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What Do You Call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography

HEATHER BUTLER

Pay attention please; I'm inviting you to move to a new kingdom

—Clarice Lispector

★ This essay attempts to identify different historical trends, styles, motives, and developments within the subgenre of lesbian pornography.¹ It offers an examination of the signification of lesbian pornography, as well as of its relationship to more mainstream pornographies, and traces the historical progression of lesbian pornography, while also locating certain significant nonlinear developments. Through the investigation of a handful of cinematic lesbian sex acts and actual pornographic films from 1968 to 2000, I analyze the various permutations of the butch/femme dyad, the dildo, the concept of authenticity, and the idea of creating through representation a discursive place/space that is coded as a specifically lesbian zone. This space reinforces not only the idea of authenticity but also the very legitimacy of lesbian sexuality in and of itself, as well as the idea of lesbian pornography.² I cannot provide an exhaustive account of all that has been done in the last thirty years within the realms of lesbian-themed exploitation film and lesbian pornography. Rather, in isolating certain films that stand out to me in particular, I examine their attempts to authenticate lesbian sexuality through representation, as well as to interpellate the potential lesbian viewer. In the process, I address some heterosexual porn in an effort to locate moments of intertextuality, in addition to those marking lesbian pornog-

raphy's direct challenges. These challenges made within the genre of lesbian pornography illustrate a more mainstream movement made by lesbians toward an autonomous and accurate representation of both lesbian sex acts and lesbian sexuality.

My essay takes its title from a joke I heard several years ago: "What do you call a lesbian with long fingers?" The punch line, "well hung," would suggest a lesbian's fingers are her most valuable sex tools — the equivalent to a penis. These fingers, which also serve as a penis substitute (or rather, *substitutes*), therefore apparently can only be contemplated in terms of male anatomy, in which size matters most.³ In the hetero cosmos, the lesbian does not exist as a discrete being, and lesbian sexuality seems to serve as a comical substitute, with her sex tools merely serving as referents to the heterosexual counterpart. The "lesbian," as she is typically represented in heterosexual pornography, is most often used as a warm-up for sex between a man and a woman.

This type of representation does not occur solely in the realm of pornography; we can also find it in mainstream cinema, personal experience,⁴ and heterocentric society in general. The "one-sex" model, which tends to privilege male sexuality at the expense of female sexuality, is reinforced even further not only when women are perceived as *ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*,⁵ but when lesbians simply become relegated to the sphere of "boys." In lesbian pornography, the joke mentioned above is discursively and visually played out and played on through role-playing and name-calling, especially dirty talk, and thus is subverted and even inverted. It is not the lesbian who is the butt of this joke, as we will see, but rather the heterosexual male, and while this joke intends to aggressively assault the lesbian and her sexuality, it actually reveals the fragile and insecure apparatus working the one-sex model and exposes the idea of monolithic sexuality as both inadequate and unnecessary. Lesbian pornography inherently uncloaks the impotence behind the phallic model and proposes alternatives to simply "taking it" or "faking it." Since biological limitations, such as an impending ejaculation, do not necessarily contain lesbian pornography, it does not have to preoccupy itself with or become imprisoned by the idea of showing telos. As a result, lesbian desire can be actively explored in ways not articulated within the heterosexual model of pornography. Lesbian pornography could be said, in fact, to be the practice behind the theory.⁶ Desire between women is (really) articulated, lesbian subjectivity and lesbian bodies are realized and represented (no joke!), and pornography is reconceptualized and reinvented in very important ways.

In all of the films that I discuss, the butch, and, with one exception, the butch/femme dyad, is present to various degrees. The figure, or idea, of the butch is and has always been *the* visible marker of lesbianism.⁷ She quite possibly both constitutes the most important icon of lesbian visibility and one of the most important icons in lesbian history; with the figure of the butch, the lesbian gains maximum visibility.⁸ As we will see, the butch destabilizes any fixed notions of gender that we might have had concerning masculinity and femininity. She gives these notions new significance and new expression, and she ultimately overthrows heterohegemony. Because of the butch's inevitable visibility, and because our cultural knowledge has given us the tools to identify and recognize her *as* butch, I argue that the butch authenticates lesbian pornography, even if only superficially. She thus answers more to the need (which is not gender-specific) to "see sex" and to see some kind of proof that sex is indeed taking place. In her very being, the butch offers "proof," for she wears her sexual preference the way most of us wear clothes. She is the certificate of authenticity in lesbian pornography for lesbians; she turns the screen into a potentially safe space for the visual representation of lesbian desire; and she inspires trust in her lesbian viewers. Without necessarily being convinced of "real" pleasure or a real orgasm, the viewer may nevertheless acknowledge a lesbian authenticity through the figure of the butch. At the very least, viewers might feel assured that the hypervisible status of the butch, as well as of the butch/femme dyad, effectively destabilize any and all notions of heteronormativity.⁹ In doing so, both can provide us with new ways of viewing pornography (the rules obviously change with the representation of same-sex desire; as we will see, the rules change even more when "lesbian" becomes lesbian).¹⁰

A Man's Worst Enemy, a Woman's Pride and Joy

The King (dir. Looney Bear, 1968) is one of many sexploitation-era films that purport to deal with the topic of lesbianism.¹¹ Within the genre of sexploitation, lesbianism constituted merely one of many "dirty" topics liberally explored, if only to titillate the targeted male viewer with brief images of female breasts, buttocks, and bellies. Where *The King* seems to deviate from the sexploitation model of lesbian-themed films is in its disarming and even sincere attempt to represent lesbians as authentic people. The majority of the sexploitation films I have watched typically depict lesbianism as something that happens to women who have been victimized by men; a phase in a young girl's sexual development *before* she moves on to boys; an afternoon

activity between bored and neglected housewives; a lurid account about depraved and deviant individuals who hopefully end up dead; or as the subject of “earnest inquiry” in the form of a “mocumentary” complete with a vulgar appropriation of psychoanalysis and phony statistics.¹² *The King* notably refuses to depict lesbianism in any of these ways, but, rather, offers an earnest attempt to represent lesbianism as an actual choice not contingent on heterosexuality and a lifestyle that remains discrete from the heterosexual imperative.

The King begins (and ends) with a rather long poem—evocative of the limericks of the early stag films, as well as of the square-up (“a prefatory statement about the social or moral ill the film claimed to combat”)¹³ of early exploitation films—about the joys of lesbianism, and more specifically about the joys of a stereotypical butch/femme setup. A photomontage of female body parts taken from pinup photos (typically breasts, beaver shots, legs, and bottoms) illustrates the poem. The film’s protagonist is an African American woman named Carol, who lives with her two white roommates, Joan and Mickey, aka the “King.” Carol works as a secretary to a frizzy type named Ms. Jerner, and the film begins with a sexual encounter between the two (“I know I won’t mind working late hours at *this* job!”). Carol returns home from work to find the King lounging (she has no day job; she’s a king, that’s a full-time job). The King begins to whip Carol for apparently stealing some money, but the whipping dissolves quickly into an embrace and then some light petting. This scene immediately establishes the stereotype of the bulldagger and her femme—the cruelly unpredictable sadist and the insatiable, passive masochist. As a butch, Mickey is rather subtle. She does not in any way conform to a recognizable notion of a butch aesthetic; she has long hair, carries a purse, and bears a strong resemblance to Janis Joplin (who was, in fact, perceived as butch by heterosexual standards). She does, however, conform to the representation of the “butch,” the “bulldagger,” or the “dyke” within the genre of sexploitation. That is, she is *named* or classified as butch, and this is discursively reinforced throughout the film, regardless of the fact that she does not look much different from the other “femme” women (figure 1).

When Joan comes home, she gets undressed and joins Carol and Mickey; eventually Carol is pushed aside, and Mickey and Joan make out exclusively. Carol finds herself displaced in favor of Joan, and in the voice-over narration, she expresses her sexual frustration and anger.¹⁴ A series of dreams and flashbacks presents Carol’s insatiable same-sex desire in sexual encounters (and failed attempts) with other women. Eventually, the three lesbians go to



1. A butch and her femme in *The King*.

Cherry Grove (the place where “things are the way they’re supposed to be: the women with the women and the men with the men”),¹⁵ and after a wild night of smoking, dancing, and making out, Carol leaves the trio in favor of Ms. Jerner, and the King is deposed. It is also important to note that much of what could be considered pornographic is really just voice-over narration. That is, there are no actual representations of sex acts on-screen; they are aurally invoked by the disembodied narrator, and there is little coherence between what is said and what is shown. It is also important to note that the narrator sounds perpetually aroused; whether she describes exactly how she takes her clothes off or how the three get to Cherry Grove, she always sounds “ready” for something never actually represented on-screen, though it is described, and often in minute detail.

In his 1999 book *“Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!” A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959*, Eric Schaefer discusses mode of production and style in a typical exploitation film. While *The King* was made in 1969, and would be classified as sexploitation rather than exploitation, its mode of production equals that of the exploitation films preceding it. The problems inherent in most exploitation films, such as the lack of continuity, tacky style, bad acting, and cheap scenery, all resulted from a specific mode of production, something we have come to see as one of the genre’s defining characteristics (48). There is little to no continuity within *The King*: one minute Carol is wearing a bikini, and the next minute a long-sleeved sweater; they say that they are at Cherry Grove, yet the beach is littered with heterosexual couples and small children; one minute they have no clothes on, and in the very next cut, they are all in the exact same positions, but dressed. In addition, films such as these often recycled stock footage from old films, which might explain the several odd cuts to unexplained (negative) images (cops beating

up patrons of a bar, an ugly white man screaming, a race car, a sailboat) that have absolutely nothing to do with the diegesis. *The King* was obviously made on a shoestring budget, using stock music, recycled footage, sparse sets, and what Schaefer calls a “hyphenate” (meaning that the same person wrote, directed, and produced it, as well as providing the narration). It adheres completely to the mode of production of a typical exploitation film.

But *The King* manages to distinguish itself from other sexploitation films in its refusal to engage in the popular views of lesbianism as either a phase, an inferior substitute to heterosexuality, or just deviant behavior. In this refusal, *The King* resists its own genre and can be read as a truly deviant representation of the classic sexploitation film and as a forerunner to lesbian pornography. *The King* remarkably seeks to interpellate an exclusively lesbian audience from the very beginning. The film represents lesbian desire as discrete from heterosexual desire by attempting to create an authentic queer space on-screen—these lesbians live in the Village in New York City and spend their weekends at Cherry Grove, both historically queer spaces. Like its more mainstream British counterpart, *The Killing of Sister George* (dir. Robert Aldrich, 1968), and, to a lesser extent, the more notorious sexploitation films by Radley Metzger and Joe Sarno, it contains stereotypical representations of a butch as aggressive, sadistic, and even predatory. It also contains a relationship with a passive, subservient, and even unsatisfied femme, who eventually leaves her butch for another woman. The use of the butch figure as an authentication device appears as a sort of “clichéé but necessary” stereotype; it provides an easily identifiable marker of lesbianism.¹⁶

I use *The King* as a starting point for my discussion of lesbian pornography because this film attempts to represent an exclusively lesbian desire that, unlike Aldrich’s more mainstream representation, does not portray lesbian sexuality as pathetic, pathological, or disgusting. In fact, *The King* portrays lesbian sex and lesbian sexuality as the only choice, which then contains other choices. (A piece from the closing limerick-like poem almost taunts the female viewer: “Take heed the rest of you, for soon you may surrender, if at any time you’ve had any doubt deciding on your gender, remember—are you a king or are you a queen, or are you like me, an in-between thing?”) I view this film not as explicitly representative of lesbian pornography, but rather as an ultimately positive genesis, and though it is fraught with complications, including an incoherent narrative, it constitutes an important document for tracing the development of the visual representation of lesbian erotics within the genre of sexploitation cinema.

In the so-called golden age of pornography (the 1970s), no distinct lesbian presence is to be found in the industry. One possible explanation for the lesbian lacuna might be the fact that lesbian separatism remained in full swing throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, and making pornography for lesbians and by lesbians was not on the agenda. However, there is no shortage of woman-to-woman sex scenes in mainstream heterosexual pornography (or what I like to call the “lesbo-jelly” in the hetero-donut). Typically, the “lesbian” number serves as a warm-up for the “real” thing, that is, sex with a penis that will eventually ejaculate.¹⁷ *Behind the Green Door* offers a perfect example of this type of pornography, for the soon-to-be-insatiable Maid Marilyn is licked, fondled, rubbed, and even comforted by several women in preparation for the bigger numbers (all heterosexual) that will follow.¹⁸

In my research on 1970s pornography, I did find a rather compelling “lesbian” presence that warrants some attention: her name is Georgina Spelvin. Notorious for her work in the classic *The Devil in Miss Jones* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972), Spelvin was an extremely prolific porn star throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, and although she began her career rather late for her profession (she was already thirty-six when *The Devil in Miss Jones* was made in 1972), both her unconventional appearance and her notable acting ability made her a remarkably successful figure in mainstream pornography. She was typically cast as a celibate spinster type who has a sexual awakening and then becomes an oversexed, kinky sex fiend and often meets a tragic end (suicide and eternal damnation are two examples). In two of her films, *Sleepyhead* (dir. Joe Sarno, 1973) and *The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann* (dir. Radley Metzger, 1975) the “lesbian” sex scenes do not only remain discrete from the heterosexual sex scenes; they are also not presented as a warm-up for what will “come” later. *Sleepyhead* tells the story of the celibate writer Bernice, played by Spelvin, who reawakens sexually on reuniting with her ex-lover Nancy, a sexually promiscuous photographer played by Judith Hamilton, who also stars opposite Spelvin in both *3 A.M.* (dir. Robert McCallum, 1975) and *The Devil in Miss Jones*. Both women go on to seduce Bernice’s Bible-banging younger sister Tracey (Tina Russell), whom they “convert” from Christianity to lesbianism. The film includes a painfully long orgy scene, but the real action occurs in the other bedroom, occupied by Bernice, Nancy, and Tracey. *Sleepyhead* focuses on sex acts between women, and the sex that does occur between men and women is always part of a larger orgy sequence, where the woman-to-woman action is greater than that of woman to man (in one orgy scene, there are four women and one man). The film ends with Nancy replacing Bernice with the latter’s younger

and more conventionally attractive sister, whereupon Bernice takes off with the Bible and a David Cassidy look-alike. Though we cannot classify this film as lesbian porn, its depiction of lesbian sex as neither a warm-up to heterosexual sex nor a pathetic imitation of it, its sexual transformations of the three female protagonists, its primarily gynocentric narrative, and its queer ending (Tracey leaves Jesus for a lesbian!), not to mention the passionate performance of Georgina Spelvin, make for a surprisingly queer heterosexual porn.¹⁹

The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann, in contrast, constitutes a completely conventional example of 1970s porn. Organized around a threadbare narrative about excessive voyeurism, there is almost nothing within this film that deviates from convention, save one sex scene between Spelvin and Barbara Bourbon (who plays Pamela). It is the longest sex scene in the film (over ten minutes), and it contains three different types of music, soft-focus shots of facial as well as vaginal caresses, conversation, smiles, and hard-core sex acts. There is cunnilingus, vaginal and anal penetration (with fingers), and tribadism; there are no faked orgasms, and there are no penises. Sex between two women is neither relegated to the realm of nonthreatening caresses and giggles, nor is it a freak show of body oil and multiple vibrator penetration, like the 1977 "lesbian" pornography *Aerobisex Girls* (dir. Bruce Seven). This sex scene stands out from the others in the film in many ways: not only does it last longer than Pamela's hetero encounters; these two women are actually friends. (Spelvin plays a hooker, with the Pamela character as her therapist. Pamela is performing a "cleansing" of Spelvin, which actually consists of smoking pot and having sex.) In the midst of what is supposed to be a serious discussion about the hardships of prostitution, the two have sex. The scene does not concern itself with the representation of authentic telos; the two women simply enjoy one another for ten minutes, and then the scene is over. The representation of lesbian sex is again discrete, and it does not conform to excessively passive activity, nor does it border on the freakish; it in fact provides a rather lyrical synthesis of the hard and soft elements of sex.

The work of Georgina Spelvin does not hold significance because she was a lesbian or a lesbian porn star, because that was not, in effect, the case.²⁰ There is, however, something very butch about Spelvin. Though her films typically paint her as a lonely, frigid spinster, she always "butches up" to become sexually assertive, as well as sexually receptive. Her work is notable because it consistently escapes the typical lesbian setup so prevalent in mainstream pornography; that is, we get to see lesbian sex acts discrete from the

heterosexual acts that surround them. We also get to see the synthesis of hard-core sex and "soft" intimacy reminiscent of nonpornographic cinema. We get to see a less conventional, somewhat older female body aggressively assert itself through active sex with other women, and we get to see "good" acting on the part of Georgina Spelvin. Though this might not constitute lesbian pornography, it certainly deviates in the right direction.

The most significant piece of lesbian pornography I looked at from the 1980s is a film entitled *Erotic in Nature* (dir. Cristen Lee Rothermund, 1985). It is extremely indicative of what had been happening (politically, socially, culturally) among lesbians in the 1970s and 1980s, and it constitutes one of the first attempts to create a lesbian presence in pornography as *different*; that is, as distinctly nonheterosexual in its emphasis on the more erotic aspects of lesbian sexuality.²¹ The film begins with shots of a very athletic, young lesbian chopping logs out in the country. She is topless, clothed only in running shorts and hiking boots. She is very tan, slim, and beautifully muscular. She chops logs, does push-ups and stretches, gazes at her body in a mirror, and listens to her radio while she prepares for a date.²² The camera focuses almost obsessively on her musculature. The film periodically cross-cuts to the image of another woman (relation as yet unknown) who masturbates with a red dildo and a red rubber hose in an outdoor bathtub. This woman is slim but curvy, and the camera lingers obsessively on her curves in much the same way it lingers on the muscles of the other lesbian. She has long, blond hair and is naked except for a red beaded necklace and a pair of sunglasses. Her fingernails are painted red, and she has one nipple pierced. We hear a voice-over moaning along to the music, a sort of "tribal" rhythm of drums and pipes, as she masturbates first with the dildo, then with both the dildo and the water hose, until she orgasms. After their respective "work-outs," the women meet up for dinner, which, of course, takes place outside, "in nature."

Erotic in nature has a double meaning. The first indicates that the majority of the scenes occur outside, around and in water, under the sun. The brown and strong bodies roll around in the grass, under trees. Nature is glorified and celebrated (think mother earth-goddess, chthonic ecstasy). The setting also has connotations of the remote, the separate, as in lesbian separatism or lesbian love life outside of hetero cities and hetero city limits, in an untouched zone where lesbians can express themselves freely and, although the scenes are shot out in the open, privately. Then there is a second meaning of *erotic in nature*: lesbian sex and sexuality as erotic in their very nature. Sex between two women is depicted as natural, wholesome, healthy;



2. A lesbian sex scene taken from *Erotic in Nature*.

rather than being deviant, it is sensual, an experience that glorifies and celebrates female bodies. Everything appears normal, as a part of nature, and of the body, and as a completely positive process (figure 2). There is no trace of “deviancy” in either the surroundings or in what the film represents as lesbian desire.²³ It is romantic and soft, like trees and breezes and birds and clear, pure streams—all fluid lesbian sexuality. There is no hint of tension or anxiety toward or about men or heterosexuality. Nor is the relationship between the two women set up as an oppositional and/or sadomasochistic one such as we saw in *The King*, for example. Nevertheless, a soft butch/femme dyad does exist, but it is oh-so-subtle (the butch figure is really more *athletic* than butch and, like her femme counterpart, wears jewelry and makeup and has extremely soft features, so that no one would probably ever call her “sir” or throw her out of the women’s bathroom). Nor does any butch/femme role-play occur. The femme uses a dildo exclusively for onanistic purposes. The dildo, it is worth noting, has a deep red color and matches the femme’s necklace (it also looks to be made out of crystal rather than silicone).

In its cinematic treatment of the lesbian body, *Erotic in Nature* in some ways resembles its mainstream counterpart, *Personal Best* (dir. Robert Towne, 1982). A similar athletic aesthetic is present in this film, which in fact charts the affair and subsequent breakup of two female athletes as they train for the Olympics. In both *Personal Best* and *Erotic in Nature*, athleticism and athletic female bodies become eroticized within the representation of lesbian sex, and the lesbian body and overall aesthetic is depicted as athletic, rather than butch. Unlike *Personal Best*, however, *Erotic in Nature* is exclusively lesbian; that is, there is no trace of the heterosexual anxiety, the “pre-verbal, pre-oedipal narcissism” so explicit, depressing, and suffocating in *Personal Best* (Williams 1986, 150). The lesbian spectator does not have to

worry that a man will wander onto the set and replace the butch in *Erotic in Nature*, which is in fact what eventually happens in *Personal Best*.²⁴ Actual sexual intimacy exists between Kit and Chris, the protagonists of *Erotic in Nature*, while the sexual intimacy between Tori and Chris in *Personal Best* is limited to arm wrestling, tickling and giggling, and light, nonthreatening stroking. Nevertheless, something in *Erotic in Nature* has gone seriously awry: the film does not give a fulfilling representation of a sex act. Rather, the camera lingers lovingly on contorted, twisting, rolling, and often posing bodies and lesbians who giggle and caress, run fingers through hair, and gaze lovingly into one another’s eyes. The voice-overs (the film has no dialogue)²⁵ emphasize how *different* and *exciting* and *new* this relationship is and how *perfect* the sex is, and yet it is difficult (primarily due to the way the film is shot) to ascertain what exactly the two are actually doing. So while the camera does attempt to represent two lesbian bodies engaging in lesbian sex, it is not initially clear what exactly that means, or even what that should look like. For example, in one scene, Kit gets on her knees behind Chris, who is on all fours, and Kit begins to move back and forth very slowly as if she were perhaps penetrating Chris with a dildo, yet she is not penetrating her, nor is she actually rubbing up against her. While Chris has a look of absolute ecstasy on her face, *there is nothing happening* other than two female bodies slowly knocking into one another. I do not mean to imply that pleasure cannot be had as a result of two female bodies moving together to the rustic call of nature; rather, I simply want to stress the fact that no penetration or tribadism seems to actually occur. There is then a quick cut back to the familiar shots of contorted, twisting, rolling female bodies. Eventually, explicit sex acts do occur between the two women, but, perhaps not consciously, this film emphasizes the very difficulty involved in the representation of lesbian sex acts, and the difficult position of lesbians in the porn industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The film also seems more invested in the image of lesbian sex as a “positive” and even nonthreatening and nonviolent reciprocal exchange than it is in the representation of actual sex acts. Perhaps it indicates an ideologically motivated intention on the part of the filmmakers to reinforce the idea that sex between women—and lesbianism itself—is “natural.”²⁶

This film reeks of a different kind of “coming out”: namely, coming out of the aftershock of 1970s lesbian feminism, as well as out of the sex wars of the early 1980s.²⁷ Any behavior possibly linked to the masculine or the aggressive (at the time, these seem to have been considered as one and the same) was considered verboten to lesbian sexuality and destructive to the goals

of lesbian feminism. Both Judith Halberstam and Carol Vance discuss the effects of the antipornography position, which, rather than developing into a lesbian call to arms for sex education or an attempt to revitalize and even queer the world of porn, settled into a moralistic, essentialist, and suffocating view of sex as always already perverse (see Halberstam 1998, 136–40; Vance 1992). For many lesbians, the butch/femme dyad was evocative of heterosexuality, a pathetic and even oppressive imitation of the male/female unit. When viewed as role-play, it was seen as objectifying and therefore as counterproductive and even devious, as were other sex-related activities that both heterosexuals and gay men enjoyed, such as s/m, strip shows, bathhouses, X-rated movie theaters, bar culture, and cruising. *Erotic in Nature* marks one of several attempts in the mid-1980s to represent lesbian sexuality,²⁸ while it also tries to move away from certain reified notions of female sexuality espoused by cultural feminists of that period. For example, the rhetoric of that period held that lesbian sex did not make for an incredibly important issue on the feminist agenda, that feminists should concentrate on “real” social issues instead, and that certain types of representation were to be avoided, namely, the pornographic, which objectified women within the heterosexual, patriarchal configurations from which lesbians sought to escape. Although *Erotic in Nature* marked a step toward the representation of what Linda Williams calls “diff’rent strokes for diff’rent folks,” it still seems to contain remnants of the fear that heterosexual sex might pervert lesbian sex and appears to espouse the notion that certain sex acts did not or could not belong in the representation of lesbian sex. However, these fears, and the prohibitions that resulted from them, were on their way out—and fast.

Life in the Fast(er) Lane: Dyking the Lesbian

In 1984, Susie Bright, Nan Kinney, and Debbie Sundahl (aka Fanny Fatale) published the first issue of a lesbian-centered erotica magazine called *On Our Backs*. The title of the magazine is both a play on and an explicit challenge to its radical feminist predecessor, *Off Our Backs*, a feminist journal that began in 1970 and held most of the opinions regarding sex and pornography I mentioned earlier. *On Our Backs* represented not only a challenge to the antipornography views of the most vocal feminists of the 1970s and 1980s but also a fierce move toward higher visibility for lesbians and lesbian sexuality. One year later, Kinney and Sundahl formed Fatale Video (still in business) and began making lesbian pornography. Some of their first videos featured rough sex, dirty talk (words previously disdained, such *cunt*, *dylke*,

and *fuck*, became reintegrated into the lesbian lexicon), the use of dildos and vibrators, elaborate s/m fantasy sequences, and female ejaculation scenes.²⁹ In 1990, Debbie Sundahl made a lesbian porn film called *Suburban Dykes* (a contradiction in terms if ever there was one!), starring Nina Hartley, Pepper, and Sharon Mitchell. In my opinion, this film marks yet another important stepping-stone, another triumphant coming-out story (this time I use the metaphor in both senses of the word), in the history of lesbian pornography. As the title intimates, the idea of lesbians and lesbian sexuality has become normal: lesbians now live in the suburbs, are in their mid-thirties, attractive, and feminine, in fact. They have regular jobs, a hot tub, and monogamous marriage-type setups; they are doing quite well. They no longer have to live in a big city in order to meet other lesbians; they are financially stable, they are not perverts, they are your neighbors, they throw little lesbian parties, they eat hot dogs, and they fuck. Their sex lives become dull, familiar, and, like any “married” couple, they need new sexual outlets to keep that “spark” long-term couples often lose (in the lesbo-lingo articulated by the film, it is called “the lesbian bed-death syndrome”). The lesbians here grew up and came out under the protective wing of cultural feminism. Eventually, they left that behind and cancelled their subscription to *Off Our Backs* in exchange for *On Our Backs*, though they do not engage in any of the “deviant” sexual behavior that the magazine condones. Not yet, at least.

In a scene from *Suburban Dykes*, Nina and Pepper are relaxing in their hot tub after another fun-filled lesbian get-together. In a moment of absolutely brilliant dialogue, which sets up everything that follows, Nina says something to the effect of, “Wow, what a party! I don’t think there’s anything left but two dead hot dogs!” The two then begin to discuss some friends who seem on the verge of breaking up. Their friends are experiencing the “lesbian bed-death syndrome” because one of them is apparently not sexually adventurous enough. Nina proceeds to bring up the idea of phone sex (apparently a friend tried it), but Pepper, who has idealistic ideas about relationships, firmly resists the idea: “If you are really in love, the sex will stay hot.” In her opinion, “lesbian bed death” is “just a phrase to sell a book,” but Nina convinces her to try the phone sex nevertheless. Nina then follows up with a confession of her own: during the party, she spied on two of their friends having sex on their weight bench in the garage. There is a flashback to a sex scene, a porn within a porn, between two butchy women who engage in rather fierce penetrative sex, fingers only.

Nina has set the scene in every way. She brings up the threatening “lesbian bed-death syndrome” and follows this by several unconventional, even

taboo, but sexy scenarios such as phone sex, voyeurism, and rough sex. All of this is coupled with snuggles and dirty talk, and as she tells Pepper the sex story, she dons white, lacy lingerie and cuddles up to Pepper, dressed in cotton jockeys, cooing, "I wished it was you taking me with that kind of passion." Nina then passes Pepper the telephone. Pepper of course makes the call and is connected to a dominatrix type called "Mistress Marlana." Nina again plays the role of audio-voyeur, and while she listens to the exchange between Pepper and Mistress Marlana, she does not verbally participate.

The phone sex escapade deserves some attention; for it is here that we can gain a better understanding of where the "typical" (read: suburban) lesbian was, sexually speaking. First of all, we find out that Pepper considers herself butch, which might come as a surprise to the viewer. Pepper is stereotypically less femme than Nina, but she does not conform in any way to the aesthetic idea of butch; she has long dark hair, shaved legs and armpits, long fingernails, and very soft features. She is only *comparatively* butch: Nina's lingerie is *more* feminine; Nina's fingernails and pubic area are *more* manicured; Nina's hair is *more* styled and sprayed than Pepper's; Pepper's voice is slightly deeper; she wears no makeup or fingernail polish; and her style of dress is *more* masculine than Nina's. We then discover that this couple does not engage in dildo-play or role-play of any kind. Pepper tells Mistress Marlana that they do, however, use vibrators, and Mistress Marlana scoffs at their obvious ignorance: "Oh *that's* right! Dykes don't like cocks!" Mistress Marlana then confesses that she, in fact, is wearing a big dildo, and that Pepper is going to, among other things, suck it. The camera then cuts to Mistress Marlana, allowing the viewer a half-profile shot of her, in which we see her as a slightly feminine dominatrix type, who is not, in fact, wearing the big black dildo, but is instead slapping it up against her thigh. This dirty talk arouses both Pepper and Nina, who has been keeping one eye on Pepper the entire time, watching how she reacts to the idea of a dildo, of being penetrated, and to dirty cock talk, and both of the women eventually orgasm through masturbation, Nina with a big pink vibrator and Pepper with her hand (figure 3). After they hang up, Nina teases Pepper by calling her a "pervert,"³⁰ while Pepper teases Nina, calling her a Peeping Tammy, and then they both agree to move on to bigger and better things, namely, an escort service, where they can rent a big bad butch (or a bull-dyke), and this is where things really get kinky (or dykey).

The big bad butch (Sharon Mitchell), who turns out to be a bit more butch than they had imagined, then comes over and provides these two lesbians



3. Nina and Pepper engage in phone sex with Mistress Marlana in *Suburban Dykes*.



4. Sharon educates Nina and Pepper in *Suburban Dykes*.

with a lesson in dyke sex; that is, dildos, emphatic safe-sex education, dirty talk, and butch/femme role-play (figure 4). In Sharon Mitchell's butch persona, we see the almost parodic return of the "butch-style" lesbian: black leather, no makeup, short, slicked-back hair, edgy urban-style clothing (in contrast to the conventional clothing of Nina and Pepper), an exaggerated swagger and smirk, gold chains, and carrying what I have come to recognize as *the* cinematic marker of the old-school butch, a motorcycle helmet. Initially stunned by Sharon's appearance (Pepper only *thought* she was butch, and maybe for the suburbs, she was), Nina and Pepper are only too eager to wave bye-bye to their vibratory vanilla sex as they welcome everything that Sharon pulls out of her big black bag, especially the big, lavender dildo. This becomes everything lesbian pornography could not be; this becomes dyke porn. I differentiate here between "lesbian" and "dyke" porn: dyke porn is exactly what lesbian porn should have been, but could not be. Dyke porn is safe-sex savvy and not afraid to appropriate sex acts once considered defini-

tive of heterosexual and gay male pornography, such as penetration, dirty talk, rough sex, and role-playing, to name a few. Anything once considered off-limits, perverted, or inappropriate (for either political or personal reasons) is now up for grabs—literally. In addition, dyke porn differentiates itself from its heterosexual and gay male counterparts in its staunch declaration and performance of safe sex. These characteristics remain constitutive of dyke porn up to the present day.

I see Sharon Mitchell's big bad butch as more than a return to a familiar and loveable lesbian stereotype; I see her as a sort of lesbian superhero as she provides Nina and Pepper with this cathartic experience of sexual enlightenment, which enables Pepper to transition into what is obviously about to become her role. The rather traditional notions of femme as passive and butch as active still cling to this film, for although Nina orchestrated the whole scene, it is Pepper who actually *does* all of it. Also, Sharon refers to Nina as Pepper's wife, and Sharon fucks Nina, not Pepper, while it is Pepper, and not Nina, who eventually fucks Sharon. In the last scene of the film, a "changing of the guard" occurs: the dildo is handed to Pepper, who makes the transition into her new role not through sex with Nina, but through sex with Sharon (Pepper penetrates the big bad butch as Nina cheers her on). It seems important to note that Pepper initially gets interested in calling the escort service because of her positive phone-sex experience, during which the idea of being penetrated by a dildo arouses her. Yet as the final sex scene suggests, Pepper will be the penetratrix, not the penetrated.

The problems presented in this film illustrate what lesbians were up against during the post-sex wars, postseparatism, and even postassimilation era: how should lesbians have sex? How *do* lesbians (real ones) have sex? Do lesbians like to watch other lesbians have sex, and, if so, how should that sex be (re)presented? Is it acceptable to recognize the presence of fierce, erotic, aggressive, and possibly perverse (perverse *for lesbians*, of course) desire? Is it then acceptable to represent this desire visually? What makes for a pleasing representation of lesbian desire? How does one successfully film hot lesbian sex? It is through the butch persona that this new lesbian, or *dyke*, sexuality becomes "normalized." That is, it has become acceptable to engage in various types of "deviant" sex-play (no lesbian membership cards will be revoked if one straps on a dildo and talks dirty cock talk to one's lover), and these sex acts are represented as positive through the very positive image of, and ironic homage to, the butch lesbian persona.

Looking (and Staying) Hard: Difference and the Dildo

One of the nice things about being a dyke is getting to choose the size of your dick.

—Rachel Vernon, *On Our Backs*

Numerous questions, concerns, and debates surround the dildo and whether it *fits* in lesbian sex (see Findlay 1999). Is it a penis substitute? Is it a male stand-in? Is it a phallus? Is it a fetish? Can it feel? Does it feel good to her? Is it erotic? Can it be castrated? Should I castrate it? Am I castrated? Do I have penis envy? Do I have phallus envy? Do I have a fetish? Do I want to be a man? Is this the only way to have active sex? Is it perverted? Am I a pervert? Do I look stupid wearing it? Should I read more Lacanian theory? Should I read a feminist's interpretation of Lacan? Should I castrate Lacan? Am I experiencing a form of castration just by reading Lacan? Should I be wearing the dildo while I read Lacan? All of these questions are entirely valid, yet they, and much of the scholarship I have read concerning the dildo, consistently fail to mention what seems to me its most important quality: the fact that the dildo functions as a pleasure-giver, not a pleasure-seeker. Unlike its male "counterpart," the dildo does not ejaculate, does not lose its erection, can come in most any size, color, and even shape and, *most important*, the dildo is detachable.

The dildo represents one aspect, or one accessory, rather, of lesbian sex, which neither begins nor ends with dildo penetration, and although the wearer is associated with a more active, or "masculine," role than the one being penetrated, this association is only somewhat accurate. For while the dildo-wearer might do the thrusting, it is the recipient of the dildo penetration who counts most. According to Cherry Smyth, "it is the 'butch/top's' aim in lesbian sex to give the 'femme/bottom' complete satisfaction, while the penis is often the only satisfied genital in heterosexual porn" (1990, 157). In my opinion, the very notion of the dildo displaces several Lacanian ideas concerning the phallus and phallic power in important ways. For example, if one were to regard penetration as a particularly phallic act, or as "the phallic act *par excellence*" (Reich 1999, 260), then she, Judith Butler (1993), Marjorie Garber (1992), Sue-Ellen Case (1993), Teresa De Lauretis (1994), and others would all be correct in their various assertions that the phallus does indeed belong to any and everyone, that the phallus is not the penis, but, rather, a detachable, performative, even phantasmatic object that nobody owns and that everybody can play with, wear, or discard. This actually makes perfect sense in the context of dyke porn. Although there is role-play and the words

“cock” and “dyke dick” are often used in sex scenes, the dildo is never intended as a substitute for or an indication of any primordial lesbian lack. The lesbians in this porn make no effort to disguise exactly what they are doing, namely, playing. They do not try to “really” pass as men.³¹ If that were the case, none of the lesbians would be wearing bright pink or sparkly gold or vibrating, bunny-shaped dildos. Dildos are *accessories* to the lesbian sex act; they are in no way requisite.

One might be able to convincingly say that there is no phallus in the Lacanian sense;³² that the dildo or the fingers, or whatever object one might use in order to penetrate, is not in fact a phallic object, and that the very idea of the phallic is displaced when the desire represented is lesbian. If one wants to speak in terms of the Lacanian phallus, then one could say that the lesbian both is and has the phallus, potentially speaking. In keeping with the idea that there is indeed a phallus that penetrates, and that the lesbian does indeed have it—whether it comes in the form of a dildo, long fingers, a tongue, or any other object—Lacan’s formulation of the phallus would not be effective or illustrative as a representation of lesbian desire. Lacan’s formula, and the subsequent feminist critique of its formulation,³³ implies that the phallus belongs to the man, yet the lesbian with her object of penetration can perform all of the same things that the penis/phallus can perform during the sex act, *except for one very important thing*—she, or rather her dildo, does not ejaculate.³⁴ She does not have to ejaculate, she is not biologically predisposed to ejaculating, the object she uses to penetrate her partner (who may, in fact, ejaculate), though it may be attached to her body in some way, is not beyond her control. It is dependable, adjustable, and controllable.

This stands in direct contrast to the end of a typical sex scene in heterosexual pornography, in which a man will ejaculate on some part of the female body. The man always comes on the woman, be it in her eyes or mouth or on her breasts, belly, or ass. Ejaculation on the woman’s face is referred to as a “facial,” thereby describing this act as a beneficial and even luxurious process for the female receiver. Facials *exfoliate*, *rejuvenate*, and *hydrate*. Facials are supposed to keep the skin from aging, they do not leave behind a sticky residue, and they moisturize without clogging pores. Facials are mostly expensive, a luxurious and self-indulgent practice, although now one can purchase them at drugstore costs in bottle form (they also come as nifty towelettes). Semen becomes more than glorified male piss; it becomes an alpha-hydroxy infused substance that replenishes, nourishes, soothes, healing dry, wrinkled, female skin. And female protagonists in heterosexual pornography, because they apparently do not orgasm in a way that is conducive

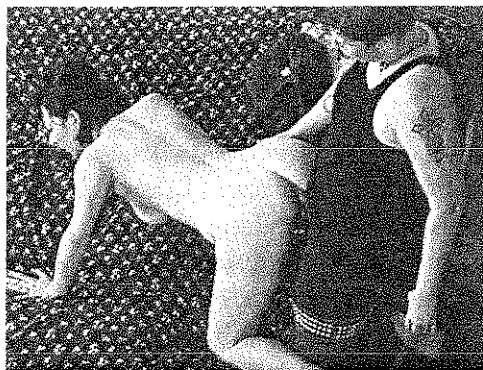
to the principle of “maximum visibility” (Williams 1989, 48–49), turn, for the most part, into cum-catchers, and there is little attempt to represent female pleasure in any form other than a smiling or ecstatic face dripping with semen.³⁵

It is logical, then, to say that the strap-on dildo provides the kind of agency to a woman (or two women) that a man’s penis simply does not. In this case, it would also be logical to say that the lesbian has more sexual agency wearing a strap-on dildo than the male has with his perpetually premature ejaculator. Therefore I propose that the Lacanian phallus has as its telos not penetration, but rather ejaculation. This gives a whole new meaning to the word *lack*; for one could argue that there is no lack in lesbian sexuality, that the real lack is in Lac(k)anian psychoanalytic theory, which gives us little more than premature ejaculate. I will return to the topic of the dildo in my discussion of three more films, all of them made within the last four years.

Dyke Porn Gets a Face-Lift and Goes Urban: Shar Rednour, Jackie Strano, and other San Francisco Lesbians

Dyke porn in the late 1990s saw more radical changes, among them younger and more urban bodies, extensive dildo- and role-play, nonmonogamous sex, dirty talk, and a continuation of the safe-sex education themes which emerged in the early 1990s (specifically in the work of Debi Sundahl and Fatale Video). In 2000, S.I.R. (which stands for Sex, Indulgence, and Rock n’ Roll) Production released *Hard Love/How to Fuck in High Heels*, a double feature written, directed, and produced by Shar Rednour and Jackie Strano (both of whom star as well). Rednour and Strano are a lesbian couple from San Francisco who are actively involved in the sex industry through video production, spoken word, books, and even as sex educators for Good Vibrations, as well as for the dyke community in San Francisco.³⁶ Their porn is actually the first to receive attention from the world of mainstream pornography (Rednour and Strano won the “Best All-Girl Feature” Award from Adult Video News). In this double feature, we see younger dykes who live in San Francisco engaging in all kinds of safe sex with multiple partners. The cast is a multiracial group of women in their late twenties and early thirties; they come in all shapes and sizes, are tattooed, pierced, hair-dyed, and often glittered.

The first feature, *Hard Love*, consists of a rather simple narrative: a recently separated couple, who each have new partners, end up in bed together after some fierce post-breakup dyke drama/trauma (figure 5). *How to Fuck*



5. Post-breakup makeup sex in *Hard Love*.

in *High Heels* is a mock behind-the-scenes feature based on a spoken word piece by Shar Rednour, which actually toured nationally with a group of poets called Sister Spit. It contains clips from her live performance, as well as actual demonstrations of how to fuck and be fucked while wearing high heels. At the end of the video, there is a mock commercial called "How to Pick Up Girls," hosted by Fairy Butch (who lives and works in San Francisco), which takes place at the Lexington (a real dyke bar in San Francisco), in which dykes use tired old one-liners on other dykes and either get lucky or get rejected. By the end of the commercial, all the dykes have gotten lucky and are all making out with one another in the bathroom. At the very end of the scene comes a humorous interpellation of the viewer and a simultaneous plug for the bar: "So come to the Lexington, San Francisco's *only* dyke bar, where every night is ladies' night," and the address and phone number of the bar are provided.

The idea of real dykes living and working and playing in a real dyke space is one of the film's main themes, as is the use of local dykes in the film (Phyllis Christopher, a local photographer, as well as Fairy Butch, author Michelle Tea, and recognizable employees from the Lexington and other local businesses). The film authenticates dyke presence/reality by co-opting an already established dyke community in San Francisco. This authentic dyke presence is portrayed as a little slice of reality predicated on a preexisting dyke cosmos already in full orbit. Rooted in place, this project potentially constitutes an intimate affair for a dyke viewer from the Bay Area. It is also very effective in its presentation of the young, urban dyke.

In *Hard Love*, the butch penetrates the femme with her dildo (or her "dyke dick," as it is called), but in *How to Fuck in High Heels*, Shar (and one other femme) penetrate one another with dildos. While there is a representation of

all types of sexual interaction between dykes, penetration with a dildo being one way among others to signify dyke pleasure, the tape does in fact adhere to certain conventions. For example, no butch-on-butch action occurs, and the only time that a femme penetrates a butch, she uses her fingers. Dildo penetration (or rather, the dyke who penetrates) is always concerned with the woman penetrated; there is a constant need for affirmation. "Is this ok?" and "Does this feel good?" are two questions asked repeatedly and with apparent sincerity throughout the film. This type of verbal affirmation is not a priority in heterosexual pornography, where pleasure is typically located on the side of the penetrator, while proof of that pleasure primarily "comes" in the form of an ejaculating penis. On the dildo difference, I quote Jackie Strano, who in a personal correspondence in the spring of 2001 kindly elaborated on what *exactly* the dildo meant to her. It is

a pleasure tool, an extension of my energy, attached to my clit, it is something that does not become flaccid or shrivel up . . . it exists to make a woman come, to give her pleasure . . . and does not come out or come down until she says it does according to her orgasmic wax and wane, not mine as a man's basic physiology would dictate. Also, I can adjust girth, length, shape, etc., according to my partner's needs and desires and not leave her stuck with just one option. Dildo play is part of the complete sex act not the pinnacle or finishing off as in straight sex.

The dildo is not only an effective pleasure tool; cinema can also easily represent dildo sex. Both partners' hands and mouths are free to talk and touch, and both bodies can be seen clearly. Dildo sex as it is represented in this film, is never concerned with actual orgasm (the only times even slight attempts are made to suggest orgasm take place during a fisting scene and a masturbation scene). None of the scenes end with orgasm; in fact, orgasm does not seem to be a preoccupation in this film. Pleasure is represented as authentic through a mutually communicative experience, and the film preoccupies itself with the representation of dyke desire and dyke sex, in its various manifestations, as well as an attempt to suggest an authentic dyke space outside of the diegesis.

KEEPIN' IT "REAL": SAN FRANCISCO LESBIANS

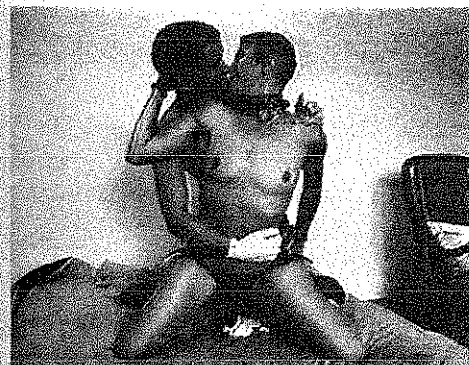
True dykes right off the street! They're incredible and they're real!

—box cover of *San Francisco Lesbians*

I take the series of amateur dyke porn entitled *San Francisco Lesbians* as a perfect example of what I call "keepin' it 'real.'" Each tape contains three to

four shorts; each short is usually fifteen to twenty minutes long, and one nonprofessional lesbian director directs all of the shorts on each tape. These brief pieces vary enormously, from sex with fruit to blow-up dolls that come to life to sex with pregnant lesbians, all kinds of fetishes, and every body type, race, and personal style imaginable, so that the idea of real dyke sex becomes, to a certain extent, exoticized.³⁷ The typical setup goes as such: either the director or one of the actresses will introduce the tape as “featuring real San Francisco lesbians,” and then she will introduce and briefly summarize each short. Often the director will also function as a character in one of the shorts (as if we needed further assurance). There is always an introduction, and there is always some sort of statement of authenticity: “My friends—real San Francisco lesbians,” or “Let’s go see what my lesbian friends are up to,” and my personal favorite, “I had so much fun last time, I decided to bring a whole new group of friends—all San Francisco lesbians,” offer three such examples. The shorts are shot on video, either in small apartments or small informal spaces (never in a studio), with primarily natural lighting, and little to no script. The actresses often burst into giggles, accidentally acknowledge the presence of the camera, or can be seen looking off into nondiegetic space; viewers often witness uncomfortable silences or unexplained noises. This series resembles the dyke porn discussed above, except that it is amateur and its strategies of authenticity differ slightly; we have no actual indication that these are, indeed, San Francisco lesbians, save an occasional poster featuring the Golden Gate Bridge (they never party with Fairy Butch at the Lexington, for example). Rather, we get to see the often uncomfortable but painfully “real” interactions between lesbians, which at times border on improvisation.

The most remarkable example of pornography I saw in the *San Francisco Lesbians* series was a beautifully awkward butch-on-butcht anal sex scene—the only butch-on-butcht scene I found in any of the dyke porn I screened—in which both dykes wear strap-ons, though only one, the “more butch” of the two, gets to penetrate (figure 6). This short clearly illustrates an attempt, however futile, to represent visually *authentic* lesbian desire and an authentic lesbian sex act. There is embarrassed and victorious laughter; there are mishaps (dildos that slip out unexpectedly, a dyke who almost takes a tumble off of the bed, dykes who say the wrong lines); there are awkward silences; there is even blushing; and there is sweating without the hot lights. There is also the safe-sex plug, which has become a staple in dyke pornography since *Suburban Dykes*, as well as the kind of dirty talk I found to be quite typical in most of the contemporary dyke porn I viewed. What proves most



6. A rare butch-on-butcht sex scene from *San Francisco Lesbians*, Volume 7.

compelling about this dyke porn—most contemporary dyke porn, in fact—is the attempt to create a fantasy of authenticity—utopian in its scope, yet strangely admirable, always optimistic, and almost believable (as a fantasy, it is totally believable, as a reality, it keeps one hovering).

HOW TO SEDUCE A BUTTHOLE:

BEND OVER BOYFRIEND (LISTEN AND LEARN)

In 1998, Shar Rednour, director of *Hard Love* and star of *How to Fuck in High Heels*, directed an educational/instructional film addressing heterosexually identified couples entitled *Bend over Boyfriend: A Couple’s Guide to Male Anal Pleasure*. Produced by Fatale Video, the film stars Dr. Carol Queen, author of *The Femme and the Leather Daddy*, *Real Live Nude Girl*, and *Exhibitionism for the Shy*, and her partner Robert Morgan, who conarrates the film. The film also features two other heterosexually identified couples, and Miss Behavin’, a sexy M.D. who pops in from time to time to give us important medical advice concerning safe anal-sex practices.

From the very beginning, viewers are aware that this video addresses specifically heterosexual couples who have little or no expertise in the area of anal play (we know this because the two couples on-screen are watching the same video we are all watching at home). Although Carol Queen explicitly states at the beginning of the film that this video lends itself to people of any sexual preference, it is indeed a video addressed to heterosexual couples, in an attempt to educate and inform. We might view this video as the closing of a porn circle that began with the stag film, which purported to “educate” men about, among other things, female sexuality. *Bend over Boyfriend*, along with many other educational videos made, for the most part, by females (Annie Sprinkle’s *Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop* (1992), Nina Hartley’s

series of *How to* videos, all of the *s/M How to* videos, as well as countless other how-to series) constitutes a radical attempt to (re)educate people in the art of sex and sexual expression. These videos have paramount importance. Through them, the topography of porn can change. They also offer a place where the female presence in pornography can really exact influence (these educational videos are primarily made by females; this one in particular was made by lesbians).³⁸

In this video, the female viewer is addressed as a potential penetratrix and her boyfriend as the penetrated. In a moment of humorous dialogue, men are metonymically reduced to their buttocks when the “young lady viewers” are advised to be extra gentle: “Remember you are trying to seduce a potentially interested but possibly reluctant buttock.” The all-important penis is replaced by the more important dildo (we have already established the advantages of a dildo). It is important to note, however, that the penis is not ignored; like the dildo, the fingers, the breasts, and the mouth, it becomes a part of the entire sex act without becoming its focus. The women in the video “butch up,” so to speak, in order to occupy the more active role of penetratrix previously occupied exclusively by their boyfriends (figure 7). Carol Queen thoroughly educates them on the art of communication. I find this part absolutely illuminating, and tragically absent from any of the heterosexual porn I have ever seen. Carol Queen comments that being communicative might be a “new thing” for the “ladies,” who are probably “not used to” communicating what they want/don’t want from their men, but can, and must, listen, while their men voice what *they* want, for anal sex obviously warrants more communication than more conventional hetero sex. Queen even expresses hope that this communicative effort might have some influence on one’s regular, noncommunicative sex life. Participants in the film talk about the advantages of gender-play that can be involved in this type of hetero sex through the use of the dildo, the fingers, and the tongue. They also talk about the various types of sex toys available for this type of play, where to find them, and, in typical dyke fashion, they offer a constant show-and-tell of safe-sex practices. It is interesting to note that the sexual techniques and practices advocated in this film made for heterosexually identified couples are primary components of queer sex. As in the previous films discussed in this essay, the idea of orgasm again becomes displaced in favor of “merely” representing new and exciting ways to have sex.

What is especially innovative about this video, besides the fact that heterosexually identified females anally penetrate men and that the penis holds even less importance here than in lesbian pornography, if that’s possible,



7. In *Bend over Boyfriend*, Carol Queen straps it on and teaches anal sex for heterosexual couples.

is its educational component. *Bend over Boyfriend* much resembles the contemporary lesbian pornography I viewed. Like its lesbian counterparts, it advocates a conscious commodification of sex toys and safe sex, thereby effectively displacing the commodification of female bodies that typically occurs in most heterosexual porn. I am not excusing the fact that commodification does occur; the variety of dildos displayed and the copious amounts of lube used to lubricate them is, to say the very least, excessive. One might even be tempted to read this video as an extended commercial for Good Vibrations, and sex toys in general. The idea that one might purchase sexual pleasure is certainly not a new one, but it is refreshing to see that the silicone purchased in these videos comes in the form of a detachable dildo (usually encased in a condom), rather than in the form of breast implants, as one might expect in mainstream porn. The film serves as an example of lesbians instructing heterosexuals on new ways of sexual expression. *Bend over Boyfriend* also gives another example of lesbians inserting themselves into the development of pornography, thereby changing its educative role. If pornography does indeed have educational value—and certainly many people do watch it to learn about sex and sexuality—what do its viewers learn by watching *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972) or *Behind the Green Door* (dir. Mitchell Bros., 1972), or a more contemporary version, such as Michael Ninn’s 1996 *Shock*? What are lesbians and heterosexually identified women learning by watching these videos? My guess is that they are learning next to nothing except how to “fake it” and how to “take it.” (Lesbians are learning that they make a nice jelly for the hetero-donut, but that they do not really exist in the heterosexual cosmos as lesbians; in fact, real lesbians don’t have sex/look at porn/strap-on dildos/have dirty thoughts.) If lesbians attempt to educate (and notice I did not say *appropriate* or *revise* or *reread* or *interpret*) the

hetero mass, they not only contribute something authentic to this world that would completely exclude them otherwise but they make their *own* desire more visible as well.

This essay began as a tentative offering of a way to look at the historical presence and evolution of the lesbian's participation within the genre of pornography. I wanted to trace certain staples of the lesbian experience throughout the last three decades, look at some of the bigger struggles she has faced, and watch the porn that she has made during and after those various struggles. I also found it necessary to look at a video not explicitly made for lesbians, but made by them, in an attempt to see lesbian presence in a not-necessarily lesbian (but certainly queer) context.³⁹ If the notions of sex and its representation are reexamined and reworked, and even retaught, in completely new ways from the point of view of someone whose visibility has been marginalized, ignored, or grossly simplified in reference to (the dominant) male sexuality, what can be done outside of the realm of sex? I do think that this lesbian effort answers to a call for "diff'rent strokes for diff'rent folks," as well as to ideas about the on/scenity of pornography, and I think that, potentially, we could go even further with this were we to acknowledge the on/scene qualities inherent within the dominant ideologies in which we work (or that work us) and the pornographic potential embedded within them. This inadequacy is only one of many. If we continue to work within those impotent and inadequate paradigms predicated on inauthentic models of subjectivity, we remain drenched in little more than premature ejaculate. How much longer should we continue to fake it? How much longer will we watch as other females fake it? When will the very idea of faking it cease to be acceptable to women?

Notes

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- 1 I use *lesbian pornography* not exactly interchangeably with *dyke porn*, but more on that shortly.
- 2 Much has already been done on lesbian pornography in general, and on certain specific films. Although I do not enter into dialogue with much of the preexisting scholarship on lesbian pornography, I attempt to supply a thorough bibliography throughout the footnotes of this essay.

- 3 This is not the only joke of this kind. There are several others, which take the tongue as well as the fingers as penis substitutes.
- 4 Mine, for example. I have heard this joke from several lesbian friends, who, through their giggles, have never been able to explain *why* they laugh, but have only been able to say that they find it "stupid but funny."
- 5 This phrase was coined by Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray in her book of the same title (in English, *This Sex Which Is Not One*). "This sex" would be the female sex, which does not exist, or cannot exist, in a world modeled and controlled by and for men and their dicks. Female sexuality is and has always been trapped, in fact, in the androcentrically structured and motivated parameters of language, psychoanalysis, and philosophy (Irigaray 1977).
- 6 A play on Robin Morgan's infamous formulation, "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice." See Morgan 1980, 139.
- 7 I do not mean to imply that the butch aesthetic is monolithic; this will become obvious as these films, and the butches in them, are discussed.
- 8 In visual culture, "before there were lesbians, there were butches." (Halberstam 1998, 186). Also, according to June Reich, "Butch/femme offers a rich history for talking about bodies, identities, and agential politics in a way that hopefully furthers the work of breaking down multiple oppressions" (1999, 255).
- 9 As Judith Butler (1991) writes, "In both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question; indeed, it is precisely that question as it is embodied in these identities that becomes one course of their erotic significance" (123).
- 10 There are, of course, other ways to make lesbian sexuality or lesbian reality visible besides the butch/femme dyad. This is simply the original lesbian stereotype, and probably one of the only sure-fire ways to "publicize" one's lesbian status.
- 11 The film begins with a poem, which has my subtitle here as one of its lines. It continues, "after her, any girl will reject any boy."
- 12 There are hundreds of exploitation films that take the topic of lesbianism as a theme. The "bored housewife" theme, in which two women play around while their husbands are at work, seems to have been the most popular. See *Sin in the Suburbs* (dir. Joe Sarno, 1964); *Odd Triangle* (dir. Joe Sarno, 1969); and *Just the Two of Us* (dir. Barbara Peters, 1970). For lesbianism as a phase in a young girl's sexual development, see *Twilight Girls* (dir. André Hunebelle, 1961); *Therese and Isabelle* (dir. Radley Metzger, 1967); *To Ingrid My Love, Lisa* (dir. Joe Sarno, 1968); and *That Tender Touch* (dir. Russell Vincent, 1969). For lesbianism as a result of victimization, see *Dominique: Daughters of Lesbos* (dir. Peter Woodcock, 1967). For lesbianism as utterly deviant and often fatal, see *The Girl with the Hungry Eyes* (dir. William Rotsler, 1967); *A Bride for Brenda* (dir. Tommy Goetz, 1968); *She Mob* (dir. Alfred Sack, 1968); and *Vibrations* (dir. Joe Sarno, 1969). For the "mocumentary," see *Chained Girls* (dir. Joseph Mawra, 1965).

- 13 This formulation comes from Eric Schaefer in this volume. For a very thorough historical account of the development of the exploitation film, see Schaefer 1999.
- 14 Judith Halberstam does a brief but nice reading of both the butch imagery and the racial politics implicit within this film (1998, 204–5). She also helped me to locate this film.
- 15 Cherry Grove serves as a marker for queers and queer space. It is a resort town about fifty miles outside of New York City that was first “colonized” by gays and lesbians in the 1930s and became the first actual gay and lesbian town. See Newton 1993.
- 16 See Halberstam 1998, chap. 6. In her discussion of the image of the butch in film, Halberstam remarks, “the stereotype, the image that announces identity in excess, is necessarily troublesome to an articulation of lesbian identity, but also foundational” (177).
- 17 I did find one entirely “lesbian” porn, entitled *Aerobisex Girls* (dir. Bruce Seven, 1977), in which leotard- and leg warmer-clad girls first aerobicize and then pour vegetable oil all over one another and anally and vaginally penetrate each other with very large, brightly colored, handheld dildoes. Eithne Johnson (1993) does an incredible job dealing with this film.
- 18 For more on *Behind the Green Door*, see Williams 1989, 156–66.
- 19 See the Gerli essay in this collection for an elaboration on queer heterosexual porn.
- 20 Since the beginning of mainstream porn, all female porn stars are bisexual, and all male porn stars are heterosexual. This means that in mainstream pornography, we get to see women fucking each other, but it means nothing more than that, and we will never see two men fuck each other.
- 21 Lillian Faderman (1991) briefly discusses this film: “Tigress productions made the film *Erotic in Nature*, which, although advertised in lesbian pornographic magazines, promised the reader to go beyond pornography: not only does it ‘steam with pleasure,’ according to the producers, but it also ‘exults in beauty and displays a tenderness which we feel will warm your hearts’” (258; emphasis mine).
- 22 In a moment of absolute semiotic brilliance, there is a shot of young butch drying off and wrapping herself up in a beach towel decorated with high heels.
- 23 To quote Linda Williams, from a personal correspondence, “There is that one pierced nipple!” I actually agree and view that one pierced nipple as a sort of metaphor for the entire film: while not *exactly* devious, it is somewhat transgressive of the typical 1980s lesbian aesthetic. The film as a whole cannot exactly be described as deviant, yet it is somewhat transgressive.
- 24 In *Personal Best*, the lesbian relationship essentially constitutes a phase, something experimental, a college fling, that Chris outgrows in favor of a more mature heterosexual relationship. She graduates not only from college but also from an immature, incomplete lesbian relationship. As in mainstream pornography, lesbianism here is merely a warm-up, or practice (or, in the case of *Personal Best*, training) for the real thing.
- 25 There was one phrase I actually heard Kit say, which was, “Ooohhh, you’re so strong!”
- 26 I owe this observation to Linda Williams, who saw a connection between this type of ideological move and the type that frequently occurs in heterosexual pornography, when nothing sexually stimulating is happening to the woman, yet she appears to be experiencing some sort of ecstasy in her face.
- 27 For a more in-depth account of this, see Faderman 1991.
- 28 There were, of course, other attempts. *On Our Backs* was created in 1984, as was *Bad Attitude*, another lesbian sex magazine. Several production companies (Tigress, Lavender Blue, and Blush) also attempted to represent the spectrum of lesbian desire (some more tame than others). Overall, however, the sleaze factor remained pretty low.
- 29 Since this is one of the only lesbian-owned and -operated producers of pornography, much has already been written on various videos, and I will not discuss the work that has been done here. See Conway 1996; Johnson 1993; Smyth 1990; and Williams 1992.
- 30 I love the fact that a lesbian calls her partner a pervert for wanting to be penetrated (historically, a woman would be considered a pervert simply for being a lesbian. Now, however, a lesbian can be considered a pervert for wanting what is considered a “heterosexual” and, therefore, perverted sex act).
- 31 For that, see the very nonpornographic book *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg or Annie Sprinkle’s film *Linda/Les and Annie* (1989), where Annie’s transgendered lover definitely attempts to pass as a man, but not through the use of a dildo.
- 32 I use Lacan’s formulation of the phallus as it is articulated in his essay “The Signification of the Phallus” (in Lacan 1977, 281–91).
- 33 Particularly the work done by Grosz 1990.
- 34 I will not discuss female ejaculation in this paper, as this is an entirely different ejaculatory situation. I am merely acknowledging it because it does indeed exist, and is important in terms of lesbian sexuality as a whole, but it cannot be compared to and does not pertain to my discussion of male sexuality. It is only important to note that so far, female ejaculation is shown to occur on the part of the woman being penetrated, and not on the part of the penetrator.
- 35 My reading of the orgasm in heterosexual porn has been informed by Patton 1989.
- 36 They have recently made another porn film entitled *Sugar High Glitter City*, which was released after this essay was written.
- 37 According to the back of the boxes, “what distinguishes this series from other ‘all-girl action’ flicks is that these are real dykes—with all the bohemian kink and enthusiasm for which San Francisco is notorious. You’ll see butches, femmes,

grunge babes and hippie chicks all playing hard with multiple dildoes and beacoup anal sex."

- 38 For a fabulous reading of another lesbian-centered educational film, *Safe Is Desire* (dir. Blush/Fatale Video, 1993), see Conway 1996.
- 39 To quote Emmanuel Cooper: "Much, if not all, queer culture is concerned with aspects of social transgression, whether involving a variety of same-sex relationships, and/or cultural confrontations . . . also . . . the rejection of fixed notions of sexuality" (1996, 14).

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The Gay Sex Clerk: Chuck Vincent's Straight Pornography

JAKE GERLI

* In the context of any current critical discussion of moving-picture pornography, Chuck Vincent would appear to inhabit one of the most contradictory predicaments of cultural production imaginable. Vincent was a gay man who directed straight pornographic films in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Based on these facts alone, the immediate impulse may be to view his career as a tale of the closet, of cinematic failure and/or commercial servitude. In fact, he made his films as an openly gay man living in the gay metropolis of New York City. His films were celebrated by the straight pornographic industry to the point that he was successful enough to start his own production company, Platinum Pictures in 1981.¹

Vincent was respected within the straight pornographic film industry for bringing what was perceived as a touch of unprecedented quality to porn.² His most notable successes, *Roommates* (1981) and *In Love* (1983) attempted to blend hard-core sex with strong cinematic narrative and high production values. Both films received awards from the Adult Film Association of America and the Critics' Adult Film Award committee.³ They also attracted attention from more mainstream audiences at the box office. *Playboy* reviewed *Roommates* alongside *Das Boot* (dir. Wolfgang Petersen, 1981), *My Dinner with André* (dir. Louis Malle, 1981), and *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1981). *Roommates* also merited a review in *Cineaste*. Circulating in both the traditional realm of pornographic consumption and the more respectable arena of art house taste, Vincent's

pornographic features of the early 1980s aimed to garner maximum box office attention. At a time when the golden age of porn shot on 35 mm seemed to be coming to an end due to dwindling box office receipts attributed to the rapid rise of video production, the industry saw Vincent's crossover attempts as examples of how to keep feature-length porno alive on film and in the theater.⁴

Vincent's films constitute pornographic films onto which an evolving industry projected its anxieties and desires. After the success of *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972) made the industry realize that pornography could attract a respectable bourgeois audience, continual efforts were made to expand and retain that audience. In the early 1980s, with decreasing attendance at the porno box office due to the rise of video, the struggle for an audience became more pronounced. The pornography industry wanted to create a hybrid product capable of crossing over to more mainstream audiences and of expanding the range of exhibition venues for pornography. Porn made a bid for the mainstream as it fashioned an image of itself as a classy affair.⁵ By emphasizing narrative, acting, editing, mise-en-scène, and costumes alongside meat and money shots, Vincent's films provided a working model for the sectors of the pornographic film industry that wanted to add some classical value to their productions.⁶

If one watches Vincent's films in the present, it becomes apparent that high production values are not their only distinguishing feature. These values are motivated in their consistent employment to accomplish aesthetic and narrative distortions of heterosexual sex troubling the utopian aspirations of generic straight pornography. Often, the straight numbers in Vincent's films depict "bad" sex, or deemphasize sex in order to focus on other aspects of the production.⁷ These breakdowns might be viewed as instances of inept filmmaking or as confirmation of the alleged impossibility of mixing explicit sex with the drives of narrative. Instead, I would contend that they constitute queer strategies of representing heterosexual sex. If straight sexuality is the norm from which queer sexualities deviate, Vincent subjects one of the grounding graphic elements of straight sexuality found in pornography—the fantasy of utopian heterosexual intercourse as encountered in pornography—to a destabilizing set of cinematic operations. Straight sex in Vincent's films is questioned, viewed with indifference, and even degraded. Vincent's films do not stop there, though. Exclusively bad sex would not make good porn. His films take visible heterosexual acts from the low point he establishes for them and puts them back into more diverse and potentially queer arrangements in order to create new affective trajectories.

These queer arrangements provoked extreme responses in both contemporary reviews of Vincent's films and in the historical accounts of straight pornography that include him. In the minds of straight critics, Vincent's films either incite discussions of the transcendence of pornography and sex, of alternative utopias, or they prompt condemnation and revulsion. In all of these instances, Vincent's queer visions of straight sex clearly prompt heterosexuality to question itself. Vincent's films interrupt the industrialized naturalization of heterosexual privilege and problem solving that marked the genre of straight porn at the time and that continues to inform the production of heterosexual pornography today. The straight porn industry's willingness to accept and to celebrate Vincent's productions circa 1982 reveals a system of production in crisis that was willing to embrace alternative, queer strategies in the name of survival. For a brief time, straight porn entertained a queer look and saw it as an innovation that could possibly rescue existing models of 35 mm feature production.

Queer Methodology

In thinking about how to frame the queer strategies exhibited in Vincent's films, I draw on Richard Dyer's 1991 historiographical essay "Believing in Fairies." In it, Dyer explains the methodology behind his book-length study of gay and lesbian film, *Now You See It* (1990). A history of gay and lesbian film may seem paradoxical in itself because gays and lesbians have historically remained without a dominant industry geared toward self-representation. Rather, queer filmmakers have often been forced to work within the margins of straight filmmaking. Dyer's effort to recover their contributions and the energies that animated them requires a more general, multiple theory of authorship that both affirms the constructed nature of the author and pays attention to the way in which film authors work "with (within and against) particular codes and conventions of film and with (within and against) particular, social ways of being lesbian or gay" (1991, 187). Teasing out historical examples of gay and lesbian agency means reading films quite carefully in order to apprehend the instances where film form manifests same-sex desire. From there, one can begin to think about the particular and historical "social ways of being lesbian or gay" that these contested signs affirm and to which they attest.

Vincent's films do exhibit significant textual peculiarities that attest to a director working "with (within and against) particular codes and conventions of film," but they present few affirmative depictions of same-sex de-

sire because Vincent was not making films for a gay or lesbian audience. He labored to produce a straight cinematic product. In this way, Vincent's films inhabit a cycle of production and circulation that is almost the inverse of Dyer's model. Vincent found himself as an out gay mediator between straight performers and technicians and straight audiences, rather than as a worker within a straight industry leaving traces of same-sex desire in his or her films for gay and lesbian audiences. As a director of straight pornographic features, though, Vincent still had to work with the demands of the genre. Although he was culturally out as a filmmaker, Vincent stood at the margin of all straight margins in a generic and semiotic sense. He had to depict heterosexual sex, while at the same time excluding screen representations of the types of sex he participated in as a gay man, preserving gay sex in his films as the "structuring absence" of straight pornography. Vincent's films are in no way explicitly homosexual, but they do introduce some queer elements that question the terms of straight sex put forth by heterosexual pornography.

Narrative

In her study of the generic parameters of straight pornography made during the 1970s and 1980s, *Hard Core*, Linda Williams observes that "in cinematic hard core we encounter a profoundly 'escapist' genre that distracts audiences from the deeper social or political causes of the disturbed relations between the sexes" (1999, 154). Heterosexual porn proposes utopian symbolic solutions to actual sexual tensions within the social construction of heterosexuality. In order to elaborate this type of symbolic resolution, though, hard core must evoke the very anxieties it seeks to address. In various forms, straight pornography repeatedly plays out a dialectic of real sexualized social relations evoked in narrative and imaginary solutions depicted in the pornographic "numbers." This dialectic rests at the end of the feature with a utopian negotiation of power and pleasure between men and women partners. Hard core thus "adhere[s] to the principle that sexual pleasure still offers the best solution to all the problems afflicting the sexual realm" (170).⁸

If the genre of straight hard core begins with a problem and proceeds to a solution, Vincent's films proceed from entirely different narrative premises. Sexual utopias are either never achieved or, if they are, they are realized in passing as part of a scrambled chronology that does not celebrate them as teleological solutions to sexual problems. For example, *Roommates*, a rough remake of Jean Negulesco's *The Best of Everything* (1959), tells the story of

three working women who live together in New York City. Amidst discrimination and disappointment in work, they try to find some sexual satisfaction. After a few high points, the film ends with the roommates leaving one another. Only the actor Joan (Veronica Hart) finds a sexually satisfying relationship. The advertising assistant and former prostitute Billie (Samantha Fox) carries with a potential Mr. Right (Jack Wrangler), but loses him when he marries another.⁹ The third roommate, Sherry (Kelly Nichols) is exploited as a model by the fashion industry and raped by a technician from one of her photo shoots (Jamie Gillis), who becomes obsessed with her. There is no realization of sexual pleasure capable of resolving the exploitative dimensions of the single women's corporate work situations in *Roommates*. The film ends with a lonely shot of Billie as she accepts a phone call from a potential tenant.

The narrative trajectory of *In Love* deviates from the generic patterns of straight hard core in another extreme fashion. A utopian vision of sex is presented at the beginning of the film, rather than at the end. Andy (Jerry Butler) and Jill (Kelly Nichols) meet by chance in Key Largo in the summer of 1962 and have a three-day affair depicted in a montage of multiple sexual scenarios and swelling music. At the end of the three days, Andy must return to his wife, and Jill ventures out into the world to seek her fortune. They decide not to keep in touch. The rest of the film is devoted to depicting the next two decades during which they live separate lives. Despite their mutual promise to forget one another, their lives are filled with longing for each other. None of the other sexual encounters they have live up to those three days in Florida. By placing the utopia of sexual fulfillment at the beginning of the film, *In Love* poses utopian sex as a problem in and of itself. The loss of utopia constitutes the narrative problem around which the film revolves. This problem is preserved even at the end of the film, when Andy and Jill finally find one another. There is no climactic lovemaking scene that restages their remembered fulfillment. *In Love* renders sexual utopia as a memory of a lost time or as simply a dream.

Style

The opening number of *In Love* that establishes the lost utopian feel is quite unusual for the pornography of the time. The sense of utopian sex ultimately derives from the cinematic manipulations of editing and voice-over, rather than the performance of the actors. The sequence alternates between several scenes, creating a transcendent sense of time and place. Scenes of Andy

and Jill fucking in two different boats are intercut with shots of them having sex in a bedroom. These numbers are juxtaposed with frames of surrounding nature and of Andy and Jill enjoying themselves on the dance floor and on bike rides. Melodramatic instrumental music and dubbed voice-over dialogue hold the seven-minute montage together. While images of Andy and Jill fucking and having a good time from disparate times and places flash across the screen, the characters attest to the greatness of the sex and the intensity of their love on the soundtrack. The emphasis on the postproduction elements of editing and sound in this sequence downplays the importance of the actual images of Andy and Jill fucking. The graphic images cease to have any primary significance. Rather, they derive most of their energy from the way in which they have been arranged in postproduction.

As Jerry Butler recalls in his autobiography *Raw Talent*, the tone of the shoot differed markedly from that of the finished sequence. There was not much chemistry between him and Nichols. He remembers: "I never really enjoyed working with Kelly, and I found her to be very tedious. What saved me was the fact that most of the sex scenes were very stylized. (We had one long sex scene in a rowboat!) Because you couldn't see a lot of ins and outs, you couldn't tell I wasn't totally erect" (1989, 91). Butler readily admits that his performance in *In Love*—particularly in the rowboat episode of the opening number—was lackluster. In Butler's estimation, Vincent rescued his performance with heavy postproduction stylization. While Butler's comments suggest that style serves as a device compensating for a subpar performance, Vincent's films appear to privilege stylization as an organizing principle, rather than a rescue strategy. Although there are no other readily available testimonies to the production methods used by Vincent other than Butler's, at the textual level it is clear that Vincent's pornographic films consistently supplement sexual numbers with flourishes of cinematic technique. Style in his films comes to dominate and mediate the "real" of the sexual performances.

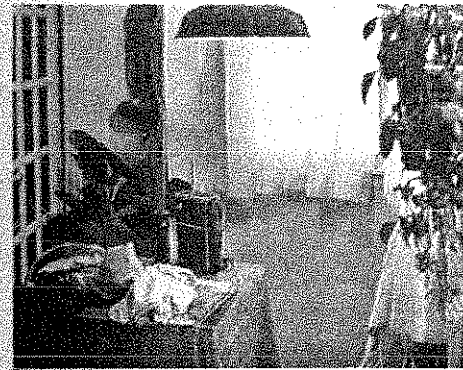
Vincent's consistent emphasis on style in the sexual numbers produces two complementary trends toward depicting straight sex in his films. In general, both techniques downplay actual sexual performances to integrate them into more complex dramas of affect and power. The first tendency in Vincent's films is toward disengagement with heterosexual sex acts, questioning the importance of the acts in and of themselves. Vincent extracts hard-core sex from a utopian fantasy world and places it in a more nuanced emotional realm, often of hurt and humiliation. The second trend in his films is to supplement straight sex with a queer look. His films deempha-

size the straight sex act in order to put it in surprising, different contexts where it becomes part of new erotic investments.

Disengagement and Critique

In a general assessment of what it was like to work with Vincent as a director, Butler evokes a sense of how Vincent would engage specifically with the hard-core sex scenes in his films: "I've mentioned earlier that Chuck is gay. There's nothing wrong with that, but how can a guy who's a softball expert coach a hardball team? There are similarities, but it isn't the same game. Sometimes Chuck seems very sheepish about heterosexual sex" (1989, 270). Butler remembers that Vincent could be "sheepish" about directing straight sex, highlighting a slight embarrassment or reluctance at the heart of Vincent's cinematic vision. While Butler attributes this to a certain inability on the part of Vincent to engage with heterosexual sex because he was gay, I would like to think about this reluctance as a strategy of representation, rather than an inherent shortcoming. As the example of Vincent's *Bon Appétit* (1980) attests, he was capable of directing hot straight sex comparable to that found in other straight porn of the time.¹⁰ The relative indifference to sexual performance in the later films such as *Roommates*, *In Love*, and *Jack and Jill 2* (1984)—a memory of which prompts Butler's more general commentary about Vincent—can be seen, then, as a defining stylistic element.

The exemplary instance of a stylized detachment from straight fucking in Vincent's films occurs in an early scene in *In Love*. After departing from the three days of bliss with Andy, Jill has moved to San Francisco. The film finds her living with her boyfriend Kip (Michael Knight). They go out to a bar, where there is an open mike. From a shot of a poet performing on stage, the film cuts to what is presumably an afternoon in the near future. The shot begins focused on a window. It slowly tracks left, revealing a radio broadcasting a baseball game (figure 1). Vaguely sexual moans can be discerned on the soundtrack, muffled by the ambient sound of the radio. The shot continues to track to the left, revealing the space of the apartment. The camera glides past a set of French doors dividing the living room of the apartment from the bedroom. Behind a chair and a guitar in the foreground, one can barely make out two bodies writhing in the midst of some sexual encounter. In this scene, which develops into a hard-core number, sex only becomes a wholly apparent part of the scene as it emerges from the background. As much hiding the sex from view as revealing it, this establishing shot signif-



1. The beginning of the distanced tracking that introduces the sexual number between Janet and Kip in *In Love*.

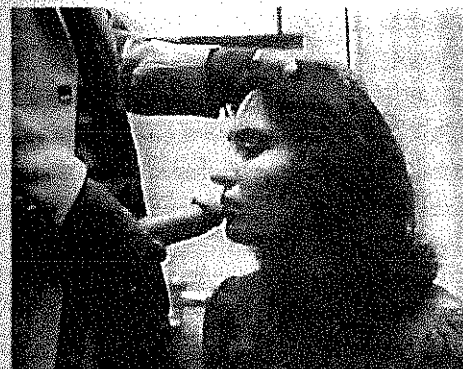
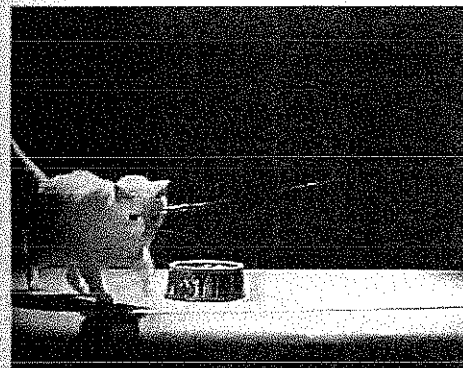
cantly downplays the sex act by making it a single element in the surrounding clutter of the apartment. Advancing at its own pace in vivid contrast to the frenetic thrusting in the background, the camera distinguishes itself in a marked fashion from the performers and what they are up to. Even after it stumbles on the performers, it continues to keep its distance, pursuing its own trajectory. This play with disengagement from the sexual numbers acts as a tease, of course, but it also provides an interruption that opens up possibilities within the pornographic feature for being critical about straight sex. The sheepishness of Vincent's films becomes a resource for the dramatic rethinking of the premises and pleasures of straight sex.

Roommates, for instance, from the beginning declares itself a film that intends to question the arrangements and fantasies underlying straight pornography. It opens with a scene in which Ted (Josh Andrews) rapes his acting student Joan. Prior to this number, the film begins with a detached sequence that shows how Joan and Ted separately commute to a rural motel to rendezvous away from Ted's wife. At the motel, it soon becomes apparent that this is the occasion for a long good-bye. Joan has decided to give up school to pursue a career in New York City. While Joan talks of her hopes to succeed in New York, Ted begins to undress her. She protests but he shuts her up by sticking his dick in her mouth and then forcing her to have genital sex with him. The sex is quick, brutal, and a torture to watch. With every piece of clothing that is removed, the film cuts to a slightly different angle, but it maintains the blank stare of a cold medium shot. The scripted maneuvers of sex advance monotonously in time toward a coerced genital goal, making the sexual number an exercise in duration, rather than arousal. Finally, a poorly lit close-up of the missionary-style penetration gives way to an exterior come shot. Ted rolls over, off the bed, and into his pants in a moment.

He's out the door, telling Joan that he has to be somewhere for an appointment, but that he will call her when he visits New York. The film cuts to an isolating long shot of her holding herself, naked and alone.

Clearly not a utopian realization, sex is depicted in this opening scene as a mechanical step-by-step process bound up with emotional and professional pressures, which ends in humiliation and loneliness. The final shot of Joan alone on the bed condenses the depressing conclusion. It is unusual for movie-picture pornography to end a sexual number with a reaction shot, especially one that radiates such disappointment and vulnerability. The sense of violation is underscored by the long duration of the reaction shot. Instead of cutting away to the next sexual scenario capable of producing some euphoria, as if this initial bad sex was just a stumbling block on the road toward more euphoric realizations, *Roommates* dwells with an abandoned and hurt individual who has been coerced into sex in an entirely un-erotic way.¹¹ The sexual problem that *Roommates* begins with is not exclusively one of pleasure that has to be worked through in order to discover the ideal sexual scenario, but rather a problem with the power relations that form the basis for the heterosexual fantasy. By explicitly making the patriarchal student-teacher relationship and its abuse a part of its opening scene, *Roommates* underscores and performs the coercive power relationships at the heart of the scenario, rather than using the sex as a way to escape from and symbolically resolve the contradictions of Joan and Ted's relationship.

Extending this critical attitude beyond the opening sequence, *Roommates* makes this demystification of heterosexual sex its feature-length project. The film's most fully developed engagement with the coercive aspects of patriarchal fantasies of heterosexual sex occurs later in the film in a scene that centers around the former prostitute Billie and her current boss Marv (Bobby Astyr). Marv knew Billie when she had sex for money and continues to put her in situations where she must "entertain" clients in order to keep her legitimate job working for him at an advertising agency. Near the end of the film, Marv forces Billie to service him too. During a commercial shoot for the cat food Pussy Treats, Marv pulls Billie into the bathroom, unzips his pants, and forces her to her knees. The sequence begins focused on the filming of the commercial, where a crew tries to force a handsome white cat to eat Pussy Treats. What seems to be an otherwise simple commercial take is frustrated again and again by the feline, who refuses even to nibble the Pussy Treats. The cat is verbally encouraged, poked with a broomstick, thrown toward the food, and dragged on a leash (figure 2). While all of this is happening, the film intersperses shots of Marv's verbal attempts to coerce



2. The cat that doesn't want its "Pussy Treats" (from *Roommates*).

3. Marv imposes his own "treat" on Billie in *Roommates*.

Billie into giving him a blow job. Finally, he decides to force her into the bathroom for her own "pussy treat." As they exit, the film cuts to a shot of the cat, which has been coerced into eating the cat food like a good kitty should. There is applause from the male crew.¹² Meanwhile, Billie and Marv reach the bathroom, where he pulls out his dick and shoves it into her mouth (figure 3). He promptly comes in her mouth. She refuses to play the part of the good pussy and spits his come all over his shoes, which he had been polishing with great care in a previous scene.

The cat food commercial functions as a commentary on the forced sex in the bathroom. Both the cat and Billie are told what they allegedly want by a group of men or a man. Both "pussies" are supposed to want their respective "pussy treats"—cat food or cock and come—and to perform the pleasure of ingesting them. Relentlessly poked and prodded, the cat is made to digest what it clearly does not want. Billie is likewise pressured into ingesting what she clearly abhors. By juxtaposing this sex scene with the takes of the cat, *Roommates* again frames straight sex as an activity that comes out of a



4. The erotics of fur enveloping sex in *In Love*.

in their nicely tailored tuxedos. The attention to the costuming in the party portions of the sequence draws attention to the rather incredible setup of Andy and Elaine's number. Elaine is the most spectacularly dressed of all the guests, her beaded dress sparkling with sequins borders. Andy wears a fitted tuxedo and his hair glistens with an elaborate pattern of artificial highlights. When they fuck, they do not remove their clothing. The packaging of the performers becomes an essential erotic part of the number, reciprocally eroticizing the costumes and grooming of the guests at the party. The erotic supplement of the clothing becomes even more of an essential element in the sex when Elaine lays Andy down on the fur coat in the back room. As she begins to suck his cock, the camera assumes an angle that makes it look like the fur is enveloping the performers (figure 4). Then, Andy and Elaine switch positions, so that she is spread out on the coat. As he starts to fuck her, the film cuts to a low angle shot that would seem to focus in on the site of penetration. But it also partially obscures Elaine behind the fuzzy edges of fur coat, making it look as if Andy could be having sex with the mink as well as Elaine.

This scene is queer in the sense that it puts the conventional straight sex act into proximity with the erotic life of things, making those things part of the performance. Andy and Elaine do not strip to grant maximum visibility of their bodies to the viewer as in most straight porn of the era, but rather retain their costumes and include them in the act. The pleasures of this scene come not exclusively from their corporeal connection, but through the link made between the moment of sexual coupling and the rest of the party. This is accomplished through the crosscutting and the clichéd countdown, but, most important, through the forms of dress.

Costuming in general is the realm of production where Vincent seems to

have invested most of his own economic and erotic energies when making his straight porn films. The attention paid to costuming in *In Love* is extraordinary for a porn film. The film spans a twenty-year period and goes to great pains to differentiate each of the historical moments it traverses through costuming and setting. This attention leads me to believe that a significant portion of the film's \$750,000 budget (enormous for a porn film at the time) was spent on costuming.¹⁵ More subjectively, Butler recalls that Vincent consistently emphasized costuming at the expense of a proper straight sexual ambiance and sometimes to the detriment of sexual numbers.¹⁶ In Butler's estimation, the type of attention Vincent devoted to the costuming of women did not achieve the proper "tasty" look required by straight porn. Instead, the way Vincent dressed women was "pretty" (1989, 270–71). A queer aesthetic asserts itself in the costumes of the women in Vincent's films, disrupting the look of patriarchal heterosexual eroticism.

Butler also remarks that Vincent "always dressed [him] very nicely" (271). The presentation of male bodies in Vincent's films is always more meticulous than in straight porn of the era. Men in Vincent's films are not flaccid, skinny bodies attached to big dicks, but comparatively sexy devils put erotically on display through their clothing and grooming. Butler is always done up with makeup, tailored clothes, and cute outfits. The real attention to the male body in Vincent's films, though, manifests itself with respect to Jack Wrangler. A frequent star and guest star in Vincent's productions, Wrangler is always the best dressed and most coifed. It is on the body of this former gay porn star that the most explicit manifestations of gay desire in Vincent's films can be read.¹⁷ At the beginning of the hard-core feature *Voyeur* (1984), for instance, Wrangler becomes the center of erotic attention at the expense of the woman in the opening scene. A cabbie (Robert Bullock) drives around New York City in search of fares. A man (Wrangler) flags down the driver and hops into the back of the cab with a woman. He tells the driver to keep driving while she unzips his pants and begins to suck him off. A complex relay of looks ensues as the cabbie is torn between keeping his eye on the road and looking through the rear-view mirror at the action on his backseat. The action in the back is shot from a low angle, which makes Wrangler's cock look like a majestic object rising out of his pinstripe suit. As he shoots his come all over the backseat, it becomes apparent that this dick is the object of the cabbie's insistent rear-view gaze. The driver slows the cab, and the man kicks the woman to the curb. As he zips up his fly, he leans into the front of the cab and tempts the cabbie with a vague but lucrative business proposition—something about investigative work that could help the cabbie

exercise the police skills he learned on the force but is no longer able to use because he was discharged for embezzling. The film cuts away from the rest of their cab ride. Having made it amply clear that the cabbie enjoys watching the man getting his dick sucked and that the man is aware of the cabbie's look and gets off on the cabbie watching him, this scene can be understood as an acknowledgment of a homoerotic bond between them. Although mediated by the discarded figure of the woman and the alibi of business, the result is not unlike a gay pickup, although the sex between men never makes it to the screen.

Straight History and Reception

As I have tried to demonstrate, Vincent's films break apart straight erotic clichés, supplement straight sex with elaborate costuming and curiosities of the *mise-en-scène*, and hint at gay desires. For whom, though, were all of these forms of "deviance" staged? It is unlikely that there was ever a queer audience for Vincent's films.¹⁸ An archive of straight reception does exist, though. Histories of straight pornography, contemporary reviews, and an industry statement all attribute a degree of significance to Vincent's pornographic productions. Despite their agreement on the importance of the director and his films, however, these responses cannot agree on *why* he must be remembered. Nevertheless, his films consistently inspire strong feelings across the spectrum of evaluative writing. Because straight critics cannot fully account for the particularities of Vincent's films, the latter provoke either thoughts of transcendence and lost utopian possibilities, or they incite violent disavowal and rejection. The responses vary as commentators try to grapple with the difference his films represent.

In reviewing the critical literature, I think the best place to begin is in the relative present, where the historical reception of Vincent's films appears the most divided. Luke Ford spends a chapter of his *History of X: 100 Years of Sex in Film* (1999) celebrating the fact that straight pornography did not follow Vincent's lead. Ford dismisses Vincent's pornographic films because of their emphasis on narrative and production values. These elements constitute aberrations when seen from the perspective of contemporary video pornography, devoted as it is to wall-to-wall sex, which Ford sees as the proper historical realization of male desire. To Ford, narrative and production values make sex unsexy because they deviate from the male desire for exclusively graphic sex. From his point of view, then, Vincent's relevance to porn history derives from the fact that he provides a stunning example of

what not to do. "Through [his] noble failures, Vincent helped turn porn in the opposite direction of his approach: Rather than more story and character development, X-rated movies since Vincent have concentrated on sex," Ford writes (160). By emphasizing cinematic elements other than graphic episodes of interlocking bodies, Vincent represents what had to be negated in order for straight porn to achieve its telos in the present day.¹⁹

Ford takes his cues from Steve and Elizabeth Brent's assessment of the film in the *Couples Guide to the Best Erotic Videos* (1997). The Brents, however, give Vincent's "failures" a more positive spin. They imbue *In Love*, for example, with an incredible degree of nostalgia: "If you're a newcomer [to pornography] . . . don't rent this film first. Save it for after you've seen some of the modern examples so you can appreciate what might have been if the forces of repression and censorship had never won their community-standards platform and banished sexuality from mainstream filmmaking" (qtd. in Ford 1999, 160). Here, the Brents offer a sophisticated account of how Vincent's films might be thought of in terms of the history of pornography. It is not that the films did not conform to the "male" desire of which pornography is merely the graphic realization, as Ford would have it, but that Vincent's films sought to challenge and to change the social value attributed to pornography. Vincent did not want to dwell in the porn ghetto, but rather attempted to develop a pornographic aesthetic that would work for both porn audiences and mainstream audiences. With pornography presently out of mainstream theaters, the Brents frame Vincent's films as symbols of a lost past they can appreciate in the nostalgic tense of "what might have been."²⁰

This conditional and virtual critical tense indicates not just another opinion about Vincent's films. It also traces the historical mode that Vincent's films inhabit relative to the type of history of straight pornography critics like Ford attempt to write. Both Ford and the Brents insist that Vincent's films are historical in some sense, but that they do not fit into an otherwise linear historical narrative of straight pornographic film's development. While Ford's strategy is to write Vincent's films off as instances of pornographic film production significant only because they serve as warnings of how not to make pornographic films, the Brents see in them lost possibilities capable of improving porn and making it a more widely appreciated cultural form. The Brents are unable, however, to give an account of these possibilities. In this respect, Vincent's films are fundamentally undecided cultural products that resist any definite status. Although they tell stories of straight sex and offer representations of straight sex, they constitute troubling anomalies without any definite place in the history of straight porn.

This lack of historical place for Vincent's films despite their manifest content of straight sex and straight stories suggests that the critics are dimly aware that something exceeds the overtly visible in his films. Vincent's films put straight sex on the screen in a fundamentally different way. As I have tried to argue, this difference is a queer one. In contrast to the historians who have relegated Vincent to the realm of anomaly, contemporaries to Vincent did not dismiss or refuse to engage fully with this queer quality. Some saw the difference at the heart of Vincent's productions as capable of rejuvenating the pornographic feature in the early 1980s.

This faith in the innovative capacities of Vincent's features is best expressed in *Dirty Looks* (1982), a feature-length compilation of sex scenes from his previous films that Vincent made to promote the release of *Roommates*.²¹ Two of the most dedicated promoters of straight porn during the early 1980s host this montage of highlighted scenes: Al Goldstein, the publisher of *Screw* magazine, and Gloria Leonard, the publisher of *High Society* magazine, narrate *Dirty Looks*, setting up each scene and praising the arousing capacities of Vincent's films and the talent of the performers he employs. Rivals in publishing, they stage an act that makes it clear they will agree to do the show together only out of mutual admiration for Vincent. It quickly becomes apparent, though, that they are not just hosting the film anthology out of respect. They have also come to Vincent to acquire a degree of respectability previously unavailable to them.

Dirty Looks begins with the arrival of Goldstein and Leonard at the apartment where their hosting will take place. He is dressed in a tacky sweater with a wolf on it—identifying him with the iconic sexual predator. She wears a leopard-print dress, projecting an image of chintzy but sensuous sexuality. Immediately, they begin to bicker, trading insults, four-letter words, and bad jokes. They eventually agree to set aside their differences and host the show out of respect for Vincent. They play the first clip. After a highlight from *Jack and Jill*, where Fox and Wrangler fuck on a hardwood floor, the film cuts back to Goldstein and Leonard. They have changed into formal wear. More strikingly, their speech—which now appears to be fed to them via prompting cards off-screen (this is made evident by their straying looks off-screen and by their sometimes stilted speech)—has undergone a complete transformation. They use much more refined vocabulary than their previous “obscene” speech. Additionally, Goldstein and Leonard demonstrate a high degree of cinematic literacy. They applaud actors' performances, promote drama in sex films, and quote from reviews in addition to praising the hotness of the sex scenes they present. The setting also changes as Goldstein and Leonard

move from an area near the apartment's back door (or an area that has the feel of a back room) to a living room equipped with a finely upholstered couch, dark wood, a bar, and an antique lamp. Through Vincent's script, his costumes, and his set composition, Goldstein and Leonard are given an air of formality and respectability. They reciprocate by promoting Vincent's films, saying that they admire the director's work because it depicts hot sex while incorporating drama, performance, and production values.

Goldstein and Leonard openly articulate that the stakes they have in Vincent's films are rooted in a shared desire for increased aesthetic quality. This is reinforced by the costume change, the migration in the *mise-en-scène*, and the elevated sense of cinematic style. As I have tried to demonstrate, these aspects of production are also linked to a distinct queer displacement of straight sex in Vincent's films. This analysis suggests that for a time, the straight porn industry was willing to see its product “queered” in an effort to produce innovations capable of creating a more viable and popular cultural product. Looking back on this moment, I would like to affirm it as a time when straight porn was willing to open itself up to a queer revision. A gay man found a way to change the terms of straight pornographic feature films and to establish himself as an admirable auteur of straight porn. Looking into the hidden realm of production, this instance begs further inquiry into the role of gay workers in producing straight pornography, a presence recently given attention through the character of the boom operator Scotty (Philip Seymour Hoffman) in *Boogie Nights* (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, 1997).²² As examples, Vincent's films also open up more general cultural questions about the role erotics straying from heteronormative ends play in straight porn. At the most general level, the willingness of the industry to welcome and celebrate films such as Vincent's point to a largely unexplored but nevertheless intimate relationship between changes in industrial conditions and changes in sexual mores, desires, and subjectivities. In some sense, the Meese Commission was right when it stated that “the history of pornography has yet to be written” (U.S. Department of Justice 1986, 233). It would seem that this declaration applies especially to our recent past.

Notes

1. Unfortunately, I do not have any legal documents attesting to the founding of this company in 1981. But 1981 is the first year in which Platinum Pictures is credited as the production company in the titles of a Vincent feature (*Roommates*).

- 2 Jerry Butler, one of the best-known male stars of the period recalls that "in the early 80s, Chuck was one of the first people to give adult films class and charisma. He shaved the ugly corners off pornography" (1989, 83–84). Dick Hebditch and Nick Anning remember Vincent as one of the ten best and most consistent directors of pornography's golden age in their history of the straight porn industry of the late 1970s and early 1980s (1988, 195).
- 3 *Roommates* won the following Adult Film Association of America (AFAA) awards in 1982: Best Film, Best Director (Chuck Vincent), Best Actress (Veronica Hart), Best Supporting Actor (Jamie Gillis). This information is available at us.imdb.com/Towards?0083007 and was last accessed April 6, 2003. In 1983, the AFAA awarded Kelly Nichols its Best Actress award for her performance in *In Love* (us.imdb.com/Towards?0085719).
- 4 In an interview with *Variety* in 1988, Vincent recalls 1982 (the year between *Roommates* and *In Love*) as a landmark year for the conflict between film and video in the straight porn industry. "The market for adult films started slipping around 1982 and in the past three years has dried up. . . . Five years ago the video companies such as VCA and Caballero would typically advance \$40-60,000 for the video rights to a theatrical porn film. Then roughly two years ago they stopped making offers—they decided they could do four shot-on-video programs themselves for the cost of video rights to a single theatrical film" (qtd. in Cohn 1988: 3, 26).
- 5 *Variety* was willing to agree with the crossover aspirations of *Roommates*: "While pic's lack of a Hollywood major pedigree may lead to it being dismissed as porn, 'Roommates' deserves a shot at mainstream audiences." ("Roommates" 1982b, 24). Echoing *Variety* with a more aesthetic inflection, *Playboy* affirmed that "*Roommates* deserves to be judged as a real movie—rare on the porn scene in recent years—that places credibility above crotch level" ("Roommates" 1982a, 36).
- 6 Rick Marx, screenwriter for *Taboo* and *Roommates*, recalls in 1988 that "the fundamental difference between now and several years ago is that back then we wanted to make a real picture—which people would enjoy and had the possibilities of attracting the crossover, mainstream audience. The best shot we had at this was Chuck Vincent's 'Roommates' in 1981, which I co-wrote" (qtd. in Cohn 1988, 26).
- 7 By "bad" sex I mean to refer to representations of sex that do not engage their viewers in a pleasurable fashion. This typology includes scenes with unerotic coercion at their heart, flatly photographed and edited scenes in which the action is difficult to see and repetitive, and scenes in which the performers clearly are not into each other.
- 8 Borrowing from Dyer's work on the film musical, Williams ventures that pornography exhibits a similar narrative/number structure. The number inevitably provides the "solution" to problems that spring from the contemporary social reality and that are evoked and framed by cinematic narrative, whether they be the realities of capitalist oppression or the general woes of heterosexual union (as in the case of the musical), or the more specific psychosexual ills of heterosexual desire and pleasure (as in the case of pornography). The number can either do this by appearing as a *separated* utopian moment that provides an escape from these anxieties, or it can function as an *integrated* spectacle that more directly confronts social problems and "solves" them in a much more ambivalent fashion. Both run in a vicious circle, either by offering capitalist solutions to antagonisms created by capitalism, or by offering sexual resolutions to sexual problems. See Williams 1999, chap. 6. My contention is that Vincent evokes the problems, but does not offer any satisfactory solutions because his numbers fail to embody straight utopian sexual fantasies.
- 9 It should be noted that Jack Wrangler was quite a famous gay porn star who abandoned his gay porn career to work in straight porn. See Wrangler's autobiography (Wrangler and Johns 1984) for a more complete story. Wrangler's place in Vincent's work will be discussed in more detail below.
- 10 *Bon Appétit* shares a lot of narrative and stylistic similarities with *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (dir. Radley Metzger, 1975) although without the educational aspect of the plot. Like *Misty Beethoven*, *Bon Appétit* is the story of a down-on-her-luck woman who becomes part of a high-class international sex contest. Faith (Kelly Nichols) caters a party for rich socialites and becomes involved in their contest to see who can seduce the ten best lovers in the world. The prize for the winner is \$250,000. Her companion photographer Scott (Randy West) must catch her in the act on film as she conquers the ten best lovers. Each lives in a different international city, so Faith and Scott travel the globe, offering an excuse to show location shots from Paris, Munich, New York, and other scenic cities around the world. In the end, Faith and Scott discover they are the best sexual matches for one another. The pornographic numbers throughout are varied, erotic, and seem to have only ever-increasing pleasure as their aim.
- 11 As Williams contends in *Hard Core*, bad sex is a structuring principle of straight feature-length pornography, but only insofar as it establishes the erotic problem that the rest of the film seeks to resolve through its ever more ecstatic numbers. *Roommates*, on the other hand, depicts the problem as one more of heterosexual sex itself, rather than a narrative conceit. It provides no specific problem that must be worked through, and it does not solve any problems. Rather, heterosexual sex in all of its many scenarios is depicted as rife with problems. See Williams 1999, chap. 6.
- 12 This scene is also an allusion, I think, to a scene in François Truffaut's film about making a film, *Day for Night* (1973). At one point in Truffaut's film, a cat similarly holds up production. The cat in *Day for Night* is supposed to eat from a breakfast tray two lovers have left outside their bungalow, becoming a metaphor for the gentleness and tenderness of the lovemaking. In the world of the film production company, finally getting the cat to perform is an affirmation of the magic of cinema (they similarly cheer). This allusion seems to work in two complemen-

tary but contradictory fashions. On the one hand, it mocks the art cinema of Truffaut by bringing it down to an utterly commercial level (in that in Vincent's film the "film within a film" is a commercial shoot). On the other hand, the quotation seems to be a way for *Roommates* to make a claim to a more legitimated form of cinema beyond pornography and its relatively low production values. Both tendencies appear to inform Vincent's film. His productions consistently demonstrate and test B movie economic limits as he works within budget but tries to elevate the artistic cache of his productions.

- 13 Peter Lehman, for example, has analyzed the affinities pornography shares with the documentary quest for truth. He calls porn "a kind of documentary" that encodes a particular patterned attraction taken for a fantasy of reality. Lehman's discussion focuses on gonzo pornography and other hybrid ethnographic-pornographic films. Other writers, such as Bill Nichols, Christian Hansen, and Catherine Needham have commented more generally on the truth-seeking impulses pornography shares with the ethnographic quest for truth. And Linda Williams has explicitly framed straight pornography as a quest for the "truth" of bodies and pleasures. See Nichols et al. 1991, Lehman 1999, and Williams 1999, esp. chap. 1.
- 14 For example, anatomical features: *Deep Throat*; capacities: *Insatiable* (dir. Godfrey Daniels, 1980), *Raw Talent* (dir. Larry Revene, 1984); characters: *Debbie Does Dallas* (dir. Jim Clark, 1978), *The Devil in Miss Jones*, *Flesh Gordon* (dir. Michael Benveniste and Howard Ziehm, 1974), *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*, *The Resurrection of Eve* (dir. Mitchell Bros., 1973).
- 15 Butler offers this figure as the budget for *In Love* (1989, 304). A significant portion of the film's budget must have also been spent on location shooting, since it takes place in a number of real settings including Miami, New York City, and San Francisco.
- 16 The full quote from Butler that I am basing these observations on runs over two full pages in his book. An edited version that brings out the most significant aspects runs as follows (I quoted the part about "sheepishness" above): "*Jack & Jill 2* was another movie I did for the famous, ever-ready Chuck Vincent. It was a three- or four-day shoot and was a typical Chuck Vincent movie. That means there was a lot of dilly-dallying and fussing with costumes. . . . My sex scenes in *Jack & Jill 2* were odd, but not really hot. I've mentioned earlier that Chuck is gay. There's nothing wrong with that, but how can a guy who's a softball expert coach a hardball team? There are similarities, but it isn't the same game. Sometimes Chuck seems very sheepish about heterosexual sex. He does care about the look and the presentation of his works, and he always dressed me very nicely, but he seemed a little confused about how to dress women. In *Jack & Jill 2*, for example, the women wore picture hats and frilly dresses—pretty, but not . . . *tasty*" (1989, 270–71).
- 17 It should be noted that another significant "broaching" of gay desire occurs in an explicit fashion in *Roommates*, although this appearance is quickly recuper-

ated into the heterosexual dynamics of the film. After moving to New York City, Joan meets a charming young man named Eddie (Jerry Butler) at an audition. They become fast friends, and he is very up front about identifying himself as gay to her. In one scene, they picnic at the docks down by the South Street Seaport. Two guys are standing at the end of the pier. After checking out their asses, Eddie suggests that he and Joan go introduce themselves. He calls dibs on the guy on the left. The scene ends at this point with them thoughtfully finishing their lunch. Importantly, a gay desire is voiced and not depicted as strange or punishable. Soon, though, Eddie's sexuality is subject to revision by the narrative. He and Joan inevitably jump into bed. By the film's end, it is unclear if Eddie is a sensitive straight guy who was experimenting, bisexual, or a gay man who is doing some experimenting of his own.

- 18 Although, as Samuel R. Delany's memoir of Times Square attests, straight porno theaters were often used by men as places to engage in sex with other men. See Delany 1999.
- 19 Ford is an unabashed misogynist when it comes to pornography. He views women's desire as insignificant to the history of straight pornography. To Ford, contemporary video pornography with constant sex is a telos that acts as a graphic realization of an eternal male heterosexual lust. Vincent does not fit into the progression pornography has gone through in order to reach this high point because he injected too much "reality" into his productions, and "reality . . . is rarely sexy" (1999, 159).
- 20 For a legal and economic history of the times, which focuses on the role the Motion Picture Association of America played in driving pornography out of the mainstream (thereby saving Hollywood), see Lewis 2000.
- 21 *Dirty Looks* includes scenes from *Bang Bang* (1975), *Dirty Lily* (1977), *Bad Penny* (1978), and *Jack and Jill* (1979), and ends with a scene from the upcoming *Roommates*.
- 22 Scotty also has, of course, a much more metaphorical function in the film. He stands in for the homoerotic gaze disavowed and mediated in much straight porn directed at straight male audiences.

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part 3

Pornography, Race, and Class