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More than a Spasm, Less than a Sign: Queer Masculinity in American Visual Culture, 1915-1955

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Abstract

This research considers the contribution of visual culture to queer masculinity among white American men during a profound reorientation both in popular understandings and the practical conditions of eroticism between men. From about 1915 to 1955 a pragmatic libidinal economy centered on the theatrical effeminacy of "fairies" was displaced by one founded on the presumption of strongly delineated and relatively fixed hetero- and homo-sexual identities. Although medical discourses about queerness had been developing since the middle of the Nineteenth Century in Europe, what Americans of the opening decades of the twentieth century knew about queerness they learned unsystematically from hearsay, the observation of local people and practices, and visual culture.

Photography and film built on existing representational conventions, such as those developed in painting, illustration, theatre and nightlife, but the voyeuristic position of the spectators of films and photographs provided a special liberty to look at men, fetishistically or critically, and imagine recreating their gestures in the medium of one's own body. Gesture is understood here as the aestheticization of self-presence by means of the movement or disposition of the body and its props. Gestures articulate a selfhood that enjoys a conditional freedom in its relation to the social world while being subject to the structures of meaning it inherits and the operation of discipline.

Through fine-grained analyses of queer gags in Charlie Chaplin's slapstick comedy and nude figure studies by George Platt Lynes, this research argues that visual culture provided an apprenticeship in and theory of queer masculinity as a set of gestures. This study supplements the scholarly literature on Charlie Chaplin by foregrounding aspects of his star text that key audiences to recognize the masculinity of his signature Tramp as queer and cataloguing his use of dance, drag, and accident to provide a figure for homoeroticism in slapstick. It also significantly extends the existing critical literature on the photography of George Platt Lynes by considering camp, surrealism, and glamour as aspects of a decades-long engagement with the phenomenal texture of life as a middle-class queer American man.

Keywords

Charlie Chaplin; George Platt Lynes; Gesture; Visual Culture; Comedy; Camp; Surrealism; Glamour; LGBT; Masculinity

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I would not have been able to complete the research that informed this dissertation without the support and assistance of Liana Zhou and Shawn C. Wilson, Director and Assistant Director of the Kinsey Institute Library and Special Collections and the cheerful and professional staff of the reading room. I also received essential support from the staff of New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure permission from George Platt Lynes's estate to reproduce the images I discuss in this document. I hope to include these photographs in future publications. In the meantime, interested readers and researchers can reach out to the excellent and helpful staff at the Kinsey Institute Special Collections to request digital reproductions using the object identifiers noted in the List of Figures.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the sustaining love and encouragement of my partner, Dr. Brian Johnson. Research and writing are difficult and sometimes frustrating, but Brian made sure they were not lonely, in addition to helping me refine my arguments with his insightful questions and comments. Of course, thanks also to my parents, friends and colleagues, many of whom seem to have developed a sixth sense about when and how to ask about my degree progress without drawing too much attention to the sad pace of my progress. Aside from Brian, my most important source of personal support during this project was my late dog, Bull. He did not live to see the completion of my doctoral studies, but thanks to him, I did!

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1. Introduction

The first time I saw Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*,[1] I was immediately struck by the intensity of the homoerotic frisson between the Tramp (Chaplin) and the eccentric Millionaire (Harry Myers), and how central an understanding of their friendship as romantic was to Chaplin's comedy. I began to search historical and critical literature about Chaplin for analyses of queerness in his humour. While I found little to support my reading of *City Lights* in film scholarship, my research in the emergence of a transatlantic queer world in Europe and the United States provided a richly textured picture of the kind of everyday knowledge that audiences would have needed in order to detect the lavender tint in Chaplin's gags. Around the same time, I became aware of George Platt Lynes's photography through several excellent books, but especially Steven Hass's *George Platt Lynes: The Male Nudes*.[2] Back then, Lynes's restrained and evocative figure studies struck me as an important counterpoint to Chaplin's ludicrous queer antics on screen and I thought to cast these bodies of works as evocative of differences between public and insider knowledges about queerness.

My research on the George Platt Lynes collection, approximately 600 photographs and 2,300 original negatives held in the archives of the Kinsey Institute, posed immediate and insurmountable challenges to that version of my project. I quickly discovered that there were important continuities between the view of queerness I saw represented in Chaplin's comedy and the artistic perspective articulated in George Platt Lynes's photography. Lynes's scrapbooks, held at the Beinecke Library, also convinced me that Lynes was powerfully shaped by the visual culture of a popular modernity he also helped to produce. Nevertheless, Lynes's photographs, taken over the course of 27 years, also seemed to document a complexity and a historical shift that was not evident in Chaplin's queer humour. Rather than taking Chaplin's comedy and Lynes's photography as representative of different societal standpoints on queerness, my developing appreciation of both bodies of work led me to question what they could reveal about a shared and changing specular knowledge of queerness as a way of living characterized by distinctive patterns of embodiment. This point

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[1] Chaplin, Charles. *City Lights*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1931.
[2] Steven Haas, *George Platt Lynes: The Male Nudes* (New York: Rizzoli Press, 2011).

of view dovetails with Eve Sedgewick's view of hetero- and homo-sexuality as identities formed through a contrastive relationship of negation. Masculinity has to do with the relationship between an embodied subject and the set of performative or characterlogical expectations applied to them because of their (presumed) male bodies. Queer masculinity describes a culturally or situationally significant variation on, or deviation from, these expectations. Because of the contrastive quality of this definition, queer masculinity is difficult to place. It is both determined from the outside by the judgements of others and borne out as a quality or condition of individual subjects. Queer masculinity derives from the entanglement of social objectivity and subjective interiority; therefore it responds historically to changes in the conditions that structure judgements and affects.

Linking Chaplin and Lynes helped me literally visualise a shift in queer masculinity that took place in the United States between the beginning of World War I and the aftermath of World War II. The shift I describe arose in the culture inhabited by white, primarily urban, and English-speaking people of the working and middle classes. Throughout this research, wherever I write "queer masculinity" readers interested in racial, class, and geographical differences in gender expression should keep these qualifiers in mind. There may be significant differences as well as points of convergence between the queer masculinities articulated by people differently positioned within society, and I do not intend any of the insights in this research to stand in the place of universal knowledge. While the image culture communicated through movies, advertisements and magazines was available to people outside that set of intersecting circumstances, it did little to include their perspectives, leading to significant blind spots in the materials I used as the basis of my research. The facts of social segregation in the period under study meant that racialized queer men developed their own homoerotic imaginaries and suffered distortion when they entered the imagination of queer white men. In Lynes's New York, this separation shows up, for instance, in the distinctive queerness of the Harlem Renaissance. While Carl van Vechten complemented his critical and intellectual patronage of Black culture with a queer photographic practice as replete with primitivism as it is with campy theatrics, George Platt Lynes took few pictures

of Black men and women, and these photographs deserve separate attention for the way Lynes's visual consideration of race complicate their eroticism.[3]

I characterize the shift in queer masculinity as the slow displacement of a flexible and pragmatic libidinal economy centered on the theatrical effeminacy of "fairies" by one founded on strongly delineated hetero- and homo-sexual identities presumed to be fixed. Although medical discourses about queerness had been developing for more than fifty years in conjunction with regional political projects and scientific research, what Americans of the opening decades of the twentieth century knew about queerness they learned unsystematically from hearsay and the observation of local people and practices. As Jeffrey Weeks puts it, "the medical model still to a large extent stayed at the level of theory and most doctors seemed to have been indifferent to or ignorant of the phenomena," concluding that "the old morality rather than the new psychology retained its influence until at least the inter-war years."[4] Despite significant medical and legal uncertainty in late nineteenth-century Britain about the nature of homosexuality and how it could be positively identified, *popular* notions "invariably associated male homosexual behaviour with effeminacy and probably transvestism as well."[5]

George Chauncey's account of a scandal on Rhode Island illustrates the general situation well. In 1919, a squad of young enlisted men from the Newport Naval Training Station were recruited to investigate "immoral conditions" in Newport by associating with suspected "sexual perverts" and having sex with them.[6] The investigation revealed that sex between men was common, involving casual and infrequent assignations by men regarded as sexually normal as well as comprising the regular conduct of a group of men known as "the gang," and that knowledge of the places and practices of the men involved was similarly widespread. Despite a broadly shared knowledge about queerness, Chauncey's examination of the voluminous testimony and court documentation that followed the Newport

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[3] For a book-length treatment of van Vechten's homoerotic photography, see James Smalls, *The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten: Public Face, Private Thoughts*. (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 2006).

[4] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (New York: Pearson, 2012), 131.

[5] Ibid., 124-125.

[6] George Chauncey, "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era," *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 2 (1985), 189.

investigation led him to conclude that "medical discourse still played little or no role in the shaping of working-class homosexual identities and categories by World War I" and "had as little influence on the military hierarchy as on the people of Newport"[7] (Chauncey, "Christian Brotherhood,"203).

Men organized their homosexual activities around the Y.M.C.A., known cruising grounds, and private parties, and Chauncey describes a local scene established and open enough to welcome a constant influx of new naval recruits. According to Chauncey, men were not labelled as different from other men solely on the basis of homosexual activity. In fact, the testimony generated by the navy investigation "revealed that many more men than the queers were regularly engaging in some form of homosexual activity," a finding that held little interest for the Navy, at least initially, because officials did not believe that occasional sex with queers impugned the sexual character of otherwise normal men.[8] Men were judged instead on the roles they assumed during sex and their gender comportment. "The only men who sharply differentiated themselves from other men, labelling themselves as 'queer,' were those who assumed the sexual and cultural roles ascribed to women."[9] During trials related to the investigation, "a straight investigator explained that 'it was common knowledge that if a man was walking along the street in an effeminate manner, with his lips rouged, his face powdered and his eyebrows pencilled, that in the majority of cases you could form a pretty good opinion of what kind of man he was … a 'fairy.'"[10] Particularities of men's physical carriage were also taken as signs of deviance. For instance, another witness provided a description of queer behaviour instantly recognizable as mincing: "he acted sort of peculiar; walking around with his hands on his hips […] the expression with the eyes and gestures … If a man was walking around and did not act real masculine, I would think he was a cocksucker."[11] The witness may have used this characterization advisedly. While effeminacy established queerness broadly, Chauncey explains that men's specific sexual aims were central to their personal self-identification, with normal men and members of the gang

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[7] Ibid., 203.
[8] Ibid., 195.
[9] Ibid., 190.
[10] Ibid., 191.
[11] Ibid. You can see the phenomenon described by the witness in the 1933 short animated feature, *Soda Squirt* (September 9, 1933, Ub Iwerks Productions), which also demonstrates the characteristic zaniness I associate with fairies.

distinguishing between men who performed oral ("French artists" or "fairies") or receptive anal ("pogues") sex, or both ("two-way artists").[12]

The importance of specific sexual behaviour led to difficulty labelling conventionally masculine men who enjoyed sex, and sometimes entered loving relationships, with effeminate men. "The navy, which sometimes grouped such men with the queers as 'perverts,' found it could only satisfactorily identify them by describing what they *did*, rather than naming what they *were*." For their part, queers identified conventionally masculine men who slept with effeminate men as "friends," "husbands," and "trade," titles that foreground their relations to other men "rather than according them an autonomous [queer] sexual identity."[13] This points to a broader truth about the sexual culture of queerness in the early twentieth century. Effeminate fairies provided the dominant image of queer masculinity, providing a reference point for all male-male sexual relations. Chauncey argues that "as the dominant pejorative category in opposition to which male sexual 'normality' was defined, the fairy influenced the culture and sexuality of *all* sexually active men."[14] Effeminate comportment or dress established a "script" for sexual relations between men, in a very real sense making such relationships possible for "normal" men by providing support for the fairies' exemption from masculine comportment.[15] As Lord Sumner put it in 1918, fairies bore "'the hallmark of a specialised and extraordinary class as much as if they had carried on their bodies some physical peculiarities."[16] I find Sumner's *as if* especially evocative because it speaks to effeminacy as a constructive agreement to exempt fairies from the general discipline of masculinity and, under extraordinary circumstances, to treat their bodies according to a different and counterfactual rule. It is hard to see how else a body like Oscar Wilde's "vigorous and hulking" frame could become "a focal point […] for all male homosexuality."[17]

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[12] Ibid., 192.
[13] Ibid.
[14] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 47.
[15] Ibid., 56-58.
[16] Quoted in Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex Politics and Society*, 123.
[17] Richard Barrios, *Screened Out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 8.

While the fairy, as a social type, centered a libidinal economy that cut across class lines, its embeddedness in bachelor culture and association with prostitution made it a working-class phenomenon. Queer intellectuals and professional men were quicker to learn of and adopt ideas from the various medical and sexological accounts of homosexuality. Although these ideas began gaining middle-class currency in the 1930s, "particularly in working-class culture, homosexual behavior per se became the primary basis for the labelling and self-identification of men as 'queer' only around the middle of the twentieth century."[18] The displacement of the fairy by the new, homosexualized queer masculinity mirrors the fate of "gay" as a term of queer recognition. Chauncey outlines two phases in the adoption of "gay" as a term of self-reference. In the first phase, beginning in the 1930s, men began to "define themselves as gay primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than effeminacy" and many adopted a conventionally masculine gender style. "Nonetheless, they did not regard all men who had sex with men as gay; men could still be trade, but they were defined as trade primarily on the basis of their purported heterosexuality rather than their masculinity."[19] "Gay" itself operated as a code word that passed mostly unremarked in mainstream commentary, increasing in importance as efforts at suppressing queer culture intensified in the 1930s and again after World War II. In the second phase, the category of trade became untenable as a sexual identity. Chauncey reports that, "Alfred Gross, publicly a leader in psychological research and social work related to homosexuals in New York form the 1930s through the 1960s and secretly a gay man himself, derided the distinction between homosexuals and trade in a speech he gave in 1947." He remonstrated fairies "to recognize that the male, no matter how roughly he might be attired, how coarse his manners, how brutal or sadistic he may be, if he be willing to submit regularly to homosexual attentions, is every whit as homosexual as the man who plays what is considered the female role in the sex act."[20] Despite Gross's universalizing rhetoric, popular and psychoanalytic devaluations of gay men continued to associate queerness with gender failure despite acknowledging that homosexuals might appear to inhabit conventional gender roles. [21] As opposed to being

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[18] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 13.
[19] Ibid., 21.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Michael S. Sherry, *Gay artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy*. (Chapel Hill North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 64.

characterized by the fairy's projection of an ersatz femininity, male same-sex desire was now characterized by the projection of an artificial, partial, or flawed masculinity.

One of the implications of the libidinal economy of the fairy is that "the closet" was a practical impossibility. Because one party in a sexual encounter was assumed to play a "women's role," and because such role-play both signalled the availability of fairies and the normalcy of men's desire for them, the idea of an invisible but "true" sexual identity was incoherent. Remarking on a point that held for the sexual culture of the Harlem Renaissance as well as the broader world of queer New Yorkers in the 1920s and 1930s, Richard Bruce Nugent recalled that "nobody was in the closet. There wasn't any closet."[22] Chauncey argues that the queer world of the early twentieth century slipped from view "because it was forced into hiding in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s."[23] The purpose of this suppression "was not to eradicate homosexuality altogether, a task authorities considered all but impossible, but to contain it by prohibiting its expression in the public sphere […] where authorities feared it threatened to disrupt public order and the reproduction of normative gender and sexual arrangements."[24] Where the fairy was an agreement of surfaces, the ascendant medical model constructed sexuality as a feature of the inwardness of subjectivity, in effect providing a closet for the occultation of homosexuality.

As Michael Sherry argues, World War II and the Cold War made anxiety about public order and gender arrangements especially urgent: "Postwar agitation diverged sharply from prewar commentary, which was largely forgotten. Its purveyors were louder, more numerous, and more widely heard. They focused on men more than women because World War II and the Cold War raised the stakes on masculinity and male performance."[25] Journalists, psychiatrists, and other public commentators "discovered" a queer presence in American culture and, "in doing so, they helped to initiate the Lavender Scare in the arts and to make queer artists one face of the 'Cold War homosexual menace.'"[26] Sherry points out that salacious exposés of the social problem of queerness were recognized as "mock shock" by the gay press in the 1950s because of the openness of pre-code Hollywood and

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[22] Ibid., 17.
[23] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 8.
[24] Ibid., 9.
[25] Sherry, *Gay Artists*, 29.
[26] Ibid., 13.

phenomena like the "pansy craze" two decades prior, and seen as an attempt to monetize social anxiety.[27] Where early twentieth-century commentary on the social problem of sexual deviance complained that shocking behavior, such as drag balls and risqué theatre, threatened public order and demeaned standards of taste, mid-century commentary speculated about how the *existence* of queer men threatened American culture when it was most important to demonstrate the superiority of the American way of life internationally.

While those who sought to pathologize or punish homosexuals after World War II continued to draw on the image of the fairy and the old working-class ethos of gender confusion it represented, these characterizations increasingly mingled with the medical model's insistence on choice of sexual object as the definitive feature of queerness. "This shift also aggravated fears that homosexuals were no longer identifiable by appearance: they were an invisible, but therefore more insidious, presence that had presumably burrowed into American life, becoming a grim menace rather than a laughable but recognizable sideshow."[28] While the pearl-clutching tone of popular press "discoveries" of homosexuality in American culture might have been silly from the perspective of queer men, the changing tenor of public discourse recognized a significant implication of the new model. Stemming from a deep and original impulse, post-war queerness really was the kind of phenomenon that required a critical or probing attention to discover. After World War II, scandals about queerness in public life in the United States were shaded by conspiracy and danger. Sherry reports that a 1952 article widely distributed in government circles opined that "by the very nature of their vice, 'homosexuals' belong to a sinister, mysterious, and efficient international."[29] Moreover, to the extent that psychoanalysis and psychology installed strange and inaccessible structures and drives within the conscious self, the kind of forensic attention that one might direct at a neighbour with daring taste in neckties could also produce an anxious and critical relation to the self. Even for self-assured heterosexuals, attacks based on disordered gender and sexual identity of queer men implied a broader critique of American masculinity *per se*. Particularly as men reintegrated into a post-war economy that struggled to accommodate demobilized soldiers, many worried that "traits assigned to gay men -- narcissism, immaturity, staleness, lack of competitiveness -- had seeped into men's lives

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[27] Ibid., 30-31.
[28] Ibid., 37.
[29] Ibid., 32.

generally" producing a "flight from masculinity" in "an era of mass culture, conformity, and female power."[30]

1.1 What is a Gesture?

The question at the heart of this research is how shifting ideas about queerness emerged from and returned to the body as practical knowledge. That preoccupation makes gesture a pivotal site of investigation but gesture itself is a complicated phenomenon. Where possible, I prefer to avoid thinking about gesture through the metaphor of language. While some gestures can be conventionalized to the point that they function like symbolic signs that convey a propositional content, most enjoy a much more fluid existence in which the "content" of the gesture is almost entirely how it inflects the character of the gesticulator or the direction of a situation.[31]

For my purposes, the way gesture is most like language is in the way it problematizes the relationship between subjective intentions and structuration. Gestures are techniques of the body, and therefore a locus of discipline. As Marcel Maus explained in his 1934 lecture, there are no natural attitudes of the body, and differences in one's cultural apprenticeship lead to significant differences in everything from the way French and American women walked to how French and English soldiers dug trenches.[32] Moreover, as Maus's discussion of the influence of American movies on how French women walked before and after World War I and the difficulties of soldiers adopting unfamiliar digging tools show, bodily performance is conditioned both by essentially aesthetic competence and by the material cultures that support some ways of moving while frustrating others. As Carrie Noland writes, "learned techniques of the body are the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to the test." While repeating gestures helps cement them as habit, perhaps leading to adaptation at the level of the nervous system, it also opens them to intentional or accidental variation, even failure. "Further, the source of that testing is not the

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[30] Ibid., 65.

[31] For an excellent, comprehensive, and influential analysis of propositional gestures, see Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[32] Marcel Maus, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2, no.1, 1973 [1935]: 70-88.

'subject' in a classic Cartesian sense, but rather the sensate motor body, the medium, if you will, on which the gestural regime -- and the 'subject' -- necessarily builds."[33]

If gestures are partly impositions of culture on the body, however, they are also at least partly evidence of the movement of something like a willful subject. A bodily movement that is not intended in a meaningful way, like a sneeze or a facial tic, cannot really be called a "gesture." Vilém Flusser writes that gestures are phenomena "for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation."[34] Flusser does not deny that gestures can be explained, only that an explanation that describes what caused a gesture, biomechanically, culturally, or psychologically, without also *interpreting* what was intended by it, is insufficient. In Flusser's eyes, gestures amount to the substance of subjectivity, since until it is realized through a gesture, thinking "is only a virtuality, which is to say, nothing."[35] He writes that "mind and body are extrapolations from the concrete phenomenon 'gesture.'" Mind and body belong to an explanation that provides "an abstract 'theoretical' horizon for the gesture that is actually observed."[36] For Flusser, the priority of gesture means that a general theory of gestures would be a meta-theory of linguistics, "because language is seen to be a particular kind of gesture. [… T]he definition of gesture cannot be made narrower without losing the essence of the phenomenon." [37] That is because, for Flusser, a "gesture is a movement through which a freedom is expressed, a freedom to hide from or reveal to others the one who gesticulates."[38] As important as the freedom to disclose one's subjectivity on their own terms is, for my purposes the more important implication of the inference of mind and body from gestural subjectivity is that mind and body become open to revision.

Combined with his analysis of the relationship between gestures and thinking, Flusser's account of gesture as the expression of a freedom comes across paradoxically compulsory. "One might be inclined to say that when a gesture is technically informed, it is no longer free (and so is no longer a gesture). But this is a naive error. For what makes a movement a gesture is not that it is free but that a freedom is 'somehow' expressed in it. And

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[33] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.
[34] Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 2.
[35] Ibid., 24.
[36] Ibid., 67.
[37] Ibid., 165-166.
[38] Ibid., 2.

'somehow' means 'by means of some technology.'"[39] Be that as it may, it is still difficult to imagine what the freedom *expressed* in such technically informed gestures *consists* of. Noland's fine-grained phenomenological analysis helps here. While the organized kinesis of gesture reminds us "that movement is not purely expressive but is culturally shaped at every turn," the kinaesthetic sensations preserved in the body as memories contribute to the constitution of a subject as a history of embodiment, expanding the agency experienced by subjects by contributing to a repertoire of "gestural 'I can's.'"[40] Beyond simply expressing the abstract, indwelling freedom of a willful subject, gesturing may actually give freedom a shape and push against its phenomenal limits. This makes gesture a "link between a naturally given body and an existential/cultural situation. Neither produced entirely by culture nor imposed inevitably by nature, gestures are a culture's distinctive conjugation of what Merleau-Ponty called the body's 'general power,' a social manifestation of its biologically driven 'prepersonal cleaving' to being."[41]

Drawing on the work of John Martin, a dance analyst active in the 1930s, Noland observes that kinaesthesia not only provides autonomous awareness of one's objective condition, but also establishes an awareness of other bodies.[42] In his analysis of the gesture of speaking, Flusser explains that speaking "is an attempt to bypass the world to reach others but in such a way that the world is absorbed" in the move. "A speaker chooses his words as a function of this very particular space, the space of graspable problems and reachable others, in short, the political space."[43] This seems to be a general truth about gesturing. It is inherently intersubjective because graspable problems, reachable others, and the terms through which they are figured are shared, not simply because the situations toward which bodies orient themselves are shared with other bodies. Because gestures belong neither to a general public, nor to an individual, drawing elements of the "general power" of the cultural body into the individual repertoire is a mode of consolidating a certain kind of legible and repeatable subjectivity through appropriation. The coherence of bodily experience, then,

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[39] Ibid., 175.
[40] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 7,4.
[41] Ibid., 56.
[42] Ibid., 13
[43] Flusser, *Gestures*, 30.

depends as much on the restriction of a general motor capacity as it does on the accumulation of gestural "I can's."

The awareness of other bodies, whether they are physically present or hypothetical, and the "testing" quality of gestural repetition makes gesturing inseparable from certain forms of affiliation or differentiation, making gestures both the phenomenal ground of discipline and a fertile site for audacious refusals. According to Bourdieu, it takes a crisis in the language of order – "an extraordinary discourse [...] capable of giving systematic expression to the gamut of extraordinary experiences" – to render doxa visible for what it is.[44] By raising the conditioned faculties of the human body to consciousness as a signifying practice, gestures can enable an irruption of doxa into the field of intentionally constituted meaning. Gesturing follows a decision to participate as a subject in the inescapably hermeneutical dimension of social life, of which one is inescapably an object. From this point of view, gestures are microscopic instances of an "extraordinary discourse" that facilitates a "change of state" in private experience. Gestures allow private experiences, which are also the common property of those belonging to an objective social position, to "recognize themselves in the public objectivity of an already constituted discourse, the objective sign of recognition of their right to be spoken and to be spoken publicly."[45]

Gesture is the aestheticization of self-presence accomplished through the movement or disposition of the body and its props. Gestures articulate a selfhood that enjoys a conditional freedom in its relation to the social world while being subject to the fundamentally hermeneutic quality of human being. Because this angle of approach to gesture makes the body available as a set of incorporated images and image practices, it has a broad applicability in visual culture studies. At the same time, gesture is a useful way of particularizing the more general relationship between aesthetic practices and social imaginaries. Within the space of my own project, this definition of gesture has the methodological benefit of being indifferent to the origins of same-sex attraction. Whatever the genesis of same-sex attraction, approaching queer masculinity through gesture allows me

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[44] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 170.

[45] Ibid.

to see queerness as a fact that is produced as an object of vision, and which therefore has a history.

1.2 Chaplin

Chapter two begins with a brief survey of changes in film performance style that brought a new psychological depth to filmic characters in relation to efforts to dignify cinema with respect to theatre and correct its perception as vulgar entertainment. While earlier performance styles were essentially anti-naturalistic because of their deployment of a restricted and formal system of dramatic gestures , the new performance style allowed film melodramas to adopt a more complex sentimentality in service to its ambitions as dramatic art. Slapstick benefited from the shift in performance style because the naturalism and seriousness imputed to the new gestural regime made it an ideal vehicle for jabs at the suffocating affects and mores of bourgeois propriety. Severing the connection between physical performance and the characters and narrative actions that could be represented openly onstage also meant that stage and screen gestures attained a new freedom to expose subjectivities and situations that could not be proclaimed openly for reasons of moral and legal censure. Chaplin was the comedian who took this the furthest, in part because his oscillation between romantic sentimentality, close sociological observation, and physical buffoonery positioned him between melodrama and the technical virtuosity of Buster Keaton or committed vulgarity of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. The chapter also provides an overview of factors that militate in favour of reading Chaplin's Tramp character as queer, or at least as sometimes or potentially queer. Quasi-ethnographic research and a series of pamphlets and speaking engagements in England and the United States by "self-titled tramp authority" Josiah Flynt Willard, raised awareness among turn-of-the-century Americans about the propensity of tramps to seduce young boys into sexual servitude with stories about the freedom of life on the road.[46] Chaplin's signature moustache may also have implicated him in vice, or at least a suspicious rejection of the professional and domestic respectability of middle-class men. In broader terms, the constellation of affects that established critical appreciation of other stars as queer were also part of Chaplin's star text, serving to establish him as the sensitive and artistic other to his contemporaries in slapstick.

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[46] James Gifford, ed., *Glances Backward: An Anthology of American Homosexual Writing, 1830-1920* Peterborough ON: Broadview Press, 2007, 343.

Chapter three surveys Chaplin's filmography to identify the gestures Chaplin used to mobilize queer masculinity in his comedy. With the exception of *City Lights*, which can be read as a love triangle in which the Tramp's intensely zany and sexually tinged friendship with the "Eccentric Millionaire" (Harry Myers) counterbalances the mostly serious romantic sentimentality of his relationship with the Flower Girl (Virginia Cherrill), Chaplin's queer gags are mostly carried off at the level of transitory gags or the colouration of Chaplin's byplay. The almost interstitial quality of many of the gags might explain the general critical neglect about the place of masculinity and queerness in Chaplin's approach to comedy. At the same time, many scenes simply fail as comedy if their queer implications are ignored. Moreover, the accumulation of gags that could be read as queer across the films in which he performed as the Tramp establishes a degree of suspicion about the potential of the anarchic character as a whole. In fact, this very indeterminacy of character, a fluid capacity for adaptation demonstrated in the occupations filled by the Tramp over the course of more than 80 short films, is part of what puts a lavender colouration on the Tramp in the first place. Again and again, Chaplin returns to the body and gesture as elements that establish, sustain, and complicate character. Chaplin frequently reframes situations where the competitive quality of masculinity, particularly boxing, surfaces through dance. While dance was unmanly by popular acclaim, under Chaplin's watch the Tramp uses choreography again and again to subvert manly display and expose masculinity as simply one of several social choreographies open to him. Chaplin appears in drag in a small number of films, and opposite cross-dressed characters in several others. While drag performance was a common feature of the music hall performance culture where Chaplin got his start in comedy, the 1871 trial of Frederick (Fanny) Boulton and Earnest (Stella) Park and subsequent highly-publicized sex scandals also made the association between drag performance and sexual deviance explicit. Chaplin exploited drag to orchestrate situations that would have been frankly objectionable without the cover provided by a double-entendre intrinsic to the uncertain relationship between the identity of performers and their characters. Finally, in Chaplin's approach to slapstick, screen business tends to flow from one gag to the next to form a continuous elaboration of the comedic situation or problem. This narrative and performative density leads to a high degree of bodily involvement between Chaplin and his co-stars. In this context, sometimes the Tramp's body parts seem to take on their own

independent life and desires. Similarly, the Tramp's romantic attentions have been known to take a more convenient object when the Tramp's female love interest is unavailable.

1.3 George Platt Lynes

Lynes was by no means the first photographer to explore the homoerotic frisson of the male figure. While this research does not attempt a complete or representative history of homoerotic photography, the overview that follows is meant to provide a sense of the visual tradition of homoeroticism against which Lynes's photography appears as an innovation. Thomas Waugh's book, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* provides an excellent overview of the subject, managing the difficult feat of integrating a history of multiple registers of image-making into a coherent account of the visibility of male same-sex eroticism in photochemical media. On the whole, Waugh's account favours a production history, although he provides key critical insights as well. For this reason, I rely heavily on Waugh's account as I develop my analysis of George Platt Lynes's work, which favours critical engagement over the industrial and technological history that affected Lynes's aesthetic project. At the same time, the theoretical or philosophical dimensions of Lynes's photography are only visible in relation to the context of his work. As I demonstrate in the chapters on Lynes that follow, Lynes's relationship to the conventions used to picture homoeroticism is complex, changing over the course of his career. Lynes himself did not provide an organized reflection on his own photography, but the images themselves evince a slow realignment from the figuration of homoeroticism in the high-cultural idiom of fine arts, first classicism then surrealism, toward figuration grounded in the phenomenal texture of queer masculinity and consumer desire. This shift implied a change in the gestural regimes that produced queer possibilities as embodied reality.

This history also foregrounds the extent to which a visual knowledge of male homoeroticism was held in common in the early twentieth century. This assertion cuts against a tendency in many historical accounts to present homoeroticism as a subject so taboo that it was subject to an almost cultic ban, and therefore represents an esoteric knowledge only recoverable through detailed historical investigation and speculative reconstruction. Jonathan Weinberg's assertion in *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant-Garde* is a case in point. He argues that, "just as there is enormous confusion in society about the determining characteristics of

homosexuality, there are no absolute rules for identifying homosexuality as the subject of works of art."[47] While I agree with Weinberg that there remains confusion in society about the ontology or etiology of homosexuality, and moreover that this lack of agreement was more complicated and more explicit in the early twentieth century, it does not follow that there were and are no "rules" for identifying homosexuality as the subject of a work of art, even if these are more rules of thumb than absolute laws. In fact, there was not that much practical confusion about the characteristics of homosexuals, even if the technical nature of specialist medical and legal discourse about it allowed middle-class people to enjoy or feign ignorance about the facts of homoerotic coupling. Comedy, popular entertainments, bachelor culture, the operation of "fairy resorts" in large cities, and highly publicized sex scandals (e.g. Boulton and Park in 1871; Oscar Wilde in 1895; the disastrous sting operation organized by the U.S. Navy in Newport Rhode Island in 1919) all pointed to an optical understanding and practical wisdom regarding homosexuality among men that included decadence, effeminacy, sensuality, prettiness, falseness, and pederasty. These qualities were not denied figuration in art.

Pictorialist photography stands out as a particularly striking case of convergence between an artistic trajectory and predicates associated with homoeroticism. The pictorialist drive to validate the status of photography as a fine art by internalizing both subject matter and aesthetic subjectivity with unimpeachable artistic pedigree was a decisive factor in the frequent adoption by pictorialist photographers of classical imagery. At the same time, queer men found in classical imagery a venue in which appreciation of the male figure was not only acceptable but valorized as an expression of refinement. In both cases, the cultural cachet of antiquity as the prelapsarian origin of political, moral, and aesthetic virtue provided a strategic ground for overcoming a stigmatizing deficiency rooted in the way photographers and perverts apprehended the objects of their gaze. Given the contemporaneous existence of the double market in "academies," photographic nude figure studies ostensibly produced for use by painters but frequently diverted to other purposes, the adoption of the pictorialist mode by queer male photographers is more of an inevitability than a stroke of cultural genius. The two photographers who inhabited the fortuitous overlap between the ambitions

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[47] Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the first American Avant-Garde* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), 41.

of pictorialism and a euphemistic "love of statues" most spectacularly were F. Holland Day and Wilhelm von Gloeden.[48]

According to Allen Ellenzweig, while personal and professional acquaintances recognized "their focus on nubile male youths [...] as the expression of personal desire," neither von Gloeden nor F. Holland Day were "considered exceptional because of his subject matter. Rather, in professional photographic circles, both were respected as Pictorialist photographers who, to different extents were identified by a particular content."[49] At the same time, the capacity of von Gloeden's togas, vases, tiger-skin carpets, laurel wreaths, bronze renaissance figures and decorative tiles to "create and reinforce a lasting program of Camp 'fag' taste" goes beyond a strictly conventional association between the theatrical accoutrements of imaginative nineteenth-century revivals.[50] As Ellenzweig puts it, "by framing friendship among young males with an opulent array of draperies, strewn garlands, vases, jewellery, headbands, and sunlit vistas of ocean and sky, the boys themselves become decorative objects for contemplation."[51] The projective and tactile quality of looking and the materiality of photographic prints combine to produce a closure between aesthetic and erotic interest. Moreover, the feminization of the young men relative to a virilized viewer makes any erotic interest evoked by the image necessarily *homo*erotic to some extent. Although he worked in the register of fine art, F. Holland Day's classicism relied on similar means (e.g. *plein air* nudity, white drapery, wreaths) to produce its ambient eroticism. Waugh notes that non-specialist magazines -- he lists *National Geographic*, *Scribner's*, and *Harper's Weekly* -- carried the work of von Gloeden and Day, but also presentable photographs by more frankly pornographic pictorialist photographers, such as von Pluschow, "all lavender tinted."[52] While Ellenzweig claims that only a limited audience personally acquainted with the photographers would have seen these photographs as expressing a homoerotic interest, he also records that in 1900, the *British Journal of Photography* mocked Day as "the leader of the Oscar Wilde

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[48] The "love of statues" acknowledges the alliance of classicism and homoeroticism inspired by Winckelmann. In Lynes'scase, the the expression was an unusually direct refection of his life. According to Lynes'sbrother, Russell, "George fell in love on sight with Monroe [Wheeler], who he insisted was the image of the sculpture of the ancient Egyptian prince Akhnaton, of which he owned a cast" (Steven Haas, "Intimate Exposures," N.P.).
[49] Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 43.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 39.
[52] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 85.

School" of photography.[53] Clearly, homoeroticism was available to the reading public as a possible or even a likely correlate of some modalities of classicism.

Weinberg clarifies that what is lacking in terms of rules for the determination of homosexuality in art is an *iconography*, "if by an iconography of homosexuality we mean a set of signs for which a culture has built up prescribed meanings."[54] As an art historian, Weinberg is undoubtedly aware of the double life led by classical imagery from the time of Winckelmann through the early decades of the twentieth century. However, such prescribed meanings as did exist "were necessarily unstable even among homosexuals."[55] Weinberg connects this to the practical importance of being able to communicate about oneself without drawing unwanted attention, and I admit that this is an important consideration, particularly in situations where the desired audience is immediately present, but it is not clear that this imperative translates easily into the somewhat different set of concerns at issue in communication mediated by images. As Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick explains in the context of literary representations, homosexuality and heterosexuality constitute one another as antipodes through a process of mutual exclusion. In Sedgwick's analysis, this means that heterosexuality and homosexuality are irrevocably connected through a logic of negative reciprocity, and the relative coherence of both categories is simultaneously constituted and undermined by a series of foundational contradictions. These contradictions are played out in a shockingly literal way in the sexological debates about the ontology of homosexuality in the early twentieth century, but the point here is that the elaboration and progressive restriction on the expression of *straightness* limned a repertoire of queerness as everything that straightness abjected. It would be absurd to argue that there was no iconography of sexual normalcy in art or the broader remit of visual culture, particularly in the visual culture of an early twentieth-century modernity heavily preoccupied with changing ideas about gender comportment and subjecthood. The same iconography automatically nominates deviance as everything that negates, or, is remaindered by normalcy. To say that queerness occupies the gap between the boundaries of normalcy and the horizon of the field of opinion does not, however, mean that it cannot achieve a relative iconographic stability. In fact, aesthetic strategies that produce gaps in a text may well be the principal way in which

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[53] Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph*, 55.
[54] Weingberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 41.
[55] Ibid.

queerness assumed a recognizable presence in early twentieth-century culture when comedy did not provide an excuse for its explicit display.[56]

While Weinberg claims homoeroticism in art requires special effort to decode and recover because its iconographic repression makes it invisible, John Ibson raises a caution that seems to propose the opposite diagnostic problem. According to him, when looking at early twentieth-century pictures of men together, contemporary viewers are likely to mistakenly identify the subjects as gay because of an anachronistic projection of the mores and procedures that regulate intimacy between men. Ibson advises that, "if one should therefore be careful about reading too much 'intimacy' into or out of a photograph from long ago, perhaps one may with more confidence, and no less consequence, note the degree of 'comfort' evident in an image - because of facial expressions and other forms of body language, in particular a person's touching or not touching someone else."[57] Ibson sets out to counter the lay impression that American men's portraits together from the mid-nineteenth century to the early 1920s are strikingly *gay*. He proceeds by ostensibly dismissing the intuition that men's intimacy in pictures might correlate to an intimacy in the lifeworld that shades into eroticism. His renunciation, however, is inconclusive because it is reversible. If the photogenic gestures of "comfort" are subject to variation at different social and historical conjunctions, why should we consider that sexual gestures between men would carry the same meanings here and now as then and there? Moreover, Ibson recovers conventional photographic situations that were undeniably charged with the frisson of same-sex eroticism. For instance, Ibson treats "Neptune ceremonies" extensively, corroborating photographic evidence of the erotic display of sailors' bodies with extensive written testimony of the sexual and emotional relationships between sailors.

Ibson is especially keen to contextualize changes in photographic practice between the turn of the twentieth century and 1930. He recounts that during this period, appearing in front of the camera became increasingly threatening to men. Ibson recounts that "by the late nineteenth century and with increasing frequency in the twentieth, photographic journals

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[56] Mary Roth, "Homosexual Expression and Homophobic Censorship: The Situation of the Text," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst Massachusetts, University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 270.

[57] John Ibson, *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 11.

consistently assumed a female subject and stressed how uncomfortable men supposedly were in front of the camera.[58] More suggestively, trade literature dealt almost exclusively with *single* portraits. By 1930, men rarely sat for a studio portrait with other men outside of a handful of highly conventional situations (e.g. group portraits of clubs and teams).[59] "Somehow, being professionally photographed -- especially two or more men together -- had in about two generations gone from being an important token of association to an unmanly thing to do."[60] This change corresponds almost exactly to the period in which male homoeroticism became increasingly visible and increasingly coherent as character. Perhaps the most important contribution of George Chauncey's careful historical work in the field of queer history has been to expose the slow and uneven displacement of a casual and pragmatic acceptance, however fraught with gender politics, of sex between men from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century by an increasingly categorical theory of sexual identity. If it is ahistorical to ascribe a gay *identity* to the men in nineteenth-century photographs, that does not mean the recognition of something queer in their comportment is baseless, or that attempting to recover the queerness of historical American visual culture is a dead end.

The status of queerness as the demoted counterpart of heterosexual normalcy meant that literary and visual evocations of queer desire were often couched in codes and alibis. According to Waugh, in the twentieth century, "the discourse of the Alibi becomes the determining framework for gay eroticism, even for those illicit and bohemian currents most liberated from social control."[61] Even so, Waugh's history of male homoeroticism in photography and film shows that "codes and alibis may often be self-conscious and tongue-in-cheek." Nevertheless, as the basis of a shared communicative horizon or even a shared sensibility about communication as such, "they often become patterns of cultural belief."[62] Further, "in the domains of visual iconography and narrative myth as well as in the domain of political ideology, the borderline between the tongue-in-cheek and the heart-in-mouth becomes blurred. An imaginary universe is constructed as a defense and then passionately

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[58] Ibid., 16.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 18.
[61] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 27.
[62] Ibid., 230.

believed in."[63] The connection between the expressive and pragmatic dimensions of queerness means that the iconography was subject to variation in order to maintain a tenuous equilibrium between exposure and occlusion, in addition to definitional struggles. Channeling Benedict Anderson, Waugh writes, "an ambiguous art photo or a well-thumbed obscene photo bought from under an overcoat sparks a knowledge of a continuum of producers, models, and other image-consumers."[64] Where Waugh characterizes this knowledge as "inarticulate" and contrasts the situation with the explicitly gay print cultures that emerged after Stonewall, I think it is more accurately described as inchoate. Furthermore, as David Halperin observes, "gay male desire actually comprises a kaleidoscopic range of queer longings -- of wishes and sensations and pleasures and emotions -- that exceed the bounds of any singular identity and extend beyond the specifics of gay male existence."[65] This is why, Halperin argues, identity-based gay politics and cultural expression of the kind that flourished in the late twentieth century remain "a perennial let-down, leaving many members of its gay constituency perpetually unsatisfied."[66] These factors conspire to instill a constitutive mobility in the repertoire of homoeroticism but claiming that its fluidity deprived the repertoire of diagnostic power for people who live through its vicissitudes misunderstands the social bearing of iconography, which I take to be the ordering of sensory experience with reference to structuring categories and exemplary instances. At the same time, as the example of pictorialism shows, the repertoire of male homoerotic desire is relatively stable, even if it never resolved into a cultural arithmetic.

Chapter four considers how Lynes took up the traditions of the homoerotic imaginary of his milieu. In becoming a photographer of the male nude, George Platt Lynes entered a complex field of signification that involved layered cultural and semantic registers. As an aesthetic engagement with a visual and corporeal understanding of queerness as a particular quality of subjectivity, Lynes's photography comprises a program of gestural research in itself. I mean this both in the sense that Lynes used photography as a means of studying and recording

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 32.
[65] David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 69.
[66] Ibid., 70.

queer masculinity as a gestural regime and that photography was the gesture that Lynes used to frame, interrogate, and revise the situation of queer masculinity.

Lynes's early career was marked by his literary ambitions. It was his interest in literature that led him to seek out Glenway Wescott, initiating one of the most significant relationships of Lynes's life. The same passion inspired Gertrude Stein to take Lynes under her wing and provided his entry into the community of queer modernist ex-pats in France. While Lynes's literary ambitions largely failed to solidify, he travelled in rarefied cultural circles from the time before he took up photography, and until his death. The influence of the homoerotic imaginary that arose from this high-cultural setting is palpable in Lynes's early work, appearing in props and settings redolent of Pictorialist takes on classical antiquity. At the same time, by 1928, when Lynes took up photography, the romantic tropes of Pictorialism were threadbare clichés, and Lynes's take on Pictorialist iconography seems to resist the ethos of the vocabulary Victorian homoeroticism provided. In chapter five, I explore Lynes's ambivalent relationship with the homoerotic imaginary he inherited in the first decade of his career through the lens of camp. Camp allowed Lynes to make recognizably queer photographs, while also establishing a distance between his work and the seriousness and mystification of bourgeois Victorian homoeroticism. Allied with the ethos of the fairy, Lynes's campy aestheticism internalized the pictorialist motif of the beautiful ephebe as an object that produces a detour along a normative line of desire. Lynes's contribution to this hoary discourse is his recognition of the complex negativity shared by the gender transitivity of fairies and ephebes. Their effeminacy is the result of an over the top desire, and it is only by striving against their germinally or habitually masculine bodies that they are able to realize their queer desires. Moreover, such queer desires are realized as a deformation of the normal line of desire. In other words, Lynes's campy photos separates the zaniness of White American men's queer masculinity in the early Twentieth century from its typical grounding in comedy.

Camp allowed Lynes to articulate a theory of queer masculinity as the reordering or disordering of aesthetic priorities, an insight he extended in his surrealist experiments from the middle of the 1930s until the middle of the 1940s. Chapter six analyzes three surrealist motifs in Lynes's work in depth; they are: screens, doubling, and metapictures. Lynes used screens in two distinct ways in his photography. Studio flats, paper, fabric, glass, wire mesh

and other surfaces frequently impede view of the model and establish nested depths. In other photographs, Lynes uses screens as projection surfaces creating a dialogue between the model and their shadow, or populating the frame with figures outside the frame of the photograph. These two uses of the screen expose the phenomenal indeterminacy of the gesturing body and substantiate in visual terms Freud's conception of the bodily ego. Rosalind Krauss argues that doubling is a foundational strategy of surrealism, because, as a "signifier of signification,"[67] it establishes "the linguistic hold on the real."[68] Gesture bears a special relationship to doubling. While gestures draw communicative force from the abstract relationship of substitutive doubling at work in the linguistic sign, their dependence on the particularities of performance foregrounds the relationship between the gesture as signifier, the immediate field of communication, and the body of the gesticulator. W.J.T. Mitchell explains that metapictures are "pictures about pictures – that is, pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is."[69] Lynes's use of screens and doubling evoke a surrealist disorientation directly, while the photographs I analyze as metapictures illuminate on a cool and distanced perspective on looking and picturing as gestures in their own right to open a gap between undifferentiated optical experience and an active, palpatory vision.

Chapter seven concludes my analysis of Lynes's photography with a discussion of the increasing tendency toward straightforward and sensitive figure studies in photographs taken in the later years of Lynes's career. While Lynes's engagement with the male nude always shared elements of the visual conventions of physical culture and physique photography, photographs he made following World War II gravitated toward artful beefcake. The shift likely reflected his changing circumstances, as decisions about his commercial career and financial mismanagement led him to downsize his studio, before giving it up altogether. At one point, Lynes's camera equipment was seized to settle unpaid tax debts. Lynes's later works reflect more limited means, but the years following World War II were also a turning point in the history of American masculinity. In key respects the paranoid climate of that

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[67] Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," 26.

[68] Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingstone. *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York Abbeville Press, 1985), 28.

[69] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35.

time consolidated the model of queerness that Gay Liberation later reacted against, a model that continues to inform common-sense understandings of queer masculinity and its corporeal enactment.

Early in the twentieth century, zany demonstrations of effeminacy allowed fairies to stabilize the masculinity of normal men as a contrastive and situational intensity, making queerness largely a question of sexual aim. This model was under increasing pressure through the first half of the twentieth century, but the 1948 publication of the Kinsey Report saw the ascendency of perceptions of homosexuality as indwelling and essentially about one's choice of sexual object.[70] In practical terms, that meant that the gestural regime that licensed sex between fairies and normal men gave way to a new set of corporeal and optical practices that amounted to a gestural regime centred on minor differences to be detected through forensic looking. Lynes's late figure studies represent a shift away from the zany accent of camp performativity and toward a reserved embodiment in which the obfuscation of queer desire contributes to the interest of Lynes's photographs. Lynes's beefcake borrows the alibi of athleticism and health elaborated by physique culture, then just beginning to emerge as the closet-y network of photographers, gyms, and publications we recognize as physique culture today. However, Lynes's photographs also outline a more complex relationship with queer masculinity as a gestural regime. While physique culture followed the trajectory of associations that linked heterosexuality, naturalism, and health backwards to deflect the manifest homoeroticism of their expressions and milieu, Lynes's take on post-war queer masculinity is grounded in an understanding of glamour as a positive commitment to seeming. In the 1930s, glamour was generally seen as a quality that belonged to powerful women. Lynes's insight into queer masculinity as a corporeal knowledge or mode of embodiment allowed him to articulate a theory of post-war queer masculinity as artificial naturalism, a paradoxical position that sublated the opposition between naturalism and artifice and between masculinity and femininity.

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[70] Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co, 1948.

2. Charlie Chaplin: A Queer Little Fellow

While Agamben must argue the fundamental gesturality of still images, at least as far as the human subject is concerned, gesture is the *prima facie* ontology of the cinematic image. As Jonathan Auerbach puts it, cinema's first decade "[made] manifest a rhetoric of the human form." In his estimation, gesturing bodies not only provided a subject matter for early film, they also provided a grounding conceptual unity for the emerging medium. In these early years, the gestures, comportments and bodily attitudes provided the "the content of the form."[71] The privileged status of the gesturing body in early cinema was rooted firmly in the scopic economy of the "cinema of attractions."[72] As an optical novelty and an element of a variety program, cinema drew on conventions from "a wide range of established nineteenth-century cultural forms such as still photography, vaudeville routines, staged amusements and spectacles, popular magazine illustrations and comic strips."[73] The new medium, then, was suspended between a dependency on existing media for its coherence, status, and exhibition practices on one hand, and an experimental impetus to probe the possibilities of the technology on the other.

Agamben tells us that cinema functioned as a record of the loss of confidence in the self-willed quality of gesturing by the mid-nineteenth century bourgeoisie, and as a way of reasserting this autonomy in the register of fantasy.[74] Agamben's formulation of gesture as something that is "suffered" or "borne" connects gesturing to trauma or a symptom, but cinema's operation as a diagnostic or therapeutic technology at least offers the *possibility* of pleasure. In his poignantly unfunny analysis of the Comic and laughter, Vladimir Propp reports Marx's passing comment on comedy: "history is thorough, and passes through many phases when carrying an old form to the grave. The final phase of a world-historical form is its *comedy*. [...] Why does history proceed in this way? So that humanity will separate itself *happily* from its past."[75] While Marx's belief in creative destruction as capitalism's essence

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[71] Jonathan Auerbach, *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 2.

[72] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, no.3 (1986): 63-70.

[73] Auerbach, *Body Shots*, 16.

[74] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 53.

[75] Vladimir Propp, *On the Comic and Laughter*, ed. and trans. Jean-Patrick Debbeche and Paul Perron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009 [1976]), 41.

might suggest that Marx is talking about a comedy of excess or decadence, Propp subordinates Marx's remark to his overall thesis that the Comic depends on the exposure of a minor concealed flaw, summarizing, "when the struggle is over, the remains of the past in the present are subject to ridicule."[76] No matter which interpretation is closer to Marx's original intention, the comment suggests that comedic reenactment is a strategy through which the ambivalence of a historical loss is articulated. Finally, in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud explains that the comedy of movement involves a "mimicry of the imagination." This mimicry activates "an unconscious comparison between the movement observed and the movement he or she would have performed in their place." The gap between the two performances generates nervous energy, which is dissipated in laughter.[77] Unlike Propp, Freud did not think this laughter was necessarily the expression of a ridiculing attitude of superiority. Instead, he believed that the comic feeling arose as a substitute for adults' loss of the capacity for pure pleasure.[78]

The significance of this constellation of ideas is clearest with respect to slapstick comedy. Moreover, they have a particular salience during the epochal shift from the cinema of attractions to the classic period of Hollywood filmmaking. Slapstick represented something of a holdout in this shift, maintaining a connection to the anarchic ethos of the nickelodeon crowd even as the industry attempted to improve its class standing through industrial consolidation and concerted efforts to produce films whose artistic ambitions would merit the attention of middle-class audiences.

In addition to the thematic, industrial, and technological shifts that accomplished the efforts of industry proponents to dignify cinema, factors well-understood in film scholarship, Roberta Pearson argues that the shift from the cinema of attractions to classic Hollywood mode comprised a transformation in the style of film acting, which has received scant scholarly attention.[79] Pearson calls the two terminuses of this movement the "histrionic" and "verisimilar" codes. The histrionic code comprised a strongly conventional repertoire of theatrical gestures, postures, and attitudes that functioned as distinct semantic units in the

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[76] Ibid., 42.

[77] Alex Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick* (Jefferson NC: Mcfarland and Company, 2007), 16.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Roberta E. Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The transformation of performance style in the Griffith Biograph films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

flow of stage business. Histrionic performance was supported by technical acting systems, most notably the Delsarte System, which persisted into, and actually gained popularity in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, and it marshalled stage business toward the maximal clarity of character's superficial emotional responses and intentions. The verisimilar code, on the other hand, drew on conventions developing in the realist novel and legitimate stage, both of which were more concerned with a nuanced depiction of psychological depth than narrative action. Pearson explains that:

> By the end of the 19th century, melodrama's appeal had waned and it was presented mainly at the cheaper or 'popular'- priced theatres, such as those clustered along New York's Bowery. On these stages the histrionic code, banished from the boards of the higher-priced theatres, still flourished. And when the popular-priced theatres and melodrama faltered circa 1907-1908, histrionically coded performances survived, though now in the nickelodeon rather than the cheap theatre.[80]

Between 1909 and 1912, "at every American studio, actors moved from a performance style heavily influenced by theatrical melodrama to a style allied to 'realist' movements in literature and theatre."[81] At the same time as the shift in performance style made its way across performance media, "melodrama" and "melodramatic" also acquired negative connotations.[82] The replacement of the histrionic style by the verisimilar style, which pretended not to be a "style" at all but a faithful representation of reality, amounted to an abjection of working-class performance cultures and the gestural coherence they represented.

While a transition to naturalistic screen comportment might be seen as progress, "the possibility of multiple interpretations of an actor's expressions and gestures gave rise to an unwelcome polysemy, posing problems of narrative clarity."[83] Even more than narrative clarity, what was lost in the transition from the histrionic code to the verisimilar code was the

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[80] Ibid., 23. George Chauncey writes (*Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* [New York: Basic Books, 1994], 194) that the Bowery was home to several notorious "fairy resorts" shuttered by civic authorities in the first twenty years of the Twentieth Century. The association between cheap entertainments and other dubious thrills remained strong through the entire period under discussion, and the concern that darkened movie theatres provided a hospitable venue for vice was especially acute.

[81] Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 4.

[82] Ibid., 8.

[83] Ibid., 55.

sense that characters behaved the way they did because they *wanted* to. In place of a narrative ontology underwritten by the sufficiency and immanence of intentions, of gestural autonomy, the psychologization of character advanced through verisimilar performance suggested layers of causation, taking part in the project of the emerging human sciences. In the context of the relationship between dance and pathology, Felicia McCarren explains that changing ideas about mental illness allowed "dance to separate from what it represents and to challenge cultural notions about what the body means, and how."[84] While dance has remained far from "verisimilar," it nevertheless paved the way for a shift in the presumed relation between the body and subjectivity that shifted the stakes of bodily performance and instituted a searching and engaged form of spectatorship. The visualization of ideas in dance "is not so much about showing (since it does not show unequivocally, completely, or unproblematically) as about showing-instead-of-telling."[85] These are the same shifts Agamben claims caused the traumatic enucleation of bourgeois gestures and provided the cultural impetus for cinema. In verisimilar performance, gestures do not originate in a unified, desiring subject, but emanate as a series of tics, jerks, and spasms from invisible forces working on or in divided subjects. If anything, cinema exacerbated a newly critical or anxious relation to movement as performance because of the superhuman capacity for inspection provided through filmic techniques like the close-up or slow-motion, and because of the ability to screen the same performance again and again.

If vestiges of the histrionic code survived in certain environs within the broader entertainment ecosystem, it also persisted longer in some genres than others. Pearson's excellent study is rooted in a fine-grained analysis of D. W. Griffith's output from 1907-1912, so it is unsurprising that she neglects to trace the fortunes of acting styles in slapstick comedy. While unease about the disruption of narrative coherence is understandable in serious drama, screen antics suggest the troubling polysemy of gestures under the verisimilar code was quite welcome in comedy, even as the clarity of the histrionic code still frequently facilitated the narrative and corporeal velocity characteristic of slapstick. Alan Dale notes that "almost every major slapstick performer had experience in popular theater, and Sennett, Chaplin, Arbuckle, Lloyd, Keaton, and Laurel felt an irresistible impulse to parody the kind

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[84] Felicia McCarren, *Dance Pathologies: Performance, Poetics, Medicine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 36.
[85] Ibid., 39.

of low-grade theatrical they had either appeared in or shared bills with."[86] In fact, according to him, the kind of humour that "replays melodrama as camp" is "perhaps the single most useful type of humor to know," and a "constant" of slapstick.[87] Furthermore, although "the essence of a slapstick gag is a physical assault on, or collapse of, the hero's dignity," "many of the most intriguing gags have more complex perceptual or emotional resonance."[88]

Slapstick clearly and schematically provides a gestural figure to repetition, loss, and pleasure or laughter. Although the scenarios and gestures of serious drama certainly provided easy fodder for comedy, the almost obsessive return of slapstick comedians to the conventions of melodramatic performance is only partially explained by its familiarity and convenience. The elaboration of the verisimilar code provided slapstick an idiom outside of histrionic performance, and importantly one that situated humour within the "reality" of a pyschologized character. McCarren argues that dance performance redeemed "as art what has been 'lost' in hysteria" allowing "the somatic translation of idea, the physicalization of meaning" to be recognized other than in terms of illness.[89] Serious drama likewise sought to invest the actions of characters with the explanatory richness of a multi-faceted inner life, as opposed to explaining their actions simplistically in terms of stock stage personalities or defects. Slapstick reenacts melodrama both at the level of diegesis and at the level of discourse, but it refuses to accede fully to the nuanced and humanistic attitude of serious drama, insisting on the persistence of an irreducibly hysterical residue in that actions of its characters. Dale admits that many of the gags that sustain the most attention go beyond a frontal assault on the dignity of the performer, which is coterminous with their bodily integrity in Dale's account, to set a more complicated set of feelings in motion. Foremost among these, as I will argue in this chapter, are feelings of loss and anxiety. As a strategy for accommodating oneself to a loss, slapstick can be seen as melancholic. Judith Butler explains that in mourning, "the successful displacement of the libido from the lost object is achieved through the formation of *words* which both signify and displace the object." Mourning is essentially metaphorical because it provides a figure for the object that can be introjected as a cognition. Melancholy, by contrast, works through incorporation. "Whereas introjection

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[86] Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 8.
[87] Ibid., 7.
[88] Ibid., 3.
[89] McCarren, *Dance Pathologies*, 17.

founds the possibility of metaphorical signification, incorporation is antimetaphorical precisely because it maintains the loss as radically unnameable; in other words, incorporation is not only a failure to name or avow the loss, but erodes the conditions of metaphorical signification itself."[90] The feelings of loss and anxiety at work in slapstick comedy resist the symbolic closure provided by dramatic narrative. Additionally, although imaginative mimicry begins as a comparative and corrective procedure ("how would I do it?"), measuring the distance between two performances cannot help but establish a permanent connection between them at the level of the spectator's motor-intentionality.[91] This is why the savage reenactments of events and relationships characterized by loss and anxiety in slapstick comedy can *only* terminate in laughter.

My analysis of slapstick comedy parts ways with Alan Dale's with respect to the character and value of its relationship with slapstick as comedy, and the implications of that relationship for his evaluation of Charlie Chaplin's comedic accomplishments. Dale characterizes the relationship between slapstick and melodrama as parody. Insofar as slapstick comedians reenact melodramatic tropes as part of their comic business, this is a fair assessment; however, the degree of exaggeration required to turn the weepy histrionics of melodrama toward hilarity is actually minimal. Parodic amplification of melodramatic performance belongs to camp, not slapstick. The slapstick response to melodrama is détournement. Slapstick follows melodrama in order to introduce a kink in the dramatic line. Typically, this involves misdirecting the line of desire, introducing an unforeseen obstacle in its flow, or solving a problem by performing a loop-de-loop where a straight line would do. I will return to the question of directions and lines in my discussion of zanies and fairies below.

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[90] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York ; London : Routledge, 2015), 68.

[91] Merleau-Ponty coined the term "motor intentionality" in *The Phenomenology of Perception* to describe how consciousness is directed toward objects at the level of pre-cognitive bodily responses. Motor intentionality is the result of the sedimentation of past performances as embodied knowledge, habit, or reflex. In *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009) Carrie Noland builds on this phenomenological concept in her account of gestures as "composed of both retentions -- the body's grasp on that which it has previously performed -- and protentions -- the body's grasping for that which it could enact in the future" (79). Identification with cinematic bodies depends on the capacity of vision to mobilize spectators' retained bodily knowledge as empathetic protention.

Dale claims that "Chaplin alone used melodrama in his features without seeming to realize that he wasn't spinning his story lines from pure inspiration and so doesn't benefit from the flippancy that makes comic melodrama preferable to serious melodrama."[92] Chaplin's earnest sentimentality is the main reason Dale prefers Buster Keaton's brand of comedy. Of course, this criticism applies mainly to Chaplin's feature-length films, up to and including *Modern Times*.[93] Dale is not alone in this opinion, and critics who elevate Keaton over Chaplin often praise Keaton's analytical engagement with basic physical forces and ineluctable facts of embodiment.[94] For Dale, problems "arise when people try to take a work of slapstick seriously: they usually try to 'elevate' it by praising it either as satire, which often seems overstated or wrong, or for its pathos, which is often enough right but which is to praise a comedy for the moments when it ceases to be comic."[95] According to him, praising slapstick for its pathos is the "more disturbing" of these two errors of judgement.[96] But this is precisely what Chaplin's contemporary critics valued in his pictures.[97] Reframed in the terms outlined above, Chaplin's skillful syncretism of slapstick and melodrama raises the extent to which the two narrative modes overlap one another to consciousness. Moreover, by drawing slapstick closer to melodrama, Chaplin lowered the barriers to its enjoyment by respectable audiences. In my analysis, praising Chaplin's comedic pathos is "disturbing" because of the questions Chaplin's loopy tracings of the melodramatic line of desire raises about masculinity. While the relative neglect of performance technique in film scholarship goes some distance in explaining the general silence on the queerness of Chaplin's characters, especially the Tramp, its almost total erasure from discussion of Chaplin's films merits closer attention. In the rest of the chapter, I recover the queer masculinity of Chaplin's Tramp, beginning with a general overview of the queer resonance of the character.

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[92] Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, 9.

[93] Chaplin, Charles. *Modern Times*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1936.

[94] For example, see Noel Carroll, *Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humour, and Bodily Coping* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Alex Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick* (Jefferson NC: Mcfarland and Company, 2007); Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[95] Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, 17.

[96] Ibid., 18.

[97] See, for example, Dale's discussion of Gilbert Seldes' (1929) review of Chaplin's 1916 two-reeler, *The Pawn Shop*. Dale concludes that Seldes' remarks on what made Chaplin's *The Pawn Shop* exemplary of Chaplin's "supreme genius" misread a withering critique of sentimentality as earnest pathos (19). I would argue that slapstick enables Chaplin to occupy both attitudes simultaneously.

I have no systematic evidence to support the claim that Chaplin enjoyed special acclaim among men who had sex with men, or that Chaplin intended to reach a public organized by a special interest in same-sex eroticism. Instead, I argue that the Tramp's queer masculinity activated a shared body of knowledge about queerness. In fact, the operative logic of many of Chaplin's queer gags depends on an awareness of queerness as a fact of corporeal enactment. Chaplin could hardly have proceeded in any other way, since the nineteenth-century sexological accounts Foucault and many historians of sexuality acknowledge as the basis of the modern understanding of homosexuality as an identity category had yet to subsume popular understandings of same-sex eroticism, and would only begin to do so mid-way through Chaplin's long career. So, I do not intend to advance the claim that Chaplin's Tramp had a special claim on queer identity. Desire is a different matter, however. As David Halperin observes, reflecting on the informal apprenticeship in gayness he received from the Judy Garland fans at a Castro movie theatre, "*gay male desire* cannot be reduced either to *sexual* desire or to gay *identity.*"[98] The irreducibility of sex and identity is at the heart of Halperin's quarrel with gay political identity as it is currently constructed. He argues that, "in the course of claiming public recognition and acceptance of the fact of homosexual *desire* (sometimes at the expense of gay sex, to be sure), the official gay and lesbian movement has effectively foreclosed inquiry into queer sensibility, style, emotion, or any specific, non-sexual form of queer *subjectivity* or *affect* or *pleasure.*"[99] The sensibility and the "kaleidoscopic" wishes, sensations, affects and pleasures that define it "exceed the bounds of any singular identity and extend beyond the specifics of gay male existence."[100] My aim is to describe how Chaplin's characters figure in the "unpredictable, unsystematic ensemble" of queer masculinity, understood as practical knowledge rather than identity.

If Chaplin is an unusual choice for a case study of queer masculinity, he should not be dismissed out of hand. Chaplin should not be ruled out as a model for queer masculinity partly (but not only) because his star text resembles in key respects the star text of an avowed Gay Icon, Montgomery Clift. Even though Clift's career began a decade after the latest Chaplin film I discuss in this research, the formal similarities in the terms in which Clift was

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[98] David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 69. Emphasis in original.
[99] Ibid., 71. Emphasis in original.
[100] Ibid., 70.

framed allow us to appreciate the extent to which the legibility of these superficially dissimilar star texts depend on queerness as a recognizable constellation of affects. Brett Farmer condenses the critical consensus of Montgomery Clift fans with reference to popular accounts of his star text in terms that align him with the kind of anti-phallic masculinity Farmer claims as the special property of gay male subjectivity. Clift was uniquely "sensitive" and "vulnerable," qualities that created the impression that he and his characters were always one misstep from disaster. For such a fragile character, one who channeled weakness "from some great reserve of manly disability," love is necessarily ambiguous and "filled with problems and pratfalls." Clift's screen personas were usually loners characterized by "a mixture of suffering, ambition and thwarted desire."[101] These serve, without alteration, as entirely plausible descriptions of Chaplin's Tramp character. Although these descriptions cleave to Clift's dramatic accomplishments, they neatly encapsulate the conjunction of Chaplin's dramatic and comedic temperaments, suggesting not only that there is some overlap in the screen personas the two stars affected, but also that they may also have elicited some of the same affects in fans. In particular, sensitivity places Chaplin's screen persona on the edge of disaster time and again; "problems and pratfalls" are the essence of slapstick, and, although they are out of sequence, "suffering, ambition and thwarted desire" are the stations of the cross for slapstick.

Chaplin's similarity to Clift goes beyond the terms of his critical reception. Farmer notes that Clift's acting style reflected a movement toward method acting in Hollywood film. The conflicted and highly emotive quality of dramatic performances by male method actors indexed strained and schismatic American gender relations in the 1950s.[102] In Michael Kimmel's account, the crisis of masculinity after World War II responded to disorienting changes in the organization, type, and availability of work for men following demobilization.[103] Despite important differences, the crisis of American masculinity in the 1950s reiterated the crisis of American masculinity in the 1910s and 1920s, the years in which Chaplin developed the character of the Tramp. In Kimmel's analysis, the earlier crisis also responded to a reorganization of men's work lives with implications for how the success

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[101] Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 227.
[102] Ibid., 228.
[103] Michael S. Kimmel, (*Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996).

or failure of men was evaluated. The similarity is clearest in demobilization following World War I, but even before then, Kimmel argues that the closure of the Frontier and the decline of independent work (as a shopkeeper, tradesman, farmer) in favour of factory and clerical work deprived men of the traditional bases of masculine accomplishment. In both crises, advances in the status of women and visible minorities heightened the perceived threat to hegemonic masculinity. The result of the mid-century crisis for Clift, according to Farmer, is a performance style characterized by a "repertoire of shifting gazes, quirky tics, and restless movements" that evokes "a decided sense of corporeal and psychical unease that disrupts the traditional stillness and assuredness of hegemonic modes of masculine performance."[104] While Chaplin's comedy and Clift's melodrama remain a mile apart, they are connected by a poignant awareness of their failure to live up to the demands of masculinity and their own expectations.

Farmer understandably and correctly aligns Montgomery Clift's star image with Richard Dyer's discussion of the sad young man, leading him to echo the frequently evoked association of gay sexuality with masochism.[105] The frequency with which Chaplin concludes films with some variation of the Tramp shuffling down the road, alone, destination unknown, the Tramp's vulnerability and frequent victimization, as well as his anaemic build and delicate features also invite comparison with the Sad Young Man. As Farmer puts it, "given hegemonic representations of male homosexuality as a deviation from (straight) manhood, the ideological figure of 'the boy who is not a man' evokes a ready semiotics of queerness that speaks to gay audiences in potent, if variable, ways," but this is the point at which a comparison on these grounds runs out of steam.[106] Chaplin's slapstick version of the Sad Young Man produces laughter as a deflection of identification and a mark of ironizing, if not wholly effective, detachment. Montgomery Clift is certainly *available* to such a perverse reception, but the invitation is not built into his star text or the narrative solicitations of his film roles. From Chaplin's perspective, Clift's seriousness is probably the symptom of his failure to adequately reflect the admonitions of productivist masculinity.

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[104] Farmer, *Spectacular Passions*, 229.
[105] Ibid., 240-241.
[106] Ibid., 230.

Chaplin is not the only early film star to magnetize a queer reading. Billy Quirk's title role in *Algie the Miner* is extravagantly queer, marshalling every conceivable icon of inverted masculinity onto a single reel of film.[107] Algie's impression when the film opens is not particularly effete. He enters the home of his sweetheart with purpose and confidently announces to the woman's father his intention to marry her. The shot is cramped, with seven actors sharing the screen, and Quirk's posture, bent forward slightly with his balled hands resting on his hips when not deployed in brisk and angular gestures, and constrained decisive movement within the scene gives his performance a confrontational, if somewhat cartoonish, bravado. It is not until after the plan is hatched for Algie to "prove his manhood" in the space of a year, announced to the audience through a handwritten note that serves as an intertitle, that Algie's manhood is a matter of debate. Following this revelation, the quality of Quirk's movement on screen changes immediately. As soon as the letter is signed, Algie snatches it archly, steps toward the screen, with his eyebrows raised and his mouth pursed, makes an inaudible boast, then kisses the letter, bringing it to his mouth delicately with both hands. He kisses his sweetheart's hand, then departs lightly with kissing the letter again for good measure.

Throughout the film, it will be Algie's comportment that impugns his manhood most resoundingly, but watching him pack a damning assemblage of personal objects, his "grip," in preparation for his trip to the frontier anchors the suspicion of queerness. Algie wears a pocket square and a high, rigid collar with his well-tailored checked jacket. He neatly folds his lace-edged handkerchief, the better to fit into his tiny valise. Algie's gun is too small, more of an accessory than a weapon. His hat is too big, and the brim is turned up at the front like a sun-hat. The gauntlet of his gloves is similarly ostentatious as well as being conspicuously clean. When he arrives in the West, Algie walks this way and that, with one hand on his hip. Algie's breaches, the impudent bounce and loopy vector of his walk transform what was a gesture of defiant posturing only a minute ago into a manifest indictment of Algie's masculinity. He stops two tough looking characters to ask for directions, and waits patiently, contrapposto and hand still on hip, as they tell him how to get to town. He kisses the cowboy on the cheek in thanks. The cowboy is so astonished that his

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[107] Guy Blache, Alice. *Algie the Miner*. Film. Directed by Edward Warren. New York: Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company, 1912.

hat falls off and he is about to attack Algie, until his friend intercedes on Algie's behalf. Algie is already on his knees, hands held together in a gesture of supplication by the time the friend has succeeded in placating the first cowboy. Algie kisses *him* and we are back to square one. Instead of replaying the scene, both cowboys pick Algie up by the elbows and carry him to a pile of railway ties -- Algie maintains a seated posture while being transported, with his toes pointed in front and his valise held in both hands above his lap -- like a delicate toy. Showing the pair his laughable gun, somehow Algie convinces the pair that he is also a cowboy, or something in the process of becoming-cowboy, and they decide to give him to Big Jim to sort out. From the rapidity of the exchange, one surmises this is not the first time the cowboys have seen something like this. Nor would this story be unfamiliar to American audiences, having such illustrious precedents as President Theodore Roosevelt.

The cowboys carry Algie into a saloon and place the bizarre ornament on a table where other generically-appropriate masculine types are playing cards. The assembly of cowboys are astonished when Algie sneezes, and they eye him up and down as a particularly surly cowboy steps forward. The surly cowboy and Algie size each other up, Algie's hand hovering over his chest precisely at the level of an invisible string of pearls. Algie again refers to his gun in order to establish his intention to prove himself the equal of the strenuous life. Evidently, this is the funniest thing the cowboys have heard in some time. Algie is indignant, but the cowboys insist on testing out his gun. The silent "bang" of the little pistol startles Algie, but sends the cowboys into another fit of laughter. The cowboy gives Algie his gun back, and he cleans it preciously with his pocket square. Finally, the cowboys introduce Algie to Big Jim and allow him to leave. Algie minces across the saloon, and out the door, held open for him by Big Jim. The cowboys razz Big Jim for no obvious diegetical reason after Algie goes, and Big Jim dismisses their taunts with a bearish wave of his hand and a grotesque face.

Within moments of Algie and Big Jim taking up cohabitation, the film establishes the broad outline of a conventional melodramatic plot. Big Jim is a drinker, and Algie will play the part of the Angel in the House saving Jim from the demon liquor. Big Jim takes the opportunity to ridicule Algie's gun *again* before showing him his own, much larger and darker gun. While Big Jim appraises Algie's pistol, Algie preens, and pats at the back of his hat, as if adjusting his hair. Algie is agog when Big Jim produces his gun, covering his mouth

in shock before protesting coquettishly. Big Jim puts the gun in Algie's hand and he is delirious. Just pointing the gun is enough to overwhelm Algie, and he swoons backwards into Big Jim's arms. I choose the word "delirious" advisedly, because the spinal lassitude, stumbling imbalance and wide-eyed, vacant stares Algie exhibits while he is holding Big Jim's gun are the same as those Big Jim displays when he suffers from delirium tremens a minute later. The intervening scene, in which Algie learns to mount a horse, permits a costume change, allowing Algie to appear in the approved uniform of the American frontier for the rest of the film. Aside from their touching earnestness, the following scenes of Algie's masculine accomplishments and his rescue of Big Jim from drink are uninteresting. All that remains is for Algie to return home and claim his bride, a prospect to which Big Jim responds with striking ambivalence. When Algie announces he will leave in two days, Big Jim is so sullen, sitting stooped on the table at the right of the screen, that he cannot even look at Algie. The prospect of adventure when Algie invites Big Jim to accompany him back east is enough to rouse Jim's spirits, and the film likewise accelerates to a predictable close via Big Jim and Algie's reintroduction to polite society via a pretended robbery that puts Algie's new jocular machismo front and centre.

Algie the Miner presents something like a diagrammatic and maximalist iconography of the screen pansy. Algie and all of his personal objects are ornamental. The film makes this point most insistently with respect to Algie's pistol, but his fancy light-coloured suit, pristine gloves and lace handkerchief leave him unprepared for productive work. This essential specularity is extended by Algie's byplay. His gestures are expressive, but non-utilitarian. For instance, his characteristically queenly facial expressions require Algie to close his eyes at the same time as he raises his eyebrows high in carefully staged affront. This rictus of scorn reverses the polarity of the face, understood as the paradigmatic seat of perception, to convert it into an expressive portrait. The most dramatic demonstration of the essentially aesthetic quality of Billy Quirk's pansy characterization is the fact that, before his conversion, his only purposeful movements across filmic space are performed for him. After casting about helplessly, he is carried here and there by the cowboys he meets. To exit the saloon, he is pulled along in Big Jim's wake. The scene in which Big Jim teaches Algie to ride imbues him with a new power of motion in tandem with his presumed virilization.

Although *Algie the Miner* was not alone in queering screen cowboys, the coy suggestions of perversion were essentially a comedic projection onto another genre.[108] For that reason alone, the film's queerness can be seen as relatively autonomous from the scenario. Moreover, the positive exposition of Algie's queerness is just so much comedic embroidery on his lack of masculinity. Inasmuch as *Algie the Miner* is a conversion narrative, the problem that animates the narrative action is Algie's missing masculinity, which could find expression in some other form. The contingency of Algie's queerness is pointed to by its sudden and somewhat perfunctory appearance following his agreement with his intended's father, as well as the breezy manner in which Algie supersedes it. Aside from all the punning about Algie's little gun, the queer humour is also resolutely chaste. By contrast, Laurel and Hardy's intensely homosocial friendship is often necessary to the diegesis and surprisingly frank. For instance, in *Two Tars*, Laurel and Hardy are sailors.[109] When their female co-stars, and ostensible romantic interests, first spot Laurel and Hardy, they call them the "Front and Rear Admiral." Whether or not they intend their description to operate as a double-entendre, the description makes such a reading readily available. The suggestion of inversion promoted by the reversibility of the epithet and its association with a class of men notoriously available as trade is reinforced by the reversal of conventional gender roles moments later when the women defend the men from a fist fight with a much smaller man, saying "you wait in the limousine, I'll deal with this bird." Laurel and Hardy frequently share a household in their comedy sketches, and occasionally even share a bed, as in *Laughing Gravy*.[110] The most direct queer innuendo between Laurel and Hardy is the famous sight gag, comprising most of the film's comedic business, in *Liberty*,[111] in which Laurel and Hardy attempt to exchange trousers, but instead exchange a crab secreted in their trousers. They are repeatedly discovered *in media res*, the camera showing us what the onlooker sees: a pantomime of gay

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[108] Richard Barrios notes two more films that give the Old West a queer twist: *The Soilers* (Ralph Ceder, 1923, starring Stan Laurel) and *The Dude Wrangler* (Richard Thorpe, 1930). The tagline for *The Dude Wrangler,* "The Story of a 'Pansy' Cowboy -- Oh Dear!" hints at the capacity of sound films to mobilize every filmic register for queer effect.

[109] Parrot, James. *Two Tars*. Film. Directed by James Parrot. Culver City, CA: Hal Roach Studios, 1928.

[110] Horne, James W. *Laughing Gravy*. Film. Directed by James W. Horne. Culver City, CA: Hal Roach Studios, 1930.

[111] McCarey, Leo. *Liberty*. Film. Directed by Leo McCarey. Culver City, CA: Hal Roach Studios, 1929.

sex. Also in 1929, Laurel chases off Hardy's wife in *That's My Wife*, before replacing her in drag.[112] Laurel and Hardy themselves finally tie the knot in *Our Wife*.[113]

Chaplin's signature character, the Tramp, is peculiarly receptive to unpredictable and incongruous associations. Ironically, this receptivity is due, in part, to the unusual stability of Chaplin's screen persona. In the 82 films in which Chaplin appeared between February 1914 and January 1967, he was credited as the Tramp, or simply Charlie, in 17 films. In 24 films, Chaplin takes on an unskilled or criminal occupation, and in 8 films, Chaplin's screen persona's primary occupation is drinking. On the face of Chaplin's filmography, he takes on a startling *variety* of roles, but this variety is more apparent than real. Chaplin's screen jobs are mostly temporary: a career of disastrous false starts. Dale summarizes the effect of Chaplin's restless movement from one role to another, writing "when Chaplin jumps out of character, it doesn't feel like hokum. It feels freshly impudent, a commentary on hokum, in part, and he creates a peculiarly detached but vital character who is instantly recognizable in any dress or setting." He concludes that, while some character comedians are always themselves, "Chaplin *never* is," and, because "consistency of character is a social thing," the failure for Chaplin to resolve into a unity or coherence makes Chaplin's characters antisocial.[114] It would be more accurate to say that Chaplin's film roles add up to an abstraction of character. Instead of presenting a unified personality, Chaplin's roles explore the whole range of possibilities open to someone defined by a particular sociological situation. Simply put, Chaplin's characters belong to a type with a clearly defined location in the sociological imagination of Chaplin's comedy.

The consistency of Chaplin's sociological vision as a director, and the extra-textual publicity that supported and anchored his filmic presence, gave his filmography the unity his characters lacked. Moreover, the distinctness of Chaplin's movement, one of the enduring bases of his celebrity, invites such an intertextual mode of reception. As Miriam Hansen points out, "by lending a focus to the film's narrative and scopic regime, the presence of a

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[112] French, Lloyd. *That's My Wife*. Film. Directed by Lloyd French. Culver City, CA: Hal Roach Studios, 1929.

[113] Horne, James W. *Our Wife*. Film. Directed by James W. Horne. Culver City, CA: Hal Roach Studios, 1931.

[114] Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, 39.

star actually undercuts that regime's apparent primacy, unity, and closure."[115] The appearance of stars in films tends toward "a string of spectacular moments that display the 'essence' of the star".[116] The antisocial disunity of Chaplin's screen roles is subtended by the corporeal unity of Chaplin's physical virtuosity. "However subtle and poetic his pantomime was, it was always accompanied by this athletic vitality, the physical élan of both the ballet dancer and the gymnast. There lived in him the desire to slash away at the grey brutality of life with the extravagant beauty of his gestures."[117]

Chaplin's élan evokes an ambivalent response, however, because its extravagant assertion of aesthetic freedom is seated in the figure of the Tramp (and his cognates). The association between the Tramp and romanticist fantasy was not unique to Chaplin. Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey, who both studied under George Santayana at Harvard, produced a book of poetry, *Songs of Vagabondia* (1894), that sold so well that they published sequels in 1896, *More Songs of Vagabondia*, and 1900 *Last Songs from Vagabondia*.[118] True to the arcadian evocation of the book's title, Carman and Hovey's poetry in *Vagabondia* is full of "midnights of revel, /And noondays of song" set on the open road (there is also a poem about pirates).[119] It rejects convention and discipline in favour of camaraderie, sincerity and imagination, mustering particular scorn for the productivist ethos that paralyzes and stupefies human singularity into the predictable regularity of the commodity form:

> Here we are free
>
> To be good or bad,
>
> Sane or mad,
>
> Merry or grim
>
> As the mood may be, --
>
> Free as the whim

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[115] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 246.
[116] Ibid., 246-247.
[117] Kyp Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 4.
[118] James Gifford, ed., *Glances Backward: An Anthology of American Homosexual Writing, 1830-1920* Peterborough ON: Broadview Press, 2007, 270.
[119] In Gifford, *Glances Backward*, 272.

Of a spook on a spree, --

Free to be oddities,

Not mere commodities,

Stupid and Salable,

Wholly available,

Ranged upon shelves;

Each with his puny form

In the same uniform,

Cramped and disabled;

We are not labelled,

We are ourselves.[120]

Chaplin's films introduce a degree of reality into this expression of the pleasure principle by dramatizing the material and social precarity that accompanies triumphant assertions of self-identity that take the form of a refusal of the social coordinates that condition a legible life. Slapstick is the perfect medium through which to give this fantasy concrete form because of its fundamentally ambivalent identificatory pleasures, as discussed above. This ambivalence was not lost on turn-of-the-century audiences.

Presumably, the desire to resolve or inhabit this ambivalence was a motivating factor behind the work of Josiah Flynt Willard, whom Gifford describes as a "self-titled tramp authority."[121] Based on his direct experience among tramps, Willard published magazine essays and several popular books with such picaresque titles as: *Tramping with Tramps: Studies and sketches of vagabond life* (1893); *The Little Brother: A story of tramp life* (1902); and *The Rise of Ruderick Clowd* (1903). For all that tramps' freedom from discipline made

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[120] Carman Bliss and Richard Hovey, "Houp-la!," in Gifford, *Glances Backward*, 271.
[121] Gifford, *Glances Backward*, 343.

them an attractive allegory for the freedom of aesthetic judgement, their lack of fixed social address also made them the locus of an unsettling indeterminacy, especially with respect to the privileged zones of social regulation: gender and sex. These suspicions about tramps were manifest in an early essay Willard contributed to the first volume of Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897), the volume treating sexual inversion. According to Willard, "every hobo in the United States knows what 'unnatural intercourse' means" and, according to Willard "every tenth man practices it."[122] Among American tramps, "boys are the victim of this passion," and tramps seduce boys into life on the road with fantastic stories, although the only example of such escapist fantasies cited by Willard were riding the rails and shooting "Indians." Willlard recounts that boys convinced to adopt the life of a tramp are called "prushuns," and they enjoy the protection of an older tramp, known as a "jocker." Willard claims that "among the men the practice is decidedly one of passion. The majority of them prefer a prushun to a woman."[123]

While artistic representations of tramps associated their mobility with authentic self-expression and a freedom from sources of external discipline that threaten to reduce and vitiate the romantic soul to the fungibility of a commodity, Willard's documentary representation saw instead the formation of an economy premised on the sexual exchange of boys. Undoubtedly, Willard's essay was meant to present a disturbing facet of the life of a tramp as a corrective to romantic visions of escape, such as those he offered in his own writing. Nevertheless, it is suggestive that the fantasmatic resolution of the tempting freedom of the tramp life is the institution of another law, and the stabilizing heterosexualization of the disturbing sexual freedom of tramps.

While the Tramp character remains present in Chaplin's other film roles as a result of the intertext formed by the humble origins of the bulk of Chaplin's roles, a more obvious element of his character ensured that the Tramp's autonomy from social constraint maintained a vestigial screen presence in all his roles. Even when Chaplin's screen persona (temporarily) takes on the role and costume of a waiter, janitor, or factory worker, he always wears his signature moustache. To my knowledge, the only times Chaplin appeared on screen

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[122] Ibid., 344.
[123] Ibid., 345.

without his moustache was in *The Masquerader*,[124] *Tango Tangles*[125] and *A Busy Day*.[126] I will have more to say about *Tango Tangles* later, but for now it has the distinction of being the only Chaplin comedy in which Chaplin appears clean-shaven and in the same gender throughout the film. In *A Busy Day*, Chaplin's querulous and boorish behaviour in the first minute of the film, as the wife of a philanderer, is rewarded with five minutes of slapstick violence at a parade. The exuberant coarseness of Chaplin's physical characterization of the wife, and the knockabout, nonsensical even for a slapstick film, locates *A Busy Day* more solidly in the performance tradition of English Music Hall than later comedy films. It is an insubstantial piece, whose main interest derives principally from the intensity of sadism Chaplin the director directs toward his screen persona. *The Masquerader* is superior in every respect, and I discuss it more fully below. In that film, a clean-shaven Charlie Chaplin, a film actor, arrives on set and is shown in the dressing room applying makeup and his trademark moustache while he participates in some low-level comedic business with Fatty Arbuckle, who is seated at an adjoining dressing table. Chaplin plays another drag role in *The Masquerader* and the scene that precipitates the most intense filmic affect involves the dramatic revelation of Chaplin's true identity. Significantly, at the moment of Chaplin's big reveal, he appears with his moustache, despite the fact that the film has established it as makeup! In Chaplin's last turn on screen in drag, *A Woman*,[127] he appears with his peculiar moustache, but he is forced to shave it to effect his transformation.

In his cultural history of the moustache, Christopher Oldstone-Moore argues that "the preeminent form of facial hair [...] was not primarily seen as a means to distinguish men from women, or older men from younger, but rather to distinguish between two elemental masculine types: sociable and autonomous."[128] While the specifics of men's facial hair permitted a variety of positions on its desirability, in general, "according to the twentieth-century gender code, a clean-shaven man's virtue was his commitment to his male peers and to local, national or corporate institutions. The mustached man, by contrast, was much more

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[124] Chaplin, Charles. *The Masquerader*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.

[125] Chaplin, Charles. *Tango Tangles*. Film. Directed by Mack Sennett. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.
[126] Chaplin, Charles. *A Busy Day*. Film. Directed by Mack Sennett. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.

[127] Chaplin, Charles. *A Woman*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Chicago: Essanay, 1915.
[128] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, "Mustaches and Masculine Codes in Early Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of Social History* 45, no.1 (2011): 48.

his own man," although the precise nature of the autonomy signalled by facial hair ranged from patriarch to rogue. Oldstone-Moore's history charts a clear turn away from facial hair in daily life following World War I. According to Oldstone-Moore, trends in facial hair extended the new enthusiasm for white-collar labour, competitive sports, clubs and other organised male leisure, substitute militarisms that Michael Kimmel interprets as ways of resisting emasculating demands issuing from the domestic sphere.[129]

In the realm of fantasy, however, the appeal of the moustache persisted. Oldstone-Moore points out that "in the 1920s and even more so in the 1930s, mustaches became the hallmark of swashbuckling romantic heroes such as Clark Gable, Errol Flynn and Douglas Fairbanks, father and son."[130] The comedic potential of the moustache that served as one of Chaplin's most recognizable trademarks depended on the pretension of the moustache to extravagant masculinity. Simply put, "if mustaches had not become a significant part of the playacting of manliness, there would be no awkwardness and no presumption to ridicule."[131] This is why Franklin Pangborn's pro forma moustache serves more as an indictment than an endorsement of his masculine bona fides. Despite the "shift in European and American manliness toward sociability," in the cultural imagination, "mustaches continued to represent the masculine alternative of forceful individuality"[132] but this was a decidedly risky gambit for some.

While the elements of the Tramp's star text discussed above provide some formal grounding for seeing Chaplin's comedy as queer, by and large, Chaplin's queerness relies less on the qualities of his costume and personal objects or on the direction of the comedic scenario than the likes of *Algie the Miner* or Laurel and Hardy. Chaplin's queer gags are minimalist in the sense that they depend almost exclusively on Chaplin's use of gesture. Even though their independence from iconographic support in the form of props, and narrative support in the form of a suggestive scenario, makes them less insistent than characterizations such as Quirk's or Laurel and Hardy's, Chaplin's queer gags are every bit as forceful and disruptive. It is the spasmodic, unpredictable eruption of queerness into the comedic flow of Chaplin's films that makes him an exemplary case for my study of gesture

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[129] Ibid., 52.
[130] Ibid., 49.
[131] Ibid., 48.
[132] Ibid., 54.

and queer masculinity. Such eruptions of queerness add comedic force even to films in which Chaplin does not develop any queer business because they impart an enduring potential to his star text.

Chaplin's comedy is queer in another respect, which comes out most forcefully by contrast with Buster Keaton's approach to comedy. Clayton claims that "Keaton's comedy is tinged with a certain fascinating coldness that is not found, for instance, in Chaplin's rendering of body-world relations."[133] Formally, Keaton's coldness is the result of his reduction of the body to a figure in a vast and impersonal landscape by the frequent use of the far-shot. This is one way in which Keaton emphasizes physical forces and the existential facts of embodiment over social and psychological dimensions of human behaviour, facets of life stressed by Chaplin.[134] "We might say that while Chaplin primarily discovers comic significance in the body's relation to character and society at large, Keaton discovers it primarily in the body's relation to space and motion."[135] Clayton claims that Chaplin emphasizes the social emplacement of bodies in order to draw comparisons between different statuses, especially rich and poor, whereas Keaton stresses the spatial placement of bodies to "delight in the contrast of movement and stillness, calculation and randomness, nearness and depth."[136] Carroll finesses Clayton's point somewhat by suggesting that what is at stake in Keaton's take on slapstick is "bodily intelligence," the capacity of the body to produce desired results in the world.[137] According to Carroll, Keaton's subtraction of bodily intelligence in situations where his character's projects go awry, "[makes] what is involved in normal functioning clearly manifest where it might otherwise remain invisible."[138] Carroll relates Keaton's strategy to Heidegger's insight that the objective qualities belonging to a piece of equipment only present themselves to consciousness when an object hesitates or fails in the performance of its intended task, concluding that "we might say that Keaton's is a pragmatic or equipmental way of being in the world."[139]

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[133] Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick*, 47.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 49.
[137] Noel Carroll, *Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humour, and Bodily Coping* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 6.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 9.

To my mind, the contrast between Keaton and Chaplin is overdrawn. It would be better to say that Chaplin's comedy understands the equipmentality of the body differently from Keaton's. Instead of being occupied with impersonal forces and the objective qualities of the material world, Chaplin directs his attention toward exposing social life as the product of bodily work, which is why his situations so often depend on the qualities of recognized social types. Gags in which the Chaplin's gaze goes astray, or where he is unable to tell whom a body part belongs to, demonstrate a keen interest in space as a formal dimension of comedy and human accomplishment, only these spaces are measured in human terms as what is out of reach, within the body's horizon, or too close for comfort. As the contrast between Keaton and Chaplin shows, the assault, what Dale calls "the essence of a slapstick gag" on the hero's dignity, can land in at least two different ways. It can assail the integrity of the body as the equipmental object through which a body expresses its volition with respect to objects and space, or it can vitiate the capacity of a body to participate in social life as a field of embodied significances. Clayton observes that Chaplin's "social proficiency creates the sense that he might pick and choose his identity as he pleases, as if it were a plaything of the self." For Keaton, on the other hand, "social identities seem more or less externally imposed."[140] If Keaton's way of being in the world is "equipmental," we might say that Chaplin's is gestural, and that Chaplin's assault on his characters' gestural integrity or dignity draws them into all manner of queer associations.

In the next chapter, I analyze how the Tramp's zany antics magnetize readings of queerness and perversity through a close examination of Chaplin's gestural performance. The Tramp's frustrated or defective masculinity, manifesting in an extreme mobility of desire and almost pathological adaptability to rapidly shifting demands and dangers, expose a crisis in early twentieth-century masculinity, even if it only does so to deflect uncomfortable questions about masculinity and desire through melancholic incorporation.

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[140] Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick*, 56.

3. That Zany Tramp

While Chaplin's appearance undoubtedly provides an iconography that keys or enables a reading of his categorical refusal of discipline as a form of queerness, Chaplin's refusal itself is realized through his bodily comportment. This chapter serves as a catalogue raisonné of motifs and gags in Chaplin's filmography that contribute to a reading of Chaplin's screen persona as a figure of queer masculinity and same-sex eroticism. Many of the gags that anchor my reading of Chaplin's queer masculinity are fleeting or sly, and could easily be missed by an inattentive viewer. At the same time, the gags are often critical to the unfolding action and the coherence of the logic of the scenario. Because of the reappearance of Chaplin's signature character and mannerisms, as well as frequent repetition and revision of successful gags, this repertoire of risqué gags may also have made Chaplin fans more alert to the subtext of individual films.

The sources that do the most to support this point of view are Sianne Ngai's analysis of zaniness in *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*[141] and Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Object, Others*,[142] both of which appreciate the objectivity of material phenomena while recognizing that human experience is a result of the contact between the objective world and intentions, sensations, and cognitions. These sources focalize the relationship between bodies as the seat of intentions, sensations, and cognitions and the field of action constituted by and for aesthetic judgement. Ngai's analysis of zaniness centers on the production and maintenance of affective relationships as the result of bodily labour, and shows how the demand for flexibility endangers the integrity and coherence of the body and the network of relationships it produces. Sara Ahmed's take on phenomenology allows us to see the field of affects generated by zany labour as a tracery of protensions and retentions that create durable, directional lines. While I do not intend to argue that these concerns were foremost in the minds of Chaplin or his fans, they are immanent in his production and reception as a kind of inarticulate operative logic that gives emotional and comedic force to some of Chaplin's most familiar gags and motifs.

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[141] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[142] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham :Duke University Press, 2006).

3.1 Zany Times

Ngai's recognition of the constitutive, or performative, dimension of aesthetic judgements prevents her from providing a clear and definitive set of criteria for identifying the zany. Instead, she characterizes it as an "aesthetic of action" typified by a "continuous succession of activities." The zany performer never rests in one role long enough to settle into a habitus appropriate to the situation they are in, leading to a performance that "involves a certain deformation of the forms of activity, a certain indifference to their qualitative differentiation."[143] Ngai's zany of choice is Lucille Ball and, like Lucy, "there is something strained, desperate, and precarious about the zany that immediately activates the spectator's desire for distance. In fact, what is most striking about zaniness is how the image of dangerously strenuous activity it projects often seems designed to block sympathy or identification as a subjective response."[144] Ngai sees a "complex negativity" at work in zany performances. While zany characters are committed to play and fun, they "labor excessively hard to produce our laughter, straining themselves to the point of endangering not just themselves but also those around them."[145] Ngai notes that the security of the spectator's position relative to the zany performer aligns them with a manager or owner; nevertheless, again and again, zany comedy visualizes the precarity of such positions of safety when the strain of coping with the demands placed on zany characters becomes literally unmanageable resulting in the factual collapse of the social and physical distance between the zany and the manager or owner.[146]

According to Ngai, zaniness is a transcription of anxieties devolving from the emphasis on affective labour in late capitalism,[147] but there is ample evidence to suggest the relationship between personality and work was at least as freighted with worry in the early and mid-twentieth century as it is today. Ngai explains that the enforced adaptiveness of low-skilled workers, especially in service occupations, and the multifarious demands of reproductive labour performed by women mark the zany off as an aesthetic in which questions of work and gender converge. Affective, immaterial, and reproductive labour all

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[143] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 197.
[144] Ibid., 8.
[145] Ibid., 10.
[146] Ibid., 11.
[147] Ibid., 174.

"raise the question whether performing counts as virtuosity or servility, as leisure or labor; whether it exemplifies an art lightheartedly indifferent to truth or a kind of frenzied 'role faith' consonant with various spirits of capitalism."[148] As discussed above with reference to Chaplin's performance style above, Michael Kimmel has demonstrated that transformations in work were closely tied to acute anxieties about masculinity in the early decades of the twentieth century. Ngai herself briefly considers the connection between changes in the culture of work in the 1930s and zaniness,[149] but her emphasis is on women, immaterial labour and late capitalism. Nevertheless, of the aesthetic categories analyzed by Ngai, zaniness is the one with the deepest and most proletarian historical roots, and her analysis is pointedly salient to Chaplin's approach to slapstick, preoccupied as it is in sounding out social and economic relationships through the body.

Ngai traces the zany to the *zanni*, a stock character of sixteenth-century commedia dell'arte representing a peasant farmer forced into the life of an itinerant servant by the loss of their land.[150] The later translation of the character of the zanni from Italian into English performance traditions transformed the grammatical function of "zany" from noun to adjective, and shifted its typical reference to "a comic performer, working in the marketplace as the assistant of a more skilled or experienced clown, buffoon, or mountebank."[151] This shift in the relationship of zanies to other characters also introduced an explicitly comparative dimension into the reception of zaniness. Because zanies were a diminished copy of their counterpart, "zany" took on a decidedly contemptuous colouring in English.[152] Insofar as Harlequin and Charlie are "archetypal proletarians, created by workers," the connection between Chaplin and zaniness has an immediately recognizable validity.[153] Moreover, Chaplin's labours on screen are almost always emplotted in scenarios that insist on the comparison between Chaplin's job performance and that of a more pragmatic partner, usually a foreman, supervisor, manager or owner. Chaplin's unique presence on screen, however, is the basis of a more profound connection to zaniness as an aesthetic judgement

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[148] Ibid., 230.
[149] Ibid., 203.
[150] Ibid., 192.
[151] Ibid., 195.
[152] Ibid.
[153] David Madden, (*Harlequin's Stick, Charlie's Cane: A Comparative Study of Commedia Dell'Arte and Silent Slapstick Comedy*. Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1975), 24.

and mode of embodiment. As Ngai points out, while zaniness originates from the comedic transcription of a particular relationship to work, it "also bears a special relationship to the category of character as such."[154] Some relationship between zaniness and character is a logical necessity, given that Ngai has described zaniness as "a style of and about action or doing,"[155] but the identification of zaniness as a manner of action that endangers its agent and the categorical or aesthetic coherence of what they are doing "evokes a kind of person/character who implodes the concept of character from within, contesting the stability of any formal representation of personhood by defining personhood itself as an unremitting succession of activities."[156]

Chaplin's filmography is full of such job and role changes. In *Modern Times*[157] alone, for instance, Chaplin plays a factory worker, revolutionary leader, prisoner, shipwright, night watchman, assistant mechanic and waiter/cabaret performer! Taking in the broader sweep of Chaplin's short films shows a restless propensity for change, gravitating especially toward certain service occupations. Chaplin played a Janitor in *The New Janitor*[158] and *The Bank*;[159] a waiter in *Caught in a Cabaret*,[160] *Dough and Dynamite*,[161] and *The Rink*;[162] and various positions in front of and behind the camera in *The Property Man*,[163] *The Masquerader*,[164] *His New Job*,[165] and *Behind the Screen*.[166] Chaplin's zaniness also extends to inanimate objects when, for instance, his handling of the alarm clock in *The Pawnshop*[167] puts it through a series of zany transformations, or when in *The Circus*,[168] Chaplin himself becomes part of a clockwork spectacle.

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[154] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 193.
[155] Ibid., 223.
[156] Ibid., 193.
[157] Chaplin, Charles. *Modern Times*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1936.
[158] Chaplin, Charles. *The New Janitor*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.
[159] Chaplin, Charles. *The Bank*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Chicago: Essanay, 1915.
[160] Chaplin, Charles. *Caught in a Cabaret*. Film. Mabel Nomand. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.
[161] Chaplin, Charles. *Dough and Dynamite*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.
[162] Chaplin, Charles. *The Rink*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Lone Star: Hollywood, 1916.
[163] Chaplin, Charles. *The Property Man*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.
[164] Chaplin, Charles. *The Masquerader*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.
[165] Chaplin, Charles. *His New Job*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Chicago: Essanay, 1915.
[166] Chaplin, Charles. *Behind the Screen*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Lone Star, 1916.
[167] Chaplin, Charles. *The Pawnshop*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Lone Star, 1916.
[168] Chaplin, Charles. *The Circus*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Charles Chaplin Productions, 1928.

Chaplin's functional zaniness is echoed in the kind of summative statements critics sometimes make about him. Harness explains that Chaplin's "preposterous situations arise from his helpless inability to conform - as in his botched rehearsal with the clown troupe in *The Circus*."[169] Here is a clown who cannot even *clown* properly. Harness sees in Chaplin "an artist, an anarchist, a rebel, who must cause upheaval in any society he passes through"; on the other hand, "he is a dancer, an athlete, a musketeer. At times he is more like a pleasing geometric shape than a human being."[170] The list alone is enough to inspire exhaustion, but it is precisely Chaplin's pointed refusal to acquire a stable hexis that pegs him as zany.

Claudia Clausias thinks that interpretations that find a messianic alterity in Chaplin, as Harness's seems to, are mistaken. She argues that, "Charlie's attempts, often frantic and always comic, to fit into that society contradict such a view."[171] Chaplin's characters are decidedly ambivalent figures. Despite their capacity to bring us happiness "as a symbol of lost childhood, of liberation and imagination," we would not want the Tramp "in *our* factory or *our* shop; nor would we be happy if *our* sister walked hand in hand down the road with him."[172] Clausius attributes this ambivalence to her theory of comedic "double perspective." "Double perspective exists when the reader or spectator is simultaneously aware of a feeling of identification with a fictional character and of a feeling of detachment from this character on the side of the author or director."[173] As Clausius explains it, Chaplin's authorial perspective ridicules the conventions, mores, and social identities he attributes to his imagined audience. While members of the audience may sympathize with him, ultimately we reject a fellowship with the Tramp, who still naively tries to accommodate the world, and "we assume a partnership with the director against the inoffensive little man."[174]

The fantasmatic alignment with the Director against a figure spectators recognize as a caricature of themselves resolves the ambivalent affects of Chaplin's comedy entirely in favour of sadism and distance. Of course, Clausius sees Chaplin as a *satirist*. The resolution she proposes ignores elements of Chaplin's performances that militate in favour of

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[169] Kyp Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 149.
[170] Ibid., 148-149.
[171] Claudia Clausius, *The Gentleman is a Tramp: Charlie Chaplin's Comedy* (New York: Peter Lang Press, 1989), 102.
[172] Ibid., 48.
[173] Ibid., 3.
[174] Ibid., 54

identification with his anarchic and cathartic corporeal freedom, especially in dance. If comedy is a melancholic way of giving a lost object form through repetition, the ambivalence of Chaplin's performance, as a zany, stems from the interruption of our desire to extend comedic gestures and situations through our own real or imagined replications of them by the threat of imminent disaster.

As a mode of action that creates an embodied affront to the forms of coherence organized by regularities such as form, genre and habitus, zaniness is a natural site for the exploration of questions of gesture and gender. What Ngai refers to as the "complex negativity" of zaniness also magnetizes questions about relationships of attraction and repulsion that pertain between bodies on the basis of the gestures they use to give their self-presence a recognizable shape. Sara Ahmed's reading of phenomenology through the lens of sexual orientation provides a nuanced set of terms and concepts for articulating the intimate linkage between the ways of behaving and the form a life takes on as a result of repeated actions. Her determined and pointed reading of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty keys her analysis of sexual orientation and gender to the more general case of orienting oneself in space with respect to the objects and others around us. She writes, "if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with."[175] The conceit of getting one's bearings in a dark room neatly condenses the most important concerns of Ahmed's analysis. Orienting oneself under these circumstances involves "different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others."[176] It requires a tentative, probing approach to the situation that recalls Carrie Noland's concept of "experiential groping" and extends the body towards its phenomenal horizons. In this situation, the body is the origin of the adventures of a subject, but it only acquires a definite shape through its extension into space, and through the registration of the history of a subject's corporeal adventures. "The 'here' of bodily dwelling is thus what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings."[177] Ahmed describes the process of acquiring an orientation in terms of "direction" and "line," each retaining a dual sense that connects spatial relations to psychic and social forms. For Ahmed, directions describe the position of an object, which are as

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[175] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.
[176] Ibid., 3.
[177] Ibid., 8.

likely to be a form of attainment as a physical thing, at the same time as prescribing a set of actions likely to bring the object within reach. In Ahmed's terminology, directions proceed in terms of "lines," which can be the path of an object or body's motion or, equally, the motion of a particular train of thought. In both cases lines have a performative force: "they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition."[178] The image Ahmed uses to bring the central terms of queer phenomenology into focus can be brought back around to zaniness by noting a reality that is eliminated from the metaphor for reasons of clarity. While there is nothing unusual about fumbling around in the dark to orient oneself alone, usually in life we have company. Admitting another person into Ahmed's demonstration immediately introduces zany possibilities: bumped heads, collisions, spills, mistaken identities. This is because we inhabit spaces both as gaps of indetermination and as objects in the horizon of other people's experience. Zany "deformation of the forms of activity [and] indifference to their qualitative differentiation" is the result of not following directions, or following them badly, of taking a wrong turn and falling out of line.[179] From my point of view, the body produced by zany dwelling is an unforeseen shape or, properly, the shape of chaos.

Chaplin's extended kooky dance-fugue on the assembly line in *Modern Times* is one of the best-known scenes in Chaplin's film career, and a diagrammatic example of his accomplishment as a zany. Harness sees *Modern Times* as Chaplin's eulogy for the Tramp and the era of silent comedy. Following the tracks laid by more prosaic eulogies, the film condenses the motifs that defined the Tramp, motifs informed by Chaplin's working-class origins and developing political critique of class and capitalism.[180] Indeed, as Harness notes, this synoptic or summative aspect of *Modern Times* led some critics to complain that the film lacks a coherent narrative trajectory and seems more like a series of loosely connected two-reelers. To my eye, the charge is accurate, but for the current purpose, it makes *Modern Times* attractive as Chaplin's definitive instance of the gags he revisits here.

In the establishing shots for the factory sequence, Chaplin is immediately singled out as different from the other workers by his appearance. The other men are heavy set or

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[178] Ibid., 16.
[179] Ibid., 197.
[180] Kyp Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008),154.

muscular. Chaplin is short and fine. Most of the other workers wear dark pants and stained white undershirts. Chaplin wears striped overalls. Although the legibility of Chaplin's difference draws on spectators' knowledge of regularities in Chaplin's characterization and comedic business, these shots nevertheless focus attention on movement and bodily presence as the privileged locus of Chaplin's comic play in this film. The other workers hammer assuredly using direct, strong movements originating from the shoulder; Chaplin uses flexible, light motions from the forearm and wrist to twist the bolts as they go by. The difference in motor-intentionality between Chaplin and the other workers is only a premonition of the zany direction in which the sequence is headed, however. In the opening of the factory sequence, Chaplin shares a place on the assembly line with his coworkers. Despite the evident strain of keeping up with the men beside him, Chaplin's body, attention and activity align with those of his fellow workers as an index of his deeper cognitive and social alignment with them. Chaplin falls in line with the workers and the regulatory flow of production.

1 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. Modern Times. *Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1936.*

When Chaplin is relieved from bolt-tightening to take a short break, his whole body convulses in an automatic continuation of his work. While the convulsive movements are meant to extend the job Chaplin performs on the production line, in fact they depart from his routine on a somatic level by involving his neck and spine, parts of his body that remain static with respect to the conveyor belt while he is working. The logic of the gag nevertheless makes intuitive sense because the machine seems to operate as a regulatory apparatus for

Chaplin's attention and intentions as much as his body, displacing Chaplin's capacity for gesture. Ahmed tells us that "following a line is not disinterested: to follow a line takes time, energy, and resources, which means that the 'line' one takes does not stay apart from the line of one's life, as the very shape of how one moves through time and space."[181] Coming off the assembly line, Chaplin's body is a partial synapse that responds only spasmodically to the direction of his will. The difficulty of applying oneself to a new line after coming off the assembly line starts with the lines a body is forced to take to execute its purposes and functions. Chaplin only returns to a human bodily hexis after a full-body convulsion interrupts the machinic twitching. When he returns to the production line, Chaplin hesitates before resuming his duties. In the interval, Chaplin cleans and files his nails, a classic Chaplin gesture -- normally accomplished with his cane -- that creates a circuit of self-directed activity and underscores the connection between leisure, autonomy and the maintenance of selfhood.

When the line stops for the workers' lunch break, Chaplin lurches along the line keeping pace with the slowing machine, as if he were its last part. He continues off the end of the line when the machine grinds to a halt, tightening the skirt buttons of the secretary who has bent over to pick something up. This is the first sign of a more extreme transference that will soon take place. Chaplin extends the earlier gag, twitching as he lurches away from the assembly line, although the tic has taken on a slightly different quality. Chaplin contracts the muscles of the shoulders and upper back, with his arms flexed and carried at waist height, in spasms that produce a flapping motion that contrasts wildly with his stiff, straight spine. The effect is comical because Chaplin's movements simultaneously dramatize the mutinous alignment of his arms and shoulders with the machine and commit him to a kind of chicken dance. Still flapping, Chaplin tries to hand a coworker a bowl of soup. It is a microscopic instance of the comportment of human civility, but even this freedom is denied to Chaplin because the persistence of his spastic chicken dance causes him to douse the coworker with soup. According to Miriam Hansen, whatever radical functions Chaplin's early films had for immigrant working-class spectators was due to "their anarchic protest (long before *Modern Times*) against the regimentation of the industrial-capitalist workplace, the discipline of the clock, and the conveyor belt, through a subversive mimicry of processes of reification and

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[181] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 17.

alienation."[182] Chaplin is never a good worker in his films, but no Chaplin film relates the abstract processes of reification and alienation more concretely to the regulation of workers' gestures. To my knowledge, this is also the *only* film in which Chaplin works in a factory (twice!) or explores the comedic potential of a conveyor belt.

In the afternoon, a reprise of the morning's comedic business on the assembly line sends Chaplin into the guts of the inscrutable machine. Inside is a kind of mechanical digestive system, but the surreal flatness of the set and Chaplin's serene passage through the giant gears, as if gliding underwater, gives the sequence a fairytale quality. The difference in Chaplin before and after his journey through the machine is accentuated by an abrupt shift in the film score (also composed by Chaplin). Chaplin's work on the production line is accompanied by the tittering of woodwinds as a tinny muted trumpet spits out a brisk and repetitive rhythm and violins frantically ascend the scale to its shrillest peaks. When Chaplin sneezes, falling out of step with the machine and fraying his last nerve, a xylophone steps in to add even more pressure to an arrangement that is already the aural equivalent of a game of Jenga, and the strings switch to sawing away at a single high note. A cymbal clashes at the exact moment that the camera cuts to Chaplin in the machine, and the music turns into an ethereal, meandering arpeggio on a glockenspiel. Once the workers succeed in reversing the direction of the conveyor belt to rescue him, Chaplin emerges from the machine in a posture of glamorous repose, with his right arm held aloft behind his head. The assaultive Satie-esque incidental music is replaced by a balletic *danse* that accentuates the change in Chaplin's motor-intentionality. The reprise of the morning's business, and the change in music and Chaplin's gestural regime allow Chaplin to tease apart two dimensions of zaniness.

Once out of the machine, Chaplin rolls onto his hip, arms extended, and performs an ornamental flourish of the wrist with his wrenches to signal the transposition of his whole body and its objects into another register of intelligibility. He tightens his coworker's nipples and nose with the wrenches and an impish smile, then steps lightly down the line tightening the bolts of the widgets on the stilled assembly line. Chaplin is on the wrong side of the line. He tightens the noses of two other coworkers who come to scold him. His movements are extravagantly non-utilitarian. His spine is loose and erect, rather than bent rigidly to direct his

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[182] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 76.

face toward a spot on the assembly line. His arms have no fixed address, floating up and away from Chaplin's body and refusing to take any grammatical or material object beyond their own explorations of rhythm and form. Chaplin executes turns and pirouettes in a light, free, and sustained flow that contrasts markedly his regimented work routine and with the heavy, disorganized slashing motions of coworkers who either continue to work on the assembly line, or make gestures of reproach at Chaplin. The change in Chaplin's gestural style corresponds to a change in the objects toward which he turns.

2 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. Modern Times. *Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1936.*

As Felicia McCarren suggests, two core concepts of Taylorism, group coordination and "the essential gesture, calculated to help the worker work at his 'best speed' […] both depended on a kind of anonymity, with the worker's body being subsumed by the rhythm of his own gesture and that of the group, and the effect of both was an erasure of individual identity."[183] McCarren argues that group coordination and the reduction of gestural excess contributed to an "economy of gesture" central to a range of avant-garde modernisms.[184] While much of the cultural elaboration of this gestural economy celebrated the positive potentials of rationality and progress, dancing also staged resistance to such modernization, erasure, and exploitation of individual bodies and insisted on the reality of real bodies giving

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[183] Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 129.
[184] Ibid., 11.

in to time, weight, and loss of energy."[185] While Chaplin's transformation in the machine inclines me to see the first half of the factory sequence as a prologue to dance, from McCarren's point of view, it might be read as a different kind of dance. The coordination of the workers of the assembly line renders them members of an unsmiling chorus line. Chaplin's performance, especially his failure to match the tempo of his coworkers, reveals that he is physically and temperamentally incapable of incorporating the essential gestures or subordinating his individuality to the rationality of work discipline on the line. As suggested by the "economy" of work-science, Chaplin's success as a labourer depends on his capacity to apply himself to externally imposed rhythms of production. After his transformation, however, Chaplin becomes the agent of a different kind of dance that "is directly opposite to our action in the world of economy of gesture." In his new state, "only fatigue stops dance, which goes on like a dream – making it possible to consider dance as a *vie intérieure* – giving to this psychological term a physiological weight."[186] Following his change of perspective, Chaplin's style of inhabiting space is ornamental, insofar as his postures and flourishes compose his body as an object for visual consumption, but his traversals of space extend his bodily horizon toward others with whom he would occupy space. In this sense, Chaplin's transformation in the machine reconfigures him into the kind of subject that moves along the direction of desire.

We could see Chaplin's application of his wrench to his coworkers as an attempt to produce a similar adjustment in them. Chaplin, however, gives us a more direct demonstration of his new law in a short series of gags directed at the secretary. The sight of the secretary turns Chaplin into a dog, and his wrenches become ears, temporarily interrupting his dance. He chases her onto the street in a hunched, stiff-legged waddle to tighten the buttons on her skirt, but is distracted by the bolts on a fire hydrant, allowing the secretary to escape indoors. Just then, a matronly woman with the same octagonal buttons, only on the front of her dress rather than the back, happens to walk by. Chaplin notices her and ceases work on the fire hydrant. Sensing danger, the woman beats a hasty retreat back the way she came, but Chaplin chases after her until he is confronted by the sight of a police officer. Like the *objet petit a* in Lacanian psychoanalysis, bolts, buttons, nipples, and noses

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[185] Ibid., 20.
[186] Ibid., 147.

are all suitable targets, and sufficient causes, for Chaplin's desire to tighten irrespective of their location, simply because they share an unspecified *something* that makes them amenable to the application of wrenches in the il-logic of slapstick comedy. According to Clayton, in this scene Chaplin's "instinct to tighten bolts becomes a fixation;"[187] however, the *lack* of fixity in the identity or address of bolt-like objects is precisely what distinguishes this sequence from Chaplin's gags on the morning's work. It would be more accurate to say that the objects of Chaplin's "instinct," which is acquired by force of habit in any case, have been decoupled from their symbolic and functional identities. Chaplin's desire to tighten has become mobile, and it produces a new mobility in him by turning him in unexpected directions.

Back in the factory Chaplin gets hold of the giant lever that controls the speed of the assembly line and uses it to perform a burlesque on the labour of the assembly line operator, a hunky worker who appears shirtless, despite the fact that his job responsibilities seem to consist solely of pulling levers at the control panel -- he even has time to sit on a stool and read a magazine. Chaplin throws the lever with his whole body, assuming a balletic *attitude derriere*. This foolishness results in an explosion. While the assembly line operator struggles to control the disaster, Chaplin finds an oilcan with an improbably long spout. Chaplin squirts the assembly line operator with the oilcan as he attempts to put the control panel to rights, then skips off to harass the men on the assembly line. One of the workers pulls the brake on the assembly line so they can sort Chaplin out, but Chaplin cannily disengages the brake to send the workers clambering back to their positions. Having reordered the workers at their stations, Chaplin is free to resume his dance. He skips down the wrong side of the assembly line squirting the men in the face with oil. Clayton explains that Chaplin's "treatment of other bodies as machines here, exemplified further by the way he cheekily squirts his colleagues with an oilcan, satirizes the manner in which they are already treated by the factory management as mere parts of a larger machine."[188] This certainly captures one facet of the gag, but Clayton's reading elides the sexual frisson in the scene itself, and the carryover of Chaplin's perverse desire in the sequence of gags with the wrench. If anything,

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[187] Alex Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick* (Jefferson NC: Mcfarland and Company, 2007), 102.
[188] Ibid.

Chaplin's change of props heightens the euphemistic work of the previous scene.

3 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. Modern Times. *Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1936*

At some point in Chaplin's blithe and undignified ballet, someone offscreen called a doctor, who arrives only after Chaplin has had time to assault everyone on the factory floor. An intertitle diagnoses the incident as a "nervous breakdown," but, in truth, even if the factory setting is novel, Chaplin's comportment here is entirely consistent with his filmography in general, giving the pronouncement the quality of a summative analysis of all of Chaplin's screen personas. The doctor's advice is to "take it easy and avoid excitement," but Chaplin the director makes it clear that the advice is impossible to enact by following Chaplin's release from the sanitarium with a montage of off-kilter street scenes and industrial labour.

The factory sequence and its montage epilogue invites a reading through the Benjaminian lens of shock, or Simmel's related analysis of urban life as an assault on the nervous energies and integrity of the modern subject; however, the physical and psychic demands of Chaplin's job at the factory lead neither to anaesthetization nor a *blasé* attitude. Instead, Chaplin's passage through the machine visualizes a "nervous breakdown," in the parlance of the film. This concept is closely allied to the medical aetiology of "weakness" in men. According to George Beard, an American doctor writing in the early twentieth century, excessive stimulation led to a variety of sexual debilities and could make some men hysterical. *In extremis*, this debility, "neuraesthenia" in Beard's terminology, could result in

a man's literal emasculation.[189] Popular sources of information about sexuality, such as the books by Dr. Fauconney, which circulated in English from 1920 to 1950, were basically continuous with this view, despite varying in their specifics.[190] In Chaplin's performance, dance is the medium *par excellence* to figure a dialectical relationship between the subordination of individuality and human motor-intentionality to the rhythms of machines in the productivist ethos and the repudiation of categorical coherence along with coordination. Deployed as a counterpoint to economic rationality, there is little option for Chaplin the dancer but to embrace madness. McCarren argues that "as the choice not to speak, dance aligns itself with what Freud calls the 'symptomatic act' – the production of meaning on the body that is part of the process of 'hysterical conversion.'"[191]

In light of its description as "an aesthetic of action pushed to physically strenuous extremes (and an aesthetic of an intensely willing and desiring subjectivity)," and one that elicits distinctly ambivalent responses in observers, it seems as if "neuraesthenia" marks the discovery of zaniness by medical science.[192] If, as Fauconney claimed, it was men "who lacked even the energy to track down women of the streets who finally turned for sexual satisfaction to other males" exhausted zanies, like Chaplin's character in the factory sequence, were at particular risk of deviation.[193] On the other hand, being a fairy implicated men in yet another theatre of zany relations with a parallel economy of affective labour. Moreover, according to Fauconney, "sexual excesses were a cause rather than an effect of perversions," as if the labour of producing desire in normal men also produced a kink in the line of fairies' lives.[194] Thus, critics of the logic of industrial capitalism shared common ground with enemies of vice in articulating a critique of the city as a place where excessive and non-instrumental desires deform the character and lead to degeneracy. In other words, both camps shared an investment in the lines that defined men's lives: the efficient line of economic production and the straight line of descent.

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[189] Angus McLaren, (*The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 141-142.
[190] Ibid., 148.
[191] McCarren, *Dancing Machines*, 42.
[192] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 184.
[193] McLaren, *Trials of Masculinity*, 148.
[194] Ibid., 152.

3.2 Choreographies: Boxing and Dancing as Counterpoint

Roughhousing is so common in slapstick comedy of the teens and twenties as to be largely unremarkable. In Chaplin's short films, rump-kicking and wild haymakers are practically mandatory, and films without martial antics are definitely the exception. "As an effort to parry the incessant challenges of others, [zaniness] lends itself to the stylization of social conflict and war," so it is no surprise Chaplin made frequent use of physical conflict as part of his comedic outlook.[195] Certain of Chaplin's films, however, afford combat, especially boxing, a place of prominence by enlisting it as a counterpoint to dancing. In doing so, Chaplin exposes masculinity as a contest that is zany both in its elaborate choreographies and in its somatic compatibility with its presumptive opposite.

Although Chaplin stages the conjunction between combat and dancing in *Tango Tangles,[196]* the connection is only weakly elaborated, and largely incidental. In the film, Chaplin is a tipsy dancer at a dancehall. The film is unusual in that Chaplin's character is drunk from his first appearance to the closing credits, likely reflecting the scenario and direction provided by Mack Sennet. Chaplin and the leader of the band (Ford Sterling) are competing for the attention of the hat-check woman. Inevitably, the romantic competition leads to a fistfight. Chaplin socks the band leader, knocking him senseless, and the band leader returns in kind. As Chaplin reels, the band leader makes a show of getting ready to continue the fight. Both the exaggerated strutting and the circular, careening motion of Chaplin and the band leader's symmetrical reeling emphasize the specular quality of combat. When Chaplin and the band leader are finally ready to move beyond posturing, the band leader takes off his jacket, flips up his waistcoat to tighten his belt, then grabs Chaplin by the head and kisses him on the mouth! The diegetic glide from fisticuffs to dancing to homosexual shenanigans is so direct and abrupt that it is hard to make heads or tails of the direction of the film. The brevity and unmotivated quality of this comedic beat also makes it difficult to discern what specifically is funny about it, aside from the sheer gall and incongruity of the spectacle. Chaplin and the band leader get into another fight after another rival, the clarinetist from the band (Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle) band member runs the band leader offstage. This time, both the band leader and Chaplin immediately strip down to

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195 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 185.
196 Chaplin, Charles. *Tango Tangles*. Film. Directed by Mack Sennett. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.

shirtsleeves, again making an elaborate spectacle of preparing to fight. Chaplin assumes an eccentric contrapposto position with his back to the camera. With no explanation and no fuss, the band leader fondles Chaplin's proffered buttocks before kicking him in the rump. As the fight continues, Chaplin cautiously backs into the band leader to avoid being hit in the face, and stomps on his food. Although Chaplin makes no attempt to integrate dance into his performance, his billing and the setting put combat and dance into the orbit of queerness.

4 Screenshot: Chaplin, Charles. Tango Tangles. *Directed by Mack Sennett. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.*

Chaplin revisits this comedic triangulation of combat, dance, and romance twice in his *Burlesque on Carmen*.[197] This time Chaplin, as "Darn Hosiery," and a rival officer (Leo White, uncredited) are competing for the attention of an alluring and wiley Gypsy woman who is wooing Chaplin to help her lover and his gang of smugglers avoid detection by the guards. At the tavern where the majority of the film's action unfolds, Chaplin attempts unsuccessfully to hoist the Gypsy woman onto a table to dance. The Gypsy's burly lover easily succeeds where Chaplin failed. The Gypsy dances as part of her effort to seduce and control Chaplin. Overall, the ploy is successful, but the Gypsy accidentally steps on Chaplin's hand, interrupting Chaplin's fascinated attention and inspiring him to reprise the dance as an assault on both the Gypsy's lover and Leo White's officer. Chaplin's take on the Gypsy dance is frenetic and disorganized, and he uses it as an opportunity to dispatch rival

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[197] Chaplin, Charles. *Burlesque on Carmen*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin and Leo White. Chicago Essanay, 1915.

suitors with sly, rhythmic kicks. Later on, the tension between Chaplin and White results in a direct confrontation. The duel between Chaplin and White drags on for an improbably long time. To accentuate the duration of the fight, the film dramatizes a parallel struggle between the smugglers, who are using their bodies to barricade the doors to the courtyard where the main diegetic action unfolds, and officers of the guard who are trying to push the door in. The camera cuts between Chaplin and White's duel and the barricaded door, which oscillates ever more wildly. Coming off its hinges altogether, the door is suspended between the officers and the smugglers. By this time, the duel has given way to wrestling. During the debacle, the ostensible reason for the duel, the Gypsy woman slips away unnoticed through a window. Chaplin and White's shared ineptitude and lack of conviction as wrestlers is heightened by the blatant unreality of the struggle over the door, temporarily focalizing Chaplin's burlesque intentions on conflict between men as the basis of romantic fantasy.

Chaplin plays a small role as a referee at a fight between Fatty Arbuckle and Edgar Kennedy (as "Cyclone" Flynn) in *The Knockout*.[198] In that role, Chaplin displays the agility of an accomplished acrobat, passing between the contenders over and over with varying degrees of personal injury, but his performance lacks the choreographic quality he develops in his later boxing sequences. Chaplin's clearest comedic interpretation of boxing and dance comes in *The Champion*[199] and is substantially reiterated in *City Lights*.[200] In *The Champion*, Chaplin as the Tramp signs up to be a sparring partner at Spike Dugan's (Ernest Van Pelt) boxing gym. The ticket to the Tramp's success is a lucky horseshoe he finds on the ground outside the gym. When he finds it, Chaplin performs a short ritual: he kisses the horseshoe, touches his mouth and anoints his shoe with a finger, and turns around twice. When Chaplin revisits the boxing motif in *City Lights* he attributes a similar series of magical gestures to a superstitious boxer played by Victor Alexander, and uses it to thematize a contagious failure transmitted through mimesis. In *The Champion*, however, Chaplin carries the horseshoe as a good luck charm -- in his boxing glove. Chaplin's magically potent right hook runs Spike Dugan off for good, allowing Chaplin to take on Bob Uppercut (Bud Jamison, uncredited) for the Championship. Although much of the film's comedic business takes place in the gym

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[198] Sennett, Mack. *The Knockout*. Film. Directed by Mack Sennett. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.

[199] Chaplin, Charles. *The Champion*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Chicago: Essanay, 1915.

[200] Chaplin, Charles. *City Lights*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1931.

alongside Chaplin's efforts to prepare for the match, nothing in the film prepares the audience to believe that Chaplin's skill, strength or luck will be enough to carry him to victory against Bob Uppercut. Likewise, in *City Lights*, Chaplin's victory is initially assured by the agreement he makes with his intended opponent. When the opponent runs off, however, and the magical charm demonstrated by the superstitious boxer turns out to be a sham, any chance of victory vanishes and serious bodily harm seems inevitable.

In the second round of the match between Chaplin and Bob Uppercut, Chaplin assumes the same exaggerated attitude of contrapposto solicitation he struck in *Tango Tangles*. Where the posture was weirdly out of place in *Tango Tangles*, here it makes sense as a comedic exaggeration of the stilted poses adopted by combatants in illustrations and staged photos of boxing around the turn of the century. Unlike Chaplin's character, Bob Uppercut is a real boxer, and he does not take the bait. Chaplin and Uppercut air-box menacingly in one another's direction until Uppercut lunges for Chaplin, ensnaring him in a clearly illegal bearhug. The pair teeter between upright wrestling and an intimate dance until Uppercut lifts Chaplin clean off his feet and twirls him around. When both of the combatants have been knocked silly later on, they embrace again and resume the dance that initiated the fight, but this time as a sprightly waltz. Chaplin's fight against Hank Mann's unnamed boxer in *City Lights* elaborates and extends the basic pattern set by *The Champion* to give fuller expression to its sexual frisson. While both sequences take place under the auspices of a heterosexual love story, with the trainer's daughter in *The Champion* and with a blind flower vendor in *City Lights*, Chaplin emphasizes the queerness of his take on boxing in *City Lights* by prefacing his boxing gag in *City Lights* with a behind the scenes gag with Hank Mann. In the gag, Chaplin attempts to ingratiate himself to Mann before the match, but Mann mis-recognizes Chaplin's fixed attention as flirtation. Mann's error is understandable, since the intensity of Chaplin's desire to endear himself to Mann and his anxiety about the upcoming match combine to twist Chaplin in on himself like a knot. Chaplin clasps his hands in front of his chest with his arms hyperextended at the elbow and his shoulders thrust forward, creating series of postures and grimaces identical to signature instances of flirtation in Chaplin's corpus. Mann is so unnerved that he changes into his boxing shorts behind a curtain. Harness

treats this instance of comedic double-perspective or gestural double-entendre as one of the few examples of homosexual flirtation in Chaplin's filmography.[201]

5 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. City Lights. *Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 193.*

Once they are in the ring, Chaplin attunes the audience to gesture as the vector for his attack on the seriousness of boxing by committing a category error. When the boxers are supposed to bump fists, Chaplin instead takes his opponent's glove in both hands and shakes it warmly, before introducing himself and shaking hands with Mann's attendants. As the match begins, Chaplin ducks behind the referee, keeping stride with him back and forth and step-by-step as his opponent attempts to move Chaplin into position for a beating. The unusual arrangement moves Chaplin's perplexed opponent to tap the referee on the shoulder, breaking the usual choreography of boxing. Chaplin seizes this opportunity to deliver a quick jab at Mann before resuming his place behind the referee. After a few more bars of this dance, Mann appeals to the referee again and Chaplin punches him in the face. As Mann winds up, Chaplin dives in and ensnares him in a bearhug. The referee is forced to separate the boxers, giving Chaplin an opportunity to resume mirroring him. After the second repetition of the bearhug-separation-mirroring sequence, the referee is alerted to his role in the unfolding farce and he wisely gets out of the way. Chaplin's opponent is so bewildered by this point that he and Chaplin continue to sway and step left and right for several seconds

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[201] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 143.

even after the referee is gone. As Mann realizes that he and Chaplin are doing the polka (badly), Chaplin socks him. In the second round, the choreography becomes even more complex, with the boxers and the referee weaving between each other and switching places in time with the incidental music, spatially and functionally, leading to a zany role confusion in which Chaplin has to separate Mann and the referee.

Chaplin's nimble manipulation of dancing and boxing as modes of behaviour that can only be distinguished as competing choreographies takes on a special resonance in the context of the challenges to American masculinity described by Michael Kimmel. As discussed above, the closure of the frontier and a secular trend among middle-class men toward white-collar work in larger organizations deprived men of the fantasmatic coordinates of masculinity available to earlier generations of men, giving rise to anxieties about over-civilisation and the feminization of men. Recreational participation in sport and spectatorship provided one avenue men could assert a connection with the ideals of physically vigorous gallantry embodied by civil war heroes and frontiersmen. Kimmel reports that "by the 1870s, the idea of 'inner strength' was replaced by a doctrine of physicality and the body."[202] The connection between physicality and masculine comportment has enjoyed an unbroken currency since that time. As Gaylyn Studlar puts it, "to offset the lack of traditional masculine validation in the workplace, muscularity achieved through athletic leisure activities became the means for asserting a middle-class manly ideal."[203] Boxing provided an ideal venue for a critical assessment and comparison of masculinity as masculine accomplishment became increasingly difficult to figure in the spaces of everyday life. As such, it was also an irresistible target for comedy.

Miriam Hansen uses the example of women's attendance at films featuring boxing to exemplify the way in which cinema extended their participation into zones of social conduct that traditionally excluded them. In addition to opening boxing to audiences marked by a different relationship to masculine contest, however, the practice of staging boxing as a specifically pro-filmic event also opens it to modes of optical engagement that are diametrically opposed to its intended seriousness, irrespective of spectators' categorical

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[202] Michael S. Kimmel, (*Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996), 120.
[203] Gaylyn Studlar, "Valentino, 'Optic Intoxication,' and Dance Madness," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge Press, 1993), 34.

identities. In particular, representations of boxing promote a fetishistic optical engagement with men's bodies that bring it into disquieting proximity with dance.

Given the centrality of dance to some of Chaplin's most memorable comedic business in addition to the boxing gags described so far, including numerous instances of social dance in his short films, the rollerskating scenes in *The Rink*[204] and *Modern Times*, and the famous singing waiter scene also in *Modern Times*, the lack of scholarly attention to Chaplin as a dancer is surprising. Paul Franklin suggests this neglect stems from the fact that Chaplin never positioned himself in terms of high-status dance venues and traditions, and because he primarily dances to provoke laughter. "On the other hand," Franklin concedes, "scholars may be resistant to the idea of the Tramp as a dancer precisely because it calls into question Chaplin's masculine potency."[205] Chaplin's contemporaries, on the other hand, recognized a close association between Chaplin and dancing by naming numerous dances and songs after his distinctive movements. As Franklin reports, "the American National Association Masters of Dancing officially recognized a new dance called the 'Charley Chaplin Waltz'" in 1916; and in 1915, both the stage revue *Watch Your Step* and the Ziegfeld Follies included numbers indebted to Chaplin.[206] Songs with titles such as, "The Chaplin Waddle," " The Charlie Strut," "The Chaplin Wiggle," "The Charlie Chaplin Glide," "The Charlie Chaplin - March Grotesque" and "Charlot One-step" all invite listeners to validate an intuitive appreciation for Chaplin's genius for movement intimately through mimetic incorporation.[207] The fact that popular acknowledgement of the connection between Chaplin and dance was located firmly in the terrain of fun or silliness reflects a certain ambiguity with respect to the rhetorical valence of the imitations it inspired. On one hand, Chaplin's highly tuned motor-intentionality and comedic timing were the basis of his celebrity and onscreen victories, while on the other hand, the emplotment of Chaplin's demonstrations of physical élan located his gift as a capacity that belonged to him only by virtue of his social, economic and aesthetic failure. Franklin quotes a 1912 book by J.E. Crawford, *Modern Dancing and Dancers*, to substantiate the suspicion leveled at dancing men in the early twentieth century: "the dance,

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[204] Chaplin, Charles. *The Rink*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Lone Star: Hollywood, 1916.

[205] Paul B. Franklin, "The Terpsichorean Tramp: Unmanly Movement in the Early Films of Charlie Chaplin," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 36.

[206] Ibid., 56.

[207] Ibid., 57.

in any other sense than that of a ball-room accomplishment, is generally regarded as unsuited to the masculine character. How often has not one heard the remark that it is unpleasing to see a man dancer. And a man himself would as a rule rather be caught in the act of stealing than of dancing alone or with his fellows."[208] Franklin argues that simply by dancing outside narrowly conceived zones of exception, the Tramp drew together "a constellation of discursive and somatic signs" in order to articulate his queerness.[209] The queerness Franklin refers to here is not the exposition of a molar homosexual identity, so much as the deformation of the expected forms of gendered conduct in favor of an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning."[210]

In *The Rink*, Chaplin plays the part of a waiter inconvenienced by restaurant patrons' demands for service and a humorless maitre d'. We soon learn that there is more going on among the patrons than a casual weekday lunch. Henry Bergman and Eric Campbell, Mrs. and Mr. Stout respectively, are both on the prowl. Mrs. Stout wastes no time striking up a flirtatious conversation with James T. Kelley, playing the role of Edna Purviance's father. While Mrs. Stout enjoys lunch, Mr. Stout takes an immediate liking to Edna Purviance at the roller-skating rink nearby. Meanwhile, Chaplin is embroiled in conflicts with both the kitchen staff and the Maitre d'. When Chaplin breaks for lunch, we discover that he is also a roller-skating enthusiast. As the scene opens on the roller-skating rink, the camera shows two men falling over each other in the foreground while couples and single people warily skate by. Evidently, pratfalls are the norm here. After a few initial wobbles, Chaplin finds his skating legs. He executes a graceful turn and strikes a pose as he rolls onto the rink. While other skaters roll by with stiff, vertical spines and tense arms, Chaplin *careens* in spacious, sweeping arcs and effortless turns. He is so at ease, that he keeps one hand nonchalantly in his pocket and busies the other with swinging his spindly cane like a propeller. The other skaters move in the same direction, following the perimeter of the rink counter-clockwise. Chaplin, on the other hand, circles gamely through the crowd, unconcerned as it thins one-by-one until only he and Mr. Stout are left on the rink. Here, as elsewhere, it is Chaplin's attitude toward space and movement, which is aesthetic both because of its orientation toward purely sensory experience and because of its non-utilitarian self-sufficiency, that

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[208] Ibid., 60.
[209] Ibid., 37.
[210] Ibid.

allows him to pass through the grid imposed by the conventions of masculine comportment and the physical regulation of the space by the coordinated movement of other bodies.

Despite all the space, Mr. Stout's clumsiness on skates eventually causes a collision. Like Chaplin, Mr. Stout departs from the pattern set by the other skaters. His deviation, however, is the result of his lack of physical coordination and his hound-like orientation toward Edna Purviance. When Mr. Stout fails to get out of the way, Chaplin skates right into him on one foot, with the other leg extended in front at the height of the fullest part of Mr. Stout's round belly. They both fall down, but Chaplin is back on his feet a moment later. Rather than stage yet another scene of knockabout with a longtime film counterpart, Chaplin retreats, skating backwards and precipitates a fight between two other patrons. He quickly ducks out of the fray by taking a seat in the chairs around the perimeter. At this point, Edna Purviance totters in his direction to steady herself against the railing. She ends up hanging from Chaplin instead. Chaplin skates with Purviance, later posing as Sir Cedric Seltzer, COD. Seeing Chaplin and Purviance swoop around the rink together is too great a provocation for Mr. Stout to brush off, and he skates after Chaplin, who displays not a whit of concern or contrition. When Chaplin can no longer avoid confrontation, his remarkable, if unmanly, skating skills save him from annihilation by the much larger man. Mr. Stout throws a haymaker, which Chaplin easily avoids, skating under Campbell's arm and twice around his circumference. Things look bad for the diminutive waiter when Mr. Stout grabs him by the collar, but Chaplin is able to turn the tables by transforming Mr. Stout into a dancing partner. Finally, Chaplin interposes his cane between himself and his aggressor and puns on the frictionless environment of the rink by using the cane to keep himself just out of reach as he skates Campbell around the rink before hurling him into the adjoining soda shop.

6 Screenshot: Chaplin, Charles. The Rink. *Lone Star: Hollywood, 1916.*

Chaplin seems constitutionally unable to follow a line established by another, but his aesthetic freedom and physical élan turn his lapses, and the excesses of others into opportunities. Purviance, enchanted by his panache and title, invites Chaplin to her skating party to be held in this very location later that day. If the party is anything to go by, Purviance's society is close knit since one word to a friend produces calamity. Although Chaplin has previously met them individually in his capacity as a waiter, excitement about Sir Seltzer's attendance at the party results in the first onscreen meeting of Purviance, her father, Mr. and Mrs. Stout. When they meet at last, the shock of recognition quickly gives way to a deadpan tableau, in which the conflict between the grid of the categorical identities and stations to which they belong and their unconstrained desires leads to physical paralysis. As luck would have it, Sir Seltzer arrives with great fanfare before the comedic impact of the confused and unhappy foursome evaporates completely. The respite of Chaplin's arrival is short-lived, however, because Mr. and Mrs. Stout and Purviance's father immediately recognize Chaplin as the waiter. To make matters worse, each of them knows that Chaplin is aware of their romantic transgressions. To underscore the repetition and amplification of the crisis of recognition, James T. Kelley, Henry Bergman, Eric Campbell, Charlie Chaplin and Edna Purviance stand stalk straight and wide eyed in a row, facing the camera and filling the entire screen from left to right. This unlikely arrangement of bodies renders the mesh of expected relationships which has served as the basis of all the secrecy in the film visible at last. The impact of the undeniably funny shot comes from its effectiveness at literalizing the schematic quality of the matrix of conventional relationships that structures the film. The

cheaters all implore the fraud not to reveal their secret through conspiratorial gestures urging silence, an early example of increasingly prominent jokes Chaplin will make about the formal conditions of silent comedy. One word from Chaplin would collapse this edifice of deceit, but instead, he is able to somersault through the mesh of ridiculous filmic premises.

With Chaplin's silence guaranteed, the party-goers are all fitted with roller skates. The resulting action goes much as expected, but one instant deserves mention because of the light it shines on a bit of comedic business on Chaplin's famous set piece in *City Lights*. After their inevitable fall, Chaplin and Mrs. Stout are attempting to get back on their feet. In the process, Mrs. Stout attempts to pull herself up by grabbing onto Chaplin's coattails. In a close shot, Chaplin falls on top of Mrs. Stout, landing with his bottom square on her face. It would be easy to dismiss euphemistic readings of this admittedly fleeting gesture were it not for Henry Bergman's notoriety for his cross-dressed performances and Chaplin's repetition of the motif with the assistance of a statue in *City Lights* years later. After about half a second, the camera cuts to assume a wider perspective on the scene, introducing a continuity error, in which Chaplin has repositioned himself on Bergman's chest despite the fact that no exegetic time has elapsed. More knockabout leads to a chase scene, in which all the men at the party chase Chaplin around the rink, still on skates, with Mrs. Stout trailing behind. Chaplin's skating skills come to the rescue once again, and he gives his pursuers the slip, sending them flying into a probably unintentional homoerotic pileup in the soda shop offscreen. Mrs. Stout is still in pursuit, however, so Chaplin suavely circles around her to his advantage before redirecting her into the soda shop with a kick, sending the pileup sprawling. The film concludes with a minor variation on Chaplin's trope of wandering into the sunset: he hooks his cane on the bumper of a passing car and is carried away into the light of the setting sun followed by the throng of men on roller skates.

7 Screenshot: Chaplin, Charles. The Rink. *Lone Star: Hollywood, 1916.*

Chaplin's turn on roller skates in *Modern Times* draws on the same aesthetic attitude toward space and bodily movement as he exhibited in *The Rink*, but directs it toward quite different ends. While the Tramp's pirouettes and dodges effected a closure between physical movement and social manoeuvre, in *Modern Times*, Chaplin skates toward more existential concerns. The Tramp is in the fourth-floor toy department on the first night of his new job as a department store security guard. Although the job is ostensibly part of the Tramp and the Gamin's (Paulette Goddard) plan to realize their dream of middle-class respectability, Chaplin's filmic perspective on the department store, revealed through an episodic tour of its various departments, also positions it as a fantasyland of consumer desire. If Chaplin's passage through the fairyland guts of the machine in the factory scene provided a figure for the zany affect of trying or desiring too hard, the department store provides a lens that refracts polymorphous desire into a spectrum of consumer goods. During their frolics in the store, the Tramp and the Gamin decide to try on some roller skates. This is the Gamin's first time on skates, but as we know from watching *The Rink*, the Tramp is an expert. The Tramp gracefully circles the toy department a few times, then skates backwards into a grand gallery; Chaplin blithely skates past a "DANGER" sign (inexplicably turned toward the screen) placed to warn customers that the balcony is missing its balustrade, stopping inches from a four-story drop. The Tramp is so good at roller skating, in fact, that he boastfully blindfolds himself with a handkerchief before exhibiting his skills on the large balcony overlooking the gallery.

As the Gamin finds her balance, the Tramp serenely executes sweeping turns and circles, changing feet and skating on one leg. Setting aside the intuition that you are watching

a man about to die, Chaplin's aesthetic command of space and the assured deftness of his movement in this short sequence is transporting. Having relegated to the background certain objects audience members are likely to see as defining the situation, Chaplin is in his own world. This scene, even more than the factory scene earlier in the film, confirms the comparison of Chaplin to a ballet dancer. Evidently, Chaplin's contemporaries saw the similarity between Chaplin and a ballet dancer, too. The most notable comparison comes from WC Fields, who also played a tramp character in his vaudeville days and was by no means a friend to Chaplin. According to Franklin, Fields "despised [Chaplin's] seemingly obsessive propensity to dance, mainly because of his questionably masculine style," calling him "a goddamned ballet dancer."[211] Apparently, Chaplin's offscreen behaviour also supported this comparison. "The actor was especially fond of impersonating stars of both the Ballet Russe and modern 'art dance.' In a 1916 newspaper article, Mary Pickford recounted a visit she made to Keystone Studios in 1914 during which the comedian, who was on set and in drag, imitated Pavlova so persuasively that Pickford assumed him to be a trained ballerina." Sculptor Clare Sheridan, Ziegfeld Follies dancer Pola Negri, and dancer and translator Louise Brooks, all close female associates of Chaplin, recounted similar episodes.[212] The esteem Chaplin held for ballet dancers was returned by no less a figure than Vasily Nijinsky. After Chaplin attended his first ballet performance, part of the second American tour of the Ballet Russes, Nijinsky visited Chaplin on set to see the filming of *Easy Street*. Romola de Pulszky-Nijinsky, Nijinsky's wife, claimed that the pair "immediately became friends."[213] Chaplin's admiration for ballet and dancers went against a broadly shared sentiment that "men who danced in ballet were an affront to America's pride in its manly, rugged pioneers. It was generally thought male dancers were likely to be deviates."[214] The choice of words is suggestive. American men who chose to dance deviated by allowing their body to trace a different line, instantiating the kind of deviation that counts even when dancing men orient themselves toward a set of approved objects. Ultimately, this fact about the aesthetic orientation of bodies is the only satisfactory explanation for why projects like Ted Shawn's revision of dance through the incorporation of macho subject matter fail to be

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[211] Ibid., 54-55.
[212] Ibid., 61.
[213] Ibid., 53.
[214] Edward Bernays, quoted in Franklin, "The Terpsichorean Tramp," 60.

persuasive. In his own way, then, Chaplin participated in the speculated queerness of "le dieu de la danse" by allowing the gestures and motor-intentionality that distinguished ballet for him to propagate themselves in his comedic repertoire. What the repudiation of dancing as an acceptable activity for men suggests, if nothing else, is that the coherence of gender depends as much on the restriction of a general motor capacity as it does on the accumulation of corporeal experiences and performances. The zany as motor capacity run amok seems capable only of serving as the basis of an *in*coherent and disordered masculinity. In the case of the roller-skating scenes in *The Rink* and *Modern Times*, however, incoherence and disorder are correlates of freedom from restrictive regimes of masculine incorporation.

By the time the Gamin sees that the Tramp is skating on the literal edge of disaster, she is so gripped by fear for the Tramp's safety that she cannot speak. Goddard's silence in this scene is conspicuous, acting as a punning acknowledgement that Chaplin's last (predominantly) silent film comedy came years after synchronized sound became commonplace: Goddard's voice is not just absent, but actually stuck behind the lump in her throat. Just one generation earlier, audiences who attended nickelodeons and other cheap film venues were accustomed to reacting noisily to the action on screen, but by the classic period of Hollywood cinema, audience were expected to sit quietly, so Goddard's reaction can also be seen as a commentary on the pacification of film audiences. The conflict between Goddard's compelling portrayal of apprehension and the metafilmic facet of her pointed silence make for a bizarre experience in which we are transfixed by Chaplin's movement in the fashion of the cinema of attractions but empathize strongly with Chaplin's endangerment in the manner of classical Hollywood narrative.

When she recovers from the initial shock, the Gamin lurches forward to warn Chaplin, teetering as she goes, only too cognizant of the gravity of the situation. Her flailing, fearful attempts to prevent herself from falling are intercut with Chaplin's confidently frictionless gliding, which is still framed by the audience-facing "DANGER" sign. The alternation composes a dialectical relationship between the paralyzing tension of foreknowledge and the absolute freedom of ignorance. The effect is more sublime than comic, and the punchline, in which the Tramp's sudden cognizance of the precarity of his situation almost precipitates the disaster he has narrowly avoided to this point, actually follows the discharge of psychic tension in the scene. The unusual comedic timing in this

scene points to a subtle difference between this scene and more conventional Chaplin business. Chaplin's roller-skating demonstration evokes the complex negativity normally associated with zaniness, but not because Goddard's character fears being drawn into the unfolding disaster. Moreover, Chaplin does not deform the expected forms of roller skating, he excels at them. Chaplin's roller-skating virtuosity allows him to transcend the forms and expectations of ordinary comportment, or it would if only he could permanently free himself from the interference of associates who are rooted in a prudential or pragmatic habitus.

Harness might be committing Chaplin to more than he realizes, then, by his description of the boxing gags as "a lock-step ballet."[215] Harness continues, "it is a dance, as so many of Charlie's most triumphant moments have been -- here the dance is the Tramp's magic dance of survival, supernaturally positioning himself with otherworldly grace out of harm's way, and taking his opponent along with him" (144). So far, so good, but Harness's claim that Chaplin's performance in the boxing ring "creates a dance of stately elegance by way of avoiding annihilation" puts matters exactly backwards. Forced into a gestural regime for which he is uniquely unprepared, Chaplin opts to transform the situation by dancing instead of boxing. The effect is about as far from "stately" as you can get, as keyed by the sprightly tempo of Chaplin's movements and the intense effort and agility required to maintain the alternative disposition of choreographic space Chaplin's dance asserts. The athleticism of Chaplin's performance is not only a result of his own physical virtuosity, which could be seen as grounds for describing the routine as "stately" in a pinch, but the necessity of parrying the overwhelming physical threat posed by a stronger and more experienced opponent. It is this endangering compulsion that gives Chaplin's performance here the seat's-edge quality of zaniness. As Studlar argues, "dancers like Nijinsky, Ted Shawn, and Valentino undercut the foundation of the masculine ideal of this 'cult of the body' since they were obviously muscular and athletic yet, at the same time, they were regarded as 'effeminate' if not 'queer.'"[216] True, Chaplin is a dancer in this scene, but his body is scrawny compared to these icons of dance, a fact that amplifies the comedic impact of his ludicrous and hard-won victory against Hank Mann. The effect of Chaplin's conflation of boxing and dance is a decentering of the masculinity exposed and measured by boxing.

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[215] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 144.
[216] Gaylyn Studlar, "Valentino, 'Optic Intoxication,' and Dance Madness," 34.

Moreover, the change of program leads to the ultimate collapse of the choreography of boxing and disorienting role-confusion in the last moments of the sequence.

I do not want to suggest that Chaplin's authorial intention in his boxing/dancing gags was primarily to subvert the norms underpinning muscular American ego ideals of masculinity, but aligning oneself with his comedic point of view requires one to entertain an attitude that is unavoidably erosive to the seriousness of masculine comportment. Chaplin's gag does not just say: let there be a choreography of boxing and an alternative choreography of dancing! It recognizes that social life is choreographic in general, insofar as it organizes human motor-intentionality for measurement against particular aesthetic programmes and directs the movement of desire along particular lines and toward designated ends. From this point of view, dancing is much more than a ballroom accomplishment. Too much attention to the choreography of social life might make one come off as queer, but the person who goes through life ignorant of the imperative to dance is a fool and likely to end up in harm's way. Chaplin's comedic explorations of dance reveal that discipline seizes bodies through social choreographies, making dance a highly charged channel for the manifestation of the basic freedom of the gesticulating body and a privileged site for zany screen business.

3.3 Drag

Despite its contemporary position as the locus classicus of queer performance, Chaplin's turns in drag do not crystallize into a frontal assault on the norms of masculine deportment. Instead, drag provides another avenue for the expansion of Chaplin's comedic attitude toward masculinity and heterosexuality as social accomplishments carried off through the manipulation and presentation of the body. Chaplin's approach to drag is unsurprising, given the prevalence of drag acts in Music Hall and other low entertainments for a general audience. As ever, Chaplin's disasters and triumphs come about as a result of his desiring the wrong thing or too much of the correct thing, capably mobilizing the ambivalent negativity characteristic of zaniness. The energy of Chaplin's understandable, if excessive, desires forces his body to assume unexpected lines and follow unconventional paths, deviating from the norm to produce effects or approach objects that would remain out of reach if he were to keep in line with the performance expectations of masculinity.

In *The Masquerader* Chaplin is an actor in a screen melodrama. His role requires him to perform the daring rescue of an infant just before a dastardly villain skewers the poor babe in its crib. Chaplin misses his cue because he is distracted by two flirtatious actresses. When he finally arrives on scene, he trounces the ne'er-do-well with the baby doll. The director gives Chaplin another chance, but Chaplin chooses another unconventional tack: he tickles the baddy in order to disarm him. Chaplin is fired and chased off the lot. He returns the next day costumed as a glamorous starlet, complete with a hat with an obliging brim and a large muff, extravagances not afforded the other actresses on set. Chaplin's reappearance as a woman reprises the opening scene, described earlier, in which Chaplin applies his signature moustache. Arguably, showcasing the artificiality of Chaplin's moustache, the most conclusive visible sign of his masculinity, works to make the proposition that the other characters are taken in by Chaplin's gender transformation more credible. Taken together, however, the effect of these paired scenes is to render both moments of Chaplin's performance of gender suspect, after all.

8 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. The Masquerader. Los Angeles: Keystone, 1914.

The mysterious woman immediately catches the interest of the actors and the ire of the actresses on the lot. The director takes a particular liking to Chaplin. In the director's private office, Chaplin fends off the director's flirtations with winsome coyness, smiling and laughing. Although Chaplin's performance of femininity is self-aware, it is not camp, doing no more to strain credulity than any performance by Chaplin's female co-stars. When the director's aggressions get to be too much, Chaplin screams for help. The outburst comes off as a rupture of real affect, but this lapse does not puncture the director's belief in Chaplin's

femininity. The new starlet is given the actors' dressing room, much to their chagrin. In his sole display of chivalry, the director brings Chaplin's suitcase into the dressing room. While the director's back is turned, Chaplin quickly steals a drag off the director's cigarette, turning toward the camera to give the grimace he makes the status of soliloquy. The momentary break plays on both the theatricality of Chaplin's gender inversion and conventions of cinematic spectatorship that aligns the perspective of the camera with that of the audience and privileged access to the truth. As if to drive the point home, this caesura in the narrative flow of the film is followed by a division in the film's organization of space. The director turns around before Chaplin has time to exhale. Chaplin creates a screen in front of her face with her hand and blows the cigarette smoke left, away from the director as she resumes her pretense. The director makes another attempt on Chaplin, chasing her around the dressing table. At first, Chaplin's flight from the director is an unserious scamper, but as she rounds the far corner of the dressing table, Chaplin's movement transforms into a full retreat. The shift in Chaplin's intention is signaled by the way Chaplin navigates the end of the dressing table closest to the screen. In order to turn the corner, Chaplin performs a series of staccato hops on the outside foot, with his other leg and both arms held stiffly away from his body. This bit of classic buffoonery reintroduces Chaplin's bodily hexis as the anchor of his star text and a reassuring proof of the materiality of gender. Chaplin's performance of femininity can create fields of queer affect that divert the lines of desire from their normal ends but doing so requires strenuous work. It is a labor Chaplin's masculine body ultimately cannot sustain, and the film continuously dramatizes the promise/threat of a zany collapse of Chaplin's artificial inversion and the relations it supports. But Chaplin is not ready to let the audience off the hook just yet.

The starlet interrupts the chase by turning her wiles on the director, abruptly reversing the direction of the situation. The reversal of the chase also realizes the affective ambivalences of zaniness spatially. Turning to face the director, Chaplin titters and covers her face modestly with the large muff. The gesture works to return spectators' attention to the flow of the action on screen after the brief meta-filmic irruption of Chaplin's star text. Chaplin ends the scene by "playfully" hurling a hairbrush at the director, another example of weaponized effeminacy, who takes his cue to leave on a high note. The instant the director's back is turned, Chaplin's girlish smile transforms into a sneer, and s/he shakes his/her fist at him. It is impossible to say whether Chaplin is the starlet or himself at this point. The director has certainly earned Chaplin's scorn for his aggressions toward the starlet, but Chaplin's reproach could equally be seen as irritation at having been put to the trouble of adopting the disguise in the first place. Chaplin hangs the muff in the closet and doffs his hat. The wig is stuck in Chaplin's hair, and Chaplin has to tug savagely to get free of it. Decisively his old self again, Chaplin thumbs his nose at the director, who is long gone by this point. The camera cuts to a shot of the director, who is sitting on set waiting for the starlet. Another cut brings us back to the dressing room where Chaplin is half out of the dress he wore as the starlet. He is reapplying his moustache. If the gesture of thumbing his nose at the director was the pivot that brought Chaplin's screen persona back into line with his star text, watching Chaplin apply his moustache renders the full restitution of his masculinity. Nevertheless, we are reminded again that Chaplin's masculinity, as well as his moustache, is *made-up*.

Meanwhile, the actors reappear on set to insist that the director let them back into the dressing room. The director goes with the actors to the dressing room to negotiate with the starlet. Chaplin answers the director through the door, but the director barges into the room for a face-to-face meeting. In a skillful visual evocation of sound, the director's surprise on entering the dressing room signals retrospectively that Chaplin was using a character voice, implying a whole aural dimension to the gender illusion that has unfolded optically until this moment in the film. The director's astonishment when he sees Chaplin, now in his Tramp get up, gives way to a pantomime recapitulating the director's infatuation with the mysterious woman. The director's ardour is communicated by recourse to the stale conventions of stage melodrama. He rises onto the balls of his feet inclining his body unstably, his eyes likewise turned toward heaven, and kisses his fingertips before clasping his hands in front of him and

returning to earth. The director's recourse to histrionic gesticulation is out of step with his performance throughout the film. This incongruity evidently casts the situation in a new light, perhaps alerting the director to his naivety. Suddenly, the question of what has happened to the starlet occurs to the director, and he points at Chaplin, accusing him of some as yet undetermined malfeasance. Chaplin winks and laughs, raising an admonishing finger with a sidelong glance, invoking a gentleman's right to privacy. The dress protruding through the closet door, however, gives form to the director's suspicions. The director tugs Chaplin violently out of the way and throws open the closet door. Finding it empty, the director spins to face Chaplin, his weight supported on his back leg, which is bent such that the director is unbalanced, as if recovering from a blow or preparing to flee. This impression is corroborated by the director's gaping mouth and worried brow. When he turns around, Chaplin is waiting for him, leaning rakishly with his arm on the dressing table mirror and his hand on his hip. Chaplin nods to confirm the director's unspoken suspicion, which the director proceeds to spell out, by pointing at Chaplin deliberately then turning to handle the starlet costume, for the benefit of members of the audience who entered late or slept through the film. The diagrammatic way in which the director exposes and recapitulates the two faces of the comedic situation by turning from Chaplin to the closet underscores the factual unity of space. As a side effect of the director's awareness of the continuity of space as a theatre of human action, the starlet is also reunited with Chaplin's male film actor, and we experience this revelation vicariously as the director's realization that his line of desire has been queered by Chaplin's chicanery. Chaplin closes the film in the usual way: by initiating a brawl that leads to a chase. Nevertheless, Chaplin affords the director poetic justice when Chaplin's character jumps into a fake well to hide, only to discover that it is a real one.

Harness claims that the comedy of *The Masquerader* does not reside in the awkwardness of a slapstick comedian trying to pass in drag (Chaplin has already essayed this in *A Busy Day*), "but in his utter effortlessness in doing so, the seamless, fluid, completely convincing adoption of feminine movement and spirit, of a face which projects delicacy and feminine whimsy [...] and the strange hold he has on the men around him."[217] I agree that the fluidity of Chaplin's shifts in the deportment of masculine and feminine gender comportment are responsible for the film as a site of identificatory pleasure and vicarious experience.

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[217] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 28.

Harness says as much when he writes, "we are in uneasy awe at his ability to erase totally the comforting line of gender division."[218] However, the *comedic* effect of the film is precisely the precarity of Chaplin's performances. This is signalled in the film by the concentration of affect in moments where Chaplin's illusion is interrupted or strained.

Harness's momentary confusion of fascination and comedy is also the reason he judges Chaplin's *A Woman*, made for Essanay the following year, to be a greater success on the same grounds. According to him, Chaplin's "female impersonation here is even more convincing and alluring than his turn in *The Masquerader*."[219] Once again, what is comic here is the laborious *contingency* of Chaplin's gender inversion. The film projects this as the authorial reading of the film in the scene in which Chaplin assumes his feminine disguise. In the shot in which Chaplin decides to adopt a feminine persona, he struggles to get into the ill-fitting clothes, pulling them over his vest and jacket. Stepping into the skirt, Chaplin first struggles to get his oversized shoe through the waist opening. Having succeeded at this hurdle, Chaplin pulls the skirt up as if it were a pair of trousers only to realize the other leg is missing. He turns this way and that to locate the missing pant leg before acknowledging his error with a sheepish shrug directed toward the camera. Chaplin's struggle to dress is intercut with the hysterical brawl between the man of the house, his wife, their daughter and the wife's lover downstairs, constructing an obvious parallel between simultaneous battles of the sexes. This structure also allows the film to elide the real business of getting Chaplin into his feminine costume, giving us humorous tableaus instead. In the final tableau, Chaplin arranges a cushion under his jacket to act as a bosom, picks up a large fur muff (again) to match his stole, adjusts his hair in the mirror (the perspective of the camera), and sashays into the hall. Chaplin's haughty carriage and parting glance at the mirror suggests the assumption of a feminine habitus with vanity as its sign. That Chaplin has forgotten to shave his moustache gives his pleasure in his image a doubled quality permitting both perverse narcissism and role-play as interpretations.

In the hall, Chaplin takes the opportunity to practice feminine deportment. The stiffness of his spine and mechanical lurching of his hips left and right to replicate the ideal grace of a feminine gait are anything but convincing. They are delivered as a travesty and are

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 50.

therefore more grotesque than alluring. Chaplin, of course, is oblivious to the threadbare quality of the illusion. He casually swings his arms outward from the elbow in a "here goes" gesture. The cushion Chaplin has used to pad out his bust falls out the bottom of the jacket, showing that its position was maintained only by the position of his forearms in the muff in front of him. When the daughter walks in on Chaplin in the hall, the slow play of affects ranging from dismay to curiosity, to amusement provides an onscreen figure for the film's own position of enunciation. Chaplin remains in character while the daughter picks at her costume, scolding her with a restrained wag of the finger and a sharp remark. Although the gesture serves more to color the situation than to raise its comedic stakes, the daughter evidently finds it hilarious. Chaplin takes another turn on the runway, adding a signature back kick and backward thrust of the bottom for the daughter's amusement, but the scene fails as comedy because it transmits the detached awareness of Chaplin the director onto his screen double. This drains the comedic potential of the scene because Chaplin's gender illusion is immediately ironized rather than generating anxiety or anticipation for the characters.

The daughter instructs Chaplin to shave and change out of his clownish shoes, and the removal of Chaplin's moustache again provides the pivot for the gender of his screen persona. In the bathroom, the film stages the bizarre spectacle of a woman shaving her face. This is the moment of a genuine transformation in Chaplin's gestural regime, and the change occasions some genuinely comedic confusion. Picking up a mug of shaving soap and a brush, Chaplin works up a lather while ambling toward the camera. He pulls a face of concentration during this ritual, but instead of spreading the lather on his whiskers, he puts the foamy brush in his mouth. Following Chaplin's reaction shot, the camera cuts away, and the film demurs from showing the shaving (the moustache is fake, in any case). Following a shot showing Chaplin descending the stairs after the daughter, the camera cuts to a close-up of Chaplin's face -- rare in Chaplin's filmography as a whole. Chaplin expresses a flash of hesitation about the plan to fool the father, but the true purpose of the shot, with its shallow field-depth, frontal orientation and narrative redundancy, seems to be to display the effectiveness of Chaplin's transformation. *A Woman* provides another glamour shot, this one a three-quarter view close up, of Chaplin as the completion of a shot-reverse shot sequence establishing the mother's lover's amorous attitude toward Chaplin. As Harness puts it, "Both of his foils

become immediately erotically transfixed with him -- he bats his eyes flirtatiously, leading them on, entirely, eerily female in his vivacious sensuousness."[220] This shot provides some justification for Harness's praise for Chaplin's gender inversion in *A Woman* because, whatever one makes of the transformation itself, in this moment, Chaplin fully inhabits the specularity normally reserved for women in Hollywood cinema. If Chaplin temporarily occupies the specular economy of femininity, however, it is only to cite his zany travesty of womanhood more fully in affective realities familiar to the audience. Ngai observes that zany performances "often [seem] to involve the destruction not just of any object but of ones specifically designed for fun, as if in revolt against the compulsory pleasure that defines it."[221] Chaplin's drag routines all seem oriented to draining feminine glamour of its capacity to please men. It is Chaplin's troubling naturalism that makes his deformation of heterosexual femininity so effective as comedy. Making a spectacle of the effort required to sustain the illusion draws the whole business into the orbit of zaniness, lending the illusion an air of instability due to excessive psychic investment. Surely exposition of the work involved in embodying normative feminine subject positions must have appealed to the frustrations of women, but it also participates in a broader deflation of the seriousness of heterosexuality, in general.

9 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. A Woman. *Chicago: Essanay, 1915.*

  Although the scenario is different, Chaplin's byplay with the father and the mother's lover are substantially similar to his characterization of the starlet in *A Masquerader*. If anything, *A Woman* provides even more space for Chaplin to visit violent retribution on his

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[220] Ibid.
[221] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 185.

suitors in response to their flirtation. Chaplin's ultimate revenge on the two men, however, is the prank by which Chaplin tricks the two men into kissing each other on the lips. Writes Harness: "The two men are so charged up by the hot little number that they play along with the sadistic little game Charlie cooks up -- placing his pretty face between them, he orders them to shut their eyes and kiss on the count of three -- at which point he withdraws, enabling the two men to kiss each other on the lips."[222] Here, comedy seems to tip all the way in the favor of sadism, but it's important to remember that the spectacle of two men kissing is mediated by a figure who, for the audience, is another problematic object. The status of Chaplin's projection of femininity in *A Woman* is undercut by Chaplin's physical characterization and comedic business throughout the whole film, even after the fetishizing glamour shots, interposing gender illusionism as the sheerest of covers for the spectacle of same-sex eroticism. Moreover, this gag is the literalizing resolution of the love triangle pertaining between the father and the mother's lover. Apparently, this is the bridge too far even for Chaplin, and the prank quickly gives way to Chaplin's exposure (the father accidentally removed Chaplin's skirt, revealing his male undergarments) and expulsion. According to Harness, the disturbing implications of *A Woman* led to its initial rejection by British censors, and the film was banned in Scandinavia for fifteen years.[223]

10 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. A Woman. *Chicago: Essanay, 1915.*

Chaplin revisits the question of the adequacy of drag as a deflection of same-sex eroticism in his 1916 short for Mutual, *Behind the Screen*, by reversing the polarity of the illusion. Although the title undoubtedly refers to the location of the action of the film on a

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[222] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 50.
[223] Ibid.

film set, a relatively frequent location for slapstick action that allowed comedy films to act as a parodic "actuality," the evocation of screens as the kind of surface that conceals or dissembles rather than reveals suggests an alternate key for interpreting the action. In the film, Edna Purviance dresses as a boy to get a job on a film set. Purviance's dress is the only element of her screen persona that participates in her gender inversion. Her makeup remains unchanged from her initial appearance as a woman, and what initially passes as feminine restraint on the part of her physical characterization now seems like the tentative shyness of a youth attempting to land a new job for which they are wholly unqualified. Purviance clasps his hands loosely in front of his body, shifting his weight anxiously from foot to foot. When he asks the stage manager (Eric Campbell) whether he needs a stagehand, he holds his hands up, close to his body, as if displaying his only qualifications, before quickly returning them to their position at waist height and fidgeting with his fingers with renewed vigor. To my knowledge, Purviance is the only person ever to call Eric Campbell "sir" in a Chaplin picture. Campbell hires Purviance on the spot.

When Chaplin and Purviance first encounter each other, about halfway through the film, Purviance is seated in a three-quarter view of the camera on a roman-style chair in the prop room. Two statues of nude male athletes in a classical style look on from the background. Purviance is playing a guitar. Chaplin shuffles onto the scene with his back to the camera, apparently unaware that he has just walked into a picture that smacks of Wilhelm von Gloeden's photographic perspective on the Orpheus myth. The camera cuts to a close shot of Chaplin leaning on the back of the chair, looking over Purviance's shoulder as he plays the guitar and sings. In marked contrast to Chaplin's immobility and impassive expression, Purviance inclines his head backward while playing and singing to look at Chaplin. Purviance stands up and takes a few quick, short steps into the foreground, then takes a makeup sponge out of his back pocket and blots his face in a series of rapid, expertly performed movements. This gesture elicits a quizzical tilt of the head and a quick appraising glance up and down Purviance's body from Chaplin. He and Purviance exchange looks as Chaplin straightens and places both fists on his hips. He raises his eyebrows, then lowers his head, inclining it toward Purviance, in order to assume the posture of someone in a position of authority questioning an inferior about some minor misdeed. Purviance does not have time to answer the implied question before Chaplin reaches his own conclusions. Chaplin shifts

out of the interrogative attitude by placing his hand back on the chair and executing the series of facial tics he relies on in other films to convey flirtatious interest: smiling broadly and evenly, he performs brief, repeated vertical adventures of the brow. From the moment Chaplin launches his investigation, Purviance has been squirming uncomfortably, standing with his feet together and his legs slightly flexed at the knees and hips while he fidgets with the sponge. Purviance's innocence prevents him from noticing that Chaplin's antics are the exhibition of a recognition that Chaplin is trying to make mutual. Chaplin's knowing looks give way to a loose-jointed approach, as Chaplin draws nearer to Purviance with his hands again on his hips. Circumnavigating the roman chair, Chaplin sidles up to Purviance, then twists his body to face away from him in feigned coyness, raising his hand to his face and glancing over his shoulder. Chaplin leans toward an increasingly baffled Purviance and ostentatiously adjusts his tie with an exaggerated grin and more flirtatious eyebrow waggling, alluding perhaps to folk wisdom about fairies' affinity for flashy neckwear. Purviance's response is inconclusive, so Chaplin repeats the gnomic affectation. Still no response. Chaplin hoists his trousers up snugly against his rear, and struts into the background, swinging his shoulders to and fro. Purviance's misrecognition of Chaplin's purpose here also licenses the film to enunciate a series of gestures meant to constellate into a figure of queer desire that will remain inarticulate despite its corporeal eloquence. None of Chaplin's gestures is conclusive in its own right, but each is drawn into an association of increasing semantic clarity and density.
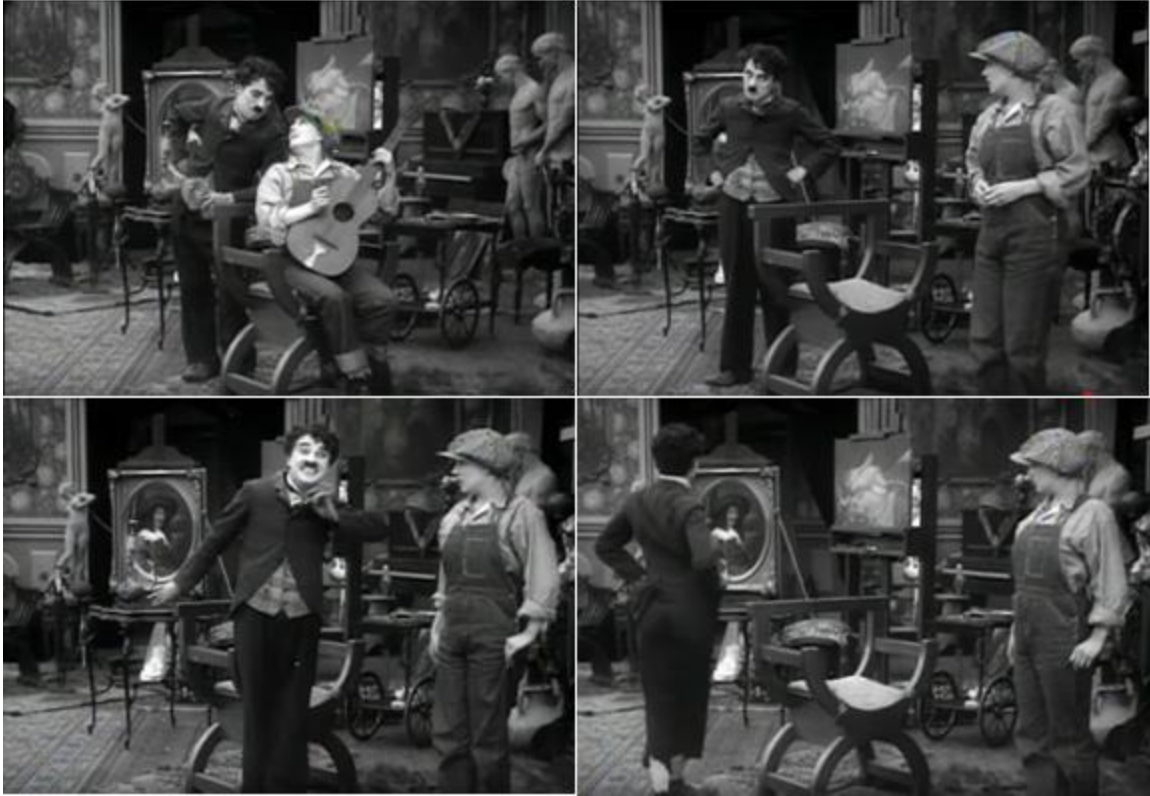
11 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. Behind the Screen. *Hollywood: Lonestar, 1916.*

The arrival on scene of another actor, Henry Bergman, appearing here, against character, in masculine attire, seems to interrupt this impasse of understandings before things get out of hand, but when Bergman bends over to show Chaplin and Purviance the gaping split up the back of his pants, Purviance faints, and Chaplin thinks he knows why. Attempting to revive Purviance, Chaplin takes Purviance's hat off his head and fans him. Naturally, this allows Purviance's hair to tumble over her shoulders, and Chaplin's whole concept of the situation is turned upside down. Chaplin once again adopts the interrogative posture we saw when he erroneously concluded that Purviance was a fairy. His tenure in this posture is longer, and Chaplin explores variations on it by leaning well back on one leg in order to critically assess Purviance once again. The humor of the situation dawns on Chaplin belatedly, and he subsequently agrees to keep Purviance's sex a secret. The extended perception image offered in Chaplin's discovery of Purviance's "true" sex provides an instructional analogy to cinematic reception of screen fairies and sissy roles, such as those that Chaplin himself occasionally passes through in the course of his comedic business. Screen fairies are merely a burlesque on real queer masculinity, a trick of cinematic framing,

but the question of whether this lack of substance is enough to deflect the suspicion that Purviance's illusory masculinity is not *only* an obstacle to Chaplin's affection is left to spectators to adjudicate privately.

The camera cuts to a tight two-shot of Chaplin and Purviance standing close together, as is customary for conspirators and lovers. Chaplin plays on the dual meaning of his proximity to Purviance by stealing a kiss on the lips. Purviance is astonished, but not upset by Chaplin's boldness, and she solicits another kiss, which Chaplin plants on her nose. Continuing to kanoodle, Chaplin and Purviance kiss again on the lips. They kiss several more times, and with increasing ardour as Eric Campbell enters from the background, breaking up the pair. Campbell points directly in Chaplin's face then slaps him across the face, then pivots with his arms held straight out at shoulder level and skips to the back of the room on his toes, turning his hands at the wrist with each hop. Turning around, Campbell initiates the return journey by bringing one finger to his pursed lips before skipping back with his arms in front and performing a swishing motion with his wrists and forearms. Campbell concludes by slapping a perplexed Chaplin again, chucking Purviance under the chin, turning back to Chaplin to give him the "shame on you" gesture, then thrusting his buttocks toward Chaplin and Purviance. Campbell is about to skip off to the right foreground, when Chaplin helps him on the way with a powerful kick. This scene can go no further, so the camera cuts to another location.

12 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. Behind the Screen. *Hollywood: Lonestar, 1916.*

The scene is unusual because it involves both Chaplin and a supporting actor in camping for the camera. Campbell's reprise of Chaplin's campy behaviour essentially offers

a partial reenactment of Chaplin's shift from seeing Purviance as the kind of love object that one approaches sideways and euphemistically to the kind of love object that can be approached directly and explicitly. Purviance's restricted and tentative physicality make her screen persona receptive to Chaplin's changing projections. Campbell initially misjudges the situation in the same way as Chaplin, but the situation has shifted in such a way that Campbell takes Chaplin as contributing to the queerness of the scene. In a sense, Campbell is actually correct, given that Chaplin had already put the moves on Purviance when he discovered that she was a woman. However, the identification of the enunciative position of the film with Chaplin, both as a director and a personality on screen, means that we see Campbell's repetition of Chaplin's error as a point of conflict, not identification. This puts Chaplin in the comfortable position of both disavowing a queer desire, to which he gives a full and compelling figure, and punishing his rival for exhibiting a similar, if more extreme version of the same disavowal.

3.4 Accidental Queerness and the Kinked Line

To this point, my analysis has focused on the ways in which Chaplin's pervasive repudiation of the expected postures and gestures of masculinity has evoked, sometimes powerfully, the spectre of queerness through aestheticism and the figure of the fairy. By orienting his body toward problematic objects, or toward approved objects in ways that deform the performative coherence of masculinity, Chaplin establishes gender comportment as a function of motor-intentionality and as a capacity that is everywhere beholden to social choreographies and regulation on grounds that are essentially aesthetic. Chaplin's unceasing refusal to live up to the strictures of masculine comportment slowly accomplishes a transvaluation of male effeminacy as an emancipatory excess that permits one to dance their way past, through or around a crisis. Stopping here, one could come away with the impression that Chaplin's queer humour is largely the result of a speculative reconstruction of a particular perspective on his films. Certainly, recovering the queer frisson of Chaplin's films requires some conceptual license, but Chaplin was not above taking comedic inspiration from bawdy sources. Most of Chaplin's most direct depictions of queer goings-on were fleeting, providing an opportunistic guffaw between his fully realized set pieces and slapstick gambits. Nevertheless, for people attuned to these moments, Chaplin's interstitial gags are enough to provide a queer coloration to the rest of the film they are in. Moreover,

one of Chaplin's best loved films, *City Lights*, presents an eccentric love triangle involving two men and a woman following two scenes that graphically key knowledgeable audiences to inferring a homosexual coupling in addition to the heterosexual one directly thematized in the film.

Chaplin's queer glimpses, and his more sustained homosexual liaison, are so direct that their critical neglect is somewhat surprising. My research did not include a systematic survey of film reviews. What reviews I read were not promising. Reviews of the films Chaplin made during the 1910s were brief and superficial, by and large, typically offering a synopsis of the scenario or the film's and sometimes an evaluative statement of its quality as comedy. By the time Chaplin made *City Lights*, his status as a sensitive artist of the cinema, and an increasing emphasis on the private lives of stars, openings, and the box office performance of films in film journalism militated against fine-grained analyses of Chaplin's bawdy moments. More recent film critics and scholars are similarly uninterested in Chaplin's more outré moments. In his analysis of *City Lights*, William Paul declares that he is "concerned with reinstating low comedy as Chaplin's greatest achievement, not a mere means by which he arrived at higher ends."[224] He surmises that Chaplin's body humour was a victim of his artistic success. According to Paul, "Chaplin offers the most insistent example of a vulgar artist embraced by high culture." However, "when low culture is embraced by high critics, something inevitably gets repressed."[225] Paul accomplishes a convincing de-repression of the humour of *City Lights*, producing the reading of that film closest to my own. But Paul's de-repression quickly gives way to a sublimation of the eroticism and anxiety that meet in Chaplin's gags about queer flirtation and sex. In his analysis, the anal humour he uncovers proffers the materiality of the body and its appetites as a dialectical complement to Chaplin's high-minded political and spiritual program, ultimately leading to the question, "how can upper and lower body be made whole?"[226] In my view, the effect of Chaplin's comedic evocations of queer eroticism is to give a figure to all the gestures and corporeal signs that are rejected in the course of normative masculine comportment. Laughing at the figure evoked through those forbidden movements simultaneously enacts

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[224] William Paul, "Charles Chaplin and the Annals of Anality," in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, ed. Andrew Horton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 111.
[225] Ibid., 113.
[226] Ibid., 125.

and broadcasts a renunciation of what the figure represents and incorporates its constituent gestures as bad objects to be repeated only under the cover of comedy. As discussed in the introduction, the gradual diffusion of medical models of same-sex attraction meant that men were under increasing pressure in the early decades of the twentieth century to avoid emotional or physical intimacy with other men. In this context, the incorporation of queer gestures as bad objects and comedy could sustain a melancholic connection to a whole category of intimacy that was increasingly problematic on practical and psychological grounds. Irrespective of the reactions of audience members, Chaplin's gags point to a body of public knowledge about the practical reality of queerness and eroticism between men.

13 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. City Lights. *Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1931.*

According to Dale, "the two most extended stretches of homosexual flirtation in Chaplin" are the gag in which Chaplin appears to flirt with Hank Mann before a boxing match (discussed above), and another gag premised on the misinterpretation of a gaze in *The Cure*.[227] As Dale describes it:

> in *The Cure* the drunken Charlie thinks that Eric Campbell's gouty villain is making eyes at him and starts making them back. We know that Campbell is working on Edna, seated behind Charlie, but Chaplin the director cuts from a three-shot to an all-

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[227] Chaplin, Charles. *The Cure*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Lone Star, 1917. Alan Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 41.

male two-shot as if to force us to share his delusion as he, for the only time in the entire movie, kittenishly expresses an interest in another man.[228]

14 Screenshot: Chaplin, Charles. The Cure. *Hollywood: Lone Star, 1917.*

Harness also singles out this moment as a rare instance of queer humour in Chaplin's filmography.[229] Without question, this is a good example of the way Chaplin implies a desire, only to introduce a kink along the line of its trajectory. Chaplin's queer flirtation gags also work as prime instances of burlesque, the comedic technique Deleuze most associates with Chaplin's comedic sensibility as a whole. In Deleuze's system, burlesque is a species of the small form of the action image, in which an action or object that would normally be inconsequential reveals hidden dimensions of a dramatic situation and sets the narrative in motion.[230] According to Deleuze, "the burlesque process itself consists in this: the action is filmed from the angle of the smallest difference from another action [...], but in this way it discloses the enormity of the distance between two situations."[231] Deleuze draws an example from *The Idle Class*,[232] in which Chaplin is seen from behind, apparently racked with sobs after learning that his wife has left him. A moment later, Chaplin turns toward the camera, and we see that he is shaking a cocktail. The gag imputes an erroneous seriousness to Chaplin, only to turn around and mock the audience for forgetting that Chaplin is a comedian. Gags like this one reveal the risk in trusting one's perceptions, which may simply be artifacts of the framing of the situation. In *The Cure*, we are induced to believe that

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[228] , *Comedy is a Man in Trouble*, 41.
[229] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 77.
[230] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1992), 162.
[231] Ibid., 169.
[232] Chaplin, Charles. *The Idle Class*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Charles Chaplin Productions, 1921.

Chaplin has entered into a surprising -- if merely optical -- assignation with his habitual rival, just long enough to register the incongruity of this possibility. However, unlike the example cited by Deleuze, the shift in perspective accomplished here by a change in shot distance does not transform our appreciation of the situation completely. While the camera reveals that Chaplin is *not* the intended object of Eric Campbell's amorous glances, the way we understand Chaplin's turn toward Campbell remains unchanged. Ultimately, the "mistake" belongs to Chaplin, and the audience assumes the position of epistemic privilege that belonged to the director in the example from *The Idle Class*.

Despite their exemplary play on subtleties of framing and manner, Chaplin's flirtatious glances are not even close to the most extended or the most blatant homosexual flirtations in Chaplin, or even in the films mentioned. Earlier in *The Cure*, a sanitarium attendant brings Chaplin to an artesian spring surrounded by benches. The attendant seats Chaplin, then sits down next to a nurse. When the attendant stands to fill a cup with springwater, Chaplin slides into the attendant's spot on the bench to be closer to the nurse. The attendant accidentally sits on Chaplin's lap, before Chaplin corrects him. The attendant extolls the health benefits of the water from the natural spring, but Chaplin is uninterested. He takes the cup only to dump it on the lap of the attendant. The attendant offers him another cup of springwater, soliciting the nurse's confirmation of its salubrious properties. The nurse agrees and cites the muscular development of the gentleman on the other side of Chaplin. The man offers his bicep as evidence, and Chaplin obligingly squeezes it, before turning his attentions back to the nurse. Chaplin squeezes her bicep approvingly as the nurse boasts of her own development. Sensing an opportunity, Chaplin tests the man's thigh and calf - an advance the man takes in good stride. Chaplin returns to the nurse to complete the parallelism established with respect to biceps. His ploy is rebuffed, but the attendant will not take a hint. Chaplin pushes him away with a palm to the face. If Dale's example of the gaze that goes astray involves homosexual desire without contact, the example at the spring involves homosexual contact without desire. Given Chaplin's frequent use of parks and benches as settings for amorous encounters, even the location and furniture of this gag push the scene in an improper direction. On another level, however, this gag is more explicit about the sexual economy of bachelor culture in the early twentieth century. In the context of relations between fairies and trade, as only the most emblematic declension of the libidinal economy

among men before the decisive hegemony of the medical model, queerness does not come down to the perspective one takes on a situation so much as one's practical orientation within it. The overheated proximity of the sanitarium attendant, a male presence that is excessive from the perspective of Chaplin's intentions, is a force that needs to be denied, deflected or deployed. Once Chaplin settles on using the attendant as a prop, the die is cast, and it becomes impossible to separate the attendant-as-tool neatly from Chaplin's ostensibly heterosexual design. Where the gaze-astray proposes queerness as an interruption in the line of heterosexual desire, which is a straight line of sight, the gag on the bench orchestrates queerness as the instrumental, substitutive outcome of a blocked or deflected desire, and acknowledges same-sex intimacy as a bare fact independent of the status it is accorded by participants.[233]

3.5 *City Lights*

The intention of the foregoing catalogue of queer moments is to demonstrate that, whatever one might want to say about the sociological insight and genuine emotional force of Chaplin's films, his comedic sensibility remains rooted in a slapstick tradition that understands character, gender, and desire as the literal incorporation of social choreographies. A slapstick theory of sexuality does not admit terms like "orientation," except insofar as they can be demonstrated as effects on or between bodies. That does not mean that slapstick shies away from analyses of character, but character and all its cognates and correlates only register as the lines a body tends to follow. This framing leads to an intense focus on genre and the propriety of aesthetic form as sites for comedic manipulation. Chaplin's zany take on the perverse aestheticism of slapstick foregrounds the provisional and belaboured quality of social accomplishments, prominently including the cultivation of the set of gestures and impulses proper to a masculine subject. In his short films, Chaplin gives the ambivalent affects of zany masculinity a figure through three main strategies: following

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[233] Another example of how ambiguities in the body's responsiveness can introduce a kink in the line of desire includes the opening scene of *His Musical Career* (1914), in which the owner of a piano moving company tests Chaplin's fitness for work by feeling his legs through his trousers. The owner's probing elicits a ticklish back kick from Chaplin, who spins around laughing and raising his finger in good-natured remonstration. In *The Police* (1916), Chaplin is being robbed in an alley. The mugger turns out to be a former cellmate. The would-be mugger approaches Chaplin from behind and puts a gun to his back. As the mugger frisks him for valuables Chaplin misinterprets the nature of the mugger's fumbling. Again, he turns around, smiling, and brings his finger to his lips, lifting his eyebrows. It is a gesture Chaplin has employed several times on screen, and always to point to an impish, willful indeterminacy of meaning.

the wrong choreography; substituting a bad object for the origin or target of a gesture; and subjecting gestural intentions to the effect of competing fields of desire. These strategies are rhetorical declensions of the substance of slapstick, which consists in investing a focalizing character with a simple, highly legible desire in view of an object that is just out of reach, then visualizing a series of obstacles to moving along the line of desire. The resulting performance succeeds or fails as slapstick to the extent it highlights the verve and resilience required to survive a world that overwhelmingly thwarts satisfaction. These strategies resonate powerfully with broadly shared understandings of same-sex eroticism refracted through the figure of the Fairy and the libidinal economy of bachelor culture, in which satisfaction is systematically blocked through the censure of extramarital sex with women (for men this was as often due to a lack of capital as it was the result of mores and health concerns, which were suffered disproportionately by women) or men. Chaplin's comedy draws on and confirms the perception of queerness as a zany irruption of disorderly desire in the gestural regime of masculinity. Chaplin does not stake out a clear position on whether queerness amounts to a permanent gestural debility, or simply a misstep. Certainly, the stability of his characterization on screen permits the imputation of a certain characterological stability, but the very sameness that allows the Tramp to stand for a sociological type evacuates him of the specific subjectivity of personal psychology or character. This uncertainty is partly abetted by Chaplin's commitment to the two-reelers that made him an international celebrity. Queer gags are rare in his longer films, with the spectacular exception of *Modern Times*, a film criticised for its episodic character. Chaplin's feature films are also the works most frequently singled out by fans and detractors for sentimentality.

From the perspective of my recovery of the queer gesturality of Chaplin's comedy, *City Lights* is unique in that it provides a point of homosexual cathexis that is both sustained and significant. Moreover, because of the structure of the film, which intercuts scenes featuring the Tramp and the Millionaire with scenes featuring the Tramp and the Flower Girl, *City Lights* proposes a striking connection between these two relationships. At the level of comedic form, the scenes with the Millionaire are almost entirely slapstick, while the scenes with the Flower Girl incline as strongly toward melodrama as any other Chaplin picture. While Chaplin's willingness to entertain melodramatic affects in these scenes might seem to

assert a priority for the heterosexual romance privileged in existing film criticism, the alternation between aggressive slapstick and melodramatic sentimentality reinscribe a zany ambivalence at the level of the film as a whole. The character of the Millionaire is unusual in his own right, as his orientation toward the Tramp both personifies and motivates the narrative oscillation between zany and sober affects. At the very least, the structure of *City Lights*, with its separate, but highly charged and mutually implicated relationships, bears a special poignancy to the experience of leading a double life.

Despite, or perhaps because of these broad indications in favour of a queer reading, *City Lights* is also significant because of the work critics have devoted to straightening out its kinked trajectory. Often, the effort involves refusing to acknowledge the decisive presence of the Millionaire at all. For instance, Calhoun performs a beautiful and erudite reading of *City Lights* that thematizes gesture as a rupture between being and seeming and understands Virginia Cherril's Flower Girl as a meta-cinematic figuration of the ideal film spectator. "The blind woman is the ideal viewer in a theater that strives to make its conventions disappear behind a veil of illusion. Hers is a vantage point from which proceeds the hallucinatory construction of the imaginary, projected as beauty, which in turn expresses a unity of body and soul."[234] In other words, the Flower Girl's blindness is both the diegetic condition of her knowledge of the Tramp's inward being, frustrated and obfuscated by the material and somatic impositions of class, *and* what allows her to project the figure of the mythic credulous spectator as a point of identification on screen.[235] In Calhoun's analysis, blindness is a figure for the capacity that allows us to discover or suppress a gap or aporia in the fabric of narration. It is a wonderful analysis, but it leaves some significant gaps of its own. One such gap is the Tramp's relationship with the Millionaire, a relationship that is itself full of gaps. These gaps fall into two broad categories: epistemic and temporal. On the temporal side, the episodic nature of the millionaire's appearances results in the Tramp's friendship with the millionaire being structured by a drive-like series of repetitions and collisions. As for epistemic gaps in the narration, the Millionaire only knows the Tramp when he is blind drunk, possibly reflecting the conditions of their first meeting and establishing drunkenness as a state of exceptionality. The question of whether the millionaire *really* forgets the Tramp,

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[234] Kenneth S. Calhoun, "Blind Gestures: Chaplin, Diderot, Lessing," *MLN* 115, no. 3 (2000), 397.
[235] Ibid., 398.

or only pretends ignorance, is a transcription of the carefully guarded uncertainty that allowed normal men to have sex with fairies in exchange for repudiating emotional intimacy with other men. This specific inflection of the question is recommended by still other gaps in the film, such as the break in narration that led the Tramp to wake up in the Millionaire's bed, while all the other party guests slept in the living room downstairs.

File Calhoun's analysis of *City Lights* under "denial," at least so far as the queer aspect of the film is concerned.[236] Another strategy for managing the disruptive queerness of the film is deflection. For instance, while Clausius acknowledges that a mistaken assumption about the Tramp's intentions is the basis of the accidental queerness gag backstage at the boxing match,[237] she claims that "the sustained irony of the film unifies the entire story to which the gags, individual and aggregate, draw attention."[238] On a more immediate level, however, the interlocking gaps in the Tramp's relationship with the millionaire and the Tramp's relationship with the Flower Girl are what gives *City Lights* its narrative structure, as the film literally alternates between Flower Girl and Millionaire episodes. Clausius's concern for the unity of the story is an epiphenomenon of her critical decision to interpret the Millionaire and Flower Girl stories as parallel. In different ways, Clausius shares this conception with Harness and Maland, and all three accounts of the film skew strongly in favour of the Millionaire and Flower Girl as sources of *City Lights'* narrative impetus. Clausius has it that "the drunk millionaire and the flower girl stories deliberately juxtapose one another with bitter cynicism opposing romantic illusions, both people are blind to Charlie's real identity and personality."[239] As Harness puts it, "the Drunk is balanced by his opposite, the blind flower girl [...]. As the Drunk symbolizes all that rules over Charlie, the flower girl in her wounded beauty is that wounded world Charlie tries to redeem."[240] Finally, Maland argues that "*City Lights* revolves around love and money. Although early drafts of the script were not so clearly conceived, the finished film alternates cleanly between a world of romance, focused on the relationship between the tramp and the flower girl, and a world of

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[236] Harness' reading of *City Lights* takes denial up a notch in his assertion that "the injustice the Tramp suffers is not so much the result of a corrupt or evil society, but of a deeper, more frightening senselessness, its utter lack of meaning" (Harness, 141). The movie makes more sense if the queerness of the production is acknowledged.
[237] Clausius, *The Gentleman is a Tramp*, 115.
[238] Ibid., 107.
[239] Ibid., 118.
[240] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 141.

extreme wealth, focused on the millionaire and his interactions with the tramp."[241] Evidence from the film makes such schematic readings difficult to sustain, even though they seem to be aligned with Chaplin's authorial intentions.

In Clausius' view, "Charlie not only represents the savior of both the millionaire and the girl but also serves as mediator between their disparate life-styles; he is useful but eventually discarded."[242] Maland also sees the Tramp as a mediator, only in his view, Chaplin's screen persona mediates between filmic projections of Chaplin's mother and father, as discussed below.[243] The Millionaire, not the Tramp's zany labour, is the ultimate source of the money the Tramp uses to pay for the Flower Girl's surgery. This is the only sense in which the Tramp can be taken seriously as mediator between the Millionaire and the Flower Girl. Charlie is never a part of the "life-style" of the Millionaire or the Flower Girl. As a patient or client to the Millionaire's whimsy, Chaplin is the object of an elaborate fort-da game, not a subject in the Millionaire's world. Charlie only escapes the cycle of abjection and incorporation when he succeeds in taking the tether ($1000) with him on his last departure from the Millionaire. Likewise, the fantasy the Flower Girl and the Tramp construct around his identity prevent him from becoming part of her lifestyle, except as a fantasmatic projection. As a savior, the Tramp's activities in view of the Millionaire and the Flower Girl follow almost opposite trajectories. With respect to the Millionaire, the Tramp's most significant intervention is when he saves the Millionaire's life on their first meeting, followed by instances of caregiving of declining significance. When it comes to the Flower Girl, the Tramp's sacrifices increase over the course of the film. A graph of these trends would intersect. Looking at the flow of generosity in *City Lights* from the perspective of the Tramp's role as a mediator of capital, first the Millionaire is the Tramp's benefactor, then the Tramp is the Flower Girl's benefactor. Looked at this way, the Millionaire and the Flower Girl really can be seen as two plots that are separate, if not parallel.

The sexual politics that positions femininity as the passive and receptive complement to masculine productive activity would see the Tramp occupying the role of "woman" vis-a-vis the Millionaire, and the role of "man" to the Flower Girl. Paul makes this suggestion

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[241] Maland, *City Lights*, 57.
[242] Clausius, *The Gentleman is a Tramp*, 117.
[243] Maland, *City Lights*, 61.

explicit in his view that the Flower Girl's blindness can be read metaphorically as castration.[244] "The Tramp loves her because he sees her as castrated."[245] He writes that the plotline featuring the Tramp's relationship with the millionaire and the relationship with the Flower Girl "parallel each other, with each plot presenting one character who acts as the benefactor for the other, but in the nighttime plot the Tramp takes over the role occupied by the woman in the daytime plot."[246] Is it too much to suggest that the Millionaire loves the Tramp for the same reason the Tramp loves the Flower Girl?

The ambiguous end of the film leaves open a possibility of yet another reversal, in which the Flower Girl becomes the Tramp's benefactor. Reversing the Flower Girl's "castration" has been the purpose of the Tramp's labours. As Paul points out, by the time he succeeds, the Tramp has lost even the vestigial phallus of his signature cane![247] Moreover, the restoration of the Flower Girl's sight has allowed her to become a successful businesswoman. She has been virilized with respect to vision *and* capital. We can only speculate what such a reversal would mean for the Tramp's relationship with the Millionaire! In any case, the movement of the Tramp between the world of the Millionaire and the world of the Flower Girl is more like the movement of a needle pulling thread than that of a mediator. This movement slowly draws the two layers of the film together, and invites spectatorial reflection on the relationship of the desire that draws the Tramp to the Millionaire and the one that draws the Tramp to the Flower Girl. Critical attempts to keep them apart seem like a deflection of the implications of this comparison.

Maland provides an account of the film with psychoanalytic resonance, when he describes *City Lights*, and in fact all of Chaplin's preceding important films, as "submerged autobiography," but this re-location of the site of criticism amounts to a meta-critical deflection rather than a recovery of queerness in *City Lights*.[248] According to Maland, this personal connection "helps to explain the emotional power of his best films, perhaps most memorably *City Lights*" by turning Chaplin toward what Maland sees as the films' central concerns. Maland notes that the Tramp's attraction to a woman had become a staple in

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[244] Paul, "Charles Chaplin and the Annals of Anality," 121.
[245] Ibid., 121-22.
[246] Ibid., 122.
[247] Ibid., 124.
[248] Maland, *City Lights*, 59.

Chaplin's films by *The Gold Rush*. With two divorces, several short romantic relationships, and the death of his mother (a woman whose bouts of debilitating mental illness resulted in significant lapses in her ability to care for Chaplin and his brother) in the years preceding the completion of *City Lights*, Chaplin was more interested than ever, Maland suggests, "in exploring how a mutual love relationship might work."[249] Maland also relates the flower girl's blindness to Chaplin's mother's infirmity and death. He suggests that *City Lights* accomplishes in fantasy what Chaplin was unable to effect in reality: restoring his mother to health.[250] But, if *City Lights* is an exploration of what a mutual love relationship might look like, the famous closing scene is disarmingly equivocal. Here again, the Millionaire is difficult to accommodate to a straightened-out reading of the film. Arguably, the Millionaire is both a point of identification and a personification of castrating paternal law, but there is no real risk in this scenario because the Millionaire has no relationship with the Flower Girl other than his provision of the Tramp with the capacity to maintain the illusion of phallic masculinity. If the Millionaire is a manifestation of Paternal Law, we join him in a state of constitutional crisis: he is shattered by his estrangement from his wife. Maland observes that Chaplin's friend, Ralph Barton, and his own father may have been sources for the Millionaire's characterization. Barton was driven to despair by a failed marriage and Chaplin's father died of complications related to alcoholism.[251] In the film, the breakdown in the expected structure of family relations appears to be the proximate condition for the intensely intimate friendship he strikes up with the Tramp, an implosion of the family romance that threatens the pre-oedipal injunction against the son desiring the Father.

Although the whole film smacks of a double life, two scenes in *City Lights* call for special attention. The first scene, in which Chaplin choreographs a lewd pantomime with a civic monument, has magnetized almost as much critical attention as the deeply affecting closing scene. The second scene, in which Chaplin meets the Millionaire for the first time, is virtually unremarked.

The opening scene of *City Lights* is one of the highlights of Chaplin's filmography. In it, a large crowd is gathered to witness the unveiling of a civic monument. As the drapes fall

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[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid., 60.
[251] Ibid., 61.

away from the arrangement of vaguely classical figures in white marble -- a woman seated on an elevated throne flanked by two male figures, one reclining holding a sword aloft, the other kneeling -- Chaplin is revealed sleeping curled in the lap of the seated figure. Embarrassed and disturbed by his unveiling, Chaplin climbs off the statue, but in the process he is impaled on the sword of the reclining figure through a hole in the seat of his trousers. The crowd calls to the Tramp to get down. In response, Chaplin lifts his hat and shrugs, spreading his hands as if to say, "it could happen to any of us!" When the national anthem plays, Chaplin stands to attention with the rest of the onlookers. Only, the posture he adopts is impossible for him to maintain as he dangles from the sword. After the anthem concludes, Chaplin clumsily dismounts the statue, but his trajectory leads him to sit directly on the face of the reclining statue from which he has just freed himself. In contrast to the momentary lapse in *The Rink*, in which Chaplin sits on Henry Bergman's face, the film does not use editing to consign this visceral encounter to the status of a Freudian slip or unconscious tic. Instead, Chaplin orchestrates a chorus of jeers voiced through kazoos to encourage the audience to take full cognizance of the euphemistic audacity of the gesture. The Tramp excuses himself by lifting his hat again both to the crowd and to the offended statue. One can only assume that the climb off the statue was hard work for Chaplin, since he pauses to rest, absent-mindedly taking a seat on the cupped palm of the kneeling statue. More kazoo jeers follow. Chaplin stands, then puts his foot on the knee of the kneeling statue to tie his shoe. Bending down to reach his shoe aligns Chaplin's nose with the thumb of the kneeling figures raised hand (although presumably only from the perspective of the camera) in a classic gesture of infantile impudence. The gesture is so uncharacteristically graceless and laboured that it frames the entire sequence retrospectively as a formally exceptional moment. At least in the limited scope of Chaplin's queer repertoire, it *is* an exceptional moment. The sequence draws an unusually large degree of its comedic force through sustained visual double-entendre and punning of a directness uncommon in Chaplin's films. Despite the audible presence of a crowd and the fleeting appearance of dignitaries, this sequence also stands out from Chaplin's other comedies in the degree to which it features him engaging in essentially solitary comedic business. Arguably, the statues stand in for Chaplin's usual co-stars, but the fact that they are incapable of movement limits them to completing Chaplin's gestures as props. This, in addition to the bawdy pantomime, focalizes the Tramp's private practices as

the preferred theatre of comedic inventions. The overall effect of this sequence is to sensitize viewers to queerness as a motive force within the film and to Chaplin as its agent.

Surprisingly little critical attention has been devoted to this richly suggestive comedic sequence. What attention has been paid to it generally neglects the scene's punning innuendo. Perhaps it is for these reasons that Paul finds *City Lights*, and this scene in particular, such attractive grounds for his own recuperative project. According to Paul, "Chaplin offers the most insistent example of a vulgar artist embraced by high culture."[252] According to Paul, "no one has ever thought to praise [Chaplin] for the anality of his humor. A point that touches on this might be mentioned in passing but always in a way that ends up containing it."[253] He describes this censorship as "an astonishing distortion of his films."[254] Two examples illustrate Paul's point.

Harness makes scant mention of the set piece that opens *City Lights*. In his brief discussion of it, he focusses on the use of *sound* in the scene by way of introducing a longer discussion of Chaplin's use of sound and his musical scores. Harness argues that Chaplin's use of sound reinforces the aestheticism and tasteful sensibility of Chaplin's films.[255] While Harness's observations advance an important point about Chaplin's orchestration of varied affective intensities, his analysis is selective. As for his perspective on the opening scene of *City Lights*, Harness locates the humour of this sequence in the satirical deflation of the dignitaries' voices into honks and squawks and the incongruity of discovering a dirty tramp in the gleaming white lap of the new sculptures.[256] No doubt, these are important factors of the scenario, but they function in the scene to frame and accentuate Chaplin's bodily engagement with the monument.

While Harness's reading of the scene directs critical appreciation toward a formal concern for comic incongruity, Clausius' reading takes *City Lights* in a literary direction. According to her, "where the ending of *City Lights* brings the irony and satire to their climactic and pitiful conclusion, the opening shot of the film displays in synecdoche form the

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[252] Paul, "Charles Chaplin and the Annals of Anality," 113.
[253] Ibid., 115.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 138.
[256] Ibid., 136.

irony of the 'economic and social inequalities of modern urban life.'"[257] As Paul notes, commentary on this scene "generally honors the scene for its satire, but if one comes to the film from reading texts on it, the most striking aspect of the scene is in fact the slightness of the satire."[258] Chaplin's use of slapstick, and the ambivalent affects of zaniness, makes enunciating a position of moral superiority difficult. The vagueness of the target of the satire imputed to *City Lights* is a more conclusive dismissal. As Paul puts it, "If all this anal and genital imagery represents satire, it's hard to see exactly what's being satirized."[259] According to Clausius, "Chaplin satirizes the whole system of which the dignitaries and the city are representatives."[260] Clausius reads the image of the Tramp "hanging helplessly with the sword [of peace] tip up his anus [as] the visual equivalent of Prosperity telling him 'up yours.'"[261] It is unclear who is satirized by the image of poverty as a form of anal violation. If anything, this visual condensation simply confirms the set of power relations in the city. In any case, this signification is disrupted seconds later when the Tramp finds himself in the crook of the statue's arm with the phallic sword seeming to project from him. A coherent satire would provide the means by which an attentive audience could interpret this as a reversal or overthrow of the symbolic relations between prosperity and the Tramp, but all Chaplin provides is another bawdy conjugation. The most that can be said about the phallic symbolism here is that the zany rezoning of bodily pleasures in same-sex eroticism signals the unsettling mobility of the phallus as an organ of psychological investments. The imaginary intensities most forcefully evoked and manipulated by Chaplin in this scene are surely the association of classicism with high-minded principles of aesthetic, moral, and political perfection on one hand, and with the practice of classical pederasty on the other. Viewers need not be aware of the cultural history of homoeroticism, however, to recognize the acts Chaplin stops short of performing on screen, or to find satisfaction in Chaplin's eloquence in circumventing the ban on representing them. Clausius conclusion that these "gags introduce the two important themes of the film: the hypocrisy of American democracy,

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[257] Clausius, *The Gentleman is a Tramp*, 108.
[258] Paul, "Charles Chaplin and the Annals of Anality," 117.
[259] Ibid., 119.
[260] Clausius, *The Gentleman is a Tramp*, 109.
[261] Ibid., 110.

and the greed and callousness of the American Dream" misses the fact that it is the image of sexual perversity that mediates this gauzy critique.[262]

In his own analysis of *City Lights*, Paul is "concerned with reinstating low comedy as Chaplin's greatest achievement, not a mere means by which he arrived at higher ends."[263] Even Paul's critical project to accord anality the status it deserves in Chaplin's comedy, however, ends up sublimating it. Paul writes that "the raucous lower body imagery" of the monument gags "takes on a retrospective resonance from the rest of the film."[264] Reflection on the rest of the film may lead some viewers to revise their appreciation of the opening scenes, but the chief function of the monument gags at the opening the film is to establish the setting and tone of the film. Paul's analysis of the film focuses narrowly on anality, which draws the humour of *City Lights* away from queerness by proposing a diagrammatic and symbolic understanding of the body rather than a phenomenological appreciation to the body as the point at which subjectivity is given effect through sensation and movement. This leads Paul to some tenuous observations. For instance, Paul explains that when the Millionaire's gun goes off in his living room, the Tramp immediately checks his backside, "as if this were the one area most vulnerable to the millionaire's aggression;" however, it takes eight seconds between the gunshot and Chaplin's anxious palpation -- an eternity in slapstick time.[265] According to Paul, the homosexual theme is explicit in only one other scene: the prologue to the boxing scene discussed earlier, in which Chaplin's obsequious glances drive his opponent to change behind a curtain rather than risk exposing himself to the presumed pansy. Only, in this instance, Chaplin and the audience share information unavailable to the bashful boxer. We know Chaplin is not making eyes at the boxer, but attempting to revive the plan to collaborate and split the prize money. In Paul's analysis, however, the scene "suggests that eroticizing a same-sex context endows the Tramp with a surprisingly aggressive power." He concludes that "the homosexual theme generally invokes an issue of power in the film."[266] Of course, as we have already seen, so does the theme of heterosexuality; moreover, the powers of eroticism in the film are equally as likely to express themselves through service as

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[262] Ibid., 111.
[263] Paul, "Charles Chaplin and the Annals of Anality," 111.
[264] Ibid., 119.
[265] Ibid., 121.
[266] Ibid.

aggression. For Paul, Chaplin's anality symbolically anchors a connection between the material, excremental fact of bodily existence and spiritual yearning. As Paul puts it, in the closing scene of *City Lights*, "as the now-seeing woman confronts the flesh-and-blood reality of the man she could previously only see in her imagination, as she must confront the apparent disparity between the material and the spiritual, the following questions emerge: How can upper and lower body be made whole? How can the spiritual grace we accord the eyes be made commensurate with the other organs that bring us into contact with the outside world and with other people?"[267] With that, the question of queerness is thoroughly sublimated.

Paul's focus on anal aggression as the key to understanding the homosexual symbolics of *City Lights* leads him to miss important facets of the film. If Chaplin's compromising encounter with the monument is not enough to put a queer cast on the film as a whole, the scene in which Chaplin first meets the "eccentric millionaire" (Harry Myers) leaves little doubt. The scene opens on the harbour front at nighttime. Given its association with petty crime, prostitution, cruising and rough trade, the location alone is enough to raises suspicions. Myers drunkenly descends a set of stairs to the waterfront and unpacks his suitcase contents: a rock and a length of rope. A moment later, Chaplin descends the stairs, apparently unaware of Myers. The stairs are deep, so the Tramp descends cautiously, each bow-legged step accompanied by a barely perceptible shrug. Chaplin's peculiar descent and the way he peevishly bats at the bench on the waterfront with his handkerchief before sitting down conveys a precious fastidiousness that is incongruous with the expected comportment of a person of his station and sex. The yawning distance between the practical facts of Chaplin's situation and his pretensions make his performance here distinctly campy. Chaplin sits on the bench, removes a flower from his lapel, sniffs it, then gazes at it appreciatively. Myers looks on mutely, the rope already fastened around his neck. The Millionaire removes the rock from his suitcase and begins to secure it to the other end of the rope. Standing up, he teeters under the combined strain of the rock and profound inebriation, making his plan to hurl the rock into the water plain. Chaplin nimbly interposes himself between Myers and the edge of the water.

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[267] Ibid., 125.

The dramatic tension causes the Millionaire and the Tramp to break into a sequence of uncharacteristically histrionic gestures. Chaplin stops Myers, placing both hands on his chest, then rises onto his toes for a half second, apparently gathering theatrical force to the pose he is about to strike. Chaplin lithely settles his weight onto his back leg, his foot turned toward the camera; his other leg is extended in front of him with his toes pointed forward. The Tramp's hips are angled slightly toward the camera, so the audience can experience some of the radiance he directs toward Myers. Chaplin's left arm remains extended in front, hand resting on Myers' chest, and the other declining in a studied arc. Chaplin fixes Myers with a solemn gaze. Thus staged, the Tramp is ready to deliver his uplifting homily. Apparently, the Millionaire has taken the temperature of the room, because at the precise second that the Tramp is about to speak, the Millionaire drops the rock on the Tramp's foot in order to strike his own melodramatic attitude of sorrow. Facing the camera, Myers brings his open hand, palm out, to his forehead, leaning backward at an uncomfortable looking angle, his right arm thrown behind him. The Millionaire is drunk, and not as accomplished an actor as the Tramp, so he wobbles a little. Meanwhile, the Tramp is hopping up and down in agony. The Millionaire finds his balance as the Tramp removes the rope from his neck and finally gets around to delivering his sermon. "Tomorrow the birds will sing," Chaplin chirps, with eyes cast skyward, fluttering the fingers of his left hand to evoke flight. The exhortation is too tinny and syrupy for the Millionaire to contemplate, so the Tramp attempts a stronger remedy. "Be brave! Face life!" Chaplin assumes an appropriately monumental posture to amplify his message, lifting his chest and gazing intently above the camera, presumably toward the heavens and a brighter future. He beats his chest for emphasis, but the gesture only punctures the pathos of the situation because it sets the Tramp coughing. The too-easy transition from the facial set of statuesque optimism to a phlegmy spasm siphons off whatever rhetorical force the speech might have carried.

15 Screenshot: Charlie Chaplin. City Lights. *Hollywood: Chaplin Studios, 1931.*

Unsurprisingly, the Millionaire remains resolute. Chaplin manages to trade places with the desperate man, so when he finally hurls the rock into the water, it is Chaplin who gets wet. Having swapped predicaments, the Millionaire rushes to save the Tramp, but not before he removes his dinner jacket. Predictably, both men end up soaking wet, but at least this zany encounter has changed the Millionaire's mind on the matter of his suicide. He thanks the Tramp profusely and offers to pay him, but ends up pushing him back in the water instead. After the bedraggled men collect their things, they link arms to leave. A police officer emerges from the shadows in time to hear Myers invite Chaplin home "to get warmed up." The police officer does not seem concerned about the welfare of the men. Instead, he eyes them suspiciously as they climb the stairs hand-in-hand. Midway up the stairs, Chaplin hesitates, and returns for the flower, which he has forgotten on the bench. The audience knows it was given to him by Virginia Cherril's blind flower girl, but this does nothing to allay the policeman's manifest suspicions about this dockside encounter.

It is notable in itself that no critic has had much to say about this scene. After all, it is a structurally significant scene in one of the most commented Chaplin films. Perhaps the scene avoids critical attention because it is not especially funny, or even interesting, unless you see it as a visual pun on cruising that foregrounds the incongruity of melodramatic sentiment in a location associated with vice and perversion. Aside from this framing, the slapstick is relatively low-stakes and predictable. The schmaltzy intensity that Chaplin and

Myers marshal here is jarringly out of sync with Chaplin's treatment of the romance between the Tramp and the Flower Girl, which is conveyed with a comparatively light touch for most of the film. The ironizing take on melodrama puts Chaplin in a tight spot artistically at the closing of the film. Chaplin's attempt at a more naturalistic rendering of affective intensity at the close of the film uses tremulous strings and close-up in place of the extravagant gesticulation he deploys on the waterfront. As the final moment of the film, however, the scene cannot dissociate itself from the zaniness or bathos of the other romance of the film. Harnesses captures the affective wavelength well in his description of the scene:

> The scene is a bookend to the earlier scene of their first meeting, in which a flower was exchanged. In going down to his lowest depths, in descending into the lowest implications of his tramphood, the Tramp has ascended to his highest heights as a hero, in his romantic, self-sacrificing saintliness. For in his final gaze is not the expectation of the hopeful lover, or the thrill of acceptance which has meant so much to him in the past, but the joyfulness of the believer whose faith is vindicated. In this way he attains dignity, and triumphs over the humiliation and shame of his situation, over the perverse and nonsensical gear-shiftings of the Drunk, over all the cruel taunting of the newsboys. [...] The Tramp is Christ.[268]

Heroism, shame, humiliation, sacrifice, abiding selfless faith in a loved one, *Christ*. On this view, it is hard to see how the scene could be outdone for melodramatic import. How, given the Tramp's withering treatment of melodramatic feeling opposite the Millionaire, can we give full credence to the dramatic denouement between him and the Flower Girl? On the other hand, the entire course of the film confirms that the Tramp is exactly the kind of person to succumb to romantic fantasy, making it difficult to dismiss the waterfront scene as *only* a gag. Acknowledging that the comedic success of the waterfront scene depends on a romantic frisson that is refused explicit figuration would necessitate an entirely different interpretation of the film, one that is not only at odds with film critics preferred association of Chaplin with romantic sentimentality but seems to have been conceived as a ribald assault on melodramatic feeling. Watching Chaplin's films in this way is entirely consistent with the organization of queer relations around the licensing, if

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[268] Harness, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin*, 146.

artificial, effeminacy of the fairy. If the queerness of Chaplin's humour requires recovery, it is partly because he so often deploys a gestural regime associated with the serious sentimentality of straight drama to depart from the line of heterosexual desire. Earlier I defined gesture as the aestheticization of self-presence accomplished through the movement or disposition of the body and its objects. My survey of Chaplin's queer gags raises the question of what kind of self is disclosed or aestheticized through double-entendres, role-playing, and accidents. Chaplin's fleeting, accidental, deflected queerness demonstrate how gesture aestheticizes the self as a *manner* of doing, or the quality that gives motor intentionality a particular tone. It is a residual zone of freedom that belongs to the tramp despite an almost complete lack of any other form of property or power and even when he ostensibly adheres to an essentially disciplinary gestural regime. The Tramp's capacity to appear, and to appear in a particular manner, is slippery and embattled, but it is the source of his capacity to produce desired affects and effects in the world around him. One of the affects he evidently produces, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, is queer desire.

4. Photographic Gestures

In this chapter, I turn my attention to George Platt Lynes. Admittedly, Lynes and Chaplin make for an incongruous juxtaposition, and I will consider this project a success if this swerve does not take it too far in the direction of comedy. At the same time, the careers of Lynes and Chaplin share key aesthetic, pragmatic, and cultural investments. For the purpose of this analysis, the most obvious connection between the photography of George Platt Lynes and Chaplin's comedy is their probing interrogation of masculinity as a set of bodily and aesthetic practices.

Chaplin and Lynes are both marked by their association with triviality, an association they resisted in their artistic production. It is a testament to Chaplin's acumen as a businessman and publicist that he was able to appeal simultaneously to the public of low entertainments and more refined sensibilities and establish himself as the funniest *artist* of silent comedy. As recounted by Steven Haas[269] and James Crump,[270] Lynes shared Chaplin's ambition toward artistic seriousness. Lynes's career, however, followed almost the opposite trajectory, from early cultural success as an artistic photographer exhibiting with some of the best-known proponents of avant-garde photography in the interwar years, to a bitterly resented career as a fashion photographer. Aside from the work of Cecil Beaton, George Platt Lynes held fashion photography in low esteem. In a 1948 letter to Monroe Wheeler, Lynes singled out Richard Avedon's work as being especially formulaic and dreary.[271] Ironically, Avedon would become one of the most successful American fashion photographers in the post-World War II generation, supplying the majority of covers for *Vogue* from 1973 to 1988 in addition to maintaining a continuously busy freelance fashion and portrait practice from the close of the war until the mid-1990s. While Avedon's photographic output seems untroubled by its origin in commerce and mass media, Lynes evidently found the disconnect between his commercial work and his autonomous production frustrating. He wrote Monroe Wheeler that,

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[269] Steven Haas, "Intimate Exposures," in *George Platt Lynes: The Male Nudes* (New York: Rizzoli Press, 2011).

[270] James Crump, *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1993).

[271] Haas, "Intimate Exposures," N.P.

"I've never been a first-rate fashion photographer, except now and then by way of fluke or odd inspiration. [...] You must know that my best work has always been spontaneous, one thing suggesting another during a sitting, always at the last minute. And you know I've usually done my best work when I've worked only for pleasure, when I've not been paid, when I've had a completely free hand, when I've had a model who excited me in one way or another. [...] There has always been the problem of making my best work money-making, of making my money-making work better."[272]

For all their aesthetic accomplishment, Lynes's most enduring public successes in his lifetime were relegated to the status of lesser arts as a result of their association with mass culture or because their proximity to cultural giants made them seem minor or derivative.

Chaplin and Lynes both also sustained longstanding artistic engagements with historical changes to the life politics of gender and sexuality. Chaplin destabilized conventional middle-class Euro-American masculinity through the comedic amplification of the failed masculinity of his screen personas. As detailed in previous chapters, Chaplin's Tramp character failed at masculinity in almost every capacity. He was economically unproductive, physically small, emotionally volatile, perverse, transient, dishonest, grandiose, and given toward a weightless fluidity of motion. In Chaplin's most sustained comedic efforts, and the films for which he is best remembered today, it was precisely his commitment to failure that opened alternate paths toward the vindication of his masculine character through the privileged affects of heterosexual romance. By and large, Chaplin made the capacity to reject expected gestural constraints and to reframe a situation in terms of a different register the condition of an aesthetic freedom. The exposition of freedom as a bodily practice and aesthetic orientation is the facet of Chaplin's comedy that resonates most strongly with Lynes's photography. This similarity can be observed directly in Lynes's dance photography, but it is also the decisive factor in Lynes's articulation of a distinctive and historically modulated queer erotic sensibility through his photographs of nude men. Lynes's and Chaplin's interventions in the gestural regimes of masculinity are also connected through their shared commitment to an affective framing well captured by Sadakichi Hartmann's

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[272] Ibid.

concept of "poetic feeling."[273] According to Hartmann, pictorialist portraiture evoked a particular quality of experience, arising from its communication of the intersubjective texture of the photographic event, that confirmed the individuality of the sitter and the photographer. Like the Pictorialists at the turn of the century, Chaplin and Lynes carefully deployed the formal strategies of serious art to dignify their bawdy and sometimes ludicrous works by activating sentiments more commonly associated with canonical artworks or literature.

Chaplin and Lynes belong together in my analysis as much for their differences as their similarities, however. On one hand, Chaplin and Lynes both drew on a broadly shared public knowledge about the practice of normal and queer masculinity, as well as its visible and invisible correlates. On the other hand, to the best of my knowledge, George Platt Lynes did not regard his photographic practice as particularly funny. If anything, Lynes's photography is colored by a determined seriousness in the face of situations and subjects many would have found ridiculous or obscene. The earnestness of Lynes's photography points to a more fundamental difference between the role of queerness in his work compared to Chaplin's queer gags. For Chaplin, bawdy allusions to same-sex desire and the presumptive character of queerness were an instrumental part of a zany apparatus that disorganized the gestural regime of masculinity in favour of a social identity rooted in a heterosexual sentimentality apparently delaminated from the social choreographies that gave masculinity its visible form. In Chaplin's films, queerness and comedy are relegated to the same undignified triviality, but Chaplin's transvaluation of his failed masculinity through sentimentality generally allows him to leave the stigma of queerness behind. Assessing the significance of the formal strategies Lynes used to visualize queer desire is the task of my re-evaluation of George Platt Lynes's nude photography. Briefly, however, I will argue that Lynes's homoerotic photographs are an extended and inchoate attempt to articulate a gestural vocabulary adequate to the terrain of queer feeling, that is, to understand how a body can "bear" or "endure" queer desire through its movements in a world that could only account publicly for queerness as trivial, absent, or as failure.

One of the principal differences between Chaplin's queer gags and Lynes's homoerotic photography is the relationship of the gestures under consideration to their

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[273] Sarah Bassnett, *Picturing Toronto: Photography and the Making of a Modern City* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016), 132.

medium of expression. Cinema, and especially slapstick comedy, is immediately and obviously gestural, in that cinematic narratives are sustained by the movement of (human and nonhuman) bodies on screen, in addition to any other sensory modalities activated by cinematic experience. Observing the gestural dimension of photography requires a little more excavation. Agamben describes a contradictory relationship between photographs and gesture. On one hand, Agamben describes still images as a "death mask" of movement, acknowledging the almost irresistible funerary and melancholic overtones of photographs as object reminders of the impossibility of recovering the immediacy of remembered or documented events. On the other hand, Agamben claims that photographs preserve the impetus of the gestures they record intact, referring themselves to a whole of which they are a part.[274] Although there is much that could be said about the schismatic phenomenology of photographs, I want to draw out a dimension of gesturality left out of Agamben's consideration of photographic depictions of gestures.

Flusser's initial characterization of a photographs as a "two-dimensional 'description' of a gesture," or "translation [of gestures] from one context into another" provides a good gloss on what Agamben means when he writes about photographs and gestures.[275] However, this is a statement about the product or result of photographing, not photography or the complex experience of looking at photographs. This idea about photographic descriptions of gestures has the benefit of inviting the question of whose gesture is being translated -- that of the subject or the photographer. In his earlier analysis of the gesture of painting, Flusser argues that discussing gestures as if they consist of an inside and an outside is an error. Instead, Flusser positions gestures as a contact surface between the subjectivity of a gesticulator and the objectivity of the world,[276] a surface that gives material form to the pure virtuality of cognition. Understanding the gesture of photographing in Flusser's phenomenological fashion means considering it as a total event, that is, a movement that brings things into contact with each other. It is probably fair to say that a photograph describes two gestures, the gesture of *being photographed* and the gesture of *photographing*; and that while poetic feeling primarily arises from the coincidence of these gestures in a

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[274] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 55.

[275] Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 73.

[276] Ibid., 69.

particular situation, the photograph also retains traces of their autonomy. While the photographic subject's gestures constitute a situation intended to produce a certain image, the photographer moves the entire situation into his or her preferred position by finding the appropriate distance from the situation, adopting a particular angle on it, and choosing when to release the shutter. The description of Lynes's photographic method provided by a studio assistant and model, Robert W. Bishop, goes some distance toward substantiating this point on practical grounds. According to Bishop, when taking pictures in his studio, Lynes was

> like a performer on stage, sort of gliding around, floating around, so gracefully. He was charged with nervous energy, seemed to find it difficult to relax. He was quick in his movements and intense. His laugh was a quick, nervous one. His mind worked quickly and decisions were, it seemed, always the right ones. When shooting in the studio, he had total concentration and peripheral vision. All the elements, the lights here, the subject's comfort, clothing in place, film in holders, exposure… George seemed to do it all himself. He was a perfectionist. He was never more so than in his ballet photography where he could gather together as many as eight dancers in controlled motion and come up with a fine photo and beautifully lighted. This is a very difficult feat and George did it routinely. When shooting a picture George was never still.[277]

Bishop's description allows us to appreciate the degree to which photographs are saturated with the photographer's gestures as well as the subject's. While the subject of a photograph composes itself to convey a particular quality of presence that has to be described as gestural, the photographer' gesture is to find the angle from which the poetic feeling can be *seen* so it can circulate as an image. Because of the critical self-consciousness of the activity of composing a situation that one experiences as an anticipated image, Flusser sees the gesture of photographing as a philosophical gesture. According to him, "photographing is a gesture of seeing and so engages in what antique thinkers called 'theoria,' producing an image that these thinkers called 'idea.'"[278] Flusser identifies three aspects of the gesture of photography: the search for a position from which to observe the situation; adapting the situation to the chosen position; adopting an evaluative attitude toward the resulting

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[277] Haas, "Intimate Exposures," N.P.
[278] Flusser, *Gestures*, 76.

description.[279] Flusser says this also passes for a description of the "gesture of philosophizing." I take Flusser's subsequent claim to mean that, "in contrast to the majority of other gestures, the point of the photographic gesture is not to change the world or to communicate with others. Rather, it aims to observe something and fix the observation, to 'formalize' it" as pertaining specifically to the observational, compositional, and critical gestures.[280] If gestures are the means by which people aestheticize their self-presence, converting the virtuality of subjectivity into objective effects (what Agamben refers to as the "communication of a communicability"), then the coincidence of the photographer's gesture of observation with the subject's composition of a communicable self in photography could even be said to produce a third, material gesture detached from both gesticulators.[281]

George Platt Lynes's photography makes no pretense of documentary impartiality. According to Bruce Weber, the "difference" of Lynes's photography is that he made "men who knew how to fix a car [...] look as if they had gone to Yale."[282] Polchin agrees with Weber's assessment, writing that "Lynes's experiments with lighting and composition gave his images an idealized quality. For him, photography was far from a simple act of documentation. Rather, it was about turning the mundane into the beautiful, of making the beautiful ideal. It was privileging a way of looking, immortalizing the act as much as the subject."[283] These later assessments are corroborated by Lynes's then lover, Glenway Wescott, who would remain a close personal friend until Lynes's death. In an essay written to accompany a collection of surrealist photographic interpretations of classical mythology by Lynes published in the January-February issue of *U.S. Camera*, 1939, Wescott championed Lynes's forceful articulation of a point of view against the false impartiality of neutral or objective photography. "The mind of a photographer as a rule is kept as thoughtless and impartial and impersonal as a lens or a light-bulb. He even puts on airs of anonymity; he affects ignorance. Why should he?" By contrast, Wescott implies that

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[279] Ibid., 77.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Flusser argues that even landscapes are gestural because the photographer knows or recognizes when a scene has composed itself as a photogenic situation. By this logic, the experience of being a photographer is waiting for the world to gesture in one's direction!
[282] James Polchin, "The Afterlife of George Platt Lynes," *The Gay and Lesbian Review* (May/June 2006): 17.
[283] Ibid.

impressing the photographer's agency on photographic subject matter is a condition of "any extensive and coherent handling of one kind of material by one man."[284]

Two of Lynes's contemporaries framed his photographic perspective in notably tactile terms. Writing for *The Professional Photographer*, June 1950, Oliver Egremont offered that "George Platt Lynes considers good photography akin to low-relief sculpture and shoots for distinctness with an atmosphere of abundant light, balanced values, and a three-dimensional effect."[285] In 1956, shortly after Lynes's death, George Balanchine, the founding choreographer of the New York City Ballet, wrote that "Lynes's secret was his sense of plasticity, his genius for lighting figures in space so that his bodies seemed to exist in an actual aery ambiance, akin to the three-dimensional vitality in sculpture."[286] Lynes himself commented that "the keenest esthetic sensation which a camera can give [...] is the sense that if one looked, one could see right around the subject. I try to create an impression of space, especially before and behind the subject."[287] These assessments of Lynes's figural photography all acknowledge photographic observation as an experience with both optical and haptic dimensions, as if photographs allowed viewers to experience the optical and kinaesthetic facets of the photographer's probing relation to the photographic situation as they move around their subject.

The future of a gesture is almost always another gesture. In the case of photography, the model's gestures are answered by the gestures of the photographer. This relay is created in anticipation of a photograph, which likewise anticipates being circulated through particular kinds of gestures in its material form and the "content" it depicts. The recursive and prospective quality of photography is borne out most conclusively in the case of photography like Lynes's nudes. Waugh observes that in erotic photography "arousal derives from the visual pleasure not only of savoring an image in a moment of onanistic reflection but also of looking through the viewfinder to construct or select a pose, gesture, or expression to remember and perhaps get off on."[288] "Ultimately," Waugh claims, "erotic picture-taking is

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[284] George Platt Lynes, "Illustrations of Mythology," *U.S. Camera* (January-February 1939): 41.

[285] Oliver Egremont, "Famous Faces: George Platt Lynes," *The Professional Photographer* (June 1950): 26.

[286] Jack Woody, *George Platt Lynes Photos, 1931-1955* (Pasadena, Ca: Twelvetrees Press, 1981), 105.

[287] Egremont, "Famous Faces: George Platt Lynes," 26.

[288] Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 338.

[...] the visualization of desire, visualization as desire, the imprint of the libido."[289] Waugh is writing here about "amateur" photography, and he seems to have the documentary/diaristic immediacy of the snapshot in mind. Arguably, this is the photographic situation least like Flusser's account of the philosophical gesture of photography as a theoretical act that produces an idea through the manipulation and critical evaluation of a situation. At the same time, Waugh's claim that "photographing a sexual event or subject becomes an act of communication and exchange in addition to the private individual act of looking at the print later, a mediated act of sexual contact with the subject" opens the door to consideration of sphere of communication, exchange and mediated contacts well beyond the sphere of direct intimacy.[290] This speculative recovery of the full gesturality of photography points me toward the questions that will orient my analysis of George Platt Lynes's photography: What theory of homoerotic desire is imprinted in the photographs? How do gestures make homoerotic desire visible as a philosophy? And what responses do these gestures anticipate?

Lynes was not the first photographer to give visible form to male same-sex desire, but the coincidence of his career as a photographer with a moment of heightened public awareness of queerness at the inception of his photographic career, followed by its increasingly anxious repression in American culture, makes his work historically significant. In Waugh's estimation, "Lynes stands out as the major figure [of the thirties generation] who, in the few short years remaining him until his early death in 1955, matured and deepened as an erotic artist."[291] While Cecil Beaton, George Hoyningen-Huene, and Horst P. Horst probably all left a more significant legacy in commercial photography, Lynes's devotion to photographing the male nude resulted in a sustained exploration of the continuity between his own homoerotic outlook and mainstream American visual culture.

According to Waugh, the "subterfuge, obscurantism, pontification, and balderdash" that contributes to the cultural mystification of the male nude confirms that it is "automatically and fundamentally an erotic discourse."[292] While Lynes's work inherits much from his predecessors and contemporaries, it also seems to resist the patterns of cultural

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[289] Ibid., 339.
[290] Ibid., 338. Waugh is aware of these implications. He cites Benedict Anderson elsewhere, and the bulk of his book is dedicated to uncovering the connection between the private experience of desire and a body of imagery that is more frequently impersonal and anonymous than not.
[291] Ibid., 141.
[292] Ibid., 9.

mystification that have complicated the appreciation of the male nude in American visual culture. A 1939 feature in *US Camera* illustrates Lynes's complicated attachment to the legacy of the male nude. The feature reproduced a series of surrealist interpretations of classical mythology Lynes made at the request of Glenway Wescott himself[293] or by Wescott's sister-in-law, Barbara Wescott, for use in publications of Harrison of Paris, the press she founded,[294] and was accompanied by an essay by Glenway Wescott. Wescott's carefully contrived errors and omissions cannily signal the cultural stakes of Lynes's dedication to the male nude throughout his career. Wescott writes that,

> The tradition of the photographic nude is silly: thousands of young men striking Greek or German attitudes, and young women pretending to be asleep, and segments of torso in make-believe moonlight. Every technique has its limitations, real or apparent; and those of the camera, particularly in the matter of the more or less bare body must be troublesome. For the camera cannot idealize much without loss of contour, muzziness, messiness; and probably it cannot go to extremes of veracity without arousing some sort of pity or distaste.

As Waugh explains, "between 1880 and 1920, the gay pictorialists were caught up in the excitement of pioneering the new technology with a gift for mechanically observing the human body. They were also engaged in the aesthetic issues of their day, namely, the battle between classical idealism and realism, both perceptual and social."[295] Wescott's opening salvo acknowledges that the cultural status of pictorialist photography and the artistic alibi of academies, ostensibly produced as references for painters but mainly bought for an earthier purpose, had worn thin by the mid-1930s, developing into a formulaic repertoire of techniques and gestures essentially extraneous to the exposition and aesthetic appreciation of human bodies. For Wescott, the exhaustion of these photographic rhetorics is the result of the difficulty of balancing two pairs of countervailing values: ideality and veracity; admiration and pity or distaste. By this logic, the ideality of pictorialism and its classical inspirations

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[293] Anatole Pohorilenko and James Crump, *When We Were Three: The Travel Albums of George Platt Lynes, Monroe Wheeler, and Glenway Wescott, 1925-1935* (Santa Fe: Arena Editions, 1998), 285.
[294] Haas, "Intimate Exposures," N.P.
[295] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 71.

necessitates its lack of clarity and its falsity. On the other hand, depicting the unvarnished reality of bodies leads to derision.

Wescott's arch description of the negativity attached to "extreme" veracity is likely itself an idealizing circumlocution. The affect that idealism attempts to blur into polite obscurity is arousal. Wescott comes close to admitting as much in his discussion of the futility of trying to control "the several states of mind in which some peculiar persons look at things." He explains that "small boys may be bothered even by public monuments in parks, even modest American parks; and Venus de Milo herself is more than certain grownups can bear," but demurs from naming desire as the distrubance by characterizing the source of children and grownups confronted by nudity as a *lack* of interest and sensitivity to human beauty. Here, Wescott allows Lynes's voice to both buttress and undermine his calculated error. "As Mr. Lynes says simply, the reason that photographs of the nude seem indecent as a rule is because they are a bore. They make you think of just one thing more than you like, or more than you should, because there is nothing else to think of." Lynes's perspective on viewers' responses to nude photography echoes popular and academic (e.g. Simmel) critiques of modernity that worried that the press of social and commercial solicitations in the city led to a deadening of the senses and a blasé attitude. However, while pictorialist photographers resisted a kind of bad empiricism arising from the matter-of-fact technicity and industrial manufacture of photographic imagery,[296] by the time Lynes took up photography this collective project had produced its own lifeless clichés.

Maybe Polchin is on to something when he observes that Lynes's "photographs of naked men have little to do with nakedness itself."[297] Although, my research at the Kinsey Institute turned up many photographs that treat male bodies with a frank and playful eroticism. The problem according to Lynes is, given the progressive anaesthetization to the shock of erotic solicitation, "how then can bodily beauty be made 'interesting?'" According to Wescott this is "the photographer's principal artistic problem: interest."[298] Polchin writes that "Lynes's camera transforms the male body from something to be photographed and desired to something more distant, something to be looked at and pondered." [299] If nudes are

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[296] Bassnett, *Picturing Toronto*, 131.
[297] Polchin, "The Afterlife of George Platt Lynes," 17.
[298] Wescott, in Lynes, "Illustrations of Mythology," 42.
[299] Polchin, "The Afterlife of George Platt Lynes," 17.

boring for Lynes, that does not deprive them of the power to command the attention of viewers despite offering nothing to think about (or just one thing). Lynes does not name the boringly repetitive compulsion to look at something that offers nothing to the intellect, but what else can it be but desire? The problem that Lynes seems to set himself in his photographic engagement with the male nude, then, is how to restore interest to desire after the expiry of pictorialism's silly Greek or German attitudes and make-believe moonlight, that is, how to picture a cognition or a theory of homoerotic desire. Or, to put it otherwise: how does one photograph the queer gesture as Flusser understands it?

While Lynes's photography resists or surpasses certain deadening legacies of the homoerotic imaginary he inherited, it nevertheless deploys some of its most basic affective and visual structures. Waugh argues that the importance of relations of looking and being looked at for gay men stems from their role in stimulating, organizing, and legitimizing desire. Photographs that depict desiring gazes confirm the importance of a particular quality of attention as the difference that founds queerness. Moreover, looking at photographs is wrapped up with the self-reflexivity that establishes communities through the intertextual dynamics of taste-making, and Waugh claims that the image of a model looking at an photograph is a "motif virtually unique to homoerotic culture," which can give way to "sophisticated play with the contradictions of representation and reality."[300] That motif oscillates between the poles of spectatorial identification and desire, which Waugh associates with two imagistic modes, narrative and presentational. Pictures of subject looking at pictures invite viewers to identify with the photographic subject on the basis of their shared activity and the presumption of a shared interest, while also allowing viewers to assume a position of optical mastery outside the frame of the image.[301] Waugh argues that too strong a focus on the similarity of same-sex models can render homoerotic photography "visually and dramatically static," and that homoerotic imagery often uses differences in ethnicity, race, age, body type and class as proxies for dynamizing sexual difference. These affective tensions, and the conventions used to give them visible form, are evident throughout Lynes's work, as I will show in the following chapters.

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[300] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 43-44.
[301] Ibid., 47.

Lynes's occupation as a fashion and dance photographer and celebrity portraitist, and his personal connections with the pivotal figures of transatlantic artistic modernism, meant that he could pursue his project from a position of relative safety and security with the encouragement of an appreciative audience. Lynes's inability to display much of his homoerotic photography publicly due to codes of public decency also meant that this work can generally be taken as the product of his own aesthetic initiatives. But even his public works partook of the outlook he brought to his nude photography. Waugh also detects an "aesthetic continuity between the imprint of homoerotic desire in the personal images of the Glamour Generation and their public work," with the repression of erotic expression in the interest of commercial viability producing only "a gentle divergence that hardly rippled the surface of their work."[302] In Lynes's case, even "gentle divergence" might be overstating the case. In Elspeth Brown's analysis, Lynes's private erotic experiences and male figure studies informed the characteristic "amorous regard" that Lynes's used to glamourize the products his photographs promoted. [303] Brown borrows the term directly from Lynes, who uses it to explain to the readers of *Bachelor* magazine how he can produce a beautiful portrait even when the sitter is ugly in "The Camera Knows When a Woman is in Love." Lynes writes that "given a Jill, one may assume the existence of a Jack – he understands her, he appreciates her, he regards her with an amorous regard." His methods is to put himself in Jack's place, deploying a "thousand tricks of the trade" and "[working] his imagination to death" to convey the desiring quality of his regard in a photograph.[304] Brown points to a series of puns and innuendo that cast his working method in a queer light even as they seem to emanate from and promote heterosexual desire.[305] Even without Lynes's winks and nudges, however, the mobility of Lynes's amorous regard and its foundation in make-believe, not to mention the effort required to heterosexualize the camera, point to an ineradicably queer subjectivity.

Lynes's career spanned a period of profound changes in the public recognition of queer masculinity. John Ibson recounts that the gender segregation and intense emotional bonds produced by mobilization for World War II, combined with its unprecedented

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[302] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 138.

[303] Elspeth Brown, "Queering Glamour in Interwar Fashion Photography: The Amorous Regard of George Platt Lynes," *GLQ* 23, no.3 (June 2017).

[304] George Platt Lynes, "The Camera Knows When a Woman is In Love," *Bachelor* (April 1937).

[305] Brown, "Queering Glamour," 301.

brutality, produced a rupture in the ordinary regulation of intimacy between men. During the War, the state of exception allowed for the articulation, frequently defensive or couched in comedy, of romantic love between men without the enabling gender transitivity of the fairy/trade dichotomy.[306] A few years after the close of WWII, however, "eroticism would become a deeply problematic core of artistic vision rather than a ripple among easefully stylized margins, untroubled surfaces, or elegantly lit corners."[307] Even after the War though, Waugh argues, "takes on Lynes that stress maladjustment and victimization do no credit to [his] optimistic late works of 'frankness and celebration,' and, even more important in my opinion, of community."[308]

Following the publication of Jack Woody's book, *George Platt Lynes: Photographs: 1931-1955* in 1981, the event Polchin credits for a revival of popular interest in Lynes's work,[309] Lynes came to stand for a particular historical moment (albeit a queer, and therefore minor, one), not unlike the way Chaplin appears as the icon of a moment in the history of cinema. Where Chaplin has been the subject of a staggering volume of scholarly writing, however, little scholarly attention has been paid to Lynes's work. I aim to address this gap in the following chapters by complementing the handful of excellent popular press books on Lynes's life and photography with a detailed critical analysis of Lynes's characteristic gestures. James Polchin notes that George Platt Lynes spent the last months of his life destroying the negatives he shot in his fashion and portrait photography.[310] Aside from photographs in museums and private collections, then, the remaining body of photographs and negatives represents Lynes's retrospective judgement about his photographic career, making it an unusually coherent archive. Lynes's archive is rendered even more compelling for people invested in the historical project of positioning Stonewall as a critical break in queer history because his denigration of his commercial work and the impossibility of exhibiting what he considered his finest work allow his reclamation to stand in for a broader vindication of everything that was forced into a closet. Lynes is also "momentous" because of his outsized impact on queer photographers who came after him. In particular, Polchin

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[306] See Isbon, *Picturing Men*.
[307] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 139-140.
[308] Ibid., 165.
[309] Polchin, "The Afterlife of George Platt Lynes," 16.
[310] Ibid.

notes that Jack Woody was promoting Robert Mapplethorpe around the same time as he released his book of Lynes's photography, and likely introduced Lynes's work to Mapplethorpe.[311] Photographers such as Herb Ritts and Bruce Weber have also internalized Lynes's distinctive crossing of glamour and beefcake as instantly recognizable visual rhetorics of queer longing. Of Lynes's surviving work, publications have tended to foreground images that demonstrate his continuity with more recent photographers and the tastes of contemporary audiences. While I applaud these publications for advancing Lynes's personal desire to share his photography as broadly as possible, in a sense, this does a disservice to what is timely or idiosyncratic about Lynes's work. The selectivity of Lynes's reclamation as queer heritage also leaves the connections between his homoerotic photography and his other contributions to American visual culture unexamined. My analysis of Lynes's work has as an ancillary goal the restoration of Lynes's historicity or timeliness to appreciation of his work.

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[311] Ibid., 18.

5. Camp Gestures

When I arrived at the Kinsey Archive to explore their extensive collection of prints and negatives by George Platt Lynes, I was already familiar with Lynes's restrained and highly polished figure studies. These images are the basis of Lynes's reclamation as a seminal gay imagemaker and represent his most recognizable influence on later photographers. Certainly, these contributions to the homoerotic imaginary of American visual culture comprise the largest share of Lynes's surviving work, extending the legacy of his glamorous celebrity portraiture in the direction of a foundationally queer point of view. However, I was surprised to discover a substantial number of inventive photographs animated by a paradoxical amalgam of whimsy and earnestness. Despite exhibiting the same well-considered composition and technically sophisticated lighting as the photographs responsible for Lynes's second fame, these images deployed outlandish props and availed themselves of motifs so shopworn that it is difficult to take them seriously as entries in the catalogue of an accomplished and original photographer.

Take, for example, figure 1, a tense and emotionally compelling grouping photographed in 1935. The standing model's elevation relative to the seated model, and the decision to withhold his face by photographing him from the back repel identification and establish an emotional distance between the standing model and the viewer, as well as between the two models. At the same time, the seated model's gaze connects the two men, while the projection of the standing model's muscular back and buttocks (resulting from a back so eccentrically arched that the model adopts an improbably wide stance) also suggests points of desiring contact for the viewer. Read against the availability of the seated model to identification due to the visibility of his impassive face, and owing to his crumpled and contorted posture, the standing model's aloofness gives the impression that the photograph records a lovers' quarrel. The scene is lit from both sides of the frame, highlighting the musculature of the models while hollowing the middle of the foreground by casting it in shadow. This shaded central area is reiterated by the curvature of the seated model's body, establishing a metonymic relationship between physical bearing, emotional experience, and the models' positional relationship. Although this compositional consideration may be determined as much by the proportions of the print, our view of the models preserves a relationship of touch between the men as a result of their strictly optical overlap at the bottom

of the frame. It is an aesthetically and technically convincing photograph, right up to the moment the eye wanders to the lace curtains that delimit an unspecified ground behind the scene while lending an unbecoming fussiness to the proceedings. The less said about the incongruous statue, with its ersatz Hellenism and its smudged paint and flaking elbows, the better. However much the relationship between the models in the photograph affect us, once these "background" features register in one's understanding of the photograph, it is impossible to repel the associations they introduce.

The coincidence of aesthetic ambition with intense affectivity, incongruity and excess color photographs like figure 1 with the suspicion of camp. This suspicion raises two immediate objections. First, as a judgement of artistic expressions, "camp" is an aspersion or dismissal more often than not. Second, the entire ecology of camp underwent significant historical change in the twentieth century. Instead of writing these photographs off as aberrations or failures, the point of my examination of them as campy is to give the unseriousness, excessive, outlandish and trivial in Lynes's work the attention it deserves in the same spirit as I attempted to recover the vulgar in Chaplin's queer humour. This is not meant to disparage the aesthetic merit of Lynes's photographs, which are excellent, even at their most ridiculous. Susan Sontag's seminal 1964 essay, "Notes on Camp"[312] is usually blamed for initializing the bowdlerization of camp that terminated in its cooptation by mass culture. Before this shift, camp described the aesthetic category that allowed a queer public to recognize the family resemblance connecting a series of objects that activated a particular constellation of queer affects. "Camp" was also the name of the subject of campy affectivity, and "camping" was the corporeal practice of rendering oneself visible as a camp through gestural performance.[313] The mid-century generalization of camp preserved the aesthetic category, but largely did away with camps and camping, so one could no longer be a camp, or spend time camping with other fairies at an all-night cafe or automat -- a practice George

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[312] Susan Sontag. "Notes on Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, a Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 53-65.

[313] Cleto notes that "camp" attained quasi-official status in English through J. Redding Ware's 1909 *Passing English of the Victorian Era*, which promotes the use of the term as an evaluation of actions and gestures characterized by exaggerated emphasis, especially when they are performed by a person of low moral character (Fabio Cleto, "Introduction: Queering the Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, a Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto [Ann Arbor Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002], 9).

Chauncey locates close to the center of the emergence of a gay social world in New York.[314] Through my analysis of the campiness of certain of Lynes's photographs, I intend to restore an aspect of the phenomenological fullness of his body of work to view and draw attention to neglected aspects of Lynes's photographic vision to expand critical appreciation for the timeliness and insight of his photographic theory of queer masculinity and desire.

The connection between the queerness of Chaplin's humour and the campy facets of some of Lynes's photography goes beyond a shared commitment to aesthetic and social incongruity because the terrains of camp and zaniness overlap in key regards. Discussing Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, Ngai writes that zaniness is "an affect as well as a style ostentatiously about gaiety -- the affect that for Nietzsche best represents the nature of 'higher type[s]' willing to allow their instincts to 'lead [them] astray to perform inexpedient acts' – [and that] emerges precisely when an all-too-obvious effort to express and thus produce that gaiety fails."[315] Although Ngai ultimately attempts to distinguish zaniness from camp, the aesthetic effect of a failed attempt at elevated expression is a faithful gloss on Sontag's 1964 definition of "camp" as failed seriousness. While Ngai pursues her analysis of the zany in its home territory of comedy, the aesthetic is about the relations that arise when producing a desired affect requires an excess of labour. Nietzsche sees inexpedient actions as the purview of the high-minded, but it does not require much of a stretch to see queerness as inexpedient with respect to genealogy and the orderly division of labour and standing along lines of sex. From that point of view, zaniness and camp coincide to the extent that camp describes an aesthetic disposition and practice that strives and fails to live up to its claims to seriousness and brings queer "gaiety" into focus as the deformed product of disappointed ambitions. Lynes's photographs display a well-developed capacity for whimsy, but in mobilizing Ngai's concept of zaniness to my analysis of Lynes's work I am not thereby positioning them as comedy. What I want to bring over from Ngai's analysis is her recognition of negativity and distance as the ineradicable biproduct of the labour of producing positive affects.

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[314] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[315] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 186.

The dramatic intensity of Lynes's photograph of the lovers' quarrel (figure 1) evinces an ambition toward high-mindedness, especially in its evocation of serious drama in its theatrical set dressing. However, the materials lack the requisite dignity to bear out the program of the photograph, and the drama itself is compromised from the outset because of the demoted social status of the relationship it figures. Ngai notes that zaniness and camp are similar in that both involve a "glorification of character" and make "failure a central part of [their] aesthetic."[316] I would add that Ngai's association of zaniness as the projection of the subject "wanting too much and trying too hard: the unhappily striving wannabe, poser, or arriviste," assumes an additional degree of poignancy when viewed through the lens of men attracted to men in a libidinal economy that demands a gendered power imbalance as the condition of romantic or erotic fulfillment.[317] In that context, homoerotic desire is foundationally "inexpedient," and the willingness of fairies to assume a position of labored gender subordination to facilitate desired encounters instantiates a complex negativity like the one that arouses sympathy and puts one's teeth on edge even as the zany's antics reach the peak of their hilarious intensity.

While an examination of the operation of race in Lynes's photography deserves concerted scholarly attention, seeing figure 1 as camp foregrounds aspects of the racial politics of the set of queer modernists to which Lynes belonged. People of colour represent a small fraction of Lynes's surviving photographs, however, even this fragmentary body of work suggests that Lynes mobilized photographic discourses of race consciously, and differently than contemporaries like Lynes's friend and noted patron of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vechten. James Small shows that Carl Van Vechten drew on a tradition of interracial photography set down in the United States by F. Holland Day.[318] In *An Ethiopian Chief [Menelek]* and *The Smoker* (both: photograph, ca. 1897. Metropolitan Museum of Art – Stieglitz Collection; not shown), F. Holland Day uses leopard skins, patterned draperies, feathers and other props to cast ephebic Black models in the light of a voluptuous exoticism. Van Vechten's elaboration of this photographic attitude in private nudes takes it to a zany pitch in which the "edenic" primitivism of Holland's generation

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[316] Ibid., 12.
[317] Ibid., 189.
[318] James Smalls, *The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten: Public Face, Private Thoughts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

gives way to sodomy, cannibalism and sadomasochism evoked through pose, setting and props, such as drums and nets, suggesting transgressive rituals.[319] Performing these rituals for Van Vechten's camera in front of metallic and floral draperies, and using a butter knife stolen from a diner drains away some of the lurid energy and ethnographic plausibility of the primitivist scene, bringing it into the world of high camp.[320] While Lynes was not known for austerity, he did not employ orientalizing props to create a primitivist atmosphere, nor did he require theatrical effects to represent the homoerotic frisson of Black men's bodies. Lynes was at pains to distance his artistic photography from pornography. Although a small number of photographs of Lynes's sexual exploits exist, these were taken on a 5x5 Kodak camera outside the studio.[321] By contrast, of the vanishingly small number of surviving frankly sexual studio photographs taken by Lynes, two are of Black men.[322]

Van Vechten frequently emphasized the contrast between the skin tones of Black and White models, perhaps under the influence of F. Holland Day's *Ebony and Ivory* (photograph, 1900. Museum of Modern Art; not shown) in which a black model is shown seated holding a bright white figurine. In a series of photographs of Hugh Laing and unidentified Black models reproduced in Smalls's book. Van Vechten uses close physical proximity between models and mirrored poses to invite comparison. With the exception of his documentation of a sexual encounter between Johhny Leapheart and Buddy McCarthy, Lynes tended to picture Black men alone or with other Black models. In photographs with dark-skinned and light-skinned models, Lynes often minimized the difference between skin tones. For instance, in Lynes's photograph of the choreographer Fred Ashton and three unidentified Black dancers from the 1934 production, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Ashton, who is white, wears a dark suit. While minimizing optical difference, Lynes's photograph reinscribes hierarchical differences between the clothed White choreographer and nude Black dancers. More typically, Lynes uses lighting to foreground gesture as the dynamic axis of difference. For example, in figure 1, the strong highlights mid-level at the edges of the photograph bring the models' outside shoulders to the same key as the white plaster statue in

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[319] Ibid., 65.
[320] Ibid., 66.
[321] For example, see Negatives 1799-1834 in the Kinsey Institute George Platt Lynes Collection.
[322] See Negatives 1169-1170 in the Kinsey Institute George Platt Lynes Collection. Incidentally, these photographs were taken the same year as the private photographs noted above.

the background, while the model on the left puts the model on the right partly in his shadow. At the same time as the arrangement of lighting equalizes the models' skin tone, it emphasizes the contrast of front and back between the models and their positioning. Elsewhere, Lynes may have used dodging or burning in the darkroom to level differences in skin tone. For instance, surviving photographs show that Nicholas Magallanes and Francisco Moncion had different skin tones, but the difference is hard to distinguish in Lynes's photographs of them in *Orpheus* (see figures 7-9). Likewise, Maria Tallchief, who was Native American, does not stand out from White dancers in Lynes's photography for the New York City Ballet. Lynes's minimization of visual differences should not be taken as evidence that he had a more enlightened perspective about race than Van Vechten. Instead, the difference between the two photographers' mobilization of racial difference stems from contrasting positions with respect to the cultural hierarchies of modernism. As Smalls argues, the campy quality of Van Vechten's photographs of Black men derives from the coincidence of scientific seriousness and voyeuristic pleasure in ethnography. For Lynes, the sentimentality of the legitimate theatre, ballet and fashion industry advertising, fields that largely excluded participation by People of Colour in the early Twentieth Century, were the determining shibboleths.

According to Ngai, the difference between zaniness and camp is that, while camp "converts the pain of failure and loss into victory and enjoyment, zaniness highlights its own inability to do this; [for the zany] ironic detachment is not an option."[323] While Ngai's distinction is apt for the current state of camp, for most of the twentieth century, the victories won through camp were ambivalent at best. As the gestural regime of the fairy, camp effeminacy brought inexpedient desires across the threshold of possibility, but it would be a mistake to cast them as the liberation of desire from a restrictive and punitive regime of gender and class respectability. Moreover, the irony of camp is more layered than Ngai allows. According to Scott Long,

> The process of camp might be called dialectical. It asserts an opposition between the
> absurd and the serious. Then it gestures toward a point -- a moment of consciousness,
> a shock, a synthesis -- from which that opposition can be seen as absurd in turn, based

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[323] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 12.

on a higher and more encompassing sense of absurdity, since it includes far more in

its sway: it separates the beholder in a vertiginous moment from a whole encrusted

body of cultural dictates and values.[324]

Although Long's Hegelian perspective risks giving too much credit to the intellectual bearing

of camp, his assessment illuminates perspectival mobility as a key facet of camp irony.

The irony of camp begins with the character who professes an incongruous,

hyperbolical, or ill-advised commitment. In this moment of the unfolding of camp irony,

what is at stake are forms and their accepted relations. If this commitment makes it

impossible to credit the sanity or sincerity of the character, the effect is not camp, so the

foundation of camp is the coincidence of forms that do not belong together. The camp's

deviation from the accepted line and direction expected of someone in their position

instantiates a moment of hermeneutic disorientation, as the spectator searches for a point of

view from which the campy goings on make sense. Camp is most effective when it preserves

the contradiction between disorienting and excessive affects or aesthetics and straight

naturalism. In Long's analysis, this unstable synthesis results in a liquidation of distinctions

between straight and camp interpretive frames, bringing about a queer sublation of

distinctions of genre and gender. Since these distinctions are hierarchical, and associated with

particular classes of persons, the effect is a levelling of power differentials. Halperin writes

that despite camp's "outrageous impertinence, it has an egalitarian, inclusive thrust: it implies

that no tragedy, not even yours, can or should claim so much worth as to presume an

unquestioned entitlement to be taken completely seriously -- that is, to be taken straight -- in

a world where some people's suffering is routinely discounted."[325] The campy quality of

figure 1 is the result of the photographer's gesture of constellating all the elements that

combine to produce that photograph. While Lynes's inclusion of the vaudevillian décor in the

background of the image initiates an ironizing shift in perspective that undermines the

seriousness of the implied relation between the models, there is nothing to suggest that Lynes

declares victory over the scene or adopts a detached perspective. Nothing about the détente

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[324] Scott Long, "The Loneliness of Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst Massachusetts, University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 79.

[325] David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 187. This is almost the obverse of the moral universe of Chaplin's late comedy, which gives seriousness to the suffering of trivial people through an affective treatment that straightens them out.

produced by camp gestures proceeds with Hegel's faith in the inevitability of dialectical progress, however. Camp is the result of intense affective and aesthetic labour, exactly like the powerfully desiring zany. In effect, the camp declares victory by becoming aware of themselves as a zany and capitalizing on the costly opportunities afforded by the threatening and disordering indifference of zaniness to distinctions of form and quality.

5.1 Camping Out

Lynes's refined camp sensibility is nowhere more evident than in his photos that depend on and extend the homoerotic inflections of late nineteenth-century pictorialism. The influence of pictorialist photographers is palpable in photos such as figures 2 and 3, which recreate key facets of the classicizing pederasty of Wilhelm von Gloeden and Wilhelm von Pluschow. As Waugh explains it, the extensive use or classicizing and orientalizing props by pictorialist photographs was "lusciously tactile and visual." At the same time, "there is also the sense that the clutter of objects and textures is necessary for concretizing the abstract erotics of the undecorated nude body."[326] Although photographs by Lynes seldom feature the kitschy bric-a-brac of von Gloeden's best excesses, Lynes's 1937 photograph taken in a theatrical dressing room demonstrate Lynes's willingness to incorporate props where they contribute to the mise-en-scene of an image. In his commercial works, Lynes's use of props was considered one of his distinguishing features. In a 1950 article in *The Professional Photographer*, Oliver Egremont writes "speaking of props, [Lynes] does not hesitate to use them lavishly, and has often employed odd bits that have taken his fancy."[327]

Posing the undecorated body as an artistic problem, as Waugh does, might misconstrue the way classical pederasty functioned in the pictorialist imagination. In figures 2 and 3, for instance, Lynes's models seem to decorate a landscape designed to produce homoerotic possibilities. The coarse "rocks" and dappled "sky" that stage the model's solitary reflections in figure 2 capably reproduce the landscape of Taormina, which features so prominently in von Gloeden's work, without requiring support from specifically classicizing props. However, the resemblance of the setting to a natural landscape produces a dissonant impression because of elements in the image that pointedly assert the artificiality of

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[326] Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 93.
[327] Oliver Egremont, "Famous Faces: George Platt Lynes," *The Professional Photographer* (June 1950), 26.

the scene. These elements work through the imaginative translation of sight into tactile impressions. The model's shadow continues from the rocks onto the reflective backdrop, producing a conflict between the iconographic reading of the surface as "sky" and inferences about the texture of the surface. Similarly, the rocky support structure is betrayed by the edges of the paper or drop cloth. These conflicting impressions invite the viewer to reach into the scene for a palpable confirmation of their suspicions. The artificiality of the photograph raises problems in the visual field that can only be resolved through touch, a synaesthetic mobility that translates easily to the relationship between the viewer and the model. Without the presence of another model to confirm the model's active subjectivity, as in figure 1, the capture of the model from behind resolves the balance of looking versus being-looked-at entirely in favour of the viewer's activity. This too contributes to the sense of a projective visual/haptic encounter. In figure 3, a modernist fracturing of the picture plane through a ruin constructed of intersecting and receding white planes coincides with the inclusion of Doric columns and an ephebic model. Against the featureless black backdrop and the flatness of the white planes, the roundness of the columns and the model's body are enough to establish them as a distinct class of objects and facilitate a fluid exchange of qualities. The model and the columns belong to antiquity and biological time, which this image seems to understand as a series of repetitions. If the model's vest seems contrived and ornamental, those qualities also cast the columns, and any pretense to the moral and aesthetic seriousness of classicism, as equally unfounded. The cultural mystification of classicism is peeled back to reveal that the ephebic model is suspended in a relationship of one column to another, with inescapably phallic associations. This series of symbolic transformations and associations foreground the gestural quality of photographic vision. The model and the landscape seem to implicate each other reciprocally in homoeroticism, but this reading of the situation hinges on its abstraction from material reality by the photographer's gesture that converts the whole scene into a unitary object for a specular and libidinal economy. The seamless integration of figure and ground in the rhetoric of such images points to a connection between camp photography and the corporeal practice of camping. Whereas fairies have movement and voice as the performative grounds of projection of effeminacy or desirability – a projection that frequently contests or resists a straight point of view on the situation – here Lynes demonstrates that photography allows for a command of the whole *mise-en-scène*, at least as it presents itself to vision.

In Victorian visual culture, the visibly pederastic quality of the pictorialists' homoerotic imaginary "was simply more acceptable to the Victorian sense of propriety than the eroticization of adult males: the exact inverse of today's pattern."[328] This quality might have been more acceptable from a certain perspective, but it also resulted in the promotion of androgynes as, according to Sontag, "one of the great images of Camp sensibility."[329] The concertedly ephebic models used in pictorialist photography and in some of Lynes's photographs preserve the masculinity of a desiring viewer by establishing a hierarchical axis of difference that substitutes for sexual difference by keying differences in age, conformation, and the tactile qualities of bodily surface and muscle tone to presumed differences in sexual aim. Lynes's photograph of Fred Danieli as Narcissus in the 1939 *U.S. Photo* (figure 4) feature is the most indicative image in this vein. In this densely populated pictorialist tableau vivant, Danieli is pictured from the waist up sprawled supine over a rocky embankment with his arms extended above his head. His languorous pose and lolling eyes evoke the erotically tinged pathos of the deposition of Christ or the morbid ecstasy of Michelangelo's Dying Slave. A reflection offers the viewer a different perspective on the young model's handsome face and interposes another layer of optical distance from the model.

Andrew Britton writes that "camp always connotes 'effeminacy,' not 'femininity,'"[330] and this image pushes the ef-feminization of the model beyond ordinary castration to the threshold of necrophilia, apparently inviting a comparison between the abolition of masculinity and death. The exchange of one axis of difference for another in the Victorian homoerotic imaginary was never effortless or seamless, and the deathly quality of Lynes's Narcissus could be an extreme reaction to cultivated effeminacy as an affront to the compulsory naturalism of normative masculinity. The excessive quality of every element of the image promotes this interpretation. The model is not only supine and vulnerable but also a marble-like image of classical perfection, with the high tonal values of his skin practically glowing by comparison to the somber background. The literal and figurative self-regard that defines the Narcissus myth is so extravagantly heightened by the model's bodily torsion, that

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[328] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 91.
[329] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 56.
[330] Andrew Britton, "For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, a Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 137.

it is rendered physiologically impossible. Too bad, since the reflecting pool has been replaced by a literal mirror. In case there remains any doubt about the identity of the photographic subject, Danieli's slim, pale body is strewn with Narcissus flowers, which also grow in a dense clump on the make-believe embankment.

Despite the decadent, transgressive, and potentially disturbing qualities of such images, however, Lynes preserves a sense of delight in the optical and cognitive play of associations. In doing so, he preserves an element of the tradition of pictorialist photography, at least where the male nude is concerned. Waugh notes that:

> however serious many of the practitioners of the classical iconography may seem,
> here too is an element of play similar to the spirit of much drag. The models shared
> this playfulness, in all evidence. Even in the most pretentious of the pastoral images,
> one can sometimes detect a subtle mockery of the classical alibi, of the thinness of the
> pretext for nudity.[331]

This is the ironizing quality of camp that leads Sontag to describe the camp perspective as "the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater" and assert that "camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a 'lamp;' not a woman, but a 'woman.'"[332]

As the practical theory of the Fairy, camp allowed queer men to be "women" in view of men willing to adopt a shift in perspective, but Lynes's camp perspective articulates the impossibility of a naturalistic or direct take on the gestural regime of queerness. In the theory that grounds the camp perspective, queer masculinity is a frame of reference produced by exactly the kind of excessive gestures or imposture seen in Lynes's Narcissus photograph. Steven Bruhm argues that queer readings of Narcissus and narcissism need to take rejection as its defining attribute.[333] After all, it was not Narcissus's self-love that caused his suitors so much consternation, but his indifferent rejection of them. In rejecting them, Narcissus "rejects not only the dictate to desire another […] but also the drive to stabilize a range of

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[331] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 95.
[332] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 56.
[333] Steven Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.

binarisms upon which gender in Western culture is founded."[334] The binary that suffers most at the hands of Lynes's campy Narcissus is the distinction between truth and simulation, and the corresponding injunction to desire reality and reject artifice. Bruhm's reevaluation of narcissism through the work of Oscar Wilde rejects the view of narcissism as stagnation or regression. Instead, his reading reveals how Romanticism found in Narcissus a figure for the dynamic relation between the self and aspirational images of the perfected self.[335] As Sontag writes, "Camp is the attempt to do something extraordinary. But extraordinary in the sense, often, of being special, glamorous. (The curved line, the extravagant gesture.)"[336] The subjectivity that produces it intersects with normalcy, but does not coincide with it, with the result that the marks of its production are always visible.

5.2 Reordering Aesthetic Priorities

Lynes's Narcissus seems to confirm established perspectives on camp. However; other images illuminate subtler implications of the inescapable artificiality of queer masculinity. Figures 5 and 6 participate in an unmistakable, if diffuse, camp register, even though they do not support any particular set of iconographical associations. The photographs produce an insistent but tenuous sense of recognition. Arguably, figure 5 evokes postures typically assumed by women in *academies* to be used as stock characters in, for instance, a bathing scene. The same image loosely evokes the *Adorante* or *Betende Knabe*, the frequently emulated Hellenistic bronze (c. 300 BC) installed by Frederick II at his pleasure palace, Sanssouci at Potsdam. In figure 6, the strong directional lighting for which Lynes was known combines with a halo-like effect produced by lighting the model through a screen from behind, and the model's dark features – turned heavenward – to create the impression of a baroque painting. Caravaggio's *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (1593-1594) or *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (1594-1596) are the nearest likenesses to my eye, but it is precisely this referential blankness that allows the photographs to reveal a nuance of camp, as a point of view and a practice, that is obscured by icons of the camp canon, such as the Narcissus myth. The strategy of camp is essentially a hyperbolical intertextuality that makes it impossible to decide whether camp imagery is narrative or presentational. Ordinary narrative

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[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid., 62-79.
[336] Sontag, "Notes on Camp," 60.

experience assumes a direct connection between gestures, character, and narrative time as constituents of experience. By contrast, camp gestures quilt together so many intertextual references that the repetitive or replicative quality of gestures emerges as a problem for the view of gestures as natural and spontaneous expressions of subjectivity. The strategy can either be narrow, as in Lynes's Narcissus photo, or broad, as in figures 5 and 6. In either case, the referential overload produces a kind of seizure/caesura in which gesture is converted from the minimal unit of narrative embodiment to a kind of Deleuzian affect image. As a theory of homoeroticism, the function of camp is to confound the intuition that desire resides in the emplotment of particular situations and reinvest it as a synchronic intensity proper to gestures.

According to Andrew Britton, "the camp attitude is a mode of perception whereby artifacts become the object of an arrested, or fetishistic, scrutiny. It does not so much 'see everything in quotation marks' as in parentheses; it is a solvent of context."[337] Britton is responding to Sontag's quip that lamps and women become "lamps" and "women" in camp hands. In fact, Britton argues that "camp is a means by which that analysis is perpetually postponed."[338] What Sontag sees as quotation marks suggest that camp problematizes the lampness of lamps. By contrast, parentheses declare the lamp's autonomy from the ordinary judgement of lamps. As in Ngai's analysis of zaniness, only a degree of distance from the problematic camp object allows for the emergence of a *complex* or ambivalent negativity.

Britton's argument aptly captures the genius of *The Soilers*,[339] the most divine example of cinematic camp before the Production Code Administration banished fairies and pansies to the obscurity of euphemism and in-jokes. Although the main action of the film centers on the brawl between Bob Canister (Stan Laurel) and Smacknarama (James Finlayson), the star of the film is George Rowe's mincing cowboy. While Canister and Smacknamara are still negotiating the terms of their duel, the camera cuts to a slightly built cowboy in an oversized hat and shirt as he enters from a door centre-screen and immediately exits through another door to the right. During this brief transit, he is entirely absorbed in a book. These few seconds tell us everything we need to know about the cowboy. Upon

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[337] Britton, "for Interpretation," 140.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Ceder, Ralph. *The Soilers*. Film. Directed by Ralph Ceder. Culver City, CA: Hal Roach Studios, 1923.

entering, he deliberately closes the door behind him, with a half-step backward and a minute shift of his weight to the back foot. Moving his hand to his hip, he settles into a contrapposto posture for a split second and rolls his shoulder forward before carving a graceful arc through the scene. The overall impression conveyed by his walk is lightness and precision. His spine is straight, and he carries his shoulders back and square with his body. Each step is *placed*, and the movement of walking originates in his subtly rolling hip motion. The cowboy dances in and out of the expanding spiral of destruction cognizant of, but untroubled by the action that brackets his performance. When the fight crashes into the adjoining room the cowboy is filing his nails. As it rages on, he examines his work, then adjusts his hair in the mirror, replaces his hat, and blows a kiss at his image before skipping back through the demolished door. Following his exit, the combat veers even more decisively toward absurdity, becoming a pillow fight. Perhaps this is the moment the two autonomous threads of the film are finally plied together. Having beaten Smacknamara senseless, and stumbled out into the street, Canister declares victory. The cowboy "yoohoo"-s at Canister from an open window on the upper storey. Canister looks up at the cowboy, who returns his gaze with his hands clasped at his throat, biting his bottom lip in excitement. "My hero," the cowboy returns. Canister dismisses him with a limp wave of the hand. Sensing the direction of the situation, the cowboy sniffs a potted flower, then drops it on Canister's head.

The point is that the campy quality of Rowe's characterization results from the absolute disjuncture between his framing of the situation and what is worthy of attention in an ordinary western. In terms of the film's visuality, Rowe's autonomy is conveyed by the choreographic quality of his physical performance and his relation to other characters as objects, while all the other characters are absorbed in the narrative space of the film because of their shared commitment to the "naturalism" of their cinematic situation. In essence, camp disorders or reorders aesthetic priorities, relegating what would normally count as the focal objects, relations, and actions to the background in favour of its own aesthetic program. Sara Ahmed writes that we can think "of the background not simply in terms of what is around what we face, as the 'dimly perceived,' but as produced by acts of relegation: some things are relegated to the background in order *to sustain* a certain direction; in other words, in order to

keep attention on what is faced."[340] To sustain or travel the inexpedient line of queer desire, the campy fairy has to relegate certain facts about the social world to the background.

As Waugh notes, although "codes of propriety were strictly enforced, [ballet] allowed a broader latitude for the expression of homoerotic sensibilities than almost any other cultural setting."[341] However seriously a ballet commits itself to its narrative project, fetishistic attention to the dancer, or empathetic identification with their movement, threatens to remainder the whole *mise-en-scène* and foreground the corporeal reality of the dancing body. In Lynes's photography, even more than providing an alibi for beefcake photography, ballet allowed viewers to glimpse "a homoerotic utopia."[342] Waugh continues: "inevitably some of the glamour photographs of men in tights transgressed the codes of decency. But the sexual photos were private complements to a public oeuvre, as with Lynes's nudes of the black cast of Stein and Thompson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934)."[343] Waugh is right about Lynes's private photos of the cast of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, but the reason these remain private is because some photos of the cast included explicit sexual acts, making the photos (and models) vulnerable to the legal regulation of obscenity. Others were more circumspect but were nevertheless removed from any plausible connection (costume, setting, or movement) to ballet performance, for example, the photo in which the choreographer, Frederick Ashton, kneels clothed in a dark suit, while three nude dancers recline around him. George Platt Lynes's photographs of *Orpheus* (1948, choreography by George Balanchine, score by Igor Stravinsky, production design by Isamu Noguchi) take full advantage of the opportunity ballet creates for contemplation of the dancer's body, which Lynes presents nude, but nobody could call these photographs "private." In fact, Lynes attempted to publish the photographs of Nicholas Magallanes and Francisco Moncion (figs. 7-9) in the company's *Ballet Theatre Annual* (1950-1951).

Allen Ellenzweig reads the lyre in the *Orpheus* photos as a phallic reference.[344] Although this reading would likely be too linear to sustain an interpretation of the entire

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[340] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham :Duke University Press, 2006), 31.
[341] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 115.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 98.

performance, it does reveal the homoerotic charge of the performance segment captured in figures 7 and 8. The choreography has Orpheus (Magallanes) perched on the Dark Angel's (Moncion) knee. The shift in Magallanes's weight informs the viewer of the full involvement of both dancers' bodies to maintain their balance and posture relative to one another. At the same time, viewers willing to go along with Ellenzweig could see the horns of Orpheus' lyre euphemistically. Of course, euphemism is rendered redundant in Lynes's nude photographs, and the variety of ways in which dancers interacted in other photographs in the series suggest that the lyre likely played a more diffuse role as a synecdochic rendering of music. Both figure 9 and the photograph illustrating Ellenzweig's reading[345] show Magallanes and Moncion reaching through the lyre to grasp each other by the hand. Moreover, music grounds the motor intentionality of the dancers and establishes the coincidence of their aesthetic and corporeal involvement. While this may not carry the Freudian satisfaction of seeing the lyre as phallus, it makes the lyre function as an opening in the aesthetic surface of the performance that allows the intimate involvement of male bodies to emerge as its ground. The significance of this gesture with respect to a myth that had already assumed the status of an alibi for the presentation of homoeroticism in art cannot be overstated. The difficulty of resolving the significance of the lyre stems in part from the liquidation of the ordinary standards of judgement when it comes to camp, or even objects suspected of camp. The opening words of John Martin's second review of *Orpheus*, "whatever else it may or may not have accomplished (and there is something to be said on both sides)," neatly sum up the only position a critic can take on camp.[346] And again, whatever else these photographs may or may not have accomplished, they work against the relegation of homoeroticism to the background as a strategy for shoring up the cultural status of ballet, raising the possibility that behind every high-cultural shibboleth there might be a whiff of camp. As Lynes explained in a letter to Alfred Kinsey later that year, the company withdrew the photos from a subsequent version of the *Annual* after receiving complaints, including from Vera Zorina, who was a dancer in the company and George Balanchine's ex-wife, but not before several

[345] George Platt Lynes, in *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 102.
[346] John Martin, "THE DANCE: 'ORPHEUS'; Ballet Society Presents A Masterpiece," *New York Times* (May 16, 1948), 3.

thousand copies were sold! This episode alone should be enough to puncture the myth of Lynes's tragic enclosure in a closet of obscurity.

According to Waugh, for the glamour generation, the figure of the dancer connoted "a kind of ethereal disengagement from the everyday world, a refusal of the increasingly important documentary culture leading up to World War II." For Waugh, this meant that "the dancer's body operated as an abstraction."[347] But if camp operates by rearranging the relations between figure and ground, it might be more accurate to say that the dancer's body is *subtracted* from the increasingly rigid grid of sexual identities to assume its own prominence as a body of free-floating desire. This subtraction reveals that it is the regulation of bodies and desires that operates as an abstraction. Lynes's Orpheus photographs prioritize the homoerotic facet of the Orpheus myth by consigning Eurydice to the background, an almost total reversal of the myth in which Orpheus turns to the love of boys out of sorrow over the loss of his wife. While the ostensible drama of the myth is Orpheus' tragic failure to rescue Eurydice from the underworld, Maria Tallchief's performance of Eurydice is accorded remarkably little attention in Lynes's photos or press coverage. Although costumed promotional photos of Tallchief and Magallanes in their roles exist, I found no examples of photographs including Tallchief in the nude series with Magallanes and Moncion. The Kinsey Archive contains examples of dance photography including nude female dancers, so this gap likely reflects the qualities of the production or Tallchief's preferences.

John Martin describes Orpheus and the Dark Angel as the "two chief figures" of the ballet, and considers that Eurydice's choreography is the weakest on account of its "spell-breaking" falsity.[348] While one might expect this to constitute a serious failing in an interpretation of the Orpheus myth, Martin writes approvingly that, owing to the sparseness with which the "details" of the story are set forth, "the mood which prevails is of a noble grief so rarefied by time and distance as to have lost its personal sadness and become a kind of universal symbol." On the face of it, this might weigh in favour of the "abstraction" of the dancer's body; however, Martin also praised the production for its capacity to "produce so deep a formal satisfaction, [and] proclaim so eloquently that form is not alone a matter of architecture but deals also with resolutions of content." As in Lynes's use of ephebic models,

[347] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 117.
[348] Martin, "THE DANCE," 3.

the deep history of repetitions of the Orpheus myth allowed Balanchine and Lynes to bracket definitive elements of the myth as "details" in favour of a pure and mobile form of queer affectivity. When he reviewed the second production of "Orpheus" in January of the following year, Martin wrote that Magallanes had always danced the title role well in the past, but noted that "suddenly and inexplicably the projection of the character assumed a passion and a dramatic understanding that it has never even approximated heretofore." Likewise, "Francisco Moncion, who plays the Dark Angel superbly, responded in kind, and since the burden of the piece falls upon the two of them, the whole work was emotionally illumined." On Tallchief's account, Martin is more reserved, admitting only that "Tallchief caught something of the contagion in the single scene of Eurydice," seeming to prefer the unprecedented force with which the Bacchantes destroyed Orpheus.[349]

The whole episode takes on additional resonance in light of Balanchine's 1936 attempt to bring the Orpheus myth to the stage, that time in the form of Gluck's opera, *Orfeo ed Euridice*. In that production, Balanchine hid the singers in the orchestra pit to foreground his choreography on stage. The production was designed by Pavel Tchelitchew. While the balletic Orpheus merely raised the suspicion of camp, Jerome D. Bohm's cutting review in the *Herald Tribune* (May 22, 1936) suggests that Balanchine's first attempt was received as an almost gloriously zany failure. He wrote:

> In lieu of classic simplicity in both choreography and settings one gazed upon groupings as inane as those offered earlier this season by the Hollywood Ballet in its version of 'Prometheus.' Among the effects were rope ladders suspended in Hades, much in the manner employed by Mr. Balanchine in his creation, 'Errante;' a masked chorus of Furies tamely cavorting in a manner that would not have frightened an infant in arms; white, leafless trees, their roots completely exposed, dangling in mid-air, supposedly part of the vegetation of the Elysian Fields which further boasted huge, frosted cones, presumably of sugar, perhaps intended as pabulum for the happy shades. The crowning banality was the concluding vision of the be-winged William

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[349] John Martin, "CITY UNIT FEATURES 'ORPHEUS' BALLET; Magallanes and Moncion Star in Fine Performance, the High Spot of Week-End Events," *New York Times* (January 17, 1949), 15.

Dollar, flying through space on visible wires, following the restoration to life of Eurydice, as in Victorian Christmas pantomimes.[350]

Bohm's list of design elements broadcasts the gratuitous ambition of the production, while his characterization of the same elements reveals their thinness. He concludes his review with queenly malice by noting that "the large audience applauded in cordial fashion." Lynes photographed the production, shooting several excellent images in which the bodies of Lew Christensen (Orfeo), Daphne Vane (Euridice) and William Dollar (Amore) combine to create a unified sculptural figure. Lynes included a photograph from his record of *Orfeo ed Euridice* in the 1939 feature in *U.S. Camera* photograph. The photograph depicts Orfeo from behind, nude, being led into the underworld by Eros (Douglas Coudy), who is draped from head to toe in wet and clinging white silk. Euridice is not in the frame.

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[350] Jerome D. Bohm, "Gluck 'Orpheus And Eurydice' At Metropolitan Opera Revived After 22 Years, but With Singers in Pit, Pantomime on Stage," *Herald Tribune* (May 23, 1936).

6. George Platt Lynes's Surrealism

Lynes's association with surrealism dates to his travels in France with Glenway Wescott and Monroe Wheeler, where he met figures such as Jean Cocteau and Man Ray, among others in the orbit of Gertrude Stein. In fact, according to Crump, Lynes and Man Ray competed informally for Stein's favor, and Stein teases Lynes about his rivalry with Man Ray for the status of Stein's official photographer.[351] Sheryl Conkleton records that two of the periodicals most important to introducing surrealism to North America, Charles Henri Ford's *View* and David Hare's *VVV*, both included photographs by George Platt Lynes.[352] However, Lynes's public association with surrealism probably owes most to the support of Julien Levy. Julien Levy was Lynes's earliest professional advocate in the United States, and was also a critical figure in the transmission of surrealism from Europe to the American art scene, and Crump credits this coincidence, in part, with Lynes's identification as a surrealist.[353] However, Lynes also exhibited his photographs alongside works by Picasso, Max Ernst, and Dali at a surrealist exhibition in his own short-lived gallery.[354] Collaborating with Arthur Everett Austin, Levy presented the first American exhibition of surrealist work, "Newer Super-Realism," from November 15-December 6, 1931 at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford Connecticut.[355] Alongside works by Lynes, the exhibition featured drawings by Dali and work by Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Giorgio de Chirico, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Cornell, and Man Ray. Haas notes that Lynes provided a photograph for the cover of the brochure accompanying and introducing the exhibition: a still life of found objects arranged improvisationally in collaboration with Julien Levy. Levy mounted an exhibition including many of the same artists, including Lynes, at his Manhattan gallery in January 1932. Lynes was also included in the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "Murals by American Painters and Photographers," the first MoMA exhibition to feature photography, where he exhibited a large photographic mural titled *Landscape*.[356]

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[351] James Crump, "Photography as Agency: George Platt Lynes and the Avant-Garde," in *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1993), 139.

[352] Sheryl Conkleton, "American Surrealist Photography," *MoMA* 16 (Winter-Spring, 1994), 21.

[353] Crump, "Photography as Agency," 140.

[354] Anatole Pohorilenko and James Crump, *When We Were Three: The Travel Albums of George Platt Lynes, Monroe Wheeler, and Glenway Wescott, 1925-1935* (Santa Fe: Arena Editions, 1998), 81.

[355] Crump, "Photography as Agency," 140. There had previously been solo exhibitions of work by artists later considered surrealist. The innovation of the 1931 exhibition was to group the works together on the grounds of style

[356] Crump, "Photography as Agency," 141.

Four years later, Lynes photograph, *The Sleepwalker*, was included in MoMA's exhibition, "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism."[357]. *The Sleepwalker* is an almost diagrammatically surrealist work. In it Lynes uses combination printing to create a seamless image of a nude man sleeping in a flexed position on a thin platform supported by a rear-facing standing nude model, who is cut off above hips. The blankness of the studio background foregrounds figuration as the primary function of the image, but disjunctions of scale and perspective problematize the integrity of perception. These subtle spatial fractures are reiterated in the arrangement of the figures which provide a visual analogy for the division of the subject of modernity. The division of the body into upper and lower regions keys the fracturing of modern subjectivity to the psychoanalytic partition of the psyche into conscious and unconscious processes – processes that are in this image oriented in opposite directions. Developing Waugh's claim that the nude is a fundamentally erotic discourse, whatever attempts are made to mystify or deflect libidinal attachments, Lynes's use of classically surrealist techniques and motifs here provides a corporeal mapping of a subjectivity whose libidinal attachments pull in opposite directions.

Despite acknowledging the influence of surrealism on Lynes's early work, and "while Lynes experimented with double exposures and other controlled accidents in the surrealist manner," Crump argues that "there is little to suggest that Lynes fully subscribed to the tenets of surrealism."[358] Moreover, Crump claims that it is doubtful "that Lynes would have aligned himself with the central figures of surrealism, especially where sexuality and eroticism are concerned."[359] André Breton himself would not be a surrealist if we take adherence to a surrealist catechism as a condition of belonging to the field of surrealist production, given that, as Rosalind Krauss notes, Breton contradicts himself on almost every theoretical claim or pronouncement he made on the subject.[360] Moreover, as Krauss illustrates by documenting the profound heterogeneity of surrealist imagery, adherence to a coherent aesthetic program may have less to do with the production of credible surrealist expressions than commitment to a set of "semiological functions" common to the project of surrealist production.[361]

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[357] Ibid. See pp.143 for a reproduction of *The Sleepwalker*.
[358] Crump, "Photography as Agency," 139.
[359] Ibid., 140.
[360] Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," *October* 19 (Winter, 1981):12.
[361] Ibid., 17.

Crump's observation about the mismatch between Lynes and the sexual politics of surrealism undoubtedly relates to the documented homophobia of foundational surrealists, which would likely be an insurmountable barrier to Lynes's full participation in the mainline of surrealist practice. At the same time, given the centrality of fantasy and eroticism to both surrealism and Lynes's work, and the tendency of both to mine these as techniques for disrupting conventional hierarchies of moral and aesthetic value, key dimensions of Lynes's photographic practice are closely aligned with surrealism, if not the sexual politics of its proponents. Crump also distances the question of Lynes's surrealist bona fides from his nudes, aligning it more closely with Lynes's commercial output. Crump notes that, "While he often used handmade sets, the fashion photographs from the 1930s also exhibit Lynes's attempts to move away from the language of surrealism, an ironic adaptation in fashion photography that exercised strong influences in the work of Man Ray and George Hoyningen-Huene."[362] Cecil Beaton, a personal friend of Lynes', claimed that Lynes "loathed photographing mannequins in the modish poses and surrealist guises of the 1930s."[363] Crump suggests that Lynes's continued engagement with surrealism reflects the direction of important clients, such as department stores (Henri Bendel, Bergdorf Goodman, Hattie Carnegie, and Saks Fifth Avenue) that constituted a substantial portion of his commissioned work."[364] Crump prefers to align Lynes's self-directed photography with other tendencies in modernism. He notes that, from the photographs he took with Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott during their travels together from 1928-1931, essentially Lynes's artistic infancy, "Lynes's interest in photographic abstractions becomes quite apparent, suggesting his knowledge and appreciation of cubism, constructivism, and the formal qualities of contemporary painting."[365] Despite the foregoing, my survey of Lynes's archive revealed an engagement with surrealist techniques and motifs that extends beyond the commissioned work Lynes accomplished for department stores and fashion magazines, forming a significant dimension of the work he found most creatively and personally rewarding: his portraits and nude figure studies.

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[362] Crump, "Photography as Agency," 141.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid., 142.
[365] Ibid., 138.

Lynes's surrealism extends dimensions of the imagistic rhetoric I have associated with camp. Apart from the dignity of involuted theoretical elaboration and sanctification through association with the artistic avant-garde, surrealism might even be indistinguishable from certain kinds of camp expression. Marcel Duchamp's social and artistic self-extension through his campy alter-ego, Rrose Sélavy, suggests that at least one among the surrealist pantheon recognized the interoperability of camp and surrealism. Perhaps the official homophobia of André Breton reflects a reactive attempt to distance his intellectual and artistic project from an existing mode of production and reception that would undercut the seriousness of his ambitions as much as from any prevailing hostility to same-sex eroticism or gender transitivity. Among the features that evidence the impact of surrealism on American photography, Conkleton lists "dramatic lighting, the fragmentation of figures, pastiche and montage, as well as the depiction of objects in unexpected contexts or in strange juxtapositions." An appreciation of theatrical exaggeration and incongruous juxtapositions are typical of the tactics deployed in camp to undermine the naturalism and seriousness of compulsory performances and affects. Camp also shares an affinity for historical and cultural eclecticism with surrealism, and in both exotic times and places are "conjured from distinctly ahistorical elements."[366] In both, history goes beyond providing a source of inspiration, lending them the legitimating sense of continuity with an essential and timeless artistic impulse. Describing surrealism's eclectic appropriation of expressions and authors that predate its emergence as a self-conscious artistic movement, Georges Hugnet and Margaret Scolari explain that the "researches and interpretations [of Surrealism] establish their stand on a foundation of humour, subversiveness and dreams; in the evasion of all that is conventional."[367] Moreover, because it "springs from the marvellous [sic], and it has always existed," surrealism is synchronic or primal.[368] By the same token, one of Sontag's least contentious notes on camp is her observation that it depends on a kind of productively anachronistic *historical* bricolage. Finally, Conkleton notes surrealism's obsessive focus on mundane details, deformation and decay.[369] "Surrealism wishes to reconcile what has been

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[366] Conkleton, "American Surrealist Photography," 21.
[367] Georges Hugnet and Margaret Scolari, "In the Light of Surrealism" *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 4, no. 2/3 (November-December, 1936), 22.
[368] Ibid., 19.
[369] Conkleton, "American Surrealist Photography," 21.

up to this point irreconcilable, to utilize what has been unreasonably despised."[370] Camp expression likewise raises the minor detail to the power of a fetish, precisely to introduce incorrect judgements into the determination of taste, glorifying the affective intensity of failure, abjection, artifice, and excess. Given these similarities, it is easy to imagine surrealism and camp as closely related strategies for introducing dissension into the collation of judgements of taste, which Kant sees as the mechanism by which correctness emerges as the product of subjective universality.

Given all formal and thematic features that camp and surrealism share, it might be expected that Lynes's poignantly unusual takes on classical myths, employing oneiric settings and figural compositions overburdened with significance, might provide the richest examples. Certainly, many of these photographs are paradigmatic instances of that intersection. In one photo (figure 10), Lynes presents a decidedly odd perspective on the cyclops. The fine-featured kneeling figure is hardly what comes to mind when one imagines the monstrous progeny of the titans, evoking both passivity and delicacy. Moreover, the model's eyes are both clearly visible, and even augmented by a third eye in the form of a large *photograph* of an eye applied to the model's chest over his heart. Elsewhere, Lynes presents a cyclops with the usual allotment of eye, an effect produced through combination printing. That photograph is much less surrealist in effect because the monstrosity, costume, gestural drama, and rubble confirm the myth of the cyclops. By contrast, figure 10 can be read as a cyclops only because Lynes's conspicuously rudimentary technique projects the eye into another semiotic register as an icon of eye-ness, a demonic supplement that seems to siphon off the significance usually accorded to the indexicality of photography. Ironizing the eye in this way positions vision as a process of interpretation – a technique that owes as much to affect as to any optical apparatus. Because of the close association between vision and knowledge, placing the eye on the model's torso also decentralizes the head as the seat of knowledge and subjectivity, potentially alluding to the body as a site of practical knowledge. This displacement keys the interpretation of another anatomical malapropism. Lynes has positioned an enlarged photograph of a toothy smile over the model's lap. The image plays on the crude association of the female sexual anatomy with the mouth, evoking the horror of castration. At the same time, the misplaced smile can be read against the model as an

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[370] Hugnet and Scolari, "In the Light of Surrealism," 32.

acknowledgement of the repurposing of the mouth for oral sex. In either case, the autonomy of the mouth and the eye as partial objects supports the promiscuous mobility of desire and role with respect to bodies and social identities that underpins the libidinal economy of the fairy. Although Lynes's "eye" and "mouth" are effective, the clumsiness of the technique he uses to produce them sits uneasily against the rhetorical ambition of the image and its association with the seriousness of classical allegory as a kind of high-cultural discourse. Moreover, the same features of the image that instance a surreal effect of psychological and epistemological disorientation also evoke syrupy clichés and dirty jokes, a familiar running together of sincerity and winking irony. The overall impression is of camp artificiality, a quality heightened by the nearly-nude model's incongruous drapery of fur.

Although Lynes's mythological photographs offer many opportunities for an analysis of his engagement with surrealism, I will focus on three motifs endemic to Lynes's nude figure studies: doubling; screens; and meta-pictures. More than simple "motifs" or means, these features have the advantage of constituting discernable and coherent photographic gestures because they visibly enact Lynes's angle on a situation. Moreover, the photographic gestures of screens, doubling, and meta-pictures expose a deeper connection between camp and surrealism, pointing to conceptual continuities that cut across a significant portion of Lynes's total output as an artistic photographer. Screens, doubling, and meta-pictures all produce what Rosalind Krauss describes as "spacing" in Lynes's photographs. These gestures allow my analysis to go beyond iconographic readings of the images to demonstrate how Lynes's photographic gestures articulate a corporeal and practical theory of queer masculinity. Spanning the late 1930s and 1940s, Lynes's surrealist experiments coincide with a shift in the understanding of sexuality within New York's queer culture. While George Chauncey reports that some middle-class men accepted emerging sexological and medical models a generation earlier than the broader American public, for the majority of men in the 1930s, queer life was still largely organized by the libidinal economy of the fairy. I do not know how familiar or how persuaded George Platt Lynes was by technical discourses of homosexuality, however even early to new ideas of queerness in the 1930s would be forced to engage with the gestural regime that characterised the fairy as a practical strategy for negotiating sexual contacts. The situation must have been disorienting for the men feeling and inventing their way through a change of state that took decades. Before the change,

sexual desire was essentially polymorphous but took on particular shapes, directions, and moral valences through the exercise of the will, whether that be toward restraint and propriety or adventure and perversion. Beginning in the 1930s, a growing number of men outside the discursive orbit of legal and medical scholars and political reformers accepted sexual desire for men as a stable, instinctual and endemic quality that set them apart from other men, irrespective of gender comportment. At the same time, practical experience informed these men that "normal" men were sometimes interested in sex with other men.[371] Neither the theoretical discourse nor the prevailing wisdom provided a satisfying way of reconciling queerness as an emotional style and gender position produced through performance and cultivation with the apparent objectivity of sexuality. In this context, the surrealist gestures I analyze below should be understood as ways of problematizing and revising the relationship between the subjective interiority and performative exteriority of queer masculinity. Experiments of this type would have been crucial in shaping the reality of queer masculinity within a changing ideological and practical context.

Krauss argues that one of the issues that has vexed definitions of surrealism as a style from the very beginning is the formal heterogeneity of images that have been considered surrealist in effect. Defining what is surreal in photography has posed particular challenges because of the association of the medium with indexicality. Surrealist publications were as likely to co-opt the work of "straight" photographers, including the likes of Atget and Brassai, as they were to use disorienting and oneiric images by photographers like Hans Bellmer. Using the example of the photographs used to illustrate surrealist periodicals, however, Krauss argues that the problem of the heterogeneity of surrealist imagery can be resolved by shifting the locus of definition from the classical art historical preoccupation with form to the "semiological functions" of surrealist images.[372] According to Krauss, the rhetorical power of photographs derives from their ability to attest to the simultaneity and seamlessness of the scene they capture. As she puts it, "the photographic image is not only a trophy of this reality, but a document of its unity as that-which-was-present-at-one-time."[373] Where Dada photomontage broke apart the continuous surface of the photograph by

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[371] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 13.
[372] Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," 17.
[373] Ibid., 23.

introducing spaces that destroy the simultaneous presence of photographic objects to each other, the surrealist practice of montage through superimposition preserves the continuity of the image, maintaining the optical impression of photography's indexicality. Despite the superficial continuity of such images, however, "without exception the surrealist photographers infiltrated the body of [their] print, this single page, with spacing."[374] In a sense, Dada's fracturing of the pictorial plane undermines the phenomenal experience of reality as a field knit together by the exchange of gestures. The capacity of subjects to extend themselves through gestures reaches a hard limit at the gutter between the images in a cut-up. Surrealist techniques restore the possibility of communication between the subjects and objects of photography without, however, restoring the phenomenological obviousness of the naturalistic perspective. This is what I take to be the significance of Krauss's formula for surrealist photography as a practice intended to "convulse reality from within."

The convulsive quality of surrealist photography shares with camp a visceral appreciation for the complexity of the figure/ground relationship. While the absolute negativity of Dada leads to a visual world in which objects fail to communicate with each other no matter how forcefully they are brought together, surrealism and camp figure a world in which the identities and qualities of things are produced through their contact with other things through the medium of a shared ground. At the same time, surrealism and camp demonstrate that the ground produces objects and relations precisely because it is not an empty space, but a field of forces, and especially of desires and interdictions.[375] In Krauss's account, the "spacing" introduced by Dada and surrealist interventions in the continuity of photographic reality corresponds to the interval between the signifier and signified. The

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[374] Ibid., 25.

[375] This shared theory of the ground might explain why statements about the ethos of surrealism work so well as statements of the ethos of camp. Man Ray writes, "surrealism has never feared that it was going too far, it has never betrayed true impulses, it has never acted with tact, with circumspection" (in Hugnet and Scolari, 32). Summing up their history of the emergence of surrealism in 1936, Georges Hugnet and Margaret Scolari assert that Breton's surrealism "proposes to declare allegiance to folly, to dreams, to the absurd, to the incoherent, to the hyperbolic – in a word – to all that is contrary to the general appearance of reality" (Hugnet and Scolari, 19). At the least, these statements suggest that camp and surrealism can both be seen as tactless avowals of a "contrary" impulse. Hugnet and Scolari frame surrealism in epistemological terms, claiming that "Surrealism is a mental attitude and a method of investigation" (Hugnet and Scolari, 20); and that "not as an esthete, but as an investigator and experimenter [surrealism] has extended its research into every field in an attempt to get to the bottom of things" (Hugnet and Scolari, 32). By contrast, as an assault on judgement and hierarchies of taste, camp is resolutely aesthetic. At the same time, Hugnet and Scolari also argue that Breton's surrealism "is dedicated to a revision of values" (Hugnet and Scolari, 20).]

integrated reality presented by photography is undermined by the introduction of spacing, thereby converting the objects given by photographs into signs without abandoning their givenness as things that have existed in front of the camera. "In this way the photographic medium is exploited to produce a paradox: the paradox of reality constituted as sign."[376] According to Krauss, "this is the move that lies at the very heart of surrealist thinking, for it is precisely this experience of *reality as representation* that constitutes the notion of the Marvelous or Convulsive Beauty."[377] George Platt Lynes's surrealist photographs bring an additional resonance to the spacings he introduces into the continuity of reality by drawing on the experience of a divided subjectivity common to queer American men in the early twentieth century. Spacing in his photographs refers more directly to the division between consciousness and the unconscious, an interval that allows the unconscious to produce consciousness as the figure against which it appears as empty ground.

6.1 Screens

George Platt Lynes's creative photography was almost exclusively the product of the controlled studio setting, if only because of the types of images he produced most: celebrity portraits, fashion plates, advertisements, dance photographs, and nude figure studies. Lynes is noted for strong, dramatic lighting and his inventive use of props and constructed sets. These practical dimensions of his photography tend to produce images with a relatively shallow depth of field. These factors help situate Lynes's frequent use of screen-like divisions in his photographs, throughout his career, as an aesthetic accommodation to constraints on his production processes. Lynes's scrims, draperies, net, tulle, grids of string, plate glass, partial walls, window screens, paper, and so on, magnify the shallow fields of his photographs by creating clearly delineated zones as foreground, midground, and background. Apart from these prosaic functions, however, it is precisely the multiplication of photographic spaces that allows Lynes's use of screens to advance a meditation on desire and figuration.

In figure 11, Lynes's use of a screen constructed from bamboo and fine window screen mesh summarizes in one image the entire rhetoric of screens Lynes will elaborate in future work. The screen produces a division in the extremely shallow space of the

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[376] Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," 28.
[377] Ibid.

photograph creating a relation of front and back in the image. The primary effect of this screen is to conceal the model's face; however, the power of the screen to impede vision is undermined by the position of the model's hands in front and behind the screen, which reveals its thinness. Moreover, the screen impedes the vision the photographer and viewers share, not the model's vision. This distancing effect is amplified by the reflective surface of parts of the screen, which imply a greater depth behind the camera – in fact, it is the reflective quality of the screen that withholds the model's face, while the model's genitals are frankly displayed. This oscillation between proximity and depth and reflection and transparency colours the distance produced by the screen as an emotional distance, or an interruption in the movement of affects and exchange of gestures.

On the face of it, a screen is a surface that interrupts the line of vision. Because an object completely obscured by a screen does not exist in the ontology of the photograph, the effect is most eloquent when the photographer uses a screen to withhold an object or render it resistant to visual palpation. In Lynes's 1954 photograph featuring Joseph Reyes and another model behind glass (figure 12), Lynes uses a continuous frosted glass screen to divide the phenomenal surface of the image into two regions, introducing a space in the continuous surface of the real. Reyes is the freely given content of the image. Against the totalizing surface of the glass, he is the only figure available to inspection. At the same time, Reyes's frank, frontal display, crossed arms, and impassive gaze abandon the atmospheric, compositional, and postural conventions that conflate the availability of the ephebic models of von Gloeden's campy Mediterranean pictorialism to vision with their sexual availability. Lynes's framing of the situation neither renders Reyes effeminate nor idealizes him. The documentary "straight" quality of Reyes's nudity resists implicating him in an exchange with viewers' identificatory projections: Reyes's image both invites and repels a desiring gaze. So, in a sense, Reyes's frontality is also a screen that produces a gap in the sensuous continuity of phenomenal reality by producing aporias through interdiction.

The glass screen creates a division in the depth of field, implying the symmetrical coexistence of frontstage and backstage regions, taking on the full implications of Goffman's use of dramaturgical metaphor for the twinned phenomenology of social action. Reyes's frontality, charged with an interdiction that inverts the power imbalance of photographic voyeurism, deflects the gaze to the figure on the right. By comparison, the figure on the right

is receptive to projections of the viewer, being doubly castrated by the rear view that denies him the ability to return our gaze and exposes his backside to consideration in the libidinal economy of the photograph. At the same time, Lynes's use of backlighting in the image underscores the permeability of front and back onto each other, suggesting that the division between these two registers of experience is *maintained*. From a technical point of view, the backlighting is required to preserve the models' three-dimensional presence against the flattening effect of the indistinct, shallow setting and diffuse frontal lighting, but the lateral division of the two models pressed against the glass, and the vertical axis it produces, also gives the impression of a complementarity or interchangeability of the front and back. Lynes uses two models to produce this image; however, because the frosted glass makes it impossible to confirm their difference optically, the screen maintains the possibility that the models are really the same person – in fact, that the scene withheld by the screen is the mirror image of the photograph of Reyes. This hypothetical, or reflected, photograph is the backside of Lynes's photograph of Reyes in every sense: it is the space of the unconscious, or deflected desires, it is the space where the gap between signifier and signified collapses and desire inhabits its object.

The object that prevents or interrupts this collapse into indistinction is the glass screen. In Lynes's hands, it is a fitting analogue for Freud's 1923 specification of the ego as a *bodily* ego, or the ego as a skin, which operates as a screen to filter sensation and produce an orderly phenomenal world as a condition of psychic integrity and social action. Experienced from the inside, the bodily ego unifies experience and provides "a mapping of the body's inner surface, the surface of sensations, intensities, and affects, the 'subjective experience' of bodily excitations and sensations."[378] However, this inwardness is experienced as an aporia in a continuous flow of relations with objects, other people and significations external to the subject who is also conditioned by them. This formative reciprocity and analogy make representation a fundamental process of selfhood. Elizabeth Grosz writes that the bodily ego is "as much a function of fantasy and desire as it is of sensation and perception; it is a taking over of sensation and perception by a fantasmatic dimension."[379] Moreover, because other people's representations provide a basis of selfhood, "the body image is the result of shared

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[378] Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 37.
[379] Ibid., 38.

sociocultural conceptions of bodies in general and shared familial and interpersonal fantasy about particular bodies."[380] Lynes's photo of Reyes records a distinctive aspect of queer masculinity, which is a particularly acute experience of the bodily ego as a locus of anxiety. While a mapping of the psyche and the surface of the body is part and parcel of an operationally viable subjectivity, it is also a filter that contains inexpedient desires, and the fear that particles of queer desire might slip through the filter or screen of the bodily ego is inseparable from the project of living a divided life. Carrie Noland's synthesis of phenomenological perspectives on gesture complicates the Freudian account of the bodily ego because she foregrounds gesture as the field of activity by which the subject cultivates a particular kind of bodily presence, and therefore exercises agency within the disciplinary frame provided by external relations. Gesture allows queer men to aestheticize a presence that is more or less consonant with "general and shared familial and interpersonal fantasy about particular bodies" in order to open a space for the kinds of relations they desire and selves they desire to be.

William Leach records that in the 1850s, a major shift in the relationship between people and the world of commodities was underway, supported by the adoption of plate glass as a building material.[381] Leach reminds readers that it was common to shop in open-air markets "in the midst of the goods themselves" until the twentieth century, a pattern that persisted into the 1920s in the countryside and working class neighbourhoods.[382] Glass distanced people from merchandise spatially, by preventing them from smelling or touching the goods. "At the same time, it amplified the visual, transforming the already watching city person into a potentially compulsive viewer."[383] The role of glass in creating desire as a function of distance underpins its aptness as an analogy for gesture and the bodily ego. Despite the felt naturalness of certain gestures, ultimately gesticulators still choose whether and how to move, and that means adopting a detached or speculative relationship to one's

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[380] Ibid., 84.
[381] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 65. Fittingly, one of the earliest advocates of the show window in North America was L. Frank Baum, whose fantastically loopy fiction put much of his advice to visual merchandisers, a profession he helped invent, into action. "Don't let the lamps and tin pots sit there, Baum said; make them 'come alive' as if they were figures on the stage" (60). From this dictum and similar exhortations it is easy to see how Baum's perspective on display could open onto a specifically surrealist relationship to goods.
[382] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 61-62.
[383] Ibid., 62-63.

affects and percepts. As the capacity to reveal a particular quality of presence via the active management of the signifying body, gesturing entails a partial *dis*identification with the self it produces as an object of vision.

Although the show window is a paradigmatic case, this dynamic does not inhere in the material itself. Judith Brown's analysis of the glamour of cellophane in the 1930s relates the libidinal dynamics of the screen to two qualities: transparency and blankness. The transparency of glass, cellophane, and certain screens is the complement of an arrested movement or interrupted connection. Blankness, on the other hand, attests to an unbridgeable gap or spacing in phenomenal reality. Lynes's 1937 photo (figure 13) of standing a man sheathed in a sheer fabric tube against a studio backdrop of clouds returns the qualities of transparency and blankness – and their relation to modern subjectivity – to the body. The model seems to be caught in the midst of a reflexive gesture confirming the phenomenal reality of his body as the means of a subjectivity that is continually undermined by the body's stubborn blankness and its inability to disclose experience directly. The bodily ego is like a skin, in that it demarcates the separation of self from the social and phenomenal world, but the same border that allows the self to register as a figure against the ground of the social world and the unconscious also introduces a layer of mediation between subjectivity and the field of conscious action. The circulation of this gesture as a photograph only serves to heighten this reading. Lynes is at pains here to effect a kind of photographic erasure, or the amplification of blankness: the model is reduced to a column of absence against a backdrop of cloud, the arch-nothing of the Western artistic tradition.

Lynes employed a similar tactic to create what I consider to be the most evocative portrait of his longtime lover Glenway Wescott (figure 14). Lynes joined Wescott and Monroe Wheeler as a third partner for seventeen years of Wescott and Wheeler's 68 year-long romantic partnership. While all accounts suggest that Lynes and Wescott shared a genuine affection for each other, remaining friends for the rest of their lives, the romantic passion between Lynes and Wheeler frequently left Wescott feeling sidelined. In Lynes's portrait, Wescott stands attired in tasteful, ordinary clothing, with his arms folded against his chest. It is unusual as a portrait because Wescott's body occupies a relatively small portion of the frame. Lynes pictures Wescott beneath and behind another figure, who crowds Wescott toward the edge of the photograph. Everything about the composition conspires to put this

figure between Wescott and the camera/viewer, but the identity of the figure -- photographed from behind and draped with clinging translucent silk – remains obscure. From a certain point of view, the figure could be mistaken for a prop after the fashion of portraits of sitters with the tools of their trade. Lynes made many examples of this kind of imagery in his extensive celebrity portraiture practice. However, Wescott was not a choreographer, and the figure's static posture, elevation, and drapery bring him closer to nineteenth-century spirit photography than anything in Lynes's dance photography practice. The draped figure takes on the blankness of the fabric that absorbs his identity before extending to the center of the frame, threatening also to absorb a pensive-looking Wescott. The ghostly blankness of the shrouded figure is open to a variety of projections, but for me it evokes the way Lynes's relationship with Wescott was haunted by resentment and jealousy over Wheeler. Wheeler was between Wescott and Lynes as much as he served as the fulcrum of the dynamic relationship between the three of them, and the draped figure seems to capture that dynamic by fielding Lynes's and Wescott's projections by virtue of his blankness while diminishing Wescott's place in his own portrait.

The enchanting remoteness Leach attributes to commodities in the emerging visual economy of the city recalls Benjamin's description of the aura of an artwork as an unbridgeable distance. While the discourse of the show window was grounded explicitly in the metaphor of the theatre, with the emergence of carefully staged displays behind plate glass, commodities seem to have adopted a strategy more in line with cinema, specifically the paradoxical singularity and multiplicity, presence and absence, of the star of the cinema screen. So, commodities -- and commodity desire -- took on something of the quality projected by Lynes's image of Reyes, the identity of the desirable object guaranteed by a kind of semiotization predicated on the withholding of phenomenal intimacy with it. Leach writes that "glass was a symbol of the merchant's unilateral power in a capitalist society to refuse goods to anyone in need, to close off access without being condemned as cruel and immoral […] At the same time, the pictures behind the glass enticed the viewer. The result was a mingling of refusal and desire that must have greatly intensified desire, adding another layer of cruelty."[384] Glass did not change the practical reality of property relations, but it

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[384] Ibid., 63.

heightened the spaces these legal relations produced to the pitch of a crisis, provoking the conversion of material objects into dreams.

Ironically, while the show window seems to epitomize the screen as interdiction, it also points to a different facet of Lynes's rhetoric of screens. The captivation of the show window, and the star, depend as much on the impression that commodities and stars reach out toward consumers along the line of desire by soliciting their attention, as it does on the impossibility of traversing the line of tension connecting spectators and shoppers to the objects of their attention. The window glass, like a cinema screen, becomes the surface that supports projections while dividing subject and object into discontinuous spaces. Lynes made frequent use of cast shadow in his nude figure studies, often using a shadow cast against a flat object or backdrop to double and displace the figure in the photograph, or to introduce an unseen figure into a photograph purely as a cast image. Due perhaps to the familiarity of cinema, or the extent to which cinema determined the phenomenology of optical experience from mid-century until recently, these images do not evoke the convulsive or schizoid quality of surrealism. One Lynes photo (figure 15), however, revives the surrealist potential of the spacings introduced by the receptive blankness of the cinema screen and show window precisely by violating them. In it, Lynes's model seems to step off the cinema screen into the space of the studio. The effect of the photo depends on Lynes's ingenious use of strong lighting projected onto the blank background behind the model, hidden by a board. The lighting makes it appear as if the model's foot dissolves into the screen, while the foot in front of the board becomes substantial. The logic of the photo requires a delamination of the physical and imaginary dimensions of space constituted by the screen as a surface that receives projection. In this photograph, Lynes positions the division of physical space to overlap with the phenomenal space of desire, so that the model belongs to both the spaces of phantasmatic projection/desire and material experience. Lynes's photo catches the moment of the model's de-sublimation, the conversion of a screen dream into a body. In terms of the physical bearing of the model, it is an awkward image, and clumsy compared to the usual sensitivity of Lynes's camera. Perhaps some clumsiness is to be expected in a photograph that visualizes the coincidence of two disjunctive regimes of signification. Critically, the model's de-sublimating traversal requires him to commit to a gesture impossible for the screen actor by taking a step toward the desiring viewer, leaving his projected shadow behind

on the hieroglyphic space of the screen. Deviating from the social choreography of straightness requires a similarly impossible turn away from the lines and habits sedimented by turning toward some objects and away from others. Remaining on the plane of straightness takes a commitment to projecting alien desires at the surface of the body and through its gestures. The discipline required to maintain a double life in the early twentieth century created a situation for many in which their gestures and desires were literally divided into different spaces, leading to the sexual mapping of cities where significant populations of queer men lived, and setting up gags like Chaplin's double-entendre on a waterfront encounter between a tramp and a millionaire.

Lynes's photo (figure 16) taken four years later can be seen as reprising the semiotic movement of figure 15. In this photograph, the model belongs fully to the phenomenal space of embodiment. At the same time, the model's contrived posture evokes literal hieroglyphs in the angularity of the disposition of his arms and the simultaneous frontality of the upper body and profile view of his lower body. This posed quality preserves a connection between the immediate bodily presence of the model and another order of significance or experience. A pose is a gesture arrested midway through its trajectory, and this makes the laboured and precarious quality of the intended connection between the phenomenal reality of the body and its capacity to signify especially transparent. A pose is always at risk of going off the rails, deviating from its intended line, either by losing the impetus of motion, or taking an undesired swerve because of the effort required to seize motor intentionality in media res. Lynes gives this painstakingly cultivated moment of connection a visible presence of the model's shadow on screen. The hinged screen creates two projection surfaces, and the vertex of the angle formed by the screens coincides with the model's shadow, roughly parallel to his vertical axis. Lynes has positioned his camera in an eccentric relation to the screen emphasizing the distortion of the model's image caused by differences in the angle of incidence between the light and the two faces of the screen. The manifest perspectivalism translates the loss of fidelity and plenitude that occurs when the polymorphous multi-stability of dreams or imagined gestures are particularized through a pose into an image that is at once continuous with the surrealist project of forcing reality to signify and acutely aware of the fragility and limitations of a subjectivity conditioned by identification with the marvelous. It is the "spacing" in the sensorium of modernity that permits the coexistence of distinct

registers of experience as discussed above, but the distance adopted by Lynes's camera, an additional spacing, allows us to assume a reflexive relationship with projection and identification by revealing the edges of the screen.

6.2 Doubling

While screens allowed Lynes to establish a variety of gestural relations, duplication or doubling stands out as especially significant and frequent in his body of work. Of the wide variety of photographic strategies used by surrealists, Krauss and Livingstone write that none so effectively establishes "the linguistic hold on the real" as doubling. They argue that doubling

> produces the formal rhythm of spacing – the two step that banishes simultaneity. And it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been added its copy. The double is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original. It comes after the first, and in this following it can only exist as a figure or image. But in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first. Through duplication, it opens up the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another.[385]

Elsewhere, Krauss describes repetition in similar terms as the "signifier of signification" in the infantile development of language.[386] Krauss and Livingstone trade heavily on doubling or repetition as a relation of identity, but this arguably makes more sense in relation to language than photography. The identity of linguistic signs is predicated on the bracketing of their analogue or prosodic features (typeface, location, sequence, vowel length, volume, intonation), that is, anything that accents the symbolic sense of a word. Duplication in photography is different because the symbolic identity of the photographic objects is almost always secondary to their individual and sensible existence. Certainly, photographers are capable of duplication by making multiple images of the same object, embedding photographic copies within an image, or printing multiple copies of the same image, but more often photography establishes the *partial* identity of doubles. Considering the uncanny, doppelgängers, and twins, mainstays of surrealism, it is the non-identity of a thing with what

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[385] Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingstone. *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York Abbeville Press, 1985), 28.
[386] Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," 26.

it resembles so closely that establishes a hallucinatory, disturbing, or disorienting effect. Understood as a gesture, photography has an intrinsic relationship with doubling because it duplicates the superficial reality of reflected light. Much has been made of the indexicality of photographs, but while the photograph originates as an index, its fate is to be an icon because what is registered, or duplicated, in photography is visual experience. The iconicity of the photographic sign makes it much more plastic than an index, a quality richly demonstrated in the history of surrealist techniques that result in the creation of visual experiences impossible for the unassisted human eye. So, it should probably be said that explicit strategies of doubling in photography draw attention to mutation, translation, or the failure of exact reproduction, and therefore expose the categorical and symbolic "language" of the real as the effect of the accumulation of things. By the same token, Krauss and Livingstone's analysis points to the inability of identities to withstand the piling up of instances within them. If surrealism forces reality to speak, the strategy of doubling reveals that reality speaks with a stutter that disrupts the seamless surface of its material significations.

In the context of Lynes's photography, especially to the extent that it can be taken as articulating a theory of queer masculinity, doubling takes on a more specific and tangible sense. On the surface, Lynes's use of doubling seems continuous with his use of screens as projection surfaces, particularly when the projected image is the shadow of the model. In these photos, however, the central drama of the image is the interplay of identification and desire. Doubling, on the other hand, focalizes the question of sameness and difference. Waugh writes that, in "the Western erotic imaginary, […] sexual representation elaborates difference but all the while holds on to sameness, building a tension between the strange and the familiar, between fantasy and reality."[387] Lynes's 1950 photo (figure17), exposes the complexity of the Narcissus myth as a metaphor for queer desire. At first glance, the image is a paradigmatic restatement of Narcissus' erotic self-regard. The tight framing of the image reduces the myth to a single gesture. In classical statements of the myth, this moment is signaled through a metamorphosis, but photography allows Lynes to dispense with that fantastic resolution because the photograph itself does the job of materializing the virtuality of Narcissus' tendency toward reflexive gestures as an aphoristic object. In interpretations of Narcissus that emphasize the sameness of Narcissus's love object, his obsession with his

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[387] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 92.

reflection entraps him in a kind of fatal self-reference. In Lynes's photo, however, the model's reflection is turned outward by the angle of the surface, potentially supporting the alternative Steven Bruhm recovers from Romanticism: that Narcissus's reflection provides an aspirational ego ideal.

I take the photograph as a phenomenological revision of the narcissistic etiology of queer desire. Sara Ahmed observes that "the threat of merger is attributed to the same-sex couple rather than to the heterosexual couple in part as a response to the presumption that 'difference,' described in terms of opposition, keeps sex in line."[388] But, as Waugh points out, the Euro-American queer imaginary of the nineteenth century was at pains to discover or inscribe difference in the context of same-sex couplings, one of the factors that made fantasies of Mediterranean pederasty so appealing. The same revulsion against the narcissistic scene underpinned the libidinal economy of the fairy and likely contributed to the early effectiveness of physical culture as an alibi for masculinist declensions of queer desire. It also made for effective comedy. Paul Franklin recounts that routines in which performers encounter their distorted reflection in a surface mistaken for a mirror were popular in English music hall and American vaudeville before being introduced into cinema by Max Linder, considered a formative influence on Chaplin.[389] Chaplin's take on this gag in *The Floorwalker*[390] incorporates a slight twist. As Franklin describes it:

Staring intently at each other, the [Tramp and the floorwalker] begin to register their differences. As if to confirm this visual realization, each extends a hand and presses it against the other's. The unexpected contact with warm human flesh sends a shock wave of sensation through their bodies, after which the floorwalker eyes the Tramp's physique and invites him to come nearer. Removing the Little Fellow's hat, the floorwalker cups the face of his near twin between his hands in a tender caress and inspects his physiognomy. The Tramp perceives this physical intimacy as a flirtation and reciprocates, eagerly kissing his mirror

[388] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham :Duke University Press, 2006), 97.

[389] Paul B. Franklin, "The Terpsichorean Tramp: Unmanly Movement in the Early Films of Charlie Chaplin," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 38-39.

[390] Chaplin, Charles. *The Floorwalker*. Film. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Hollywood: Lone Star, 1916.

image on the lips. The floorwalker wipes his mouth in disgust, while the Tramp looks to the floor in shame and sheepishly does the same.[391]

Lynes's photograph seems to elaborate an understanding he shared with the anarchic wisdom of slapstick: while recognizing oneself in another may instance curiosity, this narcissistic cathexis opens onto an almost compulsive palpation aimed at discovering differences as well as resemblances. Critically, in Chaplin's take on the mirror gag, we are left to our own judgement about whether it was the sameness or difference that led the floorwalker to reject the Tramp's advances. Lynes's photograph refracts the model's gaze to establish a relationship between the model and the viewer that is mediated by a transitory and distortionary narcissism. Playing the part of Narcissus, the model should be looking at himself, but the surface that reflects his face to us would reflect the camera to the model as a proxy for the imagined viewers of the photograph. What Lynes and Chaplin both bring to their staging of the mirror gag is the insight that queer narcissism is a case of mistaken identity. In front of a mirror, we expect to see our reflection. If we can only see others as reflected through a distorting mirror, as in this photograph, the status of our mirror image is thrown into a general crisis. Do our doubles complement, supplement, or replace us? In *The Floorwalker*, the doppelgangers respond to this existential dilemma by enlisting touch, a sense so alien to narcissism that Merleau-Ponty describes the situation of one hand touching the other in terms of a division of the self, rather than the closure of a haptic circuit. The intimacy of Lynes's close-up, which reveals the texture of the model's skin as well as raising questions about the qualities of the surface that give rise to the distorted reflection, and Lynes's intimation that the photograph records the consummation of a narcissistic impulse all conspire to draw the palpation of similarities and differences together with knowledge as a metaphor for sexuality. While *The Floorwalker* and Lynes's photograph concur with the narcissistic etiology with homosexuality to the extent of admitting that people are fascinated by their reflection, and that this line of tension opens a channel for the exchange of libidinally charged gestures, they also leave the question of the relationship between narcissistic attachment and difference unsettled, and surreally unsettling.

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[391] Franklin, "The Terpsichorean Tramp," 39.

Figure 17 acquires additional significance from a series of relationships in George Platt Lynes's life that, in a certain light, foreshadows the significance of the double, or the doubletake, in Alfred Hitchcock's surreal psychological thriller, *Vertigo*.[392] In 1940, while still in a complicated romantic relationship with Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott, Lynes fell in love with his studio assistant, George Tichenor (figure 18). Lynes's relationship with Wheeler and Wescott had grown tense because of Lynes's greater intimacy with Wheeler. Wescott occupied a different part of the large house the three shared, and complained in letters to Wheeler about his feelings of loneliness and his unwillingness to pursue other relationships as a distraction. Lynes's straightforward affair with Tichenor must have been a welcome relief from the strain of managing the delicate balance of his relationship with Wheeler and Wescott. If the shrouded figure in Lynes's 1937 photograph of Wescott (figure14) alludes to the mediation of his relationship with Lynes by Wheeler, Lynes seems to counterpose an almost austere directness in his photograph of Tichenor. The intense, frontal lighting on Tichenor, nonchalant (at least so far as George Platt Lynes's artful eye will allow) against a white wall, produces a distinct and faithful reflection on the glossy floor. This literal reflection seems to double as the semantic reflection of Wescott, the rejected third term, in a revisioned love relationship. In this sense, George's reflection both supplements his presence with a fantasmatic wholeness, while also attesting to an absence. In 1941, George Tichenor enlisted for military service. Lynes made a series of portraits of Tichenor in his uniform. When Tichenor was killed in Africa in summer of 1942, Lynes was devastated.

At the end of 1942, Lloyd Wescott, Glenway's brother, referred a farmhand working for him to Lynes as a prospective studio assistant. The new studio assistant was George Tichenor's brother, Jonathan. Haas reports that Lynes said "If I can't have the Tichenor I want, I'll take the Tichenor I can get."[393] Lynes left Wheeler and Wescott early in 1943 to pursue his relationship with Jonathan Tichenor, who worked for Lynes until he too enlisted. Lynes captured another series of portraits of Tichenor in uniform before his departure. Lynes and Tichenor continued their relationship through visits during Tichenor's training. Tichenor was discharged from the Army in May 1944, and returned to work and pursue a relationship

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[392] Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*. Film. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1958.
[393] Steven Haas, "Intimate Exposures," in *George Platt Lynes: The Male Nudes* (New York: Rizzoli Press, 2011), N.P.

with Lynes until Tichenor's flirtation with Laurie Douglas, another studio assistant and photographer working with Lynes, led them to break up (incidentally, Lynes proposed to marry Douglas and change his life). Lynes's 1944 photograph of Jonathan Tichenor (figure 19) provides an eloquent statement of the substitutive duplication of Lynes's relationship with the Tichenors. In it, Jonathan leans against a white wall, and the photo is organized by a strong horizontal division of the image into roughly balanced light upper and dark lower parts. Unlike the photograph of George, the division between the two spaces of the photograph does not mark the line of reflection, but marks the break between repetitions. Lynes's use of lighting in these photographs establishes different relationships with the models. While the glare of the spotlight is so intense in Lynes's photo of George that he has to shield his eyes (or pretend to), the lower-keyed and diffuse, somber lighting in the photo of Jonathan allows him to return the gaze of Lynes's camera directly. Jonathan is wearing a military uniform, evoking Lynes's portraits taken before the Tichenors joined active service, although the uniform is different from the one pictured in either of these photos. In place of the reflection in the photograph of George, there is a photograph in the lower portion of the photograph of Jonathan. This quoted photograph is out of focus in Lynes's composition, but close inspection reveals that it is a portrait of George Tichenor in the same clothing he was wearing in figure 18. Moreover, although wearing different clothes, Jonathan has adopted George's posture from the waist up. This gestural quotation both evokes George's presence and displaces it as a superseded entry in a series. By the same token, it is George's image that provides the impetus for this bizarre case of double-vision. Interpreting this photo through the grid provided by figure 18, here Lynes is attempting to establish contact with the firstness or immediacy of George Tichenor by photographically transforming Jonathan into his likeness. This is doubling or repetition as the relation between elements in a series. Each iteration of a repeated gesture adds another instance in to the series of phenomenal moments contracted by and retained in the sensation and significance of the movement. The narcissism of loving one's reflection is displaced in favour of an arrested or melancholic attachment to the fantasy of wholeness foreclosed by George's death, a kind of second-order narcissism fixated on a prelapsarian self. This final twist returns doubling to its connection to screens, as we can see Lynes's photograph of Jonathan as more or less conscious "screen memory" that attempts to repair the differences between Jonathan and George Tichenor.

6.3 Metapictures

The last group of photographs I want to discuss as comprising a family of surrealist gestures in Lynes's work are images W.J.T. Mitchell would refer to as "metapictures." These are "pictures about pictures – that is, pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is."[394] Mitchell considers "metapicture" a term of general application, even "a fundamental potentiality inherent in pictorial representation as such," being the way "pictures reveal and 'know' themselves, where they reflect on the intersections of visuality, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history."[395] Mitchell's term is adjacent to Deleuze's perception image, but where Deleuze's concept describes the potential of cinematic images to expose the phenomenal immediacy of looking, the metapicture is fixated on the transition from a sensation to its registration as an image. The perception image attempts to make the inwardness of sensation visible as a series of cinematic signs. Metapictures seem secondary by comparison, but it would be wrong to conclude on that basis that metapictures are therefore about the external or sociological facet of images. Instead, metapictures deploy the picture plane to iron out the involuted relationship between selfhood and the activity of introjecting the world and its objects through representation. While screens and doubling evoke a surreal sense of uncanniness, disorientation, or unease directly, the effect of metapictures is more equivocal, relying on a cool and analytical perspective aimed at inserting a wafer-thin "space" between looking and seeing.

The layered quality of seeing is why metapictures have to "show themselves in order to *know* themselves."[396] The need to adopt an external perspective to know oneself exerts a powerful force on Lynes's self-portraits. In a 1946 self-portrait (figure 20), Lynes photographs himself in a manner keeping with the mode he adhered to most consistently in the glamorous nude figure studies he accomplished in his studio. Lynes appears in glamorously affected "repose," framed by angular planes and dramatic shadows. A model appears, cut off somewhat arbitrarily by the frame, echoing Lynes's use of fragmentary bodies in the form of sculpture, shadows, and models intersected by planes and screens.

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[394] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35.
[395] Ibid., 82.
[396] Ibid., 48.

Unlike his studio work, however, the photo appears opportunistic, not meticulously planned. Without detracting from the artificiality of Lynes's pose, the substitution of a desk for Lynes's inventive use of screens and planes, the awkward posture of the other model, and the bric-a-brac on the desk exhibit the improvisational or make-do quality of fantasy shoehorned into prosaic reality. From other photos, I believe this is Lynes's private office in his home. Many of the photos Lynes took in his own home use windows and doors to frame his subjects and employ dark shadows to create strong contrasts, but this photo involves a more thorough and programmatic transposition of his studio practice into his private space. The implications of the superimposition of Lynes's lifelong aesthetic project with his private social world takes on a special urgency with the almost zany multiplication of images on the wall behind the models. The framed images depict Lynes's close personal friends (I recognize images of Paul Cadmus and Pavel Tchelitchew to either side of the partial model's right arm) and images made by them (including a portrait of Lynes on the far right). The photograph alludes to the central place of representations to intimacy, as well as to a certain anxiety about the necessary reliance on one's material and conceptual apparatus to do so. In this case, the phenomenological and logistical planes coincide directly. Not only is representation foundational to intimacy in the broad sense, it was also assumed a critical urgency in the context of a strong ban on overt displays of intimacy between men that transgressed the gestural regimes of masculine respectability. Under that ban, representation assumed a critical role in the realization and transaction of queer desires, while raising new problems by acting both as a testament to the vexed or impossible quality of queer desire and as a tangible and potentially damning record of deviance. In Lynes's work, the "'self-knowledge' of pictures" seems to mean an intimate understanding of the movement of desire and the interleafing of the givens of a materially present situation with representations of the past and future.

Although less developed than in this self-portrait, the intersection of mediation and affection is pronounced in photographs Lynes took of friends. Figure 21, probably taken at the country house Lynes shared with Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott, nests images of Paul Cadmus, George Tooker, and Jared French, framed by doorways, between Lynes's camera and a mirror on the far wall. Figure 22 shows Pavel Tchelitchew at work, with a painting of Paul Cadmus on the wall, and one of George Platt Lynes (also at work) leaning

against the fireplace. Lynes might have had Tchelitchew's painting in mind when he took a 1952 self-portrait (figure 23) wearing the same clothes and featuring the 8x10 camera depicted by Tchelitchew. According to Mitchell, metapictures focalize the "'effect of interpellation,' the sense that the image greets or hails or addresses us, that it takes the beholder into the game, enfolds the observer as object for the 'gaze' of the picture."[397] As a photograph of the gesture of photography in its most literal sense, Lynes's self-portrait is an almost schematic demonstration of this quality of metapictures. Through backlighting, Lynes gives his camera the luminous halo he uses to great effect in his figure studies and portraits while the photographer himself assumes a position subordinate to his apparatus. Lynes is between the camera and the negative holder this superficial reversal of the practical facts of the photographic situation, in which the camera is between the photographer and the subject, illuminates a phenomenological intuition about photography: that the viewer can only access the photographic situation through the mediation of the photographer's framing of it. In this sense, the camera is a prosthetic extension of the photographer, an association cemented by the analogy Lynes draws between the camera lens and his eye – cut off from his body by the deep shadow cast by the negative holder. The separation between a photographer and their eye could be seen through the lens of trauma as a mutilating or castrating gesture, but at least in this case, the dismemberment allows the photographer's body to establish a relationship of prosthetic extension. In fact, it is not only Lynes's eye that becomes part of the camera assemblage, but his hands as well, and all of his capacities that allow him to frame a situation in his particular way. For someone whose life was so caught up with creating and exchanging images as Lynes, this might be the only kind of image that can truly be considered a self-portrait.

This is a way back to Flusser's contention that the gesture of photography establishes a probing, analytical, or even philosophical relationship with the photographer's situation. For Flusser, photography is a theoretical gesture, providing the terms and limits of an analysis. Mitchell writes that the "nested, concentric spaces and levels" of a metapicture stabilize it and "separate it cleanly from the first order object-language it describes. Thus, most metapictures depict a picture-within-a-picture that is simply one among the many

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[397] Ibid., 75.

objects represented."[398] Mitchell's observation is apt with respect to images like Lynes's improvisational self-portrait (figure 20) and his pictures of friends at work (figures 21 and 22). Photographs like Lynes's 1952 self-portrait, however, decenter the cognitive bent in Flusser's and Mitchell's analyses in favour of corporeal involvement by situating photography in a reciprocal exchange of gestures that enfolds the photographer and the photographic situation before expanding to include the scene of the photograph's reception. Although, or even because, the image is a self-portrait, it stages an encounter between the viewer and a photographer, as if Lynes's eye or the camera lens were a conduit connecting the spaces and times of Lynes's studio and the viewer's phenomenal reality. At the same time, the deduced presence of a mirror reduces the viewer's reality into a plane of reflection occupying a position in the apparatus that made this image possible in the first place. The image simultaneously activates both poles of a tension Thomas Waugh describes as foundational to queer visual imaginaries, the pleasure of voyeurism and the desire to be looked at.

Waugh observes that an "extremely common motif unique to the homoerotic corpus is of the subject reading or looking at pictures."[399] For the most part, the motif involves men looking at nude pictures of women, and it functions as a testimonial to the subject's heterosexuality even as it facilitates a homosexual encounter. The prop photo allows the subject to project a desire contrary to the direction of the situation, thereby acting as the gesture that licenses the pragmatic acquiescence of rough trade. The relation between the subject and the prop photograph also means that images that employ this motif are more like perception images than metapictures, in that they make plain the quality of the subject's willful misrecognition of the situation they are in. Or, if these pictures are metapictures, the act of representation they picture is the fairy's self-representation as substitute woman. While this motif is common in homoerotic photography from its origins to today, George Platt Lynes rarely or never employed it, perhaps owing to Lynes's wish that his artistic photography not be seen as pornographic.[400] Lynes did take pictures of trade, but his angle on

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[398] Ibid., 42.

[399] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 343.

[400] With a couple exceptions, the limited number of photographs by Lynes showing sexual acts are personal photographs, taken on a 35mm camera, and employing none of Lynes's characteristic lighting, sets, props, or darkroom techniques.

these photographs transforms the motif of arousing desire in a subject that does not return the photographer's desire by showing them pictures into a motif that essays the photographic quality of the desire for trade.

In a series of photographs Lynes took of a sailor in 1934, Lynes makes explicit the camera-like quality of queer desire for trade. The photos are additionally unusual in the scope of Lynes's work, in that they are neither figure studies, nor portraits. The model is strikingly different from the ones Lynes usually worked with in figure studies. Physically, Lynes gravitated toward well-muscled men and lithe ephebes. Moreover, unlike Lynes's dancers, artists, and intimate friends, the model in these photos is stiff and uncomfortable in front of the camera, lacking both the ease of a natural posture and the aesthetic purpose of a carefully contrived pose. Lynes was an important developer of the glamour portrait, and he typically uses high-contrast lighting to reveal his sitter's distinctive features, and imaginative props or sets to establish a connection between the sitter's physiognomy and their public acclaim. In these photographs however, Lynes uses soft, diffuse lighting to reveal the model in a more objective or documentary fashion. In figure 24, the indifference of the lighting Lynes uses to the model's particularity results in a somewhat unflattering image: the musculature of the model's arms is flattened and lighting his crossed arms from below casts an unappealing shadow over the chest. Likewise, figure 25 forgoes the opportunity presented by the model's arms to dramatize the model's face, and even the classical statuary head suffers for it. Lynes's uncharacteristic allegiance to facticity in these photographs recalls the decades long documentary habit of Sam Steward, the university professor-turned-tattoo artist, and later one of Lynes's correspondents, who kept a card index detailing every sexual encounter he had in an idiosyncratic, but highly standardized language of record. What the photos lack in glamour, they make up for in informational fidelity, and this conversion of photographic values is tied to a modal difference in the relationship between the photographer and the model. In a portrait, the photographer participates in the production to vision of a holistic personality, which requires the photographer to enlist the narrative and perspectival capacities of their camera. In these photographs, the frankness of the lighting ensures everything is given to the eye neutrally, without regard for its corporeal or psychic integration as a subject. The model's arms are not raised to shield his eyes from the studio lighting, but to ensure that we can see the tattoos on their underside.

Given this framing of the situation, Lynes's use of props in the photographs assumes a set of pointed associations. While Lynes positions himself invisibly behind his camera, he stages a stand-off between the model and a substitute operating a large-format camera not unlike Lynes's own. The model gives the decoy photographer a frontal portrait, the view that best privileges the projection of the sitter's agency, while Lynes's camera captures an awkward profile image. The view might be better from the perspective of the statuary photographer, but Lynes's camera catches the model unaware, giving viewers of this photograph the opportunity to spy on or inspect this sailor, the paradigm of trade, without being interpellated by him and drawn into the dynamics of masculine posturing. The angle the sailor takes on his photographic situation allows Lynes and viewers of the photograph to adopt a different angle. Figure 25 accomplishes a similar effect through the classical statuary head. Arguably, the head promotes a less predatory reading of the photographic situation. The model and the head appear to gaze at one another, a humanizing exchange that implies a kind of equivalence, or at least a contact between two subjects. This assessment of the situation is unsustainable because the position of the model's arms would make it impossible for him to meet the statue's gaze. Moreover, the head is hung behind the model, and its uncanny suspension creates the impression that it belongs to an immaterial and symbolic reality. Alternately, the head and the model could be understood as pendant to each other, but there is really nothing in the image that would sustain that relationship formally, and at any rate, the comparison would come out badly for the distinctly unclassical model. What the head and the model share is a partial or fragmentary existence. As Waugh writes, "during the Depression, the classical no longer had the currency in Western popular culture that it did even for von Gloeden's audience: now classical references referred ironically to earlier artistic appropriations or else engaged in transforming mythological matter into a stripped-down, frankly elemental sexual modernity."[401] We have already seen instances of the latter attitude toward classical subject matter in Lynes's later mythological photographs. This photograph, at least, seems to partake of the ironic attitude toward the high-cultural value and queer idyll of classical imagery Waugh describes. Abandoning the Victorian dignity of Classical Antiquity, the head reiterates and interprets the photographic situation through

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[401] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 118-119.

synecdoche, acknowledging that photographic seeing and the desire for trade diminish and dismember the objects of their desire by converting them to a symbol or image.

In the early twentieth century, fairies prowled the waterfront, dancehalls, and the YMCA for trade in the same way surrealists scoured the spaces of modernity for fragments they could take as dispatches from the unconscious or the real. The desire to convert these finds into photographs makes of them a kind of trophy or part-object bound up with both compensating and repeating a traumatic loss. The disorienting political, economic, and scientific changes of recent history sapped the intellectual and moral confidence of Europe, going so far as to deprive the bourgeoisie of their gestures, in Agamben's analysis. Agamben clearly has in view a broader crisis of subjectivity, stemming from changing understandings in the human sciences. While surrealists responded to the dis-organization of subjectivity, fairies increasingly found the uncomplicated, if costly, pleasure of their erotic gestures organized into a personality pattern and an etiology. While the relationship between fairies and trade had always depended on a symbolic castration, the emerging perspective on queer desire enacted an additional castration at the level of volition. Under the auspices of these shifts in the cultural mapping of gender and desire, taking pictures of trade assumes the status of a voluptuous gesture of refusal. At the same time, Lynes's perspective on trade in these metapictures, and especially his jab at Classicism (perhaps including the Athenian utopias imagined by masculinist declensions of queer desire at the turn of the century) gives visible form to an ironizing or self-critical attitude toward desire for trade. With this in mind, Lynes's decision in figure 24 to withhold the model's penis from view (which may equally have been at the behest of the model, or caution on Lynes's part) can be read both as a fairy's revenge on the irreducible antagonism of fairies and trade, effected through the assertion of the residual phallic power of the fairy's gaze, and as a testament to the ultimate failure of relations with trade to repair the castration suffered by fairies by returning the phallus.

7. Turning Around: Glamour and Beefcake in Lynes's Late Career

So far, I have focused on what is campy or surreal in George Platt Lynes's photography, mainly because I think the ways these facets of his work disclose a theory of queer masculinity and embodiment have gone unremarked. While the artful beefcake for which Lynes is best remembered was present in his work from the beginning, this dimension of Lynes's photographic practice became increasingly prominent as his career wore on. After World War II, Lynes's former enthusiasm for camp artifice and surrealism was mostly replaced in his figure studies by a straightforward admiration of male form, and the imaginative settings and props Lynes was known for became scarce. Undoubtedly, Lynes's shift toward simplicity reflected the change in his personal circumstances. His move to California was a financial and professional disaster that dogged Lynes for the rest of his life. Two years after the move, Lynes to returned to New York but the fashion magazines and department stores that had been his most reliable clients had already found new talent that better reflected the commercial tastes of post-war America. Steven Haas recounts a series of moves into ever cheaper accommodations, and at one point the IRS even confiscated and auctioned Lynes's camera equipment to pay his tax debts. (A friend bought Lynes's equipment and rented it back to him.) But the shift in Lynes's practice cannot be chalked up entirely to making-do with much more rudimentary means. The years following World War II were also a turning point in the history of American masculinity. In key respects the paranoid climate of that time consolidated the model of queerness that Gay Liberation reacted against, a model that continues to inform common-sense understandings of queer masculinity and its corporeal enactment. Lynes's beefcake photos, the images that exerted the strongest influence on later photographers and continue to appeal directly to the erotic imaginary and experiences of contemporary audiences, are affecting because they exhibit Lynes's characteristic eloquence as they elaborate a theory of queer masculinity as an attitude toward the body and its capacity to project subjectivity.

Around the same time as things were turning around for Lynes and for queer masculinity, the gesture of turning around also became a conspicuous feature of many of his photographs. In his capacity as a photographer for the New York City Ballet, Lynes made

hundreds of images of dancers executing turns, but the images I have in mind all picture men with their feet firmly on the floor. These turns are not figures of dance, but part of a broader choreography that draws on an understanding of the body as a surface with two sides or faces. Lynes's 1954 photograph of Joseph Reyes and an unnamed model (figure 12) shows an interest in a phenomenology of subjectivity rooted in bodies as a screen that mediates between a projective social "front" region and a "back" region or interiority where sensations and affects are experienced. From the perspective of a thing-ly or material phenomenology, the front and back are virtualities that depend on the gestural capacities of the body. By this logic, changes in the orientation of the body and movement around the spine, which provides a material index for the positional disposition of the body by acting as an axis that gives up and down their corporeal sense, have a strong connection with the question of subjectivity and sociability.

These heady phenomenological readings come to earth from the point of view of queer masculinity, understood as an embodied knowledge and facility with a repertoire of gestures, in the central role turning around plays in cruising. Figures 26 and 27 are from a series of photographs shot in 1943 that simulate turning around as a narrative moment or unit of corporeal meaning in the process of cruising. [402] The change in position of the model on the left and the shift between a stable posture with weight distributed on both feet and a canted posture with weight on one leg suggest movement toward the model on the right side. The dark vertical bar and the white plane create vertical divisions in the frame that function as spatial divisions magnifying the distance between the foreground and the background, while also reinforcing the use of pictorial space to show the passage of time. In the interval provided by the silhouetted model's shift in posture and transition across the dark bar, the model on the right has turned around to present the camera with a back view. Viewed this way around, the photograph frames a welcomed pursuit. At the same time, and in the spirit of

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[402] Elspeth Brown also sees this pair of images as a depiction of cruising, based on the operation of Lynes's "amorous regard." Brown's identification follows from her argument about the transfer of Lynes's erotic experience to his vision of glamour in fashion photography, but the term sits awkwardly with respect to the optical negotiations involved in cruising. For one thing, "amorous" imputes an unwarranted degree of sentimentality to the dynamics of cruising, and may have been an artifact of the tongue-in-cheek tone Lynes strikes in the 1937 article in which he coined the term. For another, the regard pictured in the image Brown uses an example cleaves more closely to the hard-eyed intensity pictured in mid-century takes on furtive encounters with bikers, sailors, police officers, and working men like those fetishized by Tom of Finland or Jean Genet. See: Elspeth Brown, "Queering Glamour in Interwar Fashion Photography: The 'Amorous Regard' of George Platt Lynes," *GLQ* 23, no.3 (June 2017), 303-305.

the reversible relations of cruising, the minimal narrative presented by this series of photos can be played backwards, with the model on the right turning to look back at somebody passed on the street. This kind of reversibility or ambivalence is immanent to the practice of cruising, as well as the relations that structure it. In cruising, turning around means turning in the direction of desire, but it also activates the presentational equivalent of double-vision in that the technique is perfected where the desiring intentionality behind it is absolutely transparent, while preserving the possibility of becoming opaque, even reflective, in case the intended object of solicitation is indifferent or takes offense.

Lynes's undated photo (figure 28) made for Jared French, likely as a reference image for one of French's gnomic paintings, literalizes the twinned valences of cruising. Louis Forns and Tex Smutney are positioned as strangers passing on the street. While the image coordinates the sightlines of the models to obey the ban against men looking at each other outside carefully regulated displays, they are present to one another naked in the forms of their twins. Visualizing the bizarre contradiction of cruising, in which men enter into the dynamic of looking and being looked at that Waugh sees as characteristic of queer erotic imaginaries while appearing not to look, results in the doubling or splitting of the subjects of the image into two bodies each. The repetition of the clothed models' gestures by their unnamed body doubles is so uncanny that it compels the viewer to examine the photograph closely to confirm the differences between the doubles as well as appreciating their similarities. This absorption, which narrows the zone of attention to a roving and tactile engagement with minute details, draws the spectator into reproducing the optical relations of cruising that lead to a heightened attention to details of body, dress, and gesture as confirmation about the disposition of the object of desire. From the camera's point of view, the nude doubles appear behind the clothed models as a kind of visual hypothesis. In an inferential process like the one that Judith Butler credits with the apparent coherence of gendered subjectivity, the image makes the nude or unencumbered body of desire stand for the subjectivity that provides the reason for the gestures emanating from it, while also proposing a trajectory for the desire the subject presumes he shares with the object of his gaze.

This involuted play of the front and back, and the reflections they support about the relation of the projective and receptive dimensions of subjectivity and the correlation of these

dimensions of subjectivity with the body's dual role as an agent of expressive action and a patient of sensations, recalls Vilém Flusser's analysis of the gesture of turning a mask around. Flusser writes that "to approach a mask from the 'wrong' side is to observe a phenomenon from a point of view that was not taken earlier."[403] Flusser explains, "if I take the mask off and look at it from the outside, I see how others have seen me, but in looking at the inside of the mask, "I see the 'wrong,' prohibited side of the mask, and as I do, the other, 'right' side becomes the false face in which others think they are seeing me."[404] The relationship between the inside and the outside of the mask, surfaces that might better be described as the "contact" and "presentation" faces of the mask, is a negative dialectic that Flusser sees as a source of political and ethical insights, but through which one ultimately finds oneself "beyond good and evil," which is to say outside of the plane of history.[405] "With the gesture of turning a mask, one is no longer playing a role in history but playing with history."[406] Flusser's identification of history with ethics and politics in connection with the mask suggests that what is at issue is "history" understood as the temporal unfolding of a play of representations. Acknowledging that masks have contact and presentation surfaces does not, however, raise the question of a "true" identity underneath the mask, but shows that "what was once called the 'I' is now that ideological hook for hanging masks by their inner sides."[407]

Flusser unfolds his reflection on masks in the context of *carnivàl*, and the performative and spectacular qualities of that event give Flusser's account an abstract or general quality. For queer men though, the reflections Flusser raises through his contemplation of the gesture of turning a mask around lead in more pointed directions. To the extent that the social ontology of queer masculinity has historically been bound up with the polarity of artifice and reality, or surface and depth, and that queer masculinity has generally found itself demoted in the terms provided by both ends of these polarities – as cultivating a perverse *false* effeminacy, or as exposing a pathological *nature* – masks have been a burden and a necessity. For queer men, the mask is not an abstraction, but a quality endemic to and

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[403] Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 91.
[404] Ibid., 94.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid., 96.
[407] Ibid., 97.

immanent in their embodiment, and both the shape and function of the mask changed mid-century, bringing slow and uneven debates about queerness to a head. Although medical perspectives had achieved significant standing in popular knowledge about queerness by the time volume one of the Kinsey report[408] was released, popular understandings were still significantly informed by the aesthetic and ethical coordinates of the fairy.

A commentary from *The Spectator*, republished in *Der Kreis*, shows the extent to which apparently contradictory conceptual models of homosexuality were blended.[409] In it, acceptance of the medical model's proposition that homosexuality was an in-dwelling characteristic and the belief that homosexuals could be distinguished from men on the basis of their feminine bodies were blended with the conviction that homosexuality was cultivated in view of a given libidinal economy. The author argues that homosexuality is an unfortunate defect, but that society should be kind to the afflicted at the same time as discouraging the propagation of homosexuality. Referring to the Kinsey report, released seven years earlier, the author claims that everyone has some latent inclination toward homosexuality, but this only flowers in certain circumstances, especially prolonged segregation with members of the same sex. Nevertheless, according to the author, homosexuality can become a habit and eventually take over a person's life. Unlike these victims of circumstance, some very unfortunate people are biologically destined to queerness. The author identifies these unfortunates using the same terms as the early German sexologists, used to articulate third-sex theories some 90 years earlier. The author writes that "they bear, in very varying degrees, feminine traits both of body and mind. Soft facial contours, lack of hairiness, high voices, may go with a characteristic gait, a freedom and gracefulness of gesture, love of clothes, and adornment, and so forth. The feminine mental orientation may go very deep." In his review of *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach*,[410] "H.S." from New York summarizes the situation succinctly:

The genesis of Homosexuality is still somewhat shrouded in mystery. Two main theories have come up during the last seventy years, yet there are to each so many

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[408] Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1948).
[409] Author unknown, *Der Kreis* 23, no.4 (April 1955), 34-36.
[410] Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenberg Press, 1951).

varieties and within each so many points that just do not seem to klick, that I, for one, would not venture to take issue with Mr. Cory's chapter on Psychology. The Hirschfeldian viewpoint in this chapter is discarded, I feel, a little bit too lightly. While it is true that we may find ourselves more at ease when embracing that theory of the origin of Homosexuality, which explains it as an inborn, component, and constituent part of our soul, our real challenge upon following our drives and compulsive desires demands of us a conviction and resolution, to which the origin can contribute much less than the destiny.[411]

Transitional or syncretic ideas about homosexuality are visible in the selection of models, gestures, props and settings in mid-century homoerotic imagery. Waugh writes that World War II seemed to mark "a dividing line between the idealized dancer and the resurgent type of the musclebound body builder -- Tony Sansone and Marcel Khill nudged aside by Mr. America."[412] This transition is visible in Lynes's work as a steep drop-off in the frequency with which he shot younger models or employed campy props and settings. According to Waugh, "the striking visual transition from ephebe to muscleman echoes the rival options offered by contemporary gay sexological debates that Dyer has called 'in-betweenism' versus 'male identification,' or that Sedgwick has called 'pedagogic/pederastic relations' based on difference versus 'male-male desire based on sameness.' Within gay popular culture of the period, the 'male identification'/sameness model -- or in iconographic terms, the muscleman -- was already on the ascendant."[413] What is most interesting about commentary re/published in *Der Kreis* in the post-war period, however, is the degree to which the universalizing proposition of the model advanced by Kinsey coexisted alongside the particularizing view of queerness advanced in both third-sex medical models and models that understood queerness as the cultivation of aesthetic and ethical commitments (whether they were shaded positively or negatively). Beyond written commentaries, this unstable coexistence is reflected in the eclecticism of images published in *Der Kreis*, where George Platt Lynes shared space with the likes of Jean Cocteau, Jean Boullet and Paul Cadmus, but also American physique and European physical culture photography. From the perspective of

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[411] H.S. "Review: *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach*," *Der Kreis* 20, no.1 (January 1952), 28.
[412] Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 117.
[413] Ibid., 190.

situated practice, what Waugh characterizes as a dividing line in homoerotic imaginaries looks more like a period of protracted torsion as discordant regimes of representation suggested alternatives at the level of queer embodiment. This reorientation in ideology and practice throws the mask-like situation of the queer body into relief. Moreover, as the regulation of public expressions of queerness shifted increasingly toward formal sanctions through aggressive prosecution of public order ordinances and the Production Code in the United States starting in the 1930s,[414] masks both increased in importance and shifted in function as a part of queer masculinity. While fairies depended on the projective and constitutive functions of the mask to achieve their "destiny" or destination, the homosexual relied on the mask as camouflage.

John Ibson's study of advertisements in *Life* magazine confirms that in the 1930s men in ads "almost never touched one another, and […] were usually clothed from neck to toe."[415] At least initially, World War II seems to have led to a marked liberalization of emotional and physical intimacy between men. In Ibson's estimation, the War "seriously challenged the dichotomizing of erotic expression into heterosexual and homosexual."[416] Men in intimate poses were more common and more varied in advertisements during the War. Moreover, they participated in a wider variety of activities and were more frequently pictured touching one another, leading to the emergence of the male couple as a common motif in wartime advertising. The war in the Pacific also created ample opportunity for advertisers to depict shirtless soldiers and sailors.[417] The increased comfort with exhibitionism and bodily contact in all-male situations coincided with an intense affectivity, leading to tropical fantasies like those depicted in Cannon Mills' wartime campaign, the "True Towel Tales," in which stories of bathing hardships recounted in letters from servicemen were accompanied by scenes of nearly-nude and densely packed men bathing in jungles, Roman ruins, and the villages of South Pacific Islanders.[418] When the war ended, images of male couples practically vanished

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[414] For a history of the use of public order ordinances to exclude homosexuality from the public sphere, see George Chauncey, "Chapter 12: The Exclusion of Homosexuality from the Public Sphere in the 1930s," in *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 331-354. For more on the suppression of homosexuality on screen, see Richard Barrios, *Screened Out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[415] John Ibson, *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 160.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid., 169.
[418] The campaign ran in *Life* from 1943-1944, and was illustrated by James Bingham for N.W. Ayer.

and even lone men were seen less frequently in *Life*, while images of brides proliferated.[419] Ibson records that men in ads continued to interact in 1946, although less often, largely resuming the activities that provided a setting for their interactions in the 1930s: drinking, fishing and selling. That year, men in ads rarely touched and almost always appeared fully-clothed. Even underwear ads replaced scenes of camaraderie with competition, "such as the tug-of-war waged over a pair of boxer shorts by two men," and "men shaving together now, oddly, wore shirts."[420]

George Chauncey, Michael Kimmel and Michael Sherry all describe a regime of post-war masculinity that was more restrictive than ever in terms of the intimacy and gestural freedom men were permitted to enjoy without engendering significant hardships. Sherry notes that after World War II, "scandals about queers in the arts and about queers in politics shared an emphasis on conspiracy."[421] According to a 1952 article in the Washington newsletter, *Human Events*, widely distributed in government circles, 'by the very nature of their vice, 'homosexuals 'belong to a sinister, mysterious, and efficient international."[422] By that point, almost 20 years of vigilance in Hollywood meant that an entire generation of Americans really had grown up in a context where queerness was a suspicion denied explicit figuration, at least on screen. Moreover, the extreme conditions and sexual segregation of WWII permitted intensely homo-affective and homoerotic bonds to flower before subjecting Americans to an intensely prescriptive re-organization of sexuality and gender, such that "by the 1950s the silence was striking when it came to male interaction in *Life* ads. On the rare occasions when men were depicted together at all, a drink nearly always had to be at hand."[423]

A growing proportion of Lynes's photographs after the war (such as figure 29) depicted men turning away from the camera. Without a doubt, this choice protected Lynes's subjects from identification in the event such photographs were seized or otherwise found their way into unsympathetic hands. At the same time, photographing the model mid-turn catches a gesture that disrupts the equivalence of the line of desire and the line of sight, while

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[419] Ibson, *Picturing Men*, 171.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Michael S. Sherry, *Gay artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy*. (Chapel Hill North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 32.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibson, *Picturing Men*, 171-172.

also exhibiting the energy required to maintain that slippage as the torsion of the body. As Sara Ahmed puts it, "to become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must 'turn away' from objects that take us off that line."[424] George Platt Lynes's sensitive and cultivated rear views are evidence of a desire too costly to face up to. The images do not attempt to deflect Lynes's erotic and aesthetic interest in his models, so much as they acknowledge that the phenomenal reality of the total gesturality of bodies is differentiated into zones of semiotic intensity. The orientation of our limbs and sensory organs privileges the ventral surface of the human body as the principal site of signification, its face. From this perspective, the dorsal surface of the body is the structural complement of the face, being both the material substrate for the projective aspect of subjectivity and the symbolic location of the inwardness of the subject. Seated in a chair, the model turns toward his elevated knee. With literally nowhere to go, he folds in on himself. The motor-effort required to maintain this posture provides a compelling figure for the social and psychological effort of disciplining the "face" or presentation surface of the body to make it into a mask.

Taken in 1955, this photo is also indicative of Lynes's gravitation toward the conventions of physique photography at the end of his career, reflecting both changing tastes in the erotic imaginaries and practices of queer, middle-class, white American men. While the luxurious setting and high-contrast directional lighting speak to Lynes's facility with the conventions of dance and fashion photography of the 1930s, the pose in figure 29 is pure physique, with the torsion of the model creating the characteristic hyperbolical waist-to-chest ratio and allowing Lynes to define the model's muscles with strong highlights. Of course, similar poses in *Physique Pictorial* are usually photographed from the front, emphasizing the musculature of the chest and the raised leg. Lynes's presentation of the model as a dorsal mask plays on the ambiguity of the back of the body to effect a schismatic interpretation of the photographic situation, to evoke both the givenness of the body, along with its predicates naturalism and heterosexuality, and the precarious cultivation of social identity. Lynes's elegant translation of such contradictions of queer masculinity as beefcake in the middle years of the 20th century is probably his signal achievement, and the basis for his unshakeable

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[424] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham :Duke University Press, 2006), 21.

association with a paradoxical aesthetic concept, which he also helped to shape: masculine glamour.

7.1 Artificial Naturalism

The photographs I group under the heading of "glamour" are the kind of images for which Lynes is best known. Glamour is so much a part of Lynes's photographic practice that Waugh considers him part of a "glamour generation," consisting of queer male imagemakers who moved easily between commercial and non-commercial photography. Waugh's playful framing of Lynes's photographic practice feels right, but it also poses a conundrum. Glamour is conventionally associated with artifice or spectacle, and therefore with femininity. For instance, Waugh associates the creativity of the photographers of the glamour generation with "trying on new veils -- of the applied arts, of stylized melancholy, of High Bohemian camp," to which I would add surrealism.[425] However, the campy and surrealist facets are arguably the *least* glamorous aspects of Lynes's work, because they strive too hard to accomplish their artistic ambitions to be consistent with the cool and fatal detachment of glamour. By contrast, as Lynes's photos tend increasingly toward physique photography over the course of his career, they draw more heavily from the conventions of glamour and more successfully project the cerebral and ironic affects associated with it. Moreover, Waugh contrasts the extravagance of the photography the glamour generation produced for the emerging transatlantic image industries (fashion, journalism, advertising, performing arts, society portraiture) with "an elegant but low-key interlude of erotic image-making on the side or below the surface of their public faces."[426] While Waugh acknowledges the diverse individual interests of the photographers he includes in the glamour generation, he argues that "one can generalize about the erotic imagery that emerged in that it was usually more a peripheral aspect of the artist's vocation than its obsessive core."[427]

Lynes is an outlier in this regard, too. While there was a practical division in Lynes's photography in terms of its circulation (although both his "private" and his commercial photographs circulated to an audience beyond his personal acquaintances, and was therefore meaningfully "public"), Lynes's commercial photography was highly consistent with his

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[425] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 102.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid., 108.

artistic practices, at least formally. Lynes published homoerotic imagery in *Der Kreis*, which circulated in the United States as well as Europe, and, recalling Lynes's publication of nude promotional shots the New York City Ballet production of *Orpheus*, there is no discernable boundary between his work for the New York City Ballet and his erotically charged private photos of the same dancers. In effect, the photographs for which Lynes is best known today, commercially unviable in the United States during Lynes's career, draw on conventions Lynes honed in his fashion and dance photography to project the image of a paradox: masculine glamour. These photographs reveal the aesthetic, artificial, or gestural quality of masculinity, a symbolic endowment associated with rationality and, above all, naturalism.

Lynes's figuration of the contradiction of masculine glamour coincided with the emergence into popular culture in the 1930s of "heterosexuality" as the structural complement of perversion, which assumed scientific clarity as "homosexuality" only shortly before. Like these terms, "glamour" attempted to give form to a nebulous but totalizing personality pattern that was broadly familiar, but also qualitatively new. Drawing on an analysis of fan magazines, Patrick Keating explains that "glamour" referred to "a surprisingly wide range of subjects: the "glamour of distant places," the "glamour of wealth," the "glamour of a Latin personality," and even to the "glamour of the circus" or the "glamour of the cow-puncher" prior to the 1930s. According to Keating, the varied instances of glamour shared "connotations of distance and difference--of lives led otherwise, elsewhere, whether beautiful or not." While its enigmatic reference remained part of the phenomenon of glamour, cultural commentators quickly applied themselves to mastering its meaning. For example, Katherine Albert, a regular contributor to *Photoplay*, credited Greta Garbo for initiating the mania for glamour, citing Marlene Dietrich, Tallulah Bankhead, Joan Crawford, and Constance Bennett as additional examples, in her 1931 article "Charm? No! No! You Must Have Glamour." [428] Albert avers that, "looking at it purely objectively," glamour is a quality one exudes "by sitting quietly in a corner and letting not a flicker of intelligence, interest, or even just a faint suggestion that you're really living, cross the face. It seems to be also about never smiling--except in a slow, bitter way." According to her, the new glamorous type was simply a recursion of the vamp of the 1910s and part of a cycle that "runs like this--

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[428] Patrick Keating, "Artifice and Atmosphere: The Visual Culture of Hollywood Glamour Photography, 1930-1935," *Film History* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2017), 106.

sweet girls, vamps, sweet girls again and now glamour." [429] Other *Photoplay* authors contested Albert's perspective on glamour. Ruth Biery argued that the glamorous "shady dame" was a species unrelated to the vamps of the previous generation. Biery observed that, whereas "the vamp had used her 'feminine allure' to tempt a male protagonist […] the 'shady dame' was herself a protagonist, and a remarkably androgynous one at that."[430] Once again, Garbo provides the prototype of glamour on account of her mysterious and alluring combination of feminine and masculine qualities.

Had the debate between Albert and Biery occurred two years later, Greta Garbo's performance in *Queen Christina*[431] would likely have decided the disagreement in Biery's favour. The lavish décor of the film, coupled with the sumptuous fabrics and strict silhouettes of the gowns, designed by Adrian, and Garbo's commanding projection of Queen Christina's authority and vulnerability are unquestionably glamorous, with no hint of the seductive and calculating figure of the vamp. To cement the reading of Garbo's Queen Christina as glamorous, the trailer establishes a relationship of pendency between sequential texts reading "Garbo the Magnificent" and "Garbo the Glamorous." Garbo's magnificence is declared in large text laid over a tight shot of Garbo's face against a dark background with her gaze cast toward the source of a strong directional light beyond the top right corner of the screen, brows knit pensively in a dramatic expression of supplication. The following shot trumpets Garbo's glamour as Queen Christina, pictured from the waist up in a plain square-shouldered shearling jacket and dark wide-brimmed hat, effortlessly controls her restive white horse, laughing heartily. Abstracted from the narrative situation provided by *Queen Christina*, Garbo's singular body provides a meeting place, if not a theory, for the contradiction of voluptuous subordination and jocose self-assertion. The structure of pendency allows Garbo to predicate both of these qualities without resolving the contradiction. Moreover, the uneasy coexistence of passivity and agency in glamour corresponds to the situation of the actress as much as her character. This is why the trailer announces the glamour of *Garbo*, not the title character. The semiotic dynamics of the star image that establish an exchange of qualities between Garbo and the characters she plays refer the contradictions of glamour to a symbolic

[429] Ibid., 107.
[430] Ibid., 108.
[431] Rouben Mamoulian, *Queen Christina*. Film. Directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Culver City, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer Studios, 1933.

body that does not belong wholly to the order of material object (the actress), nor to the imaginary (the star). Glamour seems to be the capacity or willingness of a person to inhabit their body as an audaciously mutable medium that permits them to overwhelm contradictions, even if it means relaxing her claim to naturalism in favour of artifice. In other words, glamour is a tradeoff between being and seeming, or an embrace of being-in-language as a defining quality of human life.

Despite the emphasis on gender-transitive aspects of glamour in popular accounts of the concept, glamour remained a quality of womanhood, albeit one that arced away from the expected paths of femininity. While the vamp weaponized femininity as a dangerous passivity, Biery's analysis suggests that glamour was the visual mark of women's usurpation of masculine agency, and was taken as evidence of her exceptional, if incongruous, potential. From a certain point of view, the glamorous woman and the campy fairy both use gender inversion to overcome impasses in the libidinal economy of early twentieth-century white American masculinity related to the mismatch between the high esteem for men, banned as an object of desire, and the cultural value of heterosexual marriage, despite the demoted status of women. While the projective effeminacy of the fairy allowed normal men to enjoy sexual encounters with men in the context of strong sexual segregation and high downside risks for sex outside of marriage, the glamorous woman allowed men to gratify homoerotic dimensions of their attachment to masculine ego ideals, as theorized by Freud in *On Narcissism*,[432] by vesting the desirable qualities of a man in the body of a woman. At the same time, glamour and camp seem to be moving in opposite directions, so far as the hierarchy of cultural value is concerned. Camp deploys comedic deformation as the aesthetic condition of the feminization of fairies, while glamour virilizes women through passionate artificiality. It is the conceptual proximity of camp and glamour as critical relations toward the naturalism of gender roles that makes it difficult to articulate a basis for masculine glamour that avoids reiterating camp.

David Halperin writes that "the traditional split between camp and beauty, or between humor and glamour, coincides, specifically, with the old sexual division between queens and trade: that is between effeminate and virile styles of performing male sex and gender

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[432] Sandler, Joseph, Ethel Spector Person, Peter Fonagy, and Sigmund Freud. *Freud's "On Narcissism--an Introduction"*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

roles."[433] While Halperin's association of camp, humour, and queens is straightforward, the complementary association of beauty, glamour, and trade seems tenuous given the association of glamour with women. At the same time, Halperin's observation illuminates how the (uneven, incoherent) incorporation of medical models of homosexuality into the practical wisdom about sex between men after World War II changed the fortunes of trade as much as fairies. One of the Kinsey report's most important cultural innovations was treating both partners of a same-sex encounter as belonging to the same category for the purposes of its statistical count of homosexual experiences. Once sexual identity became an endemic character trait connected to one's choice of sexual object, rather than a transitory perversion of sexual aim, trade became a contradiction. This implication was not lost on concerned commentators. For example, in their 1952 book, Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer warned "those who think of queers as prancing nances" that "fairies" included "tough young kids, college football players, truck-drivers and weather-bitten servicemen."[434]

This new sense of the contradictory possibility of a subject that adheres to the gestural discipline of masculinity while harboring an aberrant sexual nature was also articulated in queer imaginaries. Waugh notes that, for all the lingering otherness in singles homoerotic photos of the fifties, especially photos of trade and hustlers, "there is a sense that the model himself could be the subject of desire, the perpetrator of the look and the consumer of the image." Moreover, "the demographics of Lynes's models increasingly support this sense as he matures: in addition to thirties-inspired dancers, bodybuilders enter the frame, sailors, working-class men, and habitués of tattoo parlors," and Lynes also takes an increasing interest in "exemplars of white middle-class ordinariness."[435] From that point of view, Halperin's association between trade and glamour is astute: the division between queens and trade expresses a difference in ethos as regards sexual identity and the cultivation of the body as its seat. It turns out, the confusing item in his associational chain is beauty. As Judith Brown observes, glamour "cannot be equated with the beautiful. Its ground is illusion, or its stronger cousin, delusion, and it elevates the false, the world of 'seeming' (beauty, rather, is

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[433] David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 205.

[434] Sherry, *Gay artists in Modern American Culture*, 36.

[435] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 157-158.

conventionally tied to Truth or to the Good)."[436] With masculine normalcy grounded in a newly selective phallicism, the illusory quality of glamour provided allowed Lynes to draw a line between the actress and trade.

One such line is Lynes's 1954 photograph of Ted Starkowski (fig.30). Every detail of the photograph is orchestrated to elevate the appearance of a masculine subject wholly determined by utility to the status of a daydream. Few other photographs by Lynes do as much to cast the model as an actor. In his tight jeans, bulging conspicuously at the crotch, fisherman-rib sweater worn without an undershirt, and workaday watchman's cap relegated to the status of an ornament, Starkowski looks like a longshoreman snatched from the imagination of Tom of Finland (although this photograph precedes the first American publication of Tom of Finland drawings by two years). Despite finding inspiration in the world of blue-collar work, this is clearly a choice in service of an aesthetic purpose. Lynes used powerful studio lighting to create the dynamic lighting effects that characterize much of his work, and photographs of Lynes's and studio assistants working shirtless attest to the literally overheated environment they produced. In the role of rough trade, Starkowski smokes an unlit cigarette. And what of the setting in a featureless anyplace? Lynes's studio provides only the minimum furniture required to support Starkowski in a posture that manages to be solicitous and pensive at the same time, welcoming an evaluating view despite being absorbed in thought.

This photograph extends rough trade as a portable structure of fantasy that discovers erotic opportunities in ambiguities of dress and pose. As pictured, Starkowski would be equally at home absorbing the atmosphere of a bar, stealing a moment of leisure at the docks, or waiting for a bus. According to Halperin, "part of what is involved [for men] in being straight is learning to imitate straight men, to perform heterosexual masculinity, and then forgetting that you ever learned it, just as you must ignore the fact that you are performing it […] They do not have a *conscious* consciousness of embodying a social form."[437] Starkowski appears in numerous photographs by George Platt Lynes, and also modeled for Bernard Perlin and Jared French, and was probably a member of Lynes's queer social scene.

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[436] Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 38.
[437] Halperin, *How to Be Gay*,196-197.

Evidently, Starkowski had a knack for acting like a straight man, or at least like a fantasy version thereof. As Halperin points out, however, gay men "are distinguished precisely by their conscious consciousness of acting like straight men whenever they perform normative masculinity."[438] As Lynes shows in his photograph of Starkowski, and as evidenced by the gay machismo of the Castro Clone in the 1970s, acting like straight men is not necessarily a strategy of camouflage. Instead, this kind of role-playing can realize a libidinal attachment to an impossibility. The glamour of trade might simply be the frisson of sustaining and inhabiting the contradiction of homosexual coupling and straightness by ignoring the status of masculinity as style or imitation or forgetting the deviation that takes one off the line of heterosexual desire. As Waugh puts it, glamour connotes "the contradictory mix of intimate identification and unfulfillable voyeurism that [is] a basis of homoerotic spectatorship: the 'envy' of the spectator, a hybrid of starfucking and projection, plus the visual pleasure of the perfectly lit, eroticized body."[439]

Lynes's late-career figure studies frequently take the low-keyed and high-contrast chiaroscuro of glamour portraiture to extremes, resulting in the obscuring or loss of the subject's likeness. While Lynes retained a personal and inventive approach to his photography throughout his career, figure 31 is typical of this tendency in his later work. In the photograph, the bright values in the focal area diffuse rapidly as they approach the edge. In a functional reversal of Waugh's observation of the close relationship between glamour and homoerotic spectatorship (and of the previous photo of Starkowski, likely taken in the same sitting), Lynes's illumination of Starkowski's chest, waist and buttocks welcome the voyeuristic gaze, but resist the intimacy of identification by casting Starkowski's face in deep shadow. In her analysis of the glamour of Chanel No.5, Judith Brown argues that glamour "relies on abstraction, on the thing translated into idea and therefore the loss of the thing itself, curling away from earthly concerns, as if in a whiff of smoke."[440] Where semiotization in service of camp involves the discovery of an excessive significance (camp is *all* face), the sublation of things as ideas in glamour confers on its objects an auratic distance from their material entanglements, which leads Brown to see glamour as "cold, indifferent, and

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[438] Ibid., 197.
[439] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 105.
[440] Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 5.

deathly."[441] This may also be why some commentators in the 1930s saw the glamorous shady dame as a recursion of the vamp. "As much about the intellect and its pleasures as the body and its desires, glamour produces distance, an inhuman sheen, and what one might term negative pleasure."[442] Brown's analysis is firmly rooted in the phenomenology of perfume, emerging as it does "in the transformation from [fluid] object to [olfactory] effect," as an act of perception that sustains a "shift away from the concrete and humdrum to the insubstantial and extraordinary." [443] However, the same could be said about the evaporation of the fairy in light of the diffusion of sexological understandings of queerness, and under pressure from an increasingly repressive and censorious sexual culture in the United States. In place of the concreteness of the gestures that made the fairy a material reality, homosexuality provided a hypothesis or suspicion about queer men's inwardness. Something akin to this substitution seems to be at work in figure 32, in which Lynes's subject faces the camera from behind a painting depicting the relationship between the human skeleton and the visible surface of the body through an x-ray-like transparency. Despite reiterating the model, the painting is not quite a double. In effect, it offers a diagrammatic or theoretical perspective on the human model it partially occludes. Preceding and occluding the model, the diagram could even be said to dominate or diminish the model. What both the painting and the photograph lack, however, is a face. This is not a concession to anonymity, since this model is pictured in numerous other photographs by Lynes, including in several of the few surviving "action" shots by Lynes. The clarity of the silhouette of the model's head and shoulders create the impression that the face is not just missing but withheld by the photograph to render the model's subjectivity opaque and frustrate identification. Although there is no reason beyond aesthetic affinity to see this photograph and the nude portrait of Starkowski as related, taken together, they suggest a perspective that recognizes that neither the material givenness of the body, nor the conceptual clarity of a theory or diagram exposes the subjective immediacy of queer masculinity. Visualizing the elusive or illusive inwardness of queer masculinity through the conventions of glamour photography involves taking pleasure in the immaterial,

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[441] Ibid.
[442] Ibid., 23.
[443] Ibid.

that is, a "pleasure associated with *not* having, a pleasure, then, that flirts with the aesthetic possibilities of negation." [444]

Judith Brown writes that glamour photography "was explicitly designed to produce the celebrity as beyond human, as intangible as light."[445] Her characterization makes sense in terms of the bright white modernist aesthetic of many Paramount productions and the reflective blankness of cellophane, but given the role of light in producing photographic objects, and as Lynes's glamour portraits and figure studies show, darkness has at least an equal stake in glamour. Except in the case of intense and focalized brightness, light reveals detail, contour, and texture, while its absence tends to obscure these qualities. Glamour activates both of these possibilities simultaneously, making the balance between exhibition and veiling itself a key cite of aesthetic interest. In fact, given the chilly affect and detachment of glamour, *interest* might be the best way of describing subjective attachment to glamorous imagery. Considering interest as a category of aesthetic experience and judgement, Sianne Ngai argues that "the interesting might be described as an aesthetic without content," making it "ideally suited to the idea of the modern subject as a reflective, radically detached or 'ironic' ego."[446] According to Ngai,

> The experience of the interesting begins with a feeling -- inquisitiveness, curiosity, wonder -- falling somewhere between an affect and a desire. It is thus a judgement based not on an existing concept of the object but on a feeling, hard to categorize in its own right, that in spite of its indeterminacy aptly discerns or alerts us precisely to what we do not have a concept for (yet).[447]

While Ngai acknowledges that people can judge things "interesting" on a variety of grounds other than aesthetic ones, she nevertheless observes a striking consistency in the function of judgement that something is interesting: "that of ascribing value to that which seems to differ, in a yet to be conceptualized way, from a general expectation or norm whose exact concept may itself be missing at the moment of judgement."[448] The glamour generation

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[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid., 102.
[446] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 116.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid., 112.

gave visible form to a homoerotic imaginary in the very years that brought queer masculinity to the attention of a mainstream public before liquidating and suppressing its material basis in zany gesturality. At the same time, the intensity of same-sex attachments during the second world war, the diffusion of sexological theories, and the urgency of restoring American men's position of economic and cultural privilege following the war reconfigured the conceptual, aesthetic and practical foundations of queer masculinity. So, while the glamour generation did not lack a *concept* of queer masculinity, they were still faced with the disorienting prospect of articulating the relationship of experiences formed under a different imaginative and theoretical regime with their changing prospects after the war. Ngai points out that there is an ambiguity around who or what is ultimately characterized by the judgement that something is "interesting." According to her, "it is not hard to 'see how it could be argued that interest is always a question of self-interest, that one is first and foremost interested in one's own ability to be interested."[449] Interest and glamour share an intermediate position with respect to subjects and objects, describing a quality of attachment. Building on Ngai's perspective, Lynes's glamour photography can be seen as an attempt to supply the phenomenological basis of post-war queer masculinity through the figuration of erotic interest or, put the other way around, by feeling out his own aesthetic and erotic interest in male figure studies, and notably trick portraits.

Glamour was not the only field of imagery through which a libidinal interest in male bodies was substantiated; it was probably not even the most important, at least in terms of its cultural reach. According to Waugh, "the high point of gay erotic culture before Stonewall belonged neither to the 'art' regime, nor to the illicit underground [...] but to the realm of the popular and commercial," with physical culture and later physique photography standing out as especially significant.[450] Although the most iconic physique publications would not be launched for another two decades, dating the "split in the bodybuilding magazine trade between the straight mainstream sector and the proliferating gay sector" to about 1950, Waugh attributes the emergence of physique photography to New York photographers, such as Edwin Townsend, Earle Forbes, Robert Gebhart, Al Urban, Lon Hanagan, Lou Melan, and Barton Horvath.[451] The work of these photographers in the 1930s and 1940s drew on the

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[449] Ibid., 130.
[450] Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 176.
[451] Ibid., 242.

classical and orientalist aesthetics of the Victorian homoerotic imaginary and the naturalistic and lyrical qualities of *Freikörperkultur*, but their principal conception of the male body was also informed by "stiff and sturdy giants of Physical Culture," such as Eugene Sandow, albeit "streamlined and aestheticized."[452] Despite his working in the same city over the same years, and drawing on the same traditions of homoerotic imagery as these pioneering photographers, few would consider Lynes a physique photographer. Waugh writes that "the body at the center of the Physical Culture image was an artificial construction, in sharp contrast to the 'natural' image of the male body conveyed by the artistic photographers."[453] We have already seen that Lynes was at least as invested in exposing the gestural and communicative potential of the male body as he was in its natural image, at least in his campy and surrealist moods. What differentiates Lynes's glamour photography from physique photography has less to do with the distinction between nature and artifice than with the strong emphasis physique photography placed on the built, constructed, or architectural quality of the body. This interest largely determines the formal considerations that make physique photography recognizable, including: the selection of powerfully built models and poses that prioritize the display of muscular development; the use of bright even lighting for photographic detail; the preparation of the model with shaving or oil to define contour; and frequently the publication of measurements as captions.

While the difference between Lynes's purpose along with his immersion in fashion, dance, and artistic modernism and the origin of physique photography in body building is significant, there are still meaningful similarities between Lynes's work and that of contributors to *Physique Pictorial*, *Adonis*, and other classic physique publications. Aside from drawing on some of the same wellsprings of the American homoerotic imaginary, Lynes also shared some models with New York-based physique models. Lynes photographed Tony Sansone, then among the best-known physique models, in 1932; in 1953, Lynes photographed Nino Sansone, evidently following in his father's footsteps. Lynes also employed Fred and William Ritter, brothers who worked as professional models as well as publishing their own physique photographs in *Strength and Health*, for surrealist photographs in the mid-1930s. Stephen Haas's introduction to *George Platt Lynes: The Male Nudes*

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[452] Ibid., 209.
[453] Ibid., 190.

includes photographs Lynes took of U.S. airmen during World War II. The resulting pictures are pure physique. In one, a nude airman is seated on a stool with his back to the camera. In one hand he holds the handle of a fencing foil at shoulder height; with the other, he pulls the tip of the sword downward in an arc, demonstrating the musculature of his back. In another photo, a model in swimming briefs is seated on a stool facing the camera. Unlike standard physique photography, his gaze is demurely directed toward the bottom left, but the pose is a classic of the genre, even if it is awkwardly executed. He lightly holds his hands at his waist with shoulders rotated forward to emphasize their muscularity, widen his torso, and exaggerate the difference between the bulk of the waist and upper body. Finally, as mentioned earlier, Lynes's work shared space with American Models Guild photos in *Der Kreis* from 1950 until after Lynes's death. A photograph published in the March 1955 issue of *Der Kreis* is indicative of the degree to which Lynes and the physique photographers shared a perspective on the male figure.[454] Published under Lynes's pseudonym, Roberto Rolf, the photograph depicts a model seated in a knees-flexed position on a floor covered with a drop-cloth and overfilling the frame. The model's legs and hips are in profile, but he is turned to face the camera from the waist up. It is another classic physique pose, and Lynes has made sure to wash the model's chest, shoulders, and one side of his face in light. As is the way of physique models, the model has sucked in his gut to accentuate or create an hourglass silhouette. Of course, in a physique photograph, the model would probably actually *be* that shape (although there is more variety among the models pictured in physique magazines than is commonly appreciated), and he would be wholly in-frame and visible in every detail due to high-keyed documentary lighting.

The purpose of these superficial comparisons is not to deflate the cultural prestige of Lynes's glamour photography so much as to ground the excellence of Lynes's work in a broadly shared attitude toward queer masculinity emerging around mid-century. Aside from a shared repertoire of source material and tropes, what Lynes's glamour photography and physique photography triangulate is the consolidation of a drive toward repetition and comparison as components of the angle the white American homoerotic imaginary took on desire and masculinity as practical matters. These qualities appear at the level of the series, with both physique photography and Lynes's later figure studies using a restricted and

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[454] Roberto Rolf, Untitled photograph, *Der Kreis* 23, no.3 (March 1955), 25.

formulaic repertoire of models, poses, and techniques. Figure 33 is not the photograph from the March 1955 issue of *Der Kreis*, however, aside from a few details, it might as well be. This photograph may be further from the model, and darker overall, and the model has not turned his torso as sharply toward the camera, but because the photographs hew so closely to a pattern endlessly replicated in physique photographs, the differences serve to enliven comparison with other photographs, rather than contributing to the impression of uniqueness, autonomy, or self-sufficiency. So consistent were the photographs of the physique genre that, following the model's measurements, the editors of *Physique Pictorial* (whose tongues only strayed from their cheeks to deliver assiduously non-committal homilies for tolerance) captioned a photograph by Bud Counts: "many weightlifters are critical of poses which vary from the 5 or 6 poses which comprise 99% of certain physique magazines, but Bud is willing to experiment, and has produced this dramatic result."[455] The photograph in question, depicting a blonde model with stag's antlers and taken from an extreme low-angle (possibly representing the story of Actaeon), is anomalous, to be sure, but the two wrestling photographs following it could have found a home in any of *Physique Pictorial*'s rivals, or even in a contact sheet for academies circa 1890. Despite the usual association between repetition and dullness, tedium, or monotony, the photographic recurrence of highly typical bodies, poses, and situations in physique photography and Lynes's glamour photography might actually be a crucial dimension of their "interest" for queer men.

According to Ngai, "the interesting narrativizes aesthetic experience, giving it both an anticipatory and a retrospective orientation," and making it like the corporeal emplotment of subjectivity through gesture.[456] Like a gesture, the judgement that a photograph is "interesting" anticipates its circulation to our future selves and to others to confirm the interest, or continued interest, of the photographs. Ngai explains that "the demand for justifications that [finding something "interesting"] solicits from others, which in turn creates the occasion for one to supply them, suggests that this aesthetic of and about circulation is actually aimed at enfranchising outsiders and thus expanding the boundaries of the original interest group."[457] Beyond sharing photographs with others, the glamour of Lynes's late figure studies and physique photography circulates by propagating the figures and situations

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[455] Bud Counts, Untitled photograph, *Physique Pictorial* 5, no.4 (Winter 1955), 22.
[456] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 133.
[457] Ibid., 172.

they depict in the lives and fantasies of desiring viewers in a very real sense. Patrick Keating describes a 1932 photospread in *Vanity Fair*, "Then Came Garbo," that presents before-and-after portraits of seven stars made over to look like Greta Garbo. While each had been elevated to stardom in part based on their unique appearance, "the tongue-in-cheek text noted that 'anthropologists of the future' would look back and make an astonishing discovery: 'Whereas early in the Century, the female citizens of America were various in type and ready to sell their birthright for a new coiffure, about 1931-32, they suddenly all began to look alike.'"[458]

More than anything else, the serial repetition found in Lynes's late figure studies and physique photography invites a comparative approach. The framework of familiar poses, backgrounds, and situations, and especially the publications of the model's measurements in captions of physique photographs, allows viewers to draw the photographs together through a series of "family resemblance," or the sense that they are undergirded by a flexible chain of similarities, despite their manifest differences. "An object can never be interesting in and of itself, but only when checked against another: the thing against its description, the individual object against its generic type."[459] The discovery of the sameness that lies underneath the difference in the surface of the photographs puts viewers in the position of an assessor or investigator, establishing an evaluative or even forensic relationship to images. Ngai writes that the judgement that this or that thing is "interesting" is both conceptual and nonconceptual. On one hand, "some standard is clearly required for the perception of difference in the first place;" but the inexactness of the standard itself makes the difference elusive. "The question that always attends this evaluation is this: what was it that I must have noticed and simultaneously not noticed about the appearance of the object in order to have judged it interesting?"[460] Ngai concludes that "the experience of the interesting is essentially a feeling of not-yet-knowing,"[461] and the only thing for it is to compare the interesting object to others to infer the identity or principle they exemplify. In Ngai's hands, the interesting becomes a drive. She notes that the "adriftness" of the coherence produced by the kind of

[458] Patrick Keating, "Artifice and Atmosphere: The Visual Culture of Hollywood Glamour Photography, 1930-1935," *Film History* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2017), 109.
[459] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 26.
[460] Ibid., 132.
[461] Ibid.

comparative probing of interesting objects "leads to the 'restless' striving and serial, ongoing circulation of the interesting and to its failure to produce 'complete satisfaction.'"[462] As the gesture that objectifies the mutual implication of a someone who looks and something that is looked at, taking a photograph both substantiates the interest of the object through iteration, and keeps interest alive by deferring the completion of the archive it creates.

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[462] Ibid., 122.

8. Concluding Thoughts: From Zany Performance to Interesting Stillness

While the figure of the fairy and zany effeminacy remain part of the horizon of queer masculinity for white middle-class men to the current day, Lynes's glamour signalled a shift in its comportment following World War II. At the beginning of the Twentieth century, effeminacy was part and parcel of the phenomenon of queerness in the common wisdom of American men and women, or at least necessary correlate of it; by the end of Lynes's career as an artistic photographer, however, the zaniness of the campy queen was secondary to homosexuality as a psychological disposition. For most men, visual culture provided an important source of information about the practical reality and social necessity of masculinity as a particular way of carrying their body. The technical discourses about sexual deviance and normalcy emerging in the human sciences made little impression on ordinary American men until at least the 1930s, and would not significantly inform people's common-sense attitudes until after the publication of the Kinsey Report in 1948. While the example of other men in their immediate environment would almost certainly provide the most important source of this gestural apprenticeship, film and photography allowed men to see masculinity and its varieties enacted in a much broader range of scenarios and registers than any would see in their lifetime. Photography and film built on existing representational conventions, such as those developed in painting, illustration, theatre and nightlife, but the voyeuristic position of the spectators of films and photographs provided a special liberty to look at men, fetishistically or critically, and imagine recreating their gestures in the medium of one's own body. That faculty of empathetic embodiment may even be a precondition of understanding action on screen or the scene depicted in a photograph in the first place. At the same time as film and photography provide conduits for a kind of speculative embodiment, they also provide an especially potent instance of the estranged or dissociative critical distance one assumes on their embodiment in the process of selecting and performing gestures in the process of projecting a subjectivity.

The zaniness of Chaplin's queer gags and Lynes's camp make the contingency of the aesthetic determination of selfhood for American men in the opening decades of the Twentieth century especially poignant. For earlier generations of men, the ideal of the self-

made man, military exploits, and if all else failed, the Frontier provided external and relatively objective standards of masculine accomplishment. As the Twentieth century wore on, however, the urbanization, industrialization and rationalization of American life provoked what Michael Kimmel describes as a crisis in the definition of masculinity.[463] The erosion of recognized grounds of masculine accomplishment must have thrown the affective and performative labour of masculinity into sharp relief. It also created the conditions in which Chaplin's incisive and relentless assault on work, the choreographies of masculinity, the stability of gender and desire, and even the unity of the body could shine as comedy. While many of Chaplin's queer gags drew on older traditions of low comedy, ultimately they foregrounded a modern sense of exasperation at the incessant labour of producing oneself as a normal man. They also hint at the anarchic freedom of a zany collapse of structuring forms and disciplinary lines. The intensity of the effort required to conform to expectations of masculine comportment given the near certainty of occasional failure conduces to bathos, bringing embattled masculinity right up to the line of camp. Despite its reputation for ironizing detachment, early twentieth-century camp responded to the rigid gestural regime of normal masculinity by producing an equally laborious and fraught effeminacy. Camp unites both a sensibility and a set of formal practices operating, like gesture, by recognizing the invention of surface and depth through performance. By deliberately cultivating the gestures of a feminine subject position, fairies and other camps created a zany zone of exception that allowed them to embody a proscribed selfhood and its desires. The aesthetic agnosticism of camp permitted queer bodies to predicate both masculinity and effeminacy, with each remaindered by the other as a set of unrealized gestures depending on the demands of the situation. While hardly a comedian himself, Lynes's campier photographs resituate the conflicted negativity of zaniness and its emphasis on the strain of producing desired affects, qualities of queerness essayed in slapstick comedy, as a core feature of queer masculinity in the early Twentieth century.

The gradual acceptance of the proposition that men who had sex with men participated in homosexuality irrespective of their sexual aim or gender comportment, and that homosexuality was a durable and minoritizing aspect of individual psychology, had profound implications for the embodied reality of queer masculinity and the organization of

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[463] Michael S. Kimmel, (*Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996).

sexual relationships among men. For one thing, the notion that men were queer because they desired other men as sexual partners, not because of their assumption of a demoted gender role in their physical comportment and sexual aims, meant that the category of trade became indefensible within the commonly accepted logic of the new libidinal economy – even if the phenomenon of straight identified men having sex with men continued. The scientific rigor of heterosexuality also produced an anxious paradigm of masculinity, in which normal men policed their attachment to other men and their bodily comportment to eradicate any suspicion of homosexuality.

While I doubt Lynes had an explicit sexual or corporeal politics in mind when photographing men, Lynes's glamour shots recover and insist on the artificiality of a newly naturalized heterosexual masculinity; this could be called Lynes's positive project. At the same time, his late photography was also coloured by the general negativity of glamour, which Brown describes variously as its detachment, distance, coolness, and association with death.[464] Brown writes that "glamour chills, then, even as it promises the impossible. Here we find another connection to the modernism that favours blankness, the polished surface, the stance of impenetrability […], the suspicion of the nothing behind it all."[465] Lynes manifests this negativity in the spareness and darkness of photographs that expose the physical strain of embodying an attitude of queer masculinity that deploys the body and its gestures as a mask. Agamben argues that modernity breaks the "mythical rigidity" of images, replacing images with gestures. At the same time, images are suspended between two contradictory ontologies. On one hand, "they preserve the *dynamis* intact," and on the other, as the "death mask" of a photographic real they attest to the "obliteration of a gesture."[466] Many of Lynes's photographs surface this tension in the conspicuous rejection of the gestures of earlier generations of queer men, both with respect to the poses and attitudes of the men pictured and in the enframing and positioning gestures typical of earlier queer photographers. It would be easy to see these photographs as morbid, but as Brown writes of

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[464] Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[465] Ibid., 5.

[466] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 55.

glamour, "somehow this blankness is transmuted into something that is seductive, powerful, and often simply gorgeous."[467]

To my eye, even Lynes's relatively staid glamour photography remains faithful to the gestural vitality of queer masculinity. That might be Lynes's most significant aesthetic achievement in relation to the physique culture emerging after the second World War. While few people credited the physique alibi for homoeroticism by the mid sixties,[468] the establishment of publications like *Physique Pictorial* (1955) and *Grecian Guild Pictorial* (1951) marked the beginning of a decade of particularly intense deflection and repression of queer masculinity in American visual culture. As Waugh puts it, "cheesecake directly addressed an overtly sexual voyeurism; [while] the voyeurism invited by the beefcake was mediated and confused by processes of identification and rendered covert or unconscious."[469] The gestures that constituted an invitation to erotic contemplation in cheesecake photography and in illicit homoerotic photography were reduced or occluded in physique, leading queer men to apply a searching or forensic eye to visual culture in an attempt to identify homosexuality in the minor difference. To that end, the serial format, the publication of model measurements, and the prominence of highly typical models, situations and poses resemble impulse toward repetition attributed to psychoanalytic drives. For queer men, the interest of physique photography in this period lies precisely in examining the models closely and comparing them to each other and to one's own body, all considered as the objects of a hypothetical desire. Hypothesis and suspicion make physique photography a paradigmatic case of the Interesting, insofar as it is a judgement that remains incomplete without confirmation by an implicit other. Borrowing Sianne Ngai's words, the partial satisfaction or incompleteness of interesting physique photography ensured "the continued circulation of discourse (and information), lubricating the pathways of its intersubjective movement and exchange," thereby confirming queer men's membership in a community constituted by a shared quality of interest.[470]

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[467] Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 5.

[468] Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 245.

[469] Ibid., 184

[470] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 46.

Compared to Lynes's photographs, the men of physique photography seem reluctant to move at all, as if the photographer's instruction "hold still" summarized advice for a whole generation of queer men. Physique magazines often referred the frozen quality of their photographs with respect to the statuesque quality of the muscled male body, no doubt capitalizing on the deep and ambivalent associations connected to classicism. Frequently, placing models among plaster columns or against a backdrop of ruins was enough to establish a connection between them and antique statuary, but occasionally the comparison was more direct. For example, a photograph (figure 34) in the May-June 1958 issue of *Adonis* invites viewers to compare a statuette and model holding the same drawing-an-invisible-bow pose. The photographer of figure 35 presumably intended to illustrate the idealizing relationship between statuesque models and *Physique Pictorial*'s audience of aspiring "bodybuilders." In February of the same year, a poem reproduced in *Der Kreis* describes a dream of sailors "as beautiful as statues."[471] The physique alibi held that looking at pictures of ideal male bodies inspired others to perfect their own body, and that this veneration was not only compatible with masculinity, but constitutive. To frame this entirely as a deflection likely misconstrues the operation of physique photography as part of the cultivation of a new form of queer masculinity. In a sense, homoerotically interested readers of physique magazines were building a new body, whether or not they visited the gyms or used the exercise programs and products advertised sporadically in the magazines, to the extent that they were reflecting on and rejecting the gestural bearing of obsolete modes of queerness. Lynes's photographs provided set of possibilities for the new queer body rooted in tension and role-play, physique magazines provided one rooted in stillness and fantasy.

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[471] Author uncredited, "Reve," *Der Kreis* no.22 (2, February 1954), 19. The poem is reproduced under "Shore Leave," a Quaintance painting depicting two sailors sharing a drink in an intimate bar. One is nude from the waist up, the other is wearing even less.

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