

CHAPTER THREE

ROSEANNE : DOMESTIC GODDESS AS HETEROSOCIAL HEROINE?

Given the extent to which gay men and straight women do bond and affiliate through a diverse range of cultural discourses despite the resistance any such relation must encounter, because of the extent to which both gay male identities and heterosexual women's identities are circumscribed through homosocial mechanisms, it would seem that these relationships may illuminate both the faultlines within the homosocial matrix and important structural negotiations of homosocial entrapment. I refer to these negotiations as heterosocial relationships. We have already seen some of the blockages such relationships need to negotiate in the writing of the 'theoretical fag-hags' in *Attitude*.

There have been some other striking representations of heterosocial affiliation recently. The Hollywood films *My Best Friend's Wedding* and *The Object of My Affection* have respectively been significant star vehicles for Julia Roberts and Jennifer Aniston (the latter still struggling to establish herself as a big screen star beyond her enormous popularity in the US sitcom *Friends*). Each film represents heterosexual romance as inherently problematic for its central, female, character. For both women intense, but confused relationships with gay men are seen as the space through which the intolerable paradoxes of heterosexuality can be resolved.

When marriage eludes (and fails) Julia Roberts' character in *My Best Friend's Wedding* all she has left is her dashing gay male side kick, played with career-redefining bravura by Rupert Everett. *The Object of My Affection* represents Aniston's character falling in love with a gay male stranger who gives her unsolicited support in the face of straight male beastliness. Both films almost seem to take it as axiomatic that heterosexual men are to a greater or lesser degree unworkable for women, and that they will inevitably have greater emotional, intellectual, and sexual synergy with gay men. Both films, however, are relatively incoherent in their attempts to make sense of the repercussions for wider social and sexual relations that such a synergy may precipitate. *The Opposite of Sex* is less reverential about relations between fags and hags, relishing in the wickedness of the Christina Ricci character, and asks trickier questions before capitulating into a cosy resolution. Similar heterosocially intriguing representations have been offered in the US sitcom *Will and Grace* and the UK sitcom *Gimme Gimme Gimme*, both of which depict domestic 'romances' of fag and hag co-habitation. *Roseanne* predates all of these heterosocially promising texts. However, I have chosen to focus on it here, because as I shall go on to show, it offers representations not only from the point of view of a heterosexual woman, but understood to be a product of that woman's perspective. More interesting still, unlike *My Best Friend's Wedding* or *The Object of My Affection*, *Roseanne* situates heterosocial bonds in wider contexts of heterosexual marriage, domestic nuclearity and patriarchal networks, and over a relatively long narrative period.

Straight women and gay men are positioned in radically different, if symmetrical, spaces within matrices of power. Women are generally disempowered in relation to gender identities organised through capitalist patriarchies, being subject to men's superior power in relation to the family, economic systems, and institutions of the state. Gay men are generally understood to be disempowered in relation to sexual identities organised through patriarchal heterosexuality, and are therefore acknowledged to be economically and institutionally powerful as men, and socially and institutionally oppressed as perverts. Theories of homosociality have provided us with an alternative framework for conceptualising gay men's oppression and the proximity of such experiences to those of women within systems of gender power. As I have suggested, conceptualising gay men as sexual outlaws and transgressive perverts may re-empower us erotically, but underestimates both the extent to which our identities express negotiations of gender, and how far our oppression is the result not just of sexual marginalisation, but of organisational *functionality* within homosocial patriarchy. In other words, the homosocial narrative portrays gay men as perverse in such unpleasant and unspeakable ways that our very connotation forecloses the possibility of male-male bonds becoming so infatuated as to displace the erotic subjection and control of women. To put it another way, gay men's *sexual* perversion is functionally reproduced within *gender* systems. Furthermore, the adherence to political and cultural agendas which see

gay men as only erotic or perverse subjects makes it hard to fashion relationships across the structures in which our identities operate.

Subcultural affiliation and strength may be the precondition of any enlightened or grounded cultural or political activity by gay men, but queerness figures variously and in many places within structures of power: to remain located and active in gay subculture *alone* not only forecloses the complexity of our identities and experiences, but leaves us potentially complicit with regimes of power other than the heterosexual. Metropolitan gay subculture may express our erotic marginalisation and resultant political and cultural empowerment, but many of us in that enclave are middle-class, or white, or able-bodied, or men, or antibody negative, many of us don't have children, many of us are well paid and institutionally or corporately powerful. Certainly the conceptualisation of gay subculture as the shared experience of sexual perversity privileges gay *male* experience, and at the very least compromises strategic visions of lesbian and gay male affiliation.¹ So, the complexity of our identities as gay men - internally, and in terms of how gayness is manifested across a terrain of other contexts, necessitates our constant mediation between micro and macro subcultural engagement.

Heterosexual women may make 'positive' or refreshing representations of gay men, as gay men may make similarly helpful representations of women. But what kind of manoeuvres are involved in staking a powerful and empowering claim to your

own representation, from a position of oppression, and offering helpful representations of other identities implicated in the systems of that oppression? This is the question we pose by attempting to assess the opportunity for heterosocial bonding in work authored by women, or by gay men. How can gay men make a claim for self-authority *without* instating themselves within homosocial regimes which subject women? How can straight women manifest privilege without invoking their heterosexuality in such a way as to re-demonise and disempower queers? This chapter considers dissident affiliations made from a position of heterosexual womanhood; the next one assess similar affiliations made by a gay man.

An illuminating illustration of this problematic dynamic appears in the form of the American sitcom *Roseanne*, which was first aired on ABC in 1988. The series enjoyed enormous popularity in America: the season which ended in the later part of 1995 generated the fourth highest advertising rates on the ABC network, after the Super Bowl, the Academy Awards and *Home Improvement*.² The popularity of the show, along with Roseanne's own transgressive behaviour, has made her a darling of the tabloid and sensationalist press, such as *The National Enquirer*. However, latterly Roseanne and *Roseanne* became popular and celebrated with self-consciously credible and intellectually precocious audiences. In Britain *Roseanne* was scheduled on Channel Four in the context of late night 'quality' situation comedies and up-market alternative cabaret. In the press, Roseanne was celebrated as a serious and

troubled artist: the watershed moment being a substantial and gritty piece by John Lahr in *The New Yorker*, but earlier profiles in *Vanity Fair* and then in *Spin* gave Roseanne middle-class intellectual credibility.³ This graduation from being interesting because of the vicissitudes of her personal life, to being considered a serious artist can be attributed to a perception of *Roseanne* as a political vehicle for social commentary:

...in these puritanical, politically correct times, nothing is more welcome than a voice that pierces dull notions of what should be with barbs of what is. *Roseanne* has made history by tackling everything from marital ennui, to 'maternal ambivalence,' to poverty, menstruation, homophobia, and mental illness in a medium that once reflected only the most sanitized versions of American family life.⁴

If there is one issue for which Roseanne has been vilified by her critics and adored by her fans it is the representation of homosexuality in her series. In February 1996, in a special issue on the up-coming Presidential primaries, *America's Out* magazine put Roseanne on the cover with the caption: 'Primary Special: Dole, Clinton & the rest: Their positions on our issues. Our choice? ROSEANNE FOR PREZ! For Gay Marriage, Lesbian Kisses & Real-World Feminism'.⁵ The same magazine named her an honorary gay person the year before,⁶ whilst she was named Person of the year in January 1995 by *The Advocate*, for whom Peter Galvin writes:

Gays and lesbians have been waiting a long time for someone like Roseanne to come along. Blasting stereotypes, flouting convention, transcending ignorance, the star's landmark sitcom, *Roseanne*, is that rare network television program that dares to treat homosexuality as nonchalantly and inconsequentially as heterosexuality...She is a rare person who, perhaps because of her own differences with the mainstream, identifies with the struggles of gays and lesbians *completely*.⁷

This sentiment is shared by Tim Allis of *Out*, when he says:

[*Roseanne*'s] gay characters were eye-opening - not because they were played as heroes, but because they were just as cranky and dysfunctional as everybody else in the manners-free Conner household.⁸

It is clear that Roseanne is perceived by these voices of American gay subculture as enacting a bonding with them through the representation she makes of gay characters in *Roseanne*. Roseanne herself confirms the affiliation: in *Out* magazine, Sue Carswell notes that Roseanne has promised that before *Roseanne* is finished for good, one of the series' co-stars, 'a character we never would have presumed to be queer, will be revealed as gay or lesbian'; Roseanne is quoted as saying, 'It's a real shocker, and I'm doing it for all you kids out there.'⁹ It is clear that *Roseanne* is understood to make a feminist appropriation of the domestic sitcom; it is also clear that the show is understood within the queer subculture to be making helpful

lesbian and gay representations. What I want to do here is to assess the extent to which *Roseanne* successfully enables the opportunity for heterosocial bonding, and determine the terms in which such a relationship negotiates larger structures of homosociality.

Roseanne and Political Credibility

It isn't difficult to see why gay men might love *Roseanne*; aside from the explicit visibility and humour *Roseanne* has offered in its representation of homosexuality, there are many features of the star's public persona that resonate with gay male subcultural practices around female star icons. The very cradle of *Roseanne*'s popularity, her eponymous sitcom, turns many conventional understandings about representing family life on its head. Even though the Conner family appears structurally normative and nuclear: mum, dad, three children living together, sister and mother living in extended familial proximity, they are firmly placed in the working-class: specifically the Conners are what the series flags self-referentially as 'white trash'.¹⁰ Becky, the eldest child, is married, and for the penultimate season lived at home with her husband; Darlene is at college by the time of the strong queer presence in the programme, but her boyfriend David lives with *Roseanne* and Dan, rather than with his abusive mother, who *Roseanne Conner* accused of 'giving respectable white trash a bad name'. This family is also meaningful in dramatic terms as conflicted and dysfunctional, not especially or pathologically, but routinely and necessarily. This dysfunction is normalised in two ways: it is either

located in the structures in which family life exists, or is attributable to the rebellious disposition of particular characters. Most often, both strategies co-exist; for example, the character of Jackie, Roseanne Conner's sister, is portrayed as somewhat hysterical and as promiscuous and unable to commit herself to long term relationships. These character attributes are rendered endearingly as transgressive but confused and eccentric, and as the behaviours of a woman damaged by an abusive father and by badly behaved boyfriends: crucially each is presented as the attempt to heal, to improve herself and make herself more self-sufficient and less dependent on the affirmation of abusive men. The progression of these narratives necessarily involves the representation of conflict, and it is in this that *Roseanne* really achieves its distinctiveness. Its comedy arises out of the dead-pan ironic engagement of the characters with a series of conflicts not rooted in trivial domestic misunderstandings and sight-gags, but in economic pressures, gender disputes, power struggles and other naturalistic oppressive conditions. As John Lahr puts it:

Roseanne's neurotic TV family was the first one to put America in contact with something resembling real life in the working-class world - a place where children are difficult, parents have real emotional and financial problems, and there's a discrepancy between what American society promises and what it delivers.¹¹

The question of Roseanne's authorship of *Roseanne* is complex, but it is an important one if we are to make a claim for the programme's heterosocial value on

the basis of Roseanne Barr/Pentland/Arnold/Thomas's manipulation of her feminism, her heterosexuality and her commitment to queer affiliation.

In her autobiography, *My Lives*, Roseanne details her move from stand-up comic to being cast in her own show through a multitude of struggles with ABC, the television network which commissioned it, and Carsey-Werner the production company which owned Matt Williams' original concept, and which produced the original series.¹² By the time of the 1995 season *Roseanne* was produced by Roseanne's own company, Full Moon & High Tide, with a contract for four more seasons with the network, and she has been executive producer of the show for the last four years, two of them jointly with her ex-husband, Tom Arnold. Lahr's substantial and considered portrait of the star pays considerable attention to the power struggles Roseanne has won to wrest control of *Roseanne* from Carsey-Werner, Matt Williams and the writing teams originally in place. Firing people is one of the principle constituents of Roseanne mythology, and like the speculations that Roseanne doesn't write the series (and her furious refusal of these claims), such material is principally valuable in the extent to which audiences find that mythology meaningful. Lahr's comment, after much prevarication, is:

In any case, the argument about creative ownership of the show is academic: Roseanne owns the mill and the charisma. And she treats the writers as extensions of herself.¹³

Whatever the complex and mediated reality of Roseanne's authorship, and of her circumscription in the context of American network television, she seems to be able to muster enough performative authority to make her claims for ownership convincing. A celebratory interview in *Entertainment Weekly* opens: 'You've got to understand the ground rules: *Roseanne* is Roseanne's show, and Roseanne rules' the piece continues, 'By the way, do you understand that Roseanne calls the shots? Just in case you don't, she says something like this: 'There's no room for anybody but me anywhere in the f---in' world.'"¹⁴

Whatever the intricacies and constantly shifting conditions of the corporate environment, this bombastic, no-nonsense, and brazenly powerful Roseanne is the one which sells magazines and propels *Roseanne* to such high ratings success. Given the popularity of *Roseanne*, and the attendant high advertising revenue it generates, Roseanne herself occupies a relatively powerful position within the complex of media corporations in which she works. From this position of complicity, of being embedded in powerful structures, Roseanne is perceived as being resistant and challenging. Peter Galvin suggests that:

although her vision of a 'politic of humanity' as she calls it, has sometimes been clouded by the ever-present - and occasionally self-created - media sensationalism surrounding her personal life, her commitment to exposing hypocrisy and fostering tolerance has never wavered.¹⁵

Roseanne herself makes characteristically modest claims for her politics:

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: *Roseanne* has made greater strides for including homosexuality as a part of life that any other show on television.

ROSEANNE: We're the only ones, too.

EW: Well, now we see it on other sitcoms.

ROSEANNE: But they all do it badly. And I know, because I'm a homosexual! I just like the message of humanity for everybody. I know everything on *Roseanne's* revolutionary. And I know that people aren't gonna get half of it for 50 years.

EW: Can you get in trouble for anything anymore?

ROSEANNE: Oh, they let me do everythin' now and it's no fun. I'm pretty bored. I've covered all the bases.¹⁶

Clearly one of the 'bases' covered by *Roseanne* is homosexuality: that is one of the major 'issues' that the series is associated with.

One of the things that makes *Roseanne's* treatment of political issues distinctive is that at its best the show does not seem to shy away from implicating its principal, and highly identifiable, characters in unflattering or ideologically damning ways. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is an episode from the 1994 season which Roseanne herself has called 'the best show we've ever done.'¹⁷ The storyline concerns Roseanne and Dan Conner's son DJ not wanting to kiss Geena, a girl in

the school play, because she is black. From here the plot progresses to Roseanne Conner accusing her husband of fostering racism in her children, to Dan seeking exoneration from his black friend, Chuck, who then challenges Dan's assumptions, to Roseanne being confronted by DJ's teacher as a racist parent, to finally being confronted by the girl's father, Mr. Williams. This final scene of the narrative is characteristic and representative of the treatment given to the whole episode. In it Roseanne Conner and her sister Jackie are cashing up a busy late night shift at the diner they jointly own. A black man appears at the door asking to be admitted. Roseanne refuses, turning the sign on the door to indicate that they are closed. After the man slams his hands against the door and storms off, Roseanne and Jackie agree that the incident was 'scary', and when he appears at the door again, Jackie reacts by shoving the cash draw back into the till, and the women panic until the man identifies himself as Geena Williams' father. Roseanne lets him in, asking him why he didn't just tell her who he was. Mr. Williams replies by asking her if she needs to know who all her customers are before she lets them into her restaurant. Roseanne defends herself by suggesting that for two women working late at night, safety is a priority. Jackie intercedes, attempting to placate the situation, but she inflames it further with anxious liberalism, by suggesting that Roseanne didn't refuse him entry because he is 'African-American', but because he's a man. Roseanne follows through with one of the show's standard comic lines about how she hates *all* men equally: the line receives the only laugh of the scene from the studio audience, and from the soundtrack it is clear that it's an anxious, relieved

sound, rather than the fulsome and ecstatic response usually audibly forthcoming in response to one of Roseanne's trademark deadpan statements. Roseanne Conner then makes the conflict explicit: she says that late at night, with their safety at stake, women alone must act on their instincts to protect themselves. Williams replies that he guesses that her son inherited Roseanne's instincts, before angrily leaving the restaurant. There is a moment of awkward stillness in the women, before Jackie attempts to comfort Roseanne: she suggests that Williams overreacted, and that most people would have behaved exactly as Roseanne had. As Jackie walks off, the tension behind her, Roseanne contemplates her sister's words and says, 'Well isn't that great?', her delivery uncomfortable, and her tone ironic. The credits then roll over an unrelated and unreservedly comic scene in which neither Roseanne nor Dan are present.

What stands out about the scene with Mr. Williams is not only its specificity and the explicit nature of its conflict, but the direction and delivery, which for a comedy show is unflinchingly dramatic and disquieting, stretching its generic conventions seemingly beyond breaking until comedy is restored and there is a delivery from the tension in the over-credit sequence, which is particularly funny, but also innocuous. Mick Bowes offers an indication of the distinctiveness of this lack of resolution:

the most characteristic feature of the 'classic' situation comedy is narrative closure. In other words, each story is resolved within the

30 minutes of the programme. In addition this closure is generally circular - it returns the characters to the positions they occupied at the start, thus allowing the next week's programme to start afresh.

This circular narrative closure allows little room for progression...¹⁸

Leaving the principal and eponymous character of *Roseanne* compromised and morally unsure about her behaviour at the end of the narrative is a fairly powerful statement. The fact that this disquiet arises out of a recognition that Roseanne's behaviour is typical, that she clearly thinks she reacted in a racist manner, and that most people - that is, most of us - would have reacted in the same way, leaves the challenge, the culpability, not only with Roseanne Conner herself, but with a white audience generally. The impression given by the episode is that racism is a subtle and pervasive part of attitudinal responses, even concerned and anxious ones, and that this is a serious issue worthy of sober reflection. At the end of the narrative, completion is withheld and our principal sources of identification remain uncomfortable and implicated, their unwitting and self-identified racism refusing a cosy restabilising of domestic and ideological harmony and furthermore left to pervade and inform future narratives and our perception of our favourite characters. The narrative processing of the 'issue' of racism, and the presence in the ensemble of the black characters of Chuck, Geena and Mr. Williams, do not function to illustrate the further coolness and daring of the Conner household: they are not reassuringly integrated into the deadpan dissent that we gleefully anticipate from Roseanne and her family. In this narrative race functions precisely to fracture the

angrily comic, and often cosily including, experience of oppression we share with the Conners by identifying them as white, culpable and sufficiently institutionally interior to actually be in a position to oppress others who might be more excluded than they are.

Roseanne and Homosociality: The Queer Challenge

It isn't difficult to see why such an ironic, conflictual and woman-centred representation of family life as *Roseanne* usually offers might be popular with a constituency whose identities are constantly being reproduced in homophobic culture as antithetical to the concerns of the family, even though we are all products and members of families in complex symbolic and emotional relationships. Roseanne herself has very publicly spoken out about her own abuse by her parents and how this produced self-loathing behaviour in relation to her body image; again there are resonances here for identities historically associated with images of sickness and physical deformity.¹⁹ Principally, however, it seems that it is the mythology around her control and power as a woman that has the most allure for Roseanne's queer constituency, and an indication of the extent of the belief in this mythology is the unquestioning way in which lesbian and gay journalists unmediatedly attribute the apparent gay-friendliness of *Roseanne* to its star. *Out* magazine has called this authority from a woman like Roseanne 'real world feminism'.²⁰ Roseanne herself has suggested that she dislikes the label 'feminist'

and prefers the title 'killer bitch', and she has been called, quite fabulously, a 'Goddess of Retribution'.²¹ This ambiguity in relation to questions of feminism is complex: on the one hand in interviews and public statements Roseanne enacts a scathing, class-based attack on academic feminism and on so-called feminist Hollywood actresses like Meryl Streep and Jodie Foster, on the other hand she employs male writers on *Roseanne* because women have apparently learned how to ventriloquise men too effectively and are less able to produce empowering dialogue for women than men are.²² Yet whatever the vicissitudes of Roseanne's strategic performance of her feminism, her vocalised commitment to some kind of pro-women politics appears unequivocal: 'Everything I do is from a commitment to feminism.'²³ It would seem then that there are abundant conditions here for the proliferation of heterosocial bonding: a powerfully situated and politicised heterosexual woman directly courting queer constituencies both in her affirmative personal statements, and in the public work that she is understood to author, where she offers gay representation apparently unfettered by the 'unreal' demands of positive images and politically correct liberalisation. How effective a basis for heterosocial bonding are the queer representations *Roseanne* makes?

There are two long running queer characters resident in the repertory company of *Roseanne*, these are Nancy, Roseanne Conner's friend and co-owner of the diner, and Leon, her old boss and now another co-owner of the diner, with whom she has shared a long-running and often hilarious enmity. One key element in both

characterisations that has been celebrated by the American lesbian and gay press is that they are 'just as cranky and dysfunctional as everybody else in the manners-free Conner household.'²⁴ The most famous and controversial 'queer' episode of *Roseanne* follows our eponymous heroine and her sister Jackie on a night out with Nancy and her girlfriend Sharon to a gay bar in the nearby town of Elgin. The principal tension that organises the narrative of the episode lies in the disparity between how 'cool' Roseanne Conner thinks she is and how cool she is perceived to be by Nancy and Leon.

The episode opens in the diner, and Roseanne and Jackie are moaning to Nancy that she hasn't yet introduced them to her new girlfriend, and they suggest that Nancy is uncomfortable with their heterosexuality; Roseanne Conner says:

...because you've never been able to accept our alternate lifestyle. It

isn't a choice you know!

Before the discussion can continue, the door opens and Nancy's girlfriend Sharon comes in. She is played by the actress and model Mariel Hemmingway. Nancy has not always been a lesbian in *Roseanne* and was previously married to Arnie Thomas, a friend of Dan's, played by Tom Arnold, Roseanne's real life husband at the time, and co-executive producer of the programme. As Sharon sits down at the counter, Roseanne asks Nancy why it is that when she dates men they look like Arnie, and when she dates women they look like Sharon. The studio audience pick up the joke and respond uproariously, acknowledging Mariel Hemmingway's beauty and the

bitchy reference to Roseanne's actual husband. The effect is complex: at an ideological level the joke seems to reference the stereotypical notion that lesbians are mannish women, and therefore 'unattractive' in heterosexual terms, and subverts this idea with a mutual recognition of Mariel Hemmingway's credentials as a typically heterosexualised blond beauty and the fact that she's playing a lesbian role. At an intra-textual level Roseanne's dry witticism inserts the figure of her own husband, and Nancy's fictional ex-husband, into the representational frame in a direct comparison with Nancy's current lesbian lover. Arnie/Tom loses the contest on looks, but then we would expect him to: men are not supposed to justify their occupation of cultural space on the basis of their appearance - Arnie was not judged in his worthiness as Nancy's husband on the basis of his beauty. The humour is sharp and incisive, but its effect is to render the spectacle of Sharon, and the lesbianism she represents, as little more than an object for visual consumption. Clearly this has multiple effects, depending on the audience constituency we are considering. *Roseanne's* deft acknowledgement that lesbians aren't supposed to be attractive in conventional feminine terms, and then its transgression of this expectation with the fetishised display of Sharon shows how lesbians can be just as beautifully feminine as straight women, women like Mariel Hemmingway.²⁵ Queer constituencies familiar with lesbian diversity and with the alluring glamour of lipstick lesbian femmes might well appreciate such a stalling of homophobic stereotyping. Yet the display of a familiar, heterosexual icon of feminine beauty, along with the narrative label of 'lesbian' has the effect of

neutralising the cultural impact of lesbianism on ideologies of gender, collapsing the difference between straight and queer women, even in the most banal physical and visual ways, and confirming that both can be equally understood as displaying the markers of heterosexual femininity for men. Nancy was introduced as a lesbian on *Roseanne* in a similar fashion when she brought her first girlfriend, Marla, to the diner and literally presented her to Roseanne and Jackie, and of course, to the audience. Marla was played by Morgan Fairchild, another iconic manifestation of blond, big-haired, glamorous heterosexual beauty. Part of the effect is to render Nancy's lesbianism as meaningful and rational for a straight audience: of course she would rather choose to sleep with women when they are as attractive as Mariel Hemingway - wouldn't you? Lesbianism thus becomes an issue of desire, and the difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality a matter of a simple choice between desiring women or desiring men. Within this framework, manifestations of homophobia are a function of the toleration of erotic difference, rather than an integral part of the constitution of heterosexuality and men's authority within it.

After Roseanne's acknowledgement of Sharon's looks, the two women bond, and Sharon invites Roseanne and her sister to come dancing with her and Nancy. Nancy appears uncomfortable with this idea, as does Jackie when she realises that they'll be going to a gay bar. At this point Leon comes into the restaurant from the kitchen, and acknowledges Sharon and Nancy by saying, 'Hiya fellas.' Again there is ambiguity here: *Roseanne* is clearly displaying an awareness of queer subcultural

codes, and Leon's line is campily deadpanned in such a way as to suggest an immediate sisterly solidarity between him and Sharon and Nancy, that excludes Roseanne and Jackie, instating a recognition of their shared cultural difference. Referring to the women, whatever the status of their performance of femininity, ironically as 'fellas' recognises their lesbianism from a fellow position of gender dissent. Yet at the same time, for an audience not conversant with queer subcultural vernacular, putting these words into the mouth of the gay male character scapegoats him as enunciating the mannish lesbian stereotype: an archetypal heterosexual construction in itself, and an insult only meaningful as such within a heterosexual context. In this reading, queerness homophobically victimises itself, leaving the tolerant and comfortable straight folks unassailably 'cool'. To decisively conclude which meaning the text prefers is difficult, and I think that it would be a little mean-spirited to suggest that it is the latter reading, in which the gay male character is the bearer of the homophobia, that *Roseanne* ultimately favours; its intentions are ideologically honourable. Nevertheless the script does embody the ambiguity, unwittingly privileging heterosexuality. The scene ends with Leon approaching Roseanne and telling her that the evening in prospect should prove to be quite entertaining. When she asks why, he replies that 'a gay bar is like a size twelve dress: you just won't fit in.' The treatment of homosexuality here suggests a sincere attempt not only to represent, but speak to, a queer subcultural constituency: it is unclear, however, what kind of homosexuality is being spoken in the name of *Roseanne's* daring and political

sophistication, let alone how queer constituencies are to interpret such ambiguity in the context of the mainstream, mass appeal of a top rated network sitcom.

The next scene opens at home with David, Darlene's boyfriend and the Conner's unofficially adopted son, and his brother Mark, who is Becky's husband, sat together on the sofa, sparring as to which is the more successfully masculine. There is a complex history of interactions that informs this sibling rivalry. The character of Darlene Conner, played by Sara Gilbert, is a tomboy, and has been widely subculturally interpreted as a lesbian: she's never been interested in boys that much, she went through a long period of depression during which her tastes and demeanour became quite gothic. For years she was only seen to wear black, she's always been politically outspoken and independent, she's a militant vegetarian and once staged an action outside the family's loose meat restaurant, she's interested in science fiction and writes comic books with her boyfriend. One of the main ways in which Darlene's relationship with David has been comically meaningful throughout its history on *Roseanne* has been in how it transgresses our traditional expectations of the representation of power relations in heterosexual teenage romance. As an expression of *Roseanne's* pro-feminism, Darlene has always been shown to be the more powerful and less dependent one in the relationship, whilst David has been shown to be passive, emotional and artistic. On the other hand, Darlene's sister Becky has always been shown to be much more traditionally feminine and girlie, always being interested in boys, mortally depressed if she

didn't have a boyfriend, and eventually so committed to her relationship with Mark that she dropped out of school and a successful academic career to elope with him at the age of seventeen. Mark has been similarly shown to be suspicious of any emotional expression, and as Roseanne once remarked of him, he has a 'dangerous, sexual thing going on.' For Dan and Roseanne, Mark has always been a threat to their daughter's sexuality, whilst David has been so lacking in sexual threat that he can be moved into the house to live with Darlene when they are both still sixteen.

We could say that the relationship between Darlene and David is a feminist representation in that it shows that women needn't remain embedded in subordinated positions in relation to men in heterosexual relationships. To some extent, in Darlene and David, *Roseanne* is taking the patriarchal stereotype of the shrewish wife and hen-pecked husband so beloved of much television situation comedy and turning it inside-out by showing that women needn't be stridently and unsympathetically represented as scapegoats to be empowered, and men in relationships with empowered women needn't be continuously and impotently chafing against the shackles of shrewishness. In relation to Darlene and Mrs. Conner David is a sympathetically drawn and viable characterisation: adorably malleable, expressive and funny, unthreatening and sensitive about women's issues without being condescending. It is in relation to the male characters in *Roseanne* that David's characterisation becomes more problematic. In an earlier episode Mark has referred to David as an 'art femme'. In the present scene with

David and Mark sat on the couch, Mark grunts derisively and accuses his brother of being 'pathetic' because Darlene bosses him around and he does her laundry: rather than exchanging his girlfriend homosocially for masculine credibility, David is, quite literally, serving her. David makes a lame denial of the accusation of castration, but within the framework Mark embodies, a framework authorised and validated by the dominance of homosocial structures and the absent but towering masculinity of their symbolic father, Dan Conner, he cannot answer the insult because it is true: David is an inadequate male in homosocial terms. The interaction reproduces the homosocial matrix so completely and authentically that the character of David has little option but to attempt to regain ground within it: the narrative cohesion of *Roseanne* demands that David's heterosexuality remain textually plausible.

Mark's wife Becky has taken a job at a local restaurant, and her uniform consists of an extremely brief cropped top and a miniscule pair of hot pants, with the restaurant's name, Bunz, stitched across the buttocks. Becky comes home from work, in her uniform, just after Mark has conjured the inadequacy of David's homosocial credentials. After she's greeted her husband and gone upstairs to change, David apes Mark's derisive grunt and says that he wouldn't let his wife go out dressed in the Bunz uniform, because 'it gives other guys ideas'. Mark sneers in reply and with a knowing leer tells David that he can keep Becky satisfied. The remark at once conjures Mark's sexual potency, and challenges David's: a man who

cannot 'satisfy' his woman cannot guarantee that she is his to display and exchange. David shifts uncomfortably and defensively replies that he can keep Darlene satisfied. At that moment Darlene passes through the room angrily shouting at David for not having used fabric softener in her washing. Here *Roseanne* is itself exchanging Darlene and her washing in a confirmation of the homosocial network, using her dissatisfaction with David (and he can't even do her laundry, let alone keep her happy sexually) in the same way as it uses Becky's lasciviously displayed rump: to validate the masculinity of Mark, and feminise David.

Because of his modestly political refusal to exchange women, or actively display his masculine credentials, David signifies queerly in relation to both Mark and Dan - it could be argued that David functions as the third queer regular on *Roseanne* in spite, or indeed, because, of his relationship with Darlene, and his relative inability to function homosocially within it. Other episodes of *Roseanne* have addressed Dan's discomfort at David's overt displays of emotion: in one memorable example when Darlene had broken up with him, David bursts into tears at regular intervals, whilst Dan blunders around, bereft of any homosocial script with which to conduct his interaction with his adopted son. The effect is to illuminate how far outside Mr. Conner's ambit of masculinity David is. Another *Roseanne* dealt with the problem of DJ getting bullied at school and his inability to fight off his attackers; Dan is unable to teach the thirteen year old to fight, who, to his father's exasperation, chooses to

cry or curl up on the floor in a ball when confronted. DJ eventually overcomes this 'problem' by beating up David, an elder but more ineffectual foe, much to the amusement of Mark, and the embarrassment of Dan, to say nothing of David's humiliation. What seems crucial about this episode is that all the male characters, even the thirteen year old DJ find common ground which isolates and 'queers' David: even a child can function within homosocial bonds more successfully than David.

We might suggest that if *Roseanne* was more fully committed to being pro-queer David's lack of masculine credentials wouldn't end up isolating and punishing him within the narrative framework, but Roseanne Conner's heterosexuality enforces a relationship between David and her husband. Ultimately the need to situate David heterosexually (that is, within the homosocial matrix that Dan emanates) compromises *Roseanne's* heterosocial potential by making him the repository of homosocial anxiety the show so carefully shields and transfers away from its self-consciously out and labelled queer characters. We may conclude that here *Roseanne* is effectively collusive with a metropolitan liberal circulation of homosexuality; this issue will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, in relation to Pedro Almodóvar. Homosexuality circulates through the text in such a way as to reassure the participants and the audience how cool and trendy they are: homosexuality is continually conjured in enlightened and frank ways, but continually re-framed

within structures of heterosexuality and homosociality that representationally reproduce the conditions of our oppression and powerlessness.

This scene of David's homosocial humiliation within the infamous 'lesbian kiss' episode of *Roseanne* reaches its climax when Dean Bates arrives at the door. David lets him in, announcing to both the audience and his brother Mark, that Dean, who is a jock-type football player, once dated Becky. In an aside between the brothers, David tells Mark that Dean is much better looking: his purpose is to threaten Mark by conjuring Dean's apparently superior homosocial credentials, but the strategy backfires, and Mark replies, 'Why don't you go and give him a big kiss?' Here David becomes the corporeal embodiment of the double bind inherent within the homosocial system: '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.'²⁶

David's already disempowered position enables Mark to exert definitional leverage upon his brother's remarks, drawing on a commonly understood rhetoric of homosexual panic to effortlessly repel David's homosocial challenge and re-write it as an erotic interest. The scenario may be humorous, but the effects are unfortunate in the light of *Roseanne's* apparent queer friendliness. Even if we were to reject the notion of David's nominal queerness, the effect of his homosocial exclusion is to constitute a powerfully interior and cohesive masculinity within the textual confines of *Roseanne*, a masculinity signifying sufficiently aggressively - and hegemonically - as to be able to exert definitional control upon gender behaviour.

David's failure and Mark's success at deploying their masculinity are brought into visibility by the text through the connotation of a demonised and inexplicitly unpleasant homosexual outside that is meaningful only in the extent to which *Roseanne* upholds a homophobic consensus. David may remain nominally understood within the text as a heterosexual characterisation, but his indeterminate performance of this in relation to other men is used to luridly constitute a homosocial system of homophobia which goes spectacularly unchallenged by the show's non-homosocially powerful female figures, such as Darlene or Roseanne Conner herself.

Indeed, as the scene with Mark, David and Dean Bates continues, we see that Darlene's autonomous feminism can actually function to collude in David's homophobic exclusion. It transpires that Dean has arrived at the house to give Darlene a lift back to school: this prompts an argument because Becky resents Darlene using her old boyfriends to get rides. Mark challenges Becky, asking her why she cares if she's now married to him, and Becky flounces out of the room. Dean is loading the car, and David gloats to Darlene about Mark's jealousy. Darlene is at the door, about to leave, and she agrees with David, but says: 'Yeah, Becky's not the one who's going to have to think of some way to pay Dean back for the ride. See ya, David.' Here Darlene's refusal to cosset David's masculinity seems to be less about her need for autonomy, than it is about her collusion with David's homosocial abjection: not only can he not trade on his relationship with Darlene to

inflate his masculine credibility in public exchanges with men, but in private, Darlene refuses to indulge his insecurities and indeed exploits them under the gaze of the audience so that the scene may end with a laugh.

The next scene opens at Lips, the gay bar in Elgin, with the arrival of Roseanne and her entourage. Several comic exchanges illuminate *Roseanne's* progressive intent, and its ease around a queer subcultural environment. Jackie is still uncomfortable about being in a gay space, she tells Roseanne that she is uneasy about people thinking that she's gay: Roseanne replies that she can think that they are gay right back at them. Jackie is pregnant, and loudly proclaims, 'Anybody can see that I'm *conventional*.' A little later, Jackie spots the woman who delivers her mail standing at the bar. The woman comes over, and Roseanne embraces her sister as if they were lovers, she says: 'Now, now, you don't have to hide our love.' The woman is pleased to see Jackie and tells her that she had a feeling about her being a lesbian. As the woman walks off, Jackie is thrown into confused panic and she asks, 'Why, what did I do?' Later at the bar Roseanne flirts with the woman serving drinks: she introduces herself, and tells the woman that she is the father of Jackie's baby. Jackie angrily shrugs off Roseanne's show of affection, calling her 'psychotic' and reacting incredulously to her sister's flirtation with the woman behind the bar. Roseanne tells her that she is doing what she would do in any bar: scoring free drinks. Here it seems that the joke is on Jackie and her lack of coolness in the queer environment: she is comically scapegoated to illustrate Roseanne's comparative ease and

familiarity. This is enjoyable stuff for a queer constituency, making the uptight heterosexual woman alienated and unattractive in the clenched anxiety of her behaviour, normalising the queer space through her amusing but abnormal reaction.

The action then moves ahead a little: Roseanne, Nancy and Sharon have been dancing, Roseanne and Sharon take a break and sit at a table together, and Roseanne says, 'Can you believe that Nancy doesn't think I'm cool enough for this place?' Sharon confirms that Roseanne has disproved the slur by teaching forty people to dance the monkey. Both women agree that they should hang out more often, and Roseanne suggests that next time they should leave the 'wives' at home, gesturing towards where Jackie is sat at the bar. Sharon's body language and tone inflect her reply with a collusive sexual intimacy as she says, 'you read my mind.' Roseanne blanks the assumed collusion, registering some confusion that ruptures her normal dead-pan stubbornness, the only reply she manages is 'Huh?' As we are registering the confusion on Roseanne's face, the back of Sharon's head moves into the shot, and we get a brief glimpse of Roseanne's widening eyes before Sharon closes up and we assume that she kisses Roseanne. As Sharon pulls away from the kiss she hugs Roseanne, whose face we can now see over Sharon's shoulder. Roseanne wipes her mouth on Sharon's sleeve, her face twisted into an expression of distaste.

It is interesting to note the account *Out* magazine offers of this 'lesbian kiss':

mainstream America - for a single moment in time - watched a woman kiss another woman *without flinching*. The press made it sensational; Roseanne made it ordinary.²⁷

It would be quite difficult to speculate on the cause of the disparity in accounts here, but whatever the strategic reason for Carswell's emphatic applause of the kiss, her interpretation is extraordinary. Pedantically speaking Carswell is correct, Roseanne does not flinch away from the kiss we may assume is forthcoming from Sharon, although it's more of a connotation of a kiss that the real thing, given that we only see the back of Sharon's head moving in front of Roseanne's, inclining slightly and resting there for a second or two. Roseanne may not flinch, but wiping your mouth on somebody's sleeve with your face screwed up is a fairly substantial expression of at least ambiguity, if not out and out loathing. What seems clear is that this display of distaste is only representationally meaningful, and certainly only comic, in the context of a heterosexual gaze. Roseanne's disgust at the homosexual act she has just been involved in is collusively displayed for the edification of a straight audience: sure, Mariel Hemmingway might be great to look at, but kissing her makes you into a dyke, and we all know how distasteful that is.

Roseanne refers to this episode as the 'homophobia show':

I think homophobia is something everybody has, and on that night Roseanne Conner dealt with her own homophobia. I don't

see it as the big lesbian kiss show, but lesbians do, and I give them that.²⁸

Implicating the character of Roseanne Conner in homophobic attitudes and behaviour, as *Roseanne* implicated her in racism, as we saw earlier, would be a significant piece of political commentary by the programme, even an instance of heterosocial affiliation. Clearly we can read the representation *Roseanne* makes of Roseanne's reaction to Sharon's connotated kiss in this way, in that it displays her culpability. However, notwithstanding the distinct ways in which race and sexuality are differently mobilised within structures of power, we could also argue that *Roseanne* deals with the two issues quite differently, according the racism substantially more seriousness.

As we saw earlier in the episode of *Roseanne* where DJ refused to kiss a girl because she was black, Roseanne and Dan Conner's culpability was represented so unsettlingly as to invite a rupture in the expected generic conventions of the programme. Roseanne's racism was not displayed for the comic edification of the audience, but to challenge us about our own potential complicity with systems of racism. If Roseanne Conner's reaction to the 'lesbian kiss' is homophobic, then that homophobia is upheld by the programme itself, as the opportunity for an audience to identify with her discomfort, and share relieved laughter that the kiss, and the lesbianism it represents, was not enjoyed. For it seems clear that Roseanne's distasteful reaction, displaying homophobia, does not invite a

challenge to dominant attitudes ventriloquizing liberalism; it does not invite us to distance ourselves from her politically unacceptable reaction: rather it panders to it, inviting voyeuristic collusion. You can gaze upon daring and weird queerness, and share disgust with it at the same time. The studio audience's reaction to this scene, embedded in the text on the soundtrack, expresses shocked titillation at the extraordinariness of the kiss, which is greeted with a loud chorus of 'oohs', whilst Roseanne's mouth-wiping and grimace, signs of her robust heterosexuality, and of her homophobia - which the programme is of course supposed to be apparently condemning, are marked with increasingly raucous and enthusiastic applause and laughter.

The next day, post-queer trauma, Roseanne offers her sister, and subsequently Nancy, a number of accounts of her unease. At the diner, we know that something is amiss because Roseanne is cleaning: Jackie tells her that it's a shame that Sharon didn't 'slip her the tongue', because they might have been able to get the place up to code. Roseanne describes the kiss as the kind that Dan used to give her before they were married: this makes Dan look unromantic, but in as much as these kinds of expression are the realm of women, such a remark actually reminds us of the status of Dan's masculinity. At first Roseanne denies that she is bothered because she has been kissed by a woman. She tells Jackie that she is upset for Nancy: she feels that Nancy will jealously regard the kiss as adulterous. When Nancy arrives at work, it transpires that she already knows about the kiss and has expressed

reservations to Sharon about her having done it: she anticipated that Roseanne would 'freak out.' Roseanne denies this, but Nancy speculates that Roseanne actually enjoyed the kiss and notes that sexuality 'isn't all black and white.' Roseanne replies that she knows all about the grey area, and isn't bothered by some tiny percentage of her gayness. Nancy is now angry: she tells Roseanne that she is a hypocrite and that this is exactly why she was uncomfortable about taking her to a gay bar in the first place. Roseanne replies:

R: Oh yeah? A hypocrite doesn't go to a gay bar and teach forty gay people how to do the monkey!

N: Oh, and we're supposed to admire you because you went to a gay bar? I'm supposed to think you're cool because you have gay friends?

R: I don't care if you think I'm cool at all, because I know that I'm cool, baby. I'm probably the coolest chick you've ever met, and for your information I have friends that are way gayer than you!

Before the argument can continue, the narrative side-steps to a brief scene between Dan and DJ, which makes an interesting reflection on the ideological struggle underway at the diner. DJ asks his father whether it is wrong for his mother to go dancing with other women. Dan's answer is delivered as a litany, he says, 'No, and anybody who tells you otherwise is wrong.' DJ then asks Dan if he dances with other men: at first Dan stays within his self-consciously insincere liberalism and says that he does, immediately retracting: 'no, never, ever, not once.'

DJ says that he is glad, because he doesn't want to dance with men either. As his son walks away, Dan heaves a sigh of relief, saying 'hallelujah.' This scene is played straightforwardly comically, the laughter arising out of Dan's well meaning (but unfelt) attempt at liberal parenting. This humour is a function of an assumed consensus about maintaining a successful liberal ventriloquism of progressiveness whilst keeping homosexuality an object: remaining clear that a son with homosexual tendencies or curiosity is a bad thing. Such humour seems to be saying that despite *Roseanne's* high queer content, audiences can be assured that their normative heterosexual world-view will remain intact. Given that this scene breaks another, larger one, which is debating the limits of heterosexual progressiveness in challenging ways, the interlude's effect on potential heterosocial spectatorship is pretty depressing, using the humour to once again delineate included and excluded audience constituencies.

Back at the diner Roseanne is still cleaning, so we know her anxieties are unresolved. Jackie attempts to placate her, 'It's not so bad that the kiss freaked you out, you're just not as cool as you thought you were.' But Roseanne isn't ready to concede yet: she incinerates her sister, reminding her of how totally uncool *she* was at the bar. Roseanne now suggests that she's upset because Dan will be jealous, but her delivery of the proposition is becoming less convincing. She reminds Jackie of how threatened Dan got in high school when another boy kissed her, and how Dan beat him up. Jackie remembers, and asks Roseanne if she thinks Dan will beat

up Sharon, because Dan will feel threatened by her. Jackie's tone here is incredulous, whilst Roseanne's confirmation betrays the implausibility of her fear. Again, the studio audience is having a good time with this: it seems preposterous that Sharon would have sufficient homosocial credibility to threaten Dan in this way. As we've seen, Sharon is so scopically heterosexual and alluring that she can't even elicit the threat conjured by the mannish butch dyke. Jackie finishes her account of Roseanne's fear by suggesting that she will end up sleeping with Sharon. Unseen by the sisters, Nancy has come into the kitchen. Roseanne is the goddess of retribution: 'Of course not! I am NOT GAY!' At this, they turn to Nancy as she slams out of the kitchen. Roseanne follows her,

R: I just don't like people calling me things that I'm not, like a hypocrite, or gay, you know, because I'm not. I wouldn't like anybody to call me an astronaut because it's fine to be an astronaut, but I'm not an astronaut. I'm not going to admit I was wrong or anything, but I just don't wanna fight with you anymore, so, I was wrong.

N: Thank you.

R: I'm still pretty cool, you know, for a forty year old mother of three who lives in Lanford, Illinois. I like that Snoopy Dog Dog.

Despite the indeterminacy of Roseanne's apology (what is she actually apologising for? is she admitting her homophobia?) Nancy reassures Roseanne that she doesn't have to be cool to be her friend. She says that she feels sick every time she pictures

Roseanne and Dan in bed together, and Roseanne says that she does too. Here, once again, the idea of Dan and the masculinity he represents, is used to frame the discussion. The friends are acknowledging Dan's place within Roseanne's heterosexuality, recognising that she is his to homosocially exchange. Indeed, *Roseanne* itself is exchanging her in the name of Dan's masculine credibility at this point. It doesn't really matter that he is portrayed unflatteringly: notwithstanding how secure and invested we know the Conner's marriage to be, his absence is structuring, and women don't necessarily have to like men to be subject to them in homosocial exchange, nor do men have to please women sexually to acquire them as homosocial currency.

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

The other significant episode of *Roseanne* infamous for its homosexual content portrays Leon's gay wedding. As the show opens a man is leaving the diner and complaining to Roseanne about the food; he's quite insulting. He leaves a cheque for the bill and no tip. There another man sat at the counter. He sympathises with Roseanne and tells her how he used to work in a restaurant, and that she shouldn't have to put up with such bad behaviour. The second man, who we learn is called Scott, asks for the phone, and uses the details printed on the cheque to ring the man's wife. He pretends to be the desk clerk at the Come and Go motel in Elgin and tells the woman that he has some underwear that she must have left the last time she stayed.²⁹ The man's wife obviously doesn't know what he's talking

about, and he says, 'Oh, you're not a busty twenty year old blonde? Woops, my mistake.' Roseanne is thrilled to have found another queen of retribution, and the incident bonds them in its delicious maliciousness, as it bonds the audience to this stranger:

R: Wow! He stiffes me for a tip and you destroy his marriage - that's awesome.

S: I thought that you'd enjoy that. You look like you've ruined a few lives in your day.

R: I think I should tell you I'm a married woman. But I'm not a fanatic about it.

The nature of this bond, its shared currency, is the punishment of an abusive heterosexual man by invoking a stereotypical homosocial narrative against him. The errant customer's identity as a heterosexual man is constituted through a system that constantly exchanges women, the blonder, bustier and younger they are the more rigorous the heterosexuality and the more distance he's able to open up between himself and the queer object. The nature of the bond here is all the more profound for its indexical relationship to the homosocial debility of Roseanne as a middle-aged brunette who may be busty, but who is also militantly fat, and of Scott as a gay man. We could describe their relationship as heterosocial.

It transpires that Scott is in town to meet up with the person who he is about to marry, the person who jilted him at the altar five years ago. Roseanne is defensive

on behalf of her new heterosocial partner, she asks: 'What kind of a horrible bitch would dump you?' at the exact moment the door opens and Leon walks in.

Roseanne is incredulous that her new buddy could be marrying the subject of her long-term enmity: 'even in a small town like this one he is at the very bottom of the homosexual heap.' But Leon has the opportunity to return the blow. It transpires that the couple are having trouble putting their wedding together. Scott suggests that they ask Roseanne, and Leon replies, 'No, no, no, no. No. Roseanne is not to be trusted with anything that involves cake...I've always dreamed of a ceremony that would culminate in a hog-fry.' But of course, the last line is Roseanne's: 'I've always thought of you as the middle-aged, obnoxious gay son that I've never had.' Under pressure from Scott, Leon finally agrees to let Roseanne plan the ceremony.

The scene is now set at the Conner home, and time has passed. David and Jackie are helping plan the wedding. Roseanne rings to check the seating plan, and David tells her (to much studio laughter) that it's fine: 'Boy, girl. Boy, boy. Boy, boy. Boy, boy. And boy.' Having fetishised this marker of the occasion's strangeness, we move on to Jackie, who is checking a brochure of strippers: she doesn't know whether to choose Rod, Lance or Shaft. She calls to Dan to help her choose a stripper and he comes running, only to back off uncomfortably (to much applause) when he sees the brochure: 'Those aren't strippers, they're guys.' In Dan's experience it is only women who are prepared to consent to offering a display of their bodies for shared male consumption. He asks Jackie if Roseanne is planning

Leon's stag party as well, and she tells him that the strippers are for the wedding. Dan thinks that Roseanne is going over the top, and Jackie agrees, but neither will tell her.

Having got some idea of the occasion in prospect, we now move on in time and to the Lanford Women's Club, where Leon arrives to meet Roseanne. She takes him into the hall, which is decorated in a gaudy mix of pink garlands, large inverted pink triangles bearing the logo 'Gay Love - Gay Power', statues of Adonis and of David adorned with pink ribbon, portraits of Streisand, Bowie, Dietrich and others, topless beefcake hunks in bow ties, and two drag performers, one impersonating Judy Garland, the other Liza Minnelli. Leon is somewhat perplexed:

L: What is all this?

R: It's a gay wedding.

L: This isn't a wedding, it's a circus. You have somehow managed to take every gay stereotype and just roll them up into one gigantic offensive, Roseanne-iacal bunch of *wrong!*

R: Relax, nobody gets the wedding they really want...

L: It's off.

R: What do you mean?

L: I said the wedding is off.

R: Well of course it's a little off, it's two guys, for god's sakes!

One of the principle virtues of the treatment of the gay wedding in this episode is that it is complex and raises a number of issues.

Whether or not gay people should be getting married is a vexed question for lesbians and gay men themselves as much as it is for legislators, right-wing religious activists, good liberals, and other moral commentators. Fundamentally all groups see the question in the same way; they are trying to assert some idea about what queer people in our cultures are for. Are we merely the victims of ignorance, blighted by an accident of difference which needs greater understanding, equality and tolerance from those who would seek to oppress us because they do not really know that we are the same as them, underneath it all? Or, are we already known by those who would oppress us as fundamental and structuring threats to the fabric of their identities and power? Are we, or can we, or should we, be good citizens?

We have seen how this question is put by Leo Bersani:

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.³⁰

We are all too familiar with how these issues are debated by heterosexual power groups: even the apparently super-liberal, gay friendly President Clinton told *The Advocate* that he doesn't believe that gay people should be allowed to marry.³¹

More significantly, lesbian and gay writers and activists have themselves expressed a wide range of investments in this question. The much-feted Andrew Sullivan, ex-editor of *The New Republic* achieves perhaps the most considered and gay (male) affirmative example of assimilationism in his *Virtually Normal*; yet however considered there remains a chronic naiveté at the heart of his position:

[marriage] would also be an unqualified social good for homosexuals. It provides role models for young gay people, who, after the exhilaration of coming out, can easily lapse into short-term relationships...³²

Here the enemy scapegoated to bring about gay inclusion seems to be promiscuity, but however parochial, at least Sullivan is under no illusions about his position:

Gay marriage is not a radical step; it is a profoundly humanizing, traditionalizing step. It is the first step in any resolution of the homosexual question - more important than any other institution, since it is the most central institution to the nature of the problem, which is to say, the emotional and sexual bond between one human being and another... It is ultimately the only reform that truly matters.³³

Such insistent pomposity is precisely a danger inherent within a politics that is insufficiently heterosocial: with the exception of his antibody status, Sullivan speaks from the relatively privileged position I spoke of earlier; in particular his

whiteness and maleness, to say nothing of his corporate authority, education and money at best make his words hegemonic in their very ignorance, and at worst traitorous in their solipsism.

In the form of their work as much as in its content, the Homocult collective exhibit a radical difference from the liberal mewlings of Andrew Sullivan. Homocult's work takes the form of graphics, posters, graffiti, flyers and collages in mixed media, that have been collected in a book, but which are more generally to be found in urban spaces: the group was founded in Manchester. One montage says: 'Shame: Rich Gays play Dead, their language in conserving, stagnating, lingering, death.' Another reproduces an image from an advertisement for a national dating agency with the caption 'You must marry. Issued by Dept. of Social Order, in conjunction with Hetrolife Plc.'³⁴ For Homocult being a homosexual is not about becoming a good citizen; their 'ultimate plan' is 'the destruction of the 'moral' state.' The homosexual politics of the Stonewall Group in Britain, and the queer politics of Outrage are an anathema: 'Now the stonewall group formed from our blood police our language, needs and lives. Outrage is a cosy sham. You can only be outraged by what surprises you. It's no surprise to common queers that there is no justice for us. We are not outraged, we are defiant.'³⁵

Roseanne's treatment of Leon and Scott's gay wedding could potentially tap into this range of ideas that diverse and complex communities of gays and lesbians

produce, side-stepping a problematic unification of queer cultures and making a more radical presentation as a result. Roseanne's campily overdetermined notion of what constitutes a gay wedding can be understood in several different ways. As a heterosexual character her delivery of the wedding and her unrepentant insistence upon Leon going through with it, can be read as an abusive appropriation of gay culture for the edification of Roseanne Conner's much-invested 'coolness', and for the voyeuristic consumption of *Roseanne's* audience. Here, her statement that 'Well of course it's a little off, it's two guys, for god's sakes!' becomes the invocation of a gap between the strangeness of gay matrimony and the normality and dignity of heterosexual union. Gays can get married, but such ceremonies are a bit of camp fun, not profound and meaningful occasions. However, Roseanne's production of the gay wedding could also be seen as a parodic inversion of exactly such profundity, using the dissident place queerness inhabits within the mythologies of marriage to critique its conventions. Why should queers mimic ceremonies of commitment sanctioned by a hostile state, when we have a distinct culture of our own from which to draw ritualistic meanings? In this reading, Roseanne's suggestion of how 'off' the ceremony is becomes a recognition of the futility of Leon's aspiration for the public sanction of his partnership, and a reminder to him of the difference of his queer identity. Yet even within this 'positive' reading of *Roseanne's* gay wedding, one which gives her the benefit of queer doubt, Roseanne Conner is the arbiter of essential dissident queerness, a heterosexual woman who teaches overly liberal gay men how to regain their lost transgressive perversity.

The narrative continues after the passing of time. The wedding is now imminent, and Roseanne has locked Leon in the bathroom so that he cannot escape. Leon's mother arrives, presenting an opportunity for more bitching. Roseanne's opening line seems to shore up the idea of her queer iconicity, as she references *The Wizard of Oz*: 'How wonderful it is that you were able to get that house off of you before the wedding!' Whilst the retort of Leon's mother introduces another way of decoding Roseanne's wedding vision: 'Look at this place. Have you ever seen such a horrific display of blue collar tastelessness?' As Leon's mother flounces off, leaving her class critique unpursued, Dan finally plucks up the courage to intervene in the unfolding queer debacle:

D: Honey I think you should tone down the wedding like he wanted.

R: No! This is *my* wedding, and he is lucky I cast him in it.

D: Roseanne, I know you wanted this wedding to be a certain way, but if you don't do something, there isn't going to be a wedding, it's going to be all your fault, and you know who's going to suffer?

Me.

Here the balance seems to be shifting back towards Roseanne's oppressive appropriation of queerness and her heterosexually privileged authority: it's her wedding, and we know that weddings are all about bridal desires: here it is Roseanne who is the bride, even though she's not getting married, she is the

heterosexual princess at the centre of the occasion. Once again Dan is deferring to Roseanne's control in the manner that we expect and love, but his massively masculine, working-class presence, and our intra-textual familiarity with his utter lack of deference to anybody else, both infers Roseanne's relation to his masculinity and re-locates her within a heterosexual matrix that is often quite normative.

Roseanne then goes to the bathroom to persuade Leon to take part in her wedding. She tells him that she has toned down the gay kitsch, but he still wants to leave, not because she's turned his wedding into a 'circus': but because he is having second thoughts about marrying Scott. Any potential liberal guilt that may be amassing due to the impending fiasco now passes back to Leon: *she's* not domineering, *he's* just flaky and unreliable. Roseanne bullies Leon, telling him that he can't leave Scott at the altar again, that Scott is that best thing that's ever happened to him. Leon agrees, but he's scared of the commitment and the permanence. Leon suggests a whole range of stupid reasons why he cannot marry, giving Roseanne the opportunity to occupy a position of rationality and knowledge with increasing belligerence. Finally Leon says:

L: Okay, then how about this, ready? What if I'm not really gay?

R: You couldn't be any gayer if your name was Gay Gayerson.

L: Oh yeah? Well you just think about it, young lady. I hate to shop, I am absolutely insensitive, I detest Barbra Streisand, and for god's sake, I'm a Republican.

R: But do you like having sex with men?

L: Well, I...

R: GAY!!

Here the loud, accusative naming of gayness, within the context of *Roseanne's* self-consciously gay-affirmative liberalism, transgresses our conventional expectations about screaming 'Gay!' at somebody. Queers are used to being named, abused and taunted by heterosexuals with the words with which we may identify ourselves. Here Leon's homosexual self-doubt conveniently vacates the space of queer articulacy, allowing the ultra 'cool' Roseanne to become the bearer, arbiter, originator, of confident, assertive and positive queer identification. Leon's deficiency in expressing the markers of gayness that *Roseanne* posits (shopping, Streisand, sensitivity, liberalism), only makes Roseanne herself even more successfully queer: she can speak it, and she can do it, as we are supposed to deduce from her decoration of the wedding. Furthermore, it seems as though it is Roseanne's insistence on being in control, of knowing and determining Leon's doubts about the marriage that goads him into more and more outrageous retorts in order to gain some self-determination: leads him, eventually, to renounce his sexuality in the hope that she will leave him alone. His final retort challenges her expression of his sexual orientation. He says, 'Oh yeah?' and then grabs her and

kisses her passionately on the mouth. He pulls back and shakes his head in a suggestion of revulsion, and strides for the door: 'I'm gay. Let's do it.' It would seem that there are dual causes of dismay for queer audiences here.

Any vestiges of identification we are supposed to have left with the self-confessed right-wing, insensitive, Streisand loathing (this confession is of course the absolute worst) Leon are scoured away by the script when it has him kiss Roseanne: using homosocial sexual objectification of women to regain his homosexuality is a pretty unsympathetic act, not only in its sexism but in its lack of queer pride - it humiliates him as a gay man, even more than his preceding renunciation. On another level, the kiss, like that between Roseanne and Sharon, is supposed to elicit revulsion out of fascination and progressive 'cool'; queerness here is once again the plaything of heterosexual voyeurism, and Roseanne is the unassailably heterosexual location for audience identification. Once again she gets a brief taste of the strange fruit (at least from the right gender this time) whilst the narrative meaning of the kiss depends upon *her* heterosexuality, and *their* strangeness. For Leon's 'test' of his gayness, as much as for Sharon's desire of Roseanne, the fixed point from which resolution springs, is Roseanne's heterosexuality: her normativity proving Leon's homosexuality, and displaying Sharon's kinky lesbianism. Neither of these interactions, as the epicentre of *Roseanne's* queer narratives, troubles heterosexuality or problematises normative gender roles as the source of homophobia. The wedding ceremony itself follows, conducted by an inept

preacher who adds comic relief by twisting up his words. There are a few moments of apparently genuine celebration of queer partnership:

Scott: I love you in a way that is mystical and eternal and illegal in twenty states.

Leon: That's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

However, the overall tone is patronising. The inept preacher is from Leon's home town and was brought to conduct the ceremony especially. The fact that he was chosen by Leon himself makes him partly responsible for the ceremony's comic illegitimacy, especially as the preacher's shortcomings mean that Scott and Leon have to make up and say their own vows.

Preacher: Do you, Leon, take this Scott to be your awfully rabid husband?

Again this indication of the gay couple's distance outside conventional heterosexual matrimony has dual meanings: either their impromptu vows are a transgressive reinscription of patriarchal matrimony, or they are an indication of the couple's lack of normality or recognition by state or religion.

Preacher: I now pronounce you man and...er...I now pronounce you men.

The preacher's indeterminacy about how to address the couple highlights the inadequacy and heterosexism of 'traditional' notions of marriage and the language used around sexual partnership; however, it also re-highlights the couple's strangeness, especially as the preacher's function is precisely to recognise and

authenticate the occasion, not to belittle it. As the newlyweds kiss, the camera quickly pans away to Dan and Roseanne. Dan is shifting in his seat, looking but not looking, mesmerised and shocked by the kiss:

Dan: And there's the kiss. I was wondering if they were going to do it, and they're doing it. Look at them going at it.

Roseanne: They are not 'going at it' Dan, it just happens to be two people of the same sex kissing, and there's nothing wrong with that.

At this moment, out of nowhere, Mariel Hemmingway (Sharon) appears over Roseanne's shoulder and says hello. Roseanne returns the greeting, with just a little too much enthusiasm, and the episode ends on a close up of her fixed and ever so slightly too wide grin. Sharon's appearance, and the jog that it provides to our memories of Roseanne's discomfort with her own 'lesbian' kiss neatly dampens the ardour of her liberal superiority in relation to Dan, and the moment is very funny, providing us with a very satisfying and rare occasion of Roseanne's silenced defeat. But of course, the cost of that humour is that both the wedding kiss of Leon and Scott, and the 'lesbian' kiss of Roseanne and Sharon from the preceding season, are displayed for voyeuristic heterosexual consumption: indeed given the rapidity with which the direction moves us from Leon and Scott's kiss (seen only from the back of Leon's head, of course) to Dan's reaction to it, we may conclude that the very point of the kiss is not its display of gay love, but its garnering of disgusted heterosexual titillation. Rather than circulating through *Roseanne* as a cultural

threat, something that contextualises and denaturalises masculinity and the heterosexual power with which it dominates women, homosexuality becomes but an effect of a liberal world view ventriloquising progressiveness, based on diversity and inclusion, but always under the terms of existing power relations. Certain issues and identities can be run through this world view in a challenging way, as the confrontation with Mr. Williams challenged Roseanne's racism. But in that episode, as with the current one, difference is not allowed to articulate for itself, but only as a testing and enlightening reflection of the oppressive term in each binary. Homosexuality is liberally enshrined, and direct expressions of homophobia are not allowed to be directed at gays and lesbians themselves. It is only in relation to the quasi-queerness of David that *Roseanne* even begins to dare to examine the place of homosexual panic in the constitution of homosocial systems. Such questions are however kept at some distance from actually identified gay characters, who all circulate through the woman-centred ambit of Roseanne herself. But as we have seen, even here, Roseanne's heterosexuality remains the structuring condition of queer representation. Queerness signifies, often blatantly, but always as the opportunity for progressive, 'cool' assimilation rather as the occasion for a challenge to heterosexual authority, Roseanne's included. Specific and distinct cultural expressions of homosexuality are ultimately seen as in no way incompatible with 'cool' heterosexuality. Indeed such expressions are displayed for the edification of cool heterosexuals, both in political terms - by flattering the

liberal ego, and in voyeuristic terms - by always framing queerness as kinky and strange. Queerness rarely appears strange and weird to queers themselves.

Mary-Come-Lately or Gay Goddess?

What makes these limitations in the scope of *Roseanne's* queerness so marked, is the extent to which the show invites lesbian and gay subcultural investment: and as we have seen from American publications, this is certainly forthcoming. However, it could be argued that the disparity between the tenor of the treatment accorded the 'issues' of racism and sexuality in *Roseanne* is due neither to the distinct and radically different nature of the questions themselves, nor to some ideological shortcoming on the part of the producers, but occurs because *Roseanne* is drawing performatively on a camp register that is characteristic of much queer cultural negotiation. This register, an attitude of *mise en scene*, timing, tone and irony, as well as the more substantial qualities of script and direction, can in itself be appealing to queer audiences as it elicits a way of reading well versed through a canon of appropriated camp classics. This is a quality of the material not highlighted in mandarin, formalised discourses of textual analysis, and I am aware of the need to do justice to the multiple and ironic layers through which *Roseanne* pitches its treatment of homosexual life. Features of the sitcom would make it highly valuable as a cultural resource for gay men regardless of its specific gay content, as most films and television in the subcultural queer canon attest.³⁶ As I have tried to indicate, *Roseanne's* scenes of dialogue have a distinctive performative

quality that at its most successful manages to convey the weight and substance of experiences the show dramatises, yet at the same time inhibiting earnest, unengaged and complacently liberal empathy. Characters frequently get upset, angry, violent, but *Roseanne* frames such emotional outbursts within a structuring representational mode of dead-pan, almost dispassionate irony that scours away any latent limp humanism our generic expectations may enshrine. The formal ideological terms through which *Roseanne* makes queer representations are thus in constant negotiation with the show's performative vernacular, which constantly frustrates suspension of disbelief, peeling away layers of textual authority. It is this quality of *Roseanne* which registers with queer audiences, the duality enforcing a recognition of the artfulness, the constructed nature of the text and what it represents; alas it seems that this reflexivity begets continuing queer identification even as the ideological investments of the show betray and trample on such investment.

The ideological intent which drives the narrative and specular organisation of the 'lesbian' kiss episode of *Roseanne* does seem to be genuinely based in an appreciation of the need to question the political authority, cultural uniformity and complacency of heterosexual society; this appreciation would appear to be derived from an allegiance and familiarity with queer subcultures. There are a sufficient number of in-jokes and subcultural references throughout the episode which suggest the presence of an 'authentic' queer subcultural voice within the dialogue

that is intended to be recognised as such. These interventions have been interpreted by publications that speak from queer subculture, and by Roseanne herself, as having heterosocial effects; that is, that they enact bonding between women and queerness. Yet the failure of these affiliations lies in their inability to diegetically transcend homosocial ideological systems: this is something made all too apparent in the later gay wedding episode. It is these homosocial systems which in their dominance maintain the breaches between women and queerness: homosocial control produces the dissident need for a bonding that will enable us to re-envisage gender relations, to reconfigure patriarchal gender roles. Heterosocial interventions attempt to elude the homosocial functionality conferred upon homosexual and female identities within male homosocial structures. Heterosocial work requires a reflexive awareness of the complex matrix of power relations that maintain difference and sometimes enmity between diverse marginal identities: that must be the fundamental basis of any affiliation conducted on the grounds of that difference. We must see the conditions which shape the experiences of our potential allies and be able to perceive our complicity with systems that enforce their oppression, as we see their complicity in ours.

It is very striking that after the initial exuberant burst of heterosocial activity between Roseanne and Scott at the beginning of the gay wedding show, there is no further interaction between them at all. Given the terms of their bonding this isn't surprising: it would be difficult to sustain such a relationship in the light of the

insistence with which the Roseanne character later maintains her control and superiority over gay men. This is to say nothing of the difficulty the producers of the show would have in reconciling the anti-homosocial nature of Roseanne and Scott's continuing interactions with Roseanne's heterosexuality and her relationship with Dan. What would the show do with Dan whilst his wife and Scott heterosocially challenged male bonding and power? We know that it is okay for Roseanne to disempower Dan, indeed this is a central component of *Roseanne's* distinctiveness. We are familiar with her fabulously bombastic rantings and we know that this does not castrate Dan or make him impotent in the overall representation of his character. There are always spaces in *Roseanne* for Dan to interact in manly homosocial terms with other men, often recognising his wife's substantial material authority in the process and trading that for masculine credibility with others: on the roof fixing tiles with Mark, playing poker with his buddies, down at the bike shop with Mark, at the municipal garage where he's the boss, or down at the Lobo bar with Fred. However, it would be a completely different proposition for Dan to be disempowered by an affiliation between Scott, a gay man, and his colluding wife. Such a direct challenge would be much more damaging to symbolic male power than Roseanne's 'domestic goddess' alone - precisely because her domestic goddess requires him to come home every night and demand his dinner on the table so that she can refuse him and they can then have a power struggle. *Roseanne* is carefully manipulated so as to preclude the writers having to find a way of reconciling the heterosocial queerness of Scott or

Leon, with the progressive and queer-positive intent of the show, whilst retaining sufficient unchallenged throbbing virility in Dan Conner. Dan's homosocial credibility is maintained in that he never has to be positioned directly in the heterosocial discourses of his wife and her faggot associates and friends, a positioning that would either compromise him (and the show itself) politically, or would sacrifice some of the homosocial power he accrues through his relationships with Fred, Mark and others, and which is measured by his symbolic distance from David, the 'art-femme'.³⁷ In close proximity and in discourse with the queer cohort, how could Dan maintain difference without recourse to direct homophobia? It is much easier for him to become homosocially energised in relation to David, at the 'art-femme's' expense, because David is not labelled as gay, and thus any repression of him will not open up *Roseanne's* apparently progressive agenda to liberal criticism.

There are two occasions in which Dan must face the queer challenge alone. One occurs when Nancy and Marla have come over on Christmas Eve. The rest of the Conner family is stranded in snow at the diner. The lesbian couple take the opportunity to kiss under the mistletoe: Dan's response is to pretend that it is not happening so that he doesn't have to engage it, and he looks away. Later on in the episode, whilst he is basting the turkey, he and Nancy talk about her having children. He suggests that she might have ruined her chances of being a mother now that she is a lesbian, but Nancy says that she and Marla are planning to have

kids. Dan asks her to explain how she could do that, 'without being at all specific'. At that moment they both look at the turkey baster, he hands it to her and runs off. In another episode Leon is playing poker with Dan and his buddies. In the course of some routine homosocial exchange of 'babe' stories, it becomes apparent that Dan is not aware that Leon is gay. Leon comes out, and it is the rest of the poker players who engage with this: one says that he knows a gay man in Chicago, called Bill, who Leon might know. Dan's intervention is to finally shut them all up so that they can play cards.

In both instances the interactions measure Dan's distance from queerness (he doesn't even express any voyeuristic interest in Nancy and Marla) without him having to produce himself in such a way as to accommodate and relate to that queerness. It is always going to be fine to have Roseanne queening and bitching and feuding around with gay men or with lesbians, because representationally Roseanne's femininity will always be more natural, credible and consequently more authoritative (however bombastic and militantly fat, she's a wife, a mother, and she's a woman) than Leon or Scott's 'unnatural' refusal of masculinity, or Nancy's refusal of heterosexuality and men, because that refusal constitutes a negation of the very site through which she may accrue social authority. In one argument between Roseanne and Leon in an episode about their partnership at the diner, she tells him that no 'Mary-come-lately' is going to stand in her way. Such remarks are as near as the show gets to out and out homophobia, and here it is rendered

safe as it comes in the context of a bitch-fest. Nevertheless, whenever the character of Roseanne Conner raises the stakes to a direct stand-off about who is the best 'Mary', Leon will always become the somewhat pathetic Mary-wannabe, whilst Roseanne, with her marriage to Dan behind her, will be the authentic Mary. Roseanne's authority is dependent on the symbolism she accrues by virtue of her blue-collar, white-trash, physically indomitable husband. Bringing her heterosocial affiliations with gay men into too close a proximity to her marriage, would challenge and erode her authority precisely by destabilising the homosocial mythology of her masculine husband.

Extra-diegetically, as a personality, a media image, Roseanne herself is obviously something of a gay icon, for the reasons I discussed above, and in the context of corporate timidity and greed her political statements about a range of issues, including those that relate to lesbians and gay men, are welcome and diverting. At its best *Roseanne* is an extraordinary piece of television, deriving a witheringly dead-pan comedy from synthesising a laissez-faire cynicism with a bombastically passionate enactment of woman-centred authority which is intoxicating in itself, especially to a queer audience, for the reasons I've discussed. If publications such as *Out* and *The Advocate* can utilise *Roseanne* strategically to effect heterosocial and queer advantages, re-fashioning its representations to find material that provides subcultural sustenance, or material with which to worry dominant faultlines, then

this is obviously very exciting. However, I am not sure that *Roseanne's* literal deployment of queerness in itself can sustain the weight of such desires.

Given the nature of the show, it is inevitable that all the principle narratives, and experiences *Roseanne* dramatises ultimately become functions of its eponymous heroine's perspective. This dramatic solipsism is one of *Roseanne's* strengths, given that it makes the show so powerfully woman-centred, and can be used effectively to solicit powerful ideological critiques when that dramatic epicentre is destabilised, as in the confrontation with Mr. Williams. However, in relation to *Roseanne's* handling of lesbian and gay issues this solipsism is something of a problem. We have seen how the nominally heterosexual, but queerly signifying character of David is used not only to empower women in the shape of Darlene by portraying them in supportive and authoritative relations with men, but to reinstate a homosocially grounded masculinity in which he is failing, and the other men are colluding. *Roseanne's* knowledge of queerness stalls at those moments when it would be challenging to heterosexuality, or incompatible with the particular character and determination of Roseanne's transgression as 'killer bitch'/feminist. Roseanne has said:

Men who are anything like women are devalued in this society.

There's a pecking order in male culture, and at the very bottom, if they're included at all, are women.³⁸

This neatly encapsulates the heterosocial enigma *Roseanne* poses. The recognition that the shape of another kind of oppression may be similar to your own, indeed may be a function of your oppression, seems an encouragingly heterosocial understanding. Yet at the very moment of this awareness, we see that this heterosocial knowledge is twisted though the axis of its empathy so that it repositions Roseanne herself as inversely privileged: she becomes even more oppressed. This privilege is naturalised, rendering Roseanne's own heterosexuality ideologically cloaked because her rendering of it lines up with heterosexist hegemonies, and because it does not interrupt the homosocial narrative along the axis of its homophobia. The Domestic Goddess, the Goddess of Retribution, Divine tamer of Faggottry, she is our (flawed) champion of the progressive in the arena of homosociality.

¹In *Lesbian Studies: Setting An Agenda* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) Tamsin Wilton makes the following assessment of Simon Watney's argument in his *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media*: 'Gay men ... who see gay male sex in a homophobic culture as intrinsically radical, and for whom the assertive and defiant expression of sexuality has developed as the backbone of the collective cultural struggle to survive AIDS, have denounced a monolithic 'feminism' as life-threatening in its erotophobia and prudery.' (p.102).

²Celia Farber, 'Don't Tread on Me', *Spin*, May 1996, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 40.

³John Lahr, 'Dealing with Roseanne', *The New Yorker*, July 17 1995; Kevin Sessums, 'Really Roseanne', *Vanity Fair*, February 1994; Celia Farber, 'Don't Tread on Me', *Spin*, May 1996, vol. 12, no. 2.

⁴Farber, 'Don't Tread on Me', p.41.

⁵*Out*, no.29, February 1996.

⁶*Out*, no.24, July/August 1995.

⁷Peter Galvin, 'Her life as a woman', *The Advocate*, January 24, 1995, p. 52, emphasis in original.

⁸Tim Allis, 'The Faces of Straight America', *Out*, no.24, July/August 1995, p.70.

⁹Sue Carswell, 'Roseanne for Queen of the Universe', *Out*, no.29, February 1996, p.114. In the 1997 season, during which *Roseanne* has dramatised the difficulties faced by the Conner family now that they are multi-millionaires, Roseanne's screen mother, Bev Harris, has admitted that whilst her dead husband was having sex with her she would fantasise about the photographs in her illicitly consumed copies of *Playboy*.

¹⁰It should be noted however, that *Roseanne's* identification of the Conner family's class identity has been subject to considerable change, even disingenuousness, throughout its run. By the time of the 1995 season Roseanne runs her own business, and is no longer quite so oppressively positioned as she once was. See Janet Lee, 'Subversive Sitcoms: *Roseanne* as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance',

Women's Studies, vol.21, 1992; and Kathleen K. Rowe, 'Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess', in Horace Newcomb (ed.) *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford University Press, 1994). Furthermore, at the beginning of the 1996/97 season the Conners win the Illinois State lottery, and become multi-millionaires, which at the least represents an abandonment of the show's realism, if not its commitment to working-class politics. This shift in the fortunes of the Conners does not appear to have been popular. In the UK Channel Four moved *Roseanne*, in the middle of its season run, from its prime time position in the schedule on Friday nights at ten-o'clock to a late-night mid-week slot, on Wednesdays at eleven-thirty.

¹¹Lahr, 'Dealing with Roseanne', p.51.

¹²Roseanne Arnold, *Roseanne: My Lives* (London: Century, 1994) p.91-95, pp.107-110, pp.111-130.

¹³Lahr, 'Dealing with Roseanne', p.54.

¹⁴Lisa Schwarzbaum, 'All the Rage', *Entertainment Weekly*, April 21 1995, no. 271, p.24.

¹⁵Galvin, 'Her life as a woman', p.52.

¹⁶Schwarzbaum, 'All the Rage', p. 24.

¹⁷ibid.

¹⁸Mick Bowes, 'Only When I Laugh', in Andrew Goodwin & Garry Whannel (eds) *Understanding Television* (New York & London: Routledge 1990) p.129.

¹⁹For Roseanne's body image see, amongst others, Sessums, 'Really Roseanne', *Vanity Fair*, February 1994. For considerations of the connections between homosexuality and sickness and deformity, see Simon Watney, 'Sex, Diversity and Disease' in his *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Stuart Marshall, 'Picturing Deviancy' in Tessa Boffin & Sunil Gupta (eds), *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1990); and Paula A. Treichler, 'AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification' in Douglas Crimp (ed.), *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1988), amongst others.

²⁰Carswell, 'Roseanne for Queen of the Universe' front cover.

²¹On 'killer bitch' see Galvin, 'Her life as a woman' p.54; for 'Goddess of retribution' see Janet Lee, 'Subversive Sitcoms: *Roseanne* as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance', *Women's Studies*, vol.21, 1992.

²²For Roseanne's attack on Streep and Foster see Lahr, 'Dealing with Roseanne' p.58; for attack on feminism see Lahr, *ibid.* p.47; for employing men writers not women, see Sessums, 'Really Roseanne' p.46.

²³Schwarzbaum, 'All the Rage' p.26.

²⁴Allis, 'The Faces of Straight America', p.70.

²⁵It doesn't seem irrelevant that Mariel Hemmingway famously played the object of Woody Allen's lolita complex in his film *Manhattan* in 1979.

²⁶Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p.89.

²⁷Carswell, 'Roseanne for Queen of the Universe' p.114; my emphasis.

²⁸ibid.

²⁹*Roseanne's* sharper eyed viewers may note that Elgin is the home of Lips, the gay bar: funny how Elgin seems to be the proximate, but not *too proximate* scene of diverse nefarious activities...

³⁰Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1995) p.113.

³¹*The Advocate*, 16 July 1996.

³²Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality* (London: Picador, 1995) p.183.

³³ibid. p.185.

³⁴Homocult, *Queer With Class: The First Book of Homocult* (Manchester: MS ED (The Talking Lesbian), 1992).

³⁵ibid. (Note that Homocult's publication does not contain page numbers.)

³⁶I am thinking here of those texts, many of which are listed in Paul Rouen, *High Camp: A Gay Guide to Cult Films, Vol.1* (San Francisco: Leyland, 1994) a representative selection of which have made it into mandarin criticism in the works of Richard Dyer, Paula Graham, Alex Doty, Andy Medhurst, Michael Bronski, Andrea Weiss and others. See Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press,

1986) (especially pp. 141-194); Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992) (especially pp.65-98, 135-148, 159-172); Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993) (especially pp.52-72, 19-51); Dyer, *Brief Encounter* (London: BFI, 1993); Graham, 'Girl's Camp: The Politics of Parody', in Tamsin Wilton (ed.) *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995); Graham, 'Looking Lesbian: Amazons and Aliens in Science Fiction Cinema' in Hamer & Budge (eds) *The Good, The Bad and the Gorgeous: Popular Culture's Romance with Lesbianism* (London: Pandora, 1994); Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Medhurst, 'Victim: Text as Context', *Screen Summer* 1994; Medhurst, 'One Queen and His Screen', in Healey & Mason (eds) *Stonewall 25: The Making of the Lesbian and Gay Community in Britain* (London: Virago, 1994); Medhurst, 'That Special Thrill: *Brief Encounter*, homosexuality and authorship', *Screen Summer* 1991; Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End Press, 1984) (especially pp.92-109); Andrea Weiss, 'A Queer Feeling When I Look at You', in Gledhill (ed.) *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991); Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (London: Penguin, 1993).

³⁷A small, but noteworthy detail: in the spoof black and white fifties episode of *Roseanne*, the character of David is transposed into the French exchange student Davide who minces around in an artist's smock and rakishly tilted beret. Even the

most heterosocially incompetent shouldn't have much of a problem decoding *that* iconography.

³⁸Galvin, 'Her life as a woman', p.54.