

ECONOMIES OF FANTASY, PLEASURE AND DESIRE IN EXPLICIT SEX FILMS

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Abstract

Title: *Economies of Fantasy, Pleasure and
Desire in Explicit Sex films*

The representation of explicit sex in film has become the focus for heated debate in Western feminism in the last twenty years. This debate has become polarised into pro and anti-censorship positions through the alignment of the representation of explicit sex to issues such as positive representation and freedom to explore different representative languages for articulating female sexuality. The thesis argues that there are other important issues at stake within the frame of Explicit Sex films that have been side-lined through the terms of the censorship debate. The primary effect of the censorship debate has been the failure to address adequately the construction of desire and sexuality in contemporary culture. The thesis seeks to remedy this exclusion by examining the conventions of the genre of Explicit Sex films through a broader analysis of the construction of sexuality in both popular culture and theory.

Through textual analysis of a range¹ of Explicit Sex films and engagement with contemporary debates about sexuality and sexual differences, the thesis will examine the recent phenomenon of video-produced Explicit Sex films. As the impact of this shift in the production and dissemination of these films has not been addressed by key critics of the genre, the thesis will address the ways in which video and camcorder technology has shifted the means of representing authenticity and will discuss the implications of the notion that authenticity operates through disavowal as a fetish. The thesis will ask what it means to assign authenticity to the sexual acts depicted in these films and will furthermore ask what it means to call Explicit Sex films transgressive. It will be argued that the mainstay of analyses of these films often neglects to interrogate the complex matrix of contemporary sexuality, which is constructed through culturally and historically specific

¹ Titles of some of the films which will be examined are *L'Education d'Anna*, *Punky Girls*, *Dr Butts II*, *Rambone the Destroyer*, *Cicciolina in Italy*, *New Wave Hookers*.

Abstract

repressions and disavowals, that underpin the textual strategies and readership of these films. The thesis examines examples of Explicit Sex films through the concepts of authenticity, performance, the phallus, and transgression, in relation to psychoanalytic notions of fetishism, desire and fantasy. This conceptual approach offers a means of re-evaluating the status of contemporary sexuality and sexual identity and broadening the field of enquiry into the possible pleasures that these films offer to viewers.

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Introduction

Mapping Polar Terrains: The Pornography Debate

The aim of this thesis is to examine the links between psychoanalytic mappings of psychosexualities and the recent phenomenon of video-produced Explicit Sex films. The leading contention of this study is that for an understanding of the ways in which these films engage fantasy, desire and pleasure for their users, it is crucial to undertake an examination of the way these films are inter-bound with the construction and formulation of psychosexualities. As will be demonstrated in this introduction, sustained analyses of these links are significantly absent from the mainstay of academic and political critiques of these films. The thesis aims to remedy this omission. The relation between the films and the structuring of contemporary sexuality will be formulated as a hypothetical question after having mapped out the key extant feminist texts which address the 'issue of pornography'.

A key challenge I have encountered in undertaking the research for this thesis has been the difficulty of obtaining video material that is outlawed in this country. This has meant, for example, that in the discussion of 'lactation' films in Chapter Four, the primary research material has been the 'marketing blurb' for the films, as I have not been able to obtain the films themselves. The outlawed status of these films has meant that I have had to enter into the alternative, underground market of the sex-film industry. This has been an educational adventure in itself and has taken me into a black market economy of film/video production that is somewhat removed from the conventional methods of research that would be relevant to the analysis of legitimate film production. The films taken for analysis cannot, under the terms of the *Obscene Publications Act*,¹ be legally screened in public cinemas nor are they legally available from the local video store. It is perhaps due to the difficulty of accessing this material that there are no extant writings or critiques of primary video texts used for the thesis. The group of films chosen for analysis are

¹ See *Appendix C* which takes extracts from the Act (1959/1964).

marketed for a 'heterosexual' audience, but far from depicting only heterosexual coitus, they present a much broader range of sexual acts. It is often popularly believed that Explicit Sex films marketed to heterosexual users solely depict heterosexual coitus. However, due to the industry's play on the 'transgressive' status of these films they almost always depict sexual acts that are in excess of heterosexual coitus. I have chosen films that are indicative of the range of Explicit Sex films that have been marketed to a predominantly heterosexual audience in the UK in the last five years. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine 'gay' addressed films, although some of the films analysed do deploy images of 'lesbian' sex.

In researching and writing this study there has also been the challenge of thinking about videos that ostensibly appear to be simplistic, transparent texts. This view of these films is often, mistakenly, taken because they lack the financial investment in legitimate Hollywood and Art cinema film production. Despite the lack of plot and poor production values, the study will show that these films are far from simplistic or transparent, and that they raise questions that are intrinsic to the concerns of contemporary cultural theory. For instance, they raise implicit questions about the nature and function of representation, the construction of gender, sexuality and sexual identity, the privileging of the mind-body split in cultural discourses, and competing systems of knowledge.

It is also important here to point out that the critical approach taken in this study, which is designed to engage with the ways in which desire inflects discourse and representation, entails a problematisation of the traditional notion of an 'objective' analysis. To write desire out of the critical approach to these films would be to contradict the psychoanalytic methodological basis for the analysis. Both politically and methodologically it is therefore important to acknowledge the presence of desire and not to attempt to disavow it. A further introductory point that must be made here is that often there will appear in the study to be a mismatch in the registers of language used in the analysis. It swings from the 'high'

language of theory to the 'low' colloquial language of sex. I have not sought to 'square' these mis-matches but to allow the differences to stand. The co-presence of these apparently conflicting cultural registers often provides a means of showing how theory or hegemonic sanitised renderings of sexual terms are often unable to capture and translate the desire invested and implicit within the signification system of contemporary sex-slang.

The fierce debate that has raged between feminists over the last twenty years around the problem of pornography has furnished Anglo-American feminism with a central issue around which debates about oppression and sexual differences have coalesced. The result of this has been to split feminism as a core movement into opposing theoretical camps. The split has, on the one hand, invigorated feminist discourse through the voicing of sexual differences, but on the other has led to a polarisation which has limited the possible approaches to the topic. The effect of this polarisation on the analysis of 'pornography' in Anglo-American feminist discourses is that the meaning of the term itself has become split. Consequently the different usages of the term tally with the given theoretical and political position of the user of the term.² The dispute about the meaning of the term is in itself useful, at a meta-discursive level, as it helps to demonstrate that any fixing of signification produces a 'master narrative' which will then serve the interests of the 'defining' party. This problem is inherent in the discourse of the pro-censorship lobby because there is a move here to fix the definition of the term so that it can be used as the basis for legislation.

² I am here following Elizabeth Wilson's analysis of the political stances that underpin the diverse feminist critiques of 'pornography' and censorship ('Feminist Fundamentalism: The Shifting Politics of Sex and Censorship' in eds. Segal and McIntosh, 1992).

A further problematic of the term pornography³ is that it is often used to describe a multitude of aesthetic and popular forms of representation to the extent that analyses of pornography often preclude specific analysis of particular forms of sexual representation. In pro-censorship readings of the term, pornography is used to describe and damn most, or even all, representations of sexuality. There are broadly two readings of the term current in feminist analysis. It is used by pro-censorship feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin⁴, Susan Griffin⁵ and Catherine Itzin⁶ (1992), to denote any depiction which presents women as sexual objects, which, it is argued, violates and degrades women. Pro-censorship critiques can range from a female model posed in a sexual way in, say, a car advertisement, through to representations of penetrative sex. This reading of the term is also supported by its general use as a metaphor for barbarity and senseless violence, for example, as an adjective mobilised to connote war atrocities. By contrast, Grace Lau⁷ Annie Sprinkle⁸ and Pat Califia⁹ (1994: 11), who describe themselves as feminists, use the term pornography to describe positively their work as a means of flouting the assumption that pornography is always produced by men and for men.

³ As I have now begun to establish that the term 'pornography' is problematic I will now drop the use of quotation markers.

⁴ *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981).

⁵ *Pornography and Silence* (1981).

⁶ Although Catherine Itzin's book is an edited collection many of the articles are written by her: Introduction, 'Entertainment for Men: What is It and What It Means', 'Pornography and the Social Construction of Sexual Inequality', Chapter Four 'Pornography and the Law' and 'Pornography and Civil Liberties: Freedom, Harm and Human Rights' in ed. Catherine Itzin *Pornography: Women Violence and Civil Liberties* (1992).

⁷ 'Ten years ago, as part of my degree thesis, I started to explore the concept of creating erotic photography for women ... I felt a real erotic frisson during my photo sessions and, whilst I needed to maintain my professional control, I was simultaneously exulted by being able to command my models' ('Confessions of a Complete Scopophilia' by Grace Lau in eds. Church Gibson and Gibson, 1993: 199/200).

⁸ Annie Sprinkle is interviewed in *Angry Women. Re/Search Publications* (Juno and Vale, 1991).

⁹ Pat Califia says of her first article on Lesbian Sexuality 'A Secret side of Lesbian Sexuality' written for *The Advocate* in 1979 that 'It created an ecological niche for me as a journalist whose work was simultaneously pornographic, political and educational' (Califia, 1994: 11).

They propose, along with feminist cultural critics such as Gayle Rubin¹⁰ and Robina Gorna¹¹, that it is crucial for feminism that women engage with the production of images of sexuality and embark on an exploration of the relationship between sex and power. There will be a closer address of the range of feminist approaches to the issues raised by pornography below.

This thesis will concentrate on recent video-based hardcore¹² pornography, rather than on the many other forms of the depiction of sexual acts. This body of video based film will be referred to in the study as 'Explicit Sex films'. My strategy here aims to counter the very generalised and morally loaded usage of the term pornography which often conflates it with violence. Instead specific video texts will be examined as a means of addressing the complex question of the psychic and discursive construction of sexuality.

A range of writings which indicate the terrain of debates, discussions and types of analyses of pornography will be surveyed below. As this survey must be kept to a summary form, it may mean that some of these arguments will lose some of their complexity. The aim of this survey, however, is to map out the most significant omissions in analyses of pornography which will then be addressed in the main body of the thesis. What emerges here is that hitherto the range of critique and evaluation of pornography has centred on the relationship of gender and representation in sexually explicit material. Lynne Segal (*Feminist Review*, Autumn 1990: 29-41) and Elizabeth Wilson (ed. Segal & MacIntosh, 1992: 15-

¹⁰ 'Instead of fighting porn, feminism should oppose censorship, support the decriminalisation of prostitution, call for the abolition of obscenity laws, support the rights of sex workers, support women in management positions in the sex industry, support the availability of sexually explicit materials, support sex education for the young, affirm the rights of sexual minorities and affirm the legitimacy of human sexual diversity. Such a direction would begin to redress the mistakes of the past. It would restore feminism to a position of leadership and credibility in matters of sexual policy. And it would revive feminism as a progressive, visionary force in the domain of sexuality' ('Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong' in eds. Assiter and Carol, 1993: 40).

¹¹ 'Sadly, there is a general lack of sexually explicit material, directed at women' ('Delightful Visions' in eds. Segal and McIntosh: 181). Here Robina Gorna argues that it is crucial for women's health that there is more 'erotica' addressed to women which will allow a 'safe sex' message to be heard and put into practice.

¹² See *Appendix A* for a discussion of the meaning of the term 'hardcore'.

28), in their differently motivated meta-textual evaluations of the pornography debate, have advocated an analysis of the political positions that underpin the different positions on the 'issue of pornography'. This meta-discursive approach proves useful as it enables the political and theoretical agendas which underscore a critique to be shown. I will draw on the method they use but will broaden this method to address the models or discourses of sexuality that are either implicit or overtly mobilised within the evaluation of pornography. Through the following survey the theoretical underpinning of each text will be discussed with the aim of showing how few of these texts ask the important question - what is sexuality? My overall project here is to map the arena of extant work, with the aim of demonstrating how a different approach to the material, which involves a sustained address of the formation and construction of sexuality, can be taken. I propose that an understanding of this is vital if the relationship between Explicit Sex films, desire and fantasy is to be addressed.

The representative views that will be discussed here can be divided into broad political and methodological positions. Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, Susan Griffin, and Catherine Itzin each argue that pornography contributes to the oppression of women. Susan Sontag, Maggie Humm and Linda Williams¹³ take a more complex approach to the aesthetic form of pornography. Feminists Against Censorship¹⁴ writers argue that pornography is not in itself the source of women's oppression and seek to re-read it through a more positive framework, as a freedom of speech issue, and some of these writers argue that it can even be used to help women to find a voice to express diverse sexual desires. These writers or groups of writers cover the US and the UK and span the mid 1960s through to the mid 1990s. There are many authors who have had to be left out for the sake of brevity; the rationale I have used here is that I have taken these writers to be representative of the main feminist positions on pornography.

¹³ References for all these writers' work are given below.

¹⁴ Feminists Against Censorship are a contemporary feminist group in the UK who are opposed to the censorship of sexual imagery. Their position is outlined in *Pornography and Feminism: The Case Against Censorship* (eds. Rodgerson and Wilson, 1991).

In *The Pornographic Imagination* (1967),¹⁵ Susan Sontag approaches written pornography in terms of its exclusion from the literary canon and an opportunity for 'psychological' readings of pornography as morally aberrant: 'as a theme for psychological analysis, pornography is rarely seen as anything more interesting than texts that illustrate a deplorable arrest in normal sexual development' (Sontag, 1982: 206). The essay opens with a tripartite division of approaches to pornography that in various ways condemn and exclude it. These are a) the social historical approach, b) a psychological approach, and c) the critique of pornographic writing as disobeying the rules of the canon of literature. The main focus of her analysis is centred on a critique of the models employed in the third category that 'damn' pornography as un-literary because it aims at arousing the body and to 'inspire the non-verbal' (Sontag, 1982: 208) which she argues is considered to be '...antithetical to the complex function of literature'. (ibid.) By contrast, she argues that pornographic writing has its own internal logic that does not conform to the rigours and conventions of the traditional 19th century novel. Instead Sontag categorises written pornography, such as the novels of Georges Bataille, as utilising certain aesthetic strategies that are current within literary modernism, such as the absence of rounded characterisation, the engagement of the reader's body and the use of episodic and fragmented form. Sontag's approach is less concerned with the gender politics of written pornography than with the use of aesthetic strategies that disrupt traditional literary forms.

A key problem with Sontag's essay is that it inherently privileges the 'elite' European erotic text and does not address more popular forms of pornography. Sontag's essay was written before the flood of sex videos hit the Western marketplace. However, many of the aesthetic features of the European erotic texts that she discusses are applicable to some of the more recent video produced Explicit Sex films. The aim of 'moving' and engaging the sexual body is the most significant attribute of all forms of pornography. This is not the definition used by

¹⁵ 'The Pornographic Imagination' (Sontag, 1982: 205-234).

pro-censorship feminists, but is a more traditional defining feature of pornography and is the expressed aim of video-produced Explicit Sex films. I would, however, fault Sontag's analysis because it splits the 'pornographic imagination' off from other popular and elite cultural forms and I would concur, on this point, with Maggie Humm¹⁶ who advocates that the study of pornography must link with other cinematic and visual forms. I would take this further than Humm though; the processes of spectatorship - desire, fantasy and pleasure - must also be addressed, as the semiotic systems of cinema are intrinsically bound up with these processes. There is a tendency, apparent in Sontag's essay as well as in other more damning analyses, to regard pornography as somehow divorced from the matrix of cultural representation; this line of enquiry often leads to a universalised and essentialised analysis of the genre, that often fails to factor-in and explore the shifting status of sexuality in both social and psychic spaces.

Maggie Humm's¹⁷ analysis reflects a body of feminist writing on pornography that takes a very different view to Sontag's rather celebratory, sex-literature-as-radical analysis. She asks who it is that speaks through the pornographic frame. Her concern, then, is for the representation and enunciation of female sexuality, rather than on subversive aesthetic strategies.¹⁸ For Humm the mapping of female sexuality in pornographic texts is the product of the male imaginary and, therefore, disallows an active female voice on sexuality. The difficulty with this line of enquiry is that it is author/auteur-centred and does not sufficiently account for sexual differences imbued within strategies of readership and the gaze.

¹⁶ 'Is the Gaze Feminist?' (eds. Day and Bloom, 1988: 69-82).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 'The question we should pose is not "What is pornography?" but the question E. Ann Kaplan poses in *Women in Film Noir*: "What is being said about women here?" and (more appositely) "Who is speaking?" It is important, therefore, not to isolate particular modes of representation but to look at the *context* of representation which includes the voice in a fuller discourse of sexuality ... for to be the object of desire is always to be defined in the passive voice' (Maggie Humm 'Is the Gaze Feminist?' in eds. Day and Bloom, 1988: 80).

Although Humm's analysis mobilises a partial critique of the male gaze¹⁹, and she acknowledges the importance of factoring into the analysis of the visual image whose social dimension constructs a spectator's 'space', she nevertheless does not get to grips with the implications of this for the spectator of pornography. Indeed, the text she takes up is *Klute*, which was produced within the Hollywood system, rather than taking a text specifically marketed as a 'sex' film. Although she usefully prescribes that female subjectivity must be addressed in relation to pornography, there is no sustained analysis of what this might mean in the analysis of specific pornographic texts. She argues that films are produced or seen in isolation, but that it is necessary to examine the social discourses that intersect with film production and spectatorship. However, there is no sustained analysis of the discourses that construct contemporary sexuality or how psychoanalysis might enable a theorisation of sexuality and desire .

Andrea Dworkin,²⁰ and Susan Griffin²¹ are two feminist writers whose work is indicative of pro-censorship approaches to pornography. The substance of their critique is also taken up in the early 1990s by Catherine Itzin,²² whose work will be discussed later. This core group attack pornography as the product and the primary supporting agent of male or patriarchal domination over women. Each of these writers propose that all kinds of pornography (by which they mean any representations of women that are sexualised in any way) bolsters male aggressive and narcissistic fantasies through the degradation of women. These written critiques have provided the basis for political lobbies that aim to tighten US and UK laws on the representation of women as sexual objects.

¹⁹ 'Mulvey's criticism has done a lot to help us examine the question of the gendered spectator; yet because her method derives from psychoanalytic accounts, via Lacan, of the formation of female subjectivity, it allows little scope for analysing female subjectivity in its semiotic and social discourses. Mulvey sets up too rigid a divide between visual analysis and contextual discourse' (Humm in eds. Day and Bloom, 1988:71).

²⁰ (Dworkin, 1981).

²¹ (Griffin, 1981).

²² (Itzin, 1993).

Dworkin's definition of pornography immediately places the term in relation to the sexual exploitation of women by men. She says:

Pornography by definition - the graphic depiction of whores - is trade in a class of persons who have systematically been denied the rights protected by the First Amendment and the rest of the Bill of Rights.
(Dworkin, 1981: 11)

Throughout her analysis, Dworkin constantly invokes a link between pornography and violence. For her, women who engage with pornography, in what ever ways or for whatever purpose, have 'false consciousness' and she maintains that these women collude with male violence and oppression levelled at women.

Susan Griffin's slightly more sophisticated analysis in her book *Pornography and Silence* (1981) has a rather different approach. The trajectory of her analysis is to oppose the forces of life (which she terms 'Eros') and death. She argues that

Pornography is an expression not of human erotic feeling and desire, and not a love of the life of the body, but a fear of bodily knowledge, and a desire to silence Eros.
(Griffin, 1981:13)

For her, all pornography is a form of sadism and has 'death' at its heart, which works to silence women and humiliate men. The effect of her analysis is to essentialise and reify all forms of pornography as a fundamental evil. The aim of her book is to re-claim sexuality from the pornographers and the implication is that sexuality must be restored to a romantic, spiritual exchange of essences, which she claims will serve the 'life instinct' and human dignity.²³ The utopian yearning for a

²³ '...what we find when we look closely at the meanings of pornography is that culture has opposed itself in violence to the natural, and takes revenge on nature' (Griffin, 1981: 2). 'This violence to body and soul extends beyond the producers of pornography, even to the pornographic audience. The attitude of the man who makes pornography is one of pure exploitation. He uses both the medium of his expression and his audience with the same callousness. He is not an artist who loves what he has made. Rather, he loves the great power which pornography gives him over his audience. The consumers of pornography, because they feed an obsession, are like drug addicts. Therefore, the producer of pornography can charge exorbitant prices for his product. But his control over his audience extends even further, into a sadistic humiliation of men' (ibid.: 118). 'For pornography is violent to a woman's soul' (ibid.: 202).

'clean and proper' sexuality and sexual exchange is a key feature of many pro-censorship analyses. But as I will go on to argue, sexuality by its nature, is entangled with power, desire and fantasy and cannot therefore be restored to an imaginary pre-lapsarian scene.

Catherine Itzin's work is more recent than that of Dworkin and Griffin and therefore warrants a closer analysis, because it directly addresses video pornography which is the topic of this thesis. For Itzin, misogyny is the sole source of pleasure that can be gained by a user of pornography. She says:

Why make a fuss about pornography? ... The short answer is because pornography plays an important part in contributing to sexual violence against women and to sex discrimination and sexual inequality. And this must matter at least as much as men's pleasure, as much as art and literature, more than profits of the pornography industry. The long answer is to be found in the pages of this book: in the descriptions of what pornography actually is, in the evidence of harm it does to women, in the links between pornography and rape, in the accounts of the connections between child pornography and child sexual abuse, in how women really feel about it, how it reinforces racism, infringes the civil liberties of women. (ed. Itzin, 1992 :1)

Itzin's introduction to her anthology, hinges on a set of emotive triggers that set the moral scene for the articles that follow. Itzin claims here that the book will describe 'what pornography actually is', however, there are references to film or video texts in just two of the twenty-six articles in the book.²⁴

The first article, 'Entertainment for Men', which is authored by Itzin, contains tabularised material cited from US surveys and some very brief comments on different forms of pornography in the UK based on research she conducted for *Cosmopolitan*. The analysis is extremely abbreviated and is conducted at break-neck speed. It devotes a maximum of three pages, or in some cases far less, to the following topics: soft and hardcore porn magazines, hardcore and softcore videos,

²⁴ 'Entertainment for Men' and 'Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography and Equality' (ed. Itzin, 1992).

snuff films, telephone sex, and horror. Films are frequently cited out of context and the description is phrased to create maximum sensational effect. There are also a good many flaws with the research methodology. Itzin seems only to have seen one hardcore film, for which she provides a description. After having said there were 81 sex videos in a 'family' video store (ibid.: 47) she then says that 'we decided to take a sample of one legal video on public sale and one illegal video sold under the counter' (ibid.: 47). This was 'decided' in a Soho sex video store and not in the 'family' video store. The chosen hardcore film was *Home Bodies* and it is described thus:

...various men and women fucking, sucking and bugging one another, some using dildos. One loops chain through her labia rings. Most are shaven. All show women enjoying being fist-fucked, bugged, casually fucked, used as animals and/or objects of lust and enjoying humiliation, including having other women urinate in their mouths.
(ibid.: 49)

The language used here is sensationalised and aimed at horrifying the reader. There is in the citation a key term which sits rather strangely with the sentiment of the article - 'all show women *enjoying*²⁵ being...'. Itzin implicitly suggests that this enjoyment is a masquerade and in so doing she makes the assumption that all women in these films are participating through a form of coercion. Whilst there might be instances of coercion, whether it be economic or emotional, there is evidence to suggest that many 'porn-stars' enjoy their work.²⁶ No further analysis is undertaken of this video in the article and its shocking content is deemed to 'speak for itself'. None of the videos she later comments upon are referenced by authors or production companies - she merely lists some titles for maximum impact, for instance, *Killer Bimbos*, *More Desires within Young Girls* (ibid.: 47). The titles seem to be chosen to emphasise the presence of 'young girls'. The rest of the 'analysis' is based on citing the marketing 'blurb' on the covers of videos,

²⁵ My italics.

²⁶ For example, Sharon Mitchell's testimony in the film *Kamikaze Hearts* (dir. Juliet Bashore, 1986, US) where she says she gets a kick out of thinking there are many men all over the world masturbating over her image.

for instance 'steamy night of lust with lusty lesbian who is later raped by husband' and 'young housewife becomes prostitute'. Whilst there is a case to be made for the validity of analysing the covers of these films, it is nevertheless the case that given the nature of her critique, some analysis of the films themselves would be pertinent to convince the reader of her argument.

The 'hardcore' video category is followed by a brief section on 'Snuff' videos - the motive for the juxtaposition is to associate hardcore with 'Snuff'. She provides almost no textual analysis whatsoever; what there is, is extremely limited. She leaves the reader with the impression that British video stores are flooded with films marketed as 'hardcore', but provides no concrete evidence for her assertions.

Itzin then goes on to discuss two 'video nasties'. *I Spit On Your Grave*²⁷ and *Driller Killer* (ibid: 49). Neither of these videos were granted certificates by the BBFC in the UK, and are therefore are not legally available for rent or sale . By conflating 'video nasties' with pornography, she manages to create a link between pornographic films and violence. This associational device was also employed in the citation above by mentioning pornography, rape, and child sexual abuse in one sentence. Itzin provides a list of 48 categories of films that are supposed to support her argument that all women are the victims of the porn trade. These 48 categories, she tells the reader, were gleaned from a survey submitted to the US Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. What is said about this research is as follows '(researchers)..coded cover images only (not content) of every fifth

²⁷ Itzin says of the film *I Spit On Your Grave*: 'a young woman, living alone, becomes the victim of a gang-rape by a group of youths from the village. The rapes are depicted in graphic detail, including bugging, amid scenes of utter degradation and violence' (Itzin, 1993: 49). It is interesting to compare this reading with Carole Clover's (Clover, 1992). Clover classifies the film as a 'rape revenge' movie. The raped girl seeks revenge for her ordeal and as a 'final girl' she is the sole figure for identification for the viewers. Clover suggests that the (usually young male audience) is forced to identify with the girl and not then with the perpetrators of a crime as the audience, versed in horror movie conventions, know that they will come to a 'sticky end'. Clover says '...I might note that I have talked to several viewers, including feminist critics, who hate themselves more for having seen *Dirty Harry*...or *Rambo*... or the rape-murder in Hitchcock's *Frenzy*, than *I Spit On Your Grave* which for all its disturbing qualities at least problematises the issue of male sexual violence...I mention these responses not in an effort to arrive at the real politics of *I Spit On Your Grave*, but to suggest that pinning down politics can be a tricky business even in the most apparently transparent cases, and that the politics of horror in general and this film in particular are less than self-evident' (Clover, 1992 :115/6).

title and therefore covered 20% of the estimated 1000 titles in each shop' (ibid.: 35). Throughout the research for this thesis, for which about 30 videos were watched, it became apparent that the lurid covers often bear no relation whatsoever to the content of the videos. This is common practice, as sex shops, especially in London's West End, seek to entice purchasers with the prospect of hardcore material, but are also wary of visits from the officers of the Obscene Publications division. They often rely on the assumption that an embarrassed purchaser is hardly likely to take the video back to the shop over a misrepresentation.

Further, none of the categories in the list cited by Itzin are backed up by titles of the films (so verification is impossible) and the article offers no contextual information on the supposed acts alluded to on the boxes of videos. One category included in the list is 'corpses'; this constitutes 0.1% of the total films 'researched' (well, at least their covers), and is defined as 'Images of a motionless individual with closed eyes as positive on this item unless a coffin, a grave site, or other imagery of death was present' (ibid.: 37). The definition is very unclear. It could, for example, describe one of the several Explicit Sex films that use vampire iconography. The presence of such categories as 'corpses' seems indicative of the sensationalist mode of presenting the information here. Overall the glaring flaws in the research do not seem to warrant the comments cited in the introduction of the book.

What emerges from these pro-censorship texts is that pornography is regarded as the root of women's oppression. None of them take a sustained address to the texts themselves and none examine the complex economies that construct adult sexuality .

There are further problems that need to be pointed out here, some of which also relate to the anti-censorship position and others to the texts I will be discussing. A key problem is the totalisation and universalisation of the category of 'women' and

'men'. All these analyses implicitly work to erase sexual differences. Men are frequently configured as inhabiting patriarchy unproblematically, and women are configured as having a collective and unified experience of gender inequality. It is this that prompts my search for a model of sexuality and gender that enables greater scope to deal with sexual differences. Gender inequality is not experienced in the same way for all women and men, instead it is subject to a host of other factors. Patriarchy too is configured by these texts as a monolithic, unchanging, and totalised institution. Throughout this thesis there will be a move to problematise these totalising modes of analysis, and a broadly post-Lacanian psychoanalytic approach will be used as a means by which to counter and disrupt generalised models of gender and sexuality which do not address the complexities and problems of gender and sexual identity. The notion of sexual differences in relation to the receiver of Explicit Sex films is then the central focus of the thesis and it is this that provides a key difference to the analyses of Dworkin, Griffin and Itzin.

In response to the pro-censorship lobby, other feminist artists, writers and cultural critics have sought to formulate arguments which problematise these readings of pornography. In Britain, Feminists Against Censorship, for example, have argued that pro-censorship arguments are flawed and, most importantly, that increased legislation may work to limit feminists who are attempting to address sexuality through art, writing and filmmaking. In *Pornography and Feminism* which was written by members of the Feminist Against Censorship Publications group in 1991 they state:

In *Pornography and Feminism: The Case Against Censorship*, we look at some of the complexities and contradictions of pornography from a feminist point of view which has led us to the belief that pornography is not a straightforward evil and increasing controls are not the answer.”
(eds. Rodgeron & Wilson, 1991: 15)

Feminists Against Censorship in Britain level two main arguments against the pro-censorship lobby:

- The pro-censorship position would mean an erasure of freedom of speech and representation by placing 'gatekeeping' with hegemonic institutions:
'...material likely to be banned under any new legislation will probably not be the material that the campaigners against pornography themselves believe to be the most harmful. Alternative feminist and gay publications are likely to be the prime target, and indeed, they already are' (ibid: 67/68).
- It is counter-productive to feminism to outlaw all kinds of sexually explicit material since this would prevent women from exploring the new languages for representing sexuality. What is needed is to pluralise images of sexuality and assign female authorship to sexually explicit texts in order to demonstrate both sexual difference and to demonstrate multiple views on the experience of sexuality: 'We believe that feminism is about choice, about taking control of our lives and bodies, and this must include our sexual choices. Much feminist criticism of both high street (so called 'soft') porn, and of alternative images, such as Della Grace's photographs of S/M lesbians, denies any possibility of choice on the part of the women involved' (ibid.: 71).

I would add a further criticism to be levelled at the pro-censorship lobby which builds on the Feminists Against Censorship argument. The pro-censorship discourse deploys an 'ideal', imaginary model of sexuality as the basis for evaluating pornography, which disavows the inherent problematic of sexuality in and of itself. It is this criticism that will be taken up in the corpus of this work, and through the mobilisation of a post-Lacanian psychoanalytic methodology, the recalcitrant excess of sexuality will be explored critically in relation to pornography and spectatorship. This is necessary since it is a problem which is unaccounted for by the pro-censorship lobby and has not been fully explored in detail from a psychoanalytic perspective or in a sustained way by anti-censorship critics.

There are two possible contributing factors for this omission. In the first place, Feminists Against Censorship are a political rather than an academic body, even though many academics have played a part in this group. Consequently this

political body aims at providing texts that are potentially available to 'common-sense' readings. Psychoanalysis, especially French psychoanalysis, is often considered to be an elitist discourse, and the specialised language of psychoanalysis does not lend itself easily to grass-roots politics. A further possible reason is that many of the recent texts, such as *Sex Exposed* (eds. Segal & MacIntosh, 1992), *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures* (eds. Assiter & Carol, 1993) and *Dirty Looks* (eds. Church Gibson & Church, 1993) are collections of essays that do not give individual authors the space to broach the complexities of psychoanalytic discourse on the construction of sexuality and sexual differences. Elizabeth Cowie's article 'Pornography and Fantasy' (in eds Segal and McIntosh, 1992) addresses some of ways in which psychoanalytic notions of fantasy can be applied to pornography. She is one of the few critics who makes the useful point, relevant to the debate on pornography, that '...there is a confusion around the issue of sexuality itself. This criticism is rarely addressed as such but instead tends to be assumed as a natural phenomenon or essence which can nevertheless be perverted or distorted' (ibid.: 133). I will be following Cowie's prescription for an examination of the construction of sexuality in relation to the representation of Explicit Sex films in this study. Cowie does not, however, bring the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy to bear directly on any pornographic texts and, perhaps due to the brevity of the article, does not fully explore the implications of her theoretical points.

The debates on the issue of pornography have then, in the main, been staged at a macro-level. Critics mostly focus on the relationship of pornography to the law, positive representation and often take a very generalised overview of gender politics. Rarely is there a deeper enquiry into the formation of sexuality and sexual differences. Few have directly addressed the specifics of cinematic forms of pornography in any sustained and detailed way. There is however, one major exception, and that is the work of Linda Williams.

Williams' book *Hardcore* (1990) is devoted to an analysis of the field of hardcore cinematic pornography. The book attempts to broaden the approach to the 'issue of pornography' through her sustained analysis of the history of cinematic

'hardcore'²⁸ sex. The book is an examination of the conventions of cinematic pornography which, she proposes, lean on other forms of cinema and the cinematic apparatus. Williams' focus is not censorship, instead, she seeks a closer understanding of the field and its history that hitherto have been omitted from the generalised assumptions about the genre in both pro and anti-censorship writings. Williams' work provides a significant sounding-board for my analysis; as the main arguments of this thesis unfold, it will become clear that there are elements of her work that are problematic. This thesis contains some major points of diversion from Williams. In the first place, it does not aim to retrace the history of the genre that she provides. It will, instead, take as its starting point an area not covered by Williams which is Explicit Sex films produced for video distribution within the last ten years. This is because Williams' history does not cover the recent shift from celluloid to video formats. As with most historical surveys Williams' history is mostly archival research. This means that she focuses on production rather than on the reception of these films (although the book does utilise some cine-psychoanalytic theory). In contrast, the aim of this study is to examine the focus on the way in which users are engaged with recent Explicit Sex films. The study seeks to problematise the user²⁹ as a coherent gender/sexual identity, either as a fixed sex/gender category or as having a fixed sexual identity. In contrast to Williams, the aim here is to address sexual differences and their relation to fantasy, desire and pleasures. This provides the rationale for the largely psychoanalytic methodology mobilised as the theoretical basis for the thesis.

Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis seems best disposed to help towards an examination of sexuality, sexual differences and how these differences might be deployed in the reception of Explicit Sex films. The strength of this theoretical methodology lies in its address to psychosexuality and the language which has been

²⁸ Some of the texts that Williams' uses, for example *Emmanuelle* and *Beyond the Green Door*, would be termed softcore in the UK.

²⁹ Rather than using the term 'viewer' or 'spectator' I will use the term 'user' to describe the reader of an Explicit Sex film. This term connotes an active participation with the text which falls into line with the film's aim to move the user's body. In so doing I signal that the processes of reading Explicit Sex films might have a qualitative difference from reading other televisual or cinematic texts.

formulated to explore this. Psychoanalytic theories do not configure sexuality as a simple fact of conscious identity; instead, sexuality is seen as a diffused, non-object that is subject to and constituted through unconscious desires and fantasies. This aspect is absent from the main body of writing on pornography which I outlined above. Psychoanalytic theory therefore presents an effective way of countering and problematising the reductive 'clean it up' discourse of the pro-censorship lobby, as it suggests the matrix of psychosexuality affronts the integrity of the unified subject. The psychoanalytic model of psycho-sexuality proposes that sexuality will always exceed psychic and social governing laws because it is inherently recalcitrant. In my view this aspect of sexuality must be considered if feminist theory is to address the ways in which gender and sexual differences inter-link. The main focus of this thesis, then, centres on psychoanalytic theories of sexuality. To phrase this as a hypothetical question - what can psychoanalytic ideas about sexuality, fantasy and desire reveal about the relation of users to Explicit Sex films? This question will provide the means of navigating the material for analysis.

I want now to outline some of the main aspects of production, authorship and the common conventions used by recent Explicit Sex films. The body of the thesis refers to these issues but it is not its main focus. I will therefore limit this outline to a few indicative points so that the reader gains a sense of the scope of the material and its production. This is further supplemented through three appendices. *Appendix A* is a survey of the ways in which these films are distributed and the types of Explicit Sex films available for purchase in the UK. It also explains some of the differences between softcore and hardcore. *Appendix B* lists a few indicative films by citing the marketing information given to prospective buyers in mail-order catalogues. *Appendix C* reproduces some of the relevant wording of the British Obscene Publications Act. *Appendix D* reproduces the cover of the recently published (1996) magazine *Real Wives* which is referred to at various points in the following chapters.

As the distribution of the primary source material used for this thesis is illegal in this country, I do not want to assume that a reader will have seen many or any of these films. So the aim of the appendices and the following section is to familiarise the reader with the terrain before going on to address issues of sexuality, desire and fantasy.

First, it will be useful to establish that the body of Explicit Sex films can be thought of as genre. This will be done by outlining issues and factors around the market differential of Explicit Sex films, authorship and production, modes of dissemination, and some of the main stylistic and formal conventions of the genre.

The generic status of Explicit Sex films is derived through its active signifying difference from other cinematic forms that depict sexual activity. Explicit Sex films signify their difference to soft-core and art house through images of penetration, erect penises and ejaculation; these images constitute the primary visual signifiers of the genre. In Britain the presence of any of these signifiers would mean that the video would not receive BBFC (British Board of Film Censors) or VSC (Video Standards Council) certification and would thus be illegal to sell or loan. Under the terms of the Obscene Publications Act (1959/1964), it is not illegal to own a film, so long as there is no evidence that an owner is 'publishing', i.e. copying, selling or lending it. Although erect penises are not outlawed in most European countries and many American States, images of vaginal, anal and oral penetration often are (although laws on this vary).

Importantly, it is through these primary signifiers, defined as illegal, that Explicit Sex films mark their difference from other cinematic genres. This, however, is not the only way in which the genre creates its signifying difference. There are some commonalities of visual style and content that can also be argued to constitute it as a genre in its own right. Explicit Sex film as a genre is supported by a star system, a recognisable iconography, and an industry infrastructure, all of which add to the differential specificity of that genre.

Explicit Sex films are marketed to make their distinction from softcore apparent to their target audiences. It could be argued that this distinction is supported by the illegality of distributing these films in this country, which adds to their transgressive cultural capital and provides a key difference to softcore films. This lends the Explicit Sex film genre an 'aura'³⁰ that makes it, arguably, more desirable and (perversely) 'valuable' because individual films from the genre are not easily available from the local video store. Explicit Sex films, then, need to keep their distinction from other films that depict sexual acts and maintain their transgressive coding by producing films that are rarely romantic, soft focus, two person scenes. Many Explicit Sex films contain - what the user is told by the marketing information is - 'bizarre' sex. This can mean anything from oral sex to 'water sports'.³¹ This too adds to the transgressive status of these films.

One of the problems of researching this genre has been the difficulty of obtaining information about the sex film industry. Due to illegality, directorship of films is often pseudonymous or completely absent; *Punky Girls*, for instance, has no credits whatsoever. Some European and US directors have, however, become underground celebrities; through magazines such as *Pornorama*, Internet discussion groups such as 'alt.sex.movies', fan gossip and information is circulated. In both these supporting extra-textual forms, directors' and stars' work is informally discussed. *Pornorama*, a recently produced magazine (1995), which as far as I know had only one issue, published a revealing interview with the French director Michael Ricaud. This interview provides some useful information about the industry infrastructure and charts Ricaud's career as a director of a range of

³⁰ The term is borrowed from Walter Benjamin's notion that some forms of elite art are venerated as sacred unique objects outlined in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (Benjamin, 1992: 215[211-235]).

³¹ The sub-genre of 'bizarre' does not include child pornography. Many production companies are very careful to state that all the actors in a film are over 18. One incentive is that penalties for child pornography are far more stringent, but more importantly, distribution companies are in the business of selling multiple copies of videos and, presumably, under the rule of financial economics, would not want to alienate the mass market. I consider child pornography to be a completely separate issue which has very specific laws different from those of *The Obscene Publications Act* for its regulation and control.

Explicit Sex films and sub-genres. He has made 'fuck' films³², gay, lesbian, S/M, transvestite films such as *Women in Prison*, *Initiation a la Suedoise*, *L'Education d'Ophelia*, and most recently *L'Education d'Anna*. Ricaud gives an interesting insight into the infrastructure of the industry and the costs of his films. He complains that the 'big' production and distribution companies often prevent smaller 'expressive' Explicit Sex films from being made. He states that directors must persuade these companies to provide the capital to make the films. Ricaud often tries to produce his own films in order to circumvent the low-budget formulaic films beloved of the industry. He blames what he perceives to be the increased stereotypicality of recent films on the move from 35mm to video. He says that Explicit Sex films shot on 35mm or 16mm have disappeared because of the difficulty of getting them printed and that the production/distribution companies now want to produce 30-50 videos a month. Ricaud complains that this has lowered the standard of films; he too now uses video. He suggests that the video format will shortly be outmoded because the market has become saturated, and predicts a return to 35mm as a means of injecting renewed interest in the genre. There is, I would argue, little evidence of this shift so far. The crucial move from celluloid to video in the industry and the saturation of the market with video-format films within the last 10 years is why this thesis concentrates on recent Explicit Sex films. This move and its implications for the form of the genre are not fully addressed in Williams' 'history' of hardcore.

Ricaud states that the cost of the film *Initiation a la Suedoise*, based on two days' shooting and two cameras, was 2 million French francs. This, he says, was a very cheap film. A hardcore 'super' star such as Catherine Ringer can earn up to 200,000 francs per film, but the typical fee for an actor is 1000 francs per day. Typical production costs are 5-7 million francs; broken down, this figure is made up from 2 million francs for the technical costs and 3 million francs for actors over 3 days (this seems rather high given Ricaud's statement that a typical fee is 1000

³² This term is often used by the industry and by users of Explicit Sex films as films which concentrate on heterosexual coitus, rather than lesbian scenes, anal sex or oral sex (although this may be included as peripheral to the main coitus interest).

francs per day). He says 300-400 copies of a video must be sold for him to break-even. He usually manages to sell 500-600 copies of a video himself and then may go on to sell the film to other distribution companies.

Ricaud is careful to justify his particular brand of film-making as different from what he calls the conventions of stereotypical pornography. He does so through the typical rhetoric of libertarian discourse. He tells us that he makes films to express himself:

For me porn is a vehicle. I mean, I'm known enough now in the profession to work in peace. For the producers [sic], my story will be a way of making porn at the moment because I can tell many other things. But if I was obliged to deal with a subject with a big budget, I couldn't express myself so well...

(Pornorama: 29)

The bid for 'auteur' status can be argued to be a way of attempting to partially legitimate certain kinds of Explicit Sex films. Ricaud himself advocates the censorship of badly produced 'un-artistic' films. This is indicative of a contradictory pull that is evident in the Explicit Sex film industry as a whole. On the one hand it wants legitimate status (despite what was said about authorial anonymity above), and often makes use of the conventions of TV and film production as means of legitimising a given text, for instance the use of computer-generated company logos, credits, named directors and stars, but conversely, there is also a recognition that the financial success of the genre owes a debt to the transgressive frisson mobilised through the illegality or perceived illegality of these films.

The traditional pseudonymous director of Explicit Sex films is rapidly being replaced by more visible figures; Bruce Seven, Harry S. Morgan and Michael Ricaud are directors' names that are mobilised to sell films, much in the way John Ford or Ridley Scott might in the legitimate cinema. This is the case with the increasing number of women directors and producers of Explicit Sex films. Isabell

Frayn's *Fist Fucking Instinct* (German) and Loretta Sterling's *Tit Tales* series (1-3) (US) are examples of this growing trend to foreground female authorship. This may be a means of targetting a female purchaser or it may be a means of assigning 'authentic' status to the sex in the film (I will explore this proposition in detail in Chapter Three).

Before video formats become part of domestic space, the main way to see Explicit Sex films was within specialised sex-cinemas. Through the shift to the use of video technology, the bulk of distribution is, in the mid 1990s, through mail order or informal loan networks. In Europe, sex shops are also a key means of distribution. British sex shops are less likely to stock hardcore, and many would appear to carry softcore but often market it as hardcore.³³ Satellite and cable television also feature mostly soft-core and, at the extreme, 'fuck' films. Home computer technologies are not yet sophisticated enough to download feature-length digitalised films. There are however, short clips of films in circulation on the Internet. The quality of these video-format films is quite poor, although new digital formats will mean that the problem of quality degradation through the use of digital replication will be eased (digitalised films will be 'clones' rather than copies). The prospect of full length digital films on the Internet or world-wide-web has some interesting implications in terms of censorship. It is far more difficult to regulate globalised digital space³⁴ because digital space is not located in a given country and for this reason it seems likely that in time (and the increase in user accessibility to the net) the Explicit Sex film industry will exploit this.³⁵

³³ I am grateful to a former employee of 'The Private Shop' - a South of England sex shop chain - for some insights into the way these shops depend on the embarrassment of 'punters' not to return videos sold as hardcore but which are in fact softcore films with hardcore covers. I was also told that there is a policy in this particular chain of keeping shops as dirty, dark and untidy as possible in order to accentuate the sense of transgression for the 'punters'.

³⁴ In this scenario *The Obscene Publications Act* will find it more difficult to locate 'publishers' and 'disseminators' of films.

³⁵ In this study I am addressing the current use of the video format. This is due to the absence of any sustained analysis of video technology and Explicit Sex films. I will in later work take up this aspect of Explicit Sex film production.

To return to the present, mail-order companies tend to advertise in softcore sex magazines and the national daily newspaper *The Daily Sport*. Extra-textual material such as reviews, magazines, internet bulletin boards, and specialist publications support the dissemination of these films. (Meta-textual material such as academic essays may, unintentionally, function in this way too.) Some mail order companies provide guarantees of delivery and produce glossy brochures, such as *Choices Direct*, which lay down the ethics of the company. Other distributors are small-time operations that produce usually hand-typed lists of video titles available - prices range from about £15-20 per video tape. Most of these video tapes contain adverts for other films and often feature more than one film. As video tape is easy to copy, many films are copies of copies, and therefore the image and sound quality is often poor. (See *Appendix B* for more information on modes of distribution.)

What are the formal and stylistic conventions that characterise the genre of Explicit Sex films? All these films centralise explicit sexual acts which may range from involving one person to a collection of people. They may deploy a story-line of sorts. It is possible to divide Explicit Sex films as a genre into films that make use of some aspects of classical narrative structure, for instance *L'Education d'Anna* and *Finishing School*, or they may be structured in a more episodic way, for instance *Tit Tales III* and *Lust-Poker*. The bulk of recent Explicit Sex films on video tend to conform to the latter format.

L'Education d'Anna, directed by Michael Ricard, is a complex noir-ish story that involves a series of sexual initiation tasks for the central female protagonist, using the iconography of film noir and S/M. It has quite a complex story-line that provides the framework for the conventional series of sexual scenes. *French Finishing School* also uses a noir-ish style to frame scenes of sexual action. The use of the camera in this film is more sophisticated than in most Explicit Sex films; it uses protracted point-of-view shots on three occasions to heighten the sense of a diegetic voyeurism. Also more time is spent on characterisation in these two films;

the central protagonist in the latter, for example, is sometimes sadistic and sometime a tender, gentle lover. Often, however, characterisation is in many films truncated, and the focus is often on the body (both male and female) rather than on psychological profiling; *Tit Tales III* is an example of this typical format. This film is composed of three discrete scenes of about 20 minutes' duration that involve different men and women. These three scenes are linked by three women who introduce themselves through a direct address to the user. One of the functions of the direct address is to signal to the user the women's apparently spontaneous enjoyment in participating in the sexual 'action'. *Carolynn* is structured around a female gym instructor who dislikes the high incidence of sex in her gym. Despite her overt dislike, she is overwhelmed by a series of sexual fantasies in which she plays out sexual scenarios with a series of staff and members of the gym. The implication is that her true desire is repressed by an inappropriate moral stance in relation to sexuality. This, however, is undercut by the closing scene where she is shown outside of the diegetic space of the main body of the film; she is playing cards with a man and laughing, which frames the film as a fantasy.

Many of the conventions of 'low-budget' Explicit Sex films, made on and for video, stem from the economic law of quick-return. Often only one camera is used and lighting is often provided by a simple three point lighting system. It is this that provides a certain quality to the images and sound of video Explicit Sex films and this has become a visual and audio style in its own right. The 'low-tech' form of the genre is further underscored by the repeated copying of video tapes. Mail order videos are often of very poor quality, but this seems, somehow, to add to the transgressive frisson of the films.³⁶ This visual style works to distinguish the genre from the 'hyper-real', sharp detail of Hollywood mainstream films. Explicit Sex films share their 'low-tech' style, and what it has come to signify in recent media culture, with independent European and US Horror and the avant-garde. The signifying potential of this 'low-tech' style will be discussed in relation to the signification of authenticity in Chapter Two and Three and also in relation to

³⁶ I will address this in Chapter Three.

transgression in Chapter Four. The anti-romantic status, which often works to distinguish the genre from some soft-core and art-house films, is supported by the use of simple lighting schemes that are designed to show maximum detail, particularly in close-up shots, rather than to disguise and provide a Hollywood-style aestheticisation of the faces and bodies of protagonists. The signifiers of 'low-tech' - poor quality image, unsophisticated lighting, lack of sharp detail - distinguish the genre from Art house and softcore, erotic movies. (See *Appendix C* for supporting information taken from mail order catalogues which have been chosen to indicate the range of activities performed in these films and the range of titles and sub-genres available by mail order to in the UK.)

The study will refer in detail to six films which are taken as representative of the field of Explicit sex films. These are: *Punky Girls*, *Rambone the Destroyer*, *Cicciolina in Italy*, *New Wave Hookers*, *Lust-Poker* and *Kinkorama 14*. All of these films were made within the last ten years and all were shot on video. They were all obtained through 'mail-order' in the United Kingdom, with the exception of *Punky Girls* which was loaned to me. Other Explicit Sex films will also be used as examples within the study. This study is not an ethnographic study of users, and aims instead to explore the position of the user within theoretical terms. Rather than simply 'applying' theory to comment on the textual strategies of the films, the examination of the films is designed to explore and comment upon contemporary discourses of sexuality, desire and fantasy. Rather than taking an ethnographic approach to the study of the users of these films the thesis will deploy psychoanalytic theory and discourse analysis to ask how what kinds of pleasures these films offer to users.

Although the above mapping of the genre of Explicit Sex films has been rather brief, I hope to have given the reader an outline of its signifying conventions and parameters. My main aim, as I have mentioned before, is not to conduct a survey of recent Explicit Sex films, but instead to concentrate on the consideration of theoretical questions around psycho-sexuality. I will aim, in particular, to focus on

issues of fantasy, desire and pleasure, and to demonstrate the links between the formation of psycho-sexuality and fantasies that are played on and through the video-frame of recent Explicit Sex films. What can psychoanalytic ideas about sexuality, fantasy and desire tell us about the relation of users to Explicit Sex films? This central question governs the study and will be broached through the division of the material in chapters and sections within these chapters. Chapter One will map out the methodological bases for the study.

Summary of the focus of each of the chapters:

Chapter 1: *A Cabinet of Sexual Curiosities* addresses the theoretical discourses of sexuality that have currency in contemporary Western culture. The aim of this chapter is to explain and define the key theoretical methodologies used in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: *Authenticity, Performativity and The Function of the Fetish* examines the role of authenticity within the genre of Explicit Sex film and explores the notion that authenticity functions as a fetish.

Chapter 3: *The Question of the Phallus* addresses the role of the Phallus in Explicit Sex films and suggests that the Phallus does not have to be mapped onto the penis, as is evident through the 'lesbian' Phallus. The effect of comedy on the Phallus/penis analogue will also be examined.

Chapter 4: *Explicit Sex Films, Transgression and the 'Accursed Share'* considers what it means to call Explicit Sex films transgressive. Transgression will be approached in two ways: as a mobilisation of signifiers coded as transgressive and through its implicit deployment of unconscious economies of sexuality.

The **Conclusion** will sum up some of the key points made in the thesis and broach the possible uses for the work conducted in this thesis and suggests areas of further enquiry and development.

As most of the chapters are quite long, I have chosen to provide thematic headings as a means of making the arguments clearer and to provide the reader with a means of locating their position in the course of the argument. Chapter titles and key headings appear at the top of each page.

Chapter 1

A Cabinet of Sexual Curiosities

Introduction - Sexuality as the Object of Curiosity

Contemporary human sexualities would seem to resemble an 18th-century cabinet of curiosities; the fabulous, the exotic and the mundane jostle for attention. The diversity of human sexual practices has posed a conundrum to scientific and philosophical thought which often attempts to understand sexual practices through a plethora of theories and narratives. Many of these theories seek to understand human sexuality in the manner of a text; searching for the rules that structure it. The variety of methods that are deployed in the study of its enigma in both personal and public spheres testify to the rich and complex matrix of human sexualities. The enigmatic nature of sexuality will prove to be key to my understanding of the relationship of desire, fantasy and pleasure to Explicit Sex films in the forthcoming chapters.

This chapter will map key theories and debates around sexuality and desire which will be deployed within the specific analysis of Explicit Sex films in the following chapters. Some of these debates and theories may not directly appear in the following chapters but they will nevertheless inform the trajectory of the analysis. Emphasis will be placed on Psychoanalytic, Foucauldian and Feminist theories which map the relation of sexuality and desire to discourse and representation. The chapter proposes that it is crucial for the analysis of Explicit Sex films to ask what sexuality is. This is what has been omitted in previous analyses of the genre. The chapter will argue that a certain combination of Foucauldian, Psychoanalytic and Feminist methodological approaches are essential for the addressing the relation between sexuality and its representation. In contemporary cultural theory it has become common practice to take an eclectic mix of these methodological

approaches to the analysis of cultural texts. The theoretical mapping undertaken in this chapter reflects Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'rhizomatic' cartography:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map is open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation. A map has multiple entry ways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same'. The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged competence...The tracing should always be put back on the map. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 12)

I will be using this notion of a 'performative' map in order to locate contemporary sexuality and to argue that to understand contemporary sexuality means addressing both desire and discourse. I will argue that to understand the meanings of fantasy, desire and pleasure in relation to contemporary sexuality and its representation it is necessary to use both a Lacanian and a Foucauldian approach by which to address the inter-permeability of desire and discourse.

Psychoanalysis provides models and concomitant vocabularies through which economies of unconscious desire can be detected through the decoding of symptomatic slippages. The analysis of sexuality within Lacanian psychoanalytic terms does not focus solely on overt physical acts but instead seeks to show that these acts are embedded within the structures of subject formation. Conscious renderings of sexual desires and wishes are seen as having unconscious sources which invisibly organise manifest sexual behaviours. In this model of sexuality and desire there is no fundamental biological organisation of sexuality but instead sexuality is seen as relational and symptomatic of the discursive process of subject formation. Given this premise, sexuality is then, in part, rendered through the array of competing discourses that are present within a given cultural moment. Although both conscious and unconscious economies of sexuality and desire are

produced through discourse, there is nevertheless something that is 'remaindered' through these processes. This is because adult sexuality is rendered through competing discourses and is constituted through a series of accumulative organisations of the sexual body and desire. Some of these 'layers' may become sublimated through the mechanisms of repression but they nevertheless remain in distorted circulation within adult sexuality.¹ Within the Lacanian psychoanalytic frame, desire and sexuality are never at any time 'free' as they are constituted through a series of competing discursive organisations (which are interlinked by imaginary and symbolic registers) and are therefore open to cultural shifts.

The psychoanalytic model of desire, when linked with a Foucauldian methodology for examining the organisation of knowledge and power through discourse, provides a useful model through which to understand the complex matrix of sexuality and desire. Scientific paradigms of sexuality, such as sexological discourse, guided by empirical objectivity and the search for stable physiological origins of sexuality, often fail to recognise that discourse and knowledge are permeated by matrices of desire.

This chapter seeks to rhizomatically map theoretical models of sexuality that have currency within contemporary culture. My aim is to show that the theoretical cabinet of sexual curiosities is heterogeneously composed but that these narratives of sexuality are often systemically linked around certain issues, themes and problems. The choice of the theories that are taken up in this chapter are no doubt inflected and mapped with unconscious desire, but there is, however, an attempt to demonstrate the links between epistemologies of sexuality and contemporary articulations of sexuality. Mapping these paradigms is crucial to the project of analysing the phenomenon of Explicit Sex films, since I contend that this genre

¹ It is because of this notion that I take issue with Foucault's critique of what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis'.

does not have a discrete status, but instead is constituted through a complex system of overlapping theoretical and popular paradigms.

This study aims to re-contextualise Explicit Sex films within the wider field of discourses on sexuality as a means of countering the many studies of pornography which treat sexuality either as a monolithic, fixed entity or as a series of discrete decontextualised objects. It will also attempt to highlight the enigmas, contradictions, slippages and impasses produced by the competing discourses which constitute the heterogeneous and diverse articulation of sexuality in contemporary culture.

Broadly following certain psychoanalytic ideas, the model of sexuality and desire that underpins much of this study conceptualised sexuality and desire as diverse and fluid. It is constituted and channelled through, but also has the potential to exceed, specific cultural, theoretical and scientific discourses. The rejection of biological or fixed notions of sexuality has political implications. The 'fixed' model of sexuality disallows any kind of changes (personal and public) and these 'fixed' models are often used to support particular investments in dominant conservative social constructs, for instance, compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy. Many commentaries and analyses of sexuality and its representation often, perhaps unwittingly, theorise 'it' as an unhistoricised, atemporal, unitary object which can be pinned down to a series of physical acts, and in so doing often 'buy into' the conservative basis upon which biological explanations of sexuality are made. It is also important to point out that at the level of theory, sexuality cannot, as many empirical studies attempt to do, be studied in a dispassionate, objectified way. This is because any commentary on sexuality will always be permeated by unconscious desire, or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, we are motivated by 'desiring machines' driven by the fly-wheels of will to knowledge and power (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984).

The overall aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical discussion of the role of theories of sexuality within the social fabric and the formation of the sexual subject. By demonstrating that the articulation of human sexualities is produced by a complex interlacing of heterogeneous epistemologies that are intrinsically linked to 'desire' and the 'will to power', the chapter will provide a basis from which to examine Explicit Sex films in more complex terms than is current within the dialectic of the pro/anti censorship debate. As outlined in the Introduction, it is the contention of this study that most analyses of pornography neglect to demonstrate how Explicit Sex films are crucially dependent on diverse discourses of sexuality. Often pornography is directly related to a single discursive field - patriarchy. However, these 'single track' critiques, which try to 'solve' the enigma of recalcitrant sexual desire (as a form of men's domination of women), often disavow the inherent problematic of sex. Dworkin and Griffin for example do not address 'patriarchy' as a discourse. A key notion that informs the following chapters is that sex itself presents the subject with a question or a problem and that it cannot simply be erased through 'equal' gender relations. I will in all the following chapters pursue the argument that the 'otherness' of sexuality engenders both curiosity and fear which invokes concomitant processes of disavowal and fetishism.

In *The History of Sexuality* (1984), Foucault argues that in the 19th century sexuality became the subject of (and subject to) scientific discourse. Through the scientific discourse of sexology, the enigma of human sexuality has been subject to a particular kind of mapping (or in Deleuze and Guattari's terms a 'tracing') which sought to identify, fix and categorise it. Through this empirically driven tracing, the vicissitudes of sexuality and sexual acts were, and still are, channelled into specified and discrete sexual identities. The effect of this taxonomical method was to produce a means of regulating sexuality. It assumes that sex is always pre-

discursive and therefore demanded discursive regulation. Foucault's critical point is that sexuality is instead constituted through discourse. As the science of sexology emerged, it worked to explain how sexual identities were produced through certain unconscious, developmental or constitutional processes. These systematic taxonomies of sexuality produced by the emerging new sciences of the 20th century,² through the provision of a grammar and a vocabulary, produce and structure popular cultural products such as *Explicit Sex* films.³ These cultural products work to disseminate and popularise sexological tracings and their concomitant hierarchisation of sexual acts through the exclusionary concepts of normal and abnormal. Sexology and other 19th-century/20th-century models of sexuality were, however, often in conflict, each theorist working to validate and popularise his or her particular reading. Edward Carpenter, for example, had a very different notion of homosexuality from Richard von Krafft-Ebing. The differences between these views were often allied to particular ideological investments and as such became a site of hegemonic contradiction and struggle. In the analysis of pornography, Andrea Dworkin and other vehemently 'one track' critics recognise that the representation of sexuality leans on a certain type of organising power (patriarchy) but they fail to recognise that sexuality is always a site of struggle between diverse, heterogeneous and competing articulations of power and desire. One of the aims of this study is to highlight some of the contradictions that are symptomatic of these discursive struggles. Here, I will be following a more subtle formulation of power as multifarious, competing and productive, drawing upon Nietzsche's notion of the will to power and Foucault and Deleuze's post-structural re-workings of Nietzschean thought.

² Sexology, psychoanalysis, sociology and other scientific or 'pseudo' scientific disciplines.

³ Cinema was, and still is, an important means of disseminating these taxonomies of sexuality. This is particularly the case with 1940s Hollywood in such genres as film noir, screwball comedy. Sex manuals, child-care manuals, magazines, TV chat shows, are further examples of the more up-to-date dissemination of sexual 'categories' and identities.

An important factor that emerges from the sexological mode of enquiry is that the process of naming and explaining sexuality and sexual identities within a normative framework, directly produced counter-hegemonic sexualities and identities. As an example of this, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991) has argued that heterosexuality, as an organisational category, depends on the identification and recognition of its oppositional difference to homosexuality. Through the sexological concept of 'perversion', non-heterosexual sexuality was given a status, a cogent site for occupation. Sexologists often retrospectively trawled old, partially forgotten, works of literature and re-rendered certain sexual activities or desires by placing them within their systematic taxonomy. In his book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), the arch-sexologist Krafft-Ebing, for example, identified four main categorisations of perversion: Fetishism, Homosexuality, Sadism, Masochism. Krafft-Ebing not so much borrowed the term Sadism from the notorious Marquis, but in effect re-framed it as a specific pathological sexual identity. In identifying and naming sexual 'types', sexology ironically provided a 'handbook' of techniques and technologies through which a diverse/perverse set of sexual identities could be identified, occupied and explored. This is not to say that these acts did not occur before sexological naming, but post-naming they became positioned as primary signifiers around which certain normative or pathological sexual identities were clustered. In response to this, Foucault asks why is our society so perverse? The sexologists would seem then to have invented perversion against themselves - which, as Foucault says, does seem uncannily perverse! One of these perversions formulated through sexological discourse was termed voyeurism: the derivation of sexual pleasure from watching or even over-hearing others have sex. This locates voyeurism as a transgressive pleasure, which is deployed by the Explicit Sex film industry, and directly leans on the sexological inscription of 'perversion'. However, the effect of the 'perverse' positioning of voyeurism meant that its presence within 'normal' sexuality was elided.

To summarise Foucault, early 20th-century sexualities and sexual identities have been mapped (traced) and embodied through sexological taxonomies of pathological and normative sexual desire. However, in contemporary culture, sexuality has, it appears, undergone, to use Thomas Kuhn's phrase, a 'paradigm shift'.⁴ Towards the end of the 1980s popular culture seems to have begun a romance with 'exotic' sexualities, which were formerly identified as pathological by sexologists.⁵ As Foucault has said, in contemporary culture

We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but—and this is the important point—a deployment quite different from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities. (Foucault 1984: 49)

Many forms of contemporary culture,⁶ such as advertising,⁷ fashion photography,⁸ TV sit-coms,⁹ soaps,¹⁰ 'sex' talk shows¹¹ and programmes aimed at a lesbian and

⁴ Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science interested in 'evolutionary epistemology' (Honderich, 1995: 451), argues in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) that science operates within an invisible and unquestioned schemata or (meta-)paradigm but this meta-paradigm is subject to change, when scientific evidence contravenes its structure.

⁵ It must be pointed out, however, that this 'romance' was apparent in many 'elite' cultural products before this time, for instance, erotic literature, surrealism and art cinema.

⁶ Although, in contemporary popular culture, so called male 'alternative comedy' is often marked by a retreat from 'traditional' music-hall and working men's club jokes about sexual relations and women into a more anal, pre-gendered slapstick/'toilet' comedy, which can be read as a retreat from the problematics of gender difference. Examples of contemporary 'alternative' comedy on British TV would be *Bottom* - a sitcom starring ex-*Young Ones* stars Ade Edmondson and Rick Mayall, *Reeves and Mortimer* - a comedy show which parodies through the use of 'over-the-top' comic banality the style of the 70's male double-act *Morecombe and Wise*.

⁷ I would cite the *Dunlop* (1994) and the *Fiat Brava* (1996) TV advertisements as examples that used overt S-M imagery to create 'interest' in their products.

⁸ The phenomenon and implications of 'gay window advertising' has been usefully documented and discussed by Sean Nixon in 'Distinguishing Looks: Masculinities, the Visual and Men's Magazines' (eds. Harwood et al., 1993) and Danae Clarke 'Commodity Lesbianism' (eds. Abelove et al., 1993).

⁹ *Absolutely Fabulous* (BBC1, 1994-6), *The High Life* (BBC2, 1996) are two good examples.

¹⁰ In 1995 lesbian characters became a part of British 'soap' life, for example, Beth in *Brookside*, Binny and Della in *Eastenders*.

¹¹ For example, *Sex Talk* (C4 1995/6).

gay audience¹², are increasingly awash with images of diverse articulations of sexuality. For instance, S/M imagery, butch/femme dykes, gay iconography, transvestites, drag, camp imagery and muscle boys would suggest that articulations of sexuality in the mid 90s is undergoing diversification and fragmentation.¹³ What was once, in sexological terms, considered pathological, has become the source of media fascination and through this mainstream, mass dissemination, has become exciting and exotic. The possible reason for this might be the result of a demand to re-confirm the demarcation lines of heterosexuality through the mobilisation of the 'other', which has meant that these diverse sexualities are put on public display. (Although it is also possible to configure this as helping to open up other possible sexual sites for habitation.) This recent media romance with sexual differences, mirrors Foucault's point that sexuality is not directly 'repressed' in contemporary culture but instead contemporary discursive power operates through multiplication and diversification. Within media theory a further apparent shift is also in play. For example Laura Mulvey's¹⁴ identification of the male economy of the gaze, has been the subject of a similar diversification.¹⁵ Challenged by 'queer' theory and 'post-feminists',¹⁶ the anchorage of the gaze as the sole domain of the white heterosexual

¹² *Out on Tuesday* (C4 1982/1990) (for a useful history of this programme see Colin Richardson's 'TVOD: The Never-Bending Story' (eds. Burston and Richardson, 1995), *Gaytime TV*, (BBC 2 1995/6) plus numerous 'gay and lesbian' film slots on C4 and BBC1.

¹³ Perhaps reflecting the supposed 'crisis of identity' that marks some views of post-modern culture (Baudrillard's notion of post-modernism for example).

¹⁴ Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' was written in 1973 and published in *Screen* in 1975 (Mulvey, 1989: 14-26). Her essay 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)' was published in 1981 and addresses the idea that women's pleasure in Hollywood film might be 'more complex' (ibid: 29) than she suggested in the earlier article.

¹⁵ A key critique of Foucault should be raised here, which foreshadows a more in-depth discussion later. Foucault replaces the notion of power through repression by power through multiplication and reiteration. Along with other critics of this view, I maintain that some forms of repression, at both psychic and social levels, are still at work within contemporary culture, particularly around sexuality. I will be critiquing Foucault's rejection of the repressive hypothesis from a psychoanalytic perspective later in this chapter.

¹⁶ I am using this term to indicate theorists who have critiqued some of the tenets of early feminism, rather than in the sense that the feminist project is 'done'.

male is now in question.¹⁷ Many post-modern and post-structuralist theorists have signalled that in post-modernity, master narratives, including hegemonic heterosexuality, are taken to be in crisis; sexuality and sexual identities as fixed objects, are apparently being punctured and fragmented.¹⁸ The address and implications of this apparent shift into the diversification and diffusion of power is absent from many critiques of pornography.

It would, however, seem that there has been less of a 'shift' than a wider dissemination of these supposed pathological sexualities suggests. It can be argued that media images derive their sexual identity from sexological taxonomies. The concept of a 'paradigm shift' warrants further analysis here as it depends upon the way in which we conceive of epistemological and social change. It would seem that there is more of a multiplication of power through diversification, rather than a fundamental paradigm shift. Within the terms of Thomas Kuhn's scientific concept of 'paradigm shift' the premise or model upon which meanings lean has undergone a change or shift. In this sense contemporary articulations of sexuality have not changed, as they still depend on transgressive encodings for excitement and 'frisson' which are derived from normative models of sexuality formulated by the epistemological framework of sexological taxonomies. Sexological taxonomies still provide the source of transgressive desire and excitement and are key to an understanding of repressed fantasies that are implicit within Explicit Sex films.¹⁹ If, however, change is seen to occur in a less dramatic way, as a set of incremental

¹⁷ For example, Gaylyn Studlar's 'Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of Cinema' (in ed. Nicholls, 1985: 602-621), Jane Gains 'Women and Representation: Can We Enjoy Alternative Pleasure?' (in ed. Erens, 1990: 75-92), Jackie Stacey 'Desperately Seeking Difference' (in ed. Erens, 1990: 363-379). Representative critical writings that specifically address the 'queer' gaze and popular culture are: Burston's reading of *Just a Gigolo* and *Top Gun* and Krzywinska's reading of the lesbian vampire film (in eds. Burston and Richardson, 1995).

¹⁸ However since I still use the public toilet marked with a figure wearing a skirt the demise of some master narratives, particularly gender, is not, I would contend, quite so marked as it might seem in theoretical terms.

¹⁹ I will take this up in more detail in Chapters Two and Four.

variations, then the presence of so called 'marginalised' sexualities in the mainstream media would constitute a variation or diversification rather than cataclysmic change. Change, I contend against Kuhn and partially following Foucault, is far more likely to be quantitative than qualitative. It is also the case that small quantitative shifts are absorbed far more easily within the terms of dominant hegemonic values. The key point I would stress here, however, is that this process of diversification and fragmentation of sexuality within the field of popular culture, broadens the arena of hegemonic struggle by increasing the counter-discourses present in the cultural field.

This then raises a question about subject agency within this arena of competing discourses. Post-structuralism and post-modernism have shown that the subject is constituted through discourse which entails a decentring of the subject as an autonomous, rational being. Although this is not the main focus of this study, it is a question which underlies the study as a whole. Does, for example, the post-structural move to decentre the subject merely render the subject passive to pre-given, hegemonic systems of language and the vicissitudes of the unconscious?²⁰ For both feminism and queer theory, the rendering of the subject as passive, or a victim, of language or the unconscious, is politically untenable. In order to counter political pessimism, it is important that ideology is not theorised as claustrophobically unified with no 'breathing space' for critical enquiry. Instead it seems more expedient to demonstrate the presence of competing and contradictory discourses through which the subject can have some degree of awareness and choice. Without this the subject is construed as a passive victim of a unified discourse. This constitutes one of my key criticisms of many feminist analyses of 'representation'.

²⁰ The unconscious is formed through our entry into the symbolic and is, according to Lacan, 'structured like a language'. This raises the question of what it implies for readership strategies such as 'reading against the grain', which is a crucial strategy mobilised by 'queer' readings of cultural texts?

As outlined in the Introduction, many analyses of pornography, perhaps unwittingly, perpetuate the myth of woman as victim of either sex and/or the text. Anti-porn lobbyists Dworkin (1981), Griffin (1981), Kappeler (1986), Itzin (1992) all take a simplistic 'hypodermic needle' approach to pornographic texts. Men are seen as consciously exploiting images of sexually 'degraded' women to support their patriarchal dominance and sex is seen as a purely patriarchal production. Women, both as participants in the images or as 'users', are often configured as colluding with the 'violent hierarchy' of patriarchy. No acknowledgement of complex subjective and discursive factors are given credence. As stated in the Introduction, questions about how sexuality is constituted, are largely ignored or reduced to single narratives. Male sexuality, taken as violently 'penetrative' and 'thrusting',²¹ is often implicit used as a metaphor for women's subordination which, I would argue, often works to reinforce and reiterate women's place in the 'violent hierarchy'. This is exemplified by the implicit values which inform their rhetoric, for instance, 'bad' women are those who collude with male sexuality, and these are (ironically) rendered into the stereotype of the femme fatale and 'good' women into the stereotype of the untouched virgin or nurturing, self-sacrificing, non-sexual mother.

The problem with this type of analysis is that women are solely seen as the 'object' of the text or gaze, which leaves no room for women to explore the more

²¹ Andrea Dworkin, for instance, says 'The sex act means penile intromission followed by penile thrusting or fucking... Fucking requires that the male act on one who has less power and this valuation is so deep, so completely implicit in the act, that the one who is fucked is stigmatized as feminine during the act even when not anatomically female. In the male system, sex is the penis, the penis is sexual power, its use in fucking is manhood...The conquering of the woman acted out in fucking, her possession, her use as a thing, is the scenario endlessly repeated, with or without direct reference to fucking, throughout culture. In fucking, he is enlarged' (Dworkin, 1981: 23).

recalcitrant, contradictory, or transgressive aspects of sexuality.²² These pro-censorship critiques of pornography often suggest that women can disengage with the 'patriarchal' paradigms of sexuality. In contrast, I would argue that for women to explore sexual diversity requires an engagement with different paradigms of sexuality. It is in this way that divergent sites of occupation can be investigated. Because sexuality and sexual identities of whatever kind are intrinsically bound into the system of symbolic representation which are constituted through competing discourses, this means engaging with representations of sexuality, through play, parody and critical enquiry. As such the study as a whole seeks to explore the complex 'knot' of sexuality and the different points of entry into sexual terrain which demands that the relation between desire, fantasy and pleasure to signification can be pursued critically.

I contend that an analysis of Explicit Sex films has to demonstrate that these films have intertextual and historical dependencies. This is rather than seeing it as an ahistorical product of a indissoluble and cohesive male imaginary and symbolic. As this thesis focuses on Explicit Sex films it is also important to address the specific cinematic language constructed through reference to other cinematic codes (the gaze, narrative, etc). The model of Explicit Sex films which tends to emerge from pro-censorship feminist critiques is one in which the heterosexual male's imaginary is simply projected into the cinema/video screen: no account is made of the specific cinematic language of Explicit Sex films as a genre or of the ways in which the heterosexual male gaze is often challenged through contradictions within the articulation of the gaze. Explicit Sex films do not lie outside the conventions of other forms of cinema but, as Linda Williams argues, the fascination with

²² Loretta Loach says in 'Bad Girls: Women Who Use Pornography' (in eds. Segal and McIntosh, 1992: 266-274) - she is referring to women who use magazine pornography in the main - that 'It...occurred to me that the conflicts within feminism about sexuality aren't so much about a difference in politics as a difference in how far we are each prepared to confront and accept our 'dark side' of various human endeavours' (ibid.: 272-273).

representing the sexual body is inherent within the language of cinema.²³

However, I would supplement Williams' view by suggesting that cinema makes use of extra-diegetic scientific, literary and psychoanalytic and other concepts of sexuality. Rather than take the overly simplistic approach that Explicit Sex films lie outside other discourses of sexuality, it would seem better to show that sexual activity, sexual identities and sexuality are riven through with contradictions and impasses due to the multiple, divergent discourses which coalesce and inscribe both cinematic and non-cinematic sexual bodies. These contradictions and impasses can then be exploited to demonstrate that sexuality is the subject of diverse discourses which are in competition and that sexuality and its cinematic rendering is a form of navigation, which implies some room for choices and rejections. My aim here is to show that Explicit Sex films are not an 'aberration' or 'mis-representation' which can be erased through legislation, as implied by pro-censorship critiques, but instead are embedded within a multifaceted matrix of competing systems of knowledge - scientific, therapeutic and cinematic. The films are informed by competing paradigms, cinematic vocabularies and the 'otherness' of sexuality itself. The view taken in this thesis is that Explicit Sex films are composed of a nexus of divergent discourses and conflicting economies of desire, rather than the product of a single unified discourse.

Post-modern critical theories have, perhaps prematurely, identified what is seen as a dissolution of grand narratives.²⁴ This is said to include the unbuttoning of the primary narratives which anchor gender difference and the unbuttoning of the heterosexual matrix. This process may not have been fully achieved but

²³ '...the specific and unprecedented cinematic pleasure of the illusion of bodily motion emerged partly as a by-product of the quest for the initially unseeable 'truths' of this motion' (Williams, 1990: 39).

²⁴ Baudrillard ('Simulacra and Simulations' in ed. Brooker, 1992), Jameson ('Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in ed. Brooker, 1992), Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984) support, in different ways, the notion that post-modern culture is characterised by the dissolution of 'grand narratives'. I mention here three key figures in the post-modern 'publishing industry', there are many others.

nevertheless there are some signals that this is in process and can be said to occur through Foucault's notion of the dissolution and multiplication of power. Whilst this dissolution of grand narratives inflects various areas of critical theory, many analyses of pornography still work within a notion of sexuality as fixed (which are, I would argue, implicitly built on heterosexual, patriarchal investments). Epistemological categories of female and male, heterosexuality and homosexuality, are often still seen by pro-censorship feminists as essential and fixed binary opposites, the 'imbalance' of which can be simply remedied by legislation. Power is often problematically seen as a patriarchal aberration which could be erased if gender relations were more equal. There seems to be a marked refusal to take into account the way in which contemporary discourses of sexuality are precisely formulated through a complex and diverse network of power relations. I would argue that it is not a case of merely erasing the current gender economy which will produce an innocent or pre-lapsarian sexuality, but instead, I will seek to demonstrate how the heterogeneous formulation and articulation of sexuality lends itself to an analysis of sexuality as having no original/natural basis. There is no place to 'return' to, which lies beyond or outside power relations which is often implied by some pro-censorship analysis of pornography. As Foucault (1992) and Butler (1990) argue, sexuality²⁵ does not pre-exist the contemporary power-knowledge-pleasure network. Explicit Sex films and pornography in general are not discrete entities which can be outlawed to reveal a gender equality and a non-oppressive form of sexuality. Although the pro-censorship lobby see pornography as leaning on a certain organisation of power, for them, all power is patriarchal, they do not recognise that sexuality itself is rendered through diverse articulations of power and that power is productive and can be positively creative. There are many other discursive economies at work within Explicit Sex films, for instance, the mind-body dualism.

²⁵ I use the singular form here - but as I will demonstrate throughout the study this is a highly problematic usage.

It is then crucial to this project to widen the focus of the analysis of Explicit Sex films. The aim is not to look for origins but, instead, to show how and why notions of origins arise, and how they circulate within fantasy and the matrix of the sexual symbolic/ imaginary.

Foucault and Discourses of Sexuality: The Genealogical Method

Foucault's use of the genealogical method builds on Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysical formulations of history, which are driven by a search for the 'essences' that underpin it. It is also a rejection of the search for linear continuities in history which are often mobilised to demonstrate 'progress' as a means of confirming the status-quo. Following Nietzsche, Foucault critiques metaphysical notions of history which are typified as taking history as a transparent window and neglecting to address the role of the 'will to power and knowledge' in the retrospective rendering of the past. The implication of metaphysical views of history is that humanity has emerged out of Plato's cave into the light of transparent truth. This is the basis on which discourse sells itself *as if* it were 'real'. In its place, the use of a genealogical analysis conceives of history as an opaque, complex web of discontinuities and accidents. Key to this methodological approach is the idea that history is always retrospectively constructed in order to fulfil an implicit political goal of the analyst; the 'will to knowledge' which impels historical analyses is then intimately bound up with pleasure²⁶ inducing 'mastery' of the past. Although I am not conducting a history of Explicit Sex films in this study, the genealogical method will inform the ways in which the impact of technological shifts on the encoding and signification of sexuality will be addressed. Foucault's work will become particularly important in the examination of the encoding of 'authenticity' in Chapter Two.

The particularities of a genealogical methodology are outlined by Foucault in the essay entitled 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'²⁷ (in ed. Rabinow, 1986: 76-100). Foucault uses the genealogical method in *Discipline and Punish* (1991) and *The*

²⁶ It is this notion that will allow for a link between Foucault and Lacanian psychoanalysis to be made. On this basis of this link the study can make use of psychoanalytic notions of pleasure, desire and fantasy alongside 'discourse' analysis.

²⁷ This was first published in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, 1971.

History of Sexuality (1984). This methodology seeks to counter the traditional search for concrete and stable origins of events. Instead, he argues that diversity is shown to lie behind the illusion of a single point of origination; origins cannot be reduced to homogeneity, but instead are heterogeneous and diverse. As Barry Smart's summary of Foucault's writings suggests:

Genealogy as the analysis of historical descent rejects the uninterrupted continuities and stable forms which have been a feature of traditional history in order to reveal the complexity, fragility, and contingency surrounding historical events. (Smart, 1985: 56)

In rejecting the idealist search for a definitive point of origin, the genealogical method has a great deal to offer in the analysis of sexuality and sexual identity. Physiological, biological, instinctual explanations which define a single point of origin of human sexuality are therefore seen as inadequate, and often serve a particular form of 'will to knowledge'. As Foucault says:

What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin: it is the dissension of other things. It is a disparity. (Foucault, 1971 in Rabinow 1986: 79)

In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', Foucault outlines the three strategies Nietzsche proposed to '...oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history' (ibid.: 93). Foucault suggests that these three strategies can be garnered into a genealogical criticism of idealist/metaphysical forms of history. These strategies inform much of the genealogical method Foucault uses in later writings and as such they are of crucial importance to the development of Foucault's work. A summary of each of these three strategies will follow and I will then go on to ask what these strategies have added to contemporary theories of sexuality and what can they can add to the analysis of Explicit Sex films.

Firstly, genealogy can be used in parodic, farcical way: 'Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival' (ibid.: 94). Parody can be used to highlight strategically the ways in which traditional histories formulate 'truths'. The seriousness which works to lend legitimacy to politically invested notions of truths and origins can be deflated and thus 'unmasked' as an articulation of the specific will(s) to knowledge. Parody acts as strategy for looking at master narratives askance, showing that the inscription of gender and sexuality is always exceeded. As Judith Butler has argued 'Gender is a norm that can never be fully internalised; "the internal" is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody' (Butler 1990: 141). Parody 'stages' this excess and can be used to subvert gender and sexual identity as an all encompassing master narrative. Chapter Two will specifically address the role and function of parody and marked performativity in Explicit Sex films and I will be asking whether it is used to subvert or reiterate fixed notions of sexual identity.

Secondly, genealogy is a strategy for the 'systematic dissociation of identity' (Foucault, 1971 in Rabinow 1986: 94). Genealogy seeks to show that identity is not unified but heterogeneous and is constructed through diverse discourses, the illusive unity of which is legitimated through stories/myths/narratives of origins and notions of historical linear progression:

The study of history makes one 'happy, unlike the metaphysicians, to possess in oneself not an immortal soul but many mortal ones'. And in each of these souls, history will not discover a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn, but a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis...The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation. (ibid.: 94-5)

This aspect of genealogical analysis has engendered a key debate within contemporary feminist theory. Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis and Julia Kristeva, amongst others, have questioned the model of sex as biologically determined and

gender as socially determined (this will be looked at in more detail below). This strategy also offers a means of looking at the way in which Explicit Sex films make use of fixed notions of sexual identity but also bear the traces of heterogeneity through the sub-textual play of 'hidden' (or unconscious) economies of sexuality. Rather than looking for continuities within the Explicit Sex film frame it seems genealogically appropriate to look for discontinuities and hiatuses in the rendering of sexual and gender identities within these films.

Thirdly, genealogy problematises the 'sacrifice of the subject of knowledge'. Traditional notions of history strategically act to erase the perspectival grounds on which historical analysis is conducted. Instead of seeing historical analysis as objective and dispassionate, genealogical enquiry foregrounds the role of the will to knowledge/power. History is always rendered through the perspective of the interpreter:

All knowledge rests on injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind). (ibid.: 95)

To shift this genealogical approach into the terms of Lacanian discourse, metaphysical notions of history bolster the unity of the subject 'supposed to know', through, paradoxically, the masking of the subject. The master narrative produced by the erasure of the enunciator acts to confine human experiences to impoverished and narrow stories.

This notion has currency in feminism in that 'patriarchal' narratives of female experience are partial and work to promote the subjective unified coherence of male theorists (as argued by, for instance, Luce Irigaray, Alice Jardine²⁸). The tales of female sexuality told by Explicit Sex films may too seem impoverished, but it is also the case that these films do not have to be read in a single way, instead they are subject to heterogeneity and multiple points of entry produced. It is on this basis that genealogy enables a view of origins of the subject and sexuality that seeks to illustrate that narratives of history and origins are retrospective and vested constructions of 'truth'. The value of examining origins as a play of heterogeneous forces is that it can be used to dismantle reified constructions of truth that privilege a particular 'subjective' or ideological position. This can then be applied to both discourse and the subject in/of discourse to show that individual or cultural identity does not have simply one point of origin and is not therefore fixed or stable:

The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us. (ibid.: 95)

...historical beginnings are lowly: not in the sense of modest or discreet like the steps of a dove, but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation. (ibid.: 79)

The genealogical method of analysing origins and identity will provide, in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory, a means of addressing the competing economies and discourses of sexuality within Explicit Sex films. By interlocking a

²⁸ Irigaray's *This Sex That is Not One* (1985a), for instance 'Cosi Fan Tutti', and Alice Jardine's 'Crisis of Legitimation: Crossing the Great Voids' in *Gynesis* (1985). Both these articles critique the basis of post-structural thought by arguing that, for example, Lacanian theory, Derridean and Deleuzian thinking, positions 'woman' as exotic 'other', offering these male thinkers an escape from the 'phallogocentric' discourse. Jardine, in particular, argues that this is the product of the male imaginary and is not therefore a form of 'escape' from the metaphysical basis of traditional Western thought.

genealogical approach to certain psychoanalytic takes on subject and identity formation, it is possible to theorise the ways in which competing discourses construct subject identity. In so doing it is vital to retain the psychoanalytic notion of repression, contra Foucault, in order to show how identity and sexuality are organised in the manner of a palimpsest. The genealogical method alongside a psychoanalytic approach can help to theorise sexuality not as a single point of origin, but as a matrix and movement, some elements of which are buried in order to give the subject an illusory sense of a coherent sexual subjecthood. My argument here is that these hidden (repressed) elements have a key part to play in contemporary sexuality through fantasy, desire and pleasure, and are then important to the analysis of the relation between Explicit Sex films and their viewers:

If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity. (ibid.: 95)

The rejection of traditional metaphysical histories as a search for 'essences' is replaced by the notion that 'origins' are a series of disparities, accidents, heterogeneities, which are retrospectively rendered as coherent beginnings. This provides a strong basis from which to critique many current theories of pornography. These views can be construed as taking an idealist and reductionist approach to looking at the diverse offerings of contemporary Explicit Sex films. Before outlining feminist and psychoanalytic theories of sexuality, it is important to look at Foucault's own study of discourses of sexuality. Foucault's work on sexuality has influenced debates around the inscription of the sexual body. The key concepts I want to focus on here are Foucault's identification of certain currencies of thought about sexuality and the 'repressive hypothesis'. I will look at his argument that the 'repressive hypothesis' is the product of a certain currency of

power and discourse. This has implications for a psychoanalytic approach to thinking about sexuality and I will show that the 'repressive hypothesis' argument has certain limitations.

The 'Repressive Hypothesis' and the Theorisation of Power

The polemic of *The History of Sexuality, Part One* (1984) is to critique the idea that, until recent times, sexuality has been the subject of social and psychic repression. Foucault calls this the 'repressive hypothesis'. Beyond the critique of the repressive claim, Foucault asks why the notion of the repression of sexuality has had cultural currency. Rather than seeing the repressive hypothesis as the identification of a 'truth' of social praxis, Foucault argues that the concept of repression has a specific function in guaranteeing certain discourses of sexuality. It is seen as having a cohesive function which unites diverse discursivities into an apparatus (or *dispositif*) that structures sexuality. According to Foucault, the apparatus acts as a 'grid of intelligibility' for constituting and organising subjects.²⁹

Foucault's *History of Sexuality* navigates the apparatus of sexuality not in terms of particular sexual practices but instead seeks to show how this apparatus works to gain social and theoretical currency:

The question I would pose is not, why are we repressed? but rather, why do we say with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against our selves that we are repressed? (Foucault, 1984: 8-9)

This is a problematic and politically loaded point and I will take issue with some aspects of Foucault's argument below. Foucault assesses the repressive hypothesis in terms of the way it operates to unite disparate discourses of sexuality. By asking how it has managed to become so pervasive, Foucault suggests that the repressive hypothesis, in a sense, veils a more complex operation of power; he suggests that

²⁹ David Macey suggests that the term '*dispositif*' (translated as apparatus) is a term that '...refers to a heterogeneous body of discourses, propositions (philosophical, moral, philanthropic and so on), institutions, laws, and scientific statements; the *dispositif* itself is the network that binds them together, that governs the play between heterogeneous strands. It is a formation which at a given historical moment, corresponds to a dominant strategic function... In a sense, the *dispositif* represents Foucault's attempt to analyse strategies of balances of power supporting types of knowledge' (Macey 1993: 355).

the repressive hypothesis works as a 'red herring' and draws critical fire away from the more insidious workings of a power/pleasure equation. There does seem to be a problem here in that other epochs/eras are retrospectively reconstructed in the light of the contemporary sexual imaginary. Foucault does not, I would argue, fully take account of the role of the imaginary and desire in the equation and this is why psychoanalytic models of desire are needed to be brought alongside Foucault's method of analysing power and discourse. Given a psychoanalytic reading of sexuality, I would argue that the notion that repression is not key to the formation of sexuality is problematic. It will emerge throughout this study, and in the specific address of psychoanalysis later in this chapter, that contemporary sexuality is predicated on a series of repressive mechanisms which give rise to fantasy, desire and pleasure.

Foucault raises three main doubts about the repressive hypothesis, which I take to be a critique of the primary theoretical tools of several key 20th century thinkers who are relevant to the field of sexuality: Wilhem Reich, Sigmund Freud, Herbert Marcuse, and Georges Bataille. To summarise his 'doubts':

1. He questions whether repression of sexuality has really occurred since the 17th century.
2. He questions whether the mechanisms of power really do operate through repression (in the form of censorship, prohibition and denial).
3. He questions whether recent critical discourses on sexuality have challenged or perpetuated power and whether there has really been a rupture between the '...age of repression and the critical analysis of repression' (Foucault, 1984: 10). He concludes that the advocacy of a lifting of 'sexual repression' is flawed and may act to further reiterate dominant models of sexuality.

Instead of seeing Explicit Sex films as somehow revealing the hidden or repressed, it may be better to ask what function does the notion of 'pornography', as revealing the repressed, have. Does the model of pornography as revealing the repressed add to a viewer's excitement?³⁰ How does it relate to desire as the basis of sexuality? What many libertarian analyses or defences of pornography do not ask is: what implicit models of sexuality does pornography lean upon for its power to 'move' the viewer? It is also useful to ask if the locus of the debate around pornography, as countering sexual repression, somehow draws fire to protect some other source of power. I will be using elements of Foucault's critique, but aligning his discourse analysis to psychoanalytic concepts of unconscious fantasy and desire, to ask how Explicit Sex films interlock with the discursive matrix of fantasy, pleasure, power, knowledge and desire.

The current anti/pro censorship debate implicitly leans on the repressive hypothesis. Broadly, the pro-censorship lobby argue that which has been repressed should stay repressed (aggression and sexual domination) and the anti-censorship lobby argue that pornography works to release the repressed and is therefore liberating. In the light of Foucault's question mark against the repressive hypothesis, both aspects of the debate seem limited. The notion of sex as a 'hidden' or 'secret' thing which is constructed *as if* it were outside discourse is, for Foucault, the source of its discursive power. As such it is important to address the discursive organisation of sex as 'secret' (repressed or clandestine) as this is inter-bound with the excitement and pleasure produced by Explicit Sex films.

³⁰ In Chapter Four, I will argue that Explicit Sex films do make use of the notion of repression in order to encode a transgressive dimension to the texts; however, contra Foucault, I will argue that this leans on the repressions that construct contemporary 'adult' sexuality.

Against Foucault and following a fairly conventional psychoanalytic line of thought, I would argue that the valency of this 'secret' is linked to early desires which are repressed through the process of becoming a (clean and proper) subject.

One of Foucault's main points raised in *The History of Sexuality* is that, rather than a regime of repression, the apparatus of sexuality seeks to transform sex (as a praxis) into discourse (words/concepts). This is engendered through the discursive mobilisation of the notion that sex is hidden and secret. The primary technique for transforming sex into words is the confession; from medieval religious confession through to the psychoanalytic couch and the techniques used by contemporary media to gain sexual confessions. Medieval sexual confession operated within the register of morality and was related to one particular institution, the Church, which used a set of techniques by which to gain the confession. Scientific discourses of sexuality, or in Foucault's terms *scientia sexualis*, uses a much wider range of techniques with which to uncover the dark secrets of sexuality which dangerously 'lurk' unknown to the sovereign subject. This then privileges those who hear the confession as, in Lacanian terms, the 'subject supposed to know'. By positing sex as a dangerous secret a certain hierarchical organisation of power is then engendered.

Contemporary popular culture often operates as confessor, which therefore keeps the repressive myth in play. In order to sustain this, dominant discourse renders sexuality as an enigma, which in turn produces the desire to hear confessions. In the last two centuries there has been a 'multiplication of discourses of sex' (Foucault 1984: 18). Although he does not mention it, contemporary popular culture often thematises the sexual confession. Both women's and men's magazines, for example, often print letters and advice pages, along with confessionals about private sexual practices. Soft-porn magazines targeted at both women and men (both 'straight' and 'gay') are often structured around sexual

confessions. *Forum*, in particular, but also *Penthouse* (targeting heterosexual men), and *Quim* (targeting 'Dykes of all sexual persuasions'), all involve stories couched in a confessional mode. Terrestrial television does not show 'real' sex but there is an increasing number of talk shows which focus on contemporary sexuality, for instance, *Talk Sex* (Channel 4 1995). The confession has been a staple narrative device with which to stitch together sexual episodes. This is at work in 'softcore' films such as *Confessions of Window Cleaner* (dir. Val Guest, 1974) and in Explicit Sex films such as *The Story of O* (dir. Just Jaeckin c.1975) and *Emmanuelle* (dir. Just Jaeckin, 1974), where the central female character tells the story of her sexual initiation to the user, and the S/M film *Moral Welfare* (date unknown).³¹ All these films rely on the repressive hypothesis as rendered through the confession of 'naughty' acts as means of engaging the interest and pleasure of a viewer. Once again I would make the point that this pleasure nonetheless leans on the repression of early sexual desires, which produce unconscious fantasy and desire which act as the sub-text to adult sexuality.

According to Foucault, a key difference between the medieval and the modern³² is that there has been a quantitative multiplication of the means of producing speech about sex. So, rather than theorising power as a repressive, prohibitive regime, Foucault argues that there is a diversity of discourses of sexuality which demonstrates that power is more complex and subtle than is suggested by a simple repression. Foucault argues that from the 18th century on, rather than a site of an increased prohibition, sexuality has been the site of a multiplication of speech and

³¹ This film was 'tacked' onto the end of a tape containing several other Explicit Sex films; but this one was rather different from the others. There was no 'sex' as such in it. It consisted of two girls having to go to the 'Welfare' officer (a man in a white coat) to confess their truancy and be spanked on their bare bottoms. The film is British (evident in the accents of the protagonists) and the film had no real beginning or end.

³² This too raises a question about Foucault's division between the medieval and the modern as history (origin), which within a psychoanalytic and post-structural reading is always a retrospective construction.

discourse. Power, he argues, ushers itself through speech in the sexual confession. In this sense power can be construed as positive and productive rather than repressive. By inciting the subject to speak of his or her sexual desires, scientific discourse has successfully posited sexuality as an anarchic unconscious danger which needs to be symbolised. This is not a repression but instead posits sexuality as a dangerous secret which has to be rendered into discourse for the health of the subject (this corresponds to the libertarian notion that pornography acts as therapy). This further mobilises economies of pleasure and desire to hear or see the sexual confession as a form of the will to power/knowledge. This discourse and its 'putting into scene' of pleasure and desire relies on an underpinning theory of repression in order for it to play itself out, without which the incitement to sexual confession would have no cultural capital or currency. However, I would argue that this discursively produced repression has a 'real' impact on mind and bodies, producing a symptomatic experience of alienation through mechanisms of repression, such as disavowal and displacement. In identifying this transformation, Foucault then asks 'What is it we demand of sex...?'. The power of this discourse is not prohibition but instead leans on its ability to put into 'scene' and produce pleasure/power; for instance the pleasure of interpretation (located in the listener) and pleasure of revelation (located in the listened to). The viewer of a pornographic confession experiences the pleasure/power of interpreting the confession as a form of cultural and sexual capital. In this sense sexual secrecy is a potent force for channelling desire and pleasure. My critique of Foucault's premise that repression is mobilised as a key trope to enable certain discourses to retain power, does not mean that his analysis of the function of sexual secrecy is redundant. In contrast, I will use this notion, in conjunction with psychoanalytic notions of sexuality, in the study as whole to show that contemporary sexuality and desire is inextricably linked to secrecy and a concomitant curiosity.

Foucault's formulation of pleasure is reminiscent of the way in which Roland Barthes³³ describes the operation of the hermeneutic code in narratives. Barthes argues that without the presence of puzzles our interest in the narrative is not piqued. It is through the presence of narrative enigmas through which we can 'pit our wits' against the text, and it is in the overturning of an expectation, that we are delighted and surprised. He suggests that the hermeneutic code is a form of striptease which teases and titillates through a play of revealing and concealing which builds to a climax of revealing all. Barthes' analogy highlights the way in which secrets work to interpellate the reader and construct pleasure through the channelling of desire. The notion that sexuality is constructed as an enigma, leaning on repression and disavowal, will prove key to my analysis of Explicit Sex films and will be taken up in detail in Chapter Two and expanded upon in the following chapters.

Rituals of revelation can be shown to be supported through the repressive hypothesis; here sex itself is constructed as an enigma which is the source of endless speech and fascination. The game, like Barthes' narrative game, engenders and 'puts into scene' desire and pleasure. But the game of revealing the sexual has an important side-effect which is the solidification of both sexual and gender identities. The game of being told and telling what or who we are for instance - the dialectic between the person 'supposed to know' and the 'wanderer in the waste' - working to reiterate, solidify and confirm identities. The relationship functions as a double-sided mirror to affirm our identity but, paradoxically, it also constructs sexual identity as impossible to know; and thus the source of endless enquiry. (This may be a rather Lacanian reading of a basically Foucauldian concept.) This raises the question of what is at work in the post-structural discourse of the decentred subject. Is it perhaps another example of the play of

³³ In *S/Z* (1974), Barthes makes the case that the 'classic readerly text' has five main codes or voices: the hermeneutic (the code of puzzles), propriarectic, the symbolic, the semic and the referential.

enigma? Seen through a post-structuralist frame, we re-affirm our narcissistic interest in ourselves by taking ourselves as other/enigma, our interest in our 'selves' is thereby maintained. In this sense post-structuralism could be construed as a further rendering of the narcissistic game to keep our selves guessing about ourselves. The implications of this is that *scientia sexualis* itself produces rather than describes the repressive hypothesis in order to perpetuate its own discourse: the truths it produces are the direct result of the techniques it uses and the questions it asks. By positing a repressive censorship (at both a psychic and social level) science justifies and perpetuates its own pleasure/knowledge economy. As a result Foucault says that:

Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by its hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and directly, perverse. (Foucault 1976: 47)

'Perversions' are not then proof of the repressive hypothesis but instead work to support the incitement to discourse. This idea is important for the address of discourses of transgression in Explicit Sex films, and I will be addressing this in Chapter Four. The 'uncovering' of acts of perversions functions as a guarantee of the efficacy of this project. As Foucault says the manifold and diverse array of sexualities in contemporary culture status are the product of a means of thought:

We must not imagine that all these things [*perverse sexualities*] that were formerly tolerated attracted notice and received a pejorative designation when the time came to give a regulative role to the one type of sexuality that was capable of reproducing power and the form of the family. These polymorphous conducts actually extracted from people's bodies and from their pleasures; or rather they were solidified in them; they were drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices. The growth of perversions is not a moralising theme that obsessed the scrupulous minds of the Victorians. It is the real product of the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures. It is possible that the West has not been capable of inventing any new pleasures, and it has doubtless not discovered any original vices. But it has defined

new rules for the game of powers and pleasures. The frozen countenance of the perversions is a fixture of this game. (Foucault, 1984: 47-8)

So within Foucault's analysis, sexual identities are mapped onto and into subjectivity. The hypostatisation of sexuality within the subject means that the subject is conservatively defined by gender and sex encodings. There seem to be two contradictory notions of power inherent in Foucault's rendering: a) In working to narrativise and map the subject, power solidifies the subject in a narrow and negative way, but he says, b) that power is multiple and heterogeneous which suggests that the operations of power are creative and productive, which is why changes can occur in the social fabric. Although it is possible to conflate these two modes of operation it is important to acknowledge the problem this engenders.

Foucault suggests that pornography, amongst other things, is one of the 'economic' interests that tap into this multiplication of pleasure (Foucault 1984: 48). The question here is that this view detracts from the notion that perversions may offer radical possibilities. It is all very well to see perversions as a product of scientific discourse but it doesn't take into account the fact that certain articulations of sexuality have been and still are the subject of prohibition and silence and that certain kinds of pornography articulate some of these silences. Hence, a key problem with Foucault's writing on sexuality is that it tends to disavow some of the very real social and psychic repressions that impact upon contemporary sexualities (which often stem from what Rich [1983] terms 'compulsory heterosexuality').

What model of power is Foucault using here? He argues that power is not a prohibitive, negative, repressive 'no' regime but instead operates through diverse sites which are capable of generating and creating desire and pleasure:

In a society such as ours, where the devices of power are so numerous, its rituals so visible, and its instruments ultimately so reliable, in this society that has been more imaginative, probably, than any other in creating devious and supple mechanisms of power, what explains the tendency not to recognise the latter except in the negative and emaciated form of prohibition. (Foucault, 1984 :86)

His criticism of explanations of power as purely operating as prohibition and repression is that these explanations fail to account for the complex and creative operation of power. In simplistically seeing power as purely inhibitive, repressive-based critiques cannot adequately show how subjects actively and complicitly participate in the vicissitudes of power. This is a very different notion of power than that used by pro-censorship notions of 'patriarchal' power which is seen as static and homogeneous:

It (power) is defined in a strangely restrictive way, in that, to begin with, this power is poor in resources, sparing of its methods, monotonous in the tactics it utilises, incapable of invention, and seemingly doomed always to repeat itself. Further, it is a power that only has the force of the negative on its side, a power to say no; in no condition to produce, capable only of positing limits, it is basically anti-energy. (Foucault, 1984: 85)

The recognition of our instrumentality in the production of power would seem, in a small sense, to liberate the subject from passive victim status at an individual/personal level. This rather seductive notion, however, does not address power at an institutional level or the tension and alienation that is produced through the channelling of gender and sexuality into fixed categories. Gender and sexual imbalances in the social and theoretical order means that different groups of people have different levels of access to instrumentality. Is it possible for women and other 'groups' to be able to divest themselves of their cultural defining framework? Once again 'grand narratives' of identity (gender, race, nationality, ethnicity and sexuality) are still at work within the cultural fabric and, to a degree, the post-structural mode does seem to act to disavow this. This notion brings us neatly but

uncomfortably onto the horns of the post-structuralist dilemma; pluralism and multiplicity, held up as a radical rejection of idealism, fails as a political position because it ultimately erases any criteria through which to measure value.³⁴ The effect of the demise of grand narratives and the decentring of the sovereign subject may work to locate the subject as wholly subjected. The projected dissolution of all paradigms leaves us with two possibilities: first, it leaves us in a chaotic free-form space which is perhaps the site of creativity, but second, leaves us with no grounds or platform from which to speak. Nietzsche's solution to this conundrum is that the individual must create, dissolve and constantly re-create the speaking position, a state of endless becoming (perhaps this is religion rather than philosophy?). This dilemma lies at the heart of contemporary European philosophy and cultural studies and underpins the question: what is the status of the subject in 'post-modern' culture? The implications of this question are of key importance to contemporary feminism and will now be taken up in relation to Lois McNay's feminist critique of Foucault's notion of power.

To locate this problem more specifically, it is necessary to look at Foucault's use of the Nietzschean notion of the 'will to power' which implies that we must constantly re-invent ourselves against dominant categorisations and boundaries. Dominant grand narratives interpellate the subject as subjected and accepting of solidified and fixed gender and sexual identities. This hypostasises the subject within the confines of a limited number of 'intelligible' identities and attempts to close down other possibilities (which, ironically, might be produced through the

³⁴ I am here following Jürgen Habermas' critique of Foucault and the 'neo-conservatism' of post-structuralism/post modernism. As he argues in 'Questions concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again': 'Under the premises of his theory of power, Foucault so levels down the complexity of societal modernization that the disturbing paradoxes of this process cannot even become apparent to him. The same tendency toward a leveling of ambiguous phenomena can be seen in Foucault's history of modern sexuality. This deals with the central area of internal nature becoming reflective, that is, of subjectivity in the early Romantic sense of an interiority capable of expressing itself. What is leveled down here is the problematic structure of a long-term process of individuation and interiorization (accompanied by techniques of disclosure and strategies of surveillance) that simultaneously creates new zones of alienation and normalization' (Habermas, 1987: 291).

rule of binary difference). It is this line of argument that has produced a useful strategic line of enquiry for some contemporary feminist analyses of sex, the body and gender, wherein gender and sexual identities are seen as strictly defined channels from which deviation is punished.³⁵ The Nietzschean/Foucauldian solution through the 'aesthetics of the self' does however seem oddly idealist in that it implies a certain sense of subject autonomy. (But is it really useful to 'do away' with some sense of subject agency? How is it that we can ask these kinds of questions?). Lois McNay argues that Foucault's aesthetics of self (the constant re-invention of the self) may be useful for feminism (as taken by Rosi Braidotti) but that it is nevertheless very difficult in the register of sexuality where there are '...taboos and injunctions that operate around masculinity and femininity...' (McNay, 1992 :71). McNay sees repression as having 'real' effects rather than as Foucault does, in the *History of Sexuality*, as a discursively manufactured thing. In suggesting, however, that gender is always a site of slippage and '...an active and never-completed process of engendering...' (McNay, 1992 :71), McNay provides a useful theoretical basis for a feminist project in counteracting the 'docile bodies' formula of Foucault's earlier work:

Foucault's idea that individuals exert a degree of autonomy in shaping their immediate conditions of existence accords with a recent feminist concern to explain, despite large scale gender inequalities, women are not passive dupes of patriarchal structures of domination. (McNay, 1992 :82)

She usefully suggests that Foucault's dynamic notion of power is under-used in his work. His earlier notion that bodies (docile bodies) are passively inscribed by power is flawed and his later work starting with *The Uses of Pleasure* provides a notion of the individual which participates more actively in the identity game and is therefore less impoverished. Thus she theorises a platform from which feminism

³⁵ For instance, Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 1995), Rosi Braidotti (1991, 1994a, 1994b), Moira Gatens (1996).

can re-frame women's diversity of experiences. This aspect is often sadly lacking in many feminist analyses of pornography. I am, then, accepting the broad tenet of the 'aesthetics of the self' argument, with all its concomitant problems, as it does seem the most useful in counter-acting reductive, and insulting, 'woman-as-passive-victim' models which underpin so many analyses of pornography. It is, however, necessary to point to psychoanalytic notions of the subject as a heterogeneous matrix of shifting identities: to factor-in to the equation the complex issues around subject status and sexuality as a process of oscillation between dominant narratives (the symbolic order) and difference. It is only through this theoretical bricolage that pornography can be shown to encode sexuality within the terms of competing discourses, which produce desire, alienation, pleasure and unconscious fantasy. It also enables questions to be opened up about the way the individual has some choices about her/his interpellation into these texts (for instance, reading against the grain, queer readings) and that readership of these films is subject to a shifting procession of fantasmatic identifications. As all types of pornographic texts draw upon many different paradigmatic structures, it is inevitable that hiatuses and contradictions around sex and gender will coalesce within these texts. These will be explored through textual analysis of key films in the following chapters. Explicit Sex films and their readers are, I contend, in no way reducible to one particular, homogeneous, paradigm as suggested by the pro-censorship lobby. Instead, they are the locus of complex, heterogeneous discourses and desires. Through a Lacanian model of sexuality, Explicit Sex films can be seen to reflect contemporary sexualities' immanently excessive and recalcitrant nature. Explicit Sex films are implicitly and irreducibly connected with unconscious libidinal economies of desire which link into the notion of the will to power/knowledge. This is underpinned by the repression and disavowal of early desires that engender shifting relations with the texts and are symptomatic of unconscious desire and fantasy.

The Denaturalisation of Sexuality: Psychoanalysis and Feminism

Psychoanalytic and feminist theories have a fundamental role to play in the way contemporary culture conceptualises and represents sexuality. These discourses have inflected the infrastructure of thinking about sexuality and sexual identities which have influenced the contemporary articulation and experience of sex. I will outline key concepts, ideas and issues which inform my analysis of economies of desire, pleasure and fantasy in Explicit Sex films. I will begin by discussing psychoanalytic ideas that have informed key feminist theories of sexuality and gender and will then go on to outline some key psychoanalytic models of sexuality and gender in relation to its theorisation of desire, pleasure and fantasy. I will end by showing how these can be allied to Foucault's genealogical method.

In thinking through the reasons for, and possible solutions to, the unequal status of women, feminism has addressed the role of contemporary sexuality in terms of everyday experience ('the personal is political') and in terms of the 'master' narratives which anchor epistemological systems and psychic economies and that implicitly privilege a 'phallogentric' organisation of gender and sexuality.³⁶ In so doing, contemporary feminism often draws critically upon the methodological frameworks of psychoanalysis and post-structuralism. I will here examine the ways in which psychoanalytic models of sexuality have presented feminism with both useful and problematic models for describing the psychic economy of sexuality. The main object of this is to focus on the theoretical debates and implications of the move to divest sexuality from its traditional biological basis, the aim of which is to provide models of sexuality from which social change can be effected.

³⁶ Although this has been problematised, by for instance Parveen Adams (Adams, 1992), through Lacanian readings of the Phallic signifier. I will take up this critique later in the chapter as it forms the basis of my discussion of the Phallus/penis analogue in Chapter Three.

The writings of Sigmund Freud have provided some feminist theories with a point of entry into the cultural and theoretical processes of the denaturalisation of sexuality.³⁷ Freud's analytical engagement with the primary importance of sexuality in the matrices of analysands' symptoms gave rise to his life-long project to investigate the formation of sexuality and its role in the subject's psychic economy. Freud's view of sexuality suggests that there are two models of sexuality which, although formulated at different points in his work, provide the building blocks of a discourse through which sexuality can be thought about outside physiological models of the reproductive imperative (Grosz, 1990).

Freud's first model of sexuality, developed in the period 1895-1897 (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 404), is known as 'seduction theory'. It posited a model of sexuality that was imposed by certain key individuals in the infant or child's social world.³⁸ According to this early model, the child is prematurely and traumatically initiated into the world of adult genital sexuality through a family member, close family friend or someone who has an intimate relationship with the child. The basis of this theory lies in the recurrence of a memory of seduction unearthed within the speech of many of Freud's analysands. He suggested that the repressed memory of seduction lies dormant until it is reactivated through the sexual re-awakening of puberty.

³⁷ This is not, however, meant to infer that feminism has had no effect on psychoanalysis: contemporary psychoanalysis has also been impacted on and has incorporated many of the issues and questions raised by various feminist critics.

³⁸ For example in *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer write that hysterical symptoms originate from a 'psychical trauma': '...our investigations reveal, for many, if not for most, hysterical symptoms, precipitating causes which can only be described as psychical traumas' (Freud & Breuer, 1974: 56).

However, as so many analysands told a similar tale, Freud began to regard these memories with some suspicion and came to abandon the notion that the seduction occurred as a real event.³⁹ He had then to address the possibility that seduction was a retrospective fantasy.⁴⁰ Freud had previously argued that the unconscious is not 'index linked' to the external world because it is subject to the primary process. Further, it cannot distinguish between the wished for and that which 'actually' happened. As a result Freud developed a theory which suggested that the infant was not, as he previously thought, non-sexual, but instead began to formulate the contentious notion that the infant is a sexual being.⁴¹

In this later model of seduction as a fantasy,⁴² the child is seen by Freud as navigating a series of developmental processes which work to articulate the sexual in different ways.

³⁹ As cited by Laplanche and Pontalis in the entry on 'Scene of Seduction/Theory of Seduction' Freud writes to Fleiss 'I will confide in you at once the great secret that has been dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my neurotica' (cited by Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 405). In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, written in 1936, Freud demonstrates a shift in his position on seduction; he says 'It is not a matter of indifference that the events of this early period, except for a few residues, fall victim to *infantile amnesia*' (Freud, 1986: 384). Freud did not discount the possibility of 'real' sexual abuse of children, but instead the point he is making is that the function of the seduction fantasy is to provide a form of 'explanation' of sexuality to the subject which disavows the problematic notion of infantile sexuality.

⁴⁰ See Laplanche and Pontalis' 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' (in ed. Burgin, 1986: 2-27) for a fuller discussion of this.

⁴¹ 'Sexual life does not only begin at puberty, but starts with plain manifestations soon after birth' (Freud, 1986: 383). 'It has been found that in early childhood there are signs of bodily activity to which only an ancient prejudice could deny the name of sexual and which are linked to psychological phenomena that we come across in adult erotic life - such as fixation to particular objects, jealousy, and so on' (ibid.: 384).

⁴² 'If hysterical subjects trace back their symptoms to traumas that are fictitious, then the new fact which emerges is precisely that they create such scenes in fantasy, and this psychological reality requires to be taken into account alongside practical reality. This reflection was soon followed by the discovery that these fantasies were intended to cover up the auto-erotic activity of the first years of childhood, to embellish it and raise it to a higher place. And now, from behind the fantasies, the whole range of a child's sexual life came to light' ([Freud, 1986: 75] also cited in Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 405/6).

These developmental phases may, to an extent, be biologically inscribed but the concomitant sexual articulation is not in itself biological.⁴³ The developmental focus on different organs (oral, anal and genital) provides the grounds for the particular sexual articulation to occur. The Oedipal crisis propels the infant further into the register of social relations and the trajectory of sexual desire is tailored to the social hierarchy. This crucially involves mechanisms of repression, which is intrinsic to the psychoanalytic paradigm and cannot, I would argue, be dismissed as easily as Foucault suggests. Within this model all bodily organs, including the brain,⁴⁴ are potentially the source of sexual pleasure, indicating that it is through the social/symbolic that certain parts of the body are allocated normative sexual currency over others, any of which is equally likely to give pleasure. I have here provided a brief over-view of seduction theory, but I will take this up in more detail in forthcoming chapters as it forms the basis of the analysis of the relationship of fantasy to these films. For now though, the important implication of this model is that sexuality is not biologically based but is related to the formation of the subject and the notion that sexuality as well as gender is not biologically inscribed. This has provided recent feminist thought⁴⁵ and other theoretical discourses⁴⁶ with a valuable model from which to begin to understand the complexities of human sexuality and sexual identity.

⁴³ 'According to the prevailing view human sexual life consists essentially in an endeavour to bring one's own genitals into contact with those of someone of the opposite sex. With this are associated, as accessory phenomena and introductory acts, kissing this extraneous body, looking at it, touching it. This endeavour is supposed to make its appearance at puberty - that is, at the age of sexual maturity - and to serve the purposes of reproduction...It is necessary to distinguish sharply between the concepts of "sexual" and "genital". The former is a wider concept and includes activities that have nothing to do with the genitals' (Freud, 1986: 383).

⁴⁴ Academic work which focuses on the enigma of sexuality offers an interesting example!

⁴⁵ For instance, Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Kaja Silverman (1988), Elizabeth Grosz (1989, 1990, 1994), Jacqueline Rose (1986).

⁴⁶ For instance, Jean Laplanche (1989) and Jeff Weeks (1985).

Freud's theories of gender and sexual identities are not, however, without their critics. Many feminists, such as Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* (1971), have considered psychoanalysis as a means of perpetuating patriarchal organisations of sex and society. Millett's criticism rests on the idea that in showing how gender identity is formed within patriarchy Freud bolsters 'patriarchal' claims. By contrast, Juliet Mitchell in her book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) defends both Freudian and Lacanian models of psychic economy by arguing they provide a descriptive rather than a proscriptive theory of sexuality which is useful for feminism. I will follow Mitchell as I take psychoanalysis to be a valuable methodology for the examination and implications of formation of the sexual psychic economy. Psychoanalysis provides a means of addressing sexual differences in that erotogenic zones are subject partly to social inscription but crucially these mappings are also subject to disruption through the return of the repressed. These ideas will be taken in more detail below in the discussion of the Lacanian notion of desire. Drawing on psychoanalysis, my main argument here is that sexuality is subject to multiple and competing discourses, some elements of which are repressed in the process of subject/gender formation and these elements can re-emerge through the primary process, as for example, occurs in secondary fantasy. As Jacqueline Rose states, Freud's most 'fundamental discovery' was 'that the unconscious never ceases to challenge our apparent identity as subjects' (Rose, 1986: 53). It is this that is not sufficiently accounted for in pro-censorship readings of pornography and in Foucault's critique of the 'repressive hypothesis'.

The political framework of feminism demonstrates why the concept of the denaturalisation of sexuality has value. The key idea is that the denaturalisation of sexuality is central to the project of theorising the subject coded as female as inhabiting the diverse and competing discourses of the symbolic/cultural order. In rejecting biological notions of sexuality as a reproductive imperative, feminism can

then begin the work of showing how biological explanations of sexuality have and are used to support particular hegemonic models. It can also be used to show how sexuality may exceed given hegemonic channellings, which entails the repression of 'unintelligible' (uncanny - the sense that they were once known and have become repressed) sexualities. The evocation of biology is often used as a means of providing an anchor or guarantee to a particular discourse. The process of reification through biological models has underpinned many normative readings of both sex and gender. Many forms of feminism work to demonstrate the fictive basis of these models. A problem often encountered here is that the exposure of discourse as fiction entails the imposition of yet another new fiction. In uncovering a 'patriarchal' fiction at work in *Explicit Sex* films some pro-censorship feminist thinkers, whose work was summarised in my Introduction, seem to reiteratively perform this function without recognition of the inherent problem within this dialectical structure.

Feminist thinking on sexuality has many guises and it is important to outline briefly a few key ideas that reflect and perhaps reinforce particular contemporary notions of sexuality.⁴⁷ Within the frame of my argument sexual identity is not fixed but multiple and subject to repression and its return. There are however a few genealogical factors that need to be highlighted here. In a general sense, and there are anomalies, so-called 'first wave' feminist thought often regarded sexuality itself as a form of oppression, the implication being that if women were not subject to the sexual attentions of men, then women would not have an unequal or a repressed status. This is dependent upon the notion of patriarchy (or power) that is used.

⁴⁷ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a historical navigation of the whole of feminist thinking about sex and sexuality, so instead I will confine my study to the concept and debates around the denaturalisation of sexuality within feminism.

First wave feminism (and this model does seem to still have credence within some later feminist thinking, for example Andrea Dworkin) has often conceived of patriarchy as an ahistorical, monolithic and seamless entity. Within this model, in both the public and private spheres, men are unproblematically seen as perpetuating the social status quo. The problematisation of patriarchy (or power) has also been the site of hegemonic struggle within feminism itself. In contrast, many feminisms, drawing from both psychoanalysis and cultural materialism, particularly Gramsci's notion of hegemony, have suggested that the unified state of patriarchy is an illusion. Patriarchy can be problematised through the search for inherent contradictions and thereby it is possible to show that patriarchy is fundamentally heterogeneous and a site of perpetual struggle for hegemonic dominance.⁴⁸ This is important to my argument as it means that sexuality is inscribed within and, more importantly, between various competing discourses.

Certain cultural theorists, such as Rosalind Coward⁴⁹ and Kate Roiphe (1994), have objected to the oversimplification of theorising patriarchy.

⁴⁸ The patriarchal apparatus is perpetuated by glossing over any of the inevitable contradictions produced by different discourses which are encompassed by this apparatus

⁴⁹ In the conclusion to *Patriarchal Precedents* (1983) Rosalind Coward critiques the 'loose currency' (Coward, 1983: 270) of the term patriarchy. She writes: 'There are two points which must be made in relation to the term patriarchy. The first is that if the term is to be developed at all rigorously as describing the real structure of social relations, it appears to be limited in crucial ways. For one thing, the arrangement of the contemporary family structure retains few of the features of a classic patriarchal structure....The application of the term "patriarchal" to all aspects of male control and dominance can obscure the differences between familial forms, differences which are vitally important if any understanding of sexual relations is to be constructed....In addition, the term 'patriarchal' describes a form of power which does not do justice to the complexity of the problem of sexual division and society. It limits what can be said in terms of the production and definition of sexual identities in a number of forms. It does not do justice to the subtle workings of discrimination. For the term "patriarchal" implies a model of power as interpersonal domination....Yet many aspects of women's oppression are constructed diffusely, in representational practices, forms of speech, in sexual practices. This oppression is not necessarily a result of the literal overpowering of a woman by a man' (ibid.: 271/272).

Other theorists, such as John Fiske, Anthony Easthope,⁵⁰ Richard Dyer⁵¹ and Clay Steinman⁵² have added to this critique by arguing that patriarchy is not inherently unified and by suggesting that individual men are not seamlessly interpellated into this 'order' of things. Critiques of this view of patriarchy and masculinity have part of their roots within Lacanian theory, in that sexual and gender *identity* always entails a splitting and alienation of the subject. In a Lacanian model of subject formation no-one seamlessly fits the gender bill (Judith Butler [1990] also takes up this notion via Foucault). Recent analyses of masculinity have highlighted the way in which masculinity, like femininity, is always a site of struggle and tension.⁵³ John Fiske, for example, suggests 'Like an ideology, patriarchy works through alibis, absences, and reductive mis-representations to disguise the masculine insecurity upon which it is based' (Fiske, 1987: 202). The traditional model of masculinity, like femininity, is then a mould that takes a good deal of squeezing and strife to occupy. As John Fiske has said, in patriarchy and capitalism 'Masculinity becomes a definition of the superhuman, so it can never be achieved' (Fiske, 1987: 210). This shows the ways in which 'patriarchy' can be mined for its inherent contradictions and impasses which can be used to de-reify it and place it within given discursive parameters. The view that gender is a site of struggle and pain also has feminist precedents, and is indicated by Simone de Beauvoir, who argues

⁵⁰ Easthope says of strict gender divisions in *What a Man's Gotta do: The masculine myth in popular culture* (1986) that 'Inevitably the strategy comes apart at the seams' (Easthope, 1986: 11). (Easthope's view is also cited by Steinman, in Craig, 1992: 200.)

⁵¹ Dyer argues in 'Don't Look Now: The instabilities of the male pin-up' (in Dyer, 1992: 103:120), along with Robert Hanke 'Redesigning Men: Hegemonic Masculinity in Transition' (in ed. Craig, 1992: 185-198) that dominant notions of 'masculinity' are constantly struggling to counter the threat of 'feminisation'. Dyer argues this can be seen in men who are 'the object of the gaze', and it is here that masculinity has to be constantly conserved through compensatory masculine signifiers.

⁵² Clay Steinman argues in 'Gaze Out of Bounds: Men Watching Men on Television' (in ed. Craig, 1992: 199-214) that 'As conceptions of desire become fluid in theory, even as patriarchal order strives to keep sexuality in line, maleness, masculinity, and the like terms become all the more elusive' (ibid.: 201).

⁵³ Further indicative articles that address the problematics 'inhabiting' masculinity are Sean Nixon's 'Distinguishing Looks: Masculinities, the Visual and Men's Magazines' (eds. Harwood, Oswell et al, 1993) and Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity in the Margins* (1992).

that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1972).⁵⁴ Jacqueline Rose states that '...psychoanalysis becomes one of the few places in our culture where it is recognised as more than a fact of individual pathology that most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all' (Rose, 1986: 91)⁵⁵ and that 'sexual difference is constructed at a price and that involves subjection to a law that exceeds natural or biological division' (ibid.: 51). The implication of these notions of painful and ill-fitting gender categories suggests that gender and sexuality are not implicit or hardwired into a person but are acquired through the long, and it is crucial to note, unending process of gendered socialisation. The implications of this will be discussed in more detail below in the discussion of the Lacanian model of subject formation. What I have shown here is that gender and sexual identities are not seamlessly achieved. That which is remaindered by the process of sex/gender inscription produce the experience of alienation or hysteria. These can be construed as symptoms of the return of the repressed.

What emerges from the above citations is the notion that neither sexuality nor gender can be biologically structured into the subject. As the process to fit the gender and sexual normative ideal must always be striven for, but can never be achieved, leaving a remainder. This further suggests that other sites for occupation are always in currency even within (or perhaps as a result of) the strict parameters of 'patriarchy'. Explicit Sex films as the product of discursive systems of sex and

⁵⁴ According to Margaret Whitford in the introduction to *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), Beauvoir herself has, at different times, both rejected and embraced psychoanalysis.

⁵⁵ In (wise) response to feminist outcries against Freud's concept of *penisneid* (penis envy), Rose, like Juliet Mitchell, says that Freud is describing (not prescribing) the state of gender affairs. This is as painful as it might appear to some feminist critics but its recognition is nonetheless crucial if feminism is to understand the reasons for gender construction. Rose says 'Freud himself recognised this increasingly in his work. In the articles which run from 1924 to 1931, he moves from that famous, or rather infamous, description of the little girl stuck with her "inferiority" or "injury" in the face of the anatomy of the little boy and wisely accepting her fate ("injury" as the *fact* of being feminine), to an account which quite explicitly describes the process of becoming "feminine" as an "injury" or "catastrophe" for the complexity of her earlier psychic and sexual life ("injury as its *price*")' (Rose, 1986: 91).

gender will also be informed by these other sites of occupation. This provides a means of critiquing views of these films which see them as somehow 'utopian'.⁵⁶

For the purposes of the current discussion I want to briefly take up the 'essentialist' debate as this has provided contemporary feminism with a framework for staging dialogue and debate about sexuality. The debate focuses on the status and source of female sexuality: some feminists seeing female sexuality as immanent within the body, and others suggesting that female sexuality is the product of the symbolic (linguistic, institutional) order. To couch this dialogue as a polarisation is, I acknowledge, problematic, and throughout the discussion here I hope to increasingly problematise this polarisation, but for the sake of clarity I begin with an (over) generalised distinction between the two (Brennan: 1989). There are those, for example Helene Cixous, who, in some of her work, celebrates an immanent female sexuality as subversive of linear, rational, phallogocentric systems of thought and being, and those, for example Catherine Clement, who see female sexuality as inscribed by a phallogocentric organisation of the symbolic register and, like Luce Irigaray,⁵⁷ calls for the creation of a female symbolic order. Both of these models of thinking about feminine sexuality engender certain logical and phenomenological impasses. The first suggests that female sexuality can exceed symbolic inscriptions of language which implies a bodily experience beyond language that is specific to women, and the second suggests that there is strictly speaking no such thing as female sexuality, as it is purely the product of phallogocentric epistemological systems (for example, philosophy, anatomy, anthropology). The latter could therefore be critiqued as a form of sociological

⁵⁶ I will take this critique further in Chapter Four.

⁵⁷ I am here referring to Margaret Whitford's thoughtful reading of Irigaray which sets out to critique Moi's view in *Sexual/Textual Politics* that Irigaray's work is essentialist ('Rereading Irigaray' in ed. Brennan, 1989): 'Irigaray's failure to consider the historical and economic specificity of patriarchal power, along with its ideological and material contradictions, forces her into providing exactly the kind of metaphysical definition she wants to avoid. She thus comes to analyse "woman" in idealist categories, just like the male philosophers she is denouncing' (Moi, 1985: 148).

determinism, which as Butler points out, is as problematic as biological determinism.⁵⁸ The dilemma faced by contemporary feminism seems to be that the former position suggests an essentialist notion of the female body as having a fundamental and irreducible experience of 'female' sexuality. The latter view, which is largely critical of Lacanian psychoanalysis, seems to suggest that, although both female and male sexuality is inscribed through the symbolic order, female/feminine sexuality is solely the product of a male sexual imaginary. The former seeks to counter the determinism of the latter but in so doing has been criticised as relying on an immanent, essentialist model of gender and sexuality. It is, however, that which is remaindered by the formation of sexual/gender identity that is of most interest within the terms of this study.

A question I would ask here is: do women actually experience their sexuality as either 'natural' or as the product of a male imaginary, or is the experience of sexuality in all its diversities fundamentally outside of the register of these discursivities? I suspect that many women, who are aware of these debates, whilst acknowledging the debates have a multitude of different thoughts, feelings, sexual personas and physical sensations at different times. The problem encountered here is the frequent mismatch between different discursive registers - in particular the disjuncture between theory and the 'phenomenal'. It is the gap between the two that perhaps Cixous articulates in her work. It is in the differences between these discourses that contradictions, absences and fissures can be seen and can become spaces invested with desire and fantasy. It will be this aspect of the debate which will be taken up in the analysis of desire, fantasy and pleasure in relation to Explicit Sex films. As Butler has convincingly argued but perhaps not sufficiently explored, the symbolic order, whilst appearing stable, in fact lacks coherency and allows

⁵⁸ 'When the relevant "culture" that "constructs" gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-as-destiny formulation. In this case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny' (Butler 1990: 8).

ambiguous sites for sexual and gender occupation. This, however, needs to be explored within the terms of psychoanalysis as a means of opening up these interstitial spaces.

Post-structuralism has sought to show that the rational subject and subject identity is a (necessary?⁵⁹) illusory meta-narrative which often acts to privilege certain subject positions i.e. the white bourgeois male.⁶⁰ Feminist thought shares with post-structural deconstruction a critique of dominant meta-narratives and, as Domna Stanton argues, recent studies of sexuality ‘...reflect and reinforce the demise of the transcendental ‘Cartesian’ subject, whose identity is the compendium of a universal, unchanging set of traits’ (Stanton, 1992: 4). Although now part of the critical landscape of contemporary cultural studies, the theoretical process of denaturalising sexuality leans on the psychoanalytic notion of unconscious desire and the role of language in gender and sexual inscription. In this sense the denaturalisation of sexuality has constituted a significant shift from more traditional notions of the sexual subject as rooted in the physiological. Judith Butler’s re-working of Foucault’s genealogical method works to critique feminist theories which posit an essential feminine sexuality that exceeds the phallogentric symbolic order, but is also used to counter the over-determinism of the ‘social construction’ approach. She states that:

A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact

⁵⁹ ‘Necessary’ in the sense that for subjecthood to be achieved, and psychosis avoided, the subject must mobilise a cohering narrative - a thread provided by history, memory and discourse. Yes it is necessary, says Clement; no it is not, says Cixous’ (as indicated in their dialogue on Freud’s case study of ‘Dora’, in eds. Bernheimer and Kahane, 1985).

⁶⁰ Although occupation of this site, as Fiske has said and is cited above as having said, can be a painful and coercive process.

the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin. (Butler 1990: p. ix)

The notion of corralling an implicitly essentialist empowering 'wild zone' (Helene Cixous, Elaine Showalter) for women is rejected as a reiteration of phallogocentric readings of women's 'otherness'. Instead, Butler usefully suggests attention should be turned to the heterogeneous constructions of sexual and gender identities.⁶¹ She argues that instead of sex determining gender, sex is always read through gender. Because of this, the 'wild zone' can never be a phallogocentric 'free' space but is rendered specifically through the dominant readings of gender differences which are allocated through the Phallus as a master or primary signifier. For Butler, following and developing Foucault's conception of power, the escape route lies not in the total rejection of the symbolic (as is suggested through *L'écriture féminine*) but instead to engage with the symbolic and make use of parody and contradiction to spotlight the heterogeneous logic and power systems that lies behind apparently neutral and natural divisions. This helps to counteract the structuralist notion that the link between the signifier and signified is arbitrary; at the level of the second order semiological system, it is not arbitrary but is motivated by conflicting desires of diverse 'agenda setters'. Given the diversity of agendas, as Gramsci has noted through his concept of hegemony, there will always be in play, at any one time, a confluence of competing hegemonies which elicits discontinuities and contradictions. It is in this chaotic, rather than unified, space that the seeds of change can germinate. This concept of hegemony must be brought alongside the psychoanalytic notion that desire and fantasy are complex, contradictory and shifting, as Gramsci's notion seems to locate the subject as purely rational and unconscious-less.

⁶¹ Butler's model here can be usefully aligned to psychoanalysis in that elements of competing discourses become 'repressed' and then emerge through secondary fantasy (such as in the reception of Explicit Sex films.)

For Butler (and I follow her here) the exploitation of contradictions can be used to crack open the invested naturalisation of sexuality and to reframe the platitudes of traditional notions of sexual relations and activities. To bring this notion to bear on Explicit Sex films seems crucial as they are also the site of diverse models of sexuality and desire. Explicit Sex films are not unified and singular, but due to the heterogeneous discourses that inflect sexuality they are riven through with contradictions and sites for marginal occupation, and they are also subject to the effects of repression as they are marked by traces of primary unconscious fantasy which are submerged through socialisation.

Lacan and Desire

Although this may seem a circuitous route to the topic of looking at Explicit Sex films, it is crucial to look at contemporary psychoanalytic concepts and debates around sexuality in order to begin to problematise current readings and broaden the, currently, rather narrow analysis of the relation between power and sexuality. The traces of these debates and ideas will also be at work within the analysis of the films in the forthcoming chapters.

Lacan's work draws upon and informs post-structural modes of enquiry. The intellectual elite of France, with its roots in Existentialism and phenomenological critiques of traditional philosophical models, rejected biological models of the subject and located itself around the rejection of the knowing Cartesian subject which also lie at the heart of classical Marxism. Lacan's early work sought to reconfigure Freud's ideas on sexuality within a post/structuralist framework which rejected biological models and concentrated on the ways in which language and its inherent patterns impact on the formation of the subject. Concepts within the Freudian corpus which leaned upon biological or physiological models, such as instinct and appetite, were abandoned or re-worked, within, as Malcolm Bowie suggests, a 'culturalist' framework.⁶² Although there are implicit problems with the presence of the biological within Freud's work it is important to note here that most scientific discourse on sexuality around the late 19th and the early 20th century was either looking for answers to the enigma of sexuality in simpler life forms (based on a Darwinian model) or, within sexology, for deviation from the

⁶² Bowie comments 'Lacan acknowledges...that retrospective longings and phantasized returns to Eden cannot simply be uprooted from the human mind, but he expects the psychoanalyst, when acting in a professional capacity, to resist their subtly varying pull. Biologizing explanations of the mind are themselves the products of such phantasy: they postulate a primal oneness that it is somehow possible and desirable to restore or emulate. Such explanations are to be resisted as soon as they arise. Lacan's vigorous "culturalist" polemic in this short early work [*Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual*, 1938] was to be amplified and diversified throughout his later career' (Bowie, 1991: 6).

'norm'. What was radical about Freud's diagnosis was that sexuality is seen as a matrix of differences rather than aligned along a normative/deviant axis.⁶³ Freud asserted that sexuality is primarily a psychic event and that the 'normal' always contains the perverse;⁶⁴ although the full implications of this were not perhaps fully explored by his work.

Lacan recognised that Freud's project of theorising a comprehensive picture of the formation of the subject was continually hindered by the prevailing discursive 'truth' of the biological model. Following Lacan, Jacqueline Rose argues that Freud's 'failure' to successfully analyse 'Dora' '...in terms of a normative concept of what woman should be, or want, ...led him to recognise the aberrant nature of sexuality itself' (eds. Mitchell & Rose 1982: 28). Rose further suggests that Freud's work was constantly hampered by the dominant epistemological notion that sexuality is the product of a purely instinctual heterosexual imperative which was the discursive lynch-pin of the biological model. It is through his analyses of 'Dora' and 'Little Hans' (Freud, 1977a), however, that Freud's allegiance to the physiological, reproductive 'cause' of sexuality was challenged. His 'wrestling' with the implications of his clinical findings, provided psychoanalysis with a model of sexuality that is not grounded in the reproductive. Instead sexuality is taken as being bound up with an unconscious matrix of fantasy and desire which is rendered through the processes of repression and the primary process (secondary revision,

⁶³ This is not to deny that some readings of Freud have re-aligned his work in these terms. This is particularly true within some psychoanalytic institutions in the UK where homosexuality is still read as a developmental failure.

⁶⁴ 'No healthy person, it appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim and the universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the term perversion as a term of reproach. In the sphere of sexual life we are brought up against peculiar and indeed, insoluble difficulties as soon as we try to draw a sharp line to distinguish mere variations within the range of what is physiological from pathological symptoms' (Freud, 1977: 74). 'Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together - a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct' (Freud, 1977: 59).

condensation, displacement and symbolisation).⁶⁵ The unconscious economies of sexuality will be crucial to the analysis of the articulation of sexuality in Explicit Sex films in forthcoming chapters. Post-structural intervention has also seized upon a further productive 'failure' in Freud's writing on sexuality. Leo Bersani argues that in the *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud remained unable to demonstrate the relationship between sexuality and pleasure. He says:

...the essays serve as a kind of resistance to, or denial of, the works failure to define sexuality; they provide human sexuality with a coherent historical narrative which helps to obscure the really unintelligible, ahistorical and perhaps clinically non-viable nature of sexual pleasure which Freud simultaneously argues for and 'forgets' within the very texts of the three essays. (Bersani, 1986: 4/5)

Whilst Bersani's comments are useful, I would contend that both these 'failures' occur as a direct result of the discursive epistemological parameters within which Freud was operating; although he does (almost against himself) discern contradictions through his clinical practice that throw the dominant biological model into disarray. The vocabulary for talking about sexual desire and pleasure in excess of the biological was not at that time formulated (although the colloquial often manages to express aspects of human experience where scientific language flounders). The boundaries of the traditional models were in effect what Freud was 'bumping up' against and Freud's new vocabulary and grammar of psychoanalysis was formulated in a slow and painstaking way which had to be measured against the dominant scientific and philosophical models. The points of 'breakdown', as Lacan implies, were constituted through Freud's neglect of his own concept of desire (the unconscious wish).

⁶⁵ This is outlined in detail in the 1915 paper *The Unconscious* [Section V: The Special Characteristics of the System Ucs] (Freud, 1984: 190-192) and *Repression*, also written in 1915 (ibid.: 153-158).

For Lacan, 'desire' becomes the primary idea around which the psychoanalytic project gains full force of meaning. Operating at the level of a concept, desire acts as a locus of interest which is seen as key to the functioning of the human psyche. In terms of its function within the human psyche, desire does not have a discrete form but instead functions to put psychic events into form or 'scene' through fantasy. Juliet Mitchell argues:

The psychoanalytic concept of sexuality confronts head on all popular conceptions. It can never be equated with genitality nor is it the simple expression of a biological drive. It is always psychosexuality, a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies involving a range of excitations and activities that produce pleasure beyond the satisfaction of any basic physiological need. It arises from various sources, seeks satisfaction in many different ways and makes use of many diverse objects for its aim of achieving pleasure. Only with great difficulty and never perfectly does it move from being a drive with many component parts - a single 'libido' expressed through very different phenomena - to being what is normally understood as sexuality, something which appears to be a unified instinct in which genitality predominates. (eds. Mitchell & Rose 1982: 2)

As Mitchell (eds. Mitchell & Rose: 1982) succinctly summarises, the psychoanalytic view of sexuality is not a singular fixed event anchored by heterosexual coitus, but it is, for both men and women, in a state of perpetual flux which entails that it is not subject to conscious intentionality. Nor does it, I contend against Bowie, truly fit the 'culturalist' (read socially determinist) model. In order to explain the concept of desire more fully it is necessary to outline Lacan's embellishment of Freud's concept of the unconscious wish which is translated by Lacan as 'desire'. This concept will prove crucial to the analysis of *Explicit Sex* films throughout this study. In Lacanian terms desire offers the solution to the problematic of both reductive physiological models and purely 'cultural determinist' models of sexuality. This concept was already present in Freud's work, but through Lacan's re-working becomes fully potent:

The concept of desire is crucial to Lacan's account of sexuality. He considered that the failure to grasp its implications lead inevitably to a reduction of sexuality back into the order of a need (something, therefore, which could be satisfied). Against this, he quoted Freud's statement: 'we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realisation of complete satisfaction'. (eds. Mitchell & Rose: 32)

In order to understand the full impact and importance of the concept of desire it needs to be located within the Lacanian map of the formation of the subject. I will paraphrase the definition of wish (desire) by Laplanche and Pontalis in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1967, 1973), to show how Lacan makes a distinction between the related concepts: need, demand and desire.

- 'Need' is addressed to an object and can thus be satisfied by that object. To clarify, a hungry person addresses his or her need to a particular item(s) of food. Once consumed the need is satisfied and (temporarily) dissipates. 'Need' is then closest to the survival imperative.
- Through language 'need' may become 'demand'. For Lacan demand is 'always a demand for love' which is addressed to the other (usually the mother in the early stages of life) and is therefore in excess of need.
- Where demand is not fulfilled and the person is barred from the satisfaction of both need and demand, it is replaced by desire. For desire to materialise there must be a 'lack'. The apparent object of desire here is a token or sign - what Lacan calls the *objet petit a* - but this is not in fact a tangible 'object' of desire but instead a non-object which is often taken by the subject as an actual object. The *objet a* haunts the quest to fill the gap of lack. Desire in all its possible manifestations is then propped against the matrix of unconscious phantasy, memories or traces of satisfactions which go beyond or exceed the satisfaction

of need, leaving the subject with a sense of loss. It is this process which constitutes both subjecthood and sexuality.

The idea that desire has no object, but constantly operates as if it has an object, is key to understanding what drives the reception of Explicit Sex films. Economies of sexuality and fantasy are symptomatic of desire's continuous and illusory search for an object to satisfy it. This idea is central to the argument of this chapter (and the corpus of the thesis) and is what is omitted from Foucauldian notions of discourse and power. The relation of desire and Explicit Sex films will provide the main focus of the analysis of these films in forthcoming chapters.

Although I have sought to outline the movement between need, demand and desire in Lacan's work my explanation does problematically and over-simplistically infer a sequence of psychic events. Lacan states, however, that desire is not a logical progression following on from demand, but instead appears between need and demand. Desire inhabits the gap between need and demand and is not a relation to the 'real' object, but instead desire stages a fantasy generated by lack. 'We call libidinal investment that which makes an object desirable, that is, what leads to its confusion with the image we carry within us...' (Lacan cited in Rose, 1986: 174). Desire is also the 'lack of a lack' and this will be outlined in greater detail below. Lacan shifts the register in which this is articulated to that of speech suggesting that desire inhabits the gap between the signifier and the signified. It is desire which facilitates the slippages and displacements within the substitution axis of language. This structuralist linguistic model goes some way to explaining how certain signifiers, for example a horse, can be invested at the level of the signified with unconscious fantasies, as in Freud's case study of 'Little Hans' (Freud, 1977a). It is then important to bring Lacan's notion of desire and the impact of repression and disavowal to Foucault's notion of discourse. If discourse is sited within Lacanian theory it can then be seen to be operating within the symbolic and

the imaginary registers, and subject to unconscious desire and fantasy through the primary process.

It is useful to note that Lacan locates all psychic events within a structuralist model of language and claims that the 'unconscious is structured like a language'. This famous 'slogan' has been an object of contention and discussion by many critics⁶⁶ of Lacan's privileging of language as the basis for subject formation. Lacan's re-reading of Freud magnifies the notion that the unconscious can only be known through the primary process, which primarily operates with linguistic devices (condensation, displacement, symbolisation as metaphor and metonymy). The unconscious comes into being at the onset of a child's entry in language. As such the imaginary, Lacan's term for the specular staging of unconscious desire, does not simply precede entry into the symbolic order but instead the two are indivisibly inter-bound, rather like the two sides of a piece of paper.⁶⁷ Under this rubric, discourse is always both imaginary and symbolic. The imaginary, in Lacanian terms, is the register in which the subject identifies with others, and the place in which desire 'puts into scene' fantasy. These fantasies are produced and repressed through the relation with the other, and the trace of unconscious fantasies are then always at work within any discourse.

As Lacan says, the imaginary is 'structured like a language'; it is subject to the primary process and is produced through the (structural) axes of substitution and combination which correspond to Freud's terms 'condensation' and 'displacement' (Lemaire, 1977: 43). Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that unconscious wishes

⁶⁶ I am here referring, for example, to Malcolm Bowie's critique of Lacan's linguistic 'determinism' which he argues is reductive and a form of 'fundamentalism' (Bowie 1991).

⁶⁷ D.S. Aoki argues that many contemporary feminists, such as Nancy Fraser, Jane Flax, Deborah Cameron, have mistaken the Lacanian Symbolic as fixed. He says: 'The Symbolic order is therefore distinguished not by fixity, but by multiple movement; not by synchrony alone, but by synchrony and diachrony; and therefore not by monolithicity, but plurality' (Aoki in *Theory Culture and Society*, Vol. 12 Nov. 1995: 52).

'...tend to be fulfilled through the restoration of signs which are bound to the earliest experiences of satisfaction; this operates according to the laws of the primary process' (1988: 481/2). The unfulfilled wishes of early childhood work as an infrastructure or matrix which implicitly maps our interaction with the other. These unfulfilled wishes, which are taken as signifiers of lack, are what produce and pattern desire. Desire operates through both the imaginary and symbolic fields, and in tandem these registers work to render desire in particular ways. It is crucial to mark this point, as I will go on to argue that an understanding of desire is crucial for the analysis of Explicit Sex films.

In Lacanian terms unconscious desire and fantasy constantly undermine our conscious interaction with what we take to be the outside world and the others within it. Unconscious desire underpins the formation of adult sexuality which is not biological but instead is linked to signs of the satisfactions and dis-satisfactions of early childhood which underpin desire. As stated above, desire inhabits the gaps between the signifier and the signified and mobilises itself through the signifying chain by motivating slippages, substitutions and displacements. The pun is a good example of this, but - it must be noted - is a rather limited example. Within the signifying chain *all* language is subject to *glissement* [slippage].

Before moving on to outline some of ways Lacan's model of desire can be used in relation to Explicit Sex films, it is important to briefly outline the role of the 'other' within the matrix of desire. As with many concepts previously referred to, there is within the Lacanian corpus no absolute definition of terms, but throughout the course of his writing and teachings, there is an embedded elaboration of key concepts. The mosaic of Lacanian teachings demands of the reader an (impossible?) attentiveness to the diversity of examples in process. As such it is rather difficult to give a conclusive definition of key terms; nevertheless it is important to sketch out these terms in coherent form in order that they can be

deployed for an understanding of desire in Explicit Sex films. The other as a concept crops up regularly in different guises, and for the sake of brevity I will (perhaps problematically) seek to demonstrate how this concept needs to be understood in relationship to desire. Lacan's use of the concept of the other has its precedent in the Kojevian readings of Hegel's dialectical model of the subject/other. For Lacan, the subject/other relation is always framed within the context of desire. The other is that to which we address our demands and desires. Individuals look to the other for satisfaction. However the other can never fulfill our demand as it 'belongs' to us. The effect of this resembles an infinity of mirrors reflecting mirrors. Here there is no primary referent and thereby a state of perpetual alienation is constituted: hence Lacan's aphorism 'desire is endlessly deferred'. This cannot be 'escaped' - except in fantasy - even by recourse to dominant narratives, which Lacan argues are the product of our intrinsic alienation.

'The Mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience' (Lacan, 1977) is the lecture which sets out Lacan's view of the process by which the infant builds a picture of itself as an 'autonomous' entity. The use of the metaphor of the mirror to elucidate this process resonates with links to the classical Freudian concept of narcissism. Through the image in the mirror the infant accumulates a fictitious sense of its (as yet ungendered) own unified being. The outline of the infant's body in the mirror provides an illusory mapping of its own bodily continuity which works against her experience of the body as fragmented (the body in bits and pieces). The result of this is that the body is then often experienced as other through non-conformity to the illusory gestalt of the mirror image. This has implications for Explicit Sex films as they do implicitly, as I will show, make reference to this pre-mirrored fragmented body.

The return of the *corps morcele* is a common trope of the Horror genre,⁶⁸ but also appears within Explicit Sex films in terms of the cinematic vocabulary used to focus on genitals or other portions of the body. The close-up genital shot is a primary signifier of the genre, and is consequently regarded by many with a mixture of horror and fascination. Many 'radical' feminist critiques of pornography have decried the fragmentation of the female body within the genre as an act of violence against women; it is also the case that the male body too is fragmented within the genre of Explicit Sex films. The contention that will be explored in relation to transgression in Explicit Sex films in Chapter Four, is that the use of genital close-ups utilises the imaginary bodily economy of the *corps morcele* to elicit desire as interest and excitement.

The alterity of our, apparently, 'own' bodies is an aspect of a wider use of the concept of the Other.⁶⁹ As Lacan suggests in 'The Direction of the treatment and the principles of its power' (Lacan, 1977) the subject is formed in relation to the imagos of primary others to which we address our early needs, demands and desires. However the 'big' Other is used by Lacan to describe the radical alterity of meaning and law. In this sense both the other and the Other are bound into desire:

...the subject has to find the constituting structure of his desire in the same gap opened up by the effect of the signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him in so far as his demand is subjected to them. (Lacan, 1977: 264)

⁶⁸ There are several writers who take this notion up in relation to Horror: for instance, Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982) has often been cited as a key text for the analysis of Body Horror. See Tanya Krzywinska 'La Belle Dame sans Merci?' (in eds. Burston and Richardson, 1995) in relation to the vampire genre, and Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (although she doesn't really explore the idea in full and is more interested in abjection and the clean and proper body which, it seems, does not seem to include the *corps morcele*).

⁶⁹ I will address the genitals in terms of alterity in detail in Chapter Four.

The big Other and the little other motivates and underpins all our social and epistemological relations. As Rose explains:

Subjects in language persist in their belief that somewhere there is a point of certainty, of knowledge and of truth. When the subject addresses its demand outside itself to another, this other becomes the fantasised place of just such a knowledge or certainty. Lacan call this the Other - the site of language to which the speaking subject necessarily refers. The Other appears to hold the 'truth' of the subject and the power to make good its loss. But this is the ultimate fantasy. (Rose, 1986: 56)

What if our demand appears to be satisfied by the (little) other? In 'The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power', Lacan, cites a dream, about a woman who has everything, offered to Freud by one of his patients.⁷⁰ Lacan comments:

...she doesn't want to be satisfied only at the level of her real needs. She wants other, gratuitous needs, and to be sure that they are gratuitous they must be satisfied. This is why to the question, 'What does the witty butcher's wife want?', we can reply, 'Caviar'. But this reply is hopeless, because she also does not want it. (Lacan, 1977: 261)

Lacan suggests that this '...impasse provides her with the key to the fields, the key to the field of the desires...' (Lacan, 1977: 261). Desire is then produced from the 'lack of a lack' which is what keeps the subject psychically 'alive' (in the sense of a motivating desire to live).

The other to whom we address our demand for love has, we mistakenly believe, the (imaginary) capacity to stop the gap of lack and to confirm our bodily integrity. We want the other to act as mirror, reflecting back to ourselves the unified and complete being we originally (mis-recognised) glimpsed in the primary mirror.

⁷⁰ It is important to note that Lacan's references to Freud's patients highlights the signifying chain of psychoanalysis - there is no degree zero - but instead a self-referential, self-regulating system.

This sends us on our quest for a confirmation of unity that we (mistakenly) thought we saw there. It is within this site of demand and desire that sexuality is located and why it is not a bodily, but a psychic, event. It is through the fantasy that the other (whatever their gender) offers a 'complementarity' that can heal the series of splits undergone by the child on its way to subjecthood (splitting from the mother/carer and through our inculcation into the symbolic order, plus numerous other splits and castrations). This engenders the fantasy of 'complementarity'.⁷¹

Lacan's rather alchemical term, complementarity, resonates within a Greek myth that narrativises the origin of sexual difference. Zeus punishes earthly beings by splitting the bi-faced spherical beings - composed of a man and women, or a man and man, or a women and woman - into two, so they forever pine for their lost half.⁷² Zeus takes some pity on them and gives them genitalia through which a (poor) substitute union can take place. The myth provides psychoanalysis with a narrative with which to de-mythologise the alienation of the subject, by showing that alienation is not the result of 'original sin' but instead the product of a series of splits that formulate the basis of subjecthood. It is through Lacan's theorising of our demand for the other to fill the empty void of lack, and them in turn asking us to do the same, which neither can achieve, that he can say that there is no 'sexual relation'.⁷³

⁷¹ Courtly Love '...is an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle to it' (in eds. Mitchell and Rose, 1982: 141).

⁷² As Francette Pacteau (ed. Burgin et al, 1986) argues, this fantasy/myth has resonance within the cultural fascination with cross-dressing as well as in the quest for a sexual (heterosexual/ bisexual/ lesbian/gay) partner.

⁷³ Much of Lacan's thinking about love referred to here is outlined in 'le Transfert' (*Le Seminaire Livre VIII 1960-1* in ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, 1991). There is not yet an English translation of this text and I have therefore been reliant on secondary sources.

The fantasy of complementarity has many symbolic and mythic precedents for example the alchemist's gold.⁷⁴ C.G. Jung takes the alchemist's gold as a symbolic metaphor for the sacred union of opposites. Jung cites Faust 'Tis rust alone that gives the coin its worth' which he elaborates as an 'alchemical quip, which at bottom only says that there is no light without shadow and no psychic wholeness without imperfection' (Jung, 1944 :159). In Lacanian theory the fantasy of complementarity which governs love and our relation to others is centred on the quest to recover the lost object (this lack is signified by the Phallus). We each in different ways quest for the lost object in the other; but this is an impossible fantasy which is based on a myth of total union with the other through which we recover the lost object. No-one, however, bears or embodies this lost object, yet we act, fetishistically, *as if* they do. Despite the impossibility of complementarity, this fantasy underpins all our relations with others, and its trace will inevitably be present in the representation of sexual relations in Explicit Sex films:

Desire is that which is manifested in the interval that demand hollows within itself, in as much as the subject, in articulating the signifying chain, brings to light the want-to-be, together with the appeal to receive the complement from the Other, if the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this want, or lack.
(Lacan, 1977: 263)

'Want to be' and the fantasy of complementarity are the twin aspects of desire which underpin our sexual un-relations. Un-relation in the sense that the other will never be able to stop the gap of lack which is produced through the splitting that constitutes subjecthood. Sexuality then is also bound up in this search for the lost object and the fantasy of complementarity. Desire abides in our (un)relation to the

⁷⁴ Jung argues in *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* that 'With the decline of alchemy the symbolic unity of spirit and matter fell apart, with the result that modern man finds himself uprooted and alienated in a desouled world' (Jung, 1954: 109). Here Jung translates alienation into the decline of a particular epistemological (religious) system and sees it in terms of the splitting of spirit and matter (which in many different traditions have been seen as corresponding to male and female).

other, but as the other (there is no other of the other) can never respond to our demand, desire is perpetuated, or as Lacan asserts, desire is endlessly deferred. In his discussion of courtly love in *God and the Jouissance of The Woman*, Lacan says :

It is an altogether refined way of making for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle to it. It is truly the most staggering thing that has ever been tried. But how can we expose its fraud? ... For the man, whose lady was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation.
(eds. Mitchell and Rose, 1982: 141)

An example of the currency of the ritual of 'courtly love' in contemporary popular culture is the 'romantic comedy': specific examples are, *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993) and the independently produced, lesbian 'rom-com', *Go Fish* (1994). Narrative closure is effected through the bringing together of the couple in traditional comedic form, and pleasure is derived from the 'happy ending'.⁷⁵ This then conforms to the fantasy of complementarity and the recovery of the lost object in the other.

As a contrast, film noir, as the 'pessimistic' genre which came out of the war-torn forties, takes the impossibility of sexual (un)relation as the basis for its narrative. The hero⁷⁶ of *Build My Gallows High* (1947),⁷⁷ for example, is fatefully seduced and thwarted by the woman he loves. His attempts to pull out of the (un)relation are useless; he just keeps being reeled in again. The hero and the *femme fatale* throw themselves into a series of masquerades in which they can no longer tell who

⁷⁵ Neale and Krutnik discuss aspects of this in the sections entitled 'Love and Marriage in the Romantic Comedy' and 'The Game of Love' (Neale and Krutnik: 1990: 136-166).

⁷⁶ Not really a hero in the classic Hollywood sense as his destiny is death rather than marriage/sex, but more of a tragic hero.

⁷⁷ Also known as *Out of the Past* (directed by Jacques Tourneur). Krutnik describes this film as '...one of the most "traumatised" of all "tough" thrillers...' (Krutnik, 1991: 106).

is lying and who is not.⁷⁸ They believe they are fated to be together, and when the hero contrives to kill her, the sexual un-relation is literalised by their dual death in the getaway car. Film noir shares with Explicit Sex films a certain clear-sightedness about the impossibility of finding the lost object in the other; Explicit Sex films too, rarely couch sex in terms of a 'romantic' narrative. But what these films do lean upon is the notion that the lost object can perhaps be achieved through plentiful sex (although I will argue that these films are not simply escapist fantasies of plenitude in Chapter Four).

Explicit Sex films, with their convention of minimal narrative, have few traces of medieval or 19th century courtly love. The sexual (un)relation, as we shall see, is conceived not in terms of a series of obstacles but instead as a series of personal sexual pleasures (or more accurately, as a purely genitally produced *jouissance*). In most cases the sexual (un)relation between the 'actors' is actualised in terms of their stilted dialogue and 'bad' acting. Explicit Sex films do not foreground, as comedy or film noir, the mismatch between action and emotions.

A concept that is crucial to the matrix and economy of desire, as I have just outlined it, is *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is 'more' than simply pleasure. Pleasure itself is not merely the fulfilment/satisfaction of a need but pleasure is derived from the surreptitious fulfilment of unconscious wishes which are disallowed by the social situation (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 325). An example would be the telling of a sexual joke in which unconscious wishes can be introduced in the realm of the social. *Jouissance*⁷⁹, however, according to Stephen Heath in the introduction of

⁷⁸ At one point in the film she says to the 'hero': 'I never told you I was anything but what I am. You just wanted to imagine I was. That's why I left you' (cited in Krutnik, 1991: 106).

⁷⁹ The difficulty of rendering the term into English is highlighted by most translators, but as Lisa Jardine ('The Politics of Impenetrability' in ed. Brennan, 1989: footnote 4, 70) points out the Frenchness of the term lends it a 'spurious weightiness' which she finds 'oppressive', however, the Frenchness of the term for this English and non-French speaker seems to lend the term an onomatopoeia; a little something of what it is supposed to represent.

Roland Barthes's *Image-Text-Music*, contrasts with *plaisir*, which is 'linked to cultural enjoyment and identity, to a homogenizing moment of the ego' and *jouissance* is linked to 'a radically violent pleasure which shatters - dissipates, loses - that cultural identity ego' (Barthes, 1977: 9). In her introduction to her translation of Lacan's *Seminaire XX*, Jacqueline Rose suggests that the sexual relation, not *jouissance*, "hangs on a fantasy of *oneness*" and that *jouissance* is used in *Seminaire XX* "to refer to that moment of sexuality which is always in excess, something over and above the phallic term which is the mark of sexual identity" (eds. Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 137).

Lacan's *Seminaire XX* elaborates on the theme of feminine *jouissance* which is set against masculine or phallic *jouissance*. These seminars have elicited a great deal of comment from feminist academics (for example Luce Irigaray, Lisa Jardine, Jane Gallop, Jacqueline Rose), and have been the focus of an ongoing debate about the status of women and female sexuality within Lacan's work. Within Lacan's topology⁸⁰ of the subject constituted through language, it is the phallic signifier which acts as the guarantor of sexual difference. According to Lacan, the phallus is not to be mistaken as a piece of anatomy (although in the realm of the imaginary the phallus is taken as an object). It is a signifier per se, but is central to the formation of desire as it is the signifier of lack. In Lacanian terms no one can possess the phallus as it is debarred from every subject regardless of gender identity. In the imaginary 'having' and 'not having' the phallus is the mark of sexual difference, it is not an anatomical difference but an imaginary difference. As Parveen Adams argues:

⁸⁰ 'Topology' as opposed to a 'system' which Lacan claims he does not have (eds. Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 142). The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* definition of topology is 'The scientific study of a particular locality... The comparatively new study of topology, the science by which, from the consideration of geographical facts about a locality, one can draw deductions as to its history' (Little, Fowler, Coulson, 1973: 2328).

Humans 'are' not something, neither do they 'have' or 'lack' something, yet these are categories of experience within which humans represent themselves to themselves. This of course is the register through which sexual difference is experienced. Having and not having bring together the question of the phallus and castration. Castration and the threat of castration are the imaginary form of the experience of difference. Again, of course no one has the phallus and no one is the phallus, but the experience of 'having' it or 'being' it is a defence against castration. (*differences*, 1992: 76)

Adams argues against the feminist rejection of the Lacanian notion of the phallus, in parallel to Rose.⁸¹ Adams points out that the problem with these critiques is that they mistakenly read the Phallus and castration as anatomical, and correspondingly argue that women lack nothing - which is a form of disavowal of the cultural status of women and the feminine as a signifier of castration.

Following Lacan, Adams locates the Phallus and castration within the imaginary and suggests that the impulse to attribute 'wholeness' to women 'far from demonstrating the lack of a lack, demonstrates the defense against lack' (ibid.: 77). In other words, the feminist critique of the Lacanian phallus is itself a symptom of lack. The Phallus/penis analogue will be taken up in detail in Chapter Three, where I will address the ways in which many critiques of Explicit Sex films conflate the two.

If 'wholeness' were achieved, and it cannot be as it is fantasy which generates desire, then the life-blood of existence - desire - would cease to be. The Woman that Lacan refers to in *God and the Jouissance of The Woman* (in eds. Mitchell & Rose, 1982) is not a 'real' woman but an imaginary woman, and there is, he is at pains to point out, no universal woman, no essence of woman (and by implication - there is no biological or anatomical status of woman). Counter theories to the Lacanian notion of the Phallus and sexual difference, that evoke a deep-seated

⁸¹ See footnote 37 above.

experiential difference of women which is based on anatomical difference, fail to account for the currency of the notion of universal 'Woman' which underpins the imaginary of gender relations in contemporary Western culture. This is not to say that the imaginary universal 'Woman' does not impact 'real' women in culture - she does.

Alice Jardine,⁸² Luce Irigaray⁸³ have, for example, critiqued the way in which Lacan makes use of the term feminine *jouissance*, which suggests to them that he is perpetuating the very myth of the universal Woman as other, which his article and work seek to dissolve. I would here, contend, however, that the notion of the other, as 'supposed to know', is also in play within the language of Lacan's text. When he writes that women cannot know of their feminine *jouissance*:

There is a *jouissance* proper to her, to this 'her' which does not exist and which signifies nothing. There is a *jouissance* proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it - that much she does know. She knows it of course when it happens. It does not happen to all of them. (eds. Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 145)

Lacan asks but is not told - but he 'knows' that he himself is subject to it through his own writing. Is it possible that the subject 'supposed to know' is being invoked here? The imaginary game of the other that knows is surely present within this text. The game is carried on in *A Love Letter* where Lacan is at pains to begin his lecture with the statement 'What analytic discourse brings out is precisely the idea that this meaning is mere semblance' (ibid.:150). Like a Zen master, Lacan admonishes his reader that analytic discourse cannot know the ultimate

⁸² Alice Jardine does so in 'Crises in Legitimation: Crossing the Great Voids' in *Gynesis* (1985).

⁸³ Irigaray does so in several texts: 'Cosi Fan Tutti' and 'Psychoanalytic Theory: Another Look' in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), and in 'The Blind Spot of the old dream of Symmetry' in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). Irigaray does however retain a psychoanalytic approach to her work on femininity; although she is careful not to reiterate some of what she considers to be Lacan's 'blind-spots' about femininity.

unknowability of human existence; the mystery of feminine *jouissance*, like a latter day Eleusinian mystery, is part of this - it cannot belong to the register of words or analytic discourse. If this *jouissance* became knowable or speakable or explainable then it would lose its powerful mystique.

I follow Jacqueline Rose in believing that what Lacan seems to be doing here is to make manifest the operation of the role of the (big) Other within feminine *jouissance*.⁸⁴ Woman cannot be anything but other here as we are dealing with Lacan's imaginary through which the *jouissance* of his language comes:

Ultimately, the question is to know, in whatever it is that constitutes feminine *jouissance* where it is not all taken up by the man - and I would even say that feminine *jouissance* as such is not taken up by him at all - the question is to know where her knowledge is at. (ibid.: 158)

This places the Woman in the place of the Other which is why in *God and the Jouissance of The Woman*, in my reading of Seminaire XX, Lacan says he has asked so many female psychoanalysts about feminine *jouissance* but they cannot tell. The two lectures cited above, then, are working through a series of registers, but primarily through the imaginary, and should not be taken as analytic statements; instead they put into the scene the role of The Woman as Other in the Lacanian imaginary.

As Malcolm Bowie says in his explanatory response to the Seminaire:

For women and for men, 'woman' is an endless sequence of projections and fabrications. What is feminine sexuality, then, if there is no Woman, no

⁸⁴ Rose admonishes the reader to 'Remember that for Lacan there can be no such guarantee - there is no 'Other of the Other' ... His rejection of the category 'Woman', therefore, belonged to his assault on any unqualified belief in the Other as such: "This ~~The~~ [of the Woman] crossed through...relates to the signifier O when it is crossed through (Ø)..." (Rose's Introduction II in eds. Mitchell and Rose, 1982: 50-1) 'The Other crossed through (Ø) stands against this knowledge as the place of division where meaning falters, where it slips and shifts' (ibid.: 51).

eternal femininity, to enshrine it? At the most primitive level of phantasy, the proliferating puns tell us, it is to be found in not having a penis, in not being 'all there'. But this minus is also a plus, for not having the small all that defines the 'phallic function' means having access to that greater all which is undulating and overspilling diversity, the joy and frenzy of unstoppable change. (Bowie, 1991: 151)

Bowie is very close to the anatomical here (in particular 'undulating' sounds very corporeal) but what is indicated here is the mapping of anatomical explanations of sexual difference and the fantasmatic productions of the imaginary. The main point is that sexual difference operates at the level of the imaginary which also conceives of difference through the experience of *jouissance*. If this is the case then the problem, cited by Alice Jardine,⁸⁵ Kaja Silverman⁸⁶ and Luce Irigaray⁸⁷ amongst others, is that Lacan seems to be buying into the same myth (of Woman) that he is trying to reveal as a myth, then there is an element of truth in this. Yet, this trope is used within these two lectures to demonstrate the imaginary function of Woman as (big) Other.

To cite Bowie once again:

Jouissance of the kind Lacan chooses to call feminine is to be found in the sinews, in thinking, in writing - where ever *signifiance*, the combined production of meaning and pleasure, occurs. Enjoying oneself and not knowing anything about it is 'feminine' in a way, but this does not mean that men are debarred by their gender from reaching such states. (ibid: 153)

Lacan's writing is then a site of feminine *jouissance* (as he himself says in the first lecture) and is a product of the complex matrix of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real overtly at work in the writing. In this sense feminine *jouissance* (as manifest through the poetic multiplicities, puns, and enigmas of these texts) would,

⁸⁵ Alice Jardine, 'Crises of Legitimation' in *Gynesis* (1985).

⁸⁶ Kaja Silverman 'The Lacanian Phallus' (in *differences*, 'The Phallus Issue', Spring, 1992).

⁸⁷ Luce Irigaray 'Cosi Fan Tutti' (in Irigaray, 1985a).

it seems, be the goal of psychoanalysis, acting as the restorative against the revelation of the absence of a sexual relation.

As a feminist, my critique of Lacan is less to do with the way he 'treats' women within his topology; it does seem that this is a description and demonstration of the role of Woman in the imaginary. Instead, it is to do with the formulation of desire as produced through the lack (or the lack of the lack).⁸⁸ My analysis of Explicit Sex films in forthcoming chapters will primarily make use of the Lacanian model of desire based on lack, as it does provide a useful means of addressing the sexual economies that are at work in these films.

⁸⁸ Despite Lacan's protestations that his 'topology' is not a system of thought it nevertheless remains that 'systems' of thought are the means by which dominant paradigms can be tested out and 'played' with: systems (signification, literary, filmic, philosophical) operate as creative parameters within/without which to work. They provide (imaginary) boundaries to bounce off, transgress, invert (as noted earlier in the chapter, the taxonomy of sexuality devised by sexology inadvertently gave rise to 'sites for occupation').

Conclusion

I have attempted to align what I consider to be the useful aspects of Foucault's genealogical method with Lacanian psychoanalytic readings of sexuality as the product of the 'putting into scene' of desire. The strength of this allegiance is that it allows desire and discourse to be seen as coincident. My argument here is that discourse, as a kind of fantasy, puts into scene desire: discourse then is the structuring *mise-en-scene* of desire (but fantasy has no simple relation to discourse and representation). The genealogical method stresses the historical and cultural rendering or channelling of desire. This can only come about if a notion of disavowal and repression is retained: this must be the result of the channelling of desire into hegemonic forms of adult sexuality. Yet, as Foucault argues, discourse is always heterogeneous and creative, which means that it is always in a process of competition and change. Explicit Sex films are products of discourse and, against the view of many of the critiques of pornography, I will argue that they are subject to contradictions and ambiguities which are produced through the traces of repressed unconscious desires and fantasies that have been sublimated and disavowed by dominant discourse. As we shall see, traces of infantile sexuality, sublimated through the socialisation process, are present in these films. Without these traces the films would fail to engage viewers. These are not however, necessarily fantasies of 'plenitude', but may be produced by anxieties around sexual and gender identity.

Rather than broaching the 'impasse' of the active/passive spectator binary, I will instead open up the ways in which these films work to pose 'fetishistic' questions that can be addressed by a spectator in different ways; in this sense desire is configured as 'productive'. The analysis of Explicit Sex films must, I contend, take into account the Lacanian notion of desire and unconscious fantasy in order to offer an explanation of how these films pose enigmas for the spectator. In so doing

I aim not to reduce sexuality to either a physiological base or to skirt the difficult issue of sexuality as Other. But this model of desire has crucial implications for women as either the subject or object of the gaze. The Lacanian model places 'The Woman' of the imaginary into the equation. This configuration of femininity as a non-sex may well be at work in the films, but I will also propose that this is by no means the only imaginary economy at work in these films. It is the contention of this thesis that the analysis of Explicit Sex films must look for signs of heterogeneity within its frames and that heterogeneity is at work at multiple levels in the films. My concern is not to buy into the male gaze *prima facie*; but instead to look beyond it to the diverse economies of sexuality that are at work in 'the' gaze. 'The' seems rather a misnomer here as the logic of my argument is that identity (gender or sexual) is never quite stable as it is subject to both the vicissitudes of the unconscious and at risk of falling between competing discourses. What I am seeking to do, in a sense, is to queer the reading of Explicit Sex films, by proposing that a complex matrix of discourse, desire, fantasy and pleasure are at work in the reception of these films which is in excess of the conventional readings of these films as solely a 'mechanism of patriarchy'.

It could be argued that Explicit Sex films work to fix sexual identities within certain limited channels of expression, but what this view does not acknowledge is that these films can be 'surfed' for contradictions, anomalies which are inherent within the heterosexual discourses on which they lean, and that spectatorship is subject to unconscious desire. The alignment of discourse analysis to psychoanalysis offers a methodology by which the impasses, contradictions and competing economies in Explicit Sex films can be broached. As Queer theory has taught, re-readings of mainstream texts may help to destabilise the currency or cultural capital of these texts and bring out the implicit, repressed or disavowed content that is latent in these texts and which is crucial for their transgressive 'frisson'.

Chapter One: *Conclusion*

I will take up the enigma posed by sexuality in the next chapter where I will examine the structuring and function of 'authenticity' within Explicit Sex films and I will be asking what the theories I have outlined above can tell us about the readership of these films.

Chapter Two

Authenticity, Performativity and The Function of the Fetish

Introduction: Authenticity as Practice

Although the concept of 'authentic' sex is often discursively constructed as the binary opposite of fantasy and marked performativity, in this chapter I will argue that the depiction of 'authentic' sex in Explicit Sex films is knotted into signification practices, desire, fantasy and fetishism. Through a broadly Lacanian approach, I will examine the semiotic and technological encoding of 'authentic' sex in these films as a kind of performance. I will show that although these films purport to depict authentic sexual acts there is nevertheless always a question mark placed over the 'authenticity' of the sexual acts for the users of these film, and that this is instrumental in the mobilisation of desire and fantasy. The films that will be discussed here are *Punky Girls* (Ger. [no credits]), *Viol au Telephone* (Fra. dir. Michel Ricaud) and *Lust-Poker* (Ger. produced by Carol Lynn and dir. Harry S. Morgan).

The Explicit Sex film industry often asserts that the depiction of 'authentic' sex is the key difference between its products and those of other genres, such as Softcore and Art House films. The films analysed in this chapter are all released on VHS video format. *Punky Girls* is shot using a camcorder and many of the others use semi-professional video formats such as Super VHS. Like most Explicit Sex films made since the beginning of the 1980s, these films do not use celluloid but instead make use of the ways in which video technology, against celluloid formats, has come to signify the audio/visual capture of a 'real' event. These films encode 'authentic' sex in different ways; but all of these films use the specific attributes of video technology to enhance the sense that the viewer is seeing 'authentic sex'. The use of video technology to signify 'authenticity' adds to the depiction of vaginal, oral and anal penetration, erect penises and the 'come-shot' which Linda Williams (1990) and Pasi

Falk (1993) see as solely signifying 'authentic' sex. Penetration and the come-shot¹ do, to a degree, work to guarantee that the sex in the film is 'authentic'; however the stylised acting and the formulaic structure of the films can often work to undermine the sense that the user is seeing an 'authentic' sexual encounter. The orchestratedness of the sex scenes, designed to give the camera access to the machinations of penetration, often disrupts the sense that the user is watching a spontaneous sexual encounter. Many films deal with this by thematising the camera as intrinsic to a given scene. This occurs in, for example, *Viol du Telephone* which opens with auditions for a porn film and includes a camera and monitor in the frame. I will discuss the specific use and implications of the camera within sex scenes in more detail later in relation to *Punky Girls*. The point here is that the 'authenticity' of the sex in these films is open to question because of the formulaic choreography of sex scenes and the overt presence of the camera or a diegetic spectator. Despite the ways in which the films sell themselves as depicting 'authentic'² sexual acts, through the depiction of penetration and the come-shot and the use of video technology to signify the capture of a 'real' event, it is however the case that there is always a certain indeterminacy about the authentic status of the sex in these films. This is often ignored within recent critical works on the genre. What is needed is an analysis of why authentic sex is centralised by recent Explicit Sex films as a key generic differential signifier and an exploration of the effect of the indeterminacy of the status of the sex. This chapter will demonstrate the following points: a) video technology does not transparently capture authentic sex but instead acts *as if* it does; b) video format is instrumental to the construction of the contemporary encoding of authentic sex; c) that the films often undermine their own claim to authenticity through their formal and textual strategies, for example, when the camera plays a performative role in these films, and d) that the indeterminate status created by the tension between authenticity and performativity

¹ Pasi Falk (1994) and Linda Williams (1990) both argue that the 'come-shot' guarantees the 'authenticity' of the sex in these films.

² As it has now been established that authenticity is an extremely problematic term I will from now on drop the convention of single quotations. This will also apply to the term 'real'.

elicits user engagement with the films through the mechanisms of disavowal and fetishism to mobilise unconscious fantasy and desire.

At a theoretical level, very few analyses of the genre critique the proposition that sex itself is a stable 'real' that can be transparently and simply re-presented.³ Alongside the analysis of the ways in which video technology constructs, but also disrupts, the signification of authentic sex, the psychoanalytic premise that sexuality is a complex and slippery enactment of discursive signs and desire will be used. This chapter will interrogate the notion that authentic sex is performatively rendered through a certain currency engendered by technology. I will argue that this technological performance operates for the user as a fetish or *objet a* to engender fantasy, pleasure and desire.

Recent critics⁴ who unproblematically centralise the authentic sex act as a transparent event often minimise the ambiguities and ambivalences produced by different kinds of performance at work in these films.⁵ By focusing on the authentic status of the sex in these films, these readings tend to discount both the overt and the implicit role of performance, which is I propose, entangled with the creation of the meaning of authentic sex. Performance, as artifice, is often construed, both in theory and in

³ In 'Sweet Sorrows, Painful Pleasures' (eds. Segal and McIntosh, 1992) Lynne Segal argues 'Through pornography real women can be avoided, male anxiety soothed, and delusions of phallic prowess indulged, by intimations of the rock-hard, larger than life male organ' (ibid.: 70). Segal's main point is that pornography is predominantly a male fantasy, but she does not address the distinctions between the different forms of pornography and the possibility of seeing these films as engaging fantasy and desire in a less gender specific way. Although Segal stresses the importance of locating pornography in its social context, my concern in this chapter is with the meanings produced by the recent shift to camcorder production of Explicit Sex films. It is because of this that the issue of the relationship of encoded authenticity to fantasy is more pressing than with previous forms of pornography.

⁴ I am here referring to two types of centralising the authentic sex act in the analysis of pornography. First, Pasi Falk's reading of pornography in 'The Representation of Presence' (Falk, 1994) in which he argues that the success and obscenity of pornography is dependent on the its use of 'indexical' signs inherent in the photographic image (ibid.: 201-207). Second, feminist and cultural critics of pornography that either overtly argue (for example Andrea Dworkin, 1981) or implicitly argue that pornography mis-represents female sexuality (for example: 'Is the Gaze Feminist?' Maggie Humm in eds. Day and Bloom, 1988).

⁵ As Mary McIntosh states in her conclusion to the paper 'Liberalism and the contradictions of sexual politics', '...far from being the socially approved blueprint for sexual behaviour, pornography is the repository of all the unacceptable and repressed desire of men..' (eds Segal and McIntosh, 1992 :167). Whilst I would agree on the broad point McIntosh makes here, I would however question whether it is just men who site recalcitrant fantasies in these texts?

modernist aesthetics, as simply the binary opposition to authenticity, as something that is playfully and artfully worked at, and conventionally flies in the face of the natural and the authentic. I would instead argue, and this is central to the thesis of this chapter, that what is deemed authentic or natural is itself a form of masquerade and thus is best configured as a performance which operates through formal, textual and interpretative strategies. My argument that authentic sex is performatively produced is exemplified by Judith Butler's work on sex and gender, and this alignment will prove important in the analysis of the relationship between technology and the construction of sex in the range of films focused upon in this chapter.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that sex and gender norms are dependent on a reiterative performance. Sex and gender norms are directly experienced as being specific (belonging) to the individual; however this nevertheless a disguised reiterative process and has no original or naturalised basis. Anyone that does not reproduce these norms would produce an 'unintelligible' body that does not fit the social mould. This is how hegemonic gender and sex 'norms' reproduce themselves through different superficial outer guises. Any elements that are 'wrongly' configured (for example, women who do not enact conventional signs of femininity) produce an experience of alienation, and pressure is brought to bear on that individual to en-act or perform 'properly' (or authentically).

In a psychoanalytic annotation of Butler's argument, alienation, in the Lacanian model, is produced through a series of psychological splits which are inevitable in the process of the social sexing and gendering of the subject. The experience of alienation is symptomatic of a failed reiterative performance but also acts as constitutive of the subject through the sex and gender matrix. As such, the alienating mismatches produced in subject formation may then be seen as a potential means of highlighting the contradictions of a given discursive system; however, these are always configured through the norm. The depiction of sex encoded as authentic works to guarantee the sex and gender matrix as 'natural', anchors sex and gender slippage and prevents the

experience of alienation, and in this sense the depiction of authentic sex can be seen as performing an apparently benign 'self-policing' function. In this sense authenticity and performance are not oppositional, as they purport to be, but, instead, are very much part of the same system. The discursive difference between the two is strategically deployed because some aspects of sexual desire do not conform to ready-made 'intelligible' categories of sex and gender. The personal experience of alienation acts as a defence mechanism that seeks to prevent the dissolution of the subject as defined by a given social apparatus. As a result of this channelling, there remains a residue of desire that exceeds the 'clean and proper', gendered body. This means that there is always the potential for some kind of disruptive excess circulating in a given system. I would argue that this excess inhabits the contradiction between the depiction of authentic sex in Explicit Sex films and the elements of the films which signify an orchestrated performance, for example, the formulaic structure of the films, the stilted acting styles and the choreographed sexual scenes designed for maximum camera access. This complex dialectical process is then key to the diverse types of performances within Explicit Sex films and in the infrastructure of the viewing process.

A key contention of my study is that the analyses that centralise authenticity, in the sense of a transparent truth, often implicitly mis-recognise desire, and, therefore, the gaze, as fixed and unified. My counter-supposition is that authenticity is performative, and this model allows a more fluid formulation of these processes, but only if the sex and gender matrix is recognised as an illusory, fictive narrative that has no one-to-one correspondence. The effect of the centralisation of the authentic sexual relation implicitly manages a hegemonic privileging of the authentic as a fixed base - something against which a culture can measure the 'truth' of a represented event. In this configuration, the authentic is central to the signifying system, operating as a core or degree zero around which other signifiers are given meaning.⁶ In Explicit Sex films

⁶ This prompts the question - is the authentic then inherent to meaning systems?

this means that the authenticity of the sex depicted is constructed through the generic difference from the sex depicted in Softcore, Hollywood and Art House films. The authentic encoding of the sex in Explicit Sex films is often supported by an invocation of bodily physiology, wherein certain signifiers acquire an indexical relation to authentic pleasure status (the erect penis⁷ and the female voice⁸ have been argued to operate in this way). In this sense the authentic sex act is discursively constructed as outside of discourse and located within the body that is taken to be extra-discursive. Through the conflation of authenticity and the fixed, 'natural' body, the gaze, desire and the subject are given anchorage. Whilst this works to stabilise signification systems, and a certain stability is necessary for communication and scientific verification to occur, it also works to produce a stultifying stasis - a re-production or reiteration - which grounds interpretative strategies (sex, gender and more) to 'safe' and recognisable, well-trodden pathways. This may go some way towards explaining why Explicit Sex films have a formulaic structure. The standard means of presenting a sex scene typified by, for example, *Lust-Poker* (but which is present in most films) is that the scene which begins with oral sex and then proceeds to vaginal and/or anal coitus in a variety of positions. This same scenario will, in most films, occur several times with some small gaps for dialogue or some form of embryonic plot in the space between scenes. Even in films that use elements of S-M or involve a more complex plot, for instance, *Viol au Telephone*, nevertheless conform to this simple structure. Given the reiterative textual strategies of these films, in what ways are the sexual acts constructed as indeterminate? This construction I maintain is crucial for the solicitation of desire and fantasy.

In most critical works on the genre the presentation of authentic sex is seen as a simple case of a camera filming a 'real' sexual event. The problem with this approach is that there is an implicit denial of the ambivalence and contestability of these

⁷ Pasi Falk (1990, 1994) in particular focuses on the indexical function of the erect penis.

⁸ Kaja Silverman's work on the fantasy of the maternal voice in *The Acoustic Mirror* seems relevant here (Silverman, 1988).

depictions. Authenticity is disrupted by the overt presence of the camera in some films - as in, for example, the exaggerated acting, the lack of continuity editing, and the orchestrated choreography of the sex scenes. What is important here is that these elements contribute to the indeterminate status of the sex, and this I would argue poses the user of the film with a question about the status of the sex in a given film. The dramatic tension and the hermeneutic code are in operation, not through the plot structure, but instead through this question mark over the authenticity of the sex. It is not the specific content of the question that is of primary importance here but rather the operation of the question per se. It is then the praxis of the question itself that mobilises the spectator's desire and also interpellates and engages the user with the film. This ties into the psychoanalytic notion that sex is always posed to the subject as an enigma and that the enigma of sex gives rise to unconscious fantasies that seek to fill the gap in knowledge.⁹ The unconscious fantasies that arise from the child's questions about sex helps to explain the multiform differences of sexuality in a given culture. The question posed by the user to the text about the authenticity of the sex on the screen, leans upon the enigma of sex posed to the uncomprehending child.

The authentic is conventionally located as an incontrovertible given, and through its apparently extra-discursive status it is protected from slippage. By encoding a body or act as authentic it performs *as if* it were perfectly transparent. It is however important to note that, although this authentic status functions *as if* it is outside the symbolic order, it is, nevertheless, a part of it, and, as Lacanian theory suggests, the symbolic order is itself the site of slippage.¹⁰ Butler, I would suggest, does not fully exploit the threat produced through desire to the established sex and gender matrix. Desire inhabits and disrupts the symbolic through paradigmatic, metonymic and metaphoric slippages, but also the symbolic disrupts demand - the gap between the demand of the sex and gender matrix and the subject's failure to reciprocate this

⁹ I am here referring to Laplanche's work on sex as the 'enigmatic signifier' (Laplanche, 1989: 126-130).

¹⁰ I am here specifically referring to D.S. Aoki's (1995) article which counters the reading of the Lacanian symbolic as fixed and I am referring to Lacan in more general way.

demand - which leads to desire and fantasy. The authentic may then be said to operate, not as immanent, but instead as a fetish or *objet a*; an enigma which keeps desire in circulation and promotes primary (unconscious) and secondary (conscious) fantasy. It is also important to note that in Lacanian terms that which is encoded as authentic is never the Real. In Lacanian terms the Real signifies that which cannot be symbolised or that which resists symbolisation. The Lacanian Real is inert; its boundless magnitude can be never reduced to the confines of language or representation. The authentic then does not operate in the register of the Real, as it is the product (or symptom) of both symbolic and imaginary registers, but it attempts to function *as if* it were the Real - as a primary signifier.¹¹ Authenticity may ostensibly look as if it grounds meaning and erases the volatile slippage of language and representation: but my argument here is that the authentic is not a thing but instead is a praxis or performance that operates as a question that disrupts language and representation. As such the question posed by the representation of 'authentic sex' is bound up with fantasy and desire that inflects both symbolic and imaginary registers. The authentic, as praxis and culturally embedded, can never be fixed, is always contested and as such it must continually strive to locate itself outside the symbolic order. So, rather than centralising authenticity as immanent or as an issue of misrepresentation, I will instead focus on the multiple functions of a performative authenticity and the question it poses for the subject. The aim here is to reconfigure authenticity as a fetish, which is tied into the enigmatic function of the *objet a*; desire invested in the gaze then is bound into this enigmatic function, and by taking this approach to the gaze it then becomes possible to problematise the conventional notion that the gaze is fixed and unified.

A fair question that might be levelled at this view of authenticity is this - if authenticity works to guarantee dominant and oppressive discourses of sexuality why not then cast

¹¹ Although in Lacanian terms there is also an element of any object or experience that can be designated as the Real.

it aside in favour of more propitious frameworks? The reason such a casting aside is injudicious, is that the authentic certainly seems to be significant in the constitution of the subject. It has, I would argue, two distinctive functions: a) to act, in Lacan's terminology, as a 'point de capiton',¹² working to button or quilt the subject together which prevents the subject from going into the free-fall of psychosis, and b) to use Laplanche's term, authenticity operates as an 'enigmatic signifier'¹³ - which is posed, as some kind of question, for example, 'what is real sex?' Laplanche argues that this question (in whatever form it may take) agitates desire, promotes fantasy. It can then be argued that this question is key to understanding the way in which the user becomes engaged with a given film. Authenticity in both these senses is performative and is knotted into the registers of the symbolic, imaginary and, in a sense, the Real - this knotting means that the function of the authentic cannot, therefore, be lightly dismissed.

Judith Butler asserts that performativity is the mode through which the established sex and gender matrix replicates itself. She argues that gender norms are perpetuated because each person must perform the signifiers that connote that gender or they incur the pain of alienation. Whilst this is a useful notion, and the performative reiteration of gender and sexuality are useful for thinking about Explicit Sex films, it is also important to hold onto the idea that performance can show gender as reified.¹⁴

¹² Lacan's term 'point de capiton' is often translated as a 'quilting point' or 'anchoring point'. In *Ecrits* he explains the function of the 'point de capiton' in the elementary cell of his graph of desire: 'In it is articulated what I have called the "anchoring point" (point de capiton), by which the signifier stops the otherwise endless chain of movement (glissement) of the signification' (Lacan, 1977: 303). Žižek (1989) uses the term 'buttoning' to express the meaning of the term.

¹³ Jean Laplanche's concept of the enigmatic signifier has become central to his reappraisal of Freud's theory of seduction and is outlined in *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (Laplanche, 1989: 126-130).

¹⁴ Butler suggests this in the discussion of drag in the introduction of *Gender Trouble* (1990); but later she comes to view this as problematic. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), she argues that all gender is a performance. In whatever outward guise this performance takes it nevertheless reiterates a core 'norm'. Here she moves away from her previous view that drag, for example, mis-aligns gender conventions and thereby can de-naturalise gender conventions. This is still a possible means of social critique but through a more complex view of the way discourse works she addresses the ways that shifts in the currency of the gender norm work as a form of reiteration. This notion will prove important to this chapter.

Performance can, as Butler suggests in *Gender Trouble*,¹⁵ be used under certain circumstances to sever the points through which the system (and the 'properly' interpellated subject) anchors itself; for example, by undermining the guarantees proffered by the mobilisation of physiological point zeroes or 'common-sense'. Sex and gender, as performative reiterations, shows how the social/subject system operates at a social and psychological level without recourse to a grounding conservative reification. For both aesthetics and gender politics, the way in which to subvert the system of the 'properly' sexed and gendered body is to foreground the performative reiteration process. With respect to the gaze and desire, performance can be used to problematise and disrupt the notion that they are 'straight-forwardly' aligned to the sex and gender matrix. It is desire, and desire invested in the gaze, that can help to circumvent an unnecessarily (and dangerous) deterministic and historicist approach to Explicit Sex films and issues of readership of these films.

In applying the idea that sexuality, gender and the subject are neither unified nor stable to the Explicit Sex film, I am acknowledging, in a way that Butler does not seem to fully explore, the radical and recalcitrant operation of sex and desire and its relation to both authenticity and performativity. This partly provides the reason why this chapter does not take performativity and authenticity as simply discrete entities. In the early drafts of this chapter I intended to separate them, following the modernist oppositional usage which separates the performative from the authentic, but I found that the two kept (infuriatingly) enfolding onto one another. As a result the strategic function of the chapter is to show how the authentic is in fact performative and therefore open to technological and historical variations, and to show the relationship of multiform desire to authenticity and to its technological rendering. Further, this strategy helps counter

¹⁵ The proposition Butler makes in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that '...gender practices within gay and lesbian cultures often thematize "the natural" in parodic contexts that bring into relief the performative construction of an original and true sex' (Butler, 1990: viii) is rejected in her later book *Bodies That Matter* (1993); here she argues that 'Performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (Butler, 1993: 12).

historicist, 'docile bodies', reading strategies of these films wherein there is an excessively simple 'reduction of society to its indwelling network of power and knowledge' (Copjec, 1994: 6). Within the historicist frame, pornographic films have mainly been seen as the product of a highly organised and unified male heterosexual desire and fantasy (thereby, perhaps, perpetuating and strengthening this conservative narrative). This assumes that male desire is 'straight-forward', but as Dyer (1992) recommends, the interpellation of the subject as male/man/masculine is never straight-forward and involves a constant vigilance against recalcitrant 'unintelligible' desire.¹⁶ To see the (feminine or masculine) subject as successfully and unproblematically interpellated into the sex and gender matrix is, I would argue, oversimplistic. The problem with this conceptual framework is that it functions to fore-close radical readings of ambivalences and ambiguities as it homogenises the gaze, desire, sexuality and the subject, and therefore blocks the possibilities of re-readings and counter-readings. It further cannot deal with the difficulties posed by sex and gender interpellation. I do not then want to take 'male heterosexual fantasy' as an unproblematised given¹⁷ as it is important for any feminist or queer project not to take 'male heterosexual' desire and fantasy at surface value.

So rather than embarking on a polemic which demonstrates that the sex in Explicit Sex films is an in-authentic representation, the aim of the chapter is to demonstrate the recursive relationship between performance and authenticity and the implications of this indeterminacy for the user as a fetishistic question. This will provide an alternative or counter discourse to the current analyses of the genre of Explicit Sex films.

¹⁶ I will take this idea up again in Chapter Four, with reference to the homosocial bond which I will argue is key to the presentation of group sex in these films.

¹⁷ As is suggested by, for example, Dworkin (1980), Griffin (1980), Segal (1992) and McIntosh (1992).

Chapter Two: *Technology and the Encoding of Authentic Sex*

“Now you can enjoy *genuine*¹⁸, erotic, uncensored adult entertainment at a remarkable price you can afford.” (*Choices Direct*)

“Q. Are your titles ‘the real thing’?”

A. Yes, the action in all our videos is completely uncensored and as described in the brief for each title...” (*Choices Direct*¹⁹)

Technology and the Encoding of Authentic Sex

The citations from the *Choices Direct* catalogue above signal to the prospective purchaser that the films depict acts of ‘real’ sex rather than simulated sex. They further demonstrate the expectation that authentic sex acts will be the main focus of the film, rather than a story of inter-personal relationships (as in Romance genres where sex, which is often thwarted and deferred, is the goal rather than the substance of the text). Explicit Sex films create their generic and market differentials by making sexual acts the primary focus of attention, and by encoding the sex as in some way ‘authentic’, as opposed to the simulated and idealistic representations of sexual acts depicted in softcore films (*Emmanuelle*, 1974), art house films (*Betty Blue*, 1986, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1987, *Henry and June*, 1990, *Ai No Corrida*, 1976), and Hollywood erotic films (*Nine and a Half Weeks*, 1985, *Wild Orchid*, 1990 and *Wild Orchid II*, 1992).

The use of camcorder and video technology in both domestic and professional audio/visual production has, I contend, ostensibly shifted the conventional encoding of authenticity and performativity. The particularity of this shift is bound up with the contemporary use of camcorder and video technologies in the domestic environment. The impact of this technological shift on the meanings of Explicit Sex films is not addressed by Williams (1990) nor Falk’s (1994) analyses of the function of

¹⁸ My italics

¹⁹ These quotations were taken from a mail-order video catalogue. There is no date printed on catalogue, but approximate date 1992/3.

authenticity and performativity. They prefer to focus on narrative feature-length celluloid sex films. I will show that the technological shift from celluloid to video-based production, alongside changes in dissemination techniques, has produced a re-articulation of the form and meanings of sex and the body in Explicit Sex films. Although these may appear to be qualitative shifts, I follow Butler²⁰ in believing these shifts to be simply changes in appearance and as such are simply quantitative. Butler (1993), following Foucault, argues that apparent shifts in the cultural articulation of concepts such as sex and gender are quantitative rather than qualitative. She argues that sex and gender are performances, but, because an individual is interpellated²¹ into acting out these norms they are taken to be specific to the individual, and therefore appear to indicate changes in the form of sex and gender. This is in fact a reiteration and replication of norms that precede the individual. I will apply this notion to technology. Technological innovations may appear to shift the articulation of the body, a given event or performance, but this is simply a change in the surface or 'outer clothing' of a paradigm and not a true paradigmatic shift. In this sense technology's quest for the 'authentic' is in fact merely a replication of an extant paradigm. The surface movement, which she calls performativity in the re-articulation of norms is how a dominant apparatus or paradigm disguises its replication. This is evident, for example, in the fact that contemporary Explicit Sex film production can be demonstrated to have 'returned' to some of the technological encodings (which equate amateurism with transparency and authenticity) produced by early sex film production.

²⁰ As I cited in footnote 15: 'Performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (Butler, 1993: 12).

²¹ Interpellation is then dependent on primary and secondary narcissism and the construction of a robust differentiated subject, which in turn involves the disavowal of the replication process. The construction of a cultural blind-spot is necessary for a norm to be replicated. This blind-spot is enabled through the technological innovation which aids and disguises the replication process.

Linda Williams (1990) documents a formal shift from the ‘stag films’ of the early cinematic period²² through to the narrative celluloid films of the late 60s and 70s.²³ She characterises the stag film as either the use of a primitive narrative or non-narrative form, often depicting a diegetic voyeur and showing genital penetration (Williams, 1990: 68). She implies that in stag films the authentic status of sex acts is rendered through an association forged between amateurism with authenticity.²⁴ This amateurism is a deliberate strategy to differentiate the films from the professional striptease: ‘The performer’s self consciousness, the smiles and the giggles that would be out of place either in a professional stripper’s act or in the next stage of this continuum, a feature length hardcore narrative, become here a form of reassurance that this show is not an act’ (ibid.:77-78).

The growth of the new video market during the 80s has prompted a flood of cheaply produced Explicit Sex videos that re-adopted the amateurism/authenticity trope used in the early stag films. I will here show how the low production values of recent video produced films have become encoded as more authentic than the devices used by celluloid feature-length sex films of the 1960s and 70s and contemporary Hollywood and TV narrative fictions.

It may be argued that Explicit Sex films have low production values because they do not have the financial resources of Hollywood or TV production companies. This may be a factor, but what is interesting is that the low production values have become a recognisable generic factor in recent video-produced Explicit Sex films. Over and above the depiction of penetration and erect penises which Williams argues constitute

²² Williams cites some of these films, which are currently held by the Kinsey Institute, such as *Am Bend* (Ger. ca. 1910), *El Satario* (Argentina, ca. 1907-1912), *The Casting Couch* (1924) (Williams, 1990: 61-2).

²³ As I have noted earlier, in *Hardcore* (1990) Williams does not broach the impact of video production on the signification systems of Explicit Sex films.

²⁴ ‘Amateurism—marking performances *in* the films as well as the technical performance *of* the film—is thus an important feature of the stag film...The hard-core sequences of the stag film are thus like a magnified and amateurized striptease in which the spectator sees more of the real sexual act as compensation for the loss of his own direct sexual relation to the performing body’ (Williams, 1990: 78).

the authentic status of the sex in these films, it is low production values used by these films that are taken to signify authenticity. I will use the film *Lust-Poker* as a typical example of the genre to demonstrate the use of low production values as intrinsic to the creation of authentic status. I will then discuss the impact of this on the presentation of authentic sex. *Lust-Poker* is a German-made film with Dutch subtitles and a simple story of a woman, played by the German porn-star Carol Lynne, who works in a gym and is disturbed by the sex she finds taking place there. She has S/M fantasies of 'punishing' members of the staff for their sexual transgression and these constitute two of the sex scenes in the film. The other scenes are composed of sex between members and staff of the gym and between Carol Lynne and her boyfriend and her female flatmate. The film ends with a shot of Carol Lynne playing poker with a man we have not seen before (perhaps the director Harry S. Morgan) and she winks at the camera to show that the film and her role in it was a fantasy.

The low production values in *Lust-Poker* can be broken down into key primary features. The video image produced by the use of semi-professional video cameras produces low-grade grainy images, which is enhanced by the copying procedure of the videos for mass distribution. This method of reproduction also affects the sound production so that the sound field is often rather indistinct. The film uses only one or two cameras and therefore utilises a simple combination of close-ups and medium shots. *Lust-Poker*, typical of the Explicit Sex film genre, uses a simple three-point lighting scheme. This lighting scheme keeps shadows to a minimum and enables visual access to most areas of the screen, which would be masked out if more complex lighting schemes were used. There is no use of dolly shots, pans or crane shots which in Hollywood narrative films facilitate the smooth mapping of the location of a given scene in the wider diegetic landscape of a film. *Lust-Poker* uses standard wipes pre-programmed into video edit machines, for example, it uses side-wipes as a means of transiting from one scene to the next. In Hollywood narrative film-making the side-wipe is rarely used, as it breaks the continuity of editing (although this technique is

often used in pop video production). The series of sexual scenes in *Lust-Poker* are set up using a simple three-step procedure beginning with an establishing shot and then switching between medium shots and close-ups. This standard sequence of shots allows the user to follow the sexual action of a given scene. The lack of a sustained narrative structure, which contrasts with Hollywood narrative films, means that it is unnecessary to give the viewer a sense of the diegetic mapping of the locations used. In *Lust-Poker* it is often difficult to tell how one location for a scene 'fits' into the landscape of the gym in which the action takes place. The film uses no outdoor locations. Other films in the genre may use outdoor locations, such *Viol au Telephone*, which sets one scene in an outdoor car disposal centre. The use of ambient miccing in *Viol au Telephone* means that there is an imbalance between the sound of exterior shots and interior shots, and the exterior shots are marked by the problems of shooting sound on set (a rushing noise which makes the dialogue quite difficult to hear). There is no cross cutting used to create a relationship between two sets of parallel actions (some films do use this technique - *Some Kind of Woman*, an American film starring Ginger Lynne, for example, uses cross-cutting to link two sets of couples and thereby temporally lengthens the orgasmic climax at the end of the scene, as well as offering more visual variety given the two different locations). In formal terms *Lust-Poker*, like most Explicit Sex films, has no sub-plots or conventional narrative structure. The film is episodically composed and (when read against Hollywood narrative films) creates a minimal thread of continuity through the film by linking the scenes through the outrage of the central character who is appalled by the frequent sexual encounters in the gym she manages. This, however, is shown to be a performance by her wink at the camera at the end of the film. The amateur status encoded by the strategies used by the film is also enhanced by the stilted acting and delivery of the dialogue.

All these features, which are common to most Explicit Sex films, are encoded as amateur only when read against the technological, textual and formal strategies used

by mainstream film and television fiction production. For amateurishness to begin to mean authentic, it must be imbued with the meanings we have come to associate with home-video production and authenticity encoded because these elements of the films are set against the slick, seamless 'hyperreal' strategies used in professional high budget film-making. By contrast, the growth of the domestic use of camcorder technology and its low-tech audio-visual production values have meant that the specific quality of the camcorder image has become associated with the home and family, the everyday and the transparent capture of a real domestic event (for example, birthdays or other special family occasions).²⁵ The encoding of authenticity, however, is not quite so straightforward as it at first seems. As we can begin to see in the *Lust-Poker* example, there are elements of the audio/visual specificities of low-tech film production that unsettles this authentic status. This is only apparent if our primary cinematic reference is to Hollywood narrative conventions. For example, the lack of a complex narrative and continuity editing, which in Hollywood facilitates the suspension of disbelief, means that the story is not read as a seamless flow because it is interrupted by, for example, inaudible dialogue, non-standard editing devices, 'bad' acting and a grainy image. As a result the production of a recording is singled out for notice. It is here that authentic status, which is itself relational and performative, tips over into inauthentic status because the foregrounding of technological performance is associated with avant-garde strategies. However, because Hollywood is not the only cinematic form we are familiar with in contemporary culture, the low-production values can be linked to another form of film-making - that of documentary and news footage. I will return to this below as this association is important to understanding why we might read Explicit Sex films as authentic, above and beyond the view that these films construct their authentic status through the depiction of penetration and erect penises.

²⁵ Explicit Sex films are made using only slightly higher grade equipment (Hi8 or Super VHS). *Punky Girls*, for instance, appears to have been made on Super VHS. Some of the other films examined in the thesis such as *Lust-Poker* may have been made on Super VHS or Hi8.

As I have said, the use of video technology in contemporary Explicit Sex films is not addressed by the otherwise useful analyses conducted by Williams and Falk. Both of these critiques concentrate on the big budget, Hollywood-ised, narrative films of the 70s.²⁶ In so doing they differentiate Explicit Sex films from other narrative films mainly through the films' inclusion of sex, which is coded as authentic because of the depiction of penetration and erect penises. In other respects, in their view, these films mirror other Hollywood modes. However, with the growth of camcorder and video technology, paralleling early cinematic stag films, the communication of authenticity is broader than merely the explicit presentation of 'fucking'. There are several problems with the lack of address of the new video formats. Primarily the problem is that the authentic status of the sex is not a simple one-to-one correspondence, but a complex rendition of authenticity as a technological and relational intertextual praxis. Both Falk and Williams fail to address this because a) they do not address the specifics of video technology and its effect on the status of authenticity, and b) they focus on authenticity purely in terms of the phallus or erect penis as functioning as the primary indexical sign which guarantees the authenticity of the sex in a given film. In the next chapter I will seek to problematise the mapping of the erect penis as an indexical sign. What is important to note here, is that by privileging the erect penis as an a sign which is taken as indexical of authenticity, these writers neglect to address the other ways in which authenticity is reiterated within the technological and textual strategies used by these films.

Performativity and authenticity then do not function in isolation - authenticity is itself performative and performativity coded as artifice is dependent on its binary relation to authenticity. The signification of authenticity and performativity, conventionally construed as the binary opposite of authenticity, is dependent on a complex intertextual interaction with other cinematic genres. Authenticity and performativity as concepts that are meaningful in contemporary culture are bound into a network of

²⁶ Such as *Beyond the Green Door*, the *Emmanuelle* series and *Deep Throat*.

meaning centred around the meta-concept of the real (this is fundamentally what is perpetuated and reiterated through the various guises of new technologies). 'Realism' as a genre and as a meaningful cultural concept gains cultural intelligibility by an ongoing and ever changing quest to capture, render and fix reality, using a procession of new technologies (promoted by the media as 'exciting' and 'innovative'). These technologies have a key role to play in a culture's understanding of what is transcribed as believable and intelligible. What is experienced as real²⁷, or taken *as if* it were real, is dependent on the arrival of new technologies that guarantee the authentic. In summary, technological developments in the means of recording events or penetrating the body (for instance, fibre-optic cameras) have ostensibly worked to shift paradigms of the real, for example from Edward Muybridge's photographic sequences through to brain-scan equipment. Further, 'new' technological apparatuses often supply metaphors for expressing and understanding the function and operation of the human body.²⁸ Here the power of the 'reality' paradigm is felt, and perpetuated, through the 'novelty' and 'newness' of the technology. For instance, to describe the brain as functioning like a telephone exchange (as was common during the 50s and 60s) would now seem excruciatingly anachronistic and inauthentic (as too might the recent understanding of the mind in terms of the computer, given a newer technological metaphor). As authenticity and performativity are indexed by the technological currency of the real, they too, are subject to shifts in metaphoric mappings that are often provided by technological innovation. This, as I have said, is a surface change and not a qualitative change in the paradigm of the real.

In order to examine the differential encoding of the authentic and performance in recent Explicit Sex films, it is of paramount importance to keep to the fore the idea that the real is not a fixed entity, but instead, is constantly being postulated and re-

²⁷ I am here using the term in its generally accepted sense, rather than the Lacanian sense - this is signalled by the use of the lower-case 'r'.

²⁸ Throughout this thesis the incidence of computer style language arise regularly for instance matrix, network, soft-wired, hard-wired.

rendered through technological articulation. It is this that keeps the paradigm of the authentic in cultural circulation. The authentic and performance, as conventionally taken as opposites, are cross-referenced to concomitant notions of the real and the artificial.²⁹ Despite some post-modernist critiques³⁰ of contemporary Western culture which suggest the real (authentic) is in decline, I contend that this binary still has core meaning in Western culture, it is perpetuated through 'blinding' technological shifts. The centrality of the binary persists because the real and the artificial are the product of a resilient epistemologically (not biologically) paradigmatic apparatus that uses shifts in technology to keep it in circulation. This 'reality' paradigm underpins scientific discourse and other discourses that need it to legitimate and guarantee their status.

The turn-over of new technologies means that the body is invested with what look like new meanings. Building on this, the format of new media technologies is intrinsically linked to the historical articulation of authenticity and performativity (as artifice), and through video technology accrue cultural currency specific to the mid 1990s. This raises the question of how these technological formulations intersect with the contemporary construction of gender, the body and sexuality in *Explicit Sex* films.

²⁹ The paradigm of the real is supported by a series of analogous binaries which are in constant cultural use, such as real/artificial and natural/artifice. These concepts are performed and therefore reiterated through technological versions or constructions of the body.

³⁰ For example, Baudrillard argues that the real has been replaced by what he loosely calls 'the code' (he is referring to DNA and digital code) which can no longer be differentiated, he says, in terms of the real and the artificial.

Technology and the Authentic Sexual Body

How do the codes of amateurism used by contemporary Explicit Sex films lend authentic status to the sex depicted in these films? To answer this question it is necessary to examine the technological inscriptions of the sexual body in these films, alongside the inter-textual relation between these films and 'actuality' footage³¹ and the ways in which we learn to distinguish between different cinematic codings.

Punky Girls uses a very simple non-narrative format which focuses the user's attention on the sexual encounter between the two protagonists. Unlike most of the other Explicit Sex films mentioned in this study, such as *Lust-Poker*, this film does not use a sequence of episodic sexual scenes, each of which are generally composed of between two and six people. By contrast, the entire seventy minutes' duration of *Punky Girls* is centred on a sexual encounter, set in a single location, between the two female protagonists.

Because *Punky Girls* does not use a series of sexual episodes, the structure of the film is extremely simple. It resembles a film that a parent, with a few minimal video skills, might produce of a child's birthday party or other domestic event. *Punky Girls* might well have been made by one person: as there is no usual script or (simple) story common to most Explicit Sex films to stitch scenes together and there is only one camera used. This is difficult to verify, though, as the film has no credits, other than the title, which was probably added on later by the distribution company. The lack of credits in this film also adds to the sense of amateurism. The simple structure of the film and the minimal use of editing and credits associates the film with what might be called raw footage, similar to that shot by the home-camcorder. *Punky Girls* could be described as primitive, and therefore coded as the most amateur of the films included in this study. This primitive status is taken further as the two central protagonists are

³¹ I am using the term 'actuality' to encompass news reportage footage, documentary formats and public 'access' formats which use domestic camcorder footage, such as *You've Been Framed* and *Video Nation*.

coded as (latter-day) punks: like punk music, which guaranteed its authentic status by its amateur approach to musicality, the film too guarantees its authentic status by ignoring many of the more refined generic rules of Explicit Sex film production.³²

Punky Girls is set in one room whose walls are hung with white and black sheets that partially disguises its more mundane function as a bedroom, lounge or hotel room. There is no bed shown in the room. That the space is not a studio can be inferred from the patterns on the walls and carpets, often accidentally revealed by a crumpled sheet, which confirm the sense that this is a domestic location. Unlike the establishing shots used to locate scenes in the gym in *Lust-Poker*, *Punky Girls* uses no long shots at all, only medium close-up and close-up shots, which also heighten the sense of an interior, domestic, space. Strewn around the floor are various sex toys, dildos of various sizes, ropes, whips and a large pot of lubricant. The absence of men, the exotic punk style of the women, and the use of mild S-M locates the film within the terminology of the industry's marketing blurb as 'specialist'. The film was made either with a single camcorder or Super VHS camera, which gives the image a rather grainy and flat appearance when read against the depth of field photography used in Hollywood. The film uses a simple editing system which could be achieved by the use of two video-tape machines linked together, designed to distribute the highlights of the sexual action throughout the film. There is no story in the Hollywood sense, other than the teasing drama which is played between the two protagonists. The dramatic tension is also constructed through the relationship of the two protagonists with the viewer.

In conjunction with the simple style of the film, the authentic status depends upon the immediacy of video camera images. In contemporary culture the video image is

³² It is interesting that at least three of the films I have looked at for this study have thematised punk in some way (*Punky Girls*, *New Wave Hookers*, *Rambone the Destroyer*- all of which were made in the late 80s and early 90s). This is the case even when these films were made at least ten to fifteen years after the first phase of punk ceased to be (post-1982). The use of punk in these films seems to be related to the ways in which punk thematised sex as a commodity and the anarchic throwing out of the 'polite' rules of middle-England. I will return to the use and meanings of punk iconography later in the chapter.

valued as being close or indexical of the event which has been recorded. We read the specific look of the video image (the grainy, flat image) to indicate the real; whereas a celluloid image, in juxtaposition with the video image, is coded as a carefully produced image and read as a fiction. This difference is due, as I have said, to the use of the video in domestic situations and the ways in which camcorder technology is used in televisual forms. As, for example, in public access television (*You've Been Framed*, *Video Nation*) which use domestic video tapes sent in by viewers. As media literate viewers, we have come to associate video format as more domestic and immediate and therefore read this image as more 'real' than other cinematic forms. This is partly because home-made videos are usually located in the everyday domestic environment. Many Explicit Sex films locate the sexual scenes in domestic bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens (for example *Cicciolina in Italy*³³). *Punky Girls* is set in a single location which could be a bedroom or a hotel room, it is not set in a studio or an exotic location (such as *L'Education d' Anna* which is set in a large French country house). The use of domestic locations links these films to the everyday world depicted by home-video. This practice is exploited by the recent 'reader's wives' phenomenon where couples make their own sex videos and send them into magazines such as *Real Wives*³⁴ who pay up to £500 for a video. The photographic spreads in this magazine also advertise videos for sale of the women having sex with their husbands. In contrast to the usual porn-star image, the magazine features 'ordinary' women of all ages and body types; the use of women whose bodies do not conform to the *Playboy* pinup image adds to the sense of authenticity, as does the 'Mrs' label that all these women are given. *Punky Girls* is in many ways similar to this (apparently) new form of Explicit Sex film production - although its use of two young punk-lesbian female protagonists differs from the heterosexual sex depicted in *Readers Wives* type films.

³³ This film is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

³⁴ See *Appendix D* for a reproduction of the cover of this magazine.

The use of the codes and conventions of home-made video (low-production and the domestic location) are deployed to enhance the sense that what the viewer is seeing is a real event which is 'simply' recorded by video. In *Punky Girls* these codings are used as key to the structure and excitement of the film as these enhance the sense that the viewer is watching a spontaneous scene, not orchestrated for the camera, and also functions to highlight the voyeuristic pleasure in watching the film. This inscribes the sexual bodies of the performers in the film as authentic. But how is it that we come to read certain types of audio/visual conventions as authentic?

This can in part be answered by referring to Hodge and Tripp's concept of 'modality' (1986: 104-131). The concept is used by Hodge and Tripp to explore the effect of television on children's behaviour. The concept of modality is deployed in order to understand how children distinguish dramatic violence from real violence. They suggest that through social interaction and watching television, children quickly come to learn a series of codes that communicate the 'reality' of an event to them. For example, a child watching a cartoon, say *Ren and Stimpy*, will use certain cues to decide whether what they are watching is 'real' or not. Some of the factors which 'weaken' modality (in other words that which is present within the audio/visual field that communicates that the representation is not 'real') are: laughter, the mode of presentation, detail of the image, style, colour, speech, music, sound effects (ibid.:109). *Ren and Stimpy*, for example, has weak modality because of the following factors: it is presented in a two-dimensional media (TV), the presentation of the characters is also two dimensional, the characters are composed of flat planes of colour and they lack naturalistic detail. Both *Ren and Stimpy*³⁵ are weird colours (and they often change colours) and bear very little resemblance to a Chihuahua or a cat. The sound effects in the text are extremely exaggerated and the frequent use of non-diegetic music also weakens the modality. Hodge and Tripp also suggest that a

³⁵ *Ren and Stimpy* often, like Tex Avery cartoons where Bugs Bunny talks to the artist or rubs out part of the screen to reveal the paper beneath, disrupts the rules of the cartoon register. However this in itself has become a signifier of the 'artificiality' of the cartoon world.

further indication of modality is the presence of credits that demonstrate the 'artificiality' of the text.

Children's TV drama, such as *Grange Hill*, has a stronger modality than cartoons and it takes a more subtle reading to recognise that these texts are 'artefacts'. This is why, therefore, they suggest only older children, who have a thorough grounding in and extensive knowledge of televisual and social codes, recognise that these texts are fictions, which Hodge and Tripp argue is crucial for the child's enjoyment of the programme. They imply that pleasure can only be derived from the text if the viewer can locate it in terms of modality. There is an interesting contradiction here in that one of the key markers of modality for Hodge and Tripp is the detailed quality of an image. As I have mentioned earlier, in the contemporary encoding of the real it is grainy, flat, low-budget images, rather than hyper-real detail, that communicates the authentic status of an image. This shift testifies to the way in which the currency of video technology has altered the mode through which a culture reality tests images and texts. I would add, however, that the presence of detail still has a place in the Explicit Sex film frame, specifically in relation to the use of the close-up, which is a primary feature of *Punky Girls* and all the other recently produced Explicit Sex films mentioned in this study.

Hodge and Tripp's paradigm usefully proposes that reality testing an image is undertaken through a series of audio and visual media conventions. Their model suggests how a viewer learns the art of suspending disbelief and how a viewer comes to regard a text as in some way authentic. Although Hodge and Tripp are using a semiotic and cognitive approach, it can nevertheless be refined through reference to psychoanalytic concepts. The process of knowing how to read authenticity implies a series of fetishistic disavowals, necessary for the suspension of disbelief, that must stand if we are to enjoy the text. Markers of modality are a way of tabulating the kinds of things we might take into account when differentiating between different kinds of texts. If the 'markers of modality' paradigm is applied to *Punky Girls*, it will

be possible to see how the text situates its authentic status through the codes it uses. By drawing on the audio/visual codes current within television, cinema, and other media, the status of the text is indexed by cross-referencing along the horizontal axis of authenticity and the vertical axis of artifice. I will focus here on lighting, editing and aspects of the cinematography, in particular, the close-up and sound used in *Punky Girls* to show how the film is taken to signify authentic sex.

The lighting used in *Punky Girls* lacks the subtle body-shaping effect that is conventionally used in Hollywood to light 'stars'. It is functionally bright so that the video camera can pick up bodily details, the use of a three-point lighting scheme means that no deep shadows are cast. The lighting here is not meant to create 'atmosphere' and does not use gels or coloured filters to 'bland' out bodily blemishes (for example, the imprint of clothing, spots, bruises, stretch marks). The lighting, then, is not supposed to be overtly 'read' by the viewer; the lighting is not, as in for instance, film noir or Melodrama, designed to be seen as intrinsic to the meaning production of the text. However, the unobtrusive mode of lighting, in drawing its technique from documentary footage, helps to communicate to the viewer that what they are watching is authentic. There is though an absence of a 'natural' light source - there are no windows or changes in the light that would be expected of a naturalistic scene lit by a diegetic window. The effect of the lighting is to give a uniform light that does not draw the spectator's attention, yet still contributes to the communication of an 'authentic' scene. *Punky Girls* uses no direct light source for illuminating the more inaccessible areas of the body. There is no direct spotlight on the genitals, as in *Dr. Butts II* (which makes use of a diegetic medical torch to illuminate genital orifices); however, the lighting scheme is bright enough to illuminate these areas so details of the subtle changes in the body can be seen in close-up shots.

Within the terms of Hodge and Tripp's modality paradigm, the lighting used in *Punky Girls* constitutes strong modality, but not as strong as would be the case if the light source came from a window or from a central light source such as household lighting.

The lighting scheme works to aid the authentic status of the scene. If this scene were lit like, for instance, Fassbinder's *Querelle* (1982, Ger.) which uses green and red gels it would work to encode the scene as fantasy. As it stands, the simple lighting scheme helps to naturalise the scene.

The camera techniques used in *Punky Girls* are coded in a far more ambiguous way than the lighting and it is here that we can see how the authenticity of the scene is rather unsettled. There is apparently only one video camera in use in the film, and it is a very mobile hand-held camera that often encircles the women and uses stepped zooms to focus on body parts. The stepped zooms differ from the use of smooth transitions to close up used in most Hollywood films and this works to make the user aware of the camera as a prosthetic device. This, I would argue, spot-lights and enhances the user's voyeuristic participation in the film. There is no comfortable disavowal of voyeurism here - it is, to use a colloquial term, 'in your face', and this can be construed as offering a transgressive frisson to the text. But the movement of the camera is associated with amateurism, and can thus be argued to further the sense of authenticity. This leads to the sense that what is being watched is an event which is being filmed, rather than an event constructed specifically for the camera.

One of the typical cinematic techniques of the genre of Explicit Sex films that is in use in this film is the close-up. The term 'explicit' suggests that the close-up is central to the genre. Bordwell states that 'Close-ups can bring out textures and details we might otherwise ignore' (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 120/1). The opening shot of *Punky Girls* is an extreme close-up of a woman's shaved cunt with a very large pink dildo in it. Close-ups of female genitalia are never present in Hollywood movies, art-house or softcore films and this first shot plunges the spectator straight into the hardcore construction of sexuality. There is no strip-tease here, which is a staple convention of softcore films. The generic differential of Explicit Sex films is to show what we do not normally see and the genital close-up acts as a primary signifier of the genre. The close-up allows the spectator visual access to parts of the body absent in

other genres, and the genre sells itself on allowing the spectator a view of that which is ordinarily hidden from the gaze. This certainly adds to the authentic status of the film, but it is not the only convention that does so. The close-up then is a technological means of showing that which is ordinarily invisible from visual culture.

The close-ups of the women's genitals in *Punky Girls* focuses the user on the detail of the women's genitals. Close-ups of the women's genitals fill the screen at moments throughout the film and trace their changing form. The close-up allows the viewer enough detail to show how the genitals change their form given the state of arousal, and the size and action of a penetrative object (hand, dildo etc.). I find the use of close-ups particularly fascinating as they chart a bodily landscape that is rarely seen in contemporary visual cultures. Women's genital portraiture is usually only the domain of cross-sectional diagrams in biology texts. A few feminist photographers have produced some rarely seen examples that depict the components of the female genital system, the inner and outer labia, clitoris, anus. This detail is, however, absent from most cinematic genres - at best what we might see is pubic hair.³⁶ The absence of detailed images of women's genitals on the screen and in other popular cultural forms, may mean that some women are curious about the shape and form of other women's genitals. This interest may be driven by various types of curiosity and desire, such as comparison or identification.³⁷

The visual detail of the close-up conforms to Hodge and Tripp's paradigm in that visual detail has strong modality, and as such is coded as authentic. But in this case, I do not think that their model is resilient enough to explain why the genital close-up has the capability to fascinate (or perhaps horrify?) the user.³⁸ What is important, for

³⁶ An example much quoted by the media, is the shot of Sharon Stone's pubic hair in *Basic Instinct*, glimpsed by both the onscreen gaze of the policeman and the spectator, under the table in the interview room. (US, dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1992).

³⁷ I will again address the paucity of representations of aspects of the female body in Chapter Four when I discuss lactation and female ejaculation.

³⁸ A more detailed analysis of this will appear in Chapter Four.

the moment, is that the detailed close-ups of the women's genitals act as a sign of authentic sex, the changing landscape of these genitals can be treated hermeneutically by the user to signify that the sex is authentic; the penetration is impressively genuine (viz. the vaginal fist fucking). I would suggest that here the penetration of the genitals with hand or dildo does operate as an indexical sign. This is interesting because Falk, for example, suggests that it is the penis and come-shot that guarantees the authenticity of a sex scene - here there is no penis or come-shot. Does this mean that the authentic status of the sex in the films that feature only women is more ambiguous? I would argue that in this particular film, it is the close-up of the women's genitals that operates as an indexical sign that helps to guarantee the authenticity of all the other components of the film.³⁹

In *Punky Girls* the simple editing scheme functions to give dramatic pace to the video, by distributing the climactic moments, such as orgasms and vaginal fist-fucking, fairly evenly throughout the film. The editing here does not function to aid the conventional means of telling of a story but instead to give the footage an episodic form. The temporal flash-forwards, used to include a climactic moment in preliminary sexual foreplay, can be construed as disrupting the continuity of authenticity. In Hollywood and most televisual texts, continuity editing acts to minimise our perception of an edit so that we may not even notice it has occurred. It works to suture seamlessly together disparate temporal and spatial dimensions. In *Punky Girls* the editing seems abrupt and discontinuous, which seems to fragment the text but importantly this also works to bolster the coding of authenticity as it is so obviously 'low-tech' and 'amateur'.

Punky Girls begins with a close-up of the two women and through the editing we are swiftly given a shot of the room in which they are located. The jump from close-up to a medium shot of the room follows a three part, cinematic continuity convention: the

³⁹ This important point will be discussed again in relation to the phallus as indexical sign and the non-sequitur of the 'lesbian' Phallus in the next chapter.

long shot, as an establishing shot; the medium shot to focus on the body of the protagonist; and a close-up generally used to highlight facial gestures, or the contours of a face, or other part of the body.

This three-step convention provides *Punky Girls* with a recognisable cinematic form, and through its use, the image is given a sense of visual logic and coherency. It therefore aids the sense of authenticity, but the further use of editing to jump backwards and forwards in time, does not follow the conventional codes of continuity. This style of editing disrupts and dislocates the continuity of the scene that, against the dominant mode of continuity editing, works to link the video with documentary or 'actuality' footage. For instance, Murray Lerner's documentary *Message to Love* (1970), on the Isle of Wight pop festival, uses as an episodic form, and spatially and temporally 'jumps' about, so that events are given retrospective meaning through the juxtaposition of scenes from various moments. The conventions of documentary styles, which use juxtaposition to assign retrospective meanings to the preceding scenes, are then important to an understanding of how *Punky Girls* assigns authentic status to the bodies and sexual acts in the film.

The authentic status of the sex in *Punky Girls* is also supported by the absence of dubbed sound, or non-diegetic music - a common feature of many TV and cinematic genres. As within the other texts that attempt to communicate authenticity, the sound-scape is completely diegetic. (British Soaps, the News and some TV drama are more conventional examples, but most of these, with the exception of field news reporting, record the sound separately from the camera and treat the sound via a mixing desk, which allows elements of the sound to be enhanced or diminished in the post-production process.) In *Punky Girls* there are no sounds added in the post-production process, and the sound is recorded by a microphone linked to the camera. This allows the microphone some independence from the camera because it is not attached to the camera. This means that the microphone will not pick up the noises of the camera and the camera-person moving around, breathing etc. The absence of any

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obviously over-dubbed sound, and the absence of a musical soundtrack, means that the sound functions as an indexical referent which in turn fortifies the apparent authenticity of the scene. However, the documentary microphone also works to create the illusion that the sounds of the pro-filmic event are merely recorded without being altered in any way. Recorded sound is not, as some film theorists such as Metz suggest, nearer to the pro-filmic event than the image; the sound too is a simulacrum (a reproduction). Even so, recorded sound is conventionally read as indexical which is why over-dubbed dialogue often seems so strange. The absence of music in *Punky Girls*, alongside the use of the camera-microphone means that the authentic status of the film is enhanced mainly because it resembles the sound-field in home video recordings.

The discontinuous editing, the cinematography (for instance, shaky, out-of-focus, zooms) and the use of sound in *Punky Girls*, conforms to a communication that the video is the product of an amateur rather than a professional. This accentuates the authenticity of the video through the particular use of signifiers which function as both iconic and indexical referents, or in Hodge and Tripp's (1986: 104-131) terms, have strong modality. This I would contend works in rather a different way to the Hollywood mode of 70s sex-films which are discussed by Williams (1990) and Falk (1994). The aim of these older films was to put 'genuine' sex (characterised by the inclusion of genital penetration and erect penises - often without use of the close-up) in a Hollywood genre film. Film noir, the Thriller and Romantic Comedy were often the Hollywood reference points for these films, rather than documentary or 'actuality' footage.

Having established how *Punky Girls* works to authenticate sex using the specific qualities of video technology, I would now ask: what is the relationship between the video-inscribed sexual body and spectatorship? In *Hardcore* (1990), Linda Williams conducts a sophisticated analysis of the genre of Explicit Sex films and argues that the development of camera technology is predicated on a search for showing a 'depth

reality' that is invisible to the naked eye. This search, she argues, is specifically aligned to masculinity.

Williams argues that visual technologies, such as those used in Explicit Sex films, are the product of masculine desire and curiosity. This desire is specifically manifest in these films as the search for the elusive and invisible (and therefore all the more tantalisingly 'authentic') female orgasm/pleasure.⁴⁰ She says that '....the genre as a whole seems to be engaged in a quest for incontrovertible 'moving' visual evidence of sexual pleasure in general, and women's pleasure in particular....' (Williams, 1990: x). Crucially she does not address the idea that women too might be curious about sex and that *Punky Girls*, for instance, might offer pleasures to women which centre around what other female genitals look-like during various states of arousal. By lumping men into a unified group under a single motive for the technological gaze, Williams does not address desire as in excess of conscious sexual and gender identity; what is absent is the possibility that these films give an opportunity to curiously scrutinise the body of those of the same sex as the user.⁴¹ The conflation seems to mar an otherwise interesting and well researched study. Although Williams acknowledges that she expected to see an 'unchallenged dominance of the phallus' (ibid.: x) but found 'uncertainty and instability' in the genre, the body of her work does not explore this important assertion. According to Williams, visual technology, and by extension Explicit Sex films, are motivated by the heterosexual male searching for the (authentic) 'truth' of women's sexuality and women's orgasm. Women too might be motivated to use technologies to see the 'truth' about female genitals and arousal.

⁴⁰ The exploration of users other than heterosexual male users, such as, straight women, bisexuals, lesbians, gay men or other sexually identified people who watch these films is interestingly absent from Williams' analysis.

⁴¹ I will take this up in greater detail in the address of homosociality in Chapter Four.

The problem here is not the point about the search for authenticity, but rather the view that this search is unremittingly that of the heterosexual male. Why is it that when it comes to looking at 'pussy', the viewer is always taken to be a straightforwardly, and unproblematically, heterosexual man? Candida Royalle's films expressly target women because in her view women do not watch Explicit Sex films because they are not 'romantic' enough. I would, however, suggest that some women do make use of Explicit Sex films⁴² and that one of the possible pleasures of these films might be that they do not follow the myth that sex and love go hand in hand. This does not mean that the women who watch these movies are 'double agents' by buying into a patriarchal construction of female sexuality. Instead, I would suggest, that these films can be read as a means of escaping from some of the stereotypes of passive, romantic 'feminine' sexuality. Williams' work, as with the many other feminist analyses of the genre, do not take on the notion that there might be a cohort of women looking at these films.

The gist of Williams' argument is that it is gender relations that map technological and cinematic coding of the real, wherein the female sexual body is the locus for the quest for physiological truth. In a slightly different formulation, I would suggest that proof of both men's and women's real physiological pleasure in participating in the films is not about the quest for an invisible female orgasm, but might instead be the result of a disavowal of anxiety and guilt that may arise from the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a film.⁴³ In her introduction, Williams says that she will offer ways of diverging from Mulvey's notion of the male gaze (*ibid.*: 42), but it would seem that

⁴² As is evidenced by Loretta Loach's interviews with women who do use Explicit Sex films ('Bad Girls: Women who use Pornography' in ed. Segal and McIntosh, 1992).

⁴³ As a viewer I am more comfortable and, importantly, enjoy the films more if I believe the participants are getting off on what they are doing. If they (and I mean either men or women) look like they are just going through the motions it all seems very tedious and more 'suspect'. This of course raises my question about how 'I' read the difference between a going through the motions of a performance and a real pleasure in the performance. It is amazing how many porn actors really do look like they are 'going through the motions'. However the more famous porn stars, such as Carol Lynne and Cicciolina, seem better able to look as if they are having a good time. It is the authenticity of the performance that is key to the users pleasure, and not necessarily the authenticity of the sex itself.

the infrastructure of her analysis is predicated on an exploration of a (singular and unproblematised) male gaze. The visual technologies used to make Explicit Sex films can be construed as being driven by desire for a visual guarantee of the pleasure of the other, but I would contend that both men and women, in different ways, are subject to curiosity about sex and that this curiosity is entangled with the processes of subject/sex formation. It may be that another type of pleasure of watching these films is that we are curiously comparing our own bodies and sexual performances to that which occurs on screen. This curiosity is driven by what I will call the 'reality paradigm' and men and women are interpellated by this into the texts. The mechanism of curiosity, then, reiterates this dominant paradigm.

In arguing that Explicit Sex films rely on visual and auditory signifiers of the truth of women's orgasm, Williams does not fully take account of the ways in which disavowal and curiosity choreograph the user's engagement with these texts. She locates authenticity purely through the come-shot and the vocal proof of women's orgasm. But as I mentioned earlier, authenticity can be configured in multiple ways and is not simply located within the signifiers of orgasm. In focusing primarily on the specularisation of the male orgasm (the come or 'money' shot⁴⁴) and the difficulty of specularising the female orgasm, Williams elides other means of looking at the construction of authenticity in these films.

Further, Williams doesn't fully explore the epistemological basis for the quest for a visual or auditory guarantee of sexual pleasure. She assumes that the 'quest' for the authentic female orgasm is taken as a primary signifier of a corporeal, bodily 'real' within the contemporary male imaginary. What she does not explore is how it is that both the male and the elusive female orgasm come to signify authenticity. Her view also works to privilege the authentic purely in terms of a particular shot of the body rather than addressing the other components of the film that enhance the signification

⁴⁴ The money shot is a term coined because male orgasm is configured as a kind of finite spending of energy and also the actors may be paid on the basis of how many come shots they can produce.

of authenticity. The view that the male gaze is predicated on seeking out the truth of women's pleasure, in terms of orgasm, cannot explain the frequent incidence of fellatio, come-shots and torso shots and rather circumvents the complexity of the 'psychic' scene of sexuality. By way of example, many films spend much more time on the build-up to an orgasm than on orgasm itself. *Punky Girls* is a primary example of this, as there is a rhythm of peaks and troughs in the structure and content of the film, but there is no closing orgasmic 'climax' as such. It may be that the notion of the male quest for the invisible female orgasm is to do with the narcissistic component of sexuality wherein there is a belief that the other (and this doesn't have to be a member of the opposite sex) is intrigued by one's orgasm. Narcissism, disavowal and curiosity, then, play a key role in the psycho-sexual scene played out in Explicit Sex films - all of which centre around the authentic status of the films.

My choice of the generic label, *Explicit Sex* films, as noted in the Introduction, implies that these texts depict a variety of the bodily-located real which is absent from other cinematic genres, and this is underpinned by the signification of the real through images of the erect penis or bodily penetration. 'Explicit' implies a kind of unveiling of the real or authentic sex. In Britain, real erections and penetration are defined as illegal by the *Obscene Publications Act* (UK 1959, 1964).⁴⁵ They are considered obscene precisely because they are taken as authentic. This definition contributes to the successful disguise of the fetish as 'authentic'. In a Baudrillardian sense, the legal underscoring of the real of these 'acts' works to legitimate and effect a distinction between fiction and non-fiction. However, as I have shown this is compounded by the other tropes of authenticity used in these films.

Falk (1994) states that the categorisation of pornography as 'obscene' has two distinct, but inter-penetrative genealogical roots, one of which is the control of behaviour, and the other is 'the nature and effects of representations' (1994: 188).

⁴⁵ See *Appendix C* for wording.

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The latter can be found, in its most systematic form, within Kant's aesthetics which resonate within, and inform, contemporary readings of 'pornography'. Kant's theory of the 'true' or authentic aesthetic experience postulates that representation should work to distance the viewer from the artefact. It should bring about an anamnesis or intellectual reflection in the viewer,⁴⁶ rather than a bodily engagement or response to a text.⁴⁷ Here, the problematic real of the body is bracketed off as banal and kept apart from the cerebral aesthetic experience. This implies that the body is somehow problematic, or a barrier, to cerebral contemplation. This constitutes an absolute split between the mind and the body. This paradigmatic split has a precedent in the medieval Christian church, which was less concerned about representation than the control of behaviour. The medieval Christian body was institutionally subjected to surveillance through the confessional whose aim was to manage and train⁴⁸ the sexual body not to intrude upon or disrupt the higher spiritual functions. By privileging cerebral responses over bodily responses there is an inherent disavowal of the recalcitrant, uncontrollable body. Within both theological and aesthetic discourses corporeality is considered inferior and ultimately dangerous to civilised culture, which is why the bodily 'authentic' is differentiated from cerebral contemplation of 'art'. The body is aligned with appetite, instinct and consumption. This notion is still current within the Obscenity Laws in the UK which conceive of the depiction of 'real' erect penises - which well over half the population may have at one time seen on a

⁴⁶ The term 'viewer' seems the most pertinent term to use here, as my former use of 'user' in relation to Explicit Sex films implies a bodily relation which is absent in Kant's aesthetic logic.

⁴⁷ This notion will be taken up again below.

⁴⁸ For example, the medieval penitential manual, such as the *Summae Confessorum* (13th century) and the *Decretum* (9th century), sought to control the sexual life of a congregation by imposing stiff penalties on the penitent for sexual behaviour or sexual thoughts outside the remit of the church at a given time (Richards, 1991: 28-9).

daily basis - and the penetration of some bodily orifices with certain implements⁴⁹, as having the capacity to corrupt and deprave the British public. Symbolic or 'artistic' representations of the erect penis⁵⁰ and penetration are however looked upon more leniently by the law, which demonstrates that the Kantian model still has hegemonic currency.

The popular belief, corroborated by the juridical system in the UK, and through the marketing information disseminated through mail order catalogues, is that Explicit Sex films record, rather than encode, authentic sexual acts with the implicit aim of erasing or disguising the technical and performative (artificial) construction of the event. The disguise of the constructedness of these films relies on the resonance of a cultural investment in differentiating between the real and the artificial which is upheld by the legal system, signification and aesthetics. The multiplication of this binary paradigm into all these discourses also underpins cinematic generic distinctions: the reality paradigm assigns the distinction between fact and fiction texts. Feature-length Explicit Sex films made in the 60s and 70s, such as *Emmanuelle* (dir. Just Jaeckin, 1975, Fr.), align more neatly behind narrative fiction format than the newer video based films that borrow their conventions from documentary formats. Films, such as *Punky Girls*, in part, play on the documentary and amateur associations in order to heighten their authentic status. As in 'fly on the wall' documentaries, the camera in *Punky Girls* remains almost totally unacknowledged by the two protagonists. A further documentary convention is that the film appears to intrude on a private emotional scene. However, there are elements of *Punky Girls* which unsettle the authentic reading of the film. The sex is treated, on the one hand, as a private event between the two women which has not been staged for the camera.

⁴⁹ Noses, ears, the mouth are allowed so long as they are not being penetrated by something that looks like an erect penis, but vaginas and anuses are completely out, with the exception of some forms of educational material. The distribution of videos, for example, showing men how to use a penile pump to gain an erection in cases of impotency are legally able to show a man's erect penis.

⁵⁰ Strap-on erect dildos are not considered problematic so long as they do not penetrate certain bodily orifices.

But through close watching, the staging becomes more obvious - in a similar way to the ambiguity within Morrissey/Warhol's docu-films such as *Flesh* (dir. Warhol & Morrissey, 1968, US). As in many of Warhol's films, *Punky Girls*, too, creates a duplicitous authenticity which is revealed as an 'arch' performance, that is, a masquerade which functions to dissolve the boundaries between the real and the artificial. The user is therefore constantly prompted to ask whether the sex they are seeing is real (thus the reality paradigm is reiterated).

There is a further level of authenticity in relation to the body of the user of Explicit Sex films. We may know that what we are watching is not 'real', but an artifice or performance, but we may nevertheless experience visceral reactions to it. This then approximates to the engagement of the viewer's body in comedy and horror genres. In this instance, the 'body horror' film provides an interesting parallel to Explicit Sex films. Whilst watching a 'body horror' film (such as *Evil Dead* [dir. Sam Raimi, 1983, US]), we may jump or sweat, feel nauseated even though we know that the film is not 'real'. Horror films often foreground the ambiguities of the 'realness' of the film; many use the codings associated with amateurism and the video format as a means of shaking the viewer's belief that what they are seeing is not real. This is perhaps why, for me at least, the use of low grade film stock or video seems to make a body horror film more successfully 'scary' (Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* [1968], or Jörg Buttgerit's 'hard-gore' film *Necromantik* are good examples). At an extra-diegetic level, however, knowing that the text is not real allows the user to disavow aspects of the film which might be uncomfortably close to unconscious desire. Reminding ourselves that what we are seeing isn't real allows us to continue to watch. If it becomes 'too real' and produces extreme bodily reactions we might not then be able to continue to watch. Through the caveat provided by knowing that a film is not real, we are able to allow ourselves to indulge in the violent or sexual fantasies that a film presents. The use of amateur codings to aid the indeterminate status of a 'body horror' film is an important feature designed to engage the viewer's

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body and it throws the binary of real/fiction into disarray; the probable pleasure here is in the process of being able to 'master' the ambiguity of the film - but this ambiguity also crucially provides the frisson of the film. This process is also at work in the genre of Explicit Sex films. We know that a text isn't real, but we may nevertheless act, in a certain way, as if it were. Video technologies have in recent years played on this ambiguous relation. As video technology is commonly used as 'surveillance',⁵¹ it is taken as having a kind of 'transparency' credibility; the immediacy of video technology is invested with the power to show 'real' events - something that the medium of celluloid does not quite have. As I have demonstrated, the cultural encoding of video technology as associating amateurism with authenticity is in operation in the meanings we currently assign to recent Explicit Sex films.

⁵¹ In July 1996 Carlton, the ITV company that serves London and the South-East, began a series of programmes that feature traffic incidents captured by motorway surveillance cameras.

The 'as if' of Authenticity: Authenticity and the Operation of the fetish

What has yet to be explored is how the authentic status of recent Explicit sex films functions through fetishism and disavowal to conserve pleasure. I will be using a Lacanian approach to disavowal and the function of the fetish to show how authenticity mobilises desire, fantasy and pleasure as a means of countering lack and how the 'reality paradigm' informs the question of authentic status posed to the user of these texts. Within Lacanian logic, lack, as the grounds upon which the subject is constructed, presents an affront to subject coherence. I will argue that cultural artefacts in general, and Explicit Sex films in particular, are deployed as a defence against the threat posed by lack. Lack cannot be erased but the social order operates on the illusory basis that certain things, objects or ideas can act to stop the gap of lack. These things, objects or ideas are proffered as having the (illusory) capacity to endow the subject with plenty and wholeness: consumer⁵² culture is based on this principle. The illusion that these things can stop the gap of lack is masked by assigning to them an authentic status, this then masks the ideological and fetishistic function of authenticity as informed by the 'reality paradigm'. I will show that Explicit Sex films use authentic status, assigned through the cultural currency of video technology and the presence assigned to visual appearance of penetration and orgasm, to act as if these acts cause desire, to disavow the lack that is the root cause of desire (the 'Real of desire'⁵³). The value of presence assigned to sound inconjunction with visual signifiers of authenticity functions, as I will argue, as a form of fetishism.

⁵² The term 'consume' connotes incorporation, internalisation of the product, although in so-called conspicuous consumption the buying of a particular commodity acts as a signifier of a certain lifestyle. It is interesting that the purchase of an Explicit Sex film is less often a conspicuous consumption. It is rather a private and furtive event, and, partially because of the illegality of the films, is an invisible consumption. (Although for groups of men or women who get together to watch the films as a more public activity the purchase or acquisition of a film does act as a sign of a certain personality or life-style statement.)

⁵³ The use of a capitalised 'R' indicates the distinction between the 'reality paradigm', as constructed through discourse, and the Lacanian Real which is that which cannot be symbolised. Here the lack that is the 'Real of desire' cannot be symbolised and is thus qualitatively different from authenticity, which I argue operates through discourse to mask the Real of desire.

As indicated in the Introduction, Explicit Sex films are defined by certain generic characteristics which are, in part, financially driven to create a market difference from other kinds of film that depict sexuality. The effect of this is that Explicit Sex films create a specific signifying system, a genre, which sustains their market differential when read against other genres - for instance, softcore, art-house films.⁵⁴ The economic dimension of the films combine with psychic economies and it is here that the link between commodity and sexual fetishism is useful to help to understand the users' pleasure in these films. The financial economic dimension does not simply provide the 'answer' to the generic strategies of the films, but instead the economics of consumerism implicitly leans upon the power of fetishism and economies of fantasy and desire which intersect with symbolic systems to maintain certain socially sanctioned or culturally intelligible sexual economies. The fetish depends on the interaction of these imaginary and symbolic registers. If authenticity is to operate as a fetish it must make sense to the readers in their particular cultural moment.

The premise upon which this section rests is that for Explicit Sex films to elicit pleasure, the films must successfully mobilise a fetish. What, then, does this term mean? Lacan's model of disavowal and the fetish relocates Freud's formulation. In 'Fetishism' (Freud, 1977 *On Sexuality* [1927]), Freud proposes that the fetish works to enable the 'pervert' (who in this model can only be a man) to disavow the perceived castration of women which is imagined because of the absence of the penis. The fetish stands in for the imagined missing penis and it allows the 'pervert' to disavow the anxiety which is mapped around an imagined castration. For Freud, disavowal is never complete, however, as castration anxiety constantly re-presents itself to men. The effect of this is a defensive psychic splitting which allows male 'perverts' to both know that the penis is absent and, at the same time, to act as if it

⁵⁴ The Explicit Sex film market is not alone in this - most Hollywood films also use this system as does most televisual output - as it is the generic expectation that pulls in the audience which, in the case of TV, keeps the advertisers happy or allows a non-advertising channel to compete with other advert-funded channels.

were there.⁵⁵ Lacan shifts the terms of Freud's reading of disavowal and fetishism in a way that is more useful to the understanding of authenticity in Explicit Sex films. Freud emphasised disavowal as 'denial', but Lacan uses the term to encompass the dual action of both a denial and a recognition of castration. The key difference is that Lacan argues that disavowal is "the failure to accept that lack causes desire" (Evans, 1996: 44). Although both Freud and Lacan in the main assign disavowal and fetishism to mainly male 'perverts', I will however argue that these concepts can be used in a far broader sense to explain how the tropes of authenticity in a given cultural moment operate. What I am saying here is that for meaning to operate it must mobilise disavowal and fetishism - which makes the 'pervert' label rather wider than Freud perhaps intended. I will then follow and elaborate on Lacan's view of disavowal and fetishism in order to understand the fetishistic operation of authenticity in Explicit Sex films.

My argument here is that the fetish is not marshalled *solely* by the male pervert. For any object (person or commodity) to be valued in discourse it must operate, through disavowal, as a fetish. In Explicit Sex films it is authentic sex which is endowed with fetishistic status. The viewing process is governed by this principle. If the fetish in whatever guise is not successfully mobilised, disgust or boredom, rather than pleasure and a tolerable desire, will be the overwhelming response. The films' success then depends on the invocation of the fetish to facilitate pleasure.⁵⁶ How then does authenticity as a fetish engender fantasy and desire?

Authenticity conscripts fantasy and desire by deploying a question that is posed to the viewer about the authentic status of the sex acts in a film. The specific content of the

⁵⁵ Dylan Evans has a useful gloss on this, in his entry on disavowal in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, he says 'Like Freud, Lacan asserts that disavowal is always accompanied by a simultaneous acknowledgement of what is disavowed. Thus the pervert is not simply ignorant of castration: he simultaneously knows it and denies it' (Evans, 1996: 44).

⁵⁶ It is here that I differ from Žižek's reading of the genre which suggests that these films give us too much of what we want (Žižek, 1991: 110). I would argue that the economic success (for instance it supports a national daily paper) of the genre testifies to the success of the fetish in Explicit Sex films.

question is less important than the praxis of the question. It may well manifest itself as the question 'is what I am seeing here 'real' sex?' but it may take other forms: for example 'how can this sex be pleasurable to the participants?' or 'what kind of pleasures are the participants getting out of these actions?'. This enquiry promotes the circulation of desire and fantasy. It should also be noted from the outset of this discussion that authenticity is not the only 'object' which can function as the fetish in these films, as potentially anything can be invested, under certain circumstances, with the power of the fetish. However, within recently made Explicit Sex films, the primary generic convention of the films is that they purport to depict authentic sex and thereby these films reiterate the 'reality paradigm' which (fetishistically) lies at the very centre of Western discourse. Even though the fetish is then potentially mobile, it nevertheless centres on the question of authenticity.

For authenticity to operate as a fetish it must be taken *as if* it were real. Within the reception of Explicit Sex films, users find themselves confronted, as suggested above, with a question about what can be taken as if it were authentic in the on-screen performance. We may know that what is being watched is a performance intent on making money, but the user nevertheless is asked to see the film in terms of what can be believed to be authentic sex. The home video format of recent Explicit Sex films used by, for example, *Punky Girls* or *Lust-Poker*, interpellates users' desire through the question of authenticity posed by the text. *Lust-Poker* presents the sexual acts it depicts as fantasy but it nevertheless still poses this same question to users. The function of this question operates as a lure to engage fantasy and desire: the question functions as a gap or space, hollowed out in the film, that the user can then fill with fantasy and desire. Furthermore the question levelled at authenticity actuates as the point of reciprocity between the text and the user. Through this question, the user is enabled to stitch the film into their psycho-sexual configuration. This is important as it provides a theoretical model of the processes of reception which allows for multiple ways of entering and engaging with the texts. This can mean that it is possible to

factor-in the use of Explicit Sex films by those people who are not heterosexually identified men. By proposing that the question of authenticity is key to the user's interpellation, it is possible to see how users who are not rigidly heterosexually identified might engage with these films.

Just because it can be demonstrated that authenticity is a discursive construction or an illusion, does not mean that it can be lightly dismissed. If authenticity is configured as a fetish, it then enables a discussion about the function of authenticity in these films without recourse to an *a priori* or immanent real, and can also be used to show how these films conscript fantasy and desire. The alleged immanence of authenticity is in the pay of the fetish - the fetish is disguised as the real cause of desire covering over lack as the cause of desire. The signification of authenticity is clearly an important factor within these films and the mobilisation of the question posed by authenticity can bring about a gap which the user is interpellated into and which opens up the play of fantasy and desire.

As Collete Soller recommends, it is not possible to analyse the 'text', but only interpretation: 'each text produces a new symptom' (eds. Ragland-Sullivan & Bracher, 1991: 171). The symptom here is the fetishistic performance of authenticity; it may be the question posed by the question of authenticity, or it might be another question posed around the enigma of sexuality. Hence it is crucial to address the function of the fetish in the interpellative processes involved in the user's engagement with these texts. The posing of the question of authenticity in Explicit Sex films then depends upon what can be used, consciously or unconsciously, by an individual to service the continued flow of desire. This may be relatively eccentric or personalised, but, because psycho-sexuality is the product of social networks there are some shared factors at work here, and it is here that gender difference might be a factor. Nevertheless, as I have said, it is authenticity as a reiteration of the 'reality paradigm' through its culturally current format that is the primary fetish in Explicit Sex films. It is the configuration of authenticity taken *as if* it were real that shifts the

concept into a performative register as a means of both capturing and mobilising fantasy and desire. The configuration of authenticity as an *as if* shows that authenticity functions to lure the viewer with a hermeneutic proposition. That then puts 'into scene' fantasy and desire. The 'success' of the fetish to enlist desire is subject to variation, such as shifts in technological renderings of what is taken to be authentic; what may work to interpellate a particular viewer at a specific moment will not necessarily work all the time. As such the reduction of fetishism to a simple gender division is not adequate to the task of deciphering the sources of desire and pleasure in these films. To clarify, what I am suggesting here is that, with varying success, these films work to promote libidinal investment through a question levelled at the authenticity of the sex in a film.

This question leans on the very structure of psycho-sexuality wherein sex, as Laplanche argues, is always 'enigmatic'. So, where authenticity is linked to this question there is a promotion of desire and in this sense it operates as a fetish. For some users authenticity might not be the locus of desire; performance, clothing, sound or other factors might then operate as a question posed to the user. This then allows a gap to be opened up in the text through which the specific psycho-sexuality of a user can be mobilised. But I would argue that the authenticity question is key to the understanding of the relation between curiosity (as the mechanism of interpellation) and the fetish.

A Lacanian reading would have it that the fetish, in whatever form, functions in the same way as the Phallus. Whilst this may conform to the logic of Lacanian theory, this seems to be a reductive approach which bars a less phallogocentric approach to the films. Taking authenticity as the key fetish in these films the phallogocentric framework in which Lacanian theory configures the fetish may be countered. I will explore this idea in more detail in Chapter Three. At this point, though, I will focus on the possible operation of the question of authenticity as mobilising desire. It is important

for my argument to explore the proposition offered to the viewer by the hermeneutic puzzle posed by sexuality through the fetish of authenticity.

Zizek's work on the fetish in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), provides a useful model through which to explore this idea. Zizek and Masud R. Khan (cited in Dadoun, 1989) both re-work the Freudian fetish through Lacan's concept of the *objet a*. As I have previously noted, Freud argues in 'Fetishism' (1977[1927])) that the fetish is specifically related to one type of castration anxiety, that of the absence of the mother's phallus. Freud's notion of the fetish can therefore only address the fetish in terms of the formation of male sexuality. Zizek and Khan extend the principle of the fetish to castration in a more open way. There are, they argue, many other ways of configuring castration and its disavowal through the fetish. As Khan notes, castration anxiety can be located in many different ways, for example, the fear of abandonment, and any form of attack to the coherence of the subject. It is not, in Khan's reading, exclusively located through the absence of the mother's phallus. Other images or signifiers of castration and its disavowal through the fetish can be enlisted.

The value of this shift away from the gendered specificity of the Freudian fetish is that it can then be used to understand female sexuality as well as male sexuality. Both men and women employ fetishistic devices: the coherency of the subject and sexuality depends upon it. Lacan's conception of the *objet a*, as the prototypical fetish, relocates it in the split that is engendered in the subject through our inculcation into language. It is this expanded definition of the fetish that will help to understand the relation between Explicit Sex films and authenticity. This also enables an examination of pleasure and desire in relation to these films which is not simply reducible to the stereotypical heterosexually identified male imaginary.

The fetishistic operation of authenticity is a pivotal shift in my analysis of the relation of unconscious fantasy to Explicit Sex films. Zizek's thesis (1989) on the interaction between the psychoanalytic fetish and commodity fetishism links psychic processes to

capitalism through the economy of the fetish. Gamman and Makinen (1994)⁵⁷ argue that it is important to hold the sexual fetish and the commodity fetish apart, but Zizek argues that they both rest on a single matrix. Gamman and Makinen (1994) seek to address the female fetish,⁵⁸ whereas Zizek makes no particular gender distinctions. Zizek's analysis centres on the processes that produce the fetish rather than on the specific fetish. In my analysis of authenticity as a fetish it would seem that his approach is the most appropriate.

Zizek links the commodity fetish with the psychoanalytic fetish, arguing that both operate as a disavowal of lack. Lack is produced through the splitting processes which are intrinsic to subject formation. This lack entails the production of fantasy that leans on, but seeks to allay, castration anxieties. Following Lacan, Zizek configures lack and the disavowal of lack through the fetish as constitutive of subject formation in a given social field.

Zizek argues that in capitalism the subject knows that a commodity or object cannot fill the lack/gap of desire, but we nevertheless act *as if* it can - it operates as a fetish. The subject invests the fetishistic object with emotion or aura of meaningfulness, the fetishistic aura then operates to help the subject to disavow lack and anxiety. This function of the fetish allows the subject, to use a colloquialism, 'to have one's cake and eat it'; libidinal investment in consumption of all kinds depends on the fetish as a performative operation of disavowal. But because the fetish may fail in its task to stop the gap of lack, it can be exploited to keep the system of desire in play and oils the wheels of psychic and capitalist economies. Hence when we purchase, say for example, a bottle of perfume, we do, at some level, act *as if* it will invest us with positive attributes of a certain desirable life-style (or ego-ideal). We know that it

⁵⁷ Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen in their book *Female Fetishism*, suggest the erotic fetish must be taken as different to the commodity fetish. Following Zizek, I would suggest that these two things are linked, and are the product of certain culturally located configuration of the subject.

⁵⁸ A criticism that could be levelled at *Female Fetishism* is that it addresses 'women' as a single unified group.

cannot really do this, but we act, against ourselves, *as if* it can. Our pleasure in the commodity or object depends upon this fetishistic *as if-ness*. Thus knowing that it cannot fill the gap of lack does not alter the comforting fantasy that it can. For the fetish to continue to work it must constantly be re-located. I would argue this idea can be used to understand the *as if* function of authenticity in Explicit Sex films. Despite the tropes of authenticity encoded into amateurism, in other words what these films show is authentic sex, the user still knows that the sex portrayed in a film is a staged performance.⁵⁹ Through disavowal, a user may, nevertheless, take it 'for real' in order to conserve pleasure and keep the enigma posed by sexuality in play. The suspension of disbelief, as a form of knowing disavowal (and not therefore denial), also depends on the fetishistic process. The oscillation between the two - knowing it is a performance, but also taking it as authentic - can be said to present a means by which to rupture the continuity of the authentic. However, this procedure works in different ways depending upon the (shifting) configuration of the individual user's psycho-sexuality.

Given the shifting operation of sexuality and desire, fetishes are not always fixed objects, although importantly, if it proves successful in conserving pleasure, a fetish might then be fixed and reiterated, as is suggested by Freud's view of fetishism, thereby leading to very fixed forms of sexual behaviour. For example, a user may take the foregrounding of performativity itself as a signifier of authenticity. What is important is that if the user is to experience pleasure through these texts, the text must be configured as in some sense able to (temporarily) stop the gap of lack. In so doing the text must be sutured into our specific psycho-sexual configuration - we may know there is nothing 'magical' about the fetish but if it is to be 'used' we must take it 'as if' it were. This is a fetishistic illusion and is built upon fantasmatic libidinal investment in an object.

⁵⁹ Dworkin, for example, neglects to factor this into her analysis of the pornography as she sees the films' portrayal of sex as real and does not take into account the process of disavowal that is needed for a user to 'believe' that the sex is real.

Cynical distance from a film, which is often apparent in people's comments about these films, does not necessarily free us from the film's creation of fetishistic illusion. Cynical comments⁶⁰ may work to free the viewer up from the demand of user-arousal made by the film. The user can then enjoy it in a disavowed way and fetishistically escapes the 'real of our unconscious desire'. For example, a frequent comment I have heard in my research is that users often say 'I watch them - but they don't do anything for me'. The double bluff or disavowal employed here parallels Zizek's view of how contemporary capitalist ideology remains resilient to cynical criticism, and this can be applied to the disavowal that occurs in relation to Explicit Sex films. This formulation could perhaps help to explain why certain feminist writers, such as Dworkin and Itzin, spend so much time in explaining their horror at these films, but, nevertheless, spend so much time writing about them. By announcing distaste about a film's content we nevertheless act *as if* they are in some way authentic and not a fetish. Assigning authenticity to the films thereby disguises the fetishistic operation of the films; indeed, in this case, authenticity itself is the fetish that allows them to be watched.

Authenticity can then be argued to disguise the fantasmatic basis of the fetish, and allows disavowal. When faced with the image of on-screen sex and genital difference, we may be appalled or fascinated by what we see or hear. Freud would locate this in the castration trauma experienced by boys when their gaze falls upon female genitals. I would however wish to relocate this. It is not simply a fetishistic disavowal of the absence of the penis, but instead a more complex matrix of castration anxieties that are being mobilised and disavowed. I would rather suggest that it is the force of sexuality which affronts rational control that locates castration anxiety, but this is also bound with pleasure. Pleasure is experienced when we find strategies to cope with the force of unconscious desire. This is why Freud suggests that fetishists are 'happy' with their fetish. In order for Explicit Sex films to conserve pleasure in

⁶⁰ I am here extrapolating from Zizek's address of the role of cynicism in Western politics (cynicism as a form of ideology): 'The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and social reality, but he none the less still insists on the mask' (Zizek, 1989: 29).

the face of the full and terrifying force of unconscious desire, something must work to keep the full force of jouissance at bay. This something, the fetish, can therefore work to engender pleasure and to allow desire to circulate in a contained manner.

In *Looking Awry*, Žižek suggests that Explicit Sex films 'fail' because they are 'too much of what we want' meaning that they are too close to the unbearable banality of the 'Real of desire'. I would argue that Žižek does not take into account the function of the fetish in his reading of these films. I would instead suggest that there is in operation in these films a fetishistic disavowal of the 'real of desire' which can be provided through elements of the mise-en-scene or technology. Because authenticity is a disguised fetish (the masking occurs through the 'reality paradigm') it can then fend off the 'real of desire' and therefore the films can be experienced as pleasurable. To clarify, because authenticity masquerades as the real it is able to cover over the traumatic unbearable 'real of desire'. This fetish aids the disavowal of sexuality as Other by giving the subject the illusion that sexuality is under the control of the subject.

How then is authenticity in Explicit Sex films kept in play as a disguised fetish to fend off the twin terrors of castration and the 'unbearable real of desire'? In short, it is through the fetishistic 'suspension of disbelief' provided by the performance of authenticity *as if* it were real. This is dependent upon the culturally current rendering of authenticity through technology. It can only function as a fetish if what is taken to be authentic is configured as making sense to the reader in that cultural moment. In the case of contemporary Explicit Sex films, this means the deployment of the encoding provided by video technology and the meaning of presence and immediacy that has become associated with it, which I have outlined above.

As I have already established, the user's understanding that what is being watched is 'authentic' is partially guaranteed by a set of visual and auditory signifiers; the signification of pleasure is metonymically associated with 'authentic' sex. The

association of pleasure as signifying the real may act as an index of authenticity and it is through indexical signifiers that the question posed to sexuality is produced. But in many films, the index of authenticity is problematised by the foregrounding of performance. This heightens the question 'is what I am seeing here real?'; which can also function as a fetish through which the user is interpellated into a film. The mix of authentic sex and the foregrounding of performance can work to highlight the film as a commodity, and in so doing creates a frisson for some users. This still nevertheless works within the terms of the 'reality paradigm'.

Authenticity, the Fetish and Sound

I now want to establish the ways in which the use of sound in Explicit Sex films contributes to the function of authenticity as a fetish. I will show that authenticity is not coded simply through the visual components of the texts but is also encoded into the sound-field of Explicit Sex films. I will also show how the fetishistic function of authenticity is mapped through unconscious fantasies which are produced in response to the enigma of sexuality.

First it is important to outline and take issue with some of the ideas about sound in these films and to examine the operation of sound in two recent films. Linda Williams' (1990) work on the use of sound in Explicit Sex films foregrounds the use of music by suggesting that the music used in them reflects the use of music in Hollywood films, particularly the Musical:

...The function of the musical numbers in a movie musical can help us to understand the similar function of the sexual numbers in the pornographic feature. To begin with, there is the obvious sense of the musical number, especially the romantic song-dance duet, as a sublimated expression of heterosexual desire and satisfaction. Beyond this is the fact that the hard-core feature - unlike the silent stag - is quite literally a musical: original music and even songs with lyrics ... frequently accompany numbers, especially the 'big production' number. Finally, there is the obvious sense in which the sexual acts listed above constitute a virtual typology of numbers in the pornographic feature. (Williams, 1990: 132-3)

Explicit Sex films made using the Hollywood narrative mode in the last ten to fifteen years do, I would agree, make frequent use of music. However I would argue against Williams' view that music is not central, like the Hollywood Musical, to the hardcore genre. Instead, the music is most often to introduce films, as in other fiction genres and is used to interlink different scenes. Williams refers to a limited selection of films taken from the 1960s and 1970s, for example, *The Resurrection of Eve* (1976) and *Behind The Green Door* (1972), and she suggests that the use of music in the genre

resembles the structure of music in the Musical and that there are other similarities between Explicit Sex films and Musicals. Her argument is problematic in several ways; it may be that the Musical is suffused with sublimated sexuality which bursts forth in the energy of song and dance routines, but on balance I would argue that the analogy has limited usefulness in the analysis of the Explicit Sex film genre. The argument becomes particularly doubtful, as I will show, in relation to the more recent video-produced Explicit Sex films. The 'romantic song-dance duet' may seem to reflect the episodic nature of the Explicit Sex film and the sexual numbers. However, this seems rather naïve and misleading when most Explicit Sex films are avowedly anti-romantic. The aim of the Hollywood Musical might be as Dyer (1992) suggests to create a joyful, utopian relief from the banal, grey tedium of everyday life, but the more recent Explicit Sex films create a very different kind of 'relief' which is rarely focused on romance. Further the 'sexual numbers' only very rarely feature just two people,⁶¹ mostly there are between three and seven participants which raises questions about reading the films in a purely heterosexual way. This seems light years away from the romantic, marriage focus of most 30s, 40s and 50s Hollywood Musicals. By making an analogy with the Musical, Williams seems, in a way, to be attempting to 'sanitise' Explicit Sex films for herself. As a film theorist, she may be trying to show that Explicit Sex films do interlink with other genres, but I would argue that there are more pertinent links with other kinds of filmic genres, for example, horror, documentary and pop video forms seem far closer to the films produced in the last 10-15 years.

A key problem with Williams' Hollywood Musical analogy is that in Explicit Sex films the sexual is not, as in the Musical, sublimated and this factor seriously disrupts the analogy. Her point that most Explicit Sex films use music is also incorrect. The

⁶¹ *Punky Girls* is one of the rare examples of an exclusively two-person film. All of the other films referred to in this thesis deploy groups of people in most of the sex scenes. Although on occasion a two-person scene might occur, this is either inter-cut with scenes from another couple, as in the Ginger Lynne vehicle *Some Kind of Woman*, or the couple are watched by a diegetic spectator, as in *Lust-Poker*, or the other people are introduced into the scene at some point.

problem here is that she is concentrating on films that were produced before camcorder technology and satellite technologies. Since the inception of these technologies there has been a flood of cheaply produced films which rarely make use of Hollywood style production values, and also rarely use music. Both *Punky Girls* and *Lust-Poker*, for example, only use it in the credits, there is none accompanying 'sexual numbers' or in interlinking scenes. I would suggest here that the absence of music enhances the users' voyeuristic (and its aural equivalent - eavesdropping) relation to the text.

Even in the more recent Explicit Sex films that do have some form of narrative, the music fades out swiftly once the action gets going - the musical song gives way to a more vocal kind of music. A good example of this is *New Wave Hookers*. In this film, which is framed as the comic fantasy of two men, punk music is the trigger that drive women who hear it into a state of sexual desire. Once the sex gets going the diegetic music quickly fades out - all the better for the user to hear the sounds that assign authenticity to the sexual acts (heavy breathing, squelching and other noises related to the sexual act). In this film, as in *Punky Girls* and *Lust-Poker*, there is no non-diegetic music. It seems to be the case that when non-diegetic music is used it is only used in the opening sequence, which is often tacked on to the beginnings of films by the distributor to advertise other titles. The films where non-diegetic music plays a part is with those that use the conventions of film noir or the Thriller. *French Finishing School* is a good example of this. Here the music provides atmosphere for the Euro-noir style of the film; but again once the sex gets going the music fades out. In this film, the music is used when the young woman who is the central protagonist in the story watches her Aunt and their butler having sex, and when she watches her art teacher having sex with various pupils. The young woman's 'education' is a form of detective story through which she discovers and photographs the hidden sexual lives of those who purport to be her moral betters, and whom she later bribes. It is

only during the voyeur scenes and the dialogue scenes that music is used to create a noir-ish atmosphere and not in the sex scenes she participates in.

In the case of *Rambo the Destroyer* and *New Wave Hookers* it is MTV and the pop video, rather than the Musical, which is the more significant referent here. This testifies to the targeting of a new market of predominantly younger, European satellite viewers where milder forms of Explicit Sex films are potentially only a push-button away from MTV. Williams' final point that the format of the Explicit Sex films corresponds to the Musical, as a series of sexual numbers, is also doubtful in relation to films like *Punky Girls* which takes the whole of its 70 minutes length to present one sexual encounter.

The fact that the Hollywood Musical analogy is problematic when seen in relation to contemporary Explicit Sex films, underpins my argument that these films more accurately resemble the primitive, amateur conventions of the earlier stag movies, documentary, and the parodic style of low-budget underground horror/art movies. Williams also misses the important point that sound is a key component in the fetish of authenticity which I will discuss in more detail below.

Williams (ibid.: 123-5) suggests a technological link with the Hollywood Musical by suggesting that neither the Musical nor Explicit Sex films record live sound. Williams asks why a genre dedicated to realism uses non-synchronous sound which creates audible discontinuities. Dubbed sound is a good example, although Williams does not mention this. This is typified by a woman whose mouth is full of an erect penis yet who still utters loud cries of pleasure. Many European films, and American films sold in Europe, have an added dubbed sound track. The effect of dubbing often provides an unintentional comic dimension⁶² to the films, which we might suggest detracts from the authentic status of a film. Williams answers her question by suggesting it is easier and cheaper to film silently and dub sound onto the image later. However, in non-

⁶² I will examine the role of intentional and unintentional comedy in the next chapter.

dubbed video produced films, such as *Punky Girls* and *Lust-Poker*, this is not the case. This is because of the economic accessibility of camcorders with built in microphones. Now it is cheaper to produce a film using the sound track recorded by the in-camera microphone than to add the sound-track (non-diegetic music or dubbed sound) in post production. The problem with Williams' analysis is that most of her insight into the production of Explicit Sex films comes from a book published in 1977⁶³ which means that she does not address the shifts from celluloid to video formats in the production of these films.

Within Williams' analysis of the earlier high-production celluloid films, the inclusion of music and non-synchronous sound accentuates the constructedness of the text. This then highlights the text as a highly organised performance. The lack of music or dubbed non-synchronous sound in *Punky Girls* and *Lust-Poker* is due to the use of synchronous sound recording (meaning the recording of the sound at the moment of filming the scene, rather than adding a vocal/musical sound-track later). The technique of synchronous sound recording increases the communication of authenticity by referencing the sound as indexical. The technological crudeness of the sound, compared to the booming, synthesised and treated 'hyperreal' sound of Hollywood and TV advertising, also contributes to the encoding of the sound as authentic.⁶⁴

The sound technique used to produce the effect of authenticity is known as close miccing, which, as the term suggests, means placing the microphone very close to the sound source. In the case of *Punky Girls* the camera microphone would fulfil this function. The use of close miccing as the sole source of sound, rather than sound

⁶³ Ziplow's *The Film Maker's Guide to Pornography* [cited by Williams, 1990: 93-94, 99, 117, 126-128, 130, 149, 252.]

⁶⁴ This is something that has been used recently within Hollywood movies, for example *Henry*, *Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *Man Bites Dog* and *Natural Born Killers*, in which grainy video footage with its concomitant limited sound field, is intercut and juxtaposed with hyper-real celluloid footage with its treated sound field, making the video elements stand out as more authentic.

added in the post-production process, creates a very intimate sound-scape. The microphone picks up on the creaking of leather and PVC, the sounds of skin against skin, the sounds of well-lubricated penetration, the whispered speech, and the range of vocal sound from gentle breathing to loud gasps of sexual pleasure. The effect of close miccing in a small room, with the walls covered in cloth, dampens down the sound of the room, and so the sounds made by the women appear to be very close to the hearer's ears - not because it is necessarily loud, but because of the absence of room noise a certain sense of space is created. The lack of room noise produced by the close miccing technique makes the sound appear to be very intimate and present (even, perhaps, claustrophobic). This, I would suggest, heightens the voyeuristic drama of the scene by leaning on the imaginary fantasies of the pre-oedipal mother's voice⁶⁵ and primal scene fantasies of parental coitus.⁶⁶ It is here that the sound can function as a component of the fetish of authenticity. This shifts the analysis away from Williams' reading of the sound in these films and shows how authentic status is enhanced by the use of video-camera technology.

Close miccing can be construed as having strong modality and this encoding is probably due to its association with home video, news and documentary formats. Also close miccing picks up 'background' noise and other sound detail, for example the movement of clothing and breathing. The detail of the close-micced sound field also works to communicate strong modality. Detail, the association with other 'realist' genres and the immediacy of the technology, which records the sound on

⁶⁵ I am here drawing on Kaja Silverman's linking of the mother's voice and the voice in cinema explored in *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988), which I will discuss in more detail below.

⁶⁶ I am referring here to Laplanche and Pontalis's analysis of primal scene fantasies outlined in 'Fantasy and The Origins of Sexuality' (in eds. Burgin, Donald and Kaplan, 1986).

location rather than that produced by a foley⁶⁷ artist or in the post-production process, are all components of the encoding of sound as authentic in contemporary media culture.

It should not be concluded that the use of close-miccing and synchronous sound recording means that authenticity is simply encoded. Components of close-micced sound may interrupt the flow of sound encoded as authentic. There is, for example, a sound in the sound-field of *Punky Girls* which could be read as disrupting the continuity of authenticity. This is the sound of a stills camera being used out of the visual frame. I would argue that it functions in the same way as the *objet a* as it ruptures the rhythm of the sounds and jerks the user into an (uncomfortable and/or exciting) recognition of their voyeuristic position. The only way to 'use' this sound is for the user to stitch it into the scene - if this is done then it can operate for the user as a fetish. The sound of the stills camera reveals the user's voyeuristic relation to the spectacle of the scene. It acts as a kind of extra-diegetic comment on the scene, which highlights the performance and the user as addressee of the scene. It is only by reading the scene as an enacted, staged performance, rather than as a genuine or authentic scene 'happened upon' by the spectator, that the stills camera becomes sutured into the diegesis of the scene. It is not only the sound of the stills camera that can be said to work in this way. The noise of the still camera flash and winder presents the user with a hermeneutic question as to the authenticity of the scene. It presents the user with a 'flaw' in the continuity of authenticity and thus allows the user a space through which to invest fantasy into the scene. The indeterminacy of the scene again mobilises the 'reality paradigm' through which the user's position as voyeur is at once recognised and disavowed.

A further ambiguity around performance and authenticity is also present within the intimate whispering between the two women. This functions, on the one hand, to

⁶⁷ A 'foley artist' reproduces aspects of a sound field, particularly background sounds, which are rarely recorded on location as it is difficult to control the levels of location background sound.

authenticate the sex by suggesting that the women have some personal engagement with each other outside of the contract of the video. On the other hand, the whispered coaxing has an extra-diegetic function as an auditory seduction addressed to the 'user'. It is significant here that the gentle coaxing is articulated by the female voice and I would argue that this form of seduction leans on fantasies of the mother's voice and the meanings and fantasies that are mapped on to it. This could be the case for both male and female users of this text. The voice pulls the viewer into an 'other scene' and the inarticulate sounds of sexual pleasure further works to transfix and seduce the user. Williams' analysis of the sound in the genre does not address this important function.

At this point it is necessary to mobilise the concepts of the fetish and fantasy as the fetishistic function of the sound field can only be made sense of through the examination of the role of the voice, and particularly the inarticulate voice. As a user of the text, it is the sound which powerfully attracts my attention. This may not be so for all users, but it does warrant a more detailed exposition. Following psychoanalytic studies of the voice, I would argue that the sounds of sex and pleasure, in conjunction with the images, interpellate the user into a fantasmatic space which derives from the primary fantasies of seduction and parental coitus. These fantasies coalesce around the enigma of adult genital sexuality, which as Jean Laplanche (1989) argues, is barred from the child's understanding.

Punky Girls evokes the enigma of sexuality presented to the child who does not yet have the physical or cognitive means to understand the implication of what she/he is hearing or seeing (Laplanche, 1989: 121-148). When using Explicit Sex films, the trace of this imaginary scene is diverted into an intelligible question which is 'is what I am seeing here real or faked?' I am here drawing on Laplanche's theory of general seduction, which seeks to re-read Freud's early notion of the seduction fantasy. Laplanche's re-reading of the Freudian conception of subject formation re-emphasises the term 'primal seduction'. It is used 'to describe a fundamental situation in which

an adult proffers to a child verbal, non-verbal and even behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual significations' (ibid.: 126). Laplanche's concept of sex as an enigmatic signifier corresponds to Lacan's *objet a*. Both of these correspond to the point from which desire and fantasy originate. I would argue that Explicit Sex films re-invoke the sexual enigma for the user. This is a key component in authenticity posed as a question to the user: 'is what I am hearing and seeing authentic?' Again it is the question and not the answer that is important here; it is the question that brings about a gap (in knowledge or belief) which the user can fill with fantasy and desire.

The fantasy of parental coitus is the child's response to the enigma of sex and can be read as one of the sources for the fascination and desire to know if what we are seeing/hearing is authentic. This imaginary scenario demonstrates, to use Nietzsche's terms, that the will to knowledge is in operation in the attempt to locate and solve the enigma of sex through a mythic or fantasmatic narrative. Sexual messages that inflect the child's relationship with others must be fixed into a narrative which provides the subject with a sense of control. Through the provision of a series of pre-ordained narratives the symbolic order offers the subject a means to contain and offer solutions to the riddles posed by the enigmatic signifier. However, symbolic narratives about sex will always be interbound with imaginary and fantasmatic narratives. It could be said that symbolic and imaginary narratives, myths and fantasies all originate from an attempt, at both macro and micro level, to solve the unsolvable riddle of the enigmatic sexual signifier. Discourse frequently works to legitimise certain kinds of narratives as if they were immanently authentic. The aim of discourse is to fix knowledge and stem the flow of the fantasy. This fetishistic disavowal of the dissembling power of the enigmatic signifier nevertheless fails; if it did not then the subject might 'close the book' on sexuality as its mystery will have been solved.

The idea of the enigmatic sexual signifier is also useful as its free-floating form is constantly reworked through conscious and unconscious means. This suggests that

sexual identity is not biologically or socially hardwired and that it undergoes a constant shifting process. What is suggested by this useful paradigm is that the imaginary and the symbolic are inextricably intertwined. The enigmatic sexual signifier mobilises both symbolic networks and imaginary and fantasmatic networks. These two cannot be teased apart, despite ideological motives to guarantee some things as immanently authentic, and that the authentic is constantly being upgraded to suit the technological and epistemological moment. The authentic has to be constantly reworked to remain resilient to change and derives its power because it works to disavow the problematic melding of the symbolic and the imaginary. It stands to separate the two and it is here that it can be considered to be an (overvalued) fetish.⁶⁸ In a sense it keeps us sane, but also has the power to guarantee ideological discourse.

Laplanche's model provides a meta-theoretical understanding of the way in which authenticity works as an *as if* which keeps the term in cultural currency and shows how it works to give the subject a means of negotiating the vicissitudes of fantasmatic and symbolic structures. Authenticity and the enigmatic sexual signifier are then key components that suture the subject. This intermeshing of fantasy and 'reality' is kept at bay by many discursive strategies. Derrida's notion of the 'metaphysics of presence' privileges the voice over the written word. This discursive privileging (or fetishisation) is at work in the synchronous sound of *Punky Girls*. The voice and the sounds of sexual pleasure are encoded and read as if they were phenomenal rather than representational. This constitutes a fetishistic investment in the voice. Although Derrida does not use this term, his comments on phonocentrism are useful for the current investigation.

⁶⁸ The resilience of authenticity to adapt to change can be seen in its different uses in philosophical discourse. To name but a few: Sartre's religio-philosophical notion of authenticity (for itself); Marx's notion of false-consciousness. Derrida's critical reading of presence and Barthes' notion of the 'grain of the voice' both focus, but in different ways, on the way in which the human voice is encoded as more authentic than written forms. All these strands coalesce rather neatly in the mythology of authenticity that underpins certain kinds of rock and pop music in the West (Punk, Pub Rock, Dub and more recently Rap).

Through his post-structural critique of phenomenology, Derrida exposes the paradigm which underlies the common-sense belief that what is experienced in the here and now is irreducibly real. This is revealed as both a comforting illusion, a necessary(?) error, and is the effect of discourse. This fetishistic paradigm places the subject centre-stage as an autonomous individual. A key point in Derrida's argument is that the illusion of an unmediated presence works to guarantee the place of the autonomous subject within language and meaning, and works to disavow the difficult assumption that the subject is the product of a signification system rather than its source. He argues that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is always arbitrary, and the meaning of the signified is always bound up with its position in the signification system. As such no meaning can exist which is not mediated through the system of signification. The notion that experience underlies language is an error or mis-recognition; there can be no unqualified presence. Within this system, however, some things are coded as having presence; for example speech over writing.

The notion that speech is immediate and therefore somehow escapes or exceeds the representation system, is revealed by Derrida as the product of a certain organisation (hierarchy) of knowledge. In this particular organisation the voice functions *as if*⁶⁹ it were more authentic than writing. This has no immanent basis, but functions as a comforting illusion through which certain hegemonic differential mappings between artifice and reality are guaranteed. Derrida calls this privileging of the voice phonocentrism; the spoken word appears to be somehow freer and more genuine than the written word. Because of its immediacy, and our narcissistic belief that we can read the intonations of the voice, we take the voice to be closer to experience - we believe that it is more difficult to lie or manufacture a sentiment if we watch and hear the voice of the other. We take the voice as if it were de-textualised through its apparent immediacy, which we read as being less able to guard itself from duplicitous

⁶⁹ I have continued to italicised *as if* here to demonstrate the links between my argument and Derrida's analyses.

meaning. Hence in the reception of Explicit Sex films we might read the voice to gain a sense of whether pleasure is 'really' being experienced by the enunciator. This might be particularly so with women - the guarantee of women's pleasure is not visual in the way that the come-shot is for men - and thus the user might seek evidence by listening closely to the voice.⁷⁰

Derrida's critique of phonocentrism exposes the way in which discourse is hierarchised, and the way in which the voice is taken to communicate greater authenticity than the written text. The paradigm also deconstructs the belief that the voice and bodily communication are able to circumvent the defensive artifice of language. I am not totally in agreement with Derrida here; the psychoanalytic notion of the symptom, for example, is partly predicated on the idea that the body can say what cannot be verbally articulated. The notion that the voice/speech is somehow more authentic than writing is reinforced by the notion that the body has a materiality all of its own which is 'extra-linguistic'. But the question this critique raises is: how is it that the voice becomes fetishised by being over-valued as a primary channel for authentic communication? In order to answer this it is necessary to look at the processes of subject formation through psychoanalysis. The discourse of the voice as authentic leans upon the key aspects of subject formation. In her book *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988) Kaja Silverman links the Derridean critique of phonocentrism to the voice in cinema and to the role of the mother's voice for the child. She concurs with Derrida's view of phonocentrism and says:

...Western metaphysics has fostered the illusion that speech is able to express the speaker's inner essence, that is, as 'part' of him or her. It locates the subject of speech in the same ontological space as the speaking subject, so that the former seems a natural outgrowth of the latter. The fiction of the authenticity of cinema

⁷⁰ There are however a few films that confound this received wisdom by depicting women who do ejaculate during orgasm (discussed in detail in Chapter Four). I would also maintain that non-ejaculatory women's orgasms are visible through muscle contractions. However, in most of the films I have watched this is a rare, but not totally excluded, sight (for example, *Kinkorama 14* also discussed in Chapter Four).

sound thus promotes belief not only in presence but self-presence. (Silverman, 1988: 43)

Silverman engages with a view within film studies current in the 80s that saw the sound dimension of a cinematic text as being closer to the pro-filmic event than the image. She critiques this view and deploys Barthes, Derrida and psychoanalysis to show that this view is a mis-recognition. I will précis and elaborate the gist of her argument and highlight aspects of it that are useful for my argument. The intonations and idiosyncrasies of the sound of the voice, what Barthes calls the 'grain of the voice' (Barthes, 1977: 179-189), and what Lacan calls the 'residue of the voice' which is remaindered beyond the specific articulation, is encoded as a sign of the presence of speech over writing, and the grain of the voice adds to the presentation of 'presence' in cinematic texts. The questions that Silverman asks are how is it that the voice has a privileged authentic status over other forms of linguistic communication and how is it that the voice comes to signify a mediating capacity between the discourses of the mind and the body? I would elaborate on this by asking: how is it that the voice becomes fetishised? Silverman offers a useful response to this which brings us back to fantasy and the function of the fetish. Silverman posits the maternal voice as the *objet a*.

I would add here that the discourse of phonocentrism is retrospectively mapped onto the mother's voice and invests it through its inclusion into an *a posteriori* matrix - it is not possible to say what function it actually has for the very small child. Phonocentrism thus leans on and renders a kind of secondary revision of the *objet a*. This is how the *objet a* becomes the fetish.

Silverman argues that the role of the mother's⁷¹ voice is significant for the child in its early life. The mother's voice becomes a site of fantasy which Silverman defines, following Laplanche and Pontalis (1986), as a 'retrospective construction of an irrecoverable event' (1988: 73). She argues that the male imaginary is inflected by fantasies of the mother's voice as both a trope of plenitude or as a trope of entrapment. I would here interrupt the discourse to ask: does it just have to be a male imaginary? I am however wary of over-simplified categories. I would also suggest that if this is a valid concept then it would also have to apply to women. The mother's voice functions as a 'sonorous envelope' (1988: 73) and is at once a sign of the loss of the *jouissance* of oneness or wholeness, but also represents an entrapment and threat to the autonomy and power of the subject.⁷² She argues that in the male imaginary (and I would include women here too as this also inflects women's relationship with both mother and other women) there is either a move to recover lost plenitude through the libidinal investment in the woman's voice, or a move to dis-invest the threatening power of the mother's voice by an attempt to place her in the position of the pre-oedipal child. The latter, she argues, underpins the way in which Hollywood often reduces the voice of women into a cry or scream. She says:

...whereas the mother's voice initially functions as the acoustic mirror in which the⁷³ child discovers its identity and voice, it later functions as the acoustic mirror in which the male subject hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble. (1988:81).

Within Silverman's reading, the reduction of the women's speech to babble or the cry in Hollywood is a product of the masculine desire to dis-invest women of the

⁷¹ This of course assumes that the primary carer is female. What, for example, happens if the primary carer is male. How would this affect the distinction between the voice of the father as representative of the name-of-the-father and the mother? If the primary carer is male then the retrospective fantasies which are located onto the body of 'woman', which Silverman argues are played out in Hollywood, would presumably be altered.

⁷² Why should this just be men - doesn't it also represent the same for women? - or does women's identificatory alignment with the mother on the resolution of the Oedipus complex alter this?

⁷³ Note she says *the* child here.

power of discourse (including the power to lie), and because the voice is aligned to presence and interior essence, the cry confirms the women's status as pure body. There is, she suggests, a slippage at work here in that the lips of the mouth and the lips of the labia become conflated, the vocal sounds become disqualified from discourse and become the sounds of the sexual body.

In *Punky Girls*, the verbal coaxing sounds become a kind of 'pussy talk' which is, within the terms of Silverman's rubric, encoded as a guarantee of the authenticity of the two women's sexual pleasure. Under this rubric, the 'pussy talk' of *Punky Girls* will be read by men as either a sign of women's alignment with the body or as a signifier of a lost plenitude that is located within the mother's body. Whilst this is useful I am not convinced that these are the only meanings which can be mapped onto these voices. Whatever the gender and sexual identity of the user, it may be that the voices are configured and mapped in different ways, and that women viewers too might construct the voice as a libidinally invested object which leans on childhood fantasies of the mother's voice. Silverman cites Stephen Heath's comment on the function of the voice in *Explicit Sex* films:

...so many bodies and bits of bodies without voices; merely perhaps, snatches of dialogue, to get things going, and then imperatively, a whole gamut of pants and cries, to deal with the immense catastrophic problem...of the visibility or not of pleasure, to provide a vocal image to guarantee the accomplishment of pleasure, the proper working of the economy. (Heath cited in Silverman, 1988: 68)

Whilst I agree with Silverman and Heath's sentiment here (that women's voices are often left unheard within dominant discourse), I am not sure that this silence is purely the product of the 'male' imaginary. My argument is that the voice in *Explicit Sex* films is rendered as a fetish through which the user can invest fantasy and desire in the text, and that the fetish engages with a knot of elements - the enigma of the sexual signifier, the question of authenticity. It may be the case that some women might configure these things differently to men - but men do not necessarily configure them

in the same way either. Would Silverman have women 'come quietly' so as not to engage with men's fantasies?

A further question arises here, one that is particularly relevant to *Punky Girls*. What happens when the vocal performance is foregrounded *as* performance? In many Explicit Sex films the sounds of ecstasy very often break 'over the top' of the naturalistic frame. Post-production crew, in trying to make these sounds significantly audible, often effect 'overkill' and the sounds become 'unbelievable'. It is at these moments that the economy of authenticity gives way to the accenting of performance, to a kind of parody or a hyper-reality, which disrupts the notion of voice coded as authentic presence. The woman's voice then becomes discursive, betraying her knowledge of the rules of the game. It may be the case that a user's rapt fascination with the vocal sounds of sexual pleasure, where the nuances of the voice are picked up by close miccing, tap into the fantasy of the mother's voice as a sign of plenitude but this, I would argue, is problematised when performativity breaks and ruptures the 'sonorous envelope' of the register of authenticity. Once again we are confronted by the fetishistic question: 'do I believe these are the sounds of authentic pleasure?'

What creates, for me at least, the frisson of these films is the question they pose about believability. It is not simply a case knowing for sure that what we see and or hear is absolutely real or absolutely artifice. This response demonstrates itself as fetishistic - it allows the user to 'have their cake and eat it too'. It is then important for this configuration of the fetish that performance is a key feature of the text. In the next section I will go on to show how this is exemplified by *Punky Girls*.

The Authenticity of Performance

In this section I will show that the signifiers of accentuated performance, exemplified by the film *Punky Girls*, operate *as if* they disrupt the authentic status of the film. My argument here is that performativity appears to confound authenticity, but in fact, operates to reiterate the reality paradigm by interpellating the reader through the indeterminate status of the sex in the film. I propose that the reality paradigm is masked and acquires new surface meaning through the discourse of performance and that the authentic status of the film is constructed in a far more complex way than Williams suggests in her view that Explicit Sex films are 'devoted to realism' (Williams, 1990: 124). The accentuation of the sexual performance in *Punky Girls* appears to rupture the user's belief that the sex they are seeing and hearing is authentic. This is crucial to the construction of an ambiguous hermeneutic space through which the film interpellates and mobilises fantasy and desire. This, I will argue, does not work to unmask the discursive construction of sexuality, but instead works to reiterate and perpetuate the continued centrality of the 'reality paradigm'.

Through this line of argument, I am also taking issue with Zizek's assertion that Explicit Sex films 'give us what we want' (1991: 110). He suggests that these films/videos reproduce unconscious scenarios in a 'naked' form that, in his reading, leads to a cessation of the flow of desire. I would by contrast argue that the function of accentuated performance, acting as a form of *coitus interruptus* by arresting the continuity of authentic sex, is to create a tension between performance and authenticity. This works to 'hollow out a space' for an individual's primary fantasy to inhabit and the Real of desire to be disavowed. The tension between authenticity and performance solicits the enigma of sexuality, fundamental to the primary fantasy, which interpellates the will or drive to knowledge.

On a more practical level, Zizek's argument that Explicit Sex films work to freeze the flow of desire by being too close to the 'Real of desire' and can only produce a feeling

of depression in the viewer, belies the economic success of the genre that prevails despite its illegality.⁷⁴

As I outlined above, Judith Butler's work on performativity in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) proposes an understanding of both sex and gender as a reiterative performance of signifiers that are current within a given cultural contingency. The idea that sex and gender are not natural but instead 'a copy of a copy' is useful to the analysis of the apparent opposition set up between authenticity and performativity in the Explicit Sex film genre. The tropes of sex and gender within these films are always intertextually linked to the formulations of sex and gender that circulate in a given culture, and thereby dominant sex and gender norms are invisibly reiterated because they are diffused through multiple discourses. The sexual performances depicted in these films are 'intelligible' because they reiterate common, but culturally specific, understandings of what authentic sex is thought to be. Although spectacle and performance might appear to confound authenticity, I am then arguing that the spectacle and performance are nevertheless operating within the same paradigm. By way of example, the magazine publication *Real Wives*⁷⁵ publishes photographs of what it calls 'ordinary' women. These images acquire authentic status through their difference from 'professional' glamour models signalled by the written captions that tell the reader that these women are all married housewives. This is, however, a form of reiteration as the women enact or perform the poses of their professional counterparts but it is their difference (body shape, age and context) from these that create both a marketable difference and a shift in the means of reiteration. This unaccustomed (apparent) authentic difference operates as the source of spectacle, but nevertheless operates within the terms of the reality paradigm. The magazine was published on the strength of the popularity of 'readers' wives' sections in standard softcore magazines. Thereby demonstrating the complex relation between

⁷⁴ I would add here that Žižek's critique also does not factor-in the kudos of obtaining and watching these films. This is tantamount to a pleasurable flouting of the 'law of the father'.

⁷⁵ Copy of the cover of this magazine is included as *Appendix D*.

authenticity ('real wives') and performative spectacle (their bodily difference from 'glamour' models). This can also be applied to *Punky Girls*, as here the two female protagonists do not resemble the 'glamorous' types of women that are featured in the 'star' vehicle films such as Ginger Lynne in *Some Kind of Woman* and Carol Lynne in *Lust-Poker*.

This apparent difference may work to offer a form of pleasure to women viewers, as the magazine suggests that a range of 'ordinary' women might enjoy or feel empowered by being the 'object of the gaze', and that the pleasure of exhibitionism is not dependent on the stereotype of 'good looks'. For some female viewers these ordinary women might be taken as more authentic than the conventional porn star. One aspect that seems to be enjoyed, if the testimony of the women given in the captions that anchor these photographs is to be believed, is that masquerading as sex symbols is the source of pleasure. A common feminist argument is that these women are suffering from 'false consciousness'; that they are playing 'into the hands of patriarchy' by turning (an apparent) oppression into pleasure. In other words they are metaphorically considered to gild the bars of the prison that holds them. However, this view does not see things from the women's point of view - and effectively silences them. The testimony of the women's voices in this magazine is that women experience the male gaze in ways other than as simply a form of oppression. I would, however, contend that the women's pleasure is dependent on the reiteration of a certain kind of sex and gender performance.

The performative reiteration of sex and gender is, as Butler suggests, masked over by reification or naturalisation of gender and sex alignments. Hegemonic discourse often presents sex and gender as the product of hard-wired physiological differences rather than as a repeat performance offset by the deployment of different signifiers. Under certain circumstances sexual and gender signifiers can appear to be marked out as performance per se, as if adding quotation marks to the performance. I will show how these quotation markers are present and operate and work to disguise the

reiterative process in the more recent forms of Explicit Sex films. These may take the form of parody or masquerade or a variety of other signifiers, which work to accentuate the spectacle and performance of a scene. I will show how spectacle and performance have a two-fold function: firstly, how the tension between performance as spectacle and authenticity opens up a space which the user can invest with fantasy and desire; secondly, how sex and gender norms are not reiterated simply through one-to-one correspondences, but that the performative enactment of sex and gender covers and disavows the reiterative action of apparent differences (although as I will argue in Chapter Four there are elements of repressed sexuality, remaindered by the subject formation process, which may 'return' in Explicit Sex films). As Butler says performativity is:

....not a singular act...for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (Butler, 1993: 12/13)

The space opened up by the hermeneutic question posed by the tension between authenticity and performativity interpellates the user into the Explicit Sex film text, by giving the user the illusion of configuring the text within the terms of their own psycho-sexuality. The text itself is not a stable object but can be broached and rendered in multiple ways, but which in different guises reiterates certain givens like the reality paradigm. A key point here is that these texts can be regarded as taking up repressed unconscious desires and fantasies, which are remaindered through the channelling processes of subject formation.⁷⁶ This gives a clue as to why these films

⁷⁶ The difficulty with this argument is that what is remaindered through the discursive channelling of sexuality, once articulated, becomes part of discourse, and therefore cannot be pinned down to specific acts. It is then very difficult to show what is in excess of discourse, because this excess is precisely what is excluded from discourse.

may work to fascinate the user; they may, for instance, mobilise unconscious homosexual fantasies that have been repressed through the heterosexual matrix. These film/videos therefore may be said to offer the opportunity to gaze at same gendered genitals, although this may be disavowed through the fetish of looking at the genitals of the other gender. The unconscious investment in the gaze is covered over by a more 'acceptable'⁷⁷ kind of looking, and might be said to function as a fetish which allows a sly gaze at same sex bodies and genitals. There may also be a bundle of different gazes, for both men and women of any sexual identity; a rivalrous gaze, a curious gaze, a comparative gaze, a contemptuous gaze. All of these are invested with and articulate different aspects of desire. Williams' suggestion that the films are motivated through the heterosexual male quest to find the invisible female orgasm therefore seems a limited, and heterosexually male-centred, way of defining the sources of the pleasure engendered through the genre.

Butler bases her ideas on the anti-essentialist notion that gender and sex norms are maintained through a performative enactment. The norm is maintained through a historically specific deployment of different vocal and visual signifiers; for instance, clothing, gestures, voice, and the look. The meanings invested in these signifiers are stabilised through a reified alignment to physiological attributes. Butler argues that physiological paradigms of the body perform *as if* they are pre-discursive and ahistorical, which is itself a discursively produced paradigm. She, however, rejects the cultural determinist assumption that the body has an inert pre-discursive materiality, which is merely waiting to be inscribed with social meanings. This too, she says, is a discursive formulation and I would suggest would include Foucault's passive body model prior to *The Care of the Self* (1990). She says 'This signifying practice effects a social space for and of the body within certain regulatory grids of intelligibility.' (1990: 131).⁷⁸ Concerning this, and glossing on Butler through

⁷⁷ 'Acceptable' as defined through the logic of the heterosexual matrix.

⁷⁸ The formation of the boundaries, contours and rims of the body will be discussed in Chapter Four in relation to transgression.

psychoanalysis, the discursive mapping of the body, and its processes, is performed through the way in which boundaries, contours and rims of the body are given substance through regulatory practices such as abjection and taboos. Explicit Sex films enforce the particularities of contemporary discursive mappings of the erotogenic body, and it is through the intrinsic use of accentuated performance and, most importantly, spectacle, that these mappings are masked. Performance is crucial to the disguised reiteration of a norm. This can happen because discourse is not a single system, but instead a matrix of conflicting and contradictory meanings. This is exemplified through the apparent contradiction between sexual performance encoded as spectacle and the encoding of 'authentic' sex. A good example of the way that spectacle might appear to interrupt the discourse of authentic sex would be the 'spectacular' and 'exotic' fist-fucking scenes in *Punky Girls* that appear to defy the discourse of sex as predicated on reproduction and heterosexuality. My contention here is that through the spectacular disruption of 'normal' morphological mappings of sex and the sexual body the films work to engage the user through the hermeneutic code. It is the ambiguous state produced through the question around authenticity ('not knowing') that engenders frisson and fantasy and allows what is remaindered from the discursive channelling of sexuality to then return to the scene. This can be taken to problematise the heterosexual matrix, but nevertheless the spectacle of the scene depends on the logic of the heterosexual matrix for its frisson and difference.

Pasi Falk's (1993, 1994) thesis is that the genre works through the mobilisation of indexical signifiers. He neglects to account for the tension created between the spectacular framing of the genre and the inclusion of indexical signifiers. As with many other film genres, there is a staging of visual sexual signifiers that is overtly signalled as orchestrated performance. The overt performance can be seen in operation in various ways, but most obviously through the staging and choreography of sexual signifiers and the VCR/televisual apparatus itself.⁷⁹ The televisual frame

⁷⁹ It is still a box in a domestic space - even if it has got nicam stereo.

itself works to accentuate performance in the same way that a proscenium arch locates and contains theatrical action as a play, and in so doing acts *as if* it were in opposition to authenticity. This ostensible difference depends on the way that any televisual image, be it home-made videos, the news, or documentary, is separated off from everyday life; thereby the authenticity of an event is superficially 'neutralised' by rendering an event into a visual spectacle.

A common argument in media studies is that the televisual framing of news footage textualises and distances audio/visual images and sounds as spectacle. This entails that the 'horror' of a news event is buffered and partially disavowed. Televisual framing works to distance the viewer from the event by fictionalising or textualising it. This is partly related to Raymond William's (1975) idea that television works as 'flow'; the proximity of news to the dominant use of fiction-based material, such as advertising or soap opera, renders the news comparable to these forms. Even though we may be aware that televisual footage from a war zone is in some sense 'real', the televisual frame and its two-dimensional quality renders its modality as weak. When a video like *Punky Girls* is seen on television, via the VCR, the tropes of authenticity are ostensibly problematised by the two-dimensionality of the image and the borders of the televisual frame, therefore a further type of disavowal is necessary for it to be read as 'authentic'.

It is important to conduct a close textual analysis of *Punky Girls* to show how the complex slippages and tensions created between authenticity and performance operate. I will not attempt a complete shot by shot analysis as this would be an unnecessarily lengthy process, but instead will focus on key relevant features of the video.

As with many mail-order Explicit Sex film videos, the main film title *Punky Girls* is preceded by a series of adverts for other similar videos. The inclusion of clips⁸⁰ of

⁸⁰ These clips are edited highlights of the more frenetic moments of each of the films.

other films without any clear dividing inter-titles creates a montage effect which blurs the distinction between discrete texts. Read through the framework of European Satellite TV, the video mimics the experience of channel surfing. Apart from a conventional advertising function, the adverts give the user a sense that they are getting more sex for their money. Thereby, in part, staging pleasurable fantasies of an irrecoverable plenitude. Clips from *Punky Girls* precede the main film so that the viewer is given a taste of what will follow. The effect of this can be construed to foreground the textuality of the film and to work against Linda Williams' idea that the genre uses many of the conventions of Realism. For example, the episodic structure of *Punky Girls* works against these conventions. What is made clear to the viewer is that an editor has cut into the continuity of the initially shot film footage in order to distribute the highlights of the sex more evenly throughout the film.

The episodic form of the film, which is a feature of most of these films, whether narrative based or not, suggests that the viewer may choose not to watch it from start to finish, as with other linear based cinematic genres. Rather, the implication is that the viewer, whether they are 'one-handed' watching or viewing with either a sexual partner or various sexual partners, will be moved by a short section of the film to stop watching and do something more interesting. This is not a practice used by mainstream filmmakers and makes it more of an interactive relation between the film and the user. The user too has an accentuated performative role in the reception of these films.

The first image on the tape is a close-up of a woman's shaved pudendum. Her torso fills the screen from just below the navel to a black stockinged upper thigh. Her flesh fills the whole screen, giving no idea of the boundaries of her body and thus tapping into fantasies of the mother's body as a signifier of boundless, impossible, plenitude. The woman is masturbating with a very large pink dildo and her torso moves rhythmically in time with the dildo. This performance acquires the status of authentic

sex through penetration, but also, because of the sound of her muted sighs that accompany the action.

There is no non-diegetic sound or music, only the sound of heightened breathing which corresponds to the movement of her body. Indeed, the sound of her breathing and moaning fills the sound space. This woman is not coded as a punk, like the women in the main feature, but instead corresponds far more closely to the stereotype of the 'porn star'; she has long hair and is wearing make-up, and is visually coded in a very different way to the women in *Punky Girls*. This status is further supported because the two punk women are not coded as porn 'starlets'; neither wear make-up, have conventional porn starlet/harlot hair styles, nor painted talon-like nails. Juxtaposed with the first woman seen, the two punk women are relationally coded as more authentic because, despite their punk hairstyles, they are coded as a certain kind of woman who might be seen on the street.

The name of the production company, *Ganai Prod*, is shown. There is then a fade to black before another low budget computer graphics title *Teenies Extreme Exclusive* appears. Given the currency of the trope low-tech = amateurism = authenticity in contemporary media, the low-budget graphics add to the sense that what is being watched is somehow authentic. The presence of the words 'teenies' and 'extreme' signal transgressive spectacle to the user and that the user is going to get genuine hardcore sex. This is supported by the following image of an extreme close-up of a shaved and open vagina, penetrated by a smaller black dildo. The close-up works to guarantee the authenticity of the penetrative act. The hand playing with the woman's clitoris does not appear to belong to the body in the frame; its size and shape suggest that it is a woman's hand. The movement of the hand, dildo and body is accompanied by stertoric but not the over-exaggerated breathing heard, for instance in *Dr Butts II*, thus signalling, through this difference, authentic pleasure. The sound of the woman's voice also creates a continuity between the first shots and these.

After a few seconds the camera slowly pulls back to reveal a naked woman lying on her back with her feet tied by rope and another woman kneeling beside her. The breathing continues seamlessly, emphasising that the movement of the camera is not the result of editing but is one long take. The sound is not dubbed-on, and thereby creates an intertextual link to the signifying system of actuality footage, for instance the 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary. This exemplifies one of the tensions created by the film between authenticity and performative spectacle, as the link to actuality footage works to foreground the scene as spectacle, thereby overtly implicating the user as voyeur. The woman lying on her back has her hand between the legs of the kneeling woman who lets the dildo fall from the other women's vagina but continues to play with her clitoris. The key role played by the clitoris in this film is important to note here, as it is for many women central to the experience of orgasm. The inclusion of clitoral stimulation may add to the sense that the scene is authentic sex. (This authenticity might be underscored for some women users as being in contrast to Hollywood, where women's orgasms are generally represented as occurring during heterosexual coitus.)

The kneeling woman is naked except for a leather collar around her neck. The sides of her head are shaved, and the whiteness and thinness of her body is accentuated by the black background. This staging foregrounds the voyeurism of the scene - their white bodies are contrasted against the black background and are thus meant to be seen. The shaved pudendum is a staple of most Explicit Sex films since, from a cinematic, utilitarian point of view, this enables greater visual access, but which further signifies a performative dimension to their bodily images. The shaved pudendum also works to foreground the genital area. After a cut to an inter-title that says *Punky Girls*, the image fades to black. This is followed by a short scene of about 20 seconds where one of the women is lying on her back and is positioned in the bottom of the frame. The other woman squats behind her with her legs open, the lying woman's arm is positioned between her legs; her hand and wrist are inside the

squatting woman's vagina. The camera slowly re-frames the shot so that both women are in view and then closes in on the action of the hand/arm and vagina; this ostensibly works to give the user a better view but also works to foreground the authentic performance of the scene. There is then a cut to a further inter-title.

The next scene reveals a significant aspect of spectacle and accentuated performance as both women are dressed in PVC and leather, fetish clothing and high PVC boots. The use of this type of clothing intertextually links the scene with the iconography of Sado-Masochism and signals that the dress is designed to engage the user's gaze. The PVC and the steel of buckles, studs and clips glint in the bright lights. This draws attention to the orchestratedness of the scene; the PVC creaks with the protagonists' movements, and the clips and leather fasteners make resounding noises when they are undone. The sound-field here works to authenticate the sex in the scene as well as resounding in the residues around the fantasy of hearing parental coitus. The use of fetishistic clothing does not accord with the conventional Freudian reading of fetishism. It is not a disavowal of female genitals, but instead the clothing draws more attention to them. The clothing may however constitute a form of 'prettification' of the genitals, enabling the user of whatever sexual identification to cope with the inherent otherness of the sight of genitals.

The two women kneel opposite one another, sizing one another up. The camera maps their bodies, zooming into their faces, multiple earrings, and thighs. A game of touching and pushing each other away ensues, the smaller, more androgynous, woman eschewing the attentions of the other, more conventionally feminine, woman. The film then progresses backwards and forwards in an episodic way between moments of sexual tension and moments of playfulness and laughter, dressing and undressing, and mild S-M. At one point during the film an advert for another film is inserted into the text which interrupts the scene and works to implicate the viewer as viewer but also as consumer. The advert is for a film which at first appears to correspond to the conventions of the sub genre of the 'fuck' film, as it includes the erect penis and

conventional fucking, however, this is inter-cut by a scene of a woman pissing over two men in a bathtub, and a woman pissing in a bucket of ice held by a man. The insertion of the scene seems to have two significant functions; it highlights the absence of men in *Punky Girls* - the absence of the penis will be discussed in the next chapter - and it foregrounds economies of sexual desire other than heterosexual coitus which are coded as bizarre spectacle.

In part *Punky Girls* resembles the conventions of fictional forms of television in other ways. The video begins with a set of credits, although they are not as comprehensive as in most conventional television programmes - but crucially no authorship is flagged. The use of credits creates an initial association with 'light entertainment' television, rather than the conventions of documentary or television news which tend to signal that the programme is not fiction, through the use of a short and powerful piece of introductory music, and spoken headlines over the music. The credits do not carry the symbolic weight of a news or documentary programme. The codes of authenticity are then complicated by the use of codes of entertainment which in turn set up the implicit notion that what you are about to see is more aligned to performance, in the sense of an enacted drama, rather than actuality footage. The early inclusion of a penetration scene, though, swiftly re-establishes the authenticity of the sex in the film.

The *modus operandus* of the cinematography⁸¹ in Explicit Sex films may ostensibly function to demonstrate the authenticity of the sexual acts, but it is also driven by the demands of spectacle and work to highlight performance. In *Punky Girls* the use of editing to divide and disrupt the temporal continuity of the text does not conform to the constraints of continuity editing. The editing is then very evident and noticeable rather than neatly sutured-in. In conjunction with the use of dissolves, the editing, the inclusion of an insert from another video and the amateur 'shaky' camera work,

⁸¹ This does seem an overly 'grand' word to use here and seems more appropriate to Art House or big-budget Hollywood movies, but the use of the term here is to describe the technical means of producing the video.

functions to emphasise the cinematic means of production, something commonly aligned with the practices of the avant-garde and modernism. Although, as I have already pointed out, these are coded not in terms of the strategies of 'high art' but instead use the amateurishness of the cinematography to establish a link with authenticity. Through continuity editing and the use of either steady-cam or a stable camera, narrative film and television conventionally creates an illusion that what is seen is an actual and unstaged event. In *Punky Girls*, though, the overt visibility of the editing stresses the production and performativity⁸² of the film. As much as the (ideal) spectator may be absorbed by the images of authentic sex, the cinematography asserts itself and cannot be ignored, thereby producing a tension between the discourses of authenticity and performance as spectacle. But this is then re-established as indicating authenticity.

The performative drama of *Punky Girls* is further accentuated through the orchestratedness of the scene which opens up a space for the question of authenticity to be posed by the user to the film. The inclusion of sex toys - dildos, ice-cubes, candles, whips, lubrication cream - works to show that the scene has been thought through before-hand. The toys also create hermeneutic puzzles and expectations for the user, such as when, where and how they will be used. It is through the use of these objects that authenticity is maintained.

The women's encoding as punk lesbians also emphasises the complex interplay and tension between performance as spectacle and authentic, believable, sex. It allows us to see why viewing performativity as a 'pure signifier', without looking at the way it intersects with authenticity, leads to an impoverished reading of the text. Punk traded on its authenticity, setting itself up in opposition to commodified forms of other youth culture. Although this became problematic, punk nevertheless emphasised itself as an

⁸² As argued earlier in the chapter, this is a relatively new development in the body of Explicit Sex films, which distinguishes itself from the narrative films of the 60s, 70s and early 80s, and which resurrects some of the techniques of the early amateur Stag films.

authentic, rather than a commodified youth culture.⁸³ Individual punks often carved alienation on to the surface of their bodies, putting into play an arresting complex contradiction between authenticity and performance. The pain produced by the razor or needle is in itself a form of abject spectacle. This was designed to disrupt the conventional logic of corporeal and social authenticity, but nevertheless worked to show that authenticity and performance are complexly interlinked.

Punky Girls acquires an added sense of authenticity, which it can be argued supersedes the use of the codes of light entertainment at work in the credit sequence at the beginning of the film, through the suggestion that the two women's participation in the film is characteristic of the taboo-busting anarchy, typical of the transgressive behaviour expected of the street-punk stereotype. The use of the punk coding then assigns a certain authenticity to the sex in the films when read against professional porn stars, such as Ginger Lynne, Carol Lynne, Traci Lords and Cicciolina.

Through the use of punk iconography the video ostensibly provides a culturally specific articulation of the sexual performance of the film as authentic. By referencing the sub-cultural dress and behavioural style of punk, the video operates to locate the two women as outside of the glamour industry, connoting the kind of every-day transgression, which was and perhaps still is typified by the popular conception of punk. The two women (if we read them as women) are (sometimes) dressed in fetish, PVC thigh length boots, PVC and leather clothing, and bondage straps. One of the punks has a mohican haircut and the other has a clean, shaven head.⁸⁴ The punk styling connotes an aggressive 'bad girl'/'tough girl'⁸⁵ sub-cultural image, which, it could be argued, references the guerrilla clothing used by separatist feminism in the 60/70s. For some feminists in this era, combat/military clothing was wielded as a

⁸³ Although punk originated through the creation of a re-newed market for selling clothes and records.

⁸⁴ Perhaps referring to Sinead O'Connor and her supposed anarchic behaviour.

⁸⁵ In 90s parlance - 'Riot Grrrl' - typified by Courtney Love and *Tank Girl* (the comic not the film).

counter to the 50s bobby-sox and circular skirt. There is a crucial difference however, in that punk wrote sex into the clothing of the 'bad girl' through the use of overtly fetishistic signifiers.

Punk as a subculture grew out of a shop opened by Malcolm McLaren and clothes designer Vivienne Westwood in the King's Road in 1976 called *Sex* (later *Seditionaries*), or at least, so the mythology goes.⁸⁶ *Sex* took underground fetish-wear, such as, PVC, rubber and leather. At that time fetish-wear could only be obtained through mail-order and by using it as street-fashion, punk treated it as emblematic of their rejection of what they considered to be the hypocrisy of suburban middle-class British tastes and values. McLaren and Westwood, influenced by French Situationism and the spirit of 1968 (both were Art school students around this time),⁸⁷ thought that the way to 'kick the establishment up the arse' was to desecrate and wickedly parody the sacred cows⁸⁸ of British culture. Westwood created what she thought was a confrontational visual style of dress by taking fetish-wear out of rent-by-the-hour-rooms and clandestine suburban bedrooms, and put it on the street on the bodies of the brave. Following Westwood's lead, punk women eschewed the soft colours and diaphanous styles of hippie clothing and the rejected hippie ideals of 'free love'. One of the ways of doing this was to wear bondage gear (the trousers, as well as PVC and rubber, the safety pin, and razor blade). Through the urban re-citation of fetish iconography that punks, like Westwood, thought to be previously the domain of the more exotic end of prostitution or fetishists, sex was (apparently) 'unmasked' and embraced as a trashy commodity. The aim of punk clothing and style was to show sex not, as hippie culture had proselytised, as natural, but instead as a performance. Westwood, as *the* punk designer, was about desecrating the mythic use-value of

⁸⁶ This is disputed by some, particularly US punks such as Richard Hell, formerly a member of the band 'The New York Dolls', and it cannot have had a single point of origin, other than in the mind of Malcolm McLaren.

⁸⁷ John Savage documents the stylistic guerilla tactics used by Westwood and McLaren in his book on Punk and the Sex Pistols: *England's Dreaming*.

⁸⁸ For example Queen Elizabeth II (punk was at its height during the queen's silver jubilee) and marital sex.

conventional signage very much in the manner of dada and Situationism (although she sold in her clothes in a Kings Road designer-wear shop). Prototypical punk singers and fans like the whip-wielding Siouxsie Sioux, drew on the distinctive style of the 50s dominatrix. Through punk, fetish clothing became a signifier for the new sexually aggressive woman who was not interested in sex as a means of capturing a husband. Although punks soon found themselves re-located from punk sub-culture to popular culture. Drawing from 'glam-rock', the early days of punk (1976-7) saw that the intrinsic fetish value of clothing became brusquely foregrounded and worked both as a de-masking and a reiteration of reified commodity fetishism. This could perhaps be seen as a logical response to the contradictory messages of consumer culture. The hidden fetishistic value of clothing metamorphosed into fetish costume, and many punk women used it as a sexual 'come-on' to terrorise and shock rather than to seduce.

In *Punky Girls*, made at least 10 years after a sanitised version of punk was embraced by consumer culture, the style of the two women's clothes, hair, bodily postures and gestures and body decoration are firmly located within the punk remit of the body as the site for performance, highlighting the signifying capability, beyond the illusion of use-value, of clothing and dress. Hippie renditions of the authentic natural self, in which the body was seen as a 'spiritual temple', were rejected and the body was treated as canvas onto which to carve out disillusionment and the failure to find an apparently authentic self beneath the integument of surface signage. Although there has been a consumerist appropriation of punk iconography⁸⁹ and a nostalgic re-framing of punk (at a nice safe time distance), its counter-cultural status still has the power to produce the transgressive frisson of the rejection of established norms. In *Punky Girls*, punk transgression is exacerbated through the mild S-M of the film, and through the protagonists' apparent rejection of heterosexuality. *Punky Girls* is not

⁸⁹ In the summer of 1996, twenty years after the emergence of punk, the *Sex Pistols*, the band whose name was most associated with punk, have reformed and their tour was named, very much in the spirit of punk, the 'Filthy Lucre' tour.

the only Explicit Sex film to use punk as the rationale for the sexual behaviour of the protagonists. *Rambone the Destroyer*, *New Wave Hookers* and *Dr. Butts II*, all produced in the late 80s, directly reference punk. In so doing, they take up punk's parody of 'bourgeois' sex which sought to problematise the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate sex. One of the outrages of punk, beloved of the tabloids, was the way in which it aggressively re-encoded sex as commodity and eschewed the conventional distinction between sex as a natural romantic form of exchange (within the confines of marriage) and sex as commodity. Despite Pat Califia's assertion that fetish-wear is not public wear because it '...draw(s) attention to erogenous zones' (Califia, 1994: 172), punk worked to transgress what it saw as the conventions of 'bourgeois' polite behaviour. The wearing of bondage gear on the street emphasised sex not as natural, but instead as a performative play of transgressive signs. Punk hovered at the margins of abjection through a provocative play with the signifiers of obscenity. Other signifiers, such as the hail of spit produced by punk audiences, the carving of messages on the skin with razor blades, the use of amphetamine and heroin and the *Sex Pistols'* legendary spitting and vomiting, all worked to undercut the rhythms of the 'clean and proper' body. The contradiction here is that punk sought corporeal authenticity, but found that this in itself operated as abject spectacle and performance.

Punk's engagement with the boundaries that divide legitimate from illegitimate sex has found its way (in a milder form) into the popular culture of the 90s through Madonna's frequent and stagey use of bondage and S-M clothing (for instance the 'Human Nature' video, 1996). Materials such as PVC, leather and rubber, used in *Punky Girls*, turn the body into spectacle by either moulding the body so that its contours are exaggerated or by criss-crossing the body to draw attention to the coercion of flesh. Long black shiny boots work to make legs look longer, and to draw attention, by contrast, to the shaved genital area. Clothing overtly coded as fetish, installs the sexual body not as natural, but instead, as an artificial construction.

There is, then, a performative play of the signifiers used to connote sleaze, these signifiers are ostensibly absent from, say, the legitimating discourse of the *au naturel* nude of classical art. The wearing of these clothes connotes that the wearer intends to be the object of an en-awed gaze, enjoying the exhibitionism that lends power to the wearer. As Pat Califia has said, 'Our society strives to make masculinity in men and femininity in women appear natural and biologically determined. Fetish costumes violate this rule by being too theatrical and deliberate' (1994: 171). The use of bondage and S-M clothing in *Punky Girls* performs and theatricalises the hidden relationship between sex and power, but I would argue that this theatricalisation is overtly embedded as historical, given its staging of punk and S-M iconography. The performative theatricalisation disrupts the idea that the object of the gaze is passive; here the gazed-at holds the aggressive power to enthrall the spectator. Butler's notion that theatricalisation disguises sex as a reiterative performance seems, ironically, to lose the potential of this form of empowerment. What is implicitly acknowledged here is that sexual frisson depends on power relationships, and what is rejected is the nostalgic utopian view of sexuality as existing outside power.

The use of punk iconography in *Punky Girls* may suggest to the viewer that what they are seeing is characteristically transgressive, and therefore 'authentic'. This differs from the narrative celluloid sex films made in the 70s. These films attempted to deflect the spectator's attention (and possible anxiety) away from the economic dimension of the films. In *Punky Girls*, however, sex is foregrounded as both an economic and power exchange between the women on screen and with the user. This is key to the drama of the video. The sexual activity is not woven into a story about, say, the enacted sexual initiation of a woman or man (seen particularly in Just Jaeckin's films which were backed by mainstream distributors: *Emmanuelle*, *The Story of O*, *Gwendoline*). There is no comforting illusion of a story in *Punky Girls* to detract attention away from the power exchange. Moreover, the power relations operate as the centre of the spectacle. The two women encircle each other, testing

out each other's ability to over-power (top) the other. This ritualised game works to implicate the spectator into the game and is enacted with them in mind. They are not, however, acting in the conventional sense, but instead, performing bodily 'feats' which work more in the manner of the spectacle of physical theatre (similar, for instance to the punk circus *Archaos*⁹⁰) rather than illusionist theatre. In one of the two fist-fucking scenes, the fistee gets up and walks around the room so that the camera has visual access to the event from all angles. Fist-fucking is in itself a rather extraordinary and dramatic image; in *Punky Girls* it is treated as the central spectacle of the video. The editing is structured around this event. The performative spectacle of this scene is further accentuated by the sound of the stills camera's motor, which suggests that it is a moment worth capturing as a still photograph. This also functions to introduce another time-scale into the video. The close-ups may ostensibly function to show the authenticity of penetration, but the very act of the close-up both stresses the spectacle of the authenticity of the sex in the scene, but also helps to guarantee it, along with the signifiers of amateurism.

Punky Girls features just two women and centres entirely on an, apparently, single encounter between them. In many Explicit Sex films there are occasionally scenes between two women that are not interrupted by another or others, either male or female. The use of only two people means that the conventional trope of the 'orgy' climax/closure, in which the camera typically roves over a group of bodies and male orgasm, is missing. (This conventional structure is present in *Rambone the Destroyer*, *Dr. Butts II* and *New Wave Hookers*.) The absence of other people involved in the sexual activity moves the film out of the usual 'orgy' register and focuses the spectator not just on the physiological dynamics between the two women, but also on the psychological dynamics between them. This dimension of the video differs from the three films mentioned above which are ruled by comedy. The psychological

⁹⁰ *Archaos* did not broach sexual taboos but instead worked with the spectator's and their own desires for destruction and danger - so much so that they were banned from venues such as Clapham Common.

dynamic in *Punky Girls* is further underscored by the S-M context of the film. The playful games of seduction and domination are articulated through the cajoling speech of the bald women, and the use of mild bondage (legs and arms are tied on various occasions). These games are never directly addressed to the camera but to each other; the moments of dialogue are whispered and gentle, making the two women appear to be wrapped up in the dynamics of their relationship, rather than as a tease addressed at the camera. This heightens the illusion that what the user is seeing is a private game that is not being played up for the camera or for the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer. There are other devices deployed by this video that also work to implicate the user's role as voyeur.

The effect of these elements is to override the presence of the camera, and it perhaps uncomfortably (or excitingly) implicates the spectator as a silent and invisible intruder on the women's private, intimate game. As the user is not sutured into the action in a subtle inclusive way, this can constitute the frisson of the text. In *Punky Girls*, the presence of the camera is rarely overtly privileged, and there is no diegetic spectator as in *Lust-Poker* and *Cicciolina in Italy*.⁹¹ This could possibly operate to present the heterosexual male spectator⁹² with no concrete point of entry into the film other than that of voyeur. However, this rendering of the user is too simplistic; the user⁹³ may find all kinds of ways in to the text (as is suggested by Freud's article 'A Child is being Beaten' 1979 [1919]). The possibilities are multiform. For instance, a gay viewer may re-configure, in imagination, the girls as boys (*Punky Boys?*⁹⁴), nevertheless the interpellation of the user into the text circulates around the question of authenticity.

⁹¹ This film is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁹² But this offers an interesting point of entry for unconscious desire and for users who do not define themselves as heterosexual males.

⁹³ Either in terms of identification with a diegetic male 'stand-in' or in the diegetic bonding between men (as in *New Wave Hookers*). The presence and implications of the homosocial are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four.

⁹⁴ I am grateful to Dr. Stephen Speed for suggesting this.

The signifiers of orchestration may induce the user to wonder if the two women are knowingly performing the signs of pleasure. A question that also may arise is - are the protagonists deriving a devious pleasure from the scene by exploiting the curiosity of the spectator? The performance here is then not easy to pin down - we are left with a question - who is performing for whom?

The use of two women coded both as punks and S-M lesbians certainly adds dramatic spectacle to the video. It is tempting to read both of these encodings as purely a titillating means of access for the straight male spectator, but the inclusion of S-M punk lesbians leaves the text wide open for queer readings. The absence of men in the video *may* invite straight men to imagine they can fill what they may perceive as a gap, but it should be stated that there is no indication in the video that this is what the two women want; they are attentive to each other and show no signs, say, by looking at the camera, that they are looking for a third party to join in. This may be disavowed by some users as they might read the use of dildos as a penis substitute; however, in this phallogentric logic the variety of pleasures beyond the dildo or other penetrating object as penis substitute are disavowed.

A convention of many Explicit Sex films is that a 'lesbian scene' is either interrupted by a man, or a mixed gender scene follows on closely. In *Dr. Butts II*, for example two male protagonists watch whilst two women kiss and caress one another. They proclaim the scene as boring (coded as humour), and tell the two women how to get the action 'going'. This could of course be construed as a diegetic controlling male gaze and knowledge, but unlike many earlier films, the men do not fuck either of the women, instead they just make suggestions to them about how to make each other orgasm. It is therefore much easier to read this video as driven by a narcissistic heterosexual fantasy. But could some male users also possibly identify with the women instead of the men here? The absence of the penis in *Punky Girls* problematises Falk's notion that the erect penis is the primary and indexical signifier in these films, and I would contend that the absence of the penis means that the sexual

play is more varied than in many Explicit Sex films. It also leaves the text wide open for queer readings (although it might be more pleasurable/political to make queer readings out of texts such as *New Wave Hookers* which ostensibly appear to target a rigidly defined male heterosexual user). I will be discussing the implications of a lesbian Phallus in relation to *Punky Girls* in the next chapter.

The combination of aggressive punk style and lesbian S-M certainly transgresses some aspects of the traditional role of women in cinema as the clichéd, passive woman. It can be said that these transgressive elements are couched as spectacle, but to apply a blanket pejorative reading of this as pure spectacle, is, in my view, a reductive reading. It rather depends on who is looking, how they are looking and what unconscious fantasies are mobilised through looking. Further, the inclusion of S-M elements in *Punky Girls* works to engage and thematise directly the power relations of the look. As Anne McClintock argues:

...s-m *performs*⁹⁵ social power as both contingent and constitutive, as sanctioned neither by fate nor by God, but by social convention and invention, and thus open to historical change.(eds. Gibson & Gibson, 1993: 210)

Punky Girls rejects many of the conventions of classical narrative, and as such the role of the viewer is foregrounded within the dynamics of the play of the film. The iconographic coding of the two women, the tension produced between the conflicting discourses of authenticity and performativity constructs a space which does not necessarily interpellate the reader as a heterosexual male. However, the key interpellative method exemplified by this film, is that of the question posed by authenticity that reiterates the reality paradigm.

Rambone the Destroyer features a dildo wielding dominatrix who ‘hams’ up her performance to the extent the film appears to be a type of sexual pantomime. *Rambone* differs from *Punky Girls* in that it makes use of sexual stereotypes in a

⁹⁵ My italics.

parodic way. By contrast, *Punky Girls* is not a pantomimic parody; the sexual performance can be read as working to implicate the user as voyeur. The film, nevertheless, demonstrates that the two women are inhabiting a role - a citation - of hardcore conventions. In *Punky Girls*, these factors complicate the register of authenticity and playfully lay bare the economic dimension of sex video production. The video might be said to use spectacle and a knowing deployment of hardcore signifiers to enliven a flagging industry. Paradoxically, this repetition can offer the user different ways of entering the text. I am still, however, left with the question as to the possible impact on the politics of queer culture when the Explicit Sex film industry uses queer sex to sell films to heterosexual users. I will take this issue up in more detail in Chapter Four where I will consider the meanings of transgression in Explicit Sex films.

I have established in this chapter some of the ways that Explicit Sex films encode authenticity through technology and how authenticity functions fetishistically as a question posed to the viewer as a means of interpellating them into the text. Before looking at what it means to call these films transgressive, it is first important to examine the relationship of the Phallus and the penis in Explicit Sex films as this relation is pivotal to understanding the ways these films mobilise the conventions of authenticity, and also to the task of seeing what psychoanalytic theories of subject/sexual formation can tell us about the readership of these films. I will do this in the next chapter by looking at feminist critiques of the Phallus/penis analogue, its relation to the fetishistic function of authenticity and exploring the proposition that there are elements of these films that can be argued to disrupt the Phallus/penis analogue.

Chapter Three

The Question of the Phallus

The Phallus/penis Analogue

How does the absence of the penis in *Punky Girls* and the use of dildos in, for example, *Rambone the Destroyer* impact on the authentic status of the sex in these films? According to Pasi Falk (1994) it is the erect penis that is the primary signifier of presence which guarantees the authenticity of the sex in the genre of Explicit Sex films. In order to answer my opening question, I will show that Falk's view of the erect penis as the indexical signifier of presence is deficient, because he makes no distinction between the penis and the Phallus. I will argue that it is strategically important to address this distinction, in order to understand how the penis becomes an analogue of the Phallus, and to show that there are signifiers other than the erect penis at work in Explicit Sex films that operate under the sign of the Phallus. This distinction will also prove important in the examination of the role of comedy in Explicit Sex films undertaken in the final section of this chapter.

Falk states that the erect penis has a specific function in the genre of Explicit Sex films:

In distinction to the female situation, the male part performs a more fundamental and surely more visible ex-pression: something standing and pressing out of his body, something real and authentically present, something with the power of evidence. It is not an element in a body language (sign function) but can be understood as an 'indexical sign' in the Peircian sense..., that is, referring to a sign wherein there is a spatio-temporal or physical connection between the sign vehicle and the entity signified - as in the relation of smoke to fire. (Falk, 1994: 201)

Whilst Falk raises the issue of the discursive practice of taking the erect penis to indicate a man's sexual desire, he does not fully show how it is that this corporeal

performance comes to be taken as a privileged indexical signifier of authenticity. By centralising an anatomical performance located only with men, I would argue that he reiterates the hegemonic alignment of the Phallus and the penis. This privileging of the male genital organ has been seen by feminist theorists as one of the ways in which the signifying system supports an ideological masculine bias. Furthermore, in so doing Falk elides the possibility that signifiers other than the erect penis as a symbol of active desire can operate fetishistically within the economy of sexuality. I would suggest that his model relates to one particular economy of sexuality at work in these films, a heterosexual male economy, which inherently masks the possibility that other sexual economies which mobilise different signifiers of desire and authenticity might be at work in these texts and in the reception of these texts.¹

Falk does usefully suggest that the indexical presence of the erect penis is supported by the use of a photographic medium, although he does not address the specifics of video technology. Following Barthes, Falk suggests the photograph is believed to have the capacity for recording a specific moment - a presence. Barthes argues that as the photograph ages it takes on the attributes of representation but it still retains the presence (similar to Benjamin's notion of aura) of the moment in which the photograph was taken, which endows it with authenticity. As an example, faked photographs, such as those which are composed to prove a reality, for example, the existence of fairies or alien space-craft, only work because in Western culture we commonly believe that photographs capture real events. As elements of the photograph may resemble what we commonly take to be real, the photograph acquires authentic status; this means that in order to sustain this belief any elements of the photograph that contradict its encoded meaning have to be discarded (or disavowed). As I have already argued, the signification of authenticity depends on our

¹ I am here following Teresa de Lauretis' formulation of what she calls 'perverse desire', outlined in *The Practice of Love* (1994). Here she suggests that lesbian sexuality privileges other signifiers which, even though they work under the sign of the Phallus as a signifier of castration, are mapped onto objects or parts of the body other than the erect penis. I will discuss her work in more detail in relation to the lesbian Phallus later in the chapter.

understanding of a code that is learned and has cultural currency. We somehow forget this and invest the photograph with the power to show 'reality'. By extrapolating from Falk and Barthes, it can be argued that the photograph then has a kind of magical, fetishistic status; it captures a moment (a presence) that through time becomes a representation of the past, but which retains the presence of the original moment. Although Falk does not read presence as a fetish, this argument supports my reading of the use of video to encode authenticity. However, for Falk the authentic status of the pornographic film operates through the presence of the erect penis which he argues is supported by the status of photography: 'photographic evidentiality as an indexical transfer which in photo-pornography is supplemented with the evidential aspects of the act, the erection (etc.) as an indexical sign of (the presence) of sexual excitement' (Falk, 1994: 204). Whilst I do not take issue with the combination of these features in the communication of authenticity, I do however take issue with his overly-simple privileging of the erect penis as the primary anchor of the authentic status of a text.

What Falk does not fully explain is how it is that the erect penis, and not some other bodily organ, comes to perform as *the* signifier of presence and authenticity. Falk implies that the referential status of the penis is based on the fact that the erect penis stands up/out² in the visual field. Whilst this is useful for the understanding of the logic that supports the reading of the penis as an indexical sign, I would argue that this reading does not go far enough because it fails to engage with the complex relationship between the Phallus and the penis. In a Lacanian reading, the Phallus is a signifier of castration and lack, rather than presence. How is it then that the penis can come to represent presence when it is interbound with the signifier of absence? Falk argues that the indexical status of the erect penis is due to its non-arbitrary link between the signifier and the signified (viz. smoke/fire). He says:

² The two teenage male protagonists in *Wayne's World* (1987) sum up this idea effectively with the term 'jjwwing' - accompanied by appropriate hand movements and big smiles - indicating the erect penis's role as a signifier of desire.

The phallus - here referring to the erect penis and not to its psychoanalytical (symbolic) meanings³ - is the thing which does not fit into the aesthetic code of representation: it doesn't 'stand for' something (as a representation) but simply stands up and against the Order. It falls outside or beneath the realm of representation, being one of the two things which should not be made into pictures. The other is the Christian God which is beyond representation as the Order conditioning all representation. (Falk, 1994: 196)

In this passage Falk has moved the erect penis out of the indexical register, by arguing that there is a metonymic link between male desire and the erection, and into an extra-discursive register which is the domain of the Lacanian Phallus. Because of this, the dismissal of the psychoanalytic Phallus seems rather odd. The approach Falk takes may be because his overall aim is to show how the representation of the erect penis in the pornographic image dis-obey the rule of the aesthetic canon and then can be read as a form of 'anti-aesthetics'. But, by locating the representation of the erect penis purely in the narrow terms of the aesthetic order, he cannot show how the Phallus/penis analogue operates in the wider field of signification and subject formation, which I would argue underpins the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic dialectic.

By assigning the Phallus the same discursive function as God in Christian discourse Falk is, in some ways, very close to the Lacanian model of the Phallus. In Lacanian discourse the Phallus cannot be represented because it is assigned an extra-discursive status, and because it is a sign that signifies 'lack'. If the Phallus is to operate as a primary signifier it must remain veiled. This enables a disavowal of the lack that it signifies. By not broaching the Lacanian Phallus, Falk elides the Phallic signifier as a signifier of lack which contradicts its function as indexical presence. It is precisely in this that the distinction between the Phallus and the penis lies. For Lacan, the Phallic signifier is a signifier of lack, which is why it cannot be represented. Once the Phallic signifier is embodied it can no longer function *as if* it were outside the system and therefore loses its aura and power to guarantee the signification system. This is

³ He does thereby make a certain type of methodological distinction between the representation of the penis and the Phallus in its psychoanalytic guise, but he does so in such a way that precludes an address of the complex interaction of the representation of the penis and the signification of the Phallus.

important to the consideration of the difference between the Phallic signifier and its corporeal analogue. It is only because the Phallic signifier is veiled, which is crucial to its continued operation *as if* it were outside the symbolic order, that it can guarantee the stability of the signification system. If the Phallus were to be embodied or represented into flesh, it loses its sublime function, as it no longer remains *as if* it were off the symbolic stage. It can then no longer act as a primary signifier which anchors or quilts the signification system and difference.

According to Lacan, it is through acquisition of language and subject-hood (written through the child's negotiation of castration fantasies), that the male child learns that the penis is not the Phallus and that the Phallus is located elsewhere in signification. It is however the case that through castration fantasies the analogue between the Phallus and the penis persists, but at the same time they are in tension because of the subject's knowledge that the Phallus is not an object but instead located within signification. Because Falk defines the phallus as an anatomical feature of the male body (and as such he works against himself to reify the body) as a signifier of presence, he does not tackle the difficult movement that turns absence into presence. As a result his model cannot broach the interesting problem of the matrix of disjunctions and alignments between the sublime Phallus and the fleshy penis in Explicit Sex films. Explicit Sex films must show that the Phallus and the penis are not the same thing if male viewers are not to be phased by the on-screen presence of other men's erect penises (otherwise these penises might be taken to be the Phallus and then in turn work to exacerbate, rather than disavow, castration fantasies for male users). What occurs in Explicit Sex films that feature a group of erect penises (such as in *Gang Bang* or *Cicciolina in Italy*) and come-shots, is an illusion of sexual plenitude based on lack. This enhances the distinction between the corporeal erection as finite and temporal and the imaginary sublime ever-erect Phallus. In most audio/visual cultural texts the Phallus/penis analogue is preserved through the absence of the penis in these texts.

This is not however the case in Explicit Sex films. It is this factor that leads Falk to argue that the presence of the penis shifts the films into the field of 'anti-aesthetics'.

What I hope to have shown in the above explanation is that by focusing on the role of the erect penis as a signifier of 'anti-aesthetics' in these films, Falk fails to theorise the complex relation of the male user to the on-screen erect penis and the Phallus. This relation is characterised by an oscillation between a fantasy of having the Phallus and the realisation that no-one can possess the Phallus. I will now explain this in more detail.

The Lacanian distinction between the pre- and post-oedipal Phallus needs to be clarified: Falk conflates the pre-oedipal Phallus as an imaginary object - a tangible thing which is searched for - with the post-oedipal symbolic Phallus. The symbolic Phallus is a signifier of both the sublime and castration and is a signifier for what is missing - a lost delight - and a symbol of the loss of an un-interrupted flow of desire. These films may try to place the user back into the pre-oedipal space wherein the Phallus re-forms as the lost object rather than (in its post-oedipal form) as the signifier of absence. By positioning these films in terms of the pre-oedipal Phallus they can be construed as simulating the promise of the Phallus given to the male child in exchange for accepting the 'law-of-the-father'. For example, *Some Kind of Woman*, a U.S.-made film with Dutch subtitles and a Ginger Lynne vehicle, is composed of a series of extracts from films that she has starred in. In one scene there are two sets of couples having heterosexual sex in different locations. The two locations are stitched together through cross-cutting between them. The scene juxtaposes the sex between the two couples but towards the end of the scene the two men come and through the use of some rapid cross cutting the duration of the two orgasms is lengthened. The use of editing is a common means by which Explicit Sex films lengthen the duration of male orgasm, and in *Gang Bang*, another U.S. film with Dutch subtitles, the male orgasm is prolonged by the use of a group of six male protagonists. Firstly, I would argue that it is not the erect penis here that becomes the signifier of loss or lack, but, as

Williams argues, it is the come-shot. By extending the orgasm through editing and the use of a group of men, the short-lived jouissance of orgasm is prolonged and thus stages a fantasy based on the disavowal of castration which in turn is related to the imaginary Phallus which is both constantly erect and coming. However, these films do not simply engage the pre-oedipal Phallus, but they also engage with the distinction between the penis and the Phallus made through the castration complex.

As the above example shows, these films are to an extent tied into the staging of men's fantasies of plenitude, configured as an unending erection and orgasm. Fantasies of pre-oedipal plenitude, however, are always retrospectively rendered through the castration fantasy. As such, they are bound into the differences and connotations between the imaginary and the symbolic functions of the Phallic signifier. What Falk does not factor into his analysis is the complex relationship between the two. If the films depicted an ever-erect, ever-coming penis, that alludes to an irrecoverable lost plenitude, they would end up by foregrounding the male user's lack. It is, I would argue, the distinction between the penis and the Phallus that allows these films to engender desire. The distinction (refigured as a lack that constructs desire) is put into operation, as I have argued above, through a question levelled at the authenticity of the text, and it is this question, in whatever form, that keeps desire in play. This depends on the male user's ability to distinguish between the imaginary and the symbolic functions of the Phallus. They must believe that they can compete with the sexual performances in the films in order for castration anxieties to be circumvented.

Following de Lauretis (1994), Adams (1992) and Butler (1992), I propose that the Phallus (as a primary signifier that guarantees the signification system) performs differently in different contexts and sexual economies, and it is not solely represented by the penis. Although, as de Lauretis argues, the penis analogue is often primary because of the castration fantasies fostered by the subject's gendered entry into the symbolic. However, the absence of men in the film *Punky Girls*, for example, allows

us to consider a less reductive reading of the penis as sole signifier of the Phallus. In Falk's argument the erect penis IS the Phallus. This is problematic because it suggests that the erect penis in the films bolsters masculinity rather than showing that there is always the trace of a castratory mis-match between the penis and the Phallus. This is potentially the problem Explicit Sex films pose for heterosexually identified male users. I would argue that the veiled Phallus, acting as some kind of guarantee of authenticity, in these films is far more diffusely located than Falk suggests.

To show how the erect penis comes to represent presence (through lack) it is important to understand Lacan's theorisation of the signification of the Phallus in both the symbolic and imaginary registers. In 'The Meaning of the Phallus'⁴ (1982) Lacan states that within the symbolic register the Phallus functions as a master or primary (non)signifier that guarantees all other signifieds:

For the Phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function in the intrasubjective economy of analysis might lift the veil from that which it served in the mysteries. For it is to this signified that it is given to designate as a whole the effect of there being a signified, inasmuch as it conditions any such effect by its presence as signifier. (ed. Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 79-80)

By invoking the veiled Phallus of the mysteries of Ancient Greece (which was not a flesh and blood penis), Lacan demonstrates by association that the Phallus functions as a transcendental signifier which lends stability to the signification system. Within the signifying system, the Phallus occupies a position analogous to mathematical zero - the value that anchors all other numeric values. However, by not using an abstract, and apparently neutral, term like zero, Lacan demonstrates that the Phallus is bound into an imaginary and symbolic bodily economy produced through discourse and fantasy. The imaginary bodily economy, which is produced through the mirror phase continues to underpin the symbolic. The imaginary body, seen in the mirror, operates

⁴ I will be referring to both Alan Sheridan and Jacqueline Rose's English translations here. The former is translated as 'The Signification of the Phallus' (in *Ecrits: A Selection*, 1977) and the latter as 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (eds. Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, 1982).

to gloss over the fragmentary moments of the child's tactile experiences (the body in bits and pieces). The fragmentary body gives way to the illusion of a unified body seen in the mirror. The composition of the bodily map gains further (illusory) coherency through the child's entry into the symbolic order. The transcendental signifier is key to this process (it is the prototypical *objet a* which is constitutive of desire, fantasy and lack) which, in functioning as a point zero, gives the psychic and signifying body/subject map its co-ordinates and coherency. The body 'in bits in pieces' is not erased through the illusory attainment of bodily and psychic coherency but is remaindered within the unconscious. This repressed, bits and pieces, body finds its way into the symbolic order through the many routes of the primary process and, as we shall see later, casts its shadow on the subject, sexual identity and on the sexual-bodies in Explicit Sex films.⁵ The repressed bits and pieces body, which is beyond the control of the subject and acts as an affront to the illusion of bodily and subject coherency, will then be configured through castration fantasy. The Phallus as a signifier of lack and castration, in the symbolic, is then retrospectively mapped via the imaginary onto early fears.

As Rose points out in her introduction to 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (1982), Lacan was further rejecting Abraham, Jones and Klein's view that the Phallus is 'an object of primitive oral aggression' (ibid.: 74). Instead, Lacan places the Phallus as central to the signification system and insists that it is crucially distinct from the penis. One of the functions of the transcendental Phallic signifier within the signifying system is to act as a measure against which gender differences are mapped. On reading 'The

⁵ As I have explored elsewhere (Krzywinska in Burston and Richardson, 1995), so-called Body Horror films are perhaps more obvious examples of this than Explicit Sex films. *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) for instance sources the phantasmatic body-in-bits and pieces for its horror and fascination. Body Horror often locates the monster within the frame of the unconscious. It is often signified by locating the monster in dreams (Freddie in *Nightmare on Elm Street*), mirrors (*Candyman*), or dark or underground places (vampires, zombies, psychotic killers), and Victorian/gothic psychiatric institutions (*Silence of the Lambs*). These monsters then come from 'the other scene', the other side of the mirror. To cite Lacan: 'The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic' (Lacan, 1977: 4).

Meaning of the Phallus', I was, at first, rather puzzled why Lacan uses the Phallus to embody the function of the master signifier and not something more abstract like, for example, mathematical zero? Like Kaja Silverman, and many other feminist critics of Lacan, I felt that his assertion that the Phallus is distinct from the penis was not helped by the use of a term that is commonly used to signify the penis. The answer to this puzzle became clearer once I had understood that it occupies both a symbolic and an imaginary place and as such can be taken to show how the body is bound into the abstract processes of signification. Ironically the common feminist use of the Phallus/penis analogue, to explain or describe the operation of patriarchy may, inadvertently, work to further re-inscribe this binding. Rather than taking them as bound together to explain 'patriarchy', I would argue that the Lacanian model offers a way of disrupting the Phallus/penis analogue which is crucial to the re-reading of the function of the penis in *Explicit Sex* film.

I will here try to be succinct in showing how the Phallus is bound into the formation of the subject. As Lacan does not set out a clear chronologically organised account of this, I will be referring to several of his papers and supplementing from secondary source material. It should be noted, as Bowie suggests, that the place of the Phallus within the Lacanian schema differs from that of the Freudian schema. For Lacan the function of the Phallus is central to the subject and meaning; for Freud, however, the Phallus is less important and as Bowie (1991) suggests, the 'primacy of the phallus' was, for Freud, located within a certain developmental phase - the phallic phase. Lacan takes this as his starting point, but he re-reads it through structuralist ideas of language and signification.

The status of the Phallus as a transcendental signifier is mapped by Lacan through the use of two well-known Freudian concepts, the Oedipal complex and the castration complex. Briefly, the child's desire for the mother is disrupted by a third party, what Lacan calls the 'Name-of-the-father'. As Bowie states:

At the centre of the drama was the organ of pleasure itself, and the phantasy of punishment by castration played a crucial role in the child's efforts to understand not only the anatomical difference between the sexes but the severe legal constraints that were placed on sexual gratification. (Bowie, 1991: 126)

There is a question begging to be answered which is - how do girls figure in this schema? Both Freud and Lacan assert that before the interpellation of the subject through social categories of gender difference, both girls and boys have no concept of gender difference. It is through the Oedipus and castration complex and the acquisition of language that the concept of gender difference becomes a factor for the child. Through the Oedipus complex, the boy fantasises that the father will punish him for his desire for the mother. This fantasy is the fantasy of castration and it underpins anxieties around subject coherence. Girls too have to negotiate castration fantasies. I would argue that castration is a founding fantasy for the structuring of gender and sex - both girls and boys. For example, Jacqueline Rose argues that the imposition of femininity is a type of castration, and this idea can be mobilised to explain how the child designated as a girl has to fit into her gendered role which may produce feelings of alienation (as was suggested earlier in the thesis). In perhaps a different way from Freud, it would seem most appropriate to configure the castration fantasy as a metaphor which is bound up with power and narcissism. In this reading, both girls and boys (women and men) experience castration anxiety and castration fantasies around anything that threatens the narcissistic illusion of subject autonomy. Castration fantasies are retrospectively mapped onto bodily differences and is rendered through a series of experiences and events that construct the gendered subject. For Freud and Lacan, the castration complex is bound to the (symbolic) father, who comes to represent the law for the child. It is the 'Name of the father' that denies the child's access to the mother's body and this works to configure the mother as 'lacking' the Phallus in the sense that she is replaced by language as the facilitator of power. The Phallus is then relocated within language.

Within Lacanian terms, the Phallus comes to represent the moment in which the child/mother relationship is split, and desire is born out of the gap or lack. This is produced from the nostalgic longing for this (retrospectively constructed) state of plenitude. This longing is also over-determined by the further alienation produced through the disjunction between the illusion of the whole body in the mirror, and the concomitant enunciation of the 'I' and the experience of the fragmented body, the 'body in bits and pieces'. The Phallus in its function as the signifier that fixes all signifieds is then, as Rose says, a fraud: 'The Phallus can only take up its place by indicating the precariousness of any identity assumed by the subject on the basis of its token' (eds. Mitchell and Rosè, 1982: 40).

Like the metaphorical mirror that endows the child with an illusory specular form and gives the child a sense of 'self', the Phallus has an in-built dual function. It has the means to create the subject and signification as a stable construct, and the means to undermine that construct. As Rose puts it:

Thus the phallus stands for that moment when prohibition must function, in the sense of whom may be assigned to whom in the triangle made up of mother, father and child, but at the same moment it signals to the subject that 'having' only functions at the price of a loss and 'being' as an effect of division. (ibid.: 40)

The Phallus is then intrinsic to entry into the Symbolic order, as it is against the Phallus as signifier, that gender identity is assigned and anatomy is then retrospectively inscribed through symbolic organisation of gender differences. The penis, according to this model, is not an analogue of the Phallus, because the Phallus cannot be reduced to anatomy. This is a point of contention for many feminist critics. As Parveen Adams argues, in Lacanian discourse no-one can possess or be the Phallus, but questions such as 'Do I have the Phallus or not? Am I the Phallus?' (Adams, 1992: 76) operate to construct the subject and gender difference. This conception has been questioned by Kaja Silverman (1992) and other feminist critics of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Silverman argues that Lacan's framing of the Phallus as

constitutive of desire de-genders the concept. She asks 'Is the phallus really as necessarily central to the operations of desire as certain passages from his work would have us believe, or might it not be possible for the subject to enter language and desire without experiencing the "paternal metaphor"?' (Silverman, 1992: 85).

Although the Phallus, in the Lacanian rendering, can be, to use Jane Gallop's phrase, an 'epicene' Phallus (cited in Silverman, 1992: 84) it nevertheless has currency within the mainstream of culture as an analogue of the penis. (It is this analogue that is the target for attack in my reading here rather than the Phallus per se.) Butler points out that despite Lacan's testimony that it is 'a signifier without a signified' the Phallus owes a debt to the penis (within the imaginary register). Does this mean that even though the penis is absent within, for example, *Punky Girls*, the transcendental mystique encoded through the Phallus/penis analogue is retained? If this is so, then all Explicit Sex films that feature only women are built around a Phallic-penile economy and all the films, which feature an erect penis, constitute an unveiling of the Phallus and a dis-location of the Phallus-penis analogue. Ironically, this would mean that 'penis' films have more power to disrupt the Phallus-penis analogue, because they highlight the difference between the two, than films that feature only women. However, I would argue that this not the case. In women-only films such as *Punky Girls*, it is the 'lesbian Phallus' (in its many guises) that can partially disrupt the logic of the Phallus-penis analogue.

The 'Lesbian Phallus'

Countering Silverman's concerns, Judith Butler (1992) convincingly makes a case that as the Phallus is not, as Lacan stresses, the penis, it is a potentially transferable signifier (given the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified). The Phallus, however, is no ordinary signifier. Butler argues that Lacan's essay 'The Signification of the Phallus', in which he writes that the Phallus is not imaginary, is written from the site of the Phallic signifier, rather than as an objective analysis of it. Lacan stages the drama of the Phallus's disavowal of its imaginary status, which it must do in order to perform as a privileged or meta-signifier. In disavowing its imaginary status the Phallus constructs itself as an idealisation. To clarify, Butler says that in the latter essay ('The Signification of the Phallus'), the drama is enacted - or symptomatised - by the narrative movement of the theoretical performance itself, what we shall consider as the performativity of the Phallus (Butler, 1992: 154; Butler, 1993: 80).

Butler also asserts:

Indeed the phallus is not a body part (but the whole), is not an imaginary effect (but the origin of imaginary effects); these negations are constitutive; they function as disavowals that precipitate - and are then erased by - the idealisation of the phallus. (Butler, 1992: 156/157)

Butler's main contention, which is pertinent to the economy of the lesbian Phallus in films such as *Punky Girls* and *Rambone the Destroyer* (both of which feature fist-fucking and strap-on or hand-held dildos), is that despite the disavowal of the Phallus's imaginary status, its sublime status can potentially be imparted to any object - and not just the penis.

By introducing the oxymoron of the 'lesbian Phallus', Butler throws a spanner in the works of conventional gender and anatomical alignments. She suggests that the fiction or fantasy of the lesbian Phallus (I like the idea that here it can be more than one) '...offers the occasion (or set of occasions) for the phallus to signify differently, and in so signifying, to re-signify, unwittingly, its own masculinist and heterosexist privilege' (Butler, 1992: 163). Against theories of lesbian sexuality that construe it as outside the order of signification, Butler makes the point that sexualities that are regarded as lesbian are discursively produced in relation to the Phallic signifier.⁶ However, the incongruity (within dominant notions of lesbian sexuality) of the lesbian Phallus can work strategically as a means of looking askance at cultural and psychoanalytic values. She says:

What is 'unveiled' is precisely the repudiated desire, that which is abjected by heterosexist logic, and that which is defensively foreclosed through the effort to circumscribe a specifically feminine morphology for lesbianism. In a sense, what is unveiled or exposed is a desire that is produced through prohibition. (ibid.: 159)

The fascination of the lesbian Phallus is constructed through the mis-alignment of conventional morphologies. This is what Butler terms 'morphological transgression' (ibid.: 161): 'when the phallus is lesbian, then it is and it is not a masculinist figure of power; the signifier is significantly split, for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled' (ibid.:162).

Punky Girls operates around the frisson created by the ambiguity of the lesbian Phallus - the question it poses to conventional gender logic. The dominatrix who uses the strap-on dildo to fuck some of the female kidnappees in *Rambone the Destroyer*, also disrupts conventional gender logic. As the story of the film is based on the

⁶ Here Butler follows the logic of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1991) notion that homosexuality and lesbian sexuality and sexual identity are constructed not outside of the heterosexual norm but instead through this matrix. Heterosexuality like any other signifier is grounded in difference and this is provided by its binary twin, homosexuality.

dominatrix's kidnapping of all-American feminine girls for the evil 'Sadaam', framed as pantomimic parody, the dildo-wielding, tough-talking dominatrix overturns the feminine conventions of the 'nice' girls she kidnaps. The dildo functions, rather conventionally, as a sign of her power, but the strap-on nevertheless works to create an erotic frisson precisely because it is out of its usual gendered alignment. As De Lauretis (1994) argues, economies of lesbian sexuality depend upon a 'fantasy of bodily dispossession' that is 'subtended by an original fantasy of castration' (de Lauretis, 1994: 212). In other words, the dildo, as a version of the lesbian Phallus, becomes a fetish which is metonymically linked to the penis, because 'lack' or 'alienation' is rendered through the castration complex (which symbolically locates 'lack' in relation to the presence or absence of the Phallus). The dildo, like the penis, operates as a fetish that covers over the lack of an object of desire. For some male viewers the dominatrix with a strap-on dildo may be read as a kind of penis-envy, which bolsters their narcissistic investment in the penis. Within a differently structured sexual economy, however, this figure signifies that other objects (although they may be metonymically related to the penis) can be invested with Phallic meaning.

In *Punky Girls* the editing strategically distributes the scenes of penetration throughout the film to keep the user's interest. Here the lesbian Phallus takes several forms: dildos, whips, hands, and it is particularly the fisting scenes that function to guarantee the authenticity of the actions. These scenes, contra to Falk's rendering of the penis as indexical sign, function to communicate 'presence'. There is though a double bind at work here: the notion of the lesbian Phallus semantically locates lesbian sex within a Phallic discourse but, as de Lauretis says, it is impossible to circumvent this trope because of the currency of the castration fantasy. However, the aim of the notion of the lesbian Phallus is to disrupt or trouble the Phallus/penis analogue by suggesting that other signifiers can operate under the sign of the Phallus. Teresa de Lauretis (1994) takes up the notion of the lesbian Phallus, but rejects the terms in which Butler explains it. She says she prefers 'to call the signifier of perverse desire a

fetish in order to avoid the unavoidable semantic complicity of phallus with penis' (de Lauretis, 1994: 231). The value of de Lauretis' argument is that she configures lesbian sexuality by suggesting that there are a series of alienating splits in the subject. This engenders a loss of bodily ego, before castration, but this loss is re-written through the castration complex, which means for lesbians a 'loss' of the female body (in particular, because butch lesbians do not conform to the bodily expectations of 'femininity' and because sexual access to other female bodies is hegemonically barred). For de Lauretis the fetish as a signifier of difference must be at work in lesbian desire 'without which lesbian lovers would be simply, so to speak, two women in bed together' (ibid.: 232). This is important in the consideration of the dominatrix in *Rambone the Destroyer*. In *Rambone* it is the dildo that signifies the difference between the dominatrix and the other women in the text. This is important as it suggests that differently-structured sexual economies (either repressed or overt in users who identify as in some way 'queer') are at work in these films. I do not, though, want to lose sight of the notion that the logical non-sequitur of the lesbian Phallus in both *Punky Girls* and *Rambone* also acts as a hermeneutic device to lure the user into desire and fantasy through the question of authenticity.

As Butler notes, what is unveiled by the lesbian Phallus is desire produced through prohibition. The transgressive frisson of the text is then produced through a difference from heterosexual penetration. I will take up the notion that desire is produced through prohibition and transgression in the following chapter. As the *Punky Girls* example demonstrates, the Phallus/penis analogue is re-framed and is in part dis-located by the notion of the lesbian Phallus, which, to answer one of my earlier questions, shows that the unveiling of the Phallus is not just a feature of films that depict penises. What I do however dislike about Butler's thesis in general is that heterosexuality is posited as a given and in my view it desperately needs to be problematised in order to rupture the illusion of its shiny seamlessness. de Lauretis does, however, seek to show that a lesbian sexual economy often re-locates the

Phallus, or as she prefers to say, the fetish, within other aspects of the body. Whilst this is useful, I would follow her argument that because of the valency of castration complex and its function in assigning sex/gender difference, it is nevertheless a form of wishful thinking to replace the term Phallus with the, less emotive, term fetish. This is because, whatever guise it takes, the Phallus, with its association with castration, is what assigns fetishistic status to objects. These fetishised objects are always metonymically linked to the Phallus and castration.

It now becomes clear that the Phallus cannot be construed as a neutral term and to do so would be mistaken. To suggest, for example, that Laplanche's enigmatic signifier would be a better substitute for the problematic term, the Phallic signifier, would effectively disavow the operation of gender dynamics in subject/sexual formation. Although the enigmatic signifier usefully demonstrates that sex is constituted through an unsolvable riddle, which launches imaginary and symbolic myths and narratives of origins, the term does not centralise the Phallus as a signifier of castration. Attempts to circumvent the Phallus cannot reflect the way it works to organise anatomy, sexuality, sexual identity and the subject. It may be that the Phallus is itself a strategic response to the enigmatic signifier - by replacing one signifier with another which in effect reiterates hegemonic gender organisation - but I would argue that the Phallus is semantically better placed to demonstrate how gender categories inform and produce both the subject and, importantly, desire. In the next section I will explore another key way in which the Phallus/penis analogue can be argued to be disrupted in Explicit Sex films through intentional and unintentional comedy.

Comedy in Explicit Sex films and the Disruption of Phallus/penis Analogue.

Neale and Krutnik argue in their discussion of the comic (1992) that the comic exceeds the set of formal properties found in the genre of Comedy. They argue that spectators may often find elements of a film funny which were not intended to be read in a comic way. This is exemplified by laughter at Horror films or old melodramas. What this demonstrates is that readership is far from a passive process and is inter-bound with circumstance and negotiation (Neale and Krutnik 1992: 63).

The notion that readings of film, or any other cultural artefacts, are predicated on shifting notions of plausibility, which gives space for negotiation and different readings, has been addressed in the previous chapter in relation to authenticity. I now want to explore the implications of the tension between the comic and the encoding of authenticity in Explicit Sex films. On watching my first 'porno' film aged about 18, I found the representations of sexual acts 'ludicrous', and way beyond the bounds of plausibility (given my admittedly limited sexual knowledge); the result was a combination of puzzlement, fascination and uproarious hilarity. Had I watched these films alone, laughter might not have been my response. As Bergson (1956) argues, laughter functions as a way of creating complicity between members of a group. Freud too argues that laughter and jokes work to create complicity, but he argues that this complicity is based on a tacit agreement between members of a group that certain sexual taboos can be broached. Freud (1991) reads laughter as a product of the broaching of a site of repression, and it is central to the argument here that laughter at Explicit Sex films is a symptom of repressed unconscious sexual economies which go beyond Neale and Krutnik's notion of the comic as a rational negotiation.

The economics of laughter in relation to Explicit Sex films has so far been absent from any work on these films.⁷ Laughter may result from a mis-alignment between the idealised images of sexuality that abound in Hollywood films and the more authentic or plausible encoding of sex in Explicit Sex films; but this laughter also has implications for the anchoring of signification through the Phallus/penis analogue. Further, the comic may work to foreground the staged performativity of a text and therefore undermine the encoding of authenticity. I will argue that there are many different renderings of the comic in these films, and that the comic has many forms, from complicit sadism, through to the laughter of liberation and the laughter of recognition. These renderings take different pathways through the psychic-social matrix.

George Orwell's commentary on English 'dirty' sea-side postcards makes clear the distinction between romanticised, idealised images of sex and the mechanics of sex in praxis. He says '...comedy can teach us a kind of robust, cheery recognition that sex (and all other facets of physical existence) falls far short of our ideals' (cited in Dyer 1992: 117). Read against idealised soft-focus fantasies of steamy eroticism in Hollywood and some forms of art cinema, Explicit Sex Films may be taken as too uncomfortably real. The absence of narrative in these films focuses the user's attention squarely on the body and the harsh utilitarian lights reveal a grotesque carnivalised body complete with spots, stretch marks, and abject bodily noises. Unlike many Hollywood model bodies, this body is subject to gravity and movement; the sway of large breasts, the flap of testicles against buttocks, and the undulating effect of physical exertion on the flesh. This body is not the hard, stable body of the ego-ideal, which is mobilised in the romantic idealised image of sexuality in advertising and Hollywood; but a body which is subject to time, movement and difference. For some this is a kind of body-horror, with all its fascinations and 'un-

⁷ I have addressed this absence in more detail in the paper 'The Comedy of Explicit Sex films' published in *Tendens: Tidsskrift for Kultursociologi* January 1994.

ideal' corporeal realities. What is seen in these films is an un-prettified representation of the sexual body that, given cultural versification in Hollywood and advertising versions of the sexual body, may seem too hard to bear: so that the grotesque in *flagrante delicto* sexual body may therefore produce laughter as a means of disavowing the unbearable weight of the real. Conversely, the sexual body in the films can also be seen as a reassuring body because it mirrors the alienating distinction between the ideal body and the body subject to time and gravity in the harsh bathroom light. In other words, we may be reassured by seeing unidealised bodies that reflect our own. If this produces laughter then it is the laughter of an uncomfortable recognition. An example of this would be the 'Readers Wives' phenomenon discussed earlier.

Explicit Sex films may be unintentionally comic for some users in certain circumstances, but it is also the case that some of these films overtly mobilise the comic. Titles of films, such as *Edward Penishands*, *Sperminator*, *Tit Tales*, *Turbo Pussies*, *Rambone the Destroyer* are examples of this 'intentional' use of the comic. *Rambone the Destroyer*, *Edward Penishands* and *Sperminator* are examples of the recent phenomenon of Explicit Sex films which intentionally parody mainstream Hollywood films. Many films actively encourage a comic reading, and they often promote a kind of naughty giggling that positions the user as a child who snickers at forbidden but tantalising enigmas of the sexual. This kind of reaction is an important part of the pleasure of the films and is neglected by many writers on the genre. In placing the spectator in the position of the child, for whom sex itself is an unsolved enigma, these films involve the complex matrix of fantasies that circulate around sexuality. Through the comic framing, the user is interpellated through the question posed by authenticity, promoting, for example, the question - do people really do this, or is this staged as a joke at my expense? In reading Explicit Sex films as comic, the status and function of the laughter needs to be addressed. Is laughter symptomatic of a Bergsonian sadistic distance and a form of group complicity, or is it

symptomatic of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque which releases the user from the seriousness of sex? Both these sources of comedy may be present in the reception of these films, but, neither of these two approaches to the comic directly address laughter as symptomatic of the subject- threatening 'otherness' of sex. It is this aspect of laughter that works to unbind the Phallus from the comic, fleshy penis. This mis-match is underpinned in Explicit Sex films because it is read through, and juxtaposed with, other discourses of sex; for example, sex framed by romance present in many Hollywood films. Whereas, in Hollywood, the invisible, and therefore veiled, erect penis is analogous to the Phallus, in Explicit Sex films its corporeal visibility disinvests it of the Phallic mystique.

The unintentional source of the comic in Explicit Sex films may have its source in the cinematic necessity of tailor-made sexual positions designed so that the camera can capture the mechanics of sexual action. Comic readings may result from the exaggerated signifiers of sexual pleasure - for example the plethora of 'oohs and aahs' which often seem to be performed rather than coded as authentic. Mis-matches of sound and gesture which result from overdubbing can further be construed as comic. This is a comedy produced by the transgression of the rules of seamlessness in classical narrative cinema. The use of codified speech - 'give it me, ooh yeah, fuck me harder' - may also seem somehow 'ludicrous' (ludic, comic, unbelievable) and therefore funny when measured against Hollywood images of sex which are often given a romantic sound-track⁸ which takes precedence over the voice. The breaking of this convention is highlighted in one of the intentional jokes in *Dr. Butts II* which relies on the woman saying 'ooh yeah fuck me' to which the bystander replies 'you're being fucked!' The comic retort works to parody the conventional speech in 'straight' (here meaning films that are not intentionally funny) Explicit Sex films and

⁸ Whitney Huston comes to mind - the song *I will Always Love You* is a musical example which frames the sex scene in *The Bodyguard* as a signifier of romantic love.

thereby raises a laugh at their expense. But, like all instances of parody, this gag can be read to recuperate and revivify the codified speech at work in the genre in general. It works to draw attention to the sexual act and to the 'obscene' status of the film.

The contorted bodily positions designed for maximum camera access and the overdubbing of sexual sounds result in a form of slapstick; however this is not a conventional form of physical slapstick where there is a sublimation or displacement of the sexual onto objects. This conventional slapstick unmasks the sublimated sexual economy that writers have often sought to show in the performances of Charlie Chaplin (William Paul in ed. Horton, 1991) and Laurel and Hardy (Neale and Kutnik, 1990). This does not mean that Explicit Sex films present a transparent window on the unconscious; there is still the sublimation of pre-Oedipal sexual economies at work within these films. The films can be considered as slapstick because of their presentation of the performing body and the economies of the comic which circulate around these performing bodies. The sound of flesh against flesh, the implausible incidence of large penises (as in *Kinkorama 14* which features a, prosthetic, two foot long penis which resembles the prosthetic phallus of Greek comedy) and large breasts, the circus-like sexual feats make the films into a form of sexual slapstick.

There is also a link here to Bergson's notion that the comic is often related to the transgression of the 'proper' functioning of the body. He says

The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and events. (Bergson, 1956: 117)

What he is referring to here, is the way in which an involuntary event, such as tripping over, is found funny by those who watch it. The body becomes a 'thing', it is no

longer at the behest of the rational mind, and it is this that produces the corrective laughter which aims to embarrass the person into being more careful to watch his/her step in the future. When read through a psychoanalytic framework this can interestingly be applied to the bodies in Explicit Sex films. The point at which the body is driven by sexual desire is the point at which it is subject to involuntary movement; this is funny because here the body exceeds the control of the rational mind. The 'dog' in *New Wave Hookers* is a good example of this - as the male actor is cast as a dog he is able to give total sway to his instincts. When a woman enters the New Wave Hooker's 'office', he sniffs up her skirt and attempts to screw her on the spot. Because the character is a dog, the threat posed by bodily involuntarism is diffused and rendered as intentionally funny. In other films this is less overt, but unintentional laughter works to defend the user against the assaults on rational autonomy ushered in by the radically 'othered' body. The user's body too, is assaulted by the images, and perhaps despite the distance produced through laughter, the body is nevertheless being engaged - either through the flush of sexual desire or through the very act of laughing itself.

Films that intentionally use comedy may do so in various ways. *Rambone the Destroyer* (1985), for example, is an example of a sub genre of Explicit Sex Films that takes a well-known mainstream movie (*Rambo*) and uses the audience's knowledge of the film's plot and characters to bring both familiarity and some semblance of dramatic breadth to the film. It acts as a way of evoking familiar characters and narrative without having to go to the expense of building this into the film. *Rambone the Destroyer* is parody (rather than pastiche) because it sends up and makes (more) ridiculous the clichéd macho-ness of the *Rambo* films. The narrative of the film is that a dominatrix and her stupid hench-man (who is the same man who plays the dog in *New Wave Hookers*) kidnap all-American girls for an Arab named 'Saddaam'. The two slip up when they kidnap the girlfriend of 'Rambo' who then rescues her and 'punishes' the kidnappers by screwing the dominatrix. The main joke of this film,

which is overt, is in its subversion of the transcendental veiled phallus. Rambo's macho Phallic mystique is revealed as a comic propensity to defeat his enemies through the use of his penis. There are a plethora of jokes about his 'gun' and his 'tool' and he defeats his enemy who is a caricature of Sadaam Hussein, by screwing the 'virgin' women who have been kidnapped from the West for his 'harem' by an S-M dominatrix who is also 'punished' by Rambo. Whilst there would seem to be an anti-Arab discourse at work here, it rather sends-up the jingoistic reductionism of recent Hollywood 'guns and heroes' films and reveals the veiled sexual economy that underpins these films. The low-production values too, work to make the playful caricaturisation more exaggerated; the costumes appear to have come from a high-street party shop and the characters' accents and speech are completely implausible. The film resembles a pantomime, and despite the presence of penetration and erect penises, it nevertheless has recourse to sexual innuendoes and the exaggeration of the sexual. It must not though be thought that this detracts from the authenticity of the sexual acts; despite the comic framing, the sexual acts are still encoded as authentic.

If the user does find a film funny, either as intended comedy or as unintentional comedy, then does this affect or interrupt the film's ability to turn on the user? Ostensibly it would appear, in a Bergsonian reading, that the comic distances the user from the action. For Bergson, laughter entails a critical distance from the object that causes humour, but which excludes empathy. The problem here is that Bergson's notion of comedy is based on a purely cerebral engagement with the comic moment. This may well work to disengage a user, but I would suggest that this is a form of partial disavowal which allows the user to watch the film - much in the same way that laughter can allow viewers to bear the horrific sights of the Body-Horror film. It is then crucial to take up Freud's reading of the comic as related to the repressed, which allows the comic to be sited within a bodily economy as well as involving psychic, rational (economies). Both comedy and Explicit Sex films share the intention of 'moving the body', and I will argue that these two are not opposites but instead are

inter-linked. This makes them function in a complementary way, since they both have their roots in the repression of pre-oedipal sexual economies.

As laughter is not innocent because it involves repressed sexual economies and also works to create complicity between groups, it may be supposed that the source of the comic relates to gender. One can imagine a scenario wherein a group of lads buy their beer and gather for an evening of watching smutty films.⁹ Whilst this seems to be the model of viewing that underpins many analyses of the genre, I would contend that this is not the most common way in which these films are viewed. I would speculate that mostly they are watched with the intent either to masturbate, or to preface a sexual encounter. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ask the question - are women the butt of the joke in Explicit Sex films?

In most examples of the genre discussed, women and women's bodies per se are not the primary source of humour. Instead, the comic is mainly centred on the performative implausibility which is caused through the cinematography and conventions of the genre, and also through the tensions presented by the 'othered' sexual body - in other words, that which detracts from the encoding of the sexual acts as authentic. Within Mulvey's logic of the on-screen and off-screen male gaze, the presence of the female genitals confront the male viewer with an unbearable reminder of castration. As a counter-measure women's bodies are fetishised to cover-over this 'lack'. Within Explicit Sex films, the 'lack', if we follow Mulvey's logic, is apparently due to the overt presentation of the female genitals, and so it must be assumed, if this logic is followed through, to be unpleasurable for male users. This is clearly not the case - if it were, then the genre would not continue to be financially successful and it would appeal only to women. Instead, I would argue that the primary anxiety of the films is the 'othered' sexual body which goes beyond gender differences and is constructed through the formation of the subject. It is through this that the fetish

⁹ This has interesting homosocial implications. It is not directly pertinent to my argument to discuss this here, but I will raise the issue later in the chapter.

comes into play, such as in the fetishistic question of authenticity. It is here that the comic might work to help users to disavow the radical otherness of the body, but it is also the case that the comic is a result of this configuration. This is manifest in many ways and subject to many differences, and not necessarily tied into the reductive concept of a single male imaginary which seeks to solve the problem of women's lack. As I have argued, Explicit Sex Films are not motivated by a search, as Linda Williams (1990) says, for the invisible female orgasm. Often the women are shown in a state of perpetual orgasm and signify a flowing unending jouissance. This can be read as ludicrous in some ways, as it will be clear to many users, designated as both male and female, that sex is rarely this ecstatic from beginning to end. This may interrupt the encoding of authentic sex for some users; alternatively it may well represent an ideal fantasy about plenitude.

Laughter created through implausibility may result from the differences of Explicit Sex films from Hollywood conventions (either in terms of formal conventions or at the level of content), but further reading of the films as implausible may result from the prevalence of the heterosexual matrix that underpins the tropes of romantic sex. Laughter might also be due to embarrassment, or result from the cultural construction of sexual acts for their own sake as abject and other. Laughter may, in Freudian terms, work to conservatively separate the ego from the otherness of sexuality and the sexual body, for example, the genitals. If this is the case then a Kantian refusal of the vulgar body is still at work in the reception of sexual images. I would suggest that there are many different kinds of laughter, and to assume that it is always defensive negates any notion that laughter can be an enunciation of the ecstatic. To tie laughter to a single defensive strategy would deny its potential for multiple meanings - the hollow laughter of the cynic, giggling at the forbidden, ecstatic laughter produced by pleasure, and the laughter that is produced through the recognition of the real.

Within the terms of the pro- and anti- censorship debate, many critics have sought to show that Explicit Sex Films seek to exhibit the mastery of patriarchy through the

male address of the films. In these analyses Explicit Sex Films are seen as representations that reinforce male narcissistic mastery of women and the presence of the erect penetrating penis as the signifier of a dominant patriarchal order. This approach in itself seems to uphold the Phallus/penis analogue and further has a limited and constricted notion of desire. The Phallus as the signifier of the 'law of the father' does seem to be undermined in these films, as the penis is present in its corporeal and unidealised state: a scrap of flesh that has a precarious, short-lived hold on corporeal, but not symbolic, power. Those theorists that see Explicit Sex Films as purely in the pay of the male imaginary, often implicitly uphold the Phallus/penis analogue as a transcendental signifier and neglect to take account of the way in which the films can be read by the user in different ways.

One of the functions of the comedy in Explicit Sex films then might be that it works to reassure users. This may be applied, in different ways, to both men and women users. For men, the films make plain the distinction between the Phallus and the penis. As Lacan says, the recognition that the penis is not the Phallus is crucial for men to be able to sustain an erection. The two must not be conflated if the man is able to perform sexually. Lacan cites an example of a man who becomes impotent because unconsciously he accepts the Phallus/penis analogue (cited in Leader, 1995: 97-98). What has occurred here is that the penis as an imaginary object has become bound into the Phallus as a signifier. Given the Phallus/penis analogue that is often promoted in discourse this is hardly a surprising conflation. These films then may well work to help men to establish a workable difference between the two; laughter may then be the result of the recognition that the possession of the penis is not the possession of the Phallus. For women, the films offer a view of the female body which, like the erect penis, is rarely represented in other visual forms. Anatomical representations, for example, are often flat, diagrammatic and focused on a disembodied womb or breast. The films offer a means of comparing intimate parts of the body which are mostly rendered as invisible in both popular culture and in our relations with others.

In Greek culture and comedy the phallus was not a veiled or a coded symbol but instead was visually present in the flesh and in stone. The phallus in Greek comedy was not a mysterious transcendental signifier but instead a comic icon. As Oliver Taplin says 'The outsize appendage was as much the hallmark of comedy as the mask' (Taplin, 1993). This would seem to imply that the male genitals were as much the butt of the joke as are women with large breasts in saucy-seaside postcards. In modern Explicit Sex Films the sight of a pair of flapping testicles whilst filmed from behind is a good example of the mis-match between the mapping of the transcendental Phallus which is mis-recognised as part of the idealised male body, and the ludicrous involuntary comic movements of the genitals. Users might find the sight of their body in the sexual act strange or ludicrous - especially when it is framed in an apparently implausible way that highlights the body as having a life of its own which may in turn disrupt the illusion of subject coherency. As Foucault has suggested, the genitals are 'othered' because they seem to have a life of their own: '...the famous gesture of Adam covering his genitals with a fig leaf is...not due to the simple fact Adam was ashamed of their presence but to the fact that his sexual organs were moving by themselves without his consent' (cited in Falk, 1993: 13). What is important here is that the penis is 'othered', not as the transcendental Phallic signifier, but instead as a signifier of the recalcitrant body which radically affronts subject autonomy. To paraphrase Žižek's (1991: 111) useful point, the Real of the sexual act disrupts the diegetic reality of a film. The physical movement which signals the presence of the genitals also works to disrupt the seamlessness of the illusion of subject autonomy. This bodily 'real' is veiled in softcore soft focus representations of sex, thereby denying visual access to the penis which works to conserve the Phallus as both sublime and as analogous to the penis.

Laughter at the unsublimity of the human sexual organs, including the penis, would not then appear to be just protective but instead indicates a disruptive recognition of our own corporeality that goes against the myths of perfect, symmetrical, smooth

bodies which we can rationally regulate (this is so in different ways for both men and women). Laughter, not the laughter of corrective sadism but the self-conscious laughter of recognition, is the result of the realisation that sexual plenitude is an illusion and that we are bound by the laws of the physical, unidealised flesh which affronts the imaginary, idealised self. For men this entails the recognition that the penis and the Phallus are not one and the same thing. In *New Wave Hookers* there is a graphic example of this. A member of the Vice Squad comes to arrest the protagonists, but his original intent is thwarted because, against himself, he becomes sexually aroused. This humorously highlights the points made above and shows how the 'law' cannot deal with the recalcitrant sexual body, graphically demonstrating how the sexual interrupts the smooth logic of the law.

New Wave Hookers is typical of the more recent parody film. The shift to the parody format is most likely to be a response to the presence and problem of unintentional comedy in the older films, and the parody format seeks to build into, and add a new lease of life to, the traditional format. This film parodies many of the generic conventions of 'straight' Explicit Sex Films. These characteristics include a sequence of different sexual episodes using two to four people and culminating in group sex in the last scene. *New Wave Hookers* uses conventional comic devices such as jokes, banter, exaggeration and caricature. It opens with two men watching a 'porn' film on TV; whilst they watch they fantasise about becoming pimps and playfully begin to explore the kind of language and gestures that a stereotypical Hollywood movie pimp would use. The use of a diegetic fantasy foregrounds, in a comic way, the user's relation to the text - something which was often unacknowledged in older films. The playful fantasy here is that the men have access to a lot of women who like sex. This scenario is not achieved in a 'straightforward' narrative way, but instead foregrounds the scenario as a fantasy. The fantasy is supported through the use of running gags and the opening joke is on the two sexually unfulfilled men who can only achieve satisfaction through the use of Explicit Sex films and within the framework of a

fantasy, rather than through diegetic reality. There are two aspects to this which are pertinent to my argument. First, that fantasy framework of the film highlights the distinction between the Phallus and the penis, and second, the fantasy framework allows the men in the films, and the women, to act out stereotypical roles in a tongue-in-cheek way. For example, and as I have previously said, before the fantasy commences the two men play-act being stereotypical Hollywood pimps (who are perhaps taken in this fantasy to 'have' the Phallus through their control over a group of women). The two men rehearse 'pimp' talk and practise saying the street term for prostitutes - 'bitches' - in a suitably exaggerated way (previously they referred to women as 'chicks'). The comic exaggeration and repetition of the term signals to the user that the film will parody the representation of pimps and prostitutes which is commonly seen on American police dramas and Hollywood films. This also allows them to circumvent, through the fantasy, the 'politically correct' mode of addressing women.

After this period of rehearsal the two men fall asleep and are then transported through dream into their fantasy of running a sex business. The business is called 'New Wave Hookers', hence the title, the rationale being that when some women listen to new wave music (which constitutes the film's soundtrack) they become - to use the jargon - hot and horny. As well as connoting transgression through its reference to punk, this device then overtly addresses the MTV generation audience. It is also perhaps this group who are targeted because it is they that will get the joke as they will have been brought up on a diet of 70s American Police dramas. There is also a parodic reference to the buddy cop movie (for instance *Lethal Weapon*) through which *New Wave Hookers* send-up the stereotypical link between black men and sexual prowess. This is evident for example in the dialogue between the two men in the fantasy where the black man says: 'Man, these bitches are crazy, they (sic) out there giving away pussy for free, all because of some bullshit music...what the hell does new wave music got that black music doesn't have. I think that these bitches come from another

planet I think they've taken a sex drug - lucky for them that I am the genius that I am. I've figured out a way to programme bitches to music and that's the new way...'. He also makes it plain to the white man (with a fake Japanese/Chinese accent) that it is because he is black that he has greater access to the power of the pimp. The jokey relationship between the white and black protagonists align the humour/parody of the film to US 'blaxploitation' films and TV of the 70s (this jokey relationship has been taken up by Quentin Tarantino in *Pulp Fiction*). The effect of this however is to reduce racial cultural differences to a matter of personal 'style' and comic focus.

The use of parody re-frames the traditional conventions of the Explicit Sex film text, and may enable some users to circumvent the clichéd use of 'porn' with its stereotypical characters and scenarios. The function of the comedy is to frame the acts as a fantasy. Because of the comic framing, the two men's language and behaviour in the film can be seen as playful and parodic, rather as a serious rendering of US cop dramas and black/white relations.

The comic framing is also supported by one of the men's adoption of a very bad Japanese accent, indicating another parody of a stereotype. The character then switches to a Chinese accent when he has sex with a Chinese woman. The film also uses caricatures, for example, there is a policeman who is on the Vice Squad, two nerdy virgin men (signalled by glasses, woolley hats and anoraks), and a man dressed as Rudolph Valentino's Sheik who can speak no English. These caricatures are played up for maximum effect, and the use of them offers a new take on the familiar conventions of the genre. However, the apparent dichotomy here is that the sexual acts are also coded as authentic. Does the comic framing disrupt the authenticity of the sex acts?

Neale and Krutnik use the term 'comic insulation', building upon the Freudian explanation of humour as a protective device. For the comedy helps '...to guarantee that "ugliness" and "error" are "painless"...It does so by marking events, actions and

characters with a degree of implausibility sufficient to ensure they are not taken seriously' (Neale & Krutnik 1992: 63). It could be argued that the comedy of *New Wave Hookers* helps the user come to terms with the Real of sexual desire, by helping the user to bear sexual involuntarism. Under this rubric it might be said that the women in the film are not the focus of the joke, and instead the joke is on the men. The parody highlights male sexual desire as an achievable fantasy. The joke is also on the un-idealised sexual body that, as I have already said, is often idealised in softcore romanticised representations of sex. Men's desire, bodies and genitals are thus set up as 'other'. This may be due to the paucity of sexually explicit images in contemporary Western culture, but this lack has its foundations in the bodily involuntarism which affronts the illusion of subject autonomy and coherency. Laughter can thus be seen not just as a form of comic insulation from the unidealised body, as Neale and Krutnik suggest, but as a recognition of the real; the laughter produced as a defence against sexual involuntarism may at first appear to be a sadistic laughter but what is also apparent is that it is also the laughter of an uncomfortable recognition.

So rather than seeing sex and the comic as oppositional, I would instead argue that they are complementary, as the comic allows the cliché of the 'porno' film to be recycled and re-used. The comedy also works to re-frame the Phallus/penis analogue by marking the distinction between the two but holding off the threat of castration through laughter.

The authenticity of the sex may be disrupted by the laughter promoted by the implausibility of the scenario. This is the result of the juxtaposition of contradictory filmic and epistemological discourses; but more significantly laughter is derived from the unbearable Real of desire (as based on lack rather than presence) that bears down on the subject. The source of the comic is not just implausibility but is also the 'Real' (the return of the repressed) which disrupts the mythic ideal. The use of intentional comedy in these films is not a distancing device and therefore does not interrupt the circulation of desire. Instead it aids the holding off of a castration threat for male

viewers. However, laughter heralds the shadowy presence of unconscious desire. Laughter betrays a transgression, whether it be the transgression of cinematic forms or the transgression of sexual taboos. It is the task of the next chapter to address the function of transgression in Explicit Sex films.

Chapter Four

Explicit Sex Films, Transgression and 'The Accursed Share'

To paraphrase Bataille, the paradox of transgression is that an individual in any culture is impelled to transgress the limits of the self and culture, but at the same time, is also impelled to conserve and maintain these limits (1957: 141). The task of this chapter is to ask what it means to call Explicit Sex films 'transgressive'. Do the transgressions performed by these films reinforce sexual norms, or do they articulate an uncomfortable 'truth' about sexuality which is absent from other more 'legitimate' presentations of sexuality? Is transgression intrinsic to desire? These questions will be read through Bataille's reading of the function and experience of transgression (1957, 1976) as instrumental to the structure and identity of a given culture. I will link this to Kristeva's analysis of the mechanism and experience of abjection¹ (1980) in order to show what transgression in Explicit Sex films means in relation to desire, fantasy and pleasure.

The Systemic and Dynamic Cultural function of Transgression

Is transgression a symptom of law, or is it the law that is the symptom of transgression? The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1973) offers a useful benchmark definition through which to discuss the systemic and dynamic function of transgression in culture:

To go beyond the limits prescribed by (a law, command, etc.); to break, to violate, infringe trespass against... 2. To go or pass beyond (any limit or bounds). [1973: 2346]

¹ Kristeva's analysis of the role of abjection in the formation of the subject in *Powers of Horror* (1980) draws on Mary Douglas's anthropological analysis of 'dirt' taboos in *Purity and Danger* (1964).

This definition can be aligned with what I will term the systemic and the dynamic modes of transgression. The systemic mode is symptomatic of the laws that structure a given culture. These laws may be juridical, religious and social. Within this model, transgression is the direct product of the rules that govern a given cultural system. The dynamic mode comes out of the systemic mode and I will use the former term to describe the individual's experience produced through the transgression of the laws of a given system. Transgression is therefore defined by the cultural system, and the effects of transgression are experienced personally by subjects within that system.

Although a given system guarantees its structural logic by positing transgression *as if* it were the act of going outside the system, transgression is nevertheless always the product of a given system.² The personal experience of transgression in a given culture functions as a form of regulation which is why Bataille states that transgression is experienced at once as both liberation and anguish. In answer to my opening question - is transgression a symptom of the law or is it the law that is the symptom of transgression? - the system and its structuring laws operate *as if* the law was a symptom of transgression, but in my reading here it is apparent that transgression is in fact a symptom of the law.

The systemic and dynamic role of transgression, read through Bataille's analysis of transgression, shows how a given cultural system is paradoxically dependent on transgression as reinforcing that system. In the general sense, the laws that structure a given culture provide the foundational contouring of that system. The framework of law provides a culture or society with a structural logic through which it can map the terrain of its collective identity and the subjects within it. This structure depends upon the channelling of desire and sexuality which constitutes the 'subject before the law' (Butler, 1990). To become a subject within culture is to become a sexed, gendered,

² Although I am using different terms to describe the two key aspects of the function of transgression I am nevertheless following Bataille's reading of transgression as a direct product of a given cultural system.

clean and proper person³ within the terms and laws of that culture. When the laws that govern this 'ideal' subject are violated or rendered ambiguous, far from being overturned, these laws are paradoxically reinforced. To give stability to a cultural system, punishment of transgression must be seen to be effective to bolster the credibility of a given cultural system. Punishment, for example, must be experienced at a personal level, and may take the form of the experience of what Lacan calls alienation (Bataille translates this experience as 'anguish'). The experience of alienation or anguish means that, as Foucault argues, the subject before the law becomes self-policing. The cultural system then operates through the rule of least resistance and the system is dependent on the alienation produced by the dynamic experience of transgression. In terms of sexual subjecthood, this means that the subject self-regulates her/himself by disavowing elements of sexuality that do not conform to the dominant model.

The system however can never be totally fixed and uniform, as a culture is constituted through a matrix of conflicting and contradictory discourses. The subject must then negotiate these competing discourses to retain a sense of integrity and coherence. For a culture to retain identity and coherence it must attempt to minimise the differences between competing discourses. The system is also dependent upon the dynamic and structural function of transgression for it to reiterate and reinforce its structural law and logic.

The law that structures a culture requires fixed meanings or one-to-one correspondence for a culture to operate; fixed meanings are necessary so that the limits and edges of a culture can be defined. These one-to-one correspondences provide the framework that determines what is considered inside and what is considered outside the law. The greatest challenge to the structure of law is not that which is positioned as 'outside' the boundary (which reinforces the demarcation lines of a system); instead, as Kristeva argues in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1986), it is ambiguity. Through

³ Bataille argues that in fact we cannot be this because we are impelled to transgress the limits of the self and culture. The subject therefore experiences transgression as anguish.

the disruption of one-to-one correspondences, ambiguity can be construed as a form of excess of meaning or over-determination that disrupts the logic of a system and blurs the edges which govern a system's structure and substance. The act of blurring cultural laws threatens the concrete terms that ground cultural or individual identity; for instance, over-determined or multiple meanings or where meaning or the logic of the system breaks down. The pro-censorship lobby's call for wider censorship of pornography, for instance, has depended upon the rigid and non-ambiguous definition of the term so that prosecution can take place; the inability to fix upon a single (functional) definition of pornography has often been the cause of the failure of such ordinances or bills.

In a structural sense, Explicit Sex Films specifically transgress the *Obscene Publications Act*⁴, which decrees that it is illegal to distribute (to rent or sell) films which are not certified by the British Board of Film Censors or the Video Standards Council, and are therefore deemed to 'corrupt and deprave' viewers. The language of the Act suggests corruption; a contamination from 'radical' transgressions. The troping of corruption leans on core social and psychic anxieties that relate to the threat posed to the integrity of identity. This can appropriately be termed border anxiety.

The nebulous language of the *Obscene Publications Act* allows it to accommodate small changes which it may need to implement so that the law maintains its integrity. Its rather vague terminology, has, nevertheless, a very specific meaning for the police and courts in contemporary Britain. Images which are deemed to 'corrupt and deprave' in Explicit Sex films are judged in Britain at the present time to be oral, anal and vaginal penetration, erect penises, and ejaculation. These are the main-stay tropes of the genre of Explicit Sex films which structurally define the genre as a transgressive violation of the juridical law. This, however, is based on a judgement of the content of

⁴ See *Appendix C* for exact wording.

the films as transgressive of 'clean and proper'⁵ cultural representations of sexuality. Explicit Sex films, then, are not only configured as violating juridical edicts, but also as transgressing aesthetic, social and psychic laws. The juridical system leans on moral and aesthetic discourse, which in turn leans on mechanisms of repression and abjection. Systemic transgressions are experienced personally in a dynamic sense, and as Bataille says, this produces both anguish and liberation. This then may provide an explanation of the transgressive 'pleasure' of watching these films, and it is to Bataille's analysis of transgression and culture that I now turn as preliminary to the exploration of the relationship between the structural and dynamic function of transgression within Explicit Sex films.

⁵ This term is widely used in cultural studies and derives from Mary Douglas's anthropological analysis of cultural taboos around 'pollution', 'contamination' and 'dirt' (Douglas, 1966). The term is expanded upon by Julia Kristeva in her analysis of the mechanism and function of 'abjection' (Kristeva, 1982). Contemporary writers on horror films have taken up the concept to help to explain the discursive basis for the pleasurable and the disturbing effects of the genre (Creed 1993, Clover 1992, Shaviro 1993, Krzywinska 1994).

Bataille, Transgression and the Dissolution of the Subject

Georges Bataille was the first modern philosopher to centralise the concept of transgression in the analysis of the relationship between society and psychic systems. Like Nietzsche, Bataille critiques the tradition which impels philosophical thought to seek unified, all-encompassing explanations of knowledge and existence. His method is to open up philosophy and the analysis of culture to the vicissitudes of heterogeneity and chance and, thereby, to address aspects of human existence that exceed systems of knowledge or economics. In order to address the role of excess and transgression as inherent to the structure of any given culture, Bataille makes an eclectic use of sociological, psychoanalytic and anthropological methodologies. Through this heterogeneous approach he is able to demonstrate the meanings of transgression within the inter-connecting matrix of social, psychic, and aesthetic fields. I will here be concentrating on the writings which specifically address transgression within sexuality and eroticism⁶. The key texts used in this chapter are: Volume 2 of *The Accursed Share*, entitled 'The History of Eroticism', written in 1976, but only translated into English in 1991, and the more widely known *Eroticism*, written in French in 1957, and translated into English in 1962. Through the interest generated by European philosophy 'stars' such as Derrida⁷ and Foucault⁸, Bataille's non-fictional writing is becoming more recognised in the field of cultural analysis. His importance, however, to the understanding of transgression has very often been neglected by writers on this topic. Bataille's writing demonstrates the significance of both the structural and the dynamic model of transgression to the structure of a culture, and as such can help to

⁶ I will not directly address Bataille's use of the concept in relation to death and sacrifice; even though, as he says, erotic transgression is inter-bound with death as the primary site of transgression and taboo.

⁷ For example Derrida's essay on Bataille 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve' (Derrida, 1978). Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* is close to Bataille's work, but as Lyotard and Bogue note, they do not take up his concept of transgression (Bogue, 1989: footnote 17 p173).

⁸ In a footnote in *Georges Bataille* Richardson cites the following 'It was at the International Cultural Centre held at C erisy-la-Salle between 29 June and 9 July 1972 (devoted to him [Bataille] and Artaud) that Bataille was consecrated as the patron saint of post-structuralism. Philippe Sollers, Roland Barthes ... Julia Kristeva were among those who gave papers' (Richardson, 1994: footnote 2 for page 3 included on page 135). He goes on to list key figures who have written on Bataille and includes Foucault's 'Pr eface   la Transgression' which was first published in *Critique* nos. 195-6 (1962).

address the complexities of the question of what it means to call Explicit Sex films transgressive.

Bataille defines the specificity of humanity as constituted through the deployment and recognition of limits and prohibitions. These limits may be psychic, social or cultural and they are built on repression, prohibition, taboo and otherness. In *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1984: 11), Foucault argues that society is no longer built on taboos (Foucault, 1984: 25) and he critiques the repressive hypothesis.⁹ Whilst Foucault makes a valid point about the need to address the institution of power in its diverse contemporary forms (Foucault, 1984: 11), Bataille, alongside Lacanian notions of the subject, argues that the subject is constituted through a series of taboos and prohibitions. Bataille and Lacan argue that these taboos are instrumental in the formation of the unconscious and the mechanism of repression. The importance of taboo and prohibition for the formation of the subject is also key to Kristeva's analysis of abjection. Against Foucault, and following Bataille, Lacan and Kristeva, I would argue that taboo and prohibition cannot be excluded because they are key to the theorisation of transgression, desire and sexuality. It is, I contend, vital to retain the role of taboo and prohibition in the analyses of the subject and what is remaindered through subject formation. This then becomes important to the examination of the meanings of transgression in Explicit Sex films because, as will be argued, these films are structured through contemporary taboos and prohibitions regarding sexuality. I contend, extrapolating from the work of Bataille, Lacan, and Kristeva, that these films contain 'hidden' or repressed economies of sexuality which within the dynamic model of transgression are personally experienced by the subject as at once both pleasurable and an affront to the integrity of subject identity. It is through the mechanisms of repression and abjection that unconscious sexual economies are manifest. It is the trace of these unconscious (abjected and repressed) sexual economies which return to

⁹ I refer the reader to the discussion of the repressive hypothesis in Chapter One.

make uncanny¹⁰ the images/sound of sexual acts in Explicit Sex films. The return of these sexual economies are central to the experience of these films as transgressive. As such, Bataille's conceptual matrix of prohibition and transgression still holds good as a means of explaining the meanings of transgression in Explicit Sex films.

Against some Marxist views which were current in French philosophical thought during the 1950s, Bataille argues that economics does not solely account for the structure of a society. Society is, he maintains, a heterogeneous matrix, with no single point of origination, it does not simply operate on a vertical base/superstructure model. His point is that fiscal economics are embedded within cultural and psychic factors; these factors are bound into fiscal economics rather than being its direct product. This is why it is crucial to address the economics, in its broadest sense, of Explicit Sex films by examining the inter-penetration of fiscal economies and psychic economies of desire, fantasy and pleasure.

Hegelian and Marxist systems, as unifying systems, have, Bataille argues, 'blind spots' which he maintains are necessary for the presentation of a unified philosophical system. These unifying systems, however, prevent the heterogeneous, complex and recursive composition of a social system from being seen. Bataille argues that what is often neglected in unified philosophical systems is the way in which systems are negatively constructed through what he calls the 'other' (or in Derridean terms through difference). It is the 'other', the 'other scene of culture', that Bataille inhabits and explores both through his fiction and his analytic work.¹¹ For Bataille, this means writing out of the personal experience of the 'excess' of a given system which he maintains is produced through the system's organisation of difference. The primary

¹⁰ Freud's concept of the 'uncanny', as will soon become apparent, is a key to the reading of Explicit Sex films. I will define the uncanny in more detail later, but to summarise, Freud uses the term to describe the effect of 'objects' (of desire) that were once the source of pleasure but through the mechanism of repression now present the subject with a sense of 'strangeness' or 'out of place-ness' ('The Uncanny' in Freud, 1990: 335-376).

¹¹ Through the frame of fiction (*Story of the Eye*, *Blue of Noon*, *L'Abbe C*) he is able to produce the experience of the full-force of transgression and excess. He does, however, attempt to do this in his more analytic work which could then be said to transgress the rules of traditional academic (as objective) discourse.

mode of Bataille work, which he shares with some aspects of phenomenology, is to explore the interpellation¹² of the individual through the specific experience of transgression. The social is conducted through the individual's experience of transgression, and he argues that the experience of transgression is central to the reiteration of a social system through the individual psyche. Bataille seeks to explore 'affect', the experience of being a subject. In so doing he uses the subject's experience of transgression as a means of countering the traditional abstraction of philosophical enquiry. This dynamic approach to transgression is crucial to the examination of Explicit Sex films as these films are expressly designed to elicit, at a personal level, the user's engagement with transgression.

For Bataille, a social system is constructed through the formation of limits and boundaries; these may take the form of taboos or laws. To become a subject, as defined by a given society, these limits must be internalised.¹³ He names two areas of life which hover on the boundaries of a social system and which work to contaminate the integrity of the social and psychic system; these are sex and death. He implies that sex and death, dancing on the boundaries of a culture, operate in different ways to structure and substantiate all human cultures. Sex and death, in all cultures, he argues, are key sites for taboos and prohibitions. A cultural system shrouds sex and death with taboos because they threaten the identity of both the system and the subject within the system. These taboos help to minimise and contain the anxiety that sex and death promote. This is where Bataille's work intersects with the Freudian model of taboos. These taboos work to guarantee the limits and identity of that culture and thereby channel desire, through, for instance, gender or sexual identity. The effectiveness of a society or culture's boundaries or limits depend upon these taboos

¹² I am here borrowing the term 'interpellation' from Louis Althusser, as it best describes Bataille's approach to the relation of the personal and the social. Althusser outlines and develops the concept of 'interpellation' in the essays *On Ideology* and *Freud and Marx* to describe 'ideology as a lived relationship of individuals to their historical conditions of existence' (Barrett in eds. Kaplan and Sprinkler, 1993: 169). Through this concept Althusser welds together a Marxist-based critique of ideology with Lacanian concepts of the subject. Here Bataille and Althusser share a similar approach to the analysis of the subject in, or rather of, culture.

¹³ This is where Bataille is close to recent psychoanalytic ideas such as 'abjection' and I will discuss these intersections later in the chapter.

being experienced at an individual, psychic level. When a boundary is pushed against or transgressed, this is experienced as a 'laceration' of a subject's integral coherence. At a psychic level, both death and sexuality (in certain guises) are experienced as disruptive of subject coherence, and the corresponding experiences are, jointly, liberation and anguish.

This idea interestingly maps onto Jonathan Dollimore's reading of transgression, in his post-containment theory work *Sexual Dissidence* (Dollimore, 1991). Here Dollimore argues that transgressions of gender and sexual conventions always incur the expense of pain, severe oppression or anguish.¹⁴ It also tallies with Butler's notion, outlined in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), that all subjects, in varying degrees, experience alienation because it is impossible to fully inhabit the ideal gender roles prescribed by the dominant order. It further relates to Lacan's notion that the subject is 'alienated' in language. According to Lacan, language both exceeds and precedes the subject and cannot fully translate feeling/affect into the rigours of words. In all the above writings on the subject there is no *a priori* subject but the subject *qua* subject is constructed through law and language, and its concomitant prohibitions. These laws and prohibitions, at once, produce desire. However, the heterogeneity of desire also undermines the one-to-one correspondence necessary for the perpetuation of cultural law. The construction of an *a priori* subject is an illusion which provides a point of origination to a given system - although *a priori* status acts *as if* it were pre-discursive, it is nevertheless, the cultural system that constructs this position. Explicit Sex films are dependent on this for the interpellation of the user into their meaning systems.

Bataille argues that transgression is inherently bound into social matrices; taboos, and the regulation of the taboos through the movement of transgression, are intrinsic to human society and communication, and transgression is key to the production of a system of differences upon which a society and the subject depends for a stable

¹⁴ It is interesting that Dollimore's criticisms of 'containment theory' in *Sexual Dissidence* (1991) are at times very close to Bataille's reading of transgression, although Bataille's work is not mentioned in this text.

identity. As an example, I would cite Bataille's analysis of differentiation between work and eroticism in Western Protestantised culture. He sees work and eroticism as conflicting forces in Western culture; work is aimed at production whereas eroticism, beyond reproductive sex, is in excess of productive ends. He argues that humanity emerged from the instinctual animal world '...by working, by understanding... *[its]*¹⁵ ...own morality and by moving imperceptibly from an unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism' (Bataille, 1957: 31).

Bataille implicitly refers to psychoanalytic notions of repression in the process¹⁶ of becoming 'civilised' (becoming a subject according to the terms of a given cultural system). His genealogical mapping of the shift from instinct to a specifically human consciousness corresponds to a Christian lapsarian model of original sin and to Freud's genealogical enquiries in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* and *Totem and Taboo*.¹⁷ The 'shame', of which Bataille speaks, has many familiar analogues. For instance, the concepts of the fall and original sin that underpin many religious narratives purport to provide an answer to a primary question levelled at the origins of the subject and sexuality. The psychoanalytic concepts of the superego, the repression of pre-oedipal sexuality and the pleasure principle also provides an answer to the primary question of the origin of sexuality, as do the 'law of the father' in Lacanian psychoanalysis and the processes of abjection. The answers these provide are, however, imaginary and bound into the heterogeneity of fantasy. For Bataille and psychoanalysis, human society is dependent on the experience of shame and guilt that has a reciprocal relation between psychic processes and social taboos about sexuality. It is here that psychoanalysis can supplement Bataille's reading of transgression in relation to repression, primary

¹⁵ Italics signals my addition.

¹⁶ It is important to note that Bataille underwent a psychoanalytic analysis.

¹⁷ For instance, 'Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher physical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilised life...it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilisation is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts. This 'cultural frustration' dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings' (Freud, 1985: 286/7); and 'We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment from a contrast and very little from the state of things' (ibid.:264).

(unconscious) and secondary (conscious) fantasy as the remainders of unanswered questions about origin, and abjection. These concepts are important for my reading of Bataille's work on transgression and excess in relation to the question of what it means to call Explicit Sex films transgressive.

Bataillean transgression, at a structural level, then, paradoxically operates to negatively reinforce social, cultural and psychic laws and boundaries. This process parallels what Hegel terms *Aufhebung*, which describes the dual process of conservation and negation.¹⁸ To read Bataille's notion of transgression in a dynamic way: transgression is not seen as a purely negative containment but is also construed as an active force which is invested in the rims and edges of the body, the edges and rims of a culture. These are invested with erotogenic excess and desire: what this describes is the libidinal economy that underpins the apparatus of a culture. Desire as produced by and invested in a system works to produce ambiguities, fissures and caesuras, by exploiting contradictions between extant discourses. This dynamic operation of transgression can then destabilise the logic and stasis of a given system. This is an important idea and will be brought to bear on the discussion of abjection and the uncanny-fic(a)tion of sex.

Rather than seeing transgressive acts as radically outside of a given system (instead, they operate *as if* they were), Bataille configures transgression as working in the service of that system, as without a personal experience of transgression of boundaries the system could not exist. He says there is a '...profound complicity of law and the violation of the law' (1957: 36). Transgressive acts give a system substance through the location of other-ness and difference, but are also symptomatic of that which is in excess of the system. Through the organisation of desire the system always contains the seeds of its own undoing, as something is always remaindered from the process of systemic organisation. As I will show in the analysis of specific Explicit Sex films

¹⁸ Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen writes '...the *Aufhebung*, in strictly Hegelian doctrine, is not a pure 'immediate' negation of the object. It is a "determined" negation, which maintains what it suppresses' (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991: 208).

below, through the overt use of transgressive tropes these films reinforce the marking of cultural boundaries, but further, these tropes depend upon implicit sexual economies that have become repressed through the given set of taboos and prohibitions. This is then a kind of excess which paradoxically is the direct product of subject formation which manifests through fantasy and the movement of unconscious desire. This excess is both the product of, but also violates, the channelling of sexual desire as heterosexual coitus.

The lapsarian model (and a certain rendering of the concept of repression) underpins libertarian calls for 'free' expression of sex¹⁹ and is also implicit in many pro-censorship writings which assume that sexuality can be divested of corrupting power. The call for a return to a pre-lapsarian construction of sexuality as 'innocent' instinct, present in both discourses, implies that sexuality is a fixed 'content', rather than circulating and relational. The call is for a 'lifting' of repression; as if it were a cloud blocking out the sunlight of human joy rather than constituent of the subject. Bataille, reflecting psychoanalytic models of sexuality, is instead arguing that sexuality is constituted through the taboos and prohibitions current in a given social system, for instance, incest, heterosexuality, reproduction and the child as non-sexual. Sexuality cannot, therefore, be divested of these fetters, because it is configured through the system of taboos, limits, laws and concomitant transgressions. The desire to remove the perceived constraints on sexuality, ironically, disavows the possibility of using transgression to locate contradictions in the logic of the social and psychic matrix. These contradictions are glossed over as a means of keeping the system intact, and to preserve the coherent status of a given social and psychic system. If these constraints, for instance through shame or power relations, were removed from sexuality, the

¹⁹ For example in the analysis of sex and politics in the writings of Herbert Marcuse (*Eros and Civilisation* [1969]) and Wilhem Reich (*The Function of the Orgasm* [1961]; *The Sexual Revolution. Towards a Self Governing Character Structure* [1970]). For a sustained discussion of these texts see Jeffrey Weeks' *Sexuality and Its Discontents*, Chapter 7 'Dangerous Desires' (Weeks, 1985).

outcome would not be the desired freedom, but instead a removal of the sources of sexuality and desire. For Bataille eroticism - sex for the sake of an excess of pleasure - draws its power precisely because it is a dynamic force derived from the violation of the law. Like Jean Genet,²⁰ Bataille celebrates transgression as being derived from the law and does not see it as simply a matter of doing away with cultural law. The energy or desire that is bound by and repressed by the system is also the product of that system. Repressed energy, then, cannot flow freely as it is the product of that system.

Bataille also addresses the treatment and understanding of taboos within the powerful knowledge-producing institutions, such as science, in Western culture. He says that the *raison d'être* of science and religion is to prevent transgression. Bataille maintains that taboos must not be fully repressed in a culture if a culture is to remain heterogeneously healthy - there must be sites of transgression within a culture so that it does not close down or crystallise. A homogeneous society, he says, is a society that seeks to eradicate all transgression; whereas a healthy heterogeneous social structure engenders an ambivalent relation to taboos. Here the taboos are not totally sublimated and therefore individuals can experience the anguish and liberation in relation to the transgression of a taboo. I take this to mean that if taboos and transgression are completely suppressed in a culture then the 'energy' of that culture will diminish correspondingly. Tolerance of transgression, but not the eradication of all boundaries, is then the mark of a living healthy culture. It is here possible to see a fore-shadowing of Deleuze's labyrinthine, rhizomic (non)system and his and Guattari's project to decentre the tyranny of grand narratives such as the Oedipus complex, although they do not foreground transgression as they reject a 'negative' construction of power.²¹

²⁰ Genet once said in interview that he would always take up the place of any oppressed group as the 'other' of a given system - no matter what it was. He also is cited as saying in an interview with Austrian journalist Rüdiger Wischenbart on his connections with the Black Panthers, The Red Army Faction and PLO 'I am drawn to people in revolt. And this is very natural to me, because I myself have the need to call the whole of society into question', cited by Edmund White in his introduction to Genet's *Prisoner of Love* (1989).

²¹ See footnote 7.

Bataille's analysis of the excess of eroticism is based on a model of the subject who is structured through continuity and discontinuity. Individual existence is characterised as a discontinuity, whereby the subject can be differentiated or split off from others. It is due to this discontinuity that the subject experiences a form of alienation. There is, he argues, a nostalgia for the continuity of pre-individualisation and it is this imaginary continuity that is petitioned through eroticism. Through eroticism, subjects seek to dissolve the boundaries between themselves and the other, but as continuity is also aligned with death (of the illusion of subject autonomy), continuity is at once feared as well as yearned for. This fear underpins the anxiety of losing the self in the other. He says: 'We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost identity' (Bataille, 1987:15). Eroticism is then experienced as a violation of the self as a contained, coherent entity: 'In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation' (ibid.: 16) and 'The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives' (ibid.: 17). This is an important point as this is where Bataille's notion of eroticism ties into the psychoanalytic notions of desire and the Kristevan notion of abjection.

Bataille argues that science has, however, worked to change our relations to a culture's taboos. The 'blind spot' of science results from 'objectivity', which prevents science from being able to understand how taboos operate at an emotional and psychic level. Objectivity, then, minimises or ignores the experiential significance of a taboo. A study which quantifies sexuality and eroticism from the 'outside' has the effect of driving the taboo 'underground' into the unconscious because it disavows the intrinsic relation between knowledge and desire. He says:

If we undertake a scientific study, indeed we regard objects as exterior to ourselves; we are subjects: in science the scientist himself becomes an object exterior to the subject, able to think objectively (he could not do this if he had not denied himself as a subject to being with).
(Bataille, 1957: 37)

Without participating within the 'full force' of the taboo the scientist can only fail to mis-recognise its significance; as Bataille goes on to say 'Unless the taboo is observed with fear it lacks the counterpoise of desire which gives it its deepest significance' (ibid.: 37). The process of scientific objectification, like Christian discourse, is to give full rein to the dynamic of the taboo; it then slips out of consciousness and with its removal, Bataille says, we become lesser, emotionally depleted beings (not in the sense of a completed unified subject as in the humanist tradition, but instead as a heterogeneous, discontinuous dis-unified creative being who breathes life through contradiction and desire). The scientific rendering of 'perversion', for instance, particularly in sexological studies such as Alfred Kinsey's taxonomy of sex, fails to address adequately the intrinsic role of desire in relation to knowledge systems. It further works to render sexual taboos unconscious; rather than keeping to the fore the contradictions and heterogeneity of desire: 'Unless the taboo is observed with fear it lacks the counterpoise of desire which gives it its deepest significance' (ibid.: 37).

As we shall see, the Bataille model of the economy of psychic functioning that is played out within the dynamic tension of continuity/discontinuity is pivotal to the analysis of the status of transgression in Explicit Sex Films. I will look at the various ways these films work to create an uncomfortable, destabilising excitement that promotes sexual desire. At the same time, however, they seek to contain the possible anguish and guilt that may arise from conflicts emerging from the encoding of authentic un-idealised representations of the sexual body which work against dominant mapping of sexual ideals. In this sense, Explicit Sex films often engender a psychological 'laceration' (which constructs sexual desire), but in so doing they may negatively reinforce the dominant social 'norm' of the non-voyeuristic, participatory couple bound together in heterosexual love and marriage. I will, then, examine the ways in which Explicit Sex films may affront and/or negatively re-affirm the heterosexual matrix. I propose that there are conflicting and diverse economies²² at work in these films, and in accordance with this the meanings of sex that are in excess

²² These economies have both conscious (overt) and unconscious (implicit) components.

of reproductive heterosexuality differ within different films. This difference will often depend on the discursive framing of the sexual acts.

Transgression, Heterosexuality and the Uncanny of Sex

Other than those designated as 'gay' Explicit Sex films, many films in the genre, such as *French Finishing School*, *L'Education d' Anna*, *Rambone the Destroyer* and *New Wave Hookers*, centralise heterosexual coitus. The aim of the genre, however, is to elicit sexual desire by presenting the user with sexual images which are deemed 'exotic' because they foreground sexual acts other than heterosexual coitus. Rather than the *Obscene Publications Act's* juridical definition of the films as transgressive (because they show explicit sexual images), it is 'exotic' sexual images that are key to a further type of transgression performed by the films. This further transgression is often achieved through the use of images of non-heterosexual acts, for instance 'lesbian' sex (*Punky Girls*), gender-fuck (typified by the women with penises as in *Kinkorama 14*), Sado-Masochism, fellatio and anal sex.²³ These 'exotic' images often depend on what may be regarded as repressed economies of sexuality that are produced through the formation of sex and gender identity, as governed by the hegemonic heterosexual matrix. As this matrix is constructed as a 'legitimate' form of sexual activity, the presence of these 'othered' sexual acts can be regarded in two different ways. First, the status of these acts is construed as exotic 'difference' with the aim of 'spicing up' the sexual action in a film. Second, they can work to disrupt the heterosexual economy, as they betray the operational valency of alternative sexual economies that are often sublimated through the heterosexual matrix. As such they can work to demonstrate the besieged nature of heterosexual identity by showing that desire exceeds its 'ideal' and narrow confines. But following the logic of Bataille's argument about transgression these 'othered' or sublated sexual acts are the direct or inverse product of the cultural apparatus of sexuality.

Explicit Sex films map sexuality through hegemonic heterosexuality, but also through 'other' (often repressed) sexual economies which lean on pre-oedipal economies of sexuality. These 'other' sexual economies are then both remaindered by the

²³ There are more - but these are the main forms.

heterosexual matrix, but are produced by and assigned their 'othered' status through the structure of this matrix. These 'othered' sexual economies may be categorised as: 'phallic' (genital auto-eroticism) - typified, for instance, in the preoccupation with images of masturbation and the 'come-shot'; 'anal' - typified, for instance, by the frequent depiction of anal penetration in films such as *Dr Butts II* and *Kinorama 14*; 'polymorphic' - typified, for instance, by the frequent 'orgy' scenes which often act as the closing scene of many films, such as *Rambone the Destroyer* and *Cicciolina in Italy*. Lesbian sex as an 'othered' sexual economy is also a staple of these films and this has been discussed in detail in relation to *Punky Girls* in Chapter Two. It is important to point out that in many videos all these acts are bracketed by heterosexual coitus and these acts are retrospectively rendered (and given their differential meaning) through the heterosexual matrix. In *Kinorama 14*, for example, there are several scenes which depict sex between two women. However, these scenes are always preceded and followed by a scene which involves heterosexual penetrative sex. It can then be argued, that these 'othered' acts support the heterosexual hegemony through a 'negative' and therefore relational difference.

To exemplify this model of sexual transgression in Explicit Sex films it is important to show how these films derive their transgressive status through the apparent non-conformity to the heterosexual hegemony. This may then help to show upon what grounds the heterosexual hegemony is tacitly supported.

The sex performed in Explicit Sex films is couched as a performance for public usage. The contemporary hegemonic ideal of heterosexual coitus is legitimated as a private domestic exchange between a couple. Scopophilia, Freud's term for the pleasure of looking in a general sense, which he argues plays a key role in adult sexuality, is sanctioned within this private space. This gains currency because it is set against the illegitimate public voyeuristic or masochistic economies of pleasure and desire. It is this illegitimate form of sexuality that is mobilised by Explicit Sex films. In the contemporary discursive hierarchy of sex, the heterosexual committed partnership of a man and a woman, who orgasm neatly together through gentle and passionate sex, is

the ideal. This is the model of sex used in the legal, and therefore legitimated, multi-media '*Lover's Guide*' style books, CD-ROMs and videos. This model is also the criterion for the 'normalisation' of lesbian and gay people - private sex, sustained loving relationships and marriage. The transgression of Explicit Sex films operates to un-cannify this model of sanctioned private sex by making explicit sexual acts open to a public gaze. One of the effects of this centralisation of the heterosexual, private ideal is to render the user of Explicit Sex films as transgressively 'abject' (which in turn works as a form of regulation). Users may, for example, be treated in public/social space with contemptuous laughter or considered 'sad', as users of these films are often designated as being unable to achieve a 'real' sexual relationship (the pejorative term 'wanker' works on the same principle). The use of these films is often popularly considered to be a weak substitute for so-called genuine sex, the criteria for which are outlined above. For fear of exclusionary treatment, many clandestine users may not admit to their pleasure in watching these videos, whereas other users may instead see it as an act of bravado, cocking a snook at establishment values - as is often evident in internet/world-wide web discussion groups on sex films (the newsgroup 'alt.sex.films' is a key site for the recommendation and discussion of films). For some users it may be the very secrecy of clandestine use that adds to a sense of transgressive pleasure. I will take up the notion of the abjection of the users of these films, in relation to a masochistic economy of visual and auditory pleasure, below.

Heterosexual coitus is often legitimated and reified through reference to the discourse of the biological imperative: reproduction. Explicit Sex films can be considered to be transgressive of the sex-for-reproduction myth, as the legitimating origin of sexual desire. Sex for reproductory purposes is completely absent in these films which favour sex for pleasure. Some recently-made videos feature condoms (for example *Kinkorama 14*), but this is as a result of the increased awareness (and fear) of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, rather than the prevention of pregnancy. Because of the absence of sex as reproduction, Explicit Sex films correspond to Bataille's reading of eroticism as transgressive because the sex depicted in these films exceeds production/work. However, as sex in Explicit Sex films is

commodified (and is therefore a form of exchange), this might present a slight problem to the application of Bataille's reading of eroticism as a form of tactile interchange which exceeds production/work. In *Explicit Sex* films, sex becomes entangled with the processes of work (the exchange of sexual labour within the capitalist system), and it may then lose its potential for exceeding the system of production. Nevertheless, it is problematic to conceive of any form of sexual exchange as outside of the system as, in a Lacanian reading of the sexual un-relation, sex is always a form of impossible demand on the other. The un-relation is thus subject to the dynamics of exchange in what Hegel called the master-slave relationship, and is therefore always bound into power.

To address the status of transgression to the taboos and prohibitions that structure the heterosexual economy I will focus on three films: *Kinkorama 14*, *Rambone the Destroyer* and *Cicciolina in Italy*. I will argue here that there is a complex interaction between the signifiers of transgression in these films, and that there are traces of sublated sexual economies which may be read as disrupting the heterosexual coital economy (even though, as I have shown above, these are the direct product of the heterosexual apparatus).

Anal sex is a staple component of many *Explicit Sex* films including those that are not termed 'kinky', 'bizarre', 'gay' or 'specialist'. In the main it is women who are anally penetrated. Some films specialise in anal sex - such as the appropriately named *Anal Antics*. Anal sex appears in some form or other in most *Explicit Sex* films. In what ways is anal sex positioned as transgressive and why is it mostly women who are anally penetrated?

As Pat Califia counsels, anal sex does not have to involve penetration by a penis, but may include a range of activities '...rimming, having a finger up your butt while you're getting a blow job, dick-fucking, sitting on dildos, holding a vibrator against the opening' (Califia, 1993: 111). Califia writes that the pleasures of anal sex are due to the mass of nerve endings in the anus. She further suggests that the stimulation of the

prostate gland in men during anal sex increases the possible pleasure of the act. Califia views anal sex as a pleasure that has been covered over by unnecessary repression, and ties the 'problem' of anal sex to what she calls 'shit-phobia'. Although Califia's aim to (re)write sex education is laudable, I would argue that her reading of anal sex skirts some crucial points. Her educative purpose is to normalise anal sex as an acceptable form of sexual play, but through this approach to it Califia rather disregards the reasons for the positioning of anal sex as transgressive. By moving to 'normalise' this act she precludes the interesting question: what makes anal sex transgressive? There are two things to consider in the address of this question: the first is the repression of an anal sex economy, and the second is the encoding of power through gendered behaviours.

The repression of an anal sexual economy is best supported by citing Freud's two papers *Character and Anal Erotism* written in 1908 (Freud: 1977) and *On Transformation of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism* first published in 1917 (Freud: 1977). Freud argues '...anal erotism is one of the components of the sexual instinct which, in the course of development and in accordance with the education demanded by our present civilisation, have become unserviceable for sexual aims' (Freud, 1977: 211). In the anal-phase of psycho-sexual development Freud argues that the child experiences pleasure around the process of defecation, and a series of meanings become attached to this pleasure. The experience of rectal 'fullness' becomes the locus of fantasy and the presence of faeces in the rectum may in the child's mind become an analogue of the penis and the vagina, or by extension may be configured as a gift or a baby. These pleasures are repressed through the processes of socialisation, and the decentering of the anus as a site of sexual sensation is sublated in favour of phallic²⁴ masturbatory activity. Within psychoanalytic logic, pleasure and fantasies that are part of the anal sexual economy may be repressed, but they nevertheless still play an unconscious part in the subject's psycho-sexual profile.

²⁴ Here 'phallic' masturbatory activity refers to both girls' and boys' activities as these activities precede the castration complex which interpellates the child as a designated gender.

This is made clear in Freud's summary of Lou-Andreas Salome's paper on anal erotism, where she usefully posits the notion that once the anal sexual economy becomes repressed, the anus becomes 'the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated or excluded from life' (Freud, 1977:104, footnote 1 added in 1920 'Three Essays on Sexuality'). In this sense anal erotism is abjected through its socially conditioned connection with 'dirt' and 'impurity'. The anal erotic economy is however only given up when it is replaced by another sexual economy (the phallic sexual economy), but as Salome says, the anal economy is also the blueprint of a genital sexual economy. The genital sexual economy is, she says, taken on lease from the rectum (ibid.: 302 'On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism' & footnote 1 on page 104 'Three Essays on Sexuality'). Freud recommends that in adult sexuality the pleasure of anal sex is read through the genital sexual economy and the abjection of anus:

We can observe the result of a regressive debasement of the genital organisation. This is expressed in the fact that every phantasy originally conceived on the genital level is transposed to the anal level - the penis being replaced by the faecal mass and the vagina by the rectum. (ibid.: 300)

Freud implies here that this is why any genital sexual activity is culturally conceived of as somehow 'dirty' and therefore transgressive, because of the close proximity of genital sex to the anus. As anal sex is always retrospectively read through the genital organisation of sexuality, its status is then related to the construction of gender difference. This brings in a further form of transgression in relation to gender difference. The meanings attached to anal penetration are configured through the gendered alignment of passivity and activity. As Califia asserts, beyond the abjection of the anus as 'dirty', anal sex becomes problematic specifically for heterosexual men because fears about appearing to be homosexual: '...concerns about sexual orientation often prevent straight men from enjoying penetration' (Califia, 1993: 113). I would argue that there is more to this than Califia suggests. It is also an issue about gender

and power; for the integrity of hegemonic masculinity to be kept intact, men must align themselves with an active role in sexual acts. This then means that to be anally penetrated encodes the penetratee as feminine.

In *Making Sex* (1990), Thomas Lacqueur examines theories of sexuality since Classical Greece, and what he says about anal sex in ancient Greek culture is relevant to contemporary gendered meanings of penetrative anal sex. He says: 'The actions of the *mollis* ("homosexual buggery") and the *tribade* were thus unnatural not because they violated natural heterosexuality but because they played out - literally embodied - radical, culturally unacceptable reversals of power and prestige' (Lacqueur, 1990: 53). Although he is referring to 'ancient' texts, this nevertheless seems valid when thinking about the contemporary status and meanings of anal sex.²⁵ Within the terms of conventionally encoded masculinity, to be anally penetrated is to take on the status of passivity which is, in contemporary Western culture, gendered female/feminine. So not only are there taboos about 'dirt' to be contended with, but also anal sex disrupts the conventional notions of gender and potentially disrupts heterosexual identity for men who identify with this position in rigid terms. The act seems less problematic for women, because when women are anally penetrated the gender order is not disrupted, as to be 'passively' anally penetrated is coded as feminine. The transgression of the gendered order is very rare in *Explicit Sex* films that are not marketed as 'gay' which explains why it is mostly women in these films who are anally penetrated (this does not mean though that the penetrator is necessarily a man). The anxieties produced by the gender order around anal sex for men,²⁶ and the reiteration of hegemonically coded gendered behaviours, are made clear in a scene from the film *Kinkorama 14*.

²⁵ I would however raise the point here that Lacqueur is providing a retrospective reading of these ancient texts and there are no guarantees that the meanings he reads into them bear any resemblance to their original meanings. This problem often seems glossed over in historical analyses, and there does seem to be a tendency to deny the possibly radical differences of ancient epistemologies.

²⁶ Within gay S/M culture the mystique and frisson surrounding anal 'fist-fucking' could perhaps be read as a means of countering the passive status of penile anal penetration by coding it as a ritualistic ordeal, a rite of passage.

This film is a series of scenes that are coded and marketed as 'kinky'²⁷ (hence the title). One scene, which occurs towards the end of the film, opens with a head and torso shot of a woman. She is lying on top of a piano and the camera slowly pulls back to reveal what is coded as an authentic erect penis between her legs. The user then has to reassess the body and face of the woman in the light of the conventional non-logic of the co-presence of breasts and penis. It may be concluded that she is a transsexual. The enigma of her sex/gender identity is posed to the user, but the shot of this fascinating (for me, at least) non-logical body is interrupted by a long-haired man and woman who enter the frame. The woman with the penis is introduced by the other woman to the man - her name is Angela. He says 'oh, I see you have a penis' and giggles a little. Angela moves seductively around him - he watches and then after a while he says that he 'can't get it on with a woman with a penis'. Angela politely says good-bye and leaves the straight couple alone to fellate and fuck each other. During this latter part of the scene the woman suggests that the man crouch on all fours on the floor, she lubricates and pushes a dildo into his anus. This goes on for some minutes and is then replaced with conventional, although brief, coitus. What is the status of the anal penetration here? It is important to look at the relation of sex and gender alignments in the film as a whole to address this question.

Kinkorama 14 is composed of a series of fourteen discrete scenes, each involving a different group of participants and, broadly, different types of sexual activity. Despite the 'kinky' categorisation of the film, it merely flirts²⁸ with the disruption of hegemonic sex/gender alignments. For instance, in the opening scene a woman masturbates her stick-on penis whilst her open vagina is clearly in view. In spite of the presence of the penis-like dildo the woman's body is coded, through her large breasts and visible vaginal opening, as female. Hence the film makes use of the iconography of 'gender-fuck' but draws the line at true gender ambiguity. This is apparent in the treatment of

²⁷ This title is justified through the brief presence of a transsexual and the use of fetishistic clothing (such as masks and leather harnesses), however, the sexual acts are very much the same as in films which are not marketed as 'kinky', such as *French Finishing School* and *Force d'plaisirs*.

²⁸ This 'flirtation' may however be enough to engender an erotic transgression for some users.

Angela. As a transsexual, with breasts, a penis and testicles, Angela presents the user (and the man in the scene) with a sex/gender problem beyond that provided by the woman in the first scene, whose stick-on penis enables her to fuck another woman. Angela is rejected by the man in the scene because this is a true violation of the hegemonic gender logic. Unlike the woman in the opening scene, Angela cannot demonstrate her penis as an obvious simulation. Her presence then works to demonstrate by juxtaposition that the other women with stick-on penises are in fact 'real' women. For the queer identified user, this moment acts as a lost opportunity for the disruption of hegemonic gender alignments. For other more rigidly sex identified users, it may offer an exciting spectacle which may mobilise desire. The potential further transgression of the homosocial bond, which operates to regulate the hegemonic gender codes, is circumvented before it all gets too confusing and anxiety-inducing. This is why after the departure of Angela the scene culminates in heterosexual coitus. The anal penetration perpetrated by the woman on the man in the gap between Angela's departure and the heterosexual coitus, allows the circuit of desire to be safely conducted within a heterosexual context and therefore helps to dissolve the potential anxiety around the anal penetration of men for hegemonic masculinity. The man regains his masculine/active status by fucking the woman from behind.

This scene can also be used to demonstrate the problem with viewing Explicit Sex films as a form of 'polymorphic plenitude'. The polymorphic plenitude argument supposes that these films work to disavow gender and sexual differences. By contrast this indicative scene shows that Explicit Sex films do have their own set of taboos and transgressions which are related to the target audience of a film, and are not simply a transgressive denial of all sex and gender differences. In order to explore this in a little more detail, it is important to assess the currency of the homosocial bond in Explicit Sex films that are not marketed as 'gay'. This will be done through a discussion of the blurring of the boundaries between the homosocial and the homoerotic, as is suggested by a Freudian reading of sexuality. To illustrate these points the films *New Wave*

Hookers, *Gang Bang* and *Cicciolina in Italy*²⁹ will be focused on. All of these films, in the main, keep the homosocial bond intact, but there are moments where its transgression can be experienced for many users, in Bataille language, as both liberation and anguish, as the homosocial tips over into the homoerotic.

New Wave Hookers and *Gang Bang* are films that centralise a male adolescent sexual-prowess fantasy. In both these films the acting is exaggerated and the amateurish delivery of the dialogue appears to be scripted. These films are produced on a shoe-string budget, which contrasts with the more sophisticated 'adult' rendering of the sexual acts in *Cicciolina in Italy*. *New Wave Hookers* and *Gang Bang* use humour, rock music sound-tracks, and centralise sexually frustrated young male protagonists. Both these films are couched as the fantasy of sexual fulfilment on the part of the young male protagonists. The women in *New Wave Hookers* and *Gang Bang* speak very little, other than to ask for sex, and the banter is the domain of the male protagonists. For example in *Gang Bang*,³⁰ the narrative centres on a single young sexually-frustrated male who frequents a go-go bar and discusses his frustration with the sympathetic older male bartender. The bartender narrates two of his own experiences in a biker-bar which involve a woman coming into the bar and asking the five bikers in the bar to fuck her because she is 'so hot'. After a third scene in which five men in an office give the 'boss' a birthday present by bringing in a woman into the office for them to share sex with, the frustrated boy gets his dream woman by showing his sexual prowess on stage with a further woman. This suggests that this film, like the other two, are primarily targeted at young men. Although not all users of these films may be in the targeted category, the film raises questions as to the homosocial bond (Eve Sedgwick, 1985), due to the close bodily proximity of the participating men during the sexual acts. This is particularly marked in *Gang Bang* where in each of the

²⁹ *Cicciolina in Italy* will be taken up in more detail below. For now, the purpose of its inclusion here is as an example of the operation of 'homosociality' in Explicit Sex films.

³⁰ Like *New Wave Hookers* and *Rambone the Destroyer*, *Gang Bang* is an American production with Dutch subtitles. All of these films look to have been made in the mid 1980s. Like most films in the genre, these films conform to the generic formula, and are composed of a series of sexual scenes punctuated with some form of conversation between scenes.

three scenes mentioned above it is a group of five men who engage in sexual acts with a single woman. In the other films there is usually a 1:2 ratio of women to men.

New Wave Hookers uses a fairly large group of protagonists who appear in different episodes. The film opens with a scene between three men and one woman, followed by a scene with two women and one man. This process of sexual exchange, typical of Explicit Sex films, culminates in a typical group orgy scene which contains all the actors who have appeared in the film - four women and five men. The technique of using the same actors in different scenes goes against the ideal of sexual monogamy which underpins heterosexuality as the legitimate sexuality. Both men and women in the films will inevitably have sex with more than one partner - usually three or four. Women will often have sex with other women but there are no scenes in which men have sex with the other men. More than one man may have sex with one woman - but in the main, men's bodily contact with the other men is kept to a minimum (there are some exceptions to this which I will discuss below). On what grounds is this gender pronounced difference based? In a footnote added in 1915 in *On Sexuality* (1977) Freud makes the point that:

All human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious. Indeed, libidinal attachments to persons of the same sex play no less a part as factors in normal mental life, and a greater part as a motive force for illness, than do similar attachments to the opposite sex. On the contrary, psychoanalysis considers that a choice of an object independently of its sex - freedom to range equally over male and female objects - as it is found in childhood, primitive states of society and early periods of history, is the original basis from which, as a result of restriction in one direction or the other, both the normal and inverted types develop...The differences in the end products may be of a qualitative nature, but analysis shows that the differences between their determinants are only quantitative. (Freud, 1977: footnote added in 1915: 56/7)

Masculinity, which defines itself as active through its binary difference to femininity which is coded as passive, requires an agreement between men who identify themselves as straight (heterosexual) about their behaviour with one another.

Sedgwick calls this the homosocial bond, whereby men must conform to the heterosexual rules of group friendship and bonding. This requires that there is a clear distinction drawn between the homosocial and the homoerotic. In a Freudian reading, this social contract requires the sublimation of the early homosexual object choice, which is then re-routed within the terms of homosociality. The sublimation of the early homosexual object choice is routed, via the primary process, through the jokey bantering speech between the men. There are however moments in all these films where the sublimation of homoeroticism is transgressed; although this is often off-set by various means, with the aim of containing any possible homosexual anxiety for straight-identified, male users. This is particularly marked in a scene in *New Wave Hookers*. In this scene two men simultaneously fuck one woman in the anus and the vagina; here only a very thin membrane keeps the two penises apart. This scene is carefully (if unconsciously) set up in order to conserve the sublimation by highlighting the locus of desire as their shared desire for the woman. This is apparent through the proxemics of the scene. The woman is sandwiched between the two men, who are set up as virgin 'nerds', and the shot is composed so that the woman occupies the centre of the frame and the two men flanking her. The jokes between the two men are not centred on the woman but on each other, for example, at one point one says to the other 'I have never fucked a woman in the arse' and the other replies 'you've never fucked a woman anywhere'. The jokes between the two men may be a means, as Freud notes on the function of 'smutty' jokes, of circumventing jealousy and rivalry between the two men, and further makes it clear that their desire is not for each other but for the woman. The adolescent bonhomie, which is communicated through the dialogue between the two men, locates their desire for the woman as a shared pleasure; their dialogue continues throughout the scene rather than being silenced by sexual action as often occurs in Explicit Sex Films. This suggests, however, far closer ties between the two men than between either one with the woman. In this sense, we can see a tension between the need to conserve heterosexuality and the threat to the heterosexual order implied when two men are overtly complicit in sexual activity.

The scenes in *Gang Bang* that use five men and one woman often rather oddly obscure the woman's body because of the number of men in the frame at one time. In the first and second scene, which take place in the biker-bar, the banter between the men is more aggressive than in the later scene in the office and in *New Wave Hookers*. The small scuffles that break out between the men over who will penetrate the woman work, along with their biker dress,³¹ to confirm their 'macho' heterosexual status. The transgression of the scene is around the breaking of pre-sexual polite ritual and monogamous sex. The woman asks for rough sex. At one point she masturbates two of the men with her hands, fellates a further man and is fucked by another, whilst being watched by the fifth man. The scene ends with them all laughing, including the woman. The scene *may* transgress the romantic monogamous ideal and the social taboos against group sex, it *may* also transgress ideals of hegemonic femininity as the woman actively seeks sexual engagement with the men. Nevertheless the scene also overtly works to conserve the homosocial bond. The men rarely touch one another, but they do watch one another's sexual performances and lay bets on who will come first. The scenes of five men to one woman also raise questions about the viewer's pleasure, given that the films are targeted at young male viewers. With so many naked men in the frame it is often difficult to see the woman. The five muscled torsos and five erect penises are foregrounded over the woman's genitals, which are rarely seen. If, as Williams (1990) argues, these films are predicated on the search for the invisible female orgasm, then why are there so many men used in these scenes? The logic of her argument would mean that it would rather be five women on screen and one man. What these scenes raise is the possibility of an implicit homoerotic gaze and pleasure that is masked by the conservation of an overt homosocial bond.

Cicciolina in Italy more directly transgresses the physical separation of men from men, but once again this is framed in such a way that it can be disavowed if it is seen as too threatening by male users. This is achieved by locating the men's bodily contact

³¹ The biker dress, with studs, leathers, moustaches, tattoos and the male 'gang' hierarchy is open to a queered reading. Also this iconography has become staple dress for many gay 'macho' men (leather-men) which can be read as de-feminising male homosexuality.

through the mediating presence of the female Italian porn-star, Cicciolina. In one scene is she 'worshipped' by three swarthy muscular men. In the opening sequence of the scene the three men surround Cicciolina who is enthroned in a chair. The men are positioned around her chair, one kneels at her feet and kisses her ankles, another concentrates his attentions on her breasts, and the third stands behind the chair and kisses her face. The men are arranged around her so that the viewer has full visual access to her body. This is intercut with shots of another woman who watches from a chair in the corner of the room. She functions as a diegetic spectator, and as the action proceeds she begins to masturbate. After a period of kissing Cicciolina's clothed body, the action is progressed by Cicciolina getting up from her chair and kneeling down between two of the men to fellate them. This is shot in close-up and positions Cicciolina's face in the centre of the frame facing the camera. Her face is flanked either side by two men's torsos. As these men are positioned as side-on to the camera their penises meet in front of Cicciolina's face. She gently rubs their penises together and sucks and licks the ends of the penises. At times both the tips of their penises are in her mouth at one time. The touching of two penises is a fairly rare moment in non-gay Explicit Sex films, although it also occurs in a very similarly shot manner in *L'Education d'Anna*. It can certainly be read as a 'queer' moment; but the presence of Cicciolina's smiling face between the two penises offers the heterosexual male user a means of disavowing the 'queer' moment. I would link this to what Danae Clark (eds. Ablove et al., 1993) has called the 'dual marketing approach of gay window advertising' (ibid.: 192). This term describes the fairly recent phenomenon in contemporary fashion advertising of targeting both a gay and straight audience with the same image. It is assumed that 'straight' readers will not recognise the lesbian or gay coding of the image, but allows for multiple or a queered interpretation of the image. When this concept is applied to the scene from *Cicciolina in Italy*, it shows that the presence of Cicciolina as the central (and named) figure in the scene works to disavow the potential homoeroticism of the image by rendering it with the terms of homosociality (a shared pleasure in Cicciolina's body). Nevertheless her presence may also allow the homoerotic image (conscious or perhaps unconsciously) to be secretly

enjoyed by the heterosexual male user. *Cicciolina* both permits, frames and accomplishes the homoerotic touching.

Gang Bang, New Wave Hookers and *Cicciolina in Italy*, like numerous other films in the genre, include 'lesbian sex' which presumably, within the logic outlined above, can be construed as circumventing homosexual anxiety for straight-identified, male users. This of course raises questions about the assumption that users are inevitably straight men and not women, bi-sexual men, homosexual men or any other category and that there is no secret pleasure derived in the viewing of 'queer' moments which taps into repressed homosexuality. The transgression of non-gay Explicit Sex films is then to do with the decentring of the reproductive, monogamous heterosexuality. In Bataille terms, the pleasure here is based on the circulation of sex beyond the two-person relationship and reproduction which is in excess of 'value' and return. However the return of polymorphic sexuality is not absolute: male homosexuality is still repressed but it leaks out, through the primary process, within the homosocial field of the videos. In Bataille terms, the experience produced by the transgression of the homosocial/homoerotic boundary may work to reinforce and perpetuate the rules of homosociality by creating for straight-identified male users a border anxiety which bolsters the need for self-regulation. Offering a fantasy scenario, whereby a group of men can share sex with a woman, may then be transgressive in several ways; the transgression of the homosocial bond may be regulated but nevertheless remains an excess which offers a space for a (consciously or unconsciously) queered gaze.

Aesthetics, Abjection and the Dynamic Function of Transgression

I want now to examine in more detail the relation between transgression and aesthetics in Explicit Sex films. The field of aesthetics has traditionally been defined as the study of beauty and taste. Although Greek and Roman philosophers engaged with poetics and beauty, the study of aesthetics seems to have been first addressed in a systematic way in the 18th century by Baumgarten, and more famously in Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* (1790). In this work Kant explores aesthetics through the analysis of beauty and ethical questions about the function of 'art'. He also sets out criteria by

which to categorise and judge aesthetic experiences and addresses the concept of aesthetic freedom and artistic 'genius'. Kant argues that aesthetic appreciation is a subjective experience which is not necessarily dependent on the inherent qualities of a work. Although he argues that the aesthetic experience is subjective, he nevertheless posits that the aesthetic field is hierarchically organised. This hierarchical system is based on the idea that 'art', as a discrete category, is defined by the engagement of a viewer at a distanced, contemplative level. According to this criteria, high art is that which produces a profound contemplation in the viewer or reader. Any cultural artefact that intentionally aims at engaging the body of the viewer or reader, however, is considered 'vulgar' or even 'obscene'. Pasi Falk's essay outlining the 'anti-aesthetics' of pornography (1993), takes up Kant's aesthetic legacy and explores the impact of this on Western aesthetics. He argues that Kant was instrumental in the exclusion of bodily engagement from the 'truly' aesthetic experience: '...if there is a desire for the object, a desire of realisation - be it eating or sexual contact - then there is no aesthetic experience' (Falk, 1993: 6/7). Kant's legacy is to render Explicit Sex films as a form of 'anti-aesthetics' because they seek to promote bodily desire for the users. These films also disobey the traditional rules of beauty and sublimity. I point out here that Falk's address of traditional aesthetics conveniently avoids any discussion of modernism or post-modern aesthetics. As Susan Sontag (1967/1983) suggests, there are clear links between the aesthetics of pornography and modernist/post-modernist work. To add to and illustrate her point, the images produced by, for example, Egon Schiele, Robert Mapplethorpe and Jeff Coons, each in different ways, obscure the traditional boundaries between the obscene and 'art'.

Falk argues that the marginalisation of pornography is based upon the discursive aesthetic system typified and reinforced by Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Falk's argument has its merits, but the problem here seems to be that he does not address the root cause of the marginalisation of bodily excess. Instead he trawls through a series of medieval and Renaissance texts which he offers as a 'genealogy of pornography'. Whilst this is interesting, it is nevertheless the case that he cannot account for why bodily excess might itself be the source of a form of repression. As argued in Chapter

Three, the absence of psychoanalytic ideas in Falk's work, particularly the relation of discourses of abjection to aesthetic discourse, means that he disregards the way sex and desire, read through transgression, can work to destabilise the coherency of the subject.

I would also level a further criticism at Falk's centralisation of Kantian aesthetics in his understanding of contemporary pornography. The legacy of the Kantian aesthetics seems problematic given the use of anti-aesthetics within modernism. Even before this, many art and cultural forms sought engagement with the grotesque and the visceral; for instance, carnival, Grand Guignol theatre, the Gothic novel and Melodrama. These forms aimed at promoting the circulation of desire through the invocation of bodily boundaries. By addressing the film *Beyond the Green Door* (1975)³² through the trajectory of medieval and Enlightenment discourses of aesthetics, Falk cannot adequately demonstrate the contemporary economy of transgression that is operative in this film. Further he does not address the variety of uses of transgression in the Explicit Sex film genre. *New Wave Hookers*, *Gang Bang* and *Dr. Butts II*, for instance, approach sex through a 'teenage boy' framework in which all sex is coded as transgressive, whereas *Cicciolina in Italy* normalises group sex by framing through tender relationships and 'adult' activities such as the dinner party. The orgy scene which closes the film is set in the context of a dinner party: couples arrive and leave the party in their respective pairings, which brackets the group sex within the terms of stable heterosexual coupledness. *French Finishing School* and *Behind the Walls of Lust*, are different again. In both these films the encoding of transgression hinges on the film noir style of the films; here transgression is bound up with the alignment of sex with crime. These films intertextually reference classic Hollywood genres, which frames the films, and the sexual scenarios within them, as 'fictional'. Different again is *Kinkorama 14* which derives its transgressive encoding

³² This film is a softcore celluloid film and was available on video in the UK before the introduction of the Video Standards Council certification process. I am not clear whether this film was rejected by the VSC or if it simply was not submitted for VSC assessment. It does not have the generic features of contemporary Explicit Sex films, even though it features nudity and the suggestion of penetrative sex. As a result, it is best categorised along the lines I have suggested in *Appendix A*, as a softcore film.

through the use of mild S-M, lesbian scenes, and some gender transgression, for example the woman with a 'stick-on' penis, and a transsexual.

To understand the relation of transgression to aesthetics and the obscene I would argue that it is necessary to examine how transgression is inter-bound with excess, abjection, sublated and repressed sexual economies. These films are not simply a transgression of aesthetic laws but also perform transgressions of psychic and social laws - to which the process of abjection is key. I will now outline, with reference to the films mentioned above, the links between Bataillean transgression and the mechanism of abjection through the specific analysis of the role of bodily fluids in these films.

As Lacan and Kristeva recommend, the challenge to the aesthetic order of a given time leans upon deep-rooted psychological structures that engender subject formation. The acquisition of the status of subject-hood depends upon the progressive disavowal of some aspects of corporeality. This occurs through the process of language acquisition and the concomitant inculcation of the subject into the symbolic order (in Lacanian terms this is the site for conformity to demands of the law³³). These processes work to bolster the narcissistic illusion of the coherent, unified subject, which solidifies under the grammatical usage of the 'I'. This demands that the polymorphic sexual body and desire is repressed, and that identity is rendered through gender and sex-type symbolic matrices. The acquisition of sexual, gender and cultural identity gives the subject a framework, an internalised map, through which to unify the divergent experiences of the 'body in bits and pieces'. Lacan's mirror phase demonstrates that it is the image in the mirror that offers a means by which these divergent, dissembled experiences are stitched together. It is by reference to this representation (or more precisely, a fore-presentation), that identity and the unification of the mind/body is formed. Lacan's use of the mirror phase, as central to the acquisition of subject-hood, implies the dissembled body. The concept does not, however, sufficiently explore the processes of

³³ I will also discuss an alternative model which de-centralises the symbolic 'law-of-the-father' later when I discuss the implications of a masochistic economy of spectatorship.

abjection in subject formation, which, I contend, are crucial to the economy of desire in Explicit Sex films.

Kristeva's use of the term 'abjection' draws on the work of Mary Douglas and frames it through psychoanalysis. In *Purity and Danger* (1964), Douglas examines a range of what she calls 'primitive cultures' and looks at the diverse range of taboos around 'dirt' and sex (most usually incest taboos) as a means of understanding the role of taboo in contemporary culture. Kristeva takes Douglas's term and translates it within the frame of subject formation. Kristeva uses the term 'abjection' to describe the process by which the subject is interpellated into culture. In order to become 'a clean and proper' subject, the subject must internalise the taboos of the culture and in so doing must learn a dislike or disgust for certain bodily processes which may then lead to a repression of the pleasures previously attached to these objects.³⁴ Kristeva maintains that the mechanism of abjection centres around (non)objects that disrupt bodily continuity. These (non)objects include bodily fluids, such as excrement, sexual fluids, scabs, dead skin cells, menstrual blood, mucus, pus. The corpse, the skin of the milk, 'slimy' non-vertebrates are also regarded as abjected. Through these abject objects the subject as a coherent entity is faced with the conditional borders of embodied substance. All these (non)objects call the subject's illusory unity into question. Bodily fluids, for instance, disrupt or violate the boundaries which constitute the illusion of subject-hood. Bodily fluids are 'bits' of the body which have become un-attached from the body.

The ambiguous status of these non-objects (are they me or not me?) threaten the subject's illusion of continuity and narcissistic integrity. The problem is that these (non) things can neither be 'properly' regarded as subject or object as they violate or transgress the differential distinction between the two. The experience of these (non)-objects can however have a two-fold movement; disgust may be violated by (an

³⁴ Prior to repression these can be properly regarded as objects - but post repression they acquire the status of non-objects.

unholy³⁵) fascination which disrupts the separation of the two and transgresses the boundary through ambiguity. Disgust, through abjection, ostensibly operates as a means of defending the coherent subject from becoming dissembled or violated. This policing function may be contaminated by the fascination of the (non)-object. The cry of disgust may then be closely associated with the cry of orgasm, and as such the movement of desire, which the subject seeks to control through abjection, is betrayed. The repressed pleasure of the object emerges within the matrix of the experience of disgust. The repressed desire is then for fusion, fluidity and, in Bataille's words continuity, which threatens the narcissistic coherency of the subject. Kristeva does argue, however, that the 'avant-garde' pre-occupation and fascination with the abject is itself a means of narcissistic mastery of the experience of (non)-objects. The mechanism of abjection then helps the subject to maintain and patrol the boundaries that structure it.

Abjection can then be seen to operate as a defence mechanism as it helps to define what is regarded as the human in a given cultural moment. It does so by facilitating the internalisation of the differential boundaries between inside/outside, Other/I, and operates to keep these differences intact.³⁶ As Kristeva says 'abjection is above all ambiguity' (Kristeva, 1982: 9). Abjection is therefore key to the mapping of the terrain and limits of the 'human' in a given culture and time. Abjected non-objects, however, have the power to contaminate and corrupt the logic of difference that underpins these mappings. Through the institution of taboos and the individual's experience of the taboo as disgust, the taboo operates to keep the integrity of a structure in place, and

³⁵ 'Holiness', 'purity' are meanings that are defined negatively through the process of abjection. 'Purification', for example, is a means of 'decontaminating' the subject from the polluting abjected non-object. The language used here pervades many apparently different discourses - however the shared feature is that the body or an item closely associated with the body is penetrated or contaminated by the non-object (for instance, viruses, radiation as well as the more obvious sexual meanings around virginity and monogamy). All these things relate to the integrity of the boundaries of the body.

³⁶ 'Intact' is also used in relation to virginity. The concept and valorisation of virginity leans upon tropes of contamination and pollution of the sexually 'innocent' body. Traditionally, virginity in Western culture is seen as being related to taboos about paternity and can be regarded as operating to 'police' and regulate female sexuality.

subject-hood and narcissism whole. This then links Bataille's notion of the function of the taboo directly to Kristeva's theorisation of the mechanism of abjection.

Fascination with the abject may then ostensibly work to pervert or contaminate the boundaries of language or the subject; but, argues Kristeva, this also helps to strengthen the ego as a means of controlling the anxiety it engenders. By naming the unnameable, the (non)-object is then conferred with the status of an object and the threat to subject integrity is lessened. (Purification rituals can also be seen as a means of helping to name and thereby control the non-object status of a given experience.) Total control through the naming is not however possible, as transgression of the distinction between object and non-object is vital to the concretisation of the differences upon which the psychic and the cultural are based. (Transgression is not only disruption here, but also acts as a reinforcement of borders. However, ambiguity, engendered through the emergence of repressed desire, can undermine the sets of differences which are the foundations of a given structure.) There is a problem here as it is not clear from Kristeva's deliberately convoluted style of writing (which is designed to show desire at work in language), if ambiguity and transgression are purely systemic or whether they can be construed as in some way undermining the stability of a given system or structure.

For Douglas, like Bataille, transgression holds the taboo in place. For Kristeva however, working with the heterogeneous contradictory complexity of psychic functioning, the status of transgression is far less clear. In my reading of her examination of abjection, I take there to be two kinds of transgression in operation in relation to abjection. First, the transgression which keeps the distinction between the object and the non-object in place (structural). Second, the transgressive function of desire which undermines the operation of difference by contaminating difference (language and identity) with a de-centralising ambiguity (dynamic).

My reading of Kristeva's abjection can then be worked as an elaboration of Bataille's model of transgression as an experience which helps to maintain the structure which

gives coherency to the subject. The subject internalises social mores through the experience elicited from the transgression of a taboo; the experience produced through transgression is crucial for it to retain cultural currency. But, transgression can also carry within it the capacity to disrupt the stability of a given system through the pressure of repressed desire which produces excess. In Bataille's terms, the transgression carried out through eroticism is bound into the dual movement of the subject in relation to nostalgia for, and also a fear of, continuity (death). Sex is predicated on the drive to combat the discontinuous isolation of the subject. But this continuity also holds its own terrors, which are primarily the terror, and counter-wise, the pleasure of the annihilation of the subject's boundaries between itself and the other. Sexuality is then predicated on the oppositional nature of this dual movement. This formulation also maps onto the notion that sexuality and sexual desires can be experienced as 'other' to the subject.

Some feminist analysis of genres such as Horror and Explicit Sex films locate abjection around the female body in the male imaginary; I am here referring to the pro-censorship platform which includes Dworkin and Itzin but also to Barbara Creed's (1993) psychoanalytic reading of the representation of women in the Horror genre. Creed's approach usefully shows how women are constructed as emblematic of abjection in the male imaginary, but this paradigm is problematic in two ways. First, it reduces the abject to 'woman' and fails to address the operation of the mechanism of abjection within both psychic and social fields. Second, within the Bataillean paradigm this is reductive, as it fails to address ways in which the experience of transgression is intrinsic to the maintenance of the structure of the subject. That sexuality and desire will always be other to the subject regardless of gender may, as Creed suggests, be projected onto others. Sexuality is, then, always a violation of subject coherency. It is linked with death and challenges the discontinuity of individual existence. The very violence of sexuality is intrinsic to it and cannot, as the pro-censorship lobby requires, be erased by the imposition of law. Through the same argument, as Bataille says, the libertarian position - which he calls the 'back to nature' argument - is also flawed, as

taboos cannot be removed per se without the structure of the subject (qua subject) being violated.

The excess of sexuality will then always pose a problem for the coherency of the subject and it is this knot of opposing drives that inflects the economy of desire in Explicit Sex films. Desire will always exceed intention in language, gesture and action. This further maps onto the notion that desire will always be 'banal' and relate to sex and aggression; its inherent contradictoriness, its ambiguous play, affronts the 'clean and proper subject' - and as such is disavowed through such mechanisms as abjection and the primary process.

These processes are what underpin the aesthetic, psychic and social transgressions of Explicit Sex films. These films foreground the constitution and channelling of desire, but also demonstrate that this channelling process produces an excess which I have earlier called the uncanny-fic(a)tion of sex. Freud defined the uncanny as the emotional affect of an object which was once 'homely' but has become unhomely through repression ('The Uncanny' in Freud, 1990: 335-376). Freud uses this term to describe the effect of the female genitals for the 'neurotic' male. The female genitals have become uncanny when once they were home : 'This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim (home) of all human beings' (ibid.: 368). My use of the term 'uncanny' in relation to sex, broadens Freud's explanation. I will use it to describe the uneasy feeling (and the frisson) that the sexual body (our own sexual body or others) can produce. It is in this sense that Explicit Sex films can be seen as uncanny (an uncanny fiction). Because the depiction of explicit sex is 'something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression....something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light' (ibid.: 363/4). The role of the uncanny and abjection will now be examined in relation to the diverse transgressive strategies used in Explicit Sex films.

I will begin by looking at *Cicciolina in Italy*. Although not dated, judging by the style of clothing, the video looks to have been made in the mid-1980s. The speech used in the video is Italian and the version I watched has Greek subtitles - so for the non-Greek or Italian speaker the focus is on the 'action' rather than the incidental dialogue. It features Cicciolina, the (in)famous blonde baby-doll porn-star, one-time member of the Italian government and ex-wife to Jeff Coons, and the American porn-star John Holmes who is (in)famous for his very large penis and his prodigious sexual encounters. Holmes and Cicciolina are cast as themselves, or at least, their star personas. The tenor of the video is friendliness and the sex scenes are bracketed by conversations, hugging and kissing between the protagonists. The video differs from the 'teenage' fantasy of videos such as *New Wave Hookers*, *Gang Bang* and *Dr Butts II* in that the sex scenes are, in part, 'normalised' by the absence of parody and contain no elements or iconography of S-M. The sex is diegetically depicted as 'normal' adult behaviour; the orgy scene at the end is bracketed by a dinner party and Holmes and Cicciolina are cast as 'partners', they are often seen hugging and kissing in bed after having sex with other people. The group sex and the 'lesbian' sex scenes are then situated within the frame of heterosexual partnership (albeit non-monogamous). This works to minimise the aesthetic and psychic transgressive dimension of the film.

The music in the film aids the communication of atmosphere and creates a continuity through the various sex scenes, but it also has a diegetic function. In the first scene of the film Cicciolina takes a tape of a song to a record executive. The music used in the film is diegetic and non-diegetic and there are three distinct types of music used. Cicciolina's song is a very sweet pop song; her high-sweet voice is set off against harps and strings and works to communicate her 'essence' to the user of the film. Reggae is used between sex and at the beginning of sex scenes and a fast paced guitar-based music is used when the sex scenes become more intense. The musical director is even given a credit.

Cicciolina and Holmes are both framed as the stars of the film, but it is Cicciolina who is onscreen for most of the film. It is she that the user sees in the very first shots

getting into her open-top sports car and driving through Rome to the house of a record executive. All the sex scenes feature Cicciolina and/or Holmes. I will focus on a key scene that occurs early in the video - Cicciolina's song/sexual performance whilst straddling a chair. This scene is important as it features the one element of the film that overtly relates to abjection, uncanniness and transgression.

The camera is set up directly facing Cicciolina on the chair. She is framed by a point of view shot from the position of the record executive. The initial shot is a slightly canted, medium shot which includes some background. Cicciolina addresses her gaze to the camera, behind her is a large mirror. Cicciolina is dressed in 'fairy-tale princess' clothes - her peroxide white-blonde hair and her tiara which has long strands of silver thread hanging from it, make her resemble Anita Louise's 'Titania' in Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935). In one scene this is underpinned by her juxtaposition with three swarthy, satyric men (which also taps into the 'Beauty and the Beast' fairy-tale, and I wonder if these fairy-tale conventions render the films more acceptable to some women and men users than the *New Wave Hookers* teenage male fantasy type film). Her fairy-tale princess image frames her sexuality as 'innocent' even though users may be aware of her predilection for urinating and defecating in many of her previous videos. The juxtaposition of 'innocent' sexuality and her pleasure in anal sex and excretory functions is the source of Cicciolina's fascination for many 'fans'. The co-presence of these elements function to embody a range of repressed and more legitimate sexual economies in the one character. Cicciolina as 'innocent' is coded through her dress, her hair, face, her high girlish voice and her sweet demeanour to all those she has sex with. Her princess clothes are also set off by the white fluffy teddy-bear she carries with her in the first few moments of the film. She is, however, not innocent of the gaze; instead, her performance is often played directly to the camera as an overt exhibitionist pleasure. The co-presence of 'innocence' and exhibitionist pleasure creates a quite complex relation to the operation of transgression in the video.

In this scene the teddy-bear is replaced by a 'tiny-tears' doll which is near life-size. She sits bestriding the chair, cradling the doll, and the framing of the shot associates this image with the Christian icon of the Virgin Madonna holding the infant Christ. In some Renaissance icons of the Virgin, her breast, usually one, is demurely on display. Whilst this may be symptomatic of a sublimated eroticism, the stainless Virgin of religious icons is wrought to conventionally down-play any overt sexual reading of the image (but is, perhaps, wrought to play-up a sublimated erotic one which may be the source of power of the Marian cult³⁷).

To read this image as sexual is, then, within the logic of Catholic discourse, perverse, even though there is certainly a sublimated sexual economy in the traditional Virgin and Child icon. The icon image is directly related to the repression of sexuality and desire in the mother and I will return to this point later. The image of Cicciolina holding the plastic, mass-manufactured doll which might belong to any small European girl, can be read to subvert the Madonna icon with which it is associated. Further, the full-frontal view of her breasts and open vaginal lips inverts the non-genital purity of the Madonna. The presence of her genitals and her seductive gestures and wide smile inverts the discourse of purity that is traditionally assigned to the Madonna/mother image. As she performs, the camera slowly zooms in until her body fills the frame. As she sings she holds the doll with one hand and masturbates with a crystalline, but plastic, dildo. There are a series of cut-away shots to the record executive biting his hand to signify his model desire. Cicciolina puts the dildo down and gently squeezes the doll which begins to 'wet' itself as the water runs down her torso and between her legs; there is a medium close-up of her lower torso and Cicciolina begins to urinate. The flow from her genital area is very visible to the user. The song with its sweet

³⁷ In *Stabat Mater*, Kristeva examines the Marian cult in relation to male fantasies about, and female experiences, of motherhood. One aspect of the power of the Marian Cult is the sublimation of sexuality within the image of the Virgin Mary. This, she speculates, may be a 'sublimated celebration of incest?' (Kristeva, 1987: 253). The power of the Marian cult then relies on the power of sublimated sexuality and fantasy, and Kristeva says 'Around the time of Blanche Castile (who died in 1252), the Virgin explicitly became the focus of courtly love, thus gathering the attributes of the desired woman and of the holy mother in a totality as accomplished as it was inaccessible. Enough to make any woman suffer, any man dream' (ibid.:245).

'tinkling' tones fetishistically mirrors the sound of her urination and the sparkling clothing and dildo. The scene ends with Cicciolina calling over the watching record executive and she fellates him. He orgasms onto her face rather quickly - her heavily made-up face is then besmirched by his semen which runs down her chin. She then very gently and sweetly admonishes³⁸ him for being a 'speedy gonzalez'.

There are several contradictions in this scene, which are located around the economy of abjection in the nexus of female archetypes, mother, virgin, fairy queen and scarlet woman. The full flood of her urination is bracketed by signifiers of seduction, and can be read as means of buffering the abjection of the scene, by making it 'acceptable' by rendering its excess as fascinating, but also as uncanny. This is made possible through the dual encoding of Cicciolina as both seductive and innocent (princess, fairy queen and Madonna). The fetishistic function of the fairy-tale *mise-en-scene* may also work to disavow the abject, 'dirty' practice of urinating on the carpet. The 'dirty' practice is then rendered as not completely abject but instead as uncanny. Its uncanny status leans on the de-location of urination from the familiar toilet into a sexual space. It underlines the un-homeliness of sex which is usually disavowed through the location of it in a familiar place (such as a bedroom). The dual encoding leads to an ambiguous unsteady space which can be occupied by the user through the economy of the enigmatic signifier which engenders fantasy and desire. The act of urination itself is not rendered obscure but instead is made 'explicit' to the user. The shot is composed so that the viewer can clearly see that the urination is coded as 'authentic'; the viewer is given access to the source of the urination through the medium close-up shot, lighting, and her open legs. Whilst, in itself, this act may be rendered as a truly abject (non)object, it is inflected by the presence of other signifiers that (dis)-effect the full-force of the abject act. Cicciolina's urination is preceded by the dolly's urination which creates an overt association with 'innocent' urination in babies and children - this also, in part, works to render Cicciolina's urination as more 'innocent'. But the sexual framework renders it as uncanny. This could be said to be furthered by the

³⁸ Like the Virgin Mary she has the 'ear of understanding' (Kristeva, 1987: 257).

fetishistic play of the lights on the flow of urine which, when juxtaposed against the sparking sequins and silver strand in her hair, construct her as a perverse, uncanny naiad, water sprite or siren - luring, through her song and body, the unsuspecting record executive to the doom of his premature ejaculation.

The encoding of innocence is also constructed through the 'star persona' of Cicciolina as a 'naughty' and 'cheeky' girl who has not yet learned the prohibitions against women urinating in full public view. Her fairy-tale princess dress and tiara, the coy movements of her head, the presence of the doll, the Madonna-like framing, and the cute song, all work to legitimate the act through the myth of childhood innocence which is untouched by adult taboos. One implication is that this is the act of a naughty, but innocent, child, rather than a woman who fully understands the implications of her act. This then may well look as if it buffers the transgressive act for the user. However, the combination of seduction with innocence which brackets the act of urination can also be read as enhancing the transgressive, uncanny currency of the scene. By aligning her blatant act with the image of the Madonna, the act is made more pleurably perverse by tapping into a pre-oedipal economy of sex and the body of the mother. As the rivulets of urine run down between her legs her conventionally encoded beauty is (s)inverted. This is furthered by the ejaculate that covers her face at the end of the scene. This demonstrates the economy of abjection which underpins the encoding of transgression in the video. The bodily fluids which besmirch her face and body, the urination and the frequency of anal sex within the film as a whole, tap into non-genital, pre-oedipal economies of sex. These constitute the 'other' scene of legitimate coitus, although they are further rendered through the post-genital economy, as these images are bracketed by images of coitus. But I would argue that the heterosexual coitus is rendered uncanny by the presence of these 'other' signifiers. The pleasure here is dependent on the fetishistic disavowal of the abject status of these acts, but some of this is conserved through the translation of it into uncanniness. The abject is made pleasurable because it is buffered. The video creates a blind-spot so the full force of abjection is tempered into uncanniness, but the currency of the abject demonstrates the presence or trace of alternative sexual economies within the text.

Although I have argued that the encoding of Cicciolina as innocent works to temper the transgressive potential of this scene, in a dual movement it can also be read as intensifying its transgression, making it more perversely pleasurable. The dual movement acts to disrupt the analogue of beauty as innocence, and sex as beastly and dirty. Cicciolina is then, uncannily, both beauty and the beast. For a beautiful woman to be pissing under the public gaze transgresses aesthetic and social encodings of the beautiful; her fairy-like persona may render it more palatable, but the primary transgression here occurs because traditional notions of beauty and innocence are 'contaminated' by the abject act and she is rendered uncanny. The uncanniness of the video depends on the currency of an 'othered' sexual economy, through the inversion of motherhood and childhood innocence, and the presentation of an abject bodily fluid.

The user is implicated in the scene through the (potentially) perverse enjoyment of this transgressive act and I would propose that this is not a 'sadistic' gaze, but is rather predicated on a masochistic economy of the gaze. Gaylyn Studlar's insightful article 'Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of Cinema' (in ed. Bill Nicholls: 1985: 602-621) argues against Laura Mulvey's formulation of the cinematic gaze as sadistic voyeurism, by proposing a masochistic economy of the gaze. She uses Freud's concept of masochism and supplements it with Deleuze's re-reading. She argues that rather than signifying castration or lack, women can within the cinematic frame, signify power, because they hold the power to castrate. For instance, Cicciolina's power to magically enslave the record executive and cause his sexually incapacitating premature ejaculation can be read as form of castratory power. Studlar also suggests that Mulvey's notion of the sadistic masculine gaze fails to account for a 'passive element' which is structured into the economy of the gaze. She argues that the male gaze '...can signify submission to rather than possession of the female' (1985: 611). To elaborate on this idea through the concept of abjection, the viewer can be pleurably abjectified by the powerful Medusa-like gaze of the woman. This is apparent in Studlar's following point:

Because pleasure in looking and, especially, looking at the dream screen of cinema and the female body involves pre-genital pleasures and ambivalences, the role and reaction of the sexually differentiated spectator must be approached in a completely different light. The pre-genital pleasures of perversion are not limited to the enjoyment of the male spectator, nor available to the female only if she abandons masochistic identification with the “female object” and then identifies with a male spectatorial position defined only by control. (ibid.: 616)

She further argues that a masochistic economy inflects spectatorship with the pleasures (and torments) of Tantalus. This idea is useful in relation to the analysis of Explicit Sex films, particularly videos that feature dominant women or women-only scenes, as in *Punky Girls* and *Cicciolina in Italy*.

Cicciolina controls the gaze and her kindly attitude towards the men in the video is always framed through her domination of the scene. As I have already said, ‘speedy gonzalez’ is seduced by her song, her gaze and her kindly words. He does not control the scene, but instead is ‘out of control’. This is signified through his biting of his hand as she sits before him, the whimpering produced by his desire and his premature ejaculation. As he watches her masturbate and urinate on the floor, he is very visibly tantalised and seduced by the image, and it is only at her behest that he is sanctioned to approach her. *Punky Girls* also works with this economy, but here there is no diegetic spectator who is brought into the scene, and the spectator is excluded from the scene as a tantalised, teased outsider. There is also another matrix of transgression at work, here, which is the excess of expectation, a seductive tantalisation, rather than sexual ‘possession’ and a transgressive inversion of conventional gendered readings of spectatorship.

The masochistic economy of the gaze can be usefully aligned with the concept of primary fantasy. I am drawing from Laplanche and Pontalis’s article ‘Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality’ (ed. Burgin et al., 1986) which examines Freud’s difficulties with, and resistance to, the insistence of fantasy in the formation of sexuality. Laplanche and

Pontalis suggest that the three primary fantasies are responses to the enigma of sexuality and origins and that these primary fantasies are repressed through, for instance, the Oedipus complex. These fantasies then become manifest through the primary process where they may become 'secondary' fantasy. These unconscious fantasies underlie all our relationships with others. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, the three primary fantasies are: the fantasy of parental coitus, of seduction, and of castration. They maintain that that which resists symbolisation is rendered unconscious, and forms a core or blueprint which patterns a subject's psycho-sexuality. As these primary fantasies are remainders of unconscious sexual messages which come from the (m)other, they contribute to the failure of discourse to symbolise the 'real' of sex. The fantasy of parental coitus produces a secondary fantasy that involves seeing or hearing that which is not meant to be seen or heard. This is clearly a key component in the pleasure of Explicit Sex films. As I have argued in Chapter Three, Explicit Sex films intrigue the user through a question posed about the authenticity of a sex scene. In this sense the films attempt to restage the 'real' of sex, but will always fail to do so because they are, in themselves, representations. I want here to focus on the primary fantasy of seduction as this too seems to produce secondary fantasies which are key to the genre. Laplanche and Pontalis, drawing on Freud and Lacan, suggest that the seduction fantasy is a means by which the child explains the enigma of his/her sexuality. Although a key discovery of psychoanalysis is that young children are sexual, it is nevertheless the case that childhood is discursively construed as a period of sexual 'innocence'.³⁹ Because of this and the repression of sexual feelings for a parent through the castration and Oedipus complex, childhood sexuality, to conserve the sense of childhood sexual innocence, must be retrospectively fantasised as having been introduced by an external seducing agent. The fantasy leans

³⁹ Jacqueline Rose explores the discourse of childhood sexual innocence in *The Case of Peter Pan* (2nd Edition, 1992) and in so doing shows the kernel of disavowal that remains in relation to the idea of children as perversely sexual: 'Freud uncovered in the sexual life of children the same perverse sexuality that analysis revealed in the symptoms of his patients and which was expressed indirectly in their dreams. By stating that this perverse sexuality was in fact quite normal to the extent that it could be located in the sexual life of the child, and by insisting, furthermore, that it was only spoken in the form of the symptom because it was a form of sexuality which was to be totally repressed elsewhere, Freud effected a break in our conception of sexuality and childhood from which we do not seem to have recovered' (Rose, 1992: 14).

on the notion that sexuality is the result of a seduction in which the subject is passive. It produces secondary fantasies around being seduced by another. Seduction is not then a sadistic fantasy (this would relate rather to secondary fantasies that stem from the primary fantasy of castration), but instead is bound into Studlar's notion of a masochistic economy of the gaze.

As the user watches Cicciolina as she masturbates and urinates, her gaze directed into the camera and therefore directly at the user, the scene translates through the fantasy of seduction. The diegetic spectator, the record executive, is seduced by her actions - he is rendered completely passive by the scene and is shown to be so engulfed by this that he loses control of himself and is driven to a swift orgasm. Users can then site themselves either with the subject of her gaze, the man, or with Cicciolina's controlling gaze. This inverse organisation of the gaze allows users to position themselves against their gender encoding.

As Cicciolina is not cast in the role of a conventional dominatrix, but rather as a fairy queen who works the seductive magic of sexuality, she does not incur the expense of castration anxiety. Could it be this that makes her perhaps the most popular contemporary female 'porn-star'? If users position themselves within the male gaze, they become abjected into the masochistic economy. But this is conducted in a rather 'gentle' way; more so than with *Punky Girls* where the alienation and abjection of the user is acute, or in *Rambone the Destroyer* where the dominatrix is cast in the role of wicked, brash, castrating, fairy. And she fucks both men and women with her magic wand - a large strap-on dildo.

Through the seduction fantasy and its masochistic economy, Cicciolina weaves an enveloping spell around the user and many of the male protagonists. She is the benign fairy/mother who holds and enchants the child. In relation to Bataille, her spell conjures up an imagined lost continuity. As Bataille notes, this continuity is also a form of castration; a loss of identity. Cicciolina enslaves and envelopes through her sweet, seductive siren-song. The signifiers of seduction sweeten the pill of identity-

threatening uncanny envelopment and the user is lulled, rather than dragged, into the masochistic position. Her seduction masks, and enables, the sadistic component of her gaze.

Here transgression operates in accordance with the dynamic model. The flows of desire that circulate involve a complex play between competing discourses. The integrity of the discourses is dissolved and gender meanings are thrown awry. The different economies of desire at work show how the organisation of differences can be transformed (or corrupted and contaminated) with ambiguity.

The masochistic economy of the text goes further than this, however. Cicciolina's blue dress, the baby-doll, her face covered with semen as if with tears, resonate within Kristeva's description in *Stabat Mater* of the Madonna as Mater Dolorosa: 'under the full blue dress, the maternal, virginal body allowed only the breast to show, while the face, with the stiffness of Byzantine icons gradually softened, was covered with tears. Milk and tears became the privileged signs of Mater Dolorosa' (Kristeva, 1986:173). The man's ejaculate that covers Cicciolina's face condenses tears and milk; and like the archetypal mothers in De Quincey's essay 'Suspiria de Profundis' (Sighs from the Depths)⁴⁰ she is both Mater Lachrymarum, Our Lady of Tears and Mater Suspiriorum, Our Lady of Sighs. The semen/tears on her face, and her sighs, are the signs of her jouissance; a self-contained jouissance that presents an enigma to the user. Her sexual jouissance is not sublimated as mysticism but is; instead, mysticism sublimated in sex. The same fantasy of the lost territory of the mother's unconscious desire underpins both. The user is left outside wondering what these messages might mean, left to ask the question: what does she want of me? This becomes the site of desire and fantasy.

To explore this further, it is important to expand on the role of the mother's unconscious desire in the formation of the child's psycho-sexuality. This will be prove to be the key to the understanding of some of the meanings of pleasure and

⁴⁰ This essay is cited in Maitland McDonagh's *Broken Mirrors, Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento* (1991).

transgression in Explicit Sex films. Laplanche, following Lacan, argues that the child is aware of the messages addressed to him/her from the mother's unconscious desire in the care of his/her body. These messages, or, to use Laplanche's term, enigmatic signifiers, produce fantasy which are attempts on the part of the child to try to understand them. This tallies with the masochistic economy of the gaze and abjection. The giving/gift of milk which sustains the child's need is not simply read as giving him/her life, but produces a question for the child (what does it mean?) and a concomitant residue of fantasy which is later repressed through the processes of the Oedipus complex. There are three forms of repression here; the repression of residues from un-resolved enigmatic signifiers, the desire for the mother repressed through the Oedipus complex and abjection, and the discursive repression of the unconscious desire of the mother in relation to the child. The former two tie closely into both the dynamic and the structural function of transgression: firstly, prohibitions which 'course' desire and sexuality, and secondly, the dynamic function of transgression in relation to uncoursed (unbound) desire that emerges through the structuring principles of the primary process. Transgression is further aligned with 'afterwardness' or 'Nachträglichkeit'. I will take up these points by citing a story taken from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and used by Laplanche to explain his re-reading of 'afterwardness':

The adult man who sees the child at the wet-nurse's breast retroactively imagines all that he could have drawn erotically from the situation if only he had known. So this is a true example of 'Zurückphantasien' (retrospective fantasy) and of hermeneutics: he reinterprets the function of breast feeding in terms of his present situation...one cannot forget that, according to Freud, oral sexuality is not purely invented by the adult. He thinks that the child at the breast enjoys sucking, which he described moreover in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* as the primary erotic experience. In this context, it is also the oral sexuality of this man which is awakened by this spectacle of the child at the breast ...What Freud scotomizes or does not wish to see in this example is the wet-nurse. He only takes into account the two interlocutors centred in the subject: that is, the man-baby, and the adult man; one sucks the breast and the other experiences erotic pleasure. Freud completely forgets here the wet-nurse and her own sexuality. He has completely

forgotten his seduction theory, and his insight in the Leonardo study into infantile seduction by the mother. He treats the breast as an object for the child, and not as an erotic zone for the nurse. There is a breast here for the subject, that is, that comes from the side of the other, which also brings from its side something erotic along with the milk. (Laplanche in ed. Fletcher & Stanton, 1992: 221)

The meanings that coalesce around Cicciolina lean upon the desire of the mother - she 'cares for the body' of the man who retrospectively inhabits the role of questioning child. However, this is retrospectively rendered through a genital sexual economy which re-reads the mysteries of the mother's unconscious desire and its enigmas and meanings. The pleasures that circulate around Cicciolina have then pre-oedipal and post-oedipal meanings. The unsolved mysteries of the mother's desire are narcissistically and secondarily re-worked so that some of the pressure of repression is lifted and hence can be experienced as both transgressive and pleasurable. No matter where users situate themselves in the scene (as the man or Cicciolina or the dolly or the dildo perhaps) the circulation of desire corresponds to questions about the other's desire and as such a masochistic economy of the gaze is in operation.

The Laplanchean paradigm, and particularly his foregrounding of the desire of the mother, is also useful for the address of a sub-group of Explicit Sex films which I will term 'lactation' films. I will take as an example *Erupting Volcanos* (sic).⁴¹

As Kristeva's analysis of the Marian cult suggests (Kristeva, 1986), the Madonna has given motherhood a certain sanctified status. The image of the breast-feeding mother is rarely presented in cinema or the plastic arts and when it is, the eroticism of the image is usually sublimated. There are however a few allegorical images which depict lactating women. I am here referring specifically to Tintoretto's *The Origin of the Milky Way* which is composed around the central figure of a naked goddess whose breasts spray off the stars of the milky way. Here the fluid is allegorised and idealised

⁴¹ I am unfortunately unable to address these lactation videos in any detail as I have only managed to view one (and only once). I will then confine my analysis to the marketing 'blurb' that is circulated through the mail-order catalogues. I did, however, feel it was vital to include some discussion of them.

(a form of translation guided by the primary process) as golden stars that shoot into the sky. Her pleasure in the act is betrayed by her slightly lascivious smile and her open bodily gestures. This image is remarkable as it is one of the few which recognises the pleasures and desire of lactation. The 'Lactation' film as a sub-genre of Explicit Sex film is not shrouded, as its adjective 'explicit' implies, in allegorical, elevated meaning, but instead imagines an economy of conscious and unconscious desire for lactating women. Even if it does look as if Explicit Sex films are indexical or iconic, they are nevertheless representations and therefore are always subject to sublimation. The *jouissance* of lactation in Western culture is, in the main, invisible and it is only barely hinted at within more mainstream depictions of motherhood. It seems ironic that it is currently left to this small sub-genre to articulate the pleasures and desires located around, and of, lactation. The videos ostensibly do this through the rule of spectacle, but this must, however, lean on another 'scene' for users to experience these images/sounds as pleasurable, fascinating or disgusting. The story cited by Laplanche from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1976) goes some way to explain this other scene through genital re-working of the enigmatic signifiers that derive from the mother's handling and care of the child - though, problematically, this does seem to be solely located with men. As the relation with the mother's desire precedes gender difference, the same economy must be at work for women - it may retrospectively be re-worked in a different way, such as through identification. In *Erupting Volcanos*, babies are completely absent and are replaced by men-babies. Because a fantasy scene has multiple points of entry it is possible for users to locate themselves with the adult-baby, the mother, or as a part-object, for example the breast, the mouth, the penis or the vagina. In the video, the lactating breast is rendered as the source of a great deal of pleasure for the woman and for the men. However, it also becomes the location for puns and double entendres. What does this imply?

The marketing description for *Erupting Volcanos*, for example, describes a bra-salesman coming to the front door of a lactating mother. The excess generated by these puns, as Freud has argued in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1991), indicates a site of repression under siege and demonstrates the valency of the

repressed, remaindered fragment of the mother's unconscious desire. This is part of the nexus of primary fantasy and informs secondary fantasy which in turn stages the primary fantasy within a post-genital/Oedipal situation. The dis-location of the use-value of the breast as providing food for the baby and the 'excess' of desire it elicits, would seem to be a perverse or queer/uncanny strategy for re-articulating both the pre-oedipal love for the mother and the puzzle presented to the child (of either sex) through the mother's unconscious desire. The re-location of the lactating breast as sexual is heralded by a fore-play of jokes which betray that a repressed fantasy is in danger of returning. What uncannily returns here, albeit through a genital framework, is the mother's body and desire, which so fascinates and engages the child, and through the repression of this fascination, provides the blueprint of adult sexual life.

An analysis of the marketing description of *Erupting Volcanos* helps to anchor and exemplify some of these points:

Erupting Volcanos [sic] - Big Top cabaret 2

Starring Nelly Williams, Lana Towers, Miss Twin Volcanoes [sic]....

Directed by Billy Miller

Nursing Bra - A middle aged woman has massive mounds full of milk which she squeezes out of her huge dark nipples. She wishes there was someone to drink it and talks all the time about how turned on she is getting. She strips to her stockings and suspenders and masturbates. She is interrupted by a bra salesman. She puts breast milk in his coffee. They strip and she sucks and tit fucks him. Her milk drops onto his balls. He spunks on her firm boobs. (Extract taken from mail order catalogue c. 1992)

This demonstrates a retrospective imaginary re-working of the mother's desire in relation to lactation through genital sexual economy, but, strange though it might seem, it also highlights the discursive repression of the mother's erotic investment in the lactating breast. As some women testify, breast-feeding can be experienced as pleasurable as it induces contractions of the uterus which are similar to those experienced in orgasm (other women suggest the sensation resembles menstrual cramps). It does seem rather odd that this sub-genre makes imaginary use of what is

usually a sublimated economy. This is perhaps inevitable given that sexuality is, as Laplanche states, a fantasmatic product of the child's reading of the mother's pleasure and desire that lies at the heart of the sexual matrix.

As indicated by the title of the film and the pseudonymous names of the actors (Lana Towers, Miss Twin Volcanoes), the articulation of fascination with the process of lactation is preceded by the puns and the jokes. The jokes bracket off the film as ostensibly non-serious and thus it evades censorship. The jokes work as a kind of fore-play, but are symptomatic of the return of the repressed. The re-working through genital economy demands that the woman is presented as sexual, both through her stockings and suspenders, and her pleasure in 'feeding' the man. In this way the transgression of dominant representations of the mother (as the Holy Mother)⁴² is fetishistically both 'played up' and 'played down'; perhaps this strategy enables both conservation and liberation, and may then be further thought of as conserved. This is, then, a further example of the dynamic function of transgression.

A further component is also at work here which relates to the fantasy of the 'phallic' mother. The presentation of lactation here is a form of ejaculation which is traditionally assigned to men. Ejaculation is framed as an 'active' rather than a 'passive' act and thereby aligned through conventional gender encoding. As the description says 'Her milk drops onto his balls'. This aligns lactation with external male ejaculation. Janine Chassegeut-Smirgel's (1985) reading of perversion would entail that this be read as a fetishistic denial of sexual difference, as the woman is encoded as 'phallic'. She argues that perversion involves a regression to the pre-

⁴² Marina Warner documents, in *Alone of All Her Sex*, Bede's words of worship for the Virgin's breasts: 'Thou whose blessed breasts, filled with a gift from on high, fed for all lands the unique glory of heaven and earth...' (cited in Warner, 2nd edition, 1990: 196). Warner explains the sublimity of the use of the image of milk in medieval writing: 'Thus the highest life was expressed by the milk of the mother—white gleaming, and moist, a pure equivalent of astral light' (ibid.: 196). The sublimated eroticism of the worship of the breast and milk is evident in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Song Of Solomon: 'Thy lips, my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue..' and 'He gives her the kiss she had longed for ... and so great is the power of that kiss that she at once conceives and her bosom swells with milk ... and the milk of sweetness will overflow everywhere in a torrent..' (cited ibid.: 197).

oedipal anal stage which protects the subject from castration anxiety. I would take issue with this reading on several counts. Firstly, the fantasy which is being played out here circulates around the hermeneutic puzzle of the mother's desire - what does she want from me? Secondly, as I have already argued, Explicit Sex films cannot simply be reduced to fantasies of plenitude and the denial of sexual/gender difference. Therefore Chassegeut-Smirgel's reading of perversion as simply a denial of sexual difference cannot hold in relation to these films. Thirdly, and the most convincing argument against Chassegeut-Smirgel's reading, is that the economy at work here is a masochistic sexual economy, wherein the mother/woman is given the position of power: hence she could be described as 'phallic'. This is not purely centred on an anal-sadistic economy, instead it is an oral-masochistic economy, in which the user is teased and tantalised and subjected to the powerful 'phallic' woman. It is this rendering of the mother, as sexual, in the sense of having her own desire, and in a position of power, that makes these scenes uncannily queer. It is here and in the following section that the concept of abjection has become more useful to the analysis of transgression in Explicit Sex films than that formulated by Bataille. Abjection encompasses Bataille's transgression and retains its 'mystical', dynamic and structural functions. Furthermore, abjection enables the examination of transgression as a symptom of an attack on subject integrity produced through the inertia of the body's 'real'.

The Dynamics of 'Squirting': The Function of Female Ejaculation.

Rather than focus on the specularly of the male orgasm as guarantee of pleasure, which is well accounted for in Linda Williams's *Hardcore* (1990: 93-119), I want now to focus on the relation of external ejaculation to abjection and the uncanny. What I would take here from Williams is the notion that the come-shot disrupts a phallic/genital sexual economy, because its aim of union with the other is interrupted by the withdrawal of the penis to (apparently) provide spectacle. As before, what needs to be addressed here is the source of the pleasure of spectacle, and I would argue that the come-shot is experienced as transgressive and pleasurable (to some) because it leans on repressed pre-genital/phallic economies of sex. The come-shot

could be thought of as a retrospective solution, read through a genital/phallic framework, to the rebus and repressed fantasy of parental coitus. The visible pleasure of the come-shot is a means of seeing (and hearing) that which is not meant to be seen (or heard). This is not however, to say that this is simply an anal-sadistic form of voyeuristic pleasure for the user. Instead I would argue that it is bound into a masochistic economy of tantalisation through the hermeneutic question posed by sex. Williams argues that the come-shot has become the central signifier of post-60s films. I have, in Chapter Three and elsewhere, shown that the phallus need not be figured as the penis and that the centralisation of the penis, as the sole analogue of the phallus, is problematic. Williams, like Falk, often refers to the penis and the phallus as if they were always firmly buttoned together. Here I want to address the come-shot in relation to transgression and abjection and also to examine the recent resurrection of 'female ejaculation', the depiction of which has become known as the 'squirting' film, and which I will argue uncannily problematises the penis/Phallus analogue.

As discussed above, Kristeva argues that bodily fluids have an ambiguous status because they transgress the distinction between inside and outside of the body. To summarise, bodily fluids are uncannified as they were once part of the body and 'at home' within it; but when they become detached from the body, through the defence mechanism of abjection, they become experienced as uncanny or disgusting. The success of the defence mechanism will depend on whether the subject experiences the sight and/or sound of bodily fluids as truly abject and disgusting or as uncanny and somehow a source of fascination. It is not only the sight of bodily fluids which are rendered thus but also the sounds they make. The sight and sound of bodily fluids then transgress, in varying degrees, the 'clean and proper' body. Bodily fluids engender anxieties because they intimate the dissembled body (the body in bits and pieces) which underlies the our narcissistic illusion of subject integrity. A further factor here is that the experiences produced by bodily fluids depend on their contextual staging. The mechanism of abjection operates in tandem with taboos around the ways the culturally interpellated subject 'deals' with bodily fluids. Taboos structure the 'proper' place for this and thus help to minimise the anxieties of these ubiquitous (non)substances. The

toilet and handkerchief are, for instance, the 'proper' locations for dealing with many forms of bodily excretia. Taboos around 'dirt' and contamination hold these spaces or stagings for coping/dealing with these things. As this involves forms of repression, it is also the case that these things can be experienced in ambiguous ways. The full force of abjection will produce pure disgust; however, because that which was once homely has become unhomely through the repressive mechanism of abjection, these films can also be experienced as 'secretly' - secret(e)ly - pleasurable. This excess can be demonstrated by bodily fluids as a frequent locus for (dirty) jokes.

The presence of certain staple bodily fluids in Explicit Sex films leans on the partial release of repressed pleasures. In order for these things to be rendered bearable they must either be fetishised or contextualised in such a way that a transgressive ambiguity between pleasure and disgust is mobilised. This is supported by the contemporary Western discursive hierarchical organisation of different types of bodily fluids that underpins their meanings in Explicit Sex films. Milk and sperm are discursively rendered least abject because they are articulated through myths around nurture and reproduction. Vaginal secretions are rendered more abject perhaps because the link to reproduction is (discursively) less obvious. Within current Western contemporary advertising, for instance, women are subject to pressure to control vaginal fluids.⁴³ Product marketing induces women to clean up, mop up these fluids through, for example, pant liners or tampons. The greater range of types of secretion - blood, discharge, lubrication of different consistencies - may also be a factor in the hierarchisation, due to the diverse range of types of vaginal secretions which intensify their indiscrete ambiguous status. Within contemporary Western discourse, women's vaginal secretions may be subject to greater abjection because, unlike semen or milk, they are in constant attendance and are not directly aligned to reproduction. I will return to vaginal secretions in relation to female ejaculation.

⁴³ There are no products, condoms aside, that claim to mop-up penile secretions. I have been told that penile secretions can be a problem for some men.

In Explicit Sex films, milk and sperm are not presented in their nurturing and reproductive narratives; this constitutes a form of transgression of myths that give them a lesser abject status. They nevertheless lean on these narratives for their meanings, which renders the experience of them more tolerable. Sperm is, nevertheless, less uncanny than milk in these films, because of the context in which they are shown. Sperm is directly related to sex, whereas milk is often separated from the sexual because of the disavowal of the unconscious desire of the mother. Another key difference is the way in which milk and sperm are produced as dynamic sprays, unlike the ambiguous flow of vaginal secretions. The fireworks of the come-shot, for instance, is, as Williams notes, rendered as spectacle that further guarantees the authenticity of the male user's pleasure. I would argue that sperm is couched in myth and allegory as an idealised substance subject. Despite this, I am compelled to point out here that for me it is much more difficult to write about the come-shot than any other dimension of the films - it is the thing that I don't quite watch (my gaze attracted by other elements of the screen) as I find this particular gooey substanceretch-inducing. Could this be because as a woman I have not grown up with having to find strategies to deal with it which might then affect its abject status? I have no problem with watching any amount of green or red viscous substances. Because of this I can only understand the pleasures of fellatio as a masochistic activity akin to St. Catherine's drinking the bowl of pus to prove her religious devotion (Douglas, 1964). This might be an extreme reaction and it may be the case that many men and women do not experience the sight of sperm as so abject, although given the logic of Kristeva's argument any bodily fluid will induce this kind of reaction. (In a sexual situation, the abjectness might add to the frisson of a sexual encounter.)

There are however a series of myths around sperm that elevate it from its abject corporeal status through allegorical and alchemical forms. Aristotle's *De Generatione Animalium* is a good example of this. He analogises sperm through the substances of nature and valorises it as the most 'super-refined' substance:

The seed, then, is a combination of pneuma and water, and the pneuma is hot air. The reason for the seed's whiteness is that the semen is foam... For within the seed of everything there is present that which makes the seeds to be fertile, the so-called hot. This is not fire or that sort of capability, but the pneuma enclosed within the seed and the foamy part, and more precisely the nature in the pneuma, being analogous to the element of the stars...the body of the semen, in which there also comes the portion of soul-source—partly separate for the body in all those in which something divine is included (and such is what we call the intellect) and partly inseparable—this body of the semen dissolves and evaporates, having a fluid and watery nature. (Aristotle, 1992: 64)

Aristotle's valorisation of sperm as 'super-refined' sublimates the ambiguous status of the us/not us substance into an alchemical metaphysical miracle ('partly separate andpartly inseparable'). In medieval alchemical terms, this is not ambiguous, but instead transformational. It represents the halfway stage in an alchemical experiment involving two separate and opposite substances which unite as a result of the alchemist's work upon them in order to release the *spiritus mundi* and effect alchemical transformation. Within the terms of abjection though, the ambiguity of the substance is rendered safely into a narrative and allegorical framework; Aristotle casts a linguistic, fetishistic spell with which to entrap and render down the ambiguous threat of the substance. His control is enabled through the sublimating function of metaphor and narrative: 'being analogous to the element of the stars', but nevertheless, (for the modern reader?) the hyperbole of the passage marks the site of a struggle: 'this body of the semen dissolves and evaporates, having a fluid and watery nature'. Although this allegorical rendering of sperm does not seem to bear any relation to that of the practice of external ejaculation in Explicit Sex films, the meanings of sperm as a 'super-refined' substance are important to the meanings of ejaculate in these films. Its abject status is tempered through a valorising narrative. In Explicit Sex films it is assigned the special status of guaranteeing the presence of authentic sexual pleasure. The circulation of these meanings can be read as fetishistic, as its emblematic status aids its contextually de-abjectified status. I would add, however, that this fetishistic status also works through the assignation of gender encodings. The fetishistic come-shot operates to cover over and disguise the masochistic economy of spectatorship that I have argued these films

operate with. The come-shot may guarantee the sex as 'authentic' but also masks the problematic status of masochistic pleasures (which are gendered feminine) for masculinity. This is implicit in the act of watching and being excluded from the sexual jouissance of others (hence the link to the fantasy of parental coitus).

The come-shot is, then, the source of a series of transgressions. Most obviously the transgression of the biblical command that a man should not spill his seed, which is often used as a metaphor for a wasteful, profligate, excessive act, and secondly, through the complex configuration of the gaze. What does it mean for a straight-identified man to watch other men coming? This could be construed as the unearthing of repressed homosexual desires; but Explicit Sex films are careful to frame the come-shot with cut-away shots to the faces of women. This device can function to disavow the homosexual desire that is circulating in the economy of the gaze here. The come-shot further offers the male user a means of identifying with a man who is at the same time both in control and out of control - this ambiguous status can be read narcissistically or masochistically. To foreground control, narcissistically disavows the uncontrollability of sex and minimises the 'other-ness' of the genitals. To foreground a masochistic reading, the come-shot abjects the man as out of control and driven by desire. The presence of both these conflicting economies works to uncannify the image. To complicate the moment still further, there is also the shadow of the Oedipal father-boy relationship here - the come-shot is the pay-off - the guarantee of pleasure for the boy who identifies with the father. The over-determined knot of meanings that resonate in the image and sound of the come-shot belie the ostensible use of it to 'guarantee' the authenticity of pleasure and demonstrate that it is more than just a phallic economy. What, then, are the pleasures of the come-shot for women users? This is also a highly complex question and to answer this question simply incurs the risk of universalising 'female' pleasure. I want to avoid this pitfall, but what I do want to mention here is that the come-shot may provide some female users with a vicarious narcissistic sense of power; the pleasure of watching men abjected and 'out of control'. This too may be related to primary fantasies of parental coitus and seduction. The

pleasure of the come-shot is then related to the uncanny movement of the sexual body which evades coercion into discourse.

Finally, I want to discuss the recent phenomenon of female ejaculation in Explicit Sex films. Female ejaculation has been out of favour in post-Renaissance anatomical mappings of the body, but previously female ejaculation was considered by Greek, Roman and Arabic writers on the body as a crucial mechanism for conception and reproduction. This model was based on a paradigm of the anatomical body that the female genitals and genital function were seen as an inverted, interiorised, mirror of male genitals and genital functioning. For many Greek, Roman and Arabic writers (Lacqueur 47-51) the optimum circumstance for conception was ejaculation (orgasm) of both man and woman simultaneously inside the vagina. The womb sprays its ejaculate down through orgasm as the penis ejaculates, for conception to occur. This was subject to some dispute. Aristotle, for example, argued that women could conceive without orgasm, but it was more likely to occur if she did orgasm. Although this anatomical imaginary has long been out of scientific favour, a version of it appears through the recent interest in female ejaculation in erotic texts. Pat Califia mentions female ejaculation in her sex hand-book *Sensuous Magic*. It is also a hot issue in Explicit Sex films, such as *How to Female Ejaculate; The British are Coming, Gusher* and *Jet Stream* (all made since 1994). It is as yet unclear if female ejaculation will remain in the industry's 'specialist' category, or if it will become an element of more mainstream 'fuck & suck' films.

The status of female ejaculation has been discussed and argued about by Linda Williams, Chris Straayer and Chuck Kleinhans. Their debate centres upon whether the female ejaculation in Annie Sprinkle's 'post-porn feminist' film *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle*⁴⁴ is a 'real' biological female ejaculation. Kleinhans maintains that the female

⁴⁴ Annie Sprinkle's film borrows from the conventions of Explicit Sex films but departs from the conventions of the genre in that her work, in both film and on-stage performance, can be read, as Straayer notes, as 'a demystification of sexiness' (Church and Church, 1993: 156), and as such is part of the 'tradition' of feminist performance art. Straayer says that Annie Sprinkle 'injects the everyday into porn' (ibid.:157).

ejaculation performed in this film is in fact simply urination. Straayer argues that this is not the issue and seeks in the essay 'The Seduction of Boundaries' (in ed. Church and Church, 1993) to argue that female ejaculation is an act, which has been buried by a male-driven medical profession, that needs to be recuperated for feminism, and she uses Sprinkle's film to make her point. Straayer resolves the argument on the authenticity of the ejaculation by stating that in Annie Sprinkle's 'aesthetic' there is no distinct line between the real (meaning the vaginal fluid squirted out at orgasm) and the performed ejaculation (meaning urine squirted out during orgasm). Williams, however, continues to argue along the lines of the view taken in *Hardcore* that the function of female ejaculation is a form of the 'frenzy of the visible', wherein ejaculation operates to guarantee the authenticity of a women's sexual pleasure. This she argues is the imaginary scenario that underpins the genre as a whole. Straayer argues against Williams that hardcore films are not simply about the quest for the invisible female orgasm; she argues that the lack of female ejaculation in these films testifies to this: 'obviously, many pornographers actually avoid available visible evidence. Censoring the image of female ejaculation, one might argue, maintains a male standard by a deliberate unknowing that consciously reproduces female "lack"' (ibid.:168).⁴⁵ For Straayer, the erasure of female ejaculation from scientific and aesthetic discourses is the result of the need keep the defining features of masculinity (typified as active with a corresponding 'active' explosive form of orgasm) and femininity (typified as passive with a corresponding 'passive' flowing form of orgasm) intact. Both Williams and Straayer, suggest that female ejaculation may disrupt conventional gender lines, but they are referring to a film which does not really show female ejaculation but in fact does, as Kleinhans maintains, show urination in a sexual situation; the attempt to use it to recuperate female ejaculation for feminism does, then, rather flounder. I will now focus on some of the material around female ejaculation within more conventional forms of Explicit Sex films.

⁴⁵ I would comment here that films such as *Gang Bang* certainly do not seem to be predicated on a search for the elusive female orgasm, although other films do spend a good deal of time filming in close-up female genitals. This does not, though, explain the extremely frequent incidence of fellatio featured in every Explicit Sex film that I have seen which feature both men and women.

There are several issues raised in the Williams, Straayer and Kleinhans debate which are important to the transgressive meanings assigned to female ejaculation. One way of addressing this is to construe female ejaculation as a disavowal of sexual difference through the assigning of a 'masculine' value to a women's body; this is perhaps evident in the surprised reaction that the non-sequitur of the term 'female ejaculation' produces. I would argue however, that it has rather more complex and over-determined meanings than this reading implies. It can be regarded, for instance, as a means of dislocating the biologically-grounded reification of sex and gender alignments. Like the lesbian Phallus, female ejaculation crosses the gender demarcation boundaries and this can be said to uncannily (or even render abject) the transgressing body. I will return to this later. Before discussing this any further I want to include two quotations cited in the magazine *Pornorama* (No.1: 35). These citations are both from women, Sarah Jane Hamilton and Kerri Downs, who are known for their female ejaculation in contemporary Explicit Sex films. The article is entitled 'Squirting; The Great Debate'. Sarah Jane Hamilton articulates the difficulty she had in persuading producers that her ejaculation was not urine. So, once again, the question of authenticity is at work. She is quoted as saying:

As some producers were uncertain of my capabilities of having a genuine wet orgasm, I had a thorough examination by my Doctor in Santa Monica to discover the truth behind the matter. He found that I had 'abundant Bartholin glands causing excessive vaginal secretions' which means I SQUIRT FOR REAL! (*Pornorama* (No.1: 35)

Why shouldn't it be urine and why are vaginal secretions considered to be genuine ejaculation and urine not? The question of authenticity raised here seems to hinge on the gendered value of ejaculation as a guarantee of pleasure. The re-location of the attribute to the vagina, as opposed to the conventional penis, is to make it work as an index of pleasure. This, I would argue, undermines the Phallus/penis analogue. Urine,

however, is not construed as an index of pleasure. This still, nevertheless, leaves the sticky problem of articulating female jouissance as the mirror of male jouissance. If, as Williams argues, the motivation for both the using and making of Explicit Sex films is to discover and en-vision the secrets of female sexuality, then female ejaculation is a gift for the industry. But, as I have said before, I consider this a rather reductive analysis of the complexities of Explicit Sex films that draw on diverse economies of sexuality, rather than the most obvious genital sexual economy. I am also concerned about the over-generalised assumptions about the categories of male and female sexuality. Female ejaculation may be related in part to the guarantee of authentic pleasure and spectacle, but the significance of these things is not so overt as it might seem. Female ejaculation is positioned as transgressive because it disaligns the discursive difference between masculine and feminine sexuality and in so doing renders the female body uncanny or even abject. This is because the ejaculation is not in its 'proper' (hegemonic) place and may engender castration anxieties for some men who use the films. The uncanny female body, this suggests, is not simply a signifier of castration, but derives its uncanny status as a signifier of power. This is supported by Kerri Downs who is interviewed by the magazine *Pornorama*. I quote at length, as she has some insightful things to say both about being a porn star, and female ejaculation:

Since a number of directors and producers have learned that I not only can squirt, but can do it on command, the first words out of their mouths when I arrive on the set is, 'You're going to squirt, right?' It is difficult to understand why I should now be isolated to performing as a circus novelty, without regard to any other abilities. My only recent referrals have been to those who produce 'strange and unusual' videos. Whether amateur, pro-am or feature production, the producers and directors I have been on sets with aren't the only ones who don't understand female ejaculations. I have been on several sets where my male partner (who has been told I squirt) says he thinks he's ready for it, and when the flood-gates open, he jumps back as if he's been doused with an acid bath, loses his wood and can't get it back for the rest of the scene. This doesn't leave me with a lot of incentive to release my emotions and enjoy what I can do. If this industry is going to capitalize on the squirting phenomenon, then it should take the time and effort to become educated about the conditions under which it

exists, and not treat it as an oddity of nature....Fortunately, I enjoy the adult industry; I enjoy all aspects of sex on and off camera, and plan on being around for a long time. Hopefully, more of us who can squirt can be recognised for our many sexual abilities and not be relegated to the carny circuit. (*Pornorama*, Vol.: 31)

The reactions to her ejaculations she reports supports the reading that female ejaculation transgresses gender lines, and adds to the abject status of female vaginal secretions. With no allegorising narrative, female ejaculation can, I suppose, seem a frightening phenomenon to the men she has partnered.⁴⁶ Williams' reading does not then seem to hold good here, as Kerri Downs's experience shows that female ejaculation, far from providing the holy grail of the perfectly visible guarantee of women's sexual pleasure, actually seems to 'turn off' the men on the set. What seems significant is that this article on female ejaculation is specifically geared towards women and the film *How to Female Ejaculate* is mainly targeted at female users. Perhaps this may be because the only texts that address female ejaculation in recent years are Queer and dyke S-M texts (Pat Califia for instance). The key idea here is that female ejaculation demonstrates the 'epicene' phallus; which is why these films may appeal to a queer gaze. The image and sounds of female ejaculation is at once a recuperation of an active bodily activity for women, but it is also 'spectacle'. The dual function of the female orgasm and the debate about its 'authenticity' reiterates my argument that sexuality must be couched as an enigma in order to engender desire. Female ejaculation is, then, centred around the performative question of authenticity.

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⁴⁶ Would this anxiety also be felt by men who watch these films - or would the distance enabled by the televisual image allow this possible anxiety to be disavowed?

Conclusion

The primary goal of this thesis has been to examine the role of economies of fantasy, pleasure and desire both in and in relation to Explicit Sex films. This line of enquiry was prompted by the failure of many feminist analyses of the genre to address the complicated matrices of discourses and psychic processes that constitute human sexuality in contemporary Western culture. I conclude that it is vital to address the role of desire, fantasy and pleasure as the co-ordinates of sexuality (or more properly sexualities) if Explicit Sex films are to be examined in a more complex way than is often the case within the pro- and anti- censorship frame. What has emerged here is that the enigma of sexuality is rendered by technology and discourse and it is critical not to reduce the reception of Explicit Sex films to stereotypical notions of the gaze and the 'patriarchal' organisation of the imaginary. It is repressed sexual economies that have been remaindered by the discursive structuring of sexuality that inflect these texts. I have argued that the trace of these excesses within these films is what gives them an uncanny and exciting frisson.

One interesting idea which has emerged through the process of researching and writing this thesis is that, far from being Explicit, the genre engages in a circuit of implicit and repressed economies of fantasy and desire which mark sexuality as disruptive, diffuse and recalcitrant. The films are not an 'explicit' rendering of unconscious repressed fantasies but instead are indicative of the way the knot of sexual discourse conserves and reiterates its enigmatic status. The notion that there is secondary re-working of repressed fantasies which is implicitly in operation in these films, has meant that it is important to theorise these films beyond the terms of conventional feminist reading of them as articulating a specifically unified 'male' gaze. As I have shown, the concept of the 'male gaze' may well be at work in the reception of these films; but it is not the sole economy at work.

My analysis of these films aimed at engaging in a dialogue with Linda Williams' and Pasi Falk's work on the genre. Both of these theorists have focused on the specific

generic conventions of the films rather than engaging with the polarised and rather generalised approach taken by pro- and anti- censorship views. It is through specific work on examples from the genre which will help to broaden the scope of analysis of these films and contribute to the forwarding of feminist analyses of the genre that do not simply take 'patriarchy' and the 'male gaze' as simple givens. The examination of implicit economies of fantasy, pleasure and desire operational through the Explicit Sex film frame has enabled a problematisation of the common assumption that there is a single unified 'gaze'. The thesis proposes that 'the' gaze is subject to competing and diverse psychic processes which can be strategically deployed to show the caesuras and gaps which are inherent within the (sexual) subject. I have used a joint theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and discourse analysis in order to ask what theory can tell us about the processes that inform the users' engagement with these texts.

Addressing the discursive function of authenticity has opened up a means of exploring the impact of video technology on the rendering of the sexual body and the interaction of technology and the body. A further question arises from the very recent shift from video technology as the new technology to digital technology. I have not explored this in the thesis, as the specifics of video technology on the depiction and meanings of the sexual body had not been fully explored by key writers on the genre. A further project would be to ask how this new technological shift impacts on the rendering of authenticity.

This thesis has sought to show how Explicit Sex films are complex texts which depend upon a cultural currency of the encoding of sexuality. I broached this complexity by mapping out key theories of sexuality that inform the coding of contemporary sexuality, and which can help to understand the key issues and debates around the representation of sexuality. This was designed to counter the frequent failure of many extant analyses to explore the construction of sexuality in relation to Explicit Sex films. I examined the ways in which the complex process of channelling subject sexual formation was evident through the examination of key concepts such as authenticity,

disavowal, fetishism, transgression and repression. The use of a psychoanalytic approach combined with an analysis of the praxis of discourse has helped to show that the technological apparatus of Explicit Sex films contributes to the encoding of authentic sex. I have demonstrated that the construction of authentic status in these films is technologically encoded, which in turn depends upon the mobilisation of a fantasy through a question levelled at the status of the sex in these films. The historically specific rendering of the 'enigma' of sexuality provides the basis for engendering the curiosity of the user which is dependent upon the processes of disavowal and fetishism.

In examining the debates around the mapping of the Phallus onto the penis, I showed that Explicit Sex films do not always deploy this configuration as is evident through the so-called lesbian Phallus. I further argued that the construction of authenticity is not solely dependent on the penis as an indexical sign of authenticity, but that indexical status is dependent on the mobilisation of culturally current technological and cinematic signifiers. Thereby I have offered a critique of views of pornography which in different ways centralise the penis, and that suggest that Explicit Sex films reflect and support a simple 'patriarchal' view of contemporary sexuality.

Building on these points, I have also shown that the meanings of transgression in Explicit Sex films are dependent upon prohibitions and taboos that structure social and psychic identity. The primary transgression lies in the genre's implicit use of economies of sexuality, desire and fantasy that are repressed through the process of subject-formation and the interpellation of the subject as having a 'clean and proper' body. In this sense, the label 'Explicit' Sex films is a misnomer - a mis-recognition of these films suggesting that they are indexical or transparent. The mobilisation of the 'explicit' label buys into the contemporary legal discourse around pornography as well as the use of 'explicitness' as the major marketing myths used by the distributors of these films. Both of these discourses assume that the primary transgression of these films is their 'explicitness'. Instead, I have argued, that the transgressions of Explicit Sex films are implicit, as they depend on fetishistic techniques to evade the censorship

mechanisms of the psychic system. Within the framework of the heterosexual matrix, 'Explicit' Sex films are not overtly transgressive as in most of the films analysed here heterosexual coitus is either systemically or literally centralised. Non-heterosexual sex is given transgressive meaning through its difference from the heterosexual norm. However, the transgression of this normative rendering of sexuality and desire depends upon the implicit presence of peripheral acts, which articulates repressed pre-oedipal economies of sex and the circulation of desire through the enigmatic status of sex and the unconscious desire of the (m)other. It is the trace of these economies which are implicitly in excess of the legitimated status of post-oedipal genital sex as a unified single pathway which disavows sexual differences. As Anika Lemaire says :

Discourse cannot be reduced to what is being explicitly said; like thought itself and like behaviour, it bears with it the weight of our 'other' of which we are unaware or half refuse. (Lemaire, 1977: 40)

As Explicit Sex films render the traces of pre-oedipal sexual economies through systems of signification and concomitant organisations of difference, the signs they deploy are always laden with the traces of the repressed. These signs carry the weight of the unbearable, banal, 'Real of desire' which can the illusory unity of subject and gender identity. Explicit Sex films, then, perform a retrospective reading of the enigmatic signifiers and repressed residues and remainders of half-heard messages from the unconscious desire of the other. These films sell themselves as fantasies of plenitude and polymorphous perversity—'pornutopia' and 'pornucopia'—but as these fantasies are retrospectively rendered through the structures of signification, the films cannot be what they purport to be. As such they are never truly free of gender differences, but nevertheless implicitly rely on repressed sexual differences.

Although Explicit Sex films often operate as if they were indexical, they operate through the signification system and images, and because signification is always subject to the primary process, and bears the weight of our 'other', the signification of transgression in Explicit Sex films is never stable and depends on the specific staging of the scene in a given social and psychic context. This, I have argued, is why

transgression must be read as both structural and dynamic. By distinguishing between the two, it is possible to see that sexuality is structured through taboos and prohibitions, but that this produces an excess that evades the anchoring of sexuality, desire and fantasy to certain one-to-one correspondences and given pathways. As I have argued this constitutes a form of reiteration - not through one-to-one correspondence but instead through performance - which work to reiterate sex and gender norms and the reality paradigm norms in different outer guises (for example wearing 'new' technological clothing).

Although Explicit Sex films may be seen in part to fix the articulation of sexuality to a given series of acts, there are always, also, the traces of repressed sexual economies that work to uncannify these signifieds, which in a queered reading is a key source of pleasure. The genre is then open to be read through individual sexual differences, other than heterosexuality. Because of Explicit Sex films' implicit inflection of these traces of othered sexualities, they can be seen as corresponding to both containment and subversive models of transgression. It is not a question of a choice between the two as they recursively engender one another in a dialectical way.

I conclude by returning to the Lacanian/Laplanchean paradigm that the signification of sex and desire is always staged as an enigma, an enigma which is supported by taboos and prohibitions, and the solution of which is endlessly deferred. This is why sexuality is always the source of diverse and endless discourse, but is also resistant to it. Sexuality, desire and fantasy are then located within the interstices of structural and dynamic functions of transgression, and through abjection, sex, fantasy and desire will always be subject to recalcitrance within a given system. It is this that keeps desire in circulation, and difference, which is vital to the functioning of the symbolic system, in play. For the queer reader, if there were no law, then there would be nothing to transgress. As Bataille argues, the taboo is necessary to the constitution of culture and sexuality. As Bersani has said, this implies that sex is never subject to redemption (Bersani, 1990). Sexual reformers, sexual taxonomists, libertarians or pro-censorship feminists cannot erase the anguish and liberation symptomatic of the sexual 'real'

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which underpins the representation of sexuality, as ideologically problematic as this may be, in Explicit Sex films.

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Appendix A

Mapping the Field of Explicit Sex Films

The purpose of Appendices A, B and C is to provide a map of the production, dissemination and sub-genres of the field of Explicit Sex films in the UK. This material supplements the brief outline of the genre given in the introduction of the thesis.

The distribution of Explicit Sex films in the UK is governed by the regulations of *The Obscene Publications Act*.¹ Distribution is then relatively invisible, so that the individual distributors can protect themselves from the possibility of prosecution under this law which targets distributors rather than the end-user or producers. Methods of distribution may be rather different in other European countries. I will concentrate on the distribution in the UK.

Channels of Distribution

Cinema:

- Cinema chains
- Clubs
- Specialist cinemas

Video:

- Video outlets - illegal 'hardcore' - under the counter
- Video outlets - legal 'softcore' - over the counter
- Market stalls - some of the hardcore videos I obtained for this research were obtained from stalls in London markets
- Mail Order - through magazines/papers
- Mail Order - dealing specifically with legal/borderline gay and lesbian material
- Swapping networks - usually 'hardcore' therefore illegal material
- Home-made hardcore and softcore video - swapping networks and 'selling' to magazines such as *Real Wives*
- Satellite/Cable - need decoder to receive and requires subscription fees
- Computer porn - in order to download images requires a modem.

¹ See *Appendix C* for details.

CINEMA

As cinemas are public spaces, the policing of sexually explicit material is through certification of films by the British Board of Film Censors. Movies rated X may have some sexually explicit material but these films conform to softcore conventions which are coded as 'legal'.

Cinema Chains

Cinema chains often show films that include sexual material, for example *Nine and Half Weeks* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1986), *Two Moon Junction* (dir. Zalman King, 1988), but these are always certificated by the BBFC and therefore can be termed 'softcore'. These films are usually narrative-based and deal with sexual relationships between, mainly, heterosexual couples. 'Art house' movies are also shown in this context, for instance, *Betty Blue* (dir. J.J. Beineix, 1986) and *Ai No Corrida* (dir. Nagisa Oshima, 1976, Fr/Jp). These are often more 'borderline' in terms of their representation of sex, but the 'art' label allows some flexibility under the *Obscene Publications Act*. The 'art-house' label enables slightly more risqué sexual activity to be shown. These films may draw upon the conventions of hardcore Explicit Sex films but exclude the primary conventions of penetration, ejaculation and erect penises; although these acts and objects may be 'suggested' by the films.

Specialist Cinemas

The ICA, BFI, and The Scala (now defunct), which require club membership, often show films which can be classed as 'art house'. Films shown in clubs do not have to be certificated by the BBFC. These may be, for instance, New York 'underground' movies in the Warhol mould, such as *Fingered* (dir. Richard Kern, US) and feminist 'counter cinema' dealing with sexuality, for instance, *Kamikaze Hearts* (dir. Juliet Bashore, 1986). These may be shown in the context of cinema history or within film festivals or director showcases. Some examples of these: *Thundercrack* and *Cafe Flesh* (both dir. by George Kuchar) which were shown at the Scala in the late 80s and early 90s, both of which parody the conventions of hardcore. Further examples include 'exploitation' films from the 50s and 60s, for example, *Faster Pussy Cat Kill, Kill* (dir. Russ Meyer, US, 1966), *I am Curious Yellow* (dir. Vilgot Sjoman, Sweden, 1967).

Clubs

Clubs, with names like Cinema XXX, show borderline softcore/hardcore material. Clubs are 'sold' as only showing films of a pornographic nature and viewers must be a member of the Club. These cinemas have a long history and

began to show 'stag films' in the 50s (and possibly before). Stag movies were usually 16mm or 8mm loops. Some of the research on this diminishing domain focuses on male bonding and the phenomenon of shared masturbation.

VIDEO

Recent Explicit Sex films on video have altered the demographic composition of the audiences for these films. Video enables films to be viewed in private spaces, such as the home, and is less accessible to 'policing' than the public space cinemas. Public access to hardcore has increased dramatically since the mass form of home video. A common 'myth', which is difficult to verify, is that VHS 'won out' over the now defunct Betamax format because the VHS market was flooded with Explicit Sex films. It is these films that are discussed at length in the body of the thesis.

Video outlets - legal softcore loaned or sold over the counter

Similar basis as the cinema chains but also access to softcore material produced by the some softcore porn magazines like *Electric Blue* and *Skin Two*. These videos do not show penetration or erect penises and are subject to the Video Standards Council, a subsidiary of the BBFC, which was set up to regulate rental and purchase videos. An area of recent development was started by the *Lovers Guide*; sold to the board of censors as an 'educational' video, marketed to heterosexual and gay couples. The 'educational' categorisation of these particular films enable them to show the erect penis. Also within the domain of the 'educational' sex film is *Making Love* (1991), *The Gay Man's Guide to Safer Sex* (1992) and *Supervirility* (1992) made by Victoria Norwood for *Penthouse*. The educational pre-text for sex films seems to echo the use of 'naturism' films in the 50s/60s as means of legitimating the representation of naked flesh. A recent development in softcore sex videos is those aimed at women, for instance Candida Royalle's films, marketed as showing sex contextualised in 'mature and loving relationships'.

Video outlets - under-the-counter uncertificated material

Popular mythology has it that video stores often sell or rent hardcore Explicit Sex films 'under the counter'; presumably the majority of people with 'access' to this channel of distribution will be male heterosexuals; for whom there would be appear to be less of a threat or risk in asking if a shop has this kind of material. With the growth of video rental chains such as 'Blockbuster' and 'Ritz', small video rental businesses have declined in number, decreasing the possibility of this form of dissemination.

Mail Order

Magazines, papers, like *The Daily Sport* which is published by sex-shop magnate David Sullivan, advertise video tapes for free-trial offers. I have received a couple of Explicit Sex film video-tapes in this way. This is also the

route by which prospective purchasers can obtain catalogues and be placed on mail-order listings. The mail-order business can range from softcore to hardcore and 'bizarre'. Many of these companies send brochures through the post and some, such as *Choices Direct*, are very conscious of obtaining a female audience. Several that I received also state in their brochures that they offer no 'child' porn, under-age actors, animals or violence. This seems to be the main dissemination technique used in the UK in the mid 1990s.

Mail Order - Lesbian and Gay films.

Distribution of legal lesbian and gay porn through mail order companies like *Out on a Limb* in the UK provide a wide range of material. Some films offered by *Out on a Limb*, like *Suburban Dykes* draw on the codes of heterosexual hardcore, whereas others explore diverse cinematic forms for presenting sexuality on the small and large screen. One of the problems faced by *Out on a Limb* is that customs and excise laws are very stringent which means that it is difficult to obtain material from outside the UK.

Swapping Networks

Groups of people, sometimes found through advertising in papers/porn magazines, that copy and/or swap hardcore movies. This is a major means of distribution of 'bizarre' and specialist movies as well as Art/Porn of the New York underground - films made Nick Zedd, Richard Kern, Lydia Lunch, for example. Computers with modems allow the Internet newsgroup topics of alt.sex.bondage and alt.sex.movies to be accessed. This public channel enables subscribers to swap films and discuss latest films and 'stars'. The 'Web' is also used politically to communicate civil rights violations and to discuss implications and issues around the depiction of sexuality. Access to the 'Net' or 'Web' depends on an individual owning or having access to the relevant technology and knowledge. There is an interesting question about the censorship of Internet newsgroups; so far it has evaded any form of significant censorship; but institutions such as Universities (Oxford in early 1996) often stipulate that computer networks users may be sacked if they are found to down-load pornographic material. A further development is the V-chip which can be used to monitor TV and computer networks and block access to any pornographic material on a individual PC or TV terminal basis. Recently many of the network servers, such as the Microsoft server, also block access to news-groups they deem to be 'unsavoury'.

Home-made Video

This is a relatively new phenomenon and is dependent on camcorder technology. This practice was documented in the UK by the 'lifestyle' magazine *Arena*. The article interviews couples who use camcorders to make their own videos and then swap them with others. According to the 'Net' this is a flourishing form of distributing Explicit Sex films in the US. In late 1995, a British magazine,

entitled *Real Wives*, has provided a means by which couples can sell their home-made videos to distributors. It also provides a personal column where couples can arrange to swap videos with other like-minded couples.

Satellite

Cable and satellite channels showing mostly softcore porn in Europe. *Red Hot Television*, for example, shows no erections but was nevertheless banned by The Department of National Heritage in the UK in 1994. Cable and Satellite softcore channels are however accessible if a user has the appropriate dish technology. Two softcore channels launched in the UK in 1996 (*X TV : The fantasy channel* and *Playboy TV*). These two channels show softcore sex and X TV costs £5.99 a month plus a £10 connection fee (Spring 1996).

Computers

There are three aspects of computer pornography which deal with hardcore material:

Networks - computer networks, such as the Internet, can be accessed by anyone with a modem. Some servers provide anonymous addressing so that people can communicate without revealing their work or home location. Discussions on porn, swapping and issues of legality are widely debated.

Software - the first computer pornography, that I managed to trace was a programme called *Mandy* - this is a series of stills which are run together to provide a very stilted animation sequence. Since *Mandy*, technology has enabled brief video clips to be put onto floppy disks. *Virtual Valerie*, for instance, began as a simple animation; but in 1996 it has become a fully interactive (softcore) game which includes video and high-definition animation. This game uses CD technology; and the possibility of full-length movies on high-performance CD is close. The resolutions and quality of the picture will be very much better than video and will offer the porn industry a new and better medium at a similar production cost to video.

Virtual Reality is the buzzword that hints towards a future of virtual worlds. The virtual simulation of sex seems to occur to most people who start to think about the possibilities of this technology. It would seem likely that Virtual Reality will be taken up by the porn industry in the same way that VCR technology was taken up. At present the technology has not reached mass-communication proportions, and therefore is not yet viable for the industry to take up.

Generic differences between Softcore and Hardcore

The next level of difference, which is reflected within the means of distribution, is softcore and hardcore films. I will deal fairly briefly with softcore as it is not the main concern of the thesis. It is, however, useful to provide a definition of the genre, as hardcore (Explicit Sex films) derive its difference by distinguishing itself from softcore.

Softcore

In the UK, many video stores stock some forms of softcore. The legal system in the UK allows softcore representations of some kinds of explicit sex under certain circumstances. The manner in which films are distributed often determines what is permissible to be shown as softcore. Very often two versions are made of a film, one softcore and one hardcore, to cater for the different distribution channels. Common generic characteristics of softcore include:

- Soft focus shots, sentimental or nostalgic story lines (often about the heroine's initiation into sexuality: *Bilitis* (dir. Gerry O'Hara, UK, 1977); *The Lover* (dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud, France, 1992), *The Story of O* (dir. Just Jaeckin, Fr,)² and *Gwendoline* (dir. Just Jaeckin, US, 1984)
- 'Lesbian' sex scenes, in films such as *Bilitis*, *The Berlin Affair* (dir. Liliana Cavani, W. Ger./Italy, 1985), are easier to shoot under the legitimate softcore banner than male and female scenes. This is due to the *Obscene Publications Act* which takes, though does not specifically mention, the representation of the erect penis as an image that can 'deprave and corrupt'. As stated earlier this image is tolerated in 'educational' films.
- No erect penises, dildos or any other phallic, penetrative objects. There are a few exceptions - *Behind Convent Walls* (dir. Walerian Borowczyk, Poland, 1977) which, for instance, shows women (nuns) masturbating with dildos but it does not use close-ups of the women's genitalia. In hardcore Explicit Sex films this would be shown in close-up.
- Lingering shots that follow the curve of a women's body, concentration upon women's breasts, thighs and legs rather than genitals. Often highlighted by the use of clothing, 'sexy' underwear and subtle makeup.
- Often effort is invested in the location of scene. Locations add exoticism or are perhaps deemed as appealing to an imagined female interest in decor. For instance, *The Bitch*, in which scenes were filmed in London's all-women health club - The Sanctuary. Sex scenes in *The Lover* are filmed in a room

² I have been unable to find the date that this film was made.

in an exotic, Chinese, part of town. Here much attention is paid to the 'beauty' of the mise-en-scene, such as, the light streaming in through the slitted blinds at the windows during a love scene, for example.

There are a group of films which could be deemed softcore, because they do not contain explicit sex, but do not follow the conventions of most softcore films. These would include *Mano Destra* (dir. Cleo Ubelemann, 1985, Swiss), *Kamikaze Hearts* (dir. Juliet Bashore, 1986, US), *Suburban Dykes* ; all these female-authored films comment on or deconstruct hardcore or softcore conventions.

Hardcore Explicit Sex films

A method of mapping hardcore Explicit Sex films is through the kinds of activities engaged in within the film. These are quite easily divided into several categories. This method of mapping reflects the marketing language of these films. The use of sub-generic coding aims to ensure that users get what they want and not something that is out of their comfort zone. As the industry is driven by economics, would mean that customers are lost. In the marketing information carried by mail-order catalogues, the range of films on offer are often divided into content-based categories, countries of origin and by the use of a hardcore 'star'. Films usually run from about 80 minutes to 120 minutes; sometimes a tape will contain one or more films, and often included on the tape is a 'montage' of other films that the distribution company has for sale. Most Explicit Sex films on video will have adverts at the beginning, middle or end of a film for these other films.

The primary generic signifier of hardcore movies is the genital close-up shot. This is composed of erect penises, male come-shots, and vaginal, anal or oral penetrations by 'foreign' objects - all of these are, under UK legal constraints, excluded from softcore. Although there are some very rare exceptions to this (the first fleeting glimpse of an erection allowed on British TV screens, perhaps deemed too brief to worry about, was in *Sebastian* [dir. Derek Jarman, 1976]). The hardcore examples below are all taken from mail-order listings. Hardcore is rarely composed of just heterosexual sex; often lesbian scenes are included, but male gay scenes are far rarer, except in hardcore specifically marketed to gay men.

There seems to be an assumption on the part of the filmmakers that if a user is interested in Explicit Sex films then they are likely to be curious about many different types of sexual activities. The inclusion of gay, lesbian or transsexual material is not in any way politicised in these films, but seems to be present because of its curiosity and transgressive value. Many mail-order catalogues offer gay and transsexual material at the back of their marketing catalogues

Appendix A

which is often tagged with a warning. For example one catalogue that carries these films suggests 'Definitely one for those with a taste for pure weird'.

I will now divide hardcore films that are available from the mid 1980s into the following categories (*Appendix B* includes some of the marketing descriptions of these films):

- Straight/heterosexual 'fuck and suck' movies, for example, *Greedy Cunts*, *Sylvia*, *Fucking Holiday*, *Sperminator*.
- Movies that concentrate upon big breasts and lactation, for example, *Erupting Volcanos*
- Movies that include anal sex, for example, *Total Anal*, *Anal Antics*
- Combinations of partners - most commonly, 2 men one woman, 1 man 2 women, 2 women alone then joined by a man - sometimes up to 4/6 people but rarely more - owing to the low budget constraint of having one or two cameras.
- Lesbian films. Most hardcore movies seem to contain a lesbian scene, for example *Tit Tales III* and *Dr Butts II*. There are, however, many films, for example *Punky Girls*, *Aerobics Girls Club* starring Sharon Mitchell (from *Kamikaze Hearts*), which only portray 'lesbian' sex.
- Transsexual and transvestite films. These are often cast under the title of 'bi-sexual' or under the heading 'different' or 'bizarre'.
- 'Gay' sex films. Most gay films are marketed specifically to gay men. Only very rarely do non gay-targeted films depict men-only sex. When men are depicted as engaged in same gender sex it is almost always with a woman present and comes under the category 'Bi-sexual' .
- 'Bizarre' categories. These are rather a miscellany of acts and can include urination and excretion as well as S/M; anal sex, 'lesbian' sex, 'gender-fuck' etc, for example, *Golden Showers 2*, *Dirty Janine*, *Kinkorama 14*.
- 'Bondage and Domination'. Often sold under the 'bizarre' label. This category seems to be predominately about women tying up men which precedes some form of penetrative sex. There are some films that use this label to mean fetish clothing; rather than S/M or B/D rituals. Many of the large distributors in the UK seem to steer clear of S/M or B/D material. This seems to be much more of a characteristic of 'art house' films, as S/M without the explicit depiction of penetrative sex is legal in the UK. It is interesting that much feminist analysis seems to think that this kind of porn is the most prevalent type. More commonly Bondage and Domination is

signified not in the actions within the film but through the dress, such as, rubber-wear, spike heels, leather straps or piercing or tattoos of the participants, as for instance in *Punky Girls*. *L'Initiation d'Anna* is an exception here, but the female protagonist is alternately shown as submissive and as a dominant.

None of these categories are strictly speaking discrete. This reflects the general tenor of the Explicit Sex film project, wherein boundaries are there to be transgressed and therefore most films will contain elements of several of the above categories.

Often in the mail-order listings, the country of origin is made a feature. Japanese porn is considered to be the extreme end of the spectrum (most violent and sadistic - but interestingly no pubic hair is allowed legally on Japanese screens or videos; it was rumoured that the Japanese censor demanded that Sharon Stone's pubic hair, in the film *Basic Instinct*, was air-brushed out). Most hardcore available in the UK originates from the US, Denmark, Germany, France and Holland. Italian and Greek films are also fairly visible. British Explicit Sex films are relatively few and far between. Explicit Sex films are also often marketed in terms of stars. Collectors, according to the 'Net', often collect the films of particular stars. Like Hollywood mainstream there is a thriving star system in the Explicit Sex film industry. Some of these stars which are used as names to market films, are: John Holmes (now dead), Cicciolina, Ginger Lynne, Tracey Adams, Fiona Richmond, Traci Lords, Catherine Ringer, Nina Hartley. The Internet newsgroup, alt.sex.movies, includes a group of people who spend time researching into Hollywood stars' appearances in softcore and Explicit Sex films.

Hardcore Explicit Sex films are divisible into three sub-genres which broadly relate to the presentation of the vehicle 'story' which frames the sexual action:

- *Pastiches of Hollywood movies (ie Rambone the Destroyer, Little Oral Annie, Sperminator, Ghostbusters)*
These bear little or no real relation to the original Hollywood movies but borrow characters in a way that resembles the 'Carry-on' movies remakes of different genre films.
- *Attempted plots (Hollywood narrative-style films)*
Occasionally, but not very often, a plot will be constructed, mostly as a link to move between sex scenes. Detectives, power-play in the work place, and sometimes thriller plots are incorporated. (for instance, *Sex and the Secretary, Behind Blue Eyes 1 & 2*)

- *Camera set up in front of some bodies (no plot)*
Plot is dispensed with; the camera concentrates upon the dynamics of the bodies of the 'actors'. Often these are filmed with one camera and have the lowest production values, and are perhaps the most problematic in terms of economic exploitation (for instance, *Punky Girls*).

Appendix B

Below are examples taken from write-ups used in several mail-order catalogues which were obtained during the period 1993-1995. I have chosen categories that tie into those films mentioned in *Appendix A*. Their inclusion in this appendix is designed to show the kinds of activities that are marketed to the prospective users. The selection of the cited descriptions is taken from 5 different mail-order catalogues. The spelling and punctuation have been left in their original form.

- Straight/heterosexual 'fuck and suck' movies

Fucking Holidays 90 mins German speech

Location is a lovely secluded beach in Minorca, just perfect for private nude sunbathing and lovemaking, and of course the action continues back at the hotel, where the randy holidaymakers meet at the bar. really super action with an array of different girls, as the horny lads check out the new arrivals, usually two at a time! If only holidays were really like this!

- Films that focus on big breasts and lactation

Erupting Volcanos - Big Top cabaret 2

Starring Nelly Williams, Lana Towers, Miss twin Volcanoes...

Directed by Billy Miller

(Extract taken from one of four stories)

Nursing Bra A middle aged woman has massive mounds full of milk which she squeezes out of her huge dark nipples. She wishes there was someone to drink it and talks all the time about how turned on she is getting. She strips to her stockings and suspenders and masturbates. She is interrupted by a bra salesman. She puts breast milk in his coffee. They strip and she sucks and tit fucks him. Her milk drops onto his balls. he spunks on her firm boobs.

Fair sound and picture quality with English dialogue. These lusciously endowed ladies will amaze and arouse you even if their fantastic fun bundles are not your particular fantasy.

1 hour and 28 minutes.

- Movies that include anal sex

Extract taken from an English mail-order company

Anal Climax 1 hour 15 min French

A great blockbuster starring the mouthwatering Alexandria Quinn that you will have wet dreams over! Also featuring Kim Wilde, Candise Heart, Satina, Madison, and more. Two stunning girls open this movie as they slide their tongues deep into each other's cunts, their fingers probing each others tiny arseholes, when the black gardener suddenly walks in. The two horny girls grab the guy's huge black dong to give it a thorough licking and sucking, before he gives them both a good hard french fucking. Watch in astonishment how the girls tiny arseholes gently stretch, as they both receive the arse fucking of their lives. Extraordinary scenes as the black stud pulls his dick out of one girls arsehole to climax in the other girls mouth who swallows every drop of his cum. Stand by for even more explosive sex scenes as a young stud fucks his girlfriends lovely arse with deep penetrating thrusts driving her to a shattering orgasm.

- 'Lesbian' films

Two Examples taken from an Amsterdam company that sell to UK:

Aerobics Girl's Club - from 4-play by Bruce Seven

Starring Sharon Mitchell, Bionca, Erica Boyer, Barbara Dare, Cara Lott, Lois Ayres, Tami Lee Curtis

Two beautiful, but frustrated women open an exercise studio. This is an explosive, exciting and well directed film. The stunning all star cast are enthusiastic and absolutely gorgeous.

The member of the Girls club sweat, suck and slurp together, then in the final scene adjourn to a rubberised area and swathe each other with oil. The glistening, slippery, oozing, dildo popping finale is a scene of lesbian frenzy that you will never forget.

98 minutes Cost £29.50

Double Diamond Vol 20. Lesbian Sex

Starring Samantha Stron, Lynn le May, Tawny Downs, Lisa Milendez, Ebony Ayes, Brandy White, Barbii, Lauryl Canyon, Boina, Kim Bernarde, Sharon Mitchell, Liz Alexander.

This exciting all pussy extravaganza consists of eight red hot short shows of lesbian lust. If you love lesbians then you will love this 2 hour special of gooey girl action. All the scenes are with couple, some are interracial. No anal sex.

2 hours £29.50

- Transsexuals and transvestites

Dream Lovers

Starring Sulka, Lon Saunders, Craig Roberts, Naughty Nikko, Frances Lopez,
Directed by Kim Christy

Large breasted **she-male** Sulka lies on the bed and wanks her fat cock. She goes to her masked male lover who stands masturbating in the shower. Sulka wraps her strange lips around his cock before he pumps into her silicone enhanced chest. Sulka is awakened by a call from Oriental she-male Naughty Nikko, who wants to bring sexy vixen Sue back to the flat. At the flat Nikko gets her 'womanhood' ready and Sues' cunt glistens as she sucks at Nikko's bizarre body. Sulka picks up Sues boyfriend and brings him back to the flat. he freaks out when he sees Sue with what he thinks is another woman. The two she-males drug him. 'What's going on?' he asks, as Nikko slips her cock in his mouth. Sue and Sulka suck Jack's cock to its full potential. An orgy ensues.

Fair picture and sound quality with English dialogue. Definitely one for those with a taste for pure weird. 76 minutes.

- 'Bi-sexual' sex.

The Big Switch : A Bi-sexual Video by Paul Norman

Starring Bunny Bleu, Brian Maxon, Athena Star, Beverley Glenn, Tex Anthony, Michael Vincent, Mark Miller

Seven old school friends meet for a reunion. Bunny fantasises that she is roped to a bed and fed hot cock at each end by tasty, hard-hung studs Michael and Mark. Mark fucks Michael's arse as he lies on top of Bunny. The three climax together as they swarm all over one another. Gorgeous, tanned, muscular Brian pushes his foxy wife, Athena, onto the kitchen table and crams his huge dick in her juicy cunt. Bunny and Beverly luxuriate in the Jacuzzi. They are soon twisting their tongues in and out of each others pussies. Michael wanks as he watches them then brings out a tie-on truncheon and order Bunny to fuck Beverly with it. He replaces the fake meat with his own as Bunny penetrates his fecal hole with her 'cock'. he erupts powerfully over Beverly. Brian and Beverly are joined by Mark for scintillating three way sex. The two studs both fuck her but not each other. etc.

75 minutes

- 'Bizarre' categories. This is rather a miscellany of actions and can include urination and excretion as well as S/M, anal sex etc.

Taken from another English Distributor, which produces very lengthy descriptions of the films it stocks - this is an extract:

Black and White Piss Party

German sound

Female starlets appearing include: Jeannie Pepper, Muriel, Elke, Rally and Tracey Adams.

1 hour and 20 mins price £20

...Jeannie Pepper is an American black girl who is currently causing a sensation in the USA with her daring pissing sexploits. This gorgeous girl makes a very welcome appearance in this great movie. She takes up a rigid hard dick up her tiny chocolate tunnel while another couple

Appendix B

watch. Then they all join in an orgy as all four swop and fuck. Jeannie is bursting to piss and with a prick up her arse, she performs the party trick of the year by pissing at the same time! A truly sensational sight and you won't forget the glorious view of her urine trickling down from her sopping cunt with her arse full of dick...

Appendix C

Extracts *The Obscene Publications Act* taken from
Geoffrey Robertson Q.C. and Andrew Nicol
(1992) 3rd Edition *Media Law* pp106-120

s 1 of *The Obscene Publications Act* (The definition of 'obscene')

For the purposes of this Act an article is deemed to be obscene if its effects or (where the article comprises of two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave or corrupt persons who are likely, in all the circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it. (extract cited in Robertson and Nicol, 1992 : 110)

.....It is an offence to publish an obscene article contrary to the Obscene Publications Act 1959, and it is an offence to have an obscene article for publication for gain, contrary to the Obscene Publications Act of 1964. A charge under the 1959 Act requires some act of publication, such as sale to customer or giving an obscene book to a friend ... Mere possession of an obscene book will not satisfy the definition of publication in s1(3)(b), which governs both acts....For the purposes of this Act a person publishes an article who (a) distributes, circulates, sells, lets on hire, gives, or lends it, or who offers it for sale or for letting on hire; or (b) in the case of an article containing or embodying matter to be looked at or a record, shows, plays or projects it...(cited *ibid.*: 119).

Robertson and Nicol offer a useful commentary on this and recommend that:

'Accounts of straightforward copulation may attract prosecution if they are detailed and explicit and without literary or artistic merit. The House of Lords has held that the arousing of libidinous thought fell squarely with the mischief aimed at by the act. (*DPP v Whyte* 1972 All ER 12). But pictures of orthodox sexual activity short of erection, penetration and ejaculation are usually made the subject of forfeiture proceedings in which no conviction is recorded and no punishment (other than the destruction of the goods) can be imposed. These "s3" proceedings (so called because the forfeiture code is contained in s3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959) serve little purpose other than to waste the time of the police and local magistrates' courts. An order for forfeiture made by justice in one district is of no use a precedent for others. The publishers of 'soft-porn' magazines cheerfully accept occasional stock losses, usually without

Appendix C

bothering to intervene (which s3 entitles them to do) to argue that their goods should not be destroyed. ' (ibid. : 125).
