium for a bonding Butch is able to enact with his father and grandfather through the totem of the watch.

Next we see the narrative purpose of this strange scene, which despite its comic intentions, appears to be too graphic and unbalancing, too protracted and contemplative to actually draw laughs. We return to the present: Butch has won a fight he was paid to lose, and is on the run with his girlfriend, Fabienne. They are in a motel room, and Butch has just realised that Fabienne did not pack his father's gold watch. His fury with her eclipses their earlier romanticism, and he dangerously decides to return home to retrieve his watch, leaving Fabienne frightened and in tears. At home Butch encounters his boss's hitman, Vincent, sat on the toilet with his trousers round his ankles, and has to kill him in order to escape with the watch.

Butch is driving back to Fabienne and the motel, when he comes across Marsellus, the black gangster boss who paid him to throw the fight. Marsellus is crossing the road and Butch unsuccessfully tries to run him over, crashing the car in the process. Marsellus, intent on murder, chases Butch into a pawn shop where both are captured and held hostage at gunpoint by a couple of sadomasochistic gay men. Marsellus is being raped by the men when Butch, who will be raped next, escapes. However, in the midst of his escape Butch hesitates, before considering an array of weapons hung on the wall with which to enact and enforce his return (hammer, baseball bat and chainsaw). These phallic symbols, conveniently placed for Butch, belong to the abject queer rapists; as displayed, inactive objects they would seem to represent the hysterical attempt by the queers to display masculinity: Butch/Willis, as a real Man is able to activate them, to release them from passive display. Butch selects a samurai sword, ritualistically displayed on a lacquered stand, which immediately imbues his return to free Marsellus with intense romantic symbolism. Such nobility is particularly striking as Butch and the man he has chosen to liberate (when he could quite easily leave him there: indeed, this would logically suit the boxer) were but a few moments earlier vigorously intent on killing each other. Homosocial integrity is restored as Butch wields the sword at one cowering faggot who is watching the other raping the gangster. As the first man is cut down, Butch steps aside to allow Marsellus to shoot his rapist between the legs, turning the faggot's groin into a bloody pulp, and representing his castrated non-man queerness, and disavowing the rape.

This bizarre and graphic chain of events is rendered in a much more realistic tone than the earlier hectic dialogue or trendy violence. (One of the most blackly comic scenes in the film, which appears to draw substantial laughter from audiences, shows Vincent the hitman accidentally blowing the back of a man's head off in a car, and his subsequent adventures in cleaning up the car and disposing of what is left of the corpse. This scene is dominated by the charismatic and powerful figure of Mr. Wolf, the fixer (Harvey Keitel), and by a cameo from Tarantino himself - despite its violence and danger then, a scene reassuring enough for the *auteur* to dramatise himself in.) The predicament of our anti-hero appears much more serious and less exhilarating than his earlier adventures. The possibility of being anally penetrated is so inimical that not only must Butch/Willis himself escape, but the empathic fear such an act engenders leads him to rescue his erstwhile foe, embodying an intense romantic symbolism as he does so. The residual power of the homosocial bond, through which men are attached by a suppression of the possibility of becoming womanly, becoming queer, becoming penetrated, overrides Butch's enmity towards Marsellus - expressed earlier in the very same scene by his trying to run over the gangster in a car. Getting run over by a car is better than being buggered. Here the contradictory narratives through which gay male identities are seen to occupy abjection functionally reinforce one another. On the one hand the inimical threat that drives the force of the scene depends not only on the unpleasantness of being raped, being taken against one's will, but

being penetrated, as a man, by another man. Submission not only to rape, but to penetration enforces a relation to queerness - it is to have that negation forced upon you. Here the notion of homosexuality, of abjection, is secured through the idea of passivity, womanliness. On the other hand however, the actual queers in this scene *are the rapists*, they are the aggressors, upon whom the heterosexual hero and villain have innocently stumbled in the course of their entertaining and quite legitimate duel. Here the queer threat is plausible in the same way in which it's meaningful when incited by the religious right as a potential aggressive conversion of the 'innocence' of children: as something predatory, conniving, and lurking in the dark recesses, always ready to entrap. Such is the agility of patriarchal hegemony that both narratives produce functional effects within homosocial structures. The distasteful nature of penetration reminds us that identities which eroticise male penetration are truly queer, truly execrable: the boundary between heterosexuality and otherness is necessary, real. But this is a real and tangible threat (so runs the homosocial logic), because those queers who eroticise anal penetration aren't just passive, they're after yours, they want to inflict it on you too, so you must constantly be on guard, and constantly display that you have a healthy fear of the penetration: you must re-represent the abject nature of it. Backs to the wall, boys.

This rescue of a man, whose death would be convenient for Butch, from the process of becoming abject before his (and the audience's) very eyes, is a

passionate, even romantic, act unlike any other in the film, underscored by the use of the iconographically charged samurai sword as object of the liberation. Furthermore, it is an act only necessary because Butch must recover the totem of his father, a totem that has acquired its poignancy by being kept in the anus of his father and his father's best friend. (It is, of course, also an act which displays Butch's recognition that male penetration is an anathema.) Moreover, the possibility of Butch's rape, of his abjection, is brought about in the first place by the ineptitude of Fabienne, which necessitates Butch's return for the gold watch. This circuit of homosocial bonding, from Butch through Koons to his father and grandfather, is secured by the eroticised abjection of anal penetration, by the stupidity and consequent exclusion of the girlfriend Fabienne, and by the scapegoating of the black gangster, whose abjection at the hands of the queers is tolerable because he's black and because it's preferable to the spectacle of our white everyman-hero, *Die Hard's* John McLane, spread-eagle over a table being buggered. Representations of black male sexuality exhibit the same degree of contradiction and conflict inherent in dominant accounts of homosexuality. Yet the ability of racist hegemonies to thrive on such contradictions makes such hostile representational modes difficult to locate; however we could identify several modes, including a hyper virilisation, a feminising objectification, a suggestion of exotic primitivism and an infantilising gender indeterminacy as being particularly prevalent. Marsellus's rape by the queers in *Pulp Fiction* neatly dovetails these conditions of racist representation with homosocial homophobia. The image of the huge black

gangster bent over the table being buggered by one of the queers secures a reassuring sense for white male audiences of both his objectification before our gaze (thereby quelling fears of his excessively active black male sexuality through the scene of his abjection - feminisation - by a faggot) and, in turn a fixing of the demonisation of gay men as culpable predators rather than the victims of homophobic regimes. Marsellus's exoticism (size, racial identification, mysterious underworld connotations) neatly trades with his maleness to at once raise the threat queers pose to manliness, and keep it at a safe distance from an imputed white male audience.

In *Pulp Fiction* there is a richness and complexity to the bonds, relationships and experience of men with and for men that does not exist for the women characters, of whom there are few, and who exist in solitary narrative circumstances: they relate to, and facilitate the men, but not each other; nor do the men really relate to them, but humour and tolerate them. Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman) is taken on a date by Vincent the hit man, under the instructions of Marsellus, her husband and his boss: their episode leads to a compelling scene in which Mia has overdosed on Vincent's heroin and must be resuscitated with a terrifying adrenaline injection into her heart. Here the film acquires its dramatic *frisson* because of the authority of the absent Marsellus and his relationship with Vincent - if she dies the hit man will be in big trouble: Mia is a the decorative vehicle for a more profound relationship between the men. The foot-long needle Vincent plunges into Mia's chest is a

phallically symbolic violation that punishes her for threatening the relation between Vincent and Marsellus. Similarly *Pulp Fiction's* other women - Jody (Rosanna Arquette), Honey Bunny (Amanda Plummer), and Fabienne (Maria de Medeiros) do not even co-exist in the same narrative strand, never mind have the opportunity to enact meaningful bonds with each other: their purpose is to provide the (hetero)sexual credentials of their men, and facilitate (as Fabienne does) the opportunity for the men to recover dangerous, usually life-threatening scenarios, and thus display their masculine credentials for the edification of homosociality. In recovering his watch, an act necessitated by Fabienne's ineptitude, Butch is able to display his credentials to Vincent (he kills him), Marsellus (he saves him) and - of course - *prevent* them from being *displayed* to the hostile, raping, faggot-others.

In her discussion of the action film *Top Gun*, Tania Modleski notes Klaus Theweleit's discussion of the proximity of violence and sex with women for heterosexual men. This violence stems from 'a fear of dissolution through union with a woman', and this fear 'propels man - or, to use Julia Kristeva's terms, abjects him - into a homosocial relation with other men.'<sup>27</sup> The penetration of woman, that which is to be penetrated, enables the possibility of other penetrations, penetration of men, the unthinkable yet always-present possibility, the leverage that constitutes homosocial relations and renders them interminably unstable. The proximity of such possibilities must be excised through violence - through masculine display -

preferably for the spectatorship of homosocial comrades, and through the identification and demonisation of others, those who are homosexuals, the apparently always-penetrated not-men. Similar themes are self-consciously handled in the stunning film *L.A. Confidential*, with its fastidiously gendered male leads (touchingly, one is bookish, bespectacled and feminised, whilst the other is all Brando poses and snarling butchness). Their powerful romantic affiliation is cemented through a common disgust for corruption, the pomposity of their moral purpose, and the homosocial exchange of a hooker who looks like Veronica Lake (*pur-lease!*) who is a conduit for their barely repressed passions for each other.

We can thus summarise the deployment of homosocial relations. The bonding of men requires the constitution of an inside group from which power can be mobilised. The security of that inside group depends upon the manifestation of outsider-others. Within patriarchal homosociality women are the principal outsiders, the oppression of whom is a necessary condition for the succession of property rights: women are the bearers of children and the opportunity for sexual pleasure, to be exchanged as symbols of potency and value as currency between men; they are also the bearers of future generations through which to secure the ownership of capital, to control in proximate nuclear arrangements, and crucially to facilitate class and racial reproduction. Homosexual men are conjured as the treacherous and barren ever present insider-other through whom the exchange of women breaks down; their existence also blurs the boundaries between who

exhibits phallic power, and who bears it: they are demonised and represented as the inimical possibility of male anal phallic penetration.<sup>28</sup> *Pulp Fiction* also shows us that within such homosocial regimes constructions of black male sexuality operate as both the inside manifestation of a masculine virility which spills over into excess and threat when mapped onto the racially charged homosocial commodification of white women, and thus also operates as outsider-other as well, particularly in the context of white propagation, and attendant fears of miscegenation and racial impurity.

### **Homosocial Dissent, Female Bonding**

The terms of possible dissenting and alternative interventions are diverse - necessarily so given that not only are functionally marginal identities produced and discursively controlled in different ways, but in ways which actively precipitate conflict and disunity *within* those margins. The key problem in Sedgwick's work on homosociality is that she does not 'take responsibility for enunciating'<sup>29</sup> the shape of female homosocial bonds, thereby effacing lesbianism, which is an effect of her assertion that there is a greater continuity between women who act in the interests of women, and women who desire women. This may be the case, and the shape and effects of a female homosocial continuum would certainly be different from the male one that Sedgwick theorises. The gap in Sedgwick's work lies in her failure to suggest that some heterosexual women may actually act in the interests of men, that is, act against the interests of other women (politically, sexually, culturally,

emotionally, psychologically), and thus may functionally require homophobia against lesbianism to naturalise a radical *discontinuity* between women who act in the interests of women and women who desire women. Furthermore, Sedgwick does not accept the significance of substantial lesbian subcultural and political activity which has attempted to open up distance between acquiescence to heterosexual institutions (which have been characterised as precisely not serving the interests of women) and woman-identified cultural assertions as a political intervention in order to resist hetero-patriarchy. The very possibility of Sedgwick's enunciation, in terms of both content and the existence of the space from which to speak, is in no small measure the result of lesbian political and academic intervention. Given the potential that feminist and/or lesbian interventions realise - that women may politically organise in ways that disrupt their functional complicity with male homosocial formations (by refusing and disrupting the authority of masculine sexuality and corresponding social subordination) - it doesn't seem too bold to suggest that there would need to be a corresponding hegemonic production of a radical discontinuity between the appropriation of feminine-heterosexual acquiescence and lesbian-other. If lesbianism promises the refusal of patriarchal control it must be sufficiently reorganised within male hegemonic narratives in a manner that would turn its potentially appealing radical-refusal into a homosocially constituted abjection from which women, in order to properly occupy feminine heterosexuality, must flee and repress, the more to display reassuring obedience, and of course to benefit from the cultural capital

feminine passivity accrues. Heterosexual female homophobia - towards lesbians - is a functional and necessary component of male homosocial formations. As Julia Penelope points out in her intervention into a debate which found articulation in *Lesbian Ethics* in the late 1980s (and which had probably begun in 1970 at the Second Congress to Unite Women when twenty women calling themselves 'Lavender Menace' - later to become Radicalesbians - interrupted the proceedings to protest at homophobia within the feminist movement): 'Lesbians who are committed to personal and social change must not only rid ourselves of the HS [heteropatriarchal semantics] dichotomy, but the HP [heteropatriarchal] misogyny that values femininity as a female attribute.'<sup>30</sup>

There are antecedents who could have offered Sedgwick the means to broaden the scope of her homosocial system. It was in order precisely to address the patriarchal context in which women are actively impelled to act in the interests of men that radical feminism so powerfully advocated the notion of sisterhood and female bonding. In *Gyn/Ecology* Mary Daly resituates the notion of the Great (world) War as the binary deadlock of patriarchy, in which it is all men, whatever side on which they fight, who oppose women: 'The secret bond that binds the warriors together, energizing them, is the violation of women, acted out physically and constantly replayed on the level of language and of shared fantasies,' and 'the male who is not willing to go forward blindly on the march of massive destruction is a 'female' ... Such fear is also called fear of being 'effeminate'.<sup>31</sup> Daly's work draws on a radical

essentialism through which she blazes against male authority and female subordination, invoking the possibilities of the discovery of sisterhood as both a refusal of dependency within male structures, and a subversive reinvisioning of bonding relationships which differ 'radically from male comradeship/brotherhood, which functions to perpetuate the State of War' (G/E p.369). Daly's argument feeds into a second-wave tendency to collapse infatuated and adoring masculine bonds into homosexual desire. Daly looks at accounts of brotherhood and bonding written by (heterosexual) men and theorises their tremulous and hysterical eroticism of brotherhood as equivalent to passionate same-sex desire, a 'diseased State of Fraternity' from which 'radically Lesbian loving is totally Other' (G/E p.372). She quotes from military accounts in which men swoon over the profundity of their bonding with comrades by simultaneously effacing homosexual desire and relegating the importance or pleasure of bonds with 'mere' women (one account Daly quotes reads: 'the communion between men is as profound as any between lovers. Actually it is more so. It does not demand for its sustenance the reciprocity, the pledges of affection, the endless reassurances required by the love of men and women' G/E p.372.) Daly rightly pours scorn on such accounts, but fails to differentiate between men acting in the interests of men, and men desiring men, thereby collapsing homophobia into homosexuality:

Male-defined erotic love involves loss of identity and is inherently transitory. It involves hierarchies, ranking roles - like the military -

on the model of S and M. While male erotic love is seen as similar to comradeship in these respects, it is experienced as weaker in intensity and depth [compared to the 'gynaesthetic experience'] (G/E p.372)

Clearly it is an imperative of Daly's separatism that she strategically insist upon as much distance as possible between Lesbian Loving and all structures of romanticised affiliation constituted by and through men. Historically speaking, the integrity of radical lesbianism depended upon a rejection of all accommodations of men precisely so as to enable the conceptualisation of relations between women that would not reproduce women's subjugation to homo-sexual subjectivity. Indeed, such bonding, 'The Fire of Female Friendship', is the political cornerstone of Daly's programme as prescribed in *Gyn/Ecology*.

It is my intention here to theorise forms of gay male subjectivity which are themselves resistant to homosocial terms of maleness, in which homosexuality is always an abjection. The force of Daly's work in the context of my argument here is to show the importance of an analysis that foregrounds gender as the system through which masculinity and femininity are meaningful, and which recognises sexuality as the tool through which the integrity of masculinity and femininity are policed, producing homophobia as the legislative force of that policing. This is not merely intellectual preciousness, necessitating 'trivial' semantic quibbling in emphasising one category over another. The degree of investment made by gay

men - beyond the specificities of same-sex desire and sexual activity - *against* mannish cultural concerns and practice, and with women and so-called 'female' interests and modes of expression, suggests that intellectual methodologies formulated in order to understand gay male practice and to anticipate the success of such interventions which reference only rigidly Foucauldian terms of sexuality will only be able to anticipate shifts and meanings in the realm of sexual desire, that is, the erotic - and I would argue that homosexuality is meaningful in terms way beyond those alone. In order to be able to precipitate advances in gay male cultural practice - that is, to elicit greater political gains - intellectual inquiry must engage with the enormous subcultural investment gay men make with women, that is, with identification, and thus with gender, and attempt to understand what this means. Not to engage with gender in work that attempts to enquire into gay male identity is to naturalise gender difference and invite complicity with homosocial mechanisms; for it is the foregrounding of desire, of heterosexuality, that demonises homosexuality and reinforces misogyny. Heteropatriarchal hegemony continually re-secures notions of masculinity and femininity in order to maintain its control of women through the continuously repetitive invocation of homosexual abjection.

A characteristic effect of Sedgwick's theorisation of conditions in which gay male identities and (heterosexual) women's identities are produced as functional effects of heteropatriarchal power, is a tendency towards entrapment. Whilst Sedgwick's

breakthrough is in part to illuminate the precariousness of male authority, and to locate homophobia and sexism as effects of that precariousness, heterosexual male identities remain central in her model. The activities of either gay men, or heterosexual women within those male homosocial bonds, are conducted through a functional association with hetero-male power. The possibility of male homosexuality lies on one side of the homosocial arrangement, policing the terms of the bonding - protecting the conditions of intimacy, whilst women lie on the other side, the currency of exchange with which men effect their transactions with each other. Straight men remain the central term across and through whom gay men and heterosexual women would appear to be prevented from associating with each other. Despite the currency female identification has in gay culture, we have seen in the previous chapter how a key strategy through which gay men have negotiated the production of their own sissified abjection remains the aspirational celebration of masculinity; it is a tendency that characterises Bersani's particular refusal of good citizenship. We could suggest then, that the entrapment which is an effect of Sedgwick's theorisation of male homosocial relations actually does record a material condition of gay male marginalisation. Gay male identities are circumscribed in relation to homosocial masculinity, such that empowerment is often seen as a function of ventriloquising the terms of that homosociality in a quasi-denial of queer abjection. Similarly, within heterosexuality not only is female agency denied, but mutual recognition between women is made conceptually implausible, beyond the passive contemplation and complaint of generic

difficulties (domestic or sexual squabbles, and so on): these denials are enforced by the commodification and objectification of women through relations of male alliance, something that may explain the oblivious popularity of *Pulp Fiction*. As I shall go on to discuss in relation to a significant critic of Sedgwick, the material effects of the proximity that both gay men and straight women have to the functioning of male homosociality, and their consequent diversity of resistant manoeuvres, have often resulted in an endlessly exploited breach in parity between them. Conflicts of desire, cultural legitimation and political agenda have produced tensions and discontinuities between gay men and straight women, particularly in subcultures which have adopted essentialist agendas, or where there has been a direct conflict of interests caused by the limitation of exploitable faultline possibilities. These conflicts are particularly crucial in a contemporary political landscape in which the idea of activist feminism has little credibility, being continually portrayed as opposing pleasure and choice.

The dangers of such conflicts can be seen in the kind of position elaborated by one of Sedgwick's most shrill critics. In 'The Beast of the Closet', David Van Leer holds Sedgwick responsible for the production of categories of the homosexual within homosociality, in the process of which he argues she underwrites a 'homophobic thematics'.<sup>32</sup>

The underlying nature of Van Leer's anger towards Sedgwick becomes clearer in the dialogue that emerged between the two in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* in 1989. He resents the intrusion into the subcultural ghetto of an outsider, a woman apparently occupying a heterosexual identity. In order to effect this rejection of Sedgwick, and her attempt to fashion a coalition between gay male politics and feminism, Van Leer naturalises gender difference, foreclosing the conceptual space from which feminism speaks, in his desire to effect closer union with heterosexual men, imputedly because gay men have more in common with heterosexual men that we do with women. In this we can see the fag-end of clone culture and what would now appear to be its hysterical need to assert the butchness of homosexual men, as a resistance to earlier notions of stereotypical effeminacy, which we have seen in the previous section to be caused by the strength of inversionist models of homosexuality and the attendant dominance of heteropatriarchal structures. Thus the conjuring of homosexual men as an abject through which heterosexuality retains virility is resisted by homosexual men by consigning women to the otherness of *true* feminine abjection, and consequently the internal logic of homosocial structures retains intact - bolstered even - by the very groups that are its anathema. Van Leer's hostility is understandable given the urgent political and material necessity of resisting homosexual pathologisation through feminisation, yet his strategy precisely reproduces, recirculates the conditions of heterosocial hegemony by corroborating the function of women as subjugated objects of exchange.

Van Leer's discomfort produces contradictory effects. What is clear from his arguments is that his project is assimilationist. Van Leer evades naming himself as a gay man and his precious prevarications over his own queer self-identification collude with oppressive secrecy mechanisms through the privileging of naturalised male heterosexuality - his silence about his identity produces an indeterminacy of identification only valuable through its homophobia. On the one hand Van Leer wants to sanctify his minority status and exclude Sedgwick (women) from such domains: 'unable to speak from within the minority, Sedgwick must perforce speak from within the majority' (p.603). On the other hand, he berates her for apparently attempting to *disallow* him an alignment with men, 'real' men. The effect of both manoeuvres is to anticipate and re-commodify the very conditions Sedgwick's model elaborates: namely that heterosexual, homosocial masculinity identifies real men, who are kept in place by the production of an execrable second term - unreal, perverse, but necessary - desiring and striving towards that ever-elusive real manliness that is the very reassurance of the negation of womanliness. As I have suggested, because masculinity is structurally elusive, and necessarily so in order to reproduce the conditions of hegemony, such a performance is precarious, and precisely becomes visible through the distancing of other terms - women, queers.

### **Mapping Heterosocial Bonds**

In the BFI series *Film Classics*, Richard Dyer says of *Brief Encounter*:

A bar in London, popular with well dressed, worked-out gay men, is called 'Brief Encounter'; I once suggested meeting my friend Hugh there, but he said he couldn't bear it, it was so very 'Brief Encounter', if I knew what that meant, and for some reason I did. For years I wanted to do a remake of it, starring Jane Fonda as Laura and Barbra Streisand as the lover...

A few paragraphs later, Dyer tells of how he once watched the film with a group of Australian and Canadian gay men who were unfamiliar with it, and his mother who:

I could see...was uncomfortable with my doing Laura's lines over Celia Johnson, because it was mocking a lovely film. It was also mocking, or at any rate pastiching, a woman. Yet, like many gay men, I ardently identify with women characters in 'women's films', I prefer the company of women to that of men and I think of myself as pro-feminist.<sup>33</sup>

Dyer appears to be professing a form of bonding, an association, an identification with women, not shared by his friend Hugh, for whom it seems the proximity of up front gay men and the campy overtones of 'Brief Encounter' are uncomfortable (but does the archly epicene 'couldn't bear it' protest too much?), and not understood by his mother; we may infer that this is because she is unfamiliar with the codes of camp in gay male subculture, or because for her such identificatory

practice is 'mocking' or 'pastiching' her gender. For the Australian and Canadian gay men Dyer's induction of them into the campy British repression that is the splendour of *Brief Encounter* is an act of subcultural affiliation undertaken through a sign of female identification, and in the presence of the mother (Freud's mummy's boys again). The meanings here are located in the shared bonding across and over the barrier of sexual (in)difference, a barrier naturalised by homosocial structures and policed by homophobia. I would contend that this subcultural and shared act of identity formation could be described as heterosocial, in that it addresses the efficacy of masculine homosocial structures and yet attempts to denaturalise the sameness secured by homosocial policing of gender normativity and consequent intra-male allegiances. In the case of Richard Dyer's friend who will not rendez-vous at 'Brief Encounter' the refusal to identify with the subcultural space is a refusal of Dyer's position (whom we already understand to identify with women) stated through a rejection of the gayness of the bar (which he can't 'bear'). Here the anxiety is precisely one of sameness: Hugh wishes to retain an allegiance with his gender, wishes to preserve his masculinity - his refusal is a homosocial act - his allegiance is with the maleness that comes into articulation precisely through a suppression of the heterosocial identification (identification with feminine spaces *against* naturalised heteropatriarchal gender orders) represented in 'Brief Encounter' / *Brief Encounter*, a suppression and rejection of Richard Dyer's female identification. As Theweleit and Daly, amongst others, have shown, maleness is established through the suppression of any bonding (identification) with women -

this is what misogyny and homophobia police - women are beneath reason, (literally) beneath masculinity. The principal identification required for the maintenance of patriarchy is with other men, with the potency of phallic authority through the elaboration of homosocial bonds. Appropriate heterosexual masculinity is achieved in male subjects by an hysterical over-identification with the promise of phallic authority. The continued repetition and restatement of this over-identification is necessitated, as we have seen, by the threat of homosexuality - this is an effect, a purpose of homosocial structures. Thus I would argue that hysterical anxiety over the display of appropriate manliness (such as not wanting to associate with inappropriate displays, such as the campiness of *Brief Encounter*) is to accede to the power of patriarchal identification - it is to aspire to the sameness of male identity, a sameness secured through misogyny and homophobia. Clearly gay men elaborate and enact many forms of dissent, many ways of alleviating and re-modelling the particular circumstances in which they find themselves; it is not my purpose to lambast others who are making the best of whatever faultline conditions they can identify and exploit. However, it is appropriate here to identify the contingency of the practices under discussion. As in the discussion of David Van Leer's rejection of Eve Sedgwick's heterosocial overtures, it is worth identifying the allegiances of Richard Dyer's friend Hugh as being counter-intuitive to the female identification Dyer himself enacts, and which I am attempting to formulate.

Heterosocial bonding with women is a reversal of the discourse of homosociality - in which appropriate masculinity is achieved through a suppression of women that a priori instates a faggot-other disavowed through misogyny. In a review of Ronald Hayman's biography of Tennessee Williams Andy Medhurst comments on the identification Richard Dyer describes in his negotiations of *Brief Encounter*, a relationship gay men have with many iconic texts:

The complex question of how Williams' female protagonists are related to his homosexuality again demands far more sophisticated and sensitive thinking than Hayman brings to bear. Referring to *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Williams claimed in a fine flourish of camp rhetoric that 'I was Alexandra del Lago from start to finish' - and there are many comparable examples in gay male culture: think of Tony Warren and Elsie Tanner, Pedro Almodóvar and Carmen Maura, the Richard Dyer/Celia Johnson interface revealed in the former's recent book on *Brief Encounter*, and what happens to me whenever I watch *Meet Me in St Louis* (I am Esther Smith from start to finish).<sup>34</sup>

Heterosocial bonds between women and gay men needn't express mutuality; indeed, given the complexly different conditions through which gay male, and heterosexual female identities are discursively produced and contested, claims towards such mutuality would embody a power relation in themselves. Bonds gay men enact with women often circumvent people, women themselves, in favour of

iconography, scales of gesture and performance, fragments of dialogue - bitchy epithets, semiotics of glamour, femininity, divinity even: dislocated and endlessly refracted representations, objectifications, enacted as a parodic refusal of homosocial masculine unification, a defiant celebration of the abjection that pivots around the display of possession, or denial, of masculine (phallic) authority, as Paula Graham has noted:

traditionally, gay male camp takes the fetishized Hollywood female star as its focus - not just any female star, but the 'strong', highly sexualized feminine images, the sirens, vamps and femmes fatales; in other words, what psychoanalytic language would designate as the fetishized phallic feminine. Camp pleasure - that most refined and ecstatic sexual pleasure - lies in a fetishistic tease of presence/absence of phallic control: power and the threat of its loss. Camp expresses the relation of gay men to male authority, *mediated by a relationship to representations of 'the feminine'*.<sup>35</sup>

Camp practices structure representational negotiations gay men make with the feminine, political interventions that have resistant or transgressive effects in terms of the conditions through which gay male identities are experienced as problematic. Camp interventions may not necessarily be effective as strategies for lesbians in the same ways that they are for gay men, as Graham argues:

gay men usually seem to identify with the feminine excess *and parody of authority* embodied in the mad-bad-pervert-witch or

repressed but sexually seething boss-woman. Lesbians, on the other hand, seem to prefer the cross-dressing Amazon or tart - even though she is heterosexualised and defeats a female order to restore a patriarchal one. This difference is probably due principally to a characteristic feeling on the part of gay men that their sexuality is repressed by masculine authority; as against a characteristic feeling on the part of lesbians that they are excluded from authoritative action by passive sexualization (as spectacle) for men.<sup>36</sup>

This could in part account for a greater symmetry in heterosocial relations between gay men and straight women than between gay men and lesbians. Clearly there is a powerful and ongoing history of identification with lesbians, which may be structured by equivalences in gender identifications, as I suggested in the discussion of Sue-Ellen Case's butch-femme aesthetic. In terms of heterosexual women, despite their similar subjection to the passive sexualisation of lesbians, in the way that Graham describes above, there is also a disparity in such experiences. Clearly most women must experience such specular control as oppressive, but within heterosexual arrangements straight women at least have the opportunity to trade such objectification as social capital, attaining a measure of legitimacy and institutionalisation in the process, unlike lesbians whose identity is precisely predicated on the resistance of such arrangements, and ostracism from them as a

consequence. I will go on to map the intricacies of these dynamics in the next chapter, which considers the American television sitcom, *Roseanne*.

Whatever the appeal of camp for gay men, however promising the heterosocial bonding I identify at work in the writings of Dyer and Medhurst, such strategies aren't necessarily dominant ones in gay subculture. We have already seen how Leo Bersani's notion of gay radicalism is tied into highly masculinised poses, and how David Van Leer's rejection of Sedgwick's attempts at heterosocial affiliation embody the seduction of male identification for gay men. The celebrated British gay writer Mark Simpson approaches questions of masculine display that I have been analysing here. However, rather than accepting that it is a defining condition of patriarchy that masculine display is performance for other men, as I have done, Simpson suggests that the male inducement towards narcissistic consumption of masculinity is a recent popular cultural phenomenon that spells the end of manliness as we know it. He says:

Men's bodies are on display everywhere ... Traditional male heterosexuality, which insists that it is always active, sadistic and desiring, is now inundated with images of men's bodies as passive, masochistic and desired ... Sexual difference no longer calls the shots, 'active' no longer maps onto 'masculine', nor 'passive' onto feminine. Traditional heterosexuality *cannot survive this reversal*, particularly because it brings masculinity into perilously close

contact with that which must always be disavowed:

homosexuality.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly the move Simpson is making here is attractive strategically, particularly if we ourselves wish to revel in popular culture's infatuated gaze upon the libidinous male body - suggesting that masculine display through the advertisement of jeans, aftershave, football and the like, sets up a homosexual gaze is a cheeky, not to say camp, whimsy. But of course, in order to effect this manoeuvre, Simpson actually has to collapse both ends of the male homosocial continuum into one another, making men acting in the interests of men the same as men desiring other men erotically; and, more insidiously, once again offering a gay male intervention which exalts, in its straining voyeurism, the efficacy of the butch hetero-male as the apex of desire - anybody's desire, including other butch males. It may be true to say that traditional heterosexuality cannot survive the current conditions in which the male body is represented: clearly popular feminist gains and the increasing visibility of gay male influence over popular cultural tastes have effected changes, but as we know to our costs, dominant arrangements do not stand still: dissident interventions are continuously assimilated, neutralised, reversed and ignored in the rolling repetitions of hegemonic reformation. As Lynne Segal has noted of Simpson's hopeful assertions: 'Sadly, however, sex and gender hierarchies seem to manage to thrive on their own contradictions.'<sup>38</sup> Precisely so: given the instability of manly masculinity *and* its necessity to the reproduction of patriarchal conditions, there are weaknesses, faultlines to be exploited; however, we cannot imagine that

male authority, like any other dominant formation, is not able to assimilate and process its own contradictions, and moreover, use our dissenting interventions as the very means to do so. Of course it is necessary that men consume images of precisely how irresistible their manliness should be, how else could the patriarchy attempt to instil in all its male subjects the arrogance of power, an arrogance which needs must overcome the unmanly shortcomings of those men who may be variously oppressed and suppressed themselves within structures of economics, professionalism, race, class, disability, location, education and skill level, effeminacy and so on?<sup>39</sup> The 'undifferentiated' gaze upon the passive figure of the hetero-male body which Simpson identifies, a gaze which 'might be female or male, hetero or homo' (p.4) does not disperse gender difference, it naturalises it by precisely clarifying the status of the butch hetero-male as the most erotic spectacle of all, because he embodies power. The imagery Simpson discusses may proffer the notion of male passivity, but unless you have the material means and sufficient identificatory authority to conjure a subject position from which to enact your own *activity* and thus to enforce *his* passivity, then all that has been reinforced by that representation is his ability to be everywhere - to flirt with all subject positions as a demonstration of his power. What is concerning about Simpson's contentions is that they do seem to account for what is currently a dominant strain of affluent, cosmopolitan gay identity which is, ironically, understood as a kind of liberation: the liberation of the pink pound, a function of gay men's economic success.<sup>40</sup>

Thus far I have shown the inherent force of homosocial ideological mechanisms, and the paradoxical instability through which those mechanisms are formed. To stress this uneven and necessary contradiction is not to suggest that resisting or supplanting such formations is a straightforward business - on the contrary, being aware of dominant contradiction in itself gets you nowhere, for we have seen the terrible power that homosocial formations exert in spite of their intrinsic instability. Indeed, in so far as any ideological matrix derives its effect from the way in which its subjects become complicit with its terms (Van Leer, 'Hugh', Simpson), the drive for a resolution of inherent contradiction ensures the need in those subjects for scapegoats through which unease can be temporarily and violently dissipated. However, this state of contradiction, if strategically exploited in agile and reflexive ways, does offer the opportunity for those residing in the functional margins of dominant ideologies to reformulate in dysfunctional arrangements. I want to suggest that the understandings produced by particular subcultures of gay men (those affiliated in similar ways to Richard Dyer and Andy Medhurst, as opposed to Dyer's friend Hugh) through bondings and identification with women, produce a particular set of arrangements that I refer to as heterosocial. Heterosociality rejects the unification of patriarchal sameness sustained through the manifestation and abjection of others; rather, the possibility of heterosocial bonds acknowledges the violence of such sameness and attempts to act discontinuously with the hegemonic unity of interests expressed in manliness as an instrument of authority. Rather than suppress bonds with women, displaying domination of them through

public institutions of romance and courtship and the display of rigorous, penile male power, gay male female identification opens the possibility of a denaturalisation of gender difference, an attempt therefore to re-imagine gender power.

### **Straight Talking: Get Some *Attitude***

In Britain in May 1994 a new queer magazine appeared called *Attitude* which advertised itself as being 'aimed primarily but not exclusively at gay men' which was 'really not interested in policing boundaries.'<sup>41</sup> *Attitude* was one of a number of new queer publications that appeared at the time, and one of only two that survived, the other being a lesbian 'lifestyle' magazine published by the owners of the long-running *Gay Times*, yet it appears to have perceptively addressed the gay male subject as consumer, and has set the standard for gay publications in this country, much as *Out* has done in the States.<sup>42</sup>

In accordance with its insistence on a post-queer integration of groovy heterosexuality, *Attitude* has a column called 'Straight Talking' in which mainly female heterosexual journalists enact a commentary on gay male culture. Thus we've had articles on how boring identity politics is because it's cool to flirt with kd lang even if you're a straight woman who enjoys the missionary position and likes hairy backs;<sup>43</sup> we've had consideration of media obsessions with reproductivity and about the relationship between pleasure and masculinity by way of musings on

spunk;<sup>44</sup> how serial monogamy, double incomes and childless heterosexual couples are making the differences between gay and straight more insignificant;<sup>45</sup> and, of course we've had (in the very first issue, no less) the manifesto of a 'theoretical fag hag' on relations between women and gay men.<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Moore says: 'I fail to see how anyone remotely interested in sexual politics could be anything but a theoretical fag-hag'; this is because 'while much in straight culture settles for the appearance of truth, what gay culture continually questions is the truth of appearances.'<sup>47</sup>

One of the reasons why I have suggested that gender is a more illuminating epistemic category than sexuality in attempting to elaborate heterosocial bonds is that even though straight women and gay men both desire men, the structural manifestations of that desire are different. Women's desire for men, and pleasure with them, is naturalised, that functionality conferring a degree of cultural legitimation, whilst gay men's equivalent erotic desire of men is perverse. Enacting bonding on the grounds of mutually shared desire alone, then, would require women to embrace perversion positively, in a reverse discourse, as gay men do; but this would be compromising for women, who would have to negotiate away the cultural capital they accrue through their heterosexuality, their 'normality'. This is one of the unspoken terms through which gay male and straight female relationships are structured. Heterosexual women are agents of cultural reproduction, in terms of parenthood, partnership, citizenship, social and cultural

presence. Straight women may have to suffer parochial and constrained identities in the course of responsibility, caring, nurturing, providing, in roles performed for families, husbands and institutions of the state, but in all of those areas they are entitled to trade on their cultural capital as women. Occupying lesbian identity, or attempting to trade on that cultural capital without the licence of male respectability - self-determining behaviour not enacted for scopophilic consumption by patriarchy, or as subservience to its material needs - is ruthlessly punished by the withdrawal of those privileges of cultural capital. As we can note from the continuingly vicious war waged upon single mothers by politicians and the media, attempting to assume responsibility for cultural reproduction without male authority makes women scapegoats of that authority.

Thus, in accounts by straight women of how valuable their bonds with gay men are, the disavowed term is always the possibility of the writer's own potential lesbianism. Not only could this possibly compromise the very authority through which fag-hags, theoretical or otherwise, trade cultural currency in their relationships with gay men, it also raises the thorny question of the constitution of female homosociality through homophobia, or more accurately, lesbophobia. In what amounts to an incoherent corrective to Suzanne Moore's celebration of fag-haggery, Suzi Feay suggests that there's a conspiracy of gay male misogyny.<sup>48</sup> She argues that gay male drag parties, and gay male designers have conspired to produce an unrealistic image of femininity which real women have difficulty living

up to. Yet this dismay at gay men's power to make de-naturalised representations of femininity that apparently compels women to conform, naturalises Feay's heterosexuality: her idea of a realistic femininity is a function of homosocial authority more constraining than any Parisian excesses. There are significant claims to be made upon gay male misogyny, even within those constituencies of the subculture which do identify in some way with women, let alone those for whom assimilationism and masculine identification are productive moves.<sup>49</sup> But there is a danger in making such claims for gay male misogyny from a position of naturalised heterosexuality which refuses to acknowledge its cultural privilege: Feay notes, 'I've ... become all too familiar with what seems a widespread horror of female secretions. Though why a group of people whose sexual lubricant is a mixture of shit and Vaseline should find a bit of mucus so objectionable is baffling.'<sup>50</sup> Slinging around such bitchiness (however accurate or amusing) suggests that Feay is more than capable of engaging her cultural capital in order to re-secure her own naturalisation.

Whilst this may be a reciprocal relationship, it is sustained by the suppression of the unspeakable term of lesbianism: 'In fact some of us [straight women] are so gay-friendly we feel as if we *are* gay ... men, that is.' The qualification exclaims the structuring absence. Such resistance, even though it is conducted in the name of breaking the barriers down ('It's time for rigid sexualities to be dissolved in a solution of mutual tolerance. No more fear and sneering; no more imprisoning

definitions.}') precisely reinstates a naturalising boundary between queer and straight. Feay shreds gay men for campily inferring that all men are queer, or can be had if pushed, suggesting that 'underlying all such attitudes is the assumption that homosexuality is more authentic than straightness'. Such shrill resistance to a standard camp rhetorical device indicates the underlying struggles over power, identity and autonomy that must necessarily characterise heterosocial bonds, given the resistant terms of their constitution. The reciprocal, or uneven exchange within heterosocial bonding is not based on (and therefore upheld by) sexual domination, domestic or maternal dependency, or heterosexual imperative, although it might well be based on an economic exchange, in which gay men trade economic power for stigma - straight women representing a cultural legitimation.

Indeed, as Suzanne Moore notes of some gay men who are 'conservative little gits' because they don't draw connections between all those who fall short of straight white male ideals,

believe me it's these connections that matter, not whether people enjoy fucking each other with eighteen-inch dildos or not. What you get up to in bed may make you extremely happy, but please don't kid yourself it's about to change the world.<sup>51</sup>

Here bonds, affiliations and identifications across what is a homosocial void of sexual (in)difference, for women and gay men, constitute acts of political growth and cultural dissent. Within the authority of homosocial domains female and

homosexual identities are negated. Substantive gains won against these terms are produced within the faultline cracks in those very mechanisms. These identities may not only offer women the best advice 'on the right shade of lipstick'<sup>52</sup> or gay men an appropriation of cultural capital, but point out possibilities for resisting the security of hierarchical gender authority, and offer profitable strategies for the acquisition of subjectivity.

### **Slash Fantasies / Heterosocial Bonds**

Yet it is crucial to recognise that dissident opportunities will necessarily cluster around points of tension within hegemonic formations. A fascinating example of this comes in the subcultural fan literature known as slash fiction, which appropriates dominant homosocial pairings from popular television texts and inscribes them within explicitly homosexual romantic narratives. The genre, which predominantly works within science fiction, gets its name from stories written in the seventies about Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek*, which were designated K/S (Kirk – slash – Spock). With the advent of easy internet access in the mid and late 1990s, and the growth in popularity of science fiction television, slash has become a substantial fan culture. Slash writers appropriate a wide range of pairings and texts, which include Chakotay/Paris (*Star Trek: Voyager*), Blake/Avon (*Blake's 7*), Picard/Q (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*), Bodie/Doyle (*The Professionals*), Vecchio/Fraser (*Due South*), and Mulder/Krycek (*The X Files*), as well as pairings from *Highlander*, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *The Sentinel*, and *Stargate SG-1*. Henry Jenkins and Constance

Penley have been foremost amongst those academics who have written about slash fiction.<sup>53</sup> Both approach the genre as one written by heterosexual women about ostensibly heterosexual male characters who are 'slashed' into homoerotic encounters or relationships which offer 'insights into female sexual fantasy'.<sup>54</sup> However, over the last couple of years there has been a growing body of slash work written by women, heterosexual and lesbian, which slashes ostensibly heterosexual female characters, such as Captain Janeway and B'Elanna Torres from *Star Trek: Voyager*, and Xena and Gabrielle from *Xena: Warrior Princess* into lesbian sexual relationships; whilst a growing number of gay male authors have joined their female counterparts in slashing male characters.<sup>55</sup> The question of who is appropriating whom when straight women write about apparently 'gay' relationships and sexuality in their own terms, and when gay men write in 'women's' slash genres has been debated online as recently as January 1999.<sup>56</sup>

How is the heterosocial dynamic working in these slash narratives? As fan fiction, slash narratives already contest the trans-national corporate ownership of texts and scenarios which acquire particular significance in the emotional imaginary of audiences. Jenkins refers to such contestation as 'textual poaching' in order to legitimate fan practices and repudiate conventional understandings of fans as immature, obsessive and culturally unsophisticated. In what ways does this already resistant space handle affiliations between women and gay men? How do slash authors situate their fantastical imaginings?

A particularly prolific slash author is Britta Matthews, who has written a series of stories which are serialised on her website; they include *The Taming of Tom Paris*, *In Dreams*, *Undaunted*, *Bored in the Delta Quadrant*, and *Susurrations*.<sup>57</sup> *The Taming of Tom Paris* won three Golden Orgasm awards in 1998: best *Voyager* story, best corporal punishment story, and best overall story, on ASCEM (L), a major web newsgroup devoted to 'Treksmut'.<sup>58</sup> *Taming* follows a familiar slash narrative. Its logic is derived from the *Star Trek* series produced and owned by Paramount, and is situated aboard the starship *Voyager*, stranded in the delta quadrant seventy years from home after an encounter with an omnipotent being. It depicts the burgeoning sexual relationship between the ship's first officer, Commander Chakotay, a mature, big built Native American, and the ship's helmsman, Tom Paris, a cute, boyish, blond WASP. *Taming* is told in the first person voice of Chakotay, through whom Matthews makes the nature of the attraction between the men clear:

I wanted him to submit to me, totally, unconditionally. But he had to do it willingly. His surrender to my will had to be complete but he had to make the decision. When the day came that he offered himself to me, I would accept with the greatest joy. His submission would be the most precious gift

I would ever receive and I would cherish him forever for giving it to me.<sup>59</sup>

Two points seem immediately clear. Firstly that the interchange between the two men is gendered, with the butch Chakotay positioned as a dominant, active protector of the more feminine, passive Paris. Secondly it is striking that the

author's own identification is with the dominant male in his sexual subjugation of the other. In Paramount's text *Star Trek: Voyager*, Tom Paris is portrayed as being a charming, confident womaniser, whose roguish past and winning smile produce a striking level of heterosexual charisma, which is utilised in a number of different episodes of the series. One of the many pleasures of *The Taming of Tom Paris* is its depictions of this stud-like character on his back being fucked by his butch, well-hung superior officer, or being bent over Chakotay's knee begging to be punished. We could perhaps suggest that here the slash scenario enables Britta Matthews to locate her own sadistic orientation to cocky, stud-like men, in a way that may otherwise be difficult to do within conventional heterosexuality. Particularly so given that the unfolding narrative of the two men's relationship is rendered in distinctly romantic terms, with a high emphasis given to the open negotiation of feelings, rather than to the more pornographic elements. Slash enables Matthews to circumvent the rather conventional terms of heterosexual romance, and formulate a cross-gendered identification that facilitates a sexual and social authority in her alignment with Chakotay that would be much more contorted were she to identify with a woman, such as B'Elanna Torres in a sadistic relationship with Paris. Clearly heterosexuality can accommodate female sadism in relation to male masochism, but inevitably such scenarios are always an inversion of more predictable arrangements, and thereby they retain the necessity for some narrative negotiation of the anticipated heterosexual gender roles in order to facilitate a convincing inversion.

Chakotay and Paris may be gendered, but we anticipate that both men occupy full subjectivity; queering the men enables the depiction of gender difference whilst maintaining the ability to locate both subjects convincingly in such a way that power play between them doesn't imply the negation of the identity of either. This identification with a sadistic male 'top' is offset by locating this fantasy through Chakotay, who despite his size, maturity, ranking and phallic prowess is ethnically represented as Native American 'other'. In as much as *Star Trek's* liberal universe is populated with aliens who represent ethnic and racial difference, slash fiction retains an investment in ethno-centric racial fetishism. Traditionally Kirk/Spock slash maps ethnic difference onto gender, depicting Spock in terms which connote exoticism through quasi-mystical, religious trappings that alternately feminise him in the logic of white racist fantasies of orientalism, and masculinise him as a function his logic and intellectualism: Spock in his dispassion represents the mind, Kirk in his vanity represents the body. In *Voyager* slash, the other most popular top is Harry Kim, who's Asian, and whose gender ethnically signifies in similar ways to Chakotay's. Chakotay's ethnicity is heavily fetishised in Paramount's *Voyager*: he's frequently to be found communing with his spirit guide, or meditating on his ancestral hereditary, whilst his facial tattoo stands as a constant signifier of ethnic difference; representationally these acts are made to signify his general sensitivity and emotional depth and thus feminise him in a way that contrasts with his butch authority and physical size. Furthermore, Chakotay's membership of the rebel

Maquis group who are fighting Federation and Cardassian colonialism, instates his political and moral righteousness. These elements work to offset Chakotay's sadism and dominance in *The Taming of Tom Paris*, making him a safer, more acceptably liberal place through which to locate sexual and social power.

We could perhaps suggest then, that slash expresses a heterosocial dynamic in terms of providing women with the opportunity to appropriate homoeroticism as the means to enact an empowering identification with a subject position through which they may exhibit power (such as Chakotay), whilst being able to avoid such an identification slipping into a ventriloquism of patriarchal dominance. The fact that Britta Matthews's object of identification is expressing homosexual desires positions him ambiguously within homosocial power systems, and yet he remains a man, with access to the privileges of his gender, and his position as second in command on the ship, yet still manifesting both cultural integrity (as an 'oppressed minority' ethnically connoting passivity and femininity, and with a heritage richly commodified within *Star Trek* culture) and emotional dexterity.

Here homosexuality is functioning as a means of enacting gender dissent for female slash authors, who are resisting their alignment as feminised objects of heterosexuality and enacting queer sistership through an identification with male homosexuality. There are problems with such identifications, however.

It is telling that *Taming*, as with the majority of such fiction, locates its idealised vision of a more egalitarian sexuality in men, and thus simultaneously retains female heterosexual identification towards men (and it is a common motif in slash that the homosexual encounter occurs for the first and only time, arising out of extraordinary circumstances in a narrative in which both participants continue to manifest heterosexuality) and expresses a homosocial counter-identification with the notion of lesbianism. Slash often preserves the potential for female heterosexual specular pleasure in male physicality, whilst inherently rejecting the possibility of lesbian alternatives, which could potentially exhibit the same range of metaphors of more egalitarian sexual relations that are exploited in the male homoeroticism most narratives toy with.

Slash eroticism of gay sex acts tends to follow rather formulaic patterns which detail the mechanical aspects of, for example, anal sex, whereby narrative time is spent explaining how the top will use his fingers to relax his partner's anal musculature, and introduce lubrication. Such fastidious attention to detail (and it is striking how relentlessly and repetitively slash authors dwell on such matters) works to denaturalise gay sex acts in a way that doesn't occur in gay pornography written by gay men. Similarly, if slash enables a degree of narrative punishment of 'straight' men, like Tom Paris, as the fucking tables are turned on them, then this makes an unfortunate correlation between 'passive' gay sexuality and humiliation, that is out of step with our expectations of heterosocial affiliation. In practice such

correlations remain largely subtextual: in *The Taming of Tom Paris*, Britta Matthews is careful to introduce a degree of versatility into the sexual and emotional role playing that takes place between Tom and Chakotay. Indeed, if the relationship merely ends up replicating the more demeaning connotations of gender difference, slash would lose its dissident potential for authors like Matthews, when its very appeal seems to lie in constituting sexual partners both of whom have access to full subjectivity within gender systems.

Nevertheless, both slash fiction and the 'theoretical fag-hags' of *Attitude* demonstrate that gender dissent and heterosocial bonds, like any other radical manoeuvre, hold no guarantee of political breakthrough. Our opportunities for cultural change or leverage arise out of knowledge, language, relationships and artefacts appended to potentially oppressive hegemonic regimes of power.

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<sup>1</sup>Sheila Jeffreys is indicative of the radical feminist position: her most recent work, *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist perspective on the lesbian sexual revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1994) is a furious diatribe against Foucauldian feminism and what she terms 'lesbianandgay' theory. Examples of the so-called libertarian feminists include such sex radicals as Susie Bright and Pat Califia, but probably also stalwarts of critical theory, such as Judith Butler.

<sup>2</sup>Gayle S. Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' in Carole S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) and 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex' in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup>Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.309.

<sup>4</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p.106, cited by de Lauretis, 'Sexual Difference and Lesbian Representation' (*Theatre Journal*, 40, 1988) in discussion of Rubin, 'Thinking Sex' (ibid, p.307).

<sup>5</sup>Such is the impact of post-Foucauldian theory that even those activists or theorists who object to the centrality of sexuality and desire based notions of identity and politics must engage with its agenda; Jeffreys' *The Lesbian Heresy* is an example.

<sup>6</sup>In Britain 'Queer' politics appeared to be very much a function of metropolitan and artistic subcultural activity in London, principally. The supposed coalescence of lesbians, gay men, people of colour, bisexuals, heterosexuals, sadomasochists, drag queens, fetishists, and transsexuals, now appears quite momentary, and although promising, always seemed dominated by relatively institutionalised journalists and artists, and those whose identities were already the most culturally validated - men, white people, the heterosexually privileged; with the occasional exceptions of

those whose outrageousness was momentarily voyeuristically celebrated in the quality press or mainstream cosmopolitan culture (I shall return to this celebration in the forthcoming chapter on Pedro Almodóvar). The trajectory of Queer politics in America has been similar, but was always founded in different conditions. The HIV/AIDS emergency has been considerably more acute on the other side of the Atlantic, lending an urgency to political militancy and coalition we have thankfully not suffered to the same extent here. And, as I noted in the previous chapter, gay or queer politics in America have culturally specific expectations that are a function of the ideological importance of the Constitution: the call to a Queer Nation in the States has an entirely different resonance than it would here.

<sup>7</sup>Jana Sawicki, 'Identity Politics and Sexual Freedom: Foucault and Feminism' in Irene Diamond & Lee Quinby (eds), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); and also in Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, 'Women's sexuality and men's appropriation of desire', in Ramazanoglu (ed.) *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of some tensions between Foucault and feminism* (London & New York: Routledge 1993).

<sup>10</sup>See Ramazanoglu and Holland, 'Women's sexuality and men's appropriation of desire', p.239, for further discussion of this.

<sup>11</sup>Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (London: Routledge, 1990) p.65.

<sup>12</sup>Domna C. Stanton, 'Introduction: The Subject of Sexuality' in Stanton (ed.) *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) pp.1-46.

<sup>13</sup>An extreme example is Louise J. Kaplan's work, *Female Perversions* (London: Penguin, 1993).

<sup>14</sup>Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1995) p.113. Further page references will be given in the text.

<sup>15</sup>One could speculate that the missing figure here is Oscar Wilde, often included with the others as the epitome of witty transgressive immorality. It would be unfair to Bersani to condemn him for not considering Wilde, but it is interesting to note that of all of them, he is probably the least easily recuperable to a masculinist agenda, given that his trial is identified as the moment at which the notions of homosexuality and effeminacy first coalesced.

<sup>16</sup>In his contribution to the volume *Constructing Masculinity* (eds) Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis & Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), entitled 'Loving Men', Bersani notes that: 'In that tension [between our 'political alignments' and our 'phantasmatic investments'] lies an important moral dimension of our political engagements. But to be aware of the tension means being aware of both sets of

determining factors, and perhaps especially of those identifications and erotic interests it is not always gratifying to acknowledge.' (p.117).

<sup>17</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, 'Sexual Difference and Lesbian Representation', reprinted in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>18</sup>ibid, p.143.

<sup>19</sup>In *The Persistent Desire: A lesbian femme/butch reader* (Boston: Alyson, 1991), Joan Nestle talks about her own experiences of homophobia from other lesbians because of her identification as a femme. Elsewhere in the collection, butch lesbians express similar experiences.

<sup>20</sup>I am here specifying gay male identification rather than lesbian identification not because I believe lesbian practice to be tremendously different, or any less important than that of gay men, but because of the intrinsically different power relations in the two sets of identifications. It is precisely my intention to assess the effects of gay male practice on the constitution of gender authority, and gauge the potential radicalism (or reactionism) in gay male practice. Nor do I wish to gesture at the existence of specific lesbian practices, whilst pretending I'd rather they went away. Many studies tokenistically gesture towards difference without ever attempting to resolve the complexities it raises. At those points at which lesbian

cultural practice throws gay male practice into relief, confusion or suspicion I

intend to try and maintain a commitment to handling such complexity.

<sup>21</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) p.3; subsequent page references will be given in the text as BM.

<sup>22</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, 'Film and the Visible' in *Bad Object Choices* (eds), *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp.223-264; see also Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp.67-73.

<sup>23</sup>Craig Owens 'Outlaws: Gay Men in Feminism' in Alice Jardine & Paul Smith (eds) *Men in Feminism* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989) p.223.

<sup>24</sup>Owens' reading of Irigaray could be disputed. The seminal essay 'Sexual Difference and Lesbian Representation' by Teresa de Lauretis (*Theatre Journal* 40, 1988; reprinted in Abelove, Barale and Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York & London: Routledge, 1993) takes as its theoretical grist a distinction de Lauretis precisely identifies in Irigaray's work between homosexuality and hommo-sexuality. For de Lauretis, this distinction expresses the paradox of sexual (in)difference, in which lesbian desire is inconceivable within the terms of sexual difference - a binary with no dialectic, no subject position other than that of the male, no desire other than that of the male, no sexuality other

than male sexuality ('hommo-sexuality'). De Lauretis argues that these are the terms of heterosexuality, terms through which the possibility of lesbianism is effaced. Within de Lauretis' deployment of Irigaray, male phallic homosexuality does become visible (and distinct from male bonding), if only by connotation. She identifies a paradox between hommo-sexuality and homosexuality, one that we could name as homosociality, but the implication of her positing of this proximity is the emergence of a gay male who is disenfranchised from the system of sexual indifference neither by his hommo-sexuality, his masculinity and maleness, nor by his narcissistic desire in others (*hommes/homos*) for that hommo-sexuality. Ironically, then, we see that the only terms of male homosexuality are masculine ones: it is perhaps this phallo-centric construction of gay male sexuality that Owens objects to. It is ironic to note the similarity between what Owens appears to object to in Irigaray and Showalter's work, and the celebratory nihilistic phallicism Bersani admires in Genet's considerations of fascism.

<sup>25</sup>Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' in Douglas Crimp (ed.), *AIDS: Cultural Analysis Cultural Activism* (London & Cambridge, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) p.212.

<sup>26</sup>Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1991) pp.62-63.

<sup>27</sup>ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Other than Leo Bersani, Mario Mieli is one of the few gay male writers to have candidly and explicitly considered gay male anal eroticism and its relation to male heterosexual anxiety, in his book, *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique*, (London: Gay Men's Press, 1980) pp.137-145. Mieli's work is a fabulous melange of a queen's subcultural world view and dense theoretical readings: 'The point is, that if you get fucked, if you know what tremendous enjoyment is to be had from anal intercourse, then you necessarily become different from the 'normal' run of people with a frigid arse...Of all the aspects of homosexuality, I would say that the one heterosexual men fear above all is anal intercourse.' (p. 139).

<sup>29</sup>The phrase is Sedgwick's own: she uses it in pointing out Marjorie Garber's effacement of complex negotiations of homo/hetero-sexual oppression and resistance in cross-dressing; in Eve Sedgwick & Michael Moon, 'Divinity: A Dossier, A Performance Piece, A Little-Understood Emotion', Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994) p.223.

<sup>30</sup>Julia Penelope, 'Heteropatriarchal Semantics: Just Two Kinds of People in the World', *Lesbian Ethics* 2,2 1986, p.59.

<sup>31</sup>Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) p.357 & p.359; subsequent page references will be given in the text, and identified as G/E.

<sup>32</sup>David Van Leer 'The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood', *Critical Inquiry* 15, no.3, Spring 1989, p.605; subsequent page references will be given in the text, BC.

<sup>33</sup>Richard Dyer, *Brief Encounter* (London: BFI, 1993) pp.11-12.

<sup>34</sup>Andy Medhurst, 'Karaoke Treatment', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 4, No.4, April 1994, p.32.

<sup>35</sup>Paula Graham, 'Girl's Camp? The Politics of Parody', in Tamsin Wilton (ed.), *Immortal Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) p.168.

<sup>36</sup>ibid, p.177.

<sup>37</sup>Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (London: Cassell, 1994) p.4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>38</sup>Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* (London: Virago, 1994) p.199.

<sup>39</sup>See Allan Hunter, 'Same Door, Different Closet: A Heterosexual Sissy's Coming-Out Party' in Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Heterosexuality: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London: Sage, 1993) pp.150-169, for a consideration by a heterosexual man of the disjuncture between dominant faction membership and the inability to display appropriate manliness.

<sup>40</sup>See my 'Small Towns, Boys and Ivory Towers: A Naked Academic' in Jan Campbell & Janet Harbord (eds) *Temporalities: Autobiography in a Postmodern Age* (Manchester:

Manchester University Press, 2000) for further discussion of the difficulties associated with the commodification of gay male identities in urban spaces.

<sup>41</sup>Editorial, *Attitude*, no.1, May 1994, p.7.

<sup>42</sup>For an account of the emergence of these publications, see my 'A Queered Pitch', *Red Pepper*, February 1995, p.27.

<sup>43</sup>Ruth Picardie, 'My date with kd lang', *Attitude*, no.8, December 1994, p.49.

<sup>44</sup>Suzanne Moore, 'Merchant semen', *Attitude*, no.5, September 1994, p.51.

<sup>45</sup>Angela Lambert, 'Close to you', *Attitude*, no.12, April 1995, p.51.

<sup>46</sup>Suzanne Moore, 'You don't have to be gay around here...but it helps', *Attitude*, no.1, May 1995, p.61.

<sup>47</sup>ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Suzi Feay, 'Will the real miss thing please stand up?', *Attitude*, no.3, July 1994, p.57.

<sup>49</sup>See Richard Dyer, 'Is a gay man always a girl's best friend?', *Attitude*, no.15, July 1995, p.114, for a consideration of gay male misogyny amongst female identifying constituencies.

<sup>50</sup>Suzi Feay, 'Will the real miss thing please stand up?', p.57.

<sup>51</sup>Suzanne Moore, 'You don't have to be gay...!', p.61.

<sup>52</sup>ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Constance Penley, *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* (London & New York: Verso, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Jenkins, *ibid*, p. 192.

<sup>55</sup> Much of this work is available on the internet. For general archives of slash fiction of all types see 'Slash Fiction on the Net' (<http://members.aol.com/ksnicholas/fanfic/slash.html>), 'Slash Revolution International' (<http://www.frii.com/~xangst/sri/index.html>); for fiction by explicitly gay men and lesbians, as well as straight women, see the Slashkink Archive (<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Gallery/8743/slashkfict.htm>); for explicitly lesbian slash see 'Obsession's Homepage Presents: The Xena Warrior Princess Lesbian Fanfiction Index' (<http://www.obsession14.com/XenaRotica/fanindex.html>).

<sup>56</sup> See the Slashkink news group (SlashKink@eGroups.com), 'Is it just me?' 4/1/99 - 5/1/99 and 'Are they gay?' 6/1/99.

<sup>57</sup> 'Britta's Slash Page' (<http://www/tommyhawksfantasyworld.com/britta/>).

<sup>58</sup> ASCEM (L) is 'alt.startrek.creative.erotica.moderated' (<http://come.to/treksmut/>).

<sup>59</sup> *The Taming of Tom Paris*, Britta's Slash Page, *ibid*.