FAULT LINES
QUEER SKINHEADS AND GAY MALE SUBJECTIVITY IN THE FILM
PRAXIS OF BRUCE LABRUCE

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AESTHETICIZATION APPROPRIATION EROTICISM FASCISM FETISHISM GAY HEALY LABRUCE MASCULINITY PERFORMATIVITY PHALLUS PORNOGRAPHY PSYCHOANALYSIS QUEER SADOMASOCHISM SEMIOTICS SKINHEAD SUBCULTURE SUBJECTIVITY VIOLENCE
ABSTRACT

*Fault Lines* positions a theory of gay male subjectivity as it relates to the Queer skinhead and its dissemination in gay male pornography. In narrating the transformation of the original skinhead as a subcultural youth type to its present re-signification as a fetish and sexual identity within gay male subculture, *Fault Lines* reveals a tripartite problem of fetishism, sadomasochism and fascism. Through an analysis of Bruce LaBruce's film *Skin Gang / Skin Flick* (1999) these problems are contextualised within a discourse of gay male pornography, broadening the investigation to consider how problems of masculinity, violence and race manifest within a distinctly gay male sexual imaginary. Examining the representational function of the Queer skinhead, *Fault Lines* seeks to speculate on how notions of a gay male subject and subjectivity can be established at the intersection of an aesthetic, political and social experience.
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7. Composite of original video covers for the German issuing of *Skin Flick* and *Skin Gang* © Cazzo Film Production & Bruce LaBruce
The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed:

Date:
Dedicated to Tim Plaisted

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These crudely sketched characters function as thresholds, beyond which the pulse of a faceless drive is unleashed; imploding every line between seducer and seduced, oppressor and oppressed, in a Roman flurry of violent and hedonistic solidarity. This is a difficult pornography, considering that the form usually attempts to disguise anonymity by making its characters inhabit a world that the viewer can identify with. This is why porn, like any other commodity, tailors itself to an anticipated subject. But this is virtually impossible for *Skin Flick* because it demands that its viewer embrace and identify with the absolute non-identity of its characters. In this sense, LaBruce is kind of a pornographic Brecht; estranging the anonymity of the gaze by making it the very subject of drama.¹
"Fault Lines" narrates the transformation of the skinhead from an aggressive and violent subcultural youth type to its signifying practice[2] in gay male subculture. In narrating this transformation, "Fault Lines" investigates how the Queer skinhead has become intertwined with gay male subjectivity, and examines its function as a fetish and sexual identity in the narrative transgressions of gay male pornography. Through an analysis of Bruce LaBruce’s film Skin Flick / Skin Gang[3] (1999) (hereafter referred only as Skin Flick), "Fault Lines" investigates a tripartite nexus involving fetishism, sadomasochism, and fascism that underscore individual and collective Queer appropriations of the skinhead. Utilizing LaBruce’s representational strategies, "Fault Lines" explores how problems of masculinity, violence and ethnicity manifest within a distinctly gay male sexual imaginary. As such, "Fault Lines" seeks to establish how notions of a gay male subject, and subjectivity, operate at the intersection of an aesthetic, political and social experience.

The image and discourse of the skinhead assumed its representational agency, as it emerged in youth culture in Britain in late 1960s. Developed out of disillusionment with the Mod scene, and a rejection of the hippie movement, the original skinhead combined the hard masculinity espoused by gang-Mods on the streets of London, the aggro of English football terrace boot boys, and the styles and music of the West-Indian Rude boys. Evolving from no singular origin but as an orchestration of disparate cultural styles and practices, the dress codes of boots, denim, braces and cropped hair, came to signify a distinctly working-class white masculinity that embodied by virtue the values of, “masculinity, male dominance and male solidarity”.[4] This exposition of masculinity was further developed with an elaboration of the skinhead image born out of the visibility of British and North American Punk movements in the 1970s and 80s. The Punk reinterpretation of the skinhead aestheticized its masculinity to a point of excess whereby associations to ultra-violence and fascism erroneously characterized the image. Such cognition was fueled by the activities of an ultra-right wing faction of boneheads, with close ties to Neo-Nazi and White Power movements, that gained an enormous amount of media attention during the 1980s. As George Marshall asserts, “the effects of the media circus around the white power scene meant that all skinheads were seen as being racist by the general public”.[5] While the group SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) was founded in 1988 to wrestle the image away from
boneheads, the signification of the skinhead as a neo-fascist still prevails. From the mid-1980s the image of the skinhead has also established itself as a dominant fetish in European urban gay networks⁶, signifying a rupture in the skinhead’s symbolic meaning. As Murray Healy asserts, the widespread use of skinhead signifiers within European gay male subcultures has confused both identities, making the distinction between the two unclear, with the image at times ceasing “to signify skinhead, sending out the message instead ‘I am gay’”⁷.

Yet given the historical and social understandings of the skinhead at a representational level, and the conscious or subconscious appropriations by gay men of skinhead signifiers, the subsequent self-identification as a Queer skinhead has provoked fierce criticism from both outside and within Queer communities. Central to arguments against these appropriations has been the Queer skinhead’s vested interest in notions of an authentic masculinity, the valorization of power through forms of social and sexual violence, and the semiotic equivalence of skinheads to Fascism. A current example of the problematical characterizations related to Queer appropriations of the skinhead can be seen in the textual codes of a poster advertising the 2001 Christopher Street Day Parade held during the Berlin Pride festival in Germany.⁸ (Fig. 1) The poster profiles two men in opposition, their facial expressions and proximity suggesting that they are poised for confrontation. The left figure can be identified as a skinhead through the signifiers of a shaved head and shirt collar that bears the trademark stripes of the popular skinhead fashion label Fred Perry. The opposing figure is starkly different, seemingly less aggressive and confrontational, and as such might be considered ‘normal’ in comparison. The poster’s slogan reads “QUE(E)R gegen RECHTS” abbreviated from the CSD Collective Mission Statement put forth as the slogan for the 2001 event as “Berlin Stellt Sich Que(e)r Gegen Rechts!” (Berlin Stand Up Against the Right!). In this context the poster can be read as not only making an explicit call for resistance against Fascism, but also against images that function on a semiotic level to imply fascistic tendencies.
This image is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Investigating this polemical convergence of “Queer” and “skinhead”, Fault Lines locates the observations of Healy’s *Gay Skins: Class, Masculinity and Queer Appropriations* (1996) as central to an analysis of Queer skinheads. Healy’s text presents a historical survey of homosexual involvement within British skinhead subcultures, and positions the evolution of the Queer skinhead as symptomatic of both the cause and consequence of the masculinization of gay male culture. In analyzing the existence of Queer skinheads Healy contends a reconceptualisation of both identities is required to expose how, “gay subculture has fetishized, utilized, rejected and appropriated the putative natural masculinity embodied in the skinhead”. This attraction and repulsion of the skinhead’s masculinity makes for a volatile gay male subject, what Healy describes as a “tautologous contradiction” wherein the cultural polarities of male sexuality and gender are embodied in a single male subject. Representations of Queer skinheads would function then as visual contradictions, tactically obscuring the distinction between the homosexual and the homosocial. Furthermore, given the skinhead’s political significance, such representations also problematize the positioning of gay male subjects with the traditional lesbian and gay politics of libertarianism.

Instigating Healy’s urge for a reconceptualization of both identities, Chapter 1 begins by drawing attention to a revisionism of the original skinhead that problematizes its phallic function, denaturalizing its masculinity, and relocating the image within a history of homosexual involvement, and as a cultural effect of trauma. The arguments of Murray Healy and James Haines, and the collaborative research of David Bell, John Binnie, Julia Cream and Jill Valentine (hereafter referred to as Bell et al.), in relation to questions of Queer style, skinhead authenticity, and gender performativity will then be observed as strategies for interpreting the function and meaning of skinhead signifiers within gay male subculture. The masculinization of gay male culture and the characterization of gay representation in gay male pornography will subsequently be approached, locating the Queer skinhead historically within a visual discourse of homoeroticism, and identifying the arguments for and against the construction of masculine gay male identities.

Chapter 2 will then proceed to address specifically how questions concerning masculinity and its connection to fetishism, sadomasochism and fascism converge on images of the
Queer skinhead. Since the presence of the skinhead as a fetish in gay subculture disrupts a traditional psychoanalytic conception of fetishism that is premised on sexual difference, *Fault Lines* seeks to interrogate alternative explanations of the function and meaning of fetishism for gay male subjects. Given also that the fetishized image of the Queer skinhead often materializes within a context of sadomasochism, the impact sadomasochistic practices have for the subjectivity of gay male subjects will be evaluated. Specifically, sadomasochism will be approached to uncover the transgressive and yet *alienating* effects such sexual practices have on gendered subjects. Furthermore, since Queer appropriations of the skinhead apprehend a specifically white form of masculinity and power, questions concerning the associations between fetishized images of power and discourses of Fascism will be discussed, exposing a disconcerting relationship between homosexuality and Fascism in the construction of the homoerotic in gay male subcultural practices.

Unravelling this nexus, Chapter 3 will engage with LaBruce’s texts to reveal how fetishism, sadomasochism and fascism manifest in the cultural production of gay male pornography. *Skin Flick*, and its pornographic counterpart *Skin Gang*, each fetishize the skinhead within pornographic narratives in a deliberate attempt to question the manner in which masculinity and violence are eroticized within gay male subculture. In both instances the Queer skinhead is romanticized as a homoerotic figure, but wherein the aesthetics of a sexualized identity are coupled with homophobic and racist violence, as well as acts of non-consensual sex. *Fault Lines* will apply a semiotic reading of each text to articulate how the gay male subject is the effect of signification. Furthermore Feminist and Queer theoretical approaches to gender and sexuality will be incorporated, to underline the ideological function of representation in constructing and defining gay male subjects. Using these texts, *Fault Lines* will then work towards forming a theory of gay male subjectivity.

In conceptualising notions of a gay male subject and gay male subjectivity, the term Queer will be used to connote gestures and analytical modes wherein as Daniel Mudie Cunningham infers, “Queer refers to both the *subject* (whether individual or collective) and *subjectivity* (the practices and performances that may be considered Queer)”. Utilizing the theoretical framework of Queer, will also enable a discussion of the representation of
masculinity and sexuality to move across the contexts of “straight”, and “gay”, and encompass such non-normative practices as sadomasochism. The contention will be made that the subject is not procured from a single origin but rather as an effect of signification, and that gay male subjectivity might therefore be understood as a range of subject positions. While not necessarily concerned with deconstructing gay male subjectivities, *Fault Lines* seeks to reconstruct a theory of gay male subjectivity through semiotic analysis.

In reconstructing a theory of gay male subjectivity, *Fault Lines* seeks to reveal gay male subculture as a contested frontier, wherein Queer appropriations of the skinhead tread a line between aestheticization, and fetishization. Applying LaBruce’s representational strategies, *Fault Lines* reveals gay male subjects to be socially, historically and aesthetically constructed, but that they also remain neither fully totalized nor stabilized. An analysis of the original skinhead demonstrates a parallel to this conception of the subject, as an identity instigated through the conflation of three disparate images, and subsequently reworked across a thirty-year span by different homogenous groups. Through an analysis of *Skin Flick*, representations of Queer Skinheads will be identified as *fault lines*, in their understanding of the nexus of violence and eroticism in the social construction of gay male subjectivity. Like the ground on either side of a fault, it is argued, hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and sexuality move in opposite directions, making for a volatile gay male subject.
The term ‘Queer skinhead’ posits a seemingly incongruous relationship between two signifiers – ‘queer’ and ‘skinhead’ – which together disrupt dominant representations of masculinity. A disruption occurs because the Queer skinhead inhabits a representational space that conjoins Queer, as that which is socially signified as homosexual, unnatural, effeminate, middle-class and politically left, with what are identified as the heterosexual, natural, hypermasculine, working class and politically right attributes of the skinhead. The signification of each term illustrates the exclusionary means by which gender binary distinctions in culture negate power and difference, and as such, both terms are defined through and by opposition. As Judith Butler describes, the construction of gender operates through “exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation”.13

In articulating such radical erasures, representations of Queer skinheads make intelligible the social process by which subjects are constituted and regulated, and hence expose the instability of binary distinctions in structuring masculinity and sexuality. This instability is premised on the (straight) skinhead’s failure to maintain dominance within binary hierarchies against the presence of Queer skinheads, which make an increasingly aggressive incursion of the stable heterosexual masculinity of the image.14 The Queer skinhead further reveals the agency of social, political, and aesthetic discourses, in structuring both subjects and subjectivity, and in doing so invites the signification of each term to be re-articulated. What emerges, it will be argued, is an ability to reassess how the continuum of masculine signifiers in gay male subculture has constructed a specific gay male subject, in which a union of violence and a racially based eroticism inform the formation of gay male subjectivity.

The Queer skinhead also renders identity problematical, in that Queer as a discourse of gender and sexuality simultaneously resists and accommodates more than just identity. Queer cites not only individual and collective identities and identifications, but also those
sexual practices, performances and representational strategies that might be considered ‘queer’. Appropriated and re-signified from its currency in discourses of homophobia, Queer accommodates the intersection of multiple discourses in an analysis of subjectivity by resisting the specificity of sex, gender and ethnicity that the terms “lesbian” and “gay” characterize. For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the deployment of Queer involves a subject undertaking “particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation” with Queer functioning simultaneously as both “anti-separatist and anti-assimilationist” and “relational and strange”. This simultaneous resistance and accommodation characteristic of Queer, will be positioned as a strategic tool in conceptualising an analysis of the Queer skinhead. It will enable an examination of what are fraught and polemical bodily imagos of masculinity, to accommodate a complexity of subject positions, and resist an essentialist paradigm of analysis that often dominate investigations into gay male subjectivity.

While we might contend that representations of Queer skinheads make binary distinctions strange and variable, we must also acknowledge that such representations remain polarized by an inability to dissociate from dominant historical and cultural associations that have characterized the skinhead as representing a white and heterosexual masculinity, associated with violent interaction and right wing politics. Susan Leigh Star’s observes a similar difficulty in reconsidering the use of the Swastika by sadomasochists, and asserts, “one must be accountable to the historical and material consequences in describing psychological experiences of any kind”. Given the loaded symbolism connected with the Swastika, Star questions the extent to which individuals or groups have the power to determine the context of symbols, and moreover whether the dominant meaning of symbols can be resignified by recontextualization. Arguing that proponents of sadomasochism suffer from objective idealism, in the desire to separate human action from historical contexts, Star suggests resignification through recontextualization can only be accomplished if a subject has “power over a wide social context and is willing to enforce the reinterpretation of the symbols over the scale of their usage”. As representations of Queer skinheads operate as a specialized sexual fetish within the context of a marginalized subculture, such a reinterpretation would prove difficult. If resignification proves problematical, how does one interpret images of Queer skinheads? Given the skinhead’s seemingly fixed meaning within Western culture,
should representations of Queer skinheads be read in similar regard? Healy foregrounds this line of inquiry by asking:

…who can afford to read the skinhead as anything other than a threatening mode of hard masculinity that is significantly white? Given the skinhead’s association with violence against communities on the grounds of racial difference, who can afford to read the skinhead as anything other than a racist fascist? Given that there are still those who engage in homophobic violence who claim that identity, can white men be so ambivalent to the social meanings of skinheads?23

The extensive reproduction of skinhead signifiers visible throughout European urban gay networks would highlight the contention that gay male subjects do indeed show ambivalence to the social meaning of the skinhead. Queer appropriations seemingly attempt to disassociate from the skinhead’s social meaning, instead fetishizing the figure as a sexual rather than political identity. This is not to disregard the potential skinhead signifiers have for gay male subjects seeking to identify with racist or neo-fascist ideologies, but to contend that the Queer skinhead principally operates as a fetish within the phantasmatic constructs of gay male subculture.24 Yet, it should also be argued that the social meaning embedded in the skinhead also functions as a primary point of eroticisation, making such appropriations far more complex than simply a sublimation of the political for the sexual.

Investigating this problematical configuration of the Queer skinhead, this analysis seeks to begin by asking: are Queer appropriations of the skinhead distinct from, or do they extend, a historical trajectory in the masculinization of gay male subjects? Given that Queer skinheads draw attention to the slippage between sexual identities and wider social identities, how can we interpret images of Queer skinheads within a broader visual history of the skinhead? Indeed what happens when the skinhead materializes as a fetish within gay male pornography that employs sadomasochistic practices? Can the social be separated from the sexual? Can the underlining association with Fascism be disassociated? Do representations of Queer skinheads work outside binary oppositions that structure both subjectivity and
culture, or are they symptomatic of a sexuality that has predicated violence and oppression as inherent to its eroticism?
SKINHEAD REVISIONISM: MIMING AN AWKWARD MASCULINITY

In reconsidering the image of the skinhead, three strategies of revisionism highlight an ability to re-signify the metonymic level on which the skinhead image has historically operated. Firstly, the wholesale heterosexism of the skinhead youth cult can be perverted by historical evidence of homosexual engagement. Second, its symbolic power can be corrupted, by localizing its use of the shaved head within a collective experiences of trauma, and third, the skinhead’s signification of a phallic and authentic masculinity can be emasculated, by repositioning the image as a pastiche of already marginalized forms of masculinity. What these strategies seek to reveal is a series of imperceptible shifts by which the mythologized masculinity of the skinhead, crosses over into hypermasculinity and dominant masculinity merges with its margins. By disrupting and re-signifying the skinhead with such revisionisms, we can begin to foreground potential readings of the skinhead within gay male subculture, and its dissemination within the commodity of gay male video pornography.

Subcultural readings of the skinhead identify two distinct phases in the development of the image: the original ‘spirit of 69’ skinhead who emerged as a retrogressive counter-glamorization of youth subcultural style and the punk reinterpretation that revived, aestheticized and exaggerated the style. In its derivation, the original skinhead attempted to stylize an authentic working class masculinity through dress codes obtained from traditional workmen gear, and a hairstyle that referenced its militaristic usage in French and American army corps. As Dick Hebdige observes the style was dominated by a fascination with being authentic and being British, and that the combination of these two points made for a style that operated as “a defensive assertion of whiteness…an attempt to make something out of nothing”. The Punk skin revived and exaggerated the most extreme elements of this wardrobe; heads were completely shaved, jeans were made tighter, boots taller, and the swastika, which already occupied a place within a Punk vernacular was incorporated. Likewise the original skinhead’s interest in the black musical traditions of Ska and Motown were replaced with the sound of an aggressive white working-class rhetoric - Oi. As Nick Knight notes the fundamental difference between both versions of the skinhead was the
Punk’s political significance, stating “new skins were given a political role which was
entirely absent from the original skinhead, who had a complete mistrust for political
parties”. In England far-right organizations such as The National Front and British
Movement facilitated this new role, enjoying an enormous recruitment of skinheads since
the late 1970s.

For George Marshall there remains a correlation between the development of these dress
codes and the skinhead’s violent behavior suggesting the skinhead dressed to revel “in the
violent and aggressive image of post-’64 Modernism and began to dress accordingly. Smart
suits were put away for nights on the town and fighting was done in shirt and jeans”. Marshall
adds further that the growth of the style was stimulated by violence, suggesting
that the image was introduced throughout England by mobs of skinheads during the English
football seasons. As Marshall suggests: “nothing did more to spread the skinhead style than
travelling mobs who would go into action before, during and after a game”. It was then in
the media frenzy that surrounded these early reports of skinhead violence that the dress
codes adopted the subtext of functioning as a gang ‘uniform’, and consequently, its ability to
operate as only a subcultural fashion was disempowered.

The emergence of the skinhead as both a style and identity has also been considered as a
rejection of the notion of masculinity and reformation of a male identity that emerged out of
post World War II urbanization. The skinhead therefore attempted to reclaim or recreate a
traditional working-class masculinity, by rejecting what was construed as the middle-class
aspirations of the Mod youth subculture. Indeed, Punk reinterpretations were considered to
be in part also a denunciation of what were considered the middle class tendencies, and
intellectual aestheticism (therefore characteristically “feminine”) attributed to certain
sections of the Punk movement. For Michael Brake however this process of disavowal was
captured in a tenuous exchange between dress codes that at once defined, and threatened, the
subject’s masculinity. Brake identifies this exchange as particular to youth subcultures that
are structured as male dominant and masculinist, arguing:
They are caught up in a situation where they are wearing a costume which transgresses traditional concepts of masculine dress, hence when challenged over effeminacy, they have to prove their masculinity, or prove by fight that they are not masculine.\(^{34}\)

Brake’s analysis also discerns how in an analysis of youth subculture, homosexuality remains invisible, suggesting gay subcultures operate in isolation to other homosocial subcultures because of their sexual significance, and furthermore, because homosocial behavior is inherently structured around a hostility to homosexuality. Indeed skinheads have been historically noted for their homophobic violence, with Marshall surmising, “Queers and anyone who looked like one were usually easy and regular targets”.\(^{35}\) Healy’s research is centered then on exposing this invisibility of gay male subjects by drawing attention to the accounts of gay men who have historically associated with the skinhead cult. Healy’s testimonies radically revise the academic and sociological biases of British youth subcultures that position masculinism with heterosexism, and the Queer skinhead as a nonintelligible body within the history of the skinhead. As Healy states: “the mythic stable site to which the skinhead is suppose to refer - straight masculinity - is destabilized by a history of homosexual involvement”.\(^{36}\) Yet the question of visibility and interpretation dominates such revisionism, as which subjects will actually decode the Queer skinhead as gay are fundamental to the materialization of corporeal visibility and invisibility, legibility and illegibility. What might problematize this reinstatement of Querness is Healy’s concession that while gay men might have had, and still maintain a presence within skinhead circles, they “still remain invisible as gay men to many straight people”.\(^{37}\) It could be argue then that it is not necessarily historical recounting of homosexual commitment that problematizes the skinhead, but current visual reproductions of the skinhead in both gay male subculture and gay male pornography, that through repetition radically de-center the skinhead’s historical significance. In the context of this analysis, the visual discourses of gay male pornography will be used as an example to illustrate this de-centering.

Kristine Stiles offers another paradigm for destabilizing the skinhead’s exposition of masculinity by making emblematic its figuration of the shaved head. While shaving a subject’s head has been characterized as rendering a subject more masculine, Stiles explores
conversely how this process can be characterized as feminine by functioning as a dominant cultural sign of trauma, as moreover an effect of a culture of trauma. Stiles traces the image of the shaved head historically in Western discourses as a signifier of humiliation and as “a visual manifestation of the supralineal condition of domination and power”. Stiles notes skinheads differ significantly from other disempowered subjects, because as agents, skinheads are active in the reconstruction of their own image. Yet for Stiles, the phallic masculinity invested in the skinhead can be challenged by its shared history with all those humiliated and / or dominated by having their heads shaved. Its virility then comes to inhabit the same representational space of war, domination and colonization. Describing the different cultural and political sites and meanings that converge on the skinhead to illustrate this shared history, Stiles states:

Skins visualized interconnected networks of brutality ordinarily categorized as different in culture. These include the hardened countenance of the military man under whose sign society contracts death, and the veneer of the outlaw, or prisoner of ball, chain, and spiked collar, whose transgressions bar him from the privilege to kill, and the demented, dangerous, unpredictability of the mental patient--shaved and lobotomized--and an image of ravaged diseased bodies, radiated and suffering, and, finally, the debased aspect of the concentration camp Jew, the ultimate picture of oppression.

The skinhead image functions then, ambivalently, as both powerful and abject, at once an image of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Stiles argues these dualities are linked to the skinhead’s attempt to adapt “an appearance of marginality with respect to Western systems of power”. Mick Furbank’s mystical vision of the crucified skin [Fig.2] echoes this project of defining one’s marginality in its use of style to mark the subject as persecuted. Branded on the body, the tattoo’s design sought to materialize the skinhead’s romanticized position of being an outsider.
This image is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
The skinhead’s sense of marginality was also articulated in its identification with the youth culture of West Indian migrants. The skinhead appropriated not only the dress codes of these youths, but also the musical styles of Ska, Reggae and Rocksteady – what has been termed as “skinhead reggae”. The distinctive style appropriated from the West Indian youths was that derived from the Rude Boys of Kingston who were renowned for their machismo and violence. The Rude Boys were the sons of Jamaican labour immigrants, and it was in the face-to-face cultural encounters at local youth clubs that skinheads were introduced to their styles and music. In a period when those values conventionally associated with the working class were being eroded by economic and social change, John Clark argues the skinhead style attempted “to recreate through the ‘mob’, the traditional working class community as a substitution for the real decline of the latter”. As Hebdige states, this appropriation sought to articulate the sense of exclusion and neglect that English working class communities felt. As Hebdige continues further, the skinhead then: “resolved or at least reduced the tension between an experienced present (the mixed ghetto) and an imaginary past (the class white slum) by initiating a dialogue which reconstituted each in terms of the other”.

As Healy points out, such a dialogue between Rude Boys and skinheads extends further the contention that such defensive assertions of ethnicity inhabited the same “hypermasculine site in which white ideology constructed blackness”. Yet one aspect of this dialogue that both Hebdige and Healy overlook is the skinhead’s fascination with what Ashley Dawson suggests is the sexuality of the Rude Boys. This fascination can be likened to what Kobena Mercer points to as a paradox between otherness and imaginary sameness that informs the construction of racial difference in the homoerotic imaginary. Mercer articulates this paradox through the example of the white artist who intends to identify with another race in order to express his own marginality (the example given is Robert Mappelthorpe), or British skinheads who adopt black styles but maintain an ideology of racism. As Mercer conceptualizes of the later:
…the white Negro was an inverted image of otherness, in which attributes devalorized by the dominant culture were simply revalorized or hypervvalorized as emblems of alienation and outsiderness, a kind of strategic self-othering in relation to dominant cultural forms.51

If the skinhead has come to embody a notion of masculinity that is made to seem authentic, (natural to the extent that it is never interrogated), Hebidge suggests by dissecting the figure’s “geometry of menace”52 we can begin to reveal how ultimately this seemingly ‘natural’ masculinity functions as “a mime of awkward masculinity”.53 With Healy’s sociological revisionism problematizing the skinhead’s claim to heterosexuality, Stile’s aesthetic narrative blurring the positions of the oppressor and the oppressed, and Mercer’s underscoring of the precarious racial differentials orchestrated in processes of self-othering, it can be argued that the skinhead’s project of remasculinization is emasculated. What can be argued with these strategies then is that by disclosing the skinhead’s masquerade of authentic masculinity, the skinhead is re-articulated as a pastiche of marginalized forms of masculinity, of visual signifiers linked to trauma, and of problematical assertions of racial otherness.
QUEER STYLE, SKINHEAD AUTHENTICITY & GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Approaching the Queer skinheads as a representational site, the arguments of Murray Healy, James Haines and David Bell (et al) offer important strategies for engaging with the implications that representations of Queer skinheads have on the constitution of gay male subjectivity. For Healy, the Queer skinhead exposes “skinhead ‘realness’ as just another style in a fluid fashion system, and the authentic masculinility of the skinhead as a simulation”.54 By this Healy contends that in extracting the skinhead image from its social and political context, gay male subculture seemingly parodies the realness of the image as fashion. This is not to overlook the adoption of the skinhead as an identity politic for some gay men, but to contend that signifiers of the skinhead operate predominantly in gay male subculture at a level of style. This would also be consistent with the contention that the construction of gay culture and identity has been historically premised on visual signifiers, with endless historical and cultural associations formed through clothing, and symbols, that identify a subject as Queer.

Healy identifies the skinhead’s transformation from identity to fashion as recognition of Postmodern appropriations, more specifically as a “Queer tactic” that adopts a metaphor of fashion to successfully disrupt identity. Healy links this transformation to the discourse of media advertising which in recent years has deployed a shift in the symbolic function of the skinhead, whereby the figure is positioned as “a rougher youth rather than a violent thug”.55 The advertising campaign by Ben Sherman depicted in the English gay magazine Attitude [Fig.3] illustrates this transformation of the skinhead, such that the skinhead’s anti-authorial behavior is literally characterized as a fashion statement. Wearing a trademark Ben Sherman shirt, the skinhead gestures the viewer with a loutish “sod off!”, recalling both the label’s history as a primary clothing label for skinheads, and the characterization of skinheads as both aggressive and dissident. Indeed by also asserting its conception of style within the context of a gay men’s fashion magazine, the advertisement highlights how traditional skinhead clothing signifiers, and the skinhead identity are being marketed directly toward a gay men’s fashion consciousness.
This image is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Healy’s analysis continues to suggest that the Queer skinhead functions as a means of undermining the straight masculinity invested in the original (heterosexual) skinhead, by exposing it as a hyperreal simulation. This notion of simulation refers to Jean Baudrillard’s encounter with the Postmodern world, in which signs are revealed to no longer reflect reality or notion of origin, but function self-referentially. As Baudrillard asserts:

…where the distinction between poles can no longer be maintained, one enters into simulation, and hence into absolute manipulation…It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself.56

By functioning as a simulation, Healy proposes the Queer skinhead’s pastiche of (straight) skinhead signifiers disavows the ability of the skinhead to remain real. Consequently, the masculinity of all skinheads can be called into question; the implication made that all skinheads function as simulations, as parodies of themselves. Furthermore, Healy concludes the visibility of Queer skinheads verifies the possibility of anyone being a skinhead, declaring:

…with gay men unwittingly looking like skinheads, dressing up as skinheads and being real skinheads, the skinhead as a symbol of straight, white, working-class masculinity is queered: potentially anyone can be a skinhead – even if they hate being a skinhead.57

The central question that troubles Healy’s analysis is whether the mimicry of heterosexuality by gay male subjects really has the potential to transform radically the stability of masculinity. James Haines takes up this questioning, and rejects Healy’s assertion that Queer skinheads expose skinhead realness as an imitation. Haines asserts instead such a conclusion overlooks a notion of skinhead authenticity, an authenticity that Haines argues, rigidly structures the acceptance of skinheads and Queer skinheads alike. Haines highlights a distinction between those male subjects considered ‘real skins’, and those discounted as fashion skins58 arguing, “not every man – gay or otherwise – who
shaves his head and puts on a pair of bovver boots and braces will be regarded by skins (even Queer skins) as a skinhead”. Interestingly, Marshall would argue conversely that notions of quality control have never regulated the skinhead cult, so therefore “anyone can claim to be a skinhead and as long as he looks the part who’s to say he’s not?”

In the course of a “discourse-centered” ethnographical study of the Internet organization “The Queer Skinhead Brotherhood”, Haines maintains Queer skinheads neither consider their appearance as subterfuge or a subversive play with identity, but rather, take seriously an interest in preserving the skinhead’s conservative notion of masculinity. Haines argues:

Far from queering the skinhead, the great majority of the Queer Skinhead Brotherhood skins set for themselves the same standards of skinhead authenticity recognized by straight skinheads, whose code of masculine behavior they aspire to follow. Queer Theory to the contrary, most Queer Skinhead Brotherhood members show no inclination to call the authenticity of skinhead masculinity into question. They are only too happy to claim it as their own, either because skinhead masculinity is a quality which they brought with them to the Queer Skinhead Brotherhood or because it is a quality to which freshcuts in the group aspire to.

Haines further questions Healy’s argument at the level of interpretation asking, “who (aside from ardent Queer Theorists) actually sees the realness and masculinity of the skinhead thus exposed”. Haines rejects Healy’s conclusion that Queer skinheads simply *queer the skinhead*, proposing instead that the masquerade of skinhead signifiers in gay male subculture function as sites of disidentification for gay male subjects, and might better be said to *skin the queer*. What Haines’ argument infers then, is that in *skinning the queer* gay male subjects approach the skinhead in an attempt to disassociate from a history of institutionalized effeminacy. While the widespread incorporation of skinhead signifiers in contemporary gay culture provides evidence of the skinhead’s capacity to operate as a fashionable style, what is more compelling is Haines’ re-articulation of gay male subjectivity that is linked to an identification with the skinhead’s (heterosexist) masculinity and desire for ‘real’ men. This is not to conflate how a subject identifies, and how it desires,
but to contend the existence of overlapping identifications and desires in the configuration of the Queer skinhead. As Butler suggests:

To identify is not to oppose desire. Identification is a phantasmatic trajectory and resolution of desire; an assumption of place; a territorializing of an object which enables identity through the temporary resolution of desire, but which remains desire, if only in its repudiated form.  

For many Queer skinheads, the dominant expectation of effeminacy has not only been pathologized as inherent to gay male subjectivity, but also to an essentialist driven construction of gay identity. An example of this can be seen in the political validity made by lesbian and gay activists and theorists to radical effeminists. In response to gay men’s visible identification with masculinity, radical effeminists attested that the political and sexual liberation of gay men rested with the wholesale acceptance and adoption of effeminacy as a strategic tool of empowerment. Yet as many Queer skinheads assert, their identification with the skinhead functions to repudiate this expectation- it is concerned with “challenging the preconceived notions of mainstream society, including those of politically correct gay society.” The Queer skinhead’s disidentification might be seen then as operating as a form of resistance to regulatory norms, both within a hegemonic normalcy, and within Queer communities, that paralyze gay male subjects into fixed social and sexual identities. As Butler would even infer, such collective disidentification could “facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern”. However, while Queer skinhead culture might be rejecting preconceived notions of gayness, this subcultural fetish still conforms, albeit in an exaggerated way, to the heterosexist expectations of men and masculinity. As such, gay male subculture’s pride in being particularly masculine, might also be understood as an attempt to conceal the subject’s homosexuality through cultural subterfuge.

The arguments made by Bell et al., for the effects of Queer appropriations of the skinhead take up many of the points raised by Healy and Haines. Yet they also argue that not only is heterosexual masculinity’s claim to originality and naturalness destabilized by parodic
contest\textsuperscript{67}, but that Queer appropriations also illuminate the unnaturalness and operation of heterosexual everyday space. Bell et al. suggest by inhabiting a seemingly heterosexual identity, gay male subjects can create Queer space through the power of the gaze, proposing: “the skinhead look is not a closet style, but a visible or clearly delineated look that makes it easy for those "in the know" to distinguish. This visibility means that through the mutually-constituting exchange of glances on the street, gay skinheads create a queer space in a heterosexual world”\textsuperscript{68} What Bell et al. fail to acknowledge in this exchange of meaning, is how other members of the gay community can misread the intentions of the subject deploying skinhead signifiers. While Bell et al. would argue Queer skinheads can avoid associations to Fascism because it is “the intentions of the author of the identity, rather than the perceptions of the viewer” that is imperative, a black gay male subject who has internalized the visual codes of the skinhead as “the uniform of the oppressor”, is unlikely to be reassured by the appropriations parodic potential. What the argument of Bell et al. highlights then is a fundamental contradiction between intentionality and reception that is also characteristic of Healy and Haines’ arguments.

Another problem with the analysis made by Bell et al. is the misreading made of Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Lisa Walker notes this in suggesting:

…the problem with the rhetoric of intentionality that creeps into Bell et. al’s discussion of how we can self-consciously perform genders in subversive ways is not just that it falls back on philosophical essentialism about subjectivity…[but that] an account of subjectivity that relies too heavily on intentionality does not take into account how people are compelled and constrained by the very regulatory norms of gender identity that are the conditions of our resistance.\textsuperscript{69}

Butler’s theory of gender performativity develops out of the contention that gender and “sexed bodies”, neither constructed in culture, nor the products of an essential psychical or biological 'core', are materialized through a series of re-iterated acts in language. Gender, Butler argues is performative, citing J.L. Austin’s term for a speech act where "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action".\textsuperscript{70} Butler contends subjects do not have
gender identities as a result of genders, psychology or psychosexual experiences, but rather at various points adopt a presumably “fixed” gender or “fixed” sexuality as a result of a matrix of power relations. In this analysis of the subject, performativity is constituted not as an action that a subject literally performs, but a process through which the subject is constituted. It is therefore not a singular act or event, but a ritualized production, or a stylized repetition of acts. Butler maintains that if gender is performative, that is, if the discourse of gender produces the effects it names, then the pre-existing gender identity, the fictions of gender that Butler refers to as a “mythical gender core” are revealed as a subterfuge:

If gender attributes the acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural significance, are performative, there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction.71

Butler uses the practice of ‘drag’ to highlight this regulatory fiction and illustrate how heterosexual norms are reintroduced within gay context, and consequently how this discourse creates notions of naturalness. Utilizing ‘drag’ to define how men can (and do) imitate women, Butler similarly suggests women also imitate other women in their performance of gender. Butler states: “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency”.72 In its literal artificiality ‘drag’ offers then an effective cultural model for dismantling the assumptions that privilege certain genders and sexualities by attributing ‘natural’ and ‘original’ to them. As such, “from a self conscious de-naturalized position we can see how the appearance of naturalness is constituted”.73

As Butler concedes, if we acknowledge the subject as produced, regulated and constrained by the reiterative powers of discourse, then we must begin to question who, and what, are responsible for constructing gay male subjects. By addressing the masculinization of gay male subculture and the representations of homosexuality deployed in gay male video pornography, these influences can be addressed to reveal how patriarchal power structures,
in the development of the commercial gay scene, have disseminated *particular* images and modes of identifications for the gay male subject.
PERVERSE PHYSICALITIES: GAY VIDEO PORN & THE MASCULINIZATION OF GAY MALE SUBCULTURE

The Queer skinhead is not the first masculine identity to be introduced into gay male subculture, nor the first to be highly criticized for its identification with heterosexist masculinities. As early as the 1950s, the image of the biker had spread and subsequently transformed into a self-regulating gay subculture deeply entangled with issues of hypermasculinism, fetishism and sadomasochism. The physicality of the biker, like the skinhead, contrasted with the effeminacy, fragility, and neuroticism that had been historically attributed to homosexuals both in popular representations and in medical and psychological discourses. The biker image’s sense of commonality likewise, contrasted with the characterization of homosexuality as an individual plight or personal pathology, such that a shared style de-emphasized individuation and subjectivism as the basis for homosexual identification. What the biker also introduced was a transformation in the eroticization of the gay male subject, wherein homoeroticism was brought to infer the homomasculine. This transformation signaled a shift away from the relationship gay subculture had with Greek Classicism, in which androgynous adolescents were positioned as sexual ideals, toward a rougher physicality in the gay male body.

The advent of *The Young Londoners* magazine is an example of the introduction of such masculine representation into the sexual imaginary of gay male subjects. Healy chronicles the transformation of *The Young Londoners* magazine to a club in 1970 as an important stage in the development of masculine gay identities. The availability of images of masculine gay subjects (in particular those of Queer skinheads) to both readers and patrons of the club, Healy argues, enabled gay men to not only fantasize about the men depicted but also to identify with them. As Healy states: “the invitation to desire through the photographs became an invitation to identify at the club: masculine sex idols went from being sited in an ambiguous heterosexual distance to an avowedly gay presence”. The Queer skinhead can also be contextualized within this history of masculine appropriations and identifications as a British successor to the US clone of the leather man. More so, Bell et. al. would argue that nostalgia underscores the succession of the Queer skinhead, suggesting the figure “stands
for a resexualization of the gay body” which reverts back to a ‘Golden Age’ of sexualized gay male representation pre-AIDS that the leatherman often recalls. Yet a differentiation must be argued between the social meaning of the skinhead and the leather man, and the impact such ideological meaning has for an analysis of gay male subculture and the formation of gay male subjectivity. While both might be sexually charged identities, and styles that have co-opted images of masculine dominance and coveted their homoerotic potential, the political significance of the skinhead renders an analysis of masculine appropriations far more problematical.

The presence of masculine signifiers and identities in gay male subculture is often characterized as an attempt to readdress the dominant expectations of effeminacy, by disclosing a veneration of “masculinity and its associated machismo”. In its collective dissociation from effeminacy, it positions effeminacy as undesirable, and in doing so valorizes those phallic identities that preserve conservative notions of masculinity. The central argument against such appropriations is that by positioning a specifically heterosexist masculinity as desirable, masculine gay identities become agents for the acceptance of those masculine qualities like toughness, virility, aggression, strength and potency that form the backbone to patriarchal oppressions. As Seymour Kleinberg argues, such appropriations function to eroticize “the most oppressive images of sexual violence and dominance…the very values of straight society that have tyrannized [homosexuals]”. Gay male subculture is then responsible for not critiquing these qualities, but fetishistically preserving them. As Healy proposes, gay male subculture eroticizes the skinhead “precisely because they represent and preserve all these conservative notions of masculinity”. Associations to misogyny and homophobia then are not challenged, but instead, as Butler contends “what emerges is a clear picture of the power dynamics characteristic of the patriarchal, historical reality”. As such, it is argued the social contexts from which these qualities derive their meaning and power cannot be disassociated, and therefore the association to patriarchy cannot be eliminated. The manifestation of masculine qualities and identities in the subcultural styles and practices of leather and uniforms are then said arguably to reproduce these oppressions.
The celebration of (heterosexual) masculine images is also seen as a means of passing as “straight”, and therefore masculine gay identities are argued to be self-oppressive and symptomatic of internalized homophobia. Indeed this performance of heterosexuality is at odds with the necessity that gay liberation makes to the active visibility of Queer identified subjects. In Healy’s reasoning, masculine gay identities reveal the gay male subject’s perverse desire to imitate their oppressor, and that gay male subjects identify with their oppressors in order to protect themselves from homophobic violence.\textsuperscript{83} Stiles’ argument that the skinhead already embodied a perverse identification with the oppressor complicates this identification. In the context of the Queer skinhead, what does it mean if the masculine gay subject identifies with an oppressor who itself already identifies with its oppressor to counter its position as oppressed? Indeed Leo Bersani argues that gay male desire will inevitably include “the potential for a loving identification with one’s enemies”.\textsuperscript{84} The characterization of such identification will exist, Bersani continues, because,

…sexual desire for men can’t be merely a kind of culturally neutral attraction to a Platonic Idea of the male body; the object of that desire necessarily includes a socially determined and socially pervasive definition of what it means to be a man.\textsuperscript{85}

Likewise, the characterization of gay representation in gay male pornography has been criticized for submitting to a logic that valorizes straight masculinity, and in doing so disavowing homosexuality. For Mark Simpson, the masculinization of gay representation in video pornography depicts, “not gay men having sex but ‘straight’ men having gay sex…thus what gay porn does is to represent a world in which men have sex with other men where there is no such thing as ‘gay.’”\textsuperscript{86} Richard Dyer sees a similarity in arguing gay and straight male video pornography share respectively equivalent filmic narratives. Dyer states further that such a similarity in narrative structure makes gay male pornography “analogous to aspects of the social construction of both male sexuality in general, and gay male practice in particular”.\textsuperscript{87} This can be identified in what Dyer terms is the “goal-directed narrative” of pornography, where following in the social construction of male sexuality, ejaculation signifies a male subject’s sexual mastery.
Dyer notes however, that narrative is only one element in a full analysis of pornography. One of the major elements Dyer contends that needs more investigating is the use of iconography – “dress and setting, and especially performers, the male types that are used, porn stars’ images and so on… [that are] all drenched in ideological meaning”. Where Dyer leaves the iconographic elements of gay male pornography undeveloped, is where the semiotic analysis of Skin Flick seeks to return. However, before approaching the film’s textual codes, this analysis seeks to unravel the nexus of fetishism, sadomasochism, and fascism, which underscores Queer appropriations of the skinhead. Furthermore, the discussion of this nexus seeks to continue questioning how gay male subjects relate to masculinity, and derive symbols to articulate their sexual desires and practices.
FETISHISM: TRAUMATIC AMNESIA & THE ANXIETY OF REPRESENTATION

In the context of gay male subculture, the concepts of fetish identities, objects and images, derive symbolic meaning from their associations to male corporeality and phallicism. These associations operate such that the logic of phallicism forms a point of continuity between gay and heterosexual male subjects. Alternatively, that these associations read the fetishization of the skinhead within gay male subculture as inferring a conflation between phallocentric masculinity, and the practices and definitions of male homosexuality deployed by gay male subculture. If as David Halperin argues, the Phallus operates as “a culturally constructed signifier of social power”, in establishing a visual discourse of phallocentrism, it can be argued the Phallus links masculine power to sexuality. Within such a framework, representations of Queer skinheads illustrate a relationship between power and sexuality through the fetishization of the skinhead’s dress codes, which in turn fetishize the gay male body with a series of phallic attributes. Indeed, the fetishized Queer skinhead operates as a more erotic and powerful signification than its punk predecessors, as it capitalizes on the phallic nature of the skinhead, without the self-effacing irony that is characteristic of post-punk appropriations.

Because the dress codes of the skinhead function as the primary signifier of the figure’s phallocentrism, Queer appropriations can also be argued as constructing a more exaggerated phallic figure. In constructing a more phallic image, the size and visibility of the skinhead’s Doc Marten boots become greater, denim jeans become tighter so as to pornographically reveal the male body, and the bomber jacket is incorporated so as to exaggerate the subject’s shoulders and thus body scale. Hair is also often totally shaved off to render the subject more masculine by disavowing any association hair might have with femininity. It is precisely because the dress codes of the skinhead operate as phallic signifiers that an eroticisation of the Queer skinhead often requires no nudity. As an amateur video of Queer skinheads [Fig.4] indicates, in pornographic depictions, Queer skinheads often remain either totally dressed throughout sexual episodes, or retain a significant amount of clothing to denote and maintain the skinhead’s phallic disposition.
This image is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Since fetishes have the ability to distinguish a subject’s sexual identification, desires and practices, the fetish’s ability to deploy style as a form of communication means its usage also operates within the various discourses of fashion. Yet Stewart Home defines a central difference in interpreting the relationships between fetish and fashion, stating that while:

…both fetish and fashion are systems that create meaning by differentiating garments, endowing details with significance, and establishing links between certain aspects of clothing and worldly activities…fashion and fetish part company in the use they make of uniforms, which for sadomasochists function as costumes. While fashion choice signifies personal aspirations, the theatrical deployment of military uniforms on the fetish scene stems from atavistic urges.91

Queer appropriations of the skinhead signal a resurgence of *atavistic urges* for a re-masculinization by the gay male subject. And such fetishism is also prefaced by the fetishistic motivations described in the skinhead’s original appropriation of black youth subcultural styles, as well as the hypermasculinist reworkings of Punk. Healy therefore suggests Queer skinheads operate as a reworking of an already *doubly fetishized* form of masculinity. As Healy maintains, “any gay man who has adopted the skinhead identity since 1980 is consciously eroticizing an already doubly fetishized hard manliness”.92 For Healy this fetishization of the skinhead functions as an effect of *traumatic amnesia*, where the presence of masculine signifiers in gay male subculture serves to repudiate the femininity associated with homosexuality. The presence of these Phallic fetishes seeks to reinstate hegemonic masculinity at the level of appearance, and as Healy contends function as “an attempt to forget that queers are not real men”.93 As Healy continues:

Where one is the same as one’s sexual partner, the partner’s castration would infer one’s own, so the femininity of both must be denied through the fetish. The penis alone is not protection enough; the phallic fetishes guard against castration inherent in earlier homosexual identities, reinstating them as real men.94
Implicit in Healy’s reading of the gay male subject’s relationship to the Phallus, is a reevaluation of Freud’s deployment of the fetish and its political permutations. Fetishism, Freud argues is an exclusively male perversion that functions as a defensive reaction to the discovery of sexual difference. In Freud’s conceptualization, the fetish operates as a primary substitute for the normal sexual object. While it resembles the usual sexual object or bears some relation to it, the fetishized sexual object is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim. The fetish serves to safeguard the male subject from sexual difference and the threat of castration that is realized in the mother after acknowledging female genitalia. It functions simultaneously to protect the male subject from the threat of castration, and furthermore to repudiate the potential of the male subject becoming homosexual by reinstating the Phallus. The implication apparent in this acquisition of the fetish, is that the male subject will require the Phallus rather than the penis itself. Given the protective nature of the fetish in Freud’s analysis, we might also consider how the presence of clothing in pornographic representations of Queer skinheads might be argued to function as a means of denying the possibility of the gay male subject being penetrable.

Jacques Lacan’s conceptualization of the Phallus furthers this distinction between the penis and the Phallus by conceiving the former as biological and the latter as a symbolic property, as an effect of signification. For Lacan the Phallus must operate in a dialectical manner: that subjects function within the heterosexual matrix of sexual difference, of either having or being the Phallus. Lacan’s theory of sexual differentiation posits the female subject as desirable by being the Phallus and the male subject closest to being identified with having the Phallus. However, Lacan’s theory of sexual differentiation is potentially contested by representations of Queer skinheads, in that the interplay between desire and masculinity present in its fetishization contests the logic that sees “being” and “having” as mutually exclusive. Such a challenge would also problematize Healy’s assumptions, which fails to work outside of the same heteronormative matrix deployed by Freud and Lacan. This can be argued, by proposing that gay male subcultural appropriations of phallic signifiers indicate that Queer skinheads pose as their masculine personas, essentially performing their masculinity, and in doing so might be said to have the Phallus. Yet the Queer skinhead also represents the desire for another to possess them. In as much as being a skinhead in gay
male subculture is a clearly recognized type, highly fetishized and highly desirable because of its representation of hypermasculinity, such a desire might also infer then the potential for the Queer skinhead to also be the Phallus.

Consequently, the central problem that arises in a conceptualization of fetishism, is the absence of an understanding of the role the Phallus plays within a homosexual context. Luce Irigaray’s reconsideration of the Phallus tackles this problem, arguing that in homosexual contexts the Phallus is disempowered. Irigaray states: “once the penis itself becomes merely a means to pleasure, pleasure among men, the Phallus loses its power”. 96 Disempowered, the Phallus becomes not a signifier of difference, but of sameness. Yet there is a difficulty in this rhetoric as patriarchal societies are argued, by Irigaray, to be “homosexual monopolies” among men, and that homosexuality functions as their “organizing principle”. What Irigaray contends then is that overt homosexual relations are only prohibited because “they openly interpret the law according to which society operates”. 97 For Irigaray the Phallus also symbolizes lack in the female subject, as both Freud and Lacan effectively characterize women as castrated men. Irigaray further suggests that if language (for Lacan) is irreducibly phallic, the only way a female subject can speak or communicate is to appropriate the masculine, for women to speak like men. Such a process bears similarities to Healy’s assertion; such that we might contend that gay male subjects internalize identification with hegemonic masculinity in order to speak, to be cognitive, to subjugate the historical positioning of homosexuality as a marginalized, mute Other. Additionally, we might also argue that Queer skinheads have agency, only through the Phallus (either having or being) and its associated masculinity.

The paradoxical relationship between concealment and disclosure that characterizes Healy and Freud’s conceptualization of fetishism, is also present in Laura Mulvey’s deployment of fetishism as a key concept in the analysis of the political aesthetics of Hollywood cinema. Given that this investigation of Queer skinheads will be localized within the film praxis of LaBruce, Mulvey’s observations on the power dynamics of cinematic vision are important to note here. In Mulvey’s reading, fetishism is “a structure that arises out of, as a consequence of, the difficulty of representing reality”. 98
What Mulvey terms as a *difficulty in representing reality* is an anxiety in articulating the relationship between representation and referentiality, and in the case of the fetish, it is always haunted by this relationship and “the fragility of the mechanisms that sustain it”. Mulvey’s work links this suspension of belief to a conceptualization of power implicit in cinematic representation and the reception of it by the viewer. This conceptualization of power positions a notion of cultural power of men over women and the film text over the spectator. Cinematic viewing is described in relation to both the voyeuristic process of objectification of the female character and the narcissistic process of identification with an “ideal ego” seen on the screen. Mulvey argues that in patriarchal society “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” and that “the determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly”. Mulvey goes on to distinguish two modes of looking for the male subject: voyeuristic and fetishistic. Presented in Freudian terms as a response to the male subject’s castration anxiety, Mulvey argues voyeuristic looking involves a controlling gaze and fetishistic looking, in contrast, involves “the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous”.

What Mulvey fails to acknowledge in this analysis of the power dynamics inherent in vision and fetishism, is foremost that vision cannot be identified merely as masculine, but rather as Elizabeth Grosz suggests, certain systems of using vision can reproduce patriarchal power relations – for example objectification. Mulvey’s rigid positioning of the female subject as fetishized object also denies the possibility of the male subject being objectified. Such assertions become problematical when introduced into homoerotic representation, because as Mercer implies, “The gendered hierarchy of seeing / being seen is not so rigidly coded in homoerotic representation, since sexual sameness liquidates the associative oppositions between active subject and passive object”. In the context of gay male subculture to be the object of an admiring gaze is not necessarily to be passive, because as the example of the Queer skinhead attests, the male subject is actively being the Phallus.
Yet what happens when we start to think of the fetish as a signifier of sexual activity and thus the sexual activity of Queer skinheads? Given that homosexual desire is reterritorialized in gay male subculture through the fetishization of hypermasculine images, its deployment within a context of sadomasochism seems a natural recourse. But given that these representations are also over coded with issues of trauma and anxiety, does the Queer skinhead have implications for, or perhaps redefine conceptions of sexual roles for gay male subjects? While such a redefinition might be analogous to the power dynamics explored in the subcultural traditions of leather, the skinhead’s social meaning problematizes a simple subversion of power dynamics. Queer skinheads are marked by a difference, in that all participants of any sexual activity would be already coded, or aligned with a violent penetrative masculinity.
SADOMASOCHISM: SKIN SEX & THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE PHALLUS

In its characterization, the Queer skinhead is often linked intimately with what has been termed as skin sex – those sexual practices and desires that involve an eroticization of power and powerlessness. As Rosner contends, “rough sex is always more likely to come with rough looks” suggesting further “skins are into shaving more than just their heads…skinheads often like rough sex, watersports and discipline”.105 The interplay of the power dynamics characteristic of such sexual practices, are what characterize both an analysis of gay male sadomasochism (hereafter referred to as SM), and depictions of Queer skinheads where hypermasculinity extends beyond appearance to denote sexual practices. Indeed it could be argued that the visibility of sadomasochistic symbols and practices have become so normalized within representations of Queer skinheads, that they appear both ubiquitous and beyond reproach. And because the Queer skinhead still operates within a heterosexual matrix of power relations, the Queer skinhead fetish scene has increased the presence of master / slave role-playing within a gay male consciousness. Furthermore, while an analysis of fetishism has pointed to the reconceptualization of the Phallus in homosexual contexts through phallic signifiers, gay male SM can be characterized as a critical site that reinstates the Phallus, by incorporating difference into a homoerotic sexual economy. Irigaray’s acknowledgment of “sameness” is then disavowed by the operation of difference that typifies the interplay of dialectics such as dominant / submissive, master / slave and masculine / feminine.

An analysis of the associations between gay male SM, Queer skinheads, and SM discourses to an understanding of gay male subjectivity is complicated also by the need to draw a distinction between gay male and lesbian SM. Such a distinction highlights the extent to which each has a different history, and how each gender has been partisan to different cultural struggles. It should be argued that gay male SM does not need to address a historical positioning of woman as passive objects or of masculinized desire in the same way that lesbian SM does. However, a similarity can be identified in the rejection each makes of the cultural stereotypes that surround male and female homosexuality. For the context of this analysis, both will be located as a reclamation and resignification of power dynamics, with
Lesbian SM emerging as a response to discourses that desexualize lesbian subjects, and gay male SM a response to discourses that feminize gay male subjects. As David Savran suggests, gay male SM was developed in part as a response to an anxiety over the feminization of gay male subjects, an anxiety that positions homosexuality as a form of gender deviance:

Having been stripped of their masculine identification by a theory of sexual inversion that attempts to position gay men, because they desire other men, on the terrain of femininity, leathermen were determined to prove they were real men and to reclaim the aggressive and brooding masculinity associated with the “wild ones” like Marlon Brando and James Dean.106

To understand this strategy of resignification and self-representation, for gay male subjects in particular, it is important to revisit the debates that have polarized an analysis of SM and homosexuality. These debates are pivoted on the question of whether a desire for domination undermines that domination, provides opposition to it, or merely reinforces that domination. Anti-SM discourses born out of Radical Lesbian Feminism, attest that the power dynamics emulated in SM are fundamentally a patriarchal eroticization of violence, arguing that SM is “firmly rooted in patriarchal sexual ideology, with its emphasis on the fragmentation of desire from the rest of our lives”.107 Indeed it could be argued, homosexual desire, certainly in male subjects, is already so stigmatized within a hegemonic normalcy that it is already divorced from ordinary lives through the processes of heterosexism and violence. Anti-SM discourses attest furthermore that when a black subject participates within SM practices as a submissive agent, the subject’s racial difference introduces other forms of social oppressions. Butler condemns SM scenarios then for ignoring the specificity of historical and social contexts, arguing that the separation of the ‘public/private’ and the ‘social/sexual’ is made so “distinct that the power relations in sexuality do not have anything to do with power relations [in the outside world]”.108 What emerges then for Butler is a clear picture of how the SM movement “glorifies the life of fantasy to the point where the public realm all but disappears”.109
For Pat Califia however, SM is truly radical in its ability to “challenge…the very meaning we assign to all sexual acts”. Pro-SM discourses like those of Califia are structured around the contention that all sexual relationships and sexualities are socially constructed in a dialectical way, such that the sexual development of a subject transpires within “an alienating social context”. Respectively, such contra-arguments maintain that a distinction must be drawn between what are real forms of power and violence, and what are SM forms of power and violence. For Foucault no sexuality or sexual relationship is without the expression of power through the positions of domination and submission, and one must always consider context and the limits of agency. As Foucault asserts: “we must not think by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality”. Indeed Foucault argues for power to be considered a necessary component to all relationships, and accordingly SM to be understood as a “strategic game”, in which subjects invent “new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their bodies”. In the context of gay male subculture, one might add that the motivation for “playing” such games is deeply influenced by a backdrop of socialization, those processes that give rise to the violence of structural relationships such as homophobia and internalized hatred. Foucault goes further to suggest SM is also:

…a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call a desexualization of pleasure…One can say that SM is the eroticisation of power, the eroticisation of strategic relations…the SM game…a strategic relation, because it is always fluid…even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game; either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tactic, that makes them aware of certain boundaries.

Halperin argues what Foucault terms as desexualization, is not merely the detachment of pleasure from sexual acts, but what SM does is to detach sexual pleasure from genital specificity, such that pleasure is neither localized nor dependent on the genitals. What emerges then for Foucault is an ability to re-address the relationship gay male subculture has with phallic signifiers, such that they can be interpreted as a valorization of masochism. As Foucault states:
Beneath the sign and under the shelter of these masculine theatrical displays, the sexual relations that take place reveal themselves to be, rather, valorizations of a masochistic sort...What these signs and symbols of masculinity are for is not to go back to something that would be on the order of phallocraticism, of machismo, but rather to invent oneself, to make one’s body into the site of production of extraordinary polymorphous pleasures, pleasures that at the same time are detached from the valorization of the genitals and especially of the male genitals.116

Similarly, in attempting to analyze this problematical relationship between masculinity, SM and homosexuality, Savran contends that if discourses of gay male SM are concerned with a “recuperation of an active and powerful masculinity”,117 then the masculinization of gay male subculture “represents a disavowal of his castration”.118 Savran argues further that gay male SM attests to both the violent social and political oppressions of gay men, and like Foucault, that desire will always be socially produced and marked by histories of oppression. Savran, contrary to Butler’s assertion, also maintains that in disrupting the binary distinctions of public / private, SM actually strengthens the conception that the private is “the central determining feature, not just of subjectivity, but of the social as well”.119 This is because the private is the space of the self, where a subject internalizes the public, and makes it part of one’s subjectivity.

Yet Healy’s arguments, concerning the relationship Queer skinheads have to sadomasochism, problematize these conceptions of public/private and social/sexual. For Healy, the skinhead enters the sexual imaginary of gay male subjects through its association historically to queerbashing. Queerbashing in a social context is the ritualized violence against unconsenting subjects perceived to be Queer or effeminate - a punishment for being homosexual. For Healy, this punishment for being homosexual is transformed within the sexual imaginary of gay subculture and the “violent act of a (straight) queerbasher bashing a (queer) victim becomes a sexual act between two queers”.120 In such a transition, the staging of corporeal punishment scenarios might then be interpreted then as symbolic ways
for gay male subjects to allow themselves to be punished. Healy develops further the ramifications of such a disbanding of the distinction between sex and violence, stating:

If there really is no difference between sex and violence, gay and straight, then queerbashing (on the street, executed by straight) was always/already a queer act that could be enjoyed sexually by both the unwilling queer victim and the queered aggressor in the same way as a gay bedroom scenario.¹²¹

While Healy’s rationale enables a transgression from the otherwise debilitating binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, sex/violence and victim/aggressor, it gives too simplistic a resolution to what are very complex power formations. While this analysis of the Queer skinhead does not purport to have an answer to the dilemma provoked by this seeming conflation of social violence into sexual practice, it should be argued that the notion that gay male SM replicates the oppressive features of patriarchy is an over-simplification. Furthermore, that the only way to address the complex workings of power is to examine specific texts individually to see what effects they produce. In the context of this analysis, this point will be argued by localizing an analysis of Queer skinheads within the textual codes of Skin Flick.

Given that representations of Queer skinheads foreground the image as a fetish, or as Healy notes an accumulation of fetishes, and that the image’s dominant context remains that of gay male SM; debates surrounding the eroticisation of masculinity, fetishism and SM’s eroticisation of power, have converged on discourses of fascism. Indeed Susan Sontag notes a natural link between gay male SM and fascism, suggesting the eroticization of fascism (in particular Nazism) is most visible in gay male subcultures. For Sontag the deployment of such signifiers operates as part of “the theatricalization of sexuality”,¹²² where subjects take part in the “rehearsal of enslavement rather than its enactment”.¹²³ But given that fascism and its symbols function within our collective experience as the greatest emblem of domination, the Queer skinheads associations to Fascism proves more complex than just a staging of sexual dominance and submission. Indeed, what the Queer skinhead reveals is a volatile continuum between the aesthetics of fascism and homoeroticism, which inevitably
problematizes the construction of an essentialist driven gay identity. As Sontag would surmise, this difficult situation because, “the colour is black, the material is leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, [and] the fantasy is death”.124
In Stephen Frears’ *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986), the character of Nasser asks his nephew’s new boyfriend whether the undertaking of a homosexual relationship has meant he has given up being a skinhead. Nasser jokingly asks Johnny: “do you give a good pink rinse, or are you still a fascist?” What Nasser’s question signals is the unintelligibility in acknowledging any relationship between homosexuality and fascism, and the anxiety such a relationship would infer in the conceptualization of gay male subjectivity. Indeed the absence of such a relationship is arguably an effect of the framing of gay male subjectivity, as it is traditionally aligned with a political mode of libertarianism that perceives sexual identity in terms of equal rights. Such a model would seek to deny the possibility of any coexistence of Queer and fascist, since the persecution of homosexuals by Nazi regimes would negate its ability to be a form of identification. Yet what representations of Queer skinheads reveal, is how gay male subjects are deeply entangled with fascism, suggesting foremost a relationship between the representational strategies used in discourses of white power, with those of gay male eroticism. By investigating further, the historical associations that link skinheads to fascism and the codes of fascist regimes that paradoxically prohibit yet require homosexual behavior, an understanding of why such joint representational strategies are created and utilized can be foreground. What such strategies reveal is how the masculinity of both fascism and skinheads are constructed, and therefore can be seen deploying stylization, and masquerade, as figures that problematize any convenient or simplistic binary coding.

Healy maintains that a plurality of motivations might inform Queer appropriations of the skinhead, ranging from a sexual fascination that invokes SM fantasies, to social objectives that invoke a desire for the sexualized masculinity of the fascist skinhead itself. What invariably links these motives is, “the idea that masculinity equals authenticity equals violent aggression, and that the skinhead is all of these to the supreme degree”\textsuperscript{125} and as Healy states furthermore, that “choosing the skinhead as a sexual rather than political identity doesn’t drain the skinhead of its political significance”.\textsuperscript{126} Even while homophobia has been a foundation of Nazism and many other far-right movements, for Healy the
equation between masculinity, authenticity and violence concludes a direct relationship between homosexuality and fascism. Inherent in such a relationship are mutual strategies of self-representation that are preoccupied not merely with normative masculinity, but with the exploitation of hypermasculinism. As Healy argues:

Of course, the skinhead is not fundamentally Nazi any more than it is fundamentally homosexual. It’s just a pile of clothes and a shaved head. But the fact that the look has remained so persistent among homosexual and Nazis – and almost no one else – is significant. It suggests that homosexuals and fascists share similar ideas about masculinity. Homosexuals and Nazis are attracted to the skinhead because it represents a fixed, essentialist and ultimately fascistic mythology of authentic masculinity.127

Healy considers then a direct historical correlation between the advent of far-right appropriations of the skinhead in the 1980s, and the rise of the skinhead as a fetish in gay male subculture. Healy argues Queer appropriations directly correlate with the motivations of the far right’s appropriations, in that both are attracted to the image of the skinhead for its exposition of an ‘authentic’ masculinity. As Healy suggests:

…since the original skinhead movement was an attempt to reassert conservative masculinity in the face of cultural change, skinheads have a particular investment in authenticity, the fixing of identity and the preservation of boundaries, which, in the current sociological organization, lends itself to conservative ideologies and far-right politics.128

While Healy’s revisionism of the skinhead has demonstrated the existence of gay men throughout the history of the skinhead cult, so too can Healy’s revisionism be used to reveal the existence of gay fascist skinheads. The most significant example here is Nicky Crane who was a leader of the Kent division of the British Movement Leader Guard and a prominent skinhead leader throughout the early 1980s.129 Crane is the archetypal Nazi skinhead; so much so that Crane’s picture adorned the cover of the seminal Oi album Strength Through Oi!130 As a fascist skinhead Crane was noted for his violent behavior,
which included glamorized accounts of gay bashing. Yet at the same time, Crane was also an active gay man, to the extent that Crane, unbeknownst to other Neo-Nazis appeared in a number of hardcore gay male pornographic films. Crane finally came out on the Channel 4 program “Skin Complex” in September 1992, claiming that since coming to terms with his sexuality he had dropped out of right wing politics. In this interview Crane also revealed that his long-time partner was an older Jewish man, and in the following year after the broadcast of the interview Crane died of AIDS related illnesses.

While the example of Crane highlights historically the existence of gay fascist identities, the notion there might be gay Nazis still strikes many as implausible. Healy suggests this is partly because the notion of ‘gay rights’ is “a product of leftist activism, and partly because homosexuals were a target of far-right groups”. Yet as Klaus Theweleit observes in Freicorps and National Socialist discourse, there remains no inherent contradiction. Theweleit’s analysis of male sexuality, positions the relationship between homosexuality and fascism in relation to a study of Nazi masculinist ideology, which preserves an ambivalent relationship to the feminine, such that it simultaneously exalts and denigrates the feminine. As a result, Theweleit demonstrates how fascist cultural organizations in fact require homosexual activity, while ostensibly prohibiting it. Theweleit observes the use made of homosexual practices by the Third Reich as a form of self-maintenance and anal sex as a practice intended to disempower the revolutionary potential of homosexuality. For as Theweleit suggests, “Anal penetration comes to represent the opening of social prisons, admissions into a hidden dungeon that guards the keys to a recuperation of the revolutionary dimension of desire – ‘revolutionary’ in the sense that it is a ‘desire to desire’”.132

For Marshall however, the far right’s appropriation of the skinhead has been consistently misinterpreted, and suggests it wasn’t “so much the skinhead turning to Nazism but Nazis turning to the skinhead”.133 Indeed the original skinhead did not operate through organized political movements, and it wasn’t until the late 1970s revival of the image that Neo-Nazi movements conscripted the image. While the appropriation and politicization of youth subcultures by ideologies is an important issue, what is significantly more important is how
as Marek Kohn suggests, British youth subculture’s use of fascist visual imagery moved from being considered as merely kitsch, to operating on a psychological level. For Kohn such imagery was considerably more psychological than political, as fascist signifiers were used as a form of “symbolic terrorism”. Kohn’s suggestion here, supports Sontag’s notion of the self-conscious masquerade present in the eroticization of fascism, which for its subjects operates as “a form of gratification that is both violent and indirect, very mental”.

If an aspect of Fascism is concerned with the stylization of power and sexuality through masquerade, then the Web-based e-group *Swastika Knights* describes this stylization within a homoerotic sexual economy. *Swastika Knights* identifies itself as:

…a man-to-man open forum for those interested in NS [National Socialism], WP [White Power] or the Skinhead movement and desire to share, communicate and network with like minded men. Swastika Knights is more than just “the fetish only” of uniforms and boots…it is real and for men who believe.

*Swastika Knights* functions as a message board service where members actively engage in discourse surrounding homosexuality and fascism, network for social and political reasons, and share image files. In the messages posted there remains a tension between what some member purport are “fetish only” members, and “those who believe”. However, while many defend their beliefs by pointing to homosexual Nazi leader Ernst Rohm, the emphasis of the group remains for most members on gay male SM, with very few actually involved with the political rhetoric.

Among the images circulated are a number of Neo-Nazi gay porn posters created by members. [Fig.5] What is interesting about these images, is how the technique of pastiche orientates images of naked men towards a homoerotic dramatization of Neo-
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Nazi fantasies. The creators of these images have strategically selected body types that connote to the fascistic bodily imagination: the figures resemble both the bodily perfection of the Nordic youth or the stylized hypermasculine skinhead. Combined with Nazi signifiers in the form of text and symbols, these images conceptualise and contextualise their eroticism within a historical context of domination and violence, to demonstrate the intertextual frisson that arises from the doubling of signs.

Indeed we might consider the historical context of masculine appropriations in gay subculture in relation to questions of ethnicity, as each iconic variation (the leather man, cowboy, biker, skinhead etc) invariably represents a white male subject. As Mercer states: “If the frisson of eroticism conveyed by these styles depends on their connotation to masculine power then this concerns the kind of power traditionally associated with white masculinity”. Furthermore, if we are to consider fascism itself as a strategy of self-representation, then we might also consider the ‘clone’ image in gay male subculture as fascistic in its valorization of certain types of masculinities and body imagos. Healy sees the effect of this racial dimension to gay male eroticism as indicative of how “the gay scene has been created by and for the needs of white men”. Yet as Healy also concludes the “tautological signification” of fascism means that the Queer skinhead renders the skinhead an open signifier, stating: “he can never function as the phallic naturalization of masculinity”. Taking the Queer skinhead to be an open signifier, this analysis will now move on to investigate the function and meaning of Queer skinheads within the film praxis of Bruce LaBruce.
STRATEGIES OF NEGATION: BRUCE LABRUCED & THE ANNIHILATION OF THE MODERN HOMOSEXUAL

Before approaching an analysis of the textual\textsuperscript{141} codes of Skin Flick (1999), reviewing the representational strategies used by LaBruce in No Skin Off My Ass (1991) [Fig.6] will foreground LaBruce’s examination of gay male subjectivity through the image of the Queer skinhead. In these representational strategies, LaBruce situates violence and eroticism as an ambivalent attraction in the sexual imaginary of gay male subjects. This attraction subsequently inspires an investigation of the violent foundations of homosexual desire and gay male subculture’s fascination with appearance and style. Like Furbank’s *crucified skin*, LaBruce’s film praxis deploys style to mark the gay male subject as an outsider, but aggravates this position and process of self-definition by implicating the image of the skinhead within the dissident pleasures of non-normative sexual practices. The effects of these strategies are that the sexual essentialism of gay male subjectivity is challenged, offering instead a reconstruction of the notions of homosexual identity, desire and practices.

*No Skin Off My Ass* remains one of the first visual interpretations of a gay male subcultural fascination with the Queer skinhead, and what LaBruce refers to as his “first porno”.\textsuperscript{142} For LaBruce pornography offers a radical discourse for investigating gay male subjectivity, stating: “I choose to work in pornography because in some ways it’s the last refuge of the unmediated, undiluted gay identity, the last bastion of radicalism and dissent”.\textsuperscript{143} LaBruce also interprets *No Skin Off My Ass* as a logical progression from the Queercore fanzine *J.D’s* (short for Juvenile Delinquents) which saw LaBruce and his collaborator G.B Jones introduce homosexual pornography to the punk fanzine formula.\textsuperscript{144} Since the release of *No Skin Off My Ass*, there have been a number of short films made that investigate Queer skinheads; most notably Jürgen Brüning’s *Er hat’ne Glatze und ist Rasist, Er ist schwul unde ein Faschist*\textsuperscript{145} (He Is Bold and He Is Racist, He Is Gay and He Is a Fascist) (1994); Jon Wilson’s *Oi Queer* (1996), Mia Engberg’s *The Stars We Are* (1997), Ben and Dominic Roddam’s *Taste the Sweat* (1997) and Nathaniel Walters’ *Solace* (1998).
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No Skin Off My Ass opens with a skinhead wandering around the dismal cityscape of Toronto and LaBruce watching the character of Frances Austen in the credits to Robert Altman’s *That Cold Day In The Park* (1969). The character of Frances becomes an object of identification for LaBruce in *No Skin Off My Ass* by mirroring the narrative trajectory of Altman’s film. In *That Cold Day in the Park*, a volatile relationship is played out between a lonely spinster and a mute teenage delinquent. Mimicking Frances on the television screen, LaBruce observes his object of desire (the skinhead) sitting alone in a park outside his apartment window. Like Frances’ delinquent, when LaBruce invites the skinhead back to his apartment, he realizes the skinhead is also a mute. LaBruce describes the role of the skinhead was “played quasi-convincingly by his then boyfriend...a hustler turned fascist skinhead” and infers the film’s inspiration drew from his own volatile relationship with a skinhead. As LaBruce describes: “I even fell in love with a skinhead hustler who hated fags, and, during our tempestuous relationship, got the shit beaten out of me on more than one occasion”.

In *No Skin Off My Ass* LaBruce undertakes the role of an effeminate hairdresser who upon discovering skinheads, ceases to care about his profession. As the hairdresser confesses: “I feel like throwing away all my brushes, combs, scissors, shampoos – everything but my electric clippers...a shaved head is the only haircut that makes sense anymore”. The hairdresser explains further that he has done his “research” on skinheads, later citing historical details about the youth subculture and meticulously dissecting details of the skinhead’s dress codes. From a self-conscious and informed position then, the hairdresser articulates his desires as such: “Of course I don’t always agree with your beliefs, but then I never was a very political person. I guess it’s more of an aesthetic question with me”. If only to confirm this, a musical refrain repeated throughout the film articulates the hairdresser’s aesthetic attraction: “skinhead guys just turn me on”. We might consider LaBruce’s disavowal of the skinhead’s political significance as a blunt criticism of how gay male subculture has been prepared to overlook the fascist signification of the skinhead, for the sake of being in love with, like the hairdresser, the notion of authentic masculinity. Furthermore, by positioning the skinhead as a homoerotic object for an effeminate gay male subject, *No Skin Off My Ass* sets out to cultivate a relationship between desire and danger,
which in turn develops into a relationship between eroticism and violence. The effect of such relations is that the image of the skinhead is simultaneously decontextualized and eroticized as a symbolic oppressor.

Upon arriving at his apartment, LaBruce undertakes a number of strategies to invert the power dynamics and phallic totality of the skinhead. The hairdresser offers the skinhead a bubble bath, which the skinhead splashes around in masturbating. The bath sequence closes with the skinhead’s heterosexuality conquered, and the hairdresser poised above him ejaculating. After the bath, the hairdresser plays the skinhead a tape: “let me be the one to run to you”. The skinhead answers back by switching tapes: “one of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you”. Matias Viegener reads the skinhead’s refusal to speak as characteristic of what Hebdige calls punk’s \textit{blankness} – “the removal of expression…the refusal to speak and be positioned”.\textsuperscript{150} The character’s odd silence, Viegener argues, then functions to “play with the confusing subcultural indexes of punk and skinhead, straight and gay: how does one distinguish the straight from the gay?”\textsuperscript{151} Indeed LaBruce’s characterization of the skinhead problematizes the image’s traditional meaning, as we are later informed that the skinhead is in fact middle-class, and that he merely \textit{claims skinhead}\textsuperscript{152} as an identity. We also discover the skinhead is pretending to be a mute, which complicates the power dynamics inherent in the duality of spoken/ being spoken for that is evident in the hairdresser and skinhead’s musical conversation. Furthermore, the character of the skinhead doesn’t struggle to reconcile homosexual desire with skinhead dogmatism. The skinhead engages sexually with the hairdresser, and yet refutes the expectation of identifying as gay. For Viegener then the interplay in LaBruce’s film between “self-effacement” and “self-revelation” in relation to gay identity stresses:

…the importance within these gay subcultures of being seen over being heard; referentiality or analytical language is distrusted. Style functions to seduce one into a world of images in which language and speech (demonstrated in the disjunctive soundtrack) are secondary to the reign of the index and the icon over the sign.\textsuperscript{153}
In the Nazi dream sequence that follows, LaBruce complicates further the construction of gay identity through style by fetishizing notions of domination through the evocation of fascist iconography. In the dream sequence the skinhead is chained with a dog collar to a toilet and forced to lick the leather boots of the hairdresser. While the hairdresser smokes and ashes on the skinhead’s back we hear a musical rendition of “Deutschland Uber Alles” in the background. At the end of the sequence, the skinhead stands and gestures the viewer with a Seig Heil. The hairdresser follows suit, but with a mark of difference – having saluted, the hairdresser drops his hand to remain poised with a limp wrist. In enunciating the presence of fascism in gay male subcultural desires, dress codes and practices, LaBruce again mounts a further challenge to the sexual essentialism and gentrification of gay male identity politics.

Healy identifies five central problems with *No Skin Off My Ass*. Healy argues that in characterizing the hairdresser as effeminate, LaBruce mimics oppressive stereotypes; that by locating desire in the skinhead, LaBruce fetishizes an oppressive sexual object; that the quasi-sadomasochistic games depicted in their relationship play out oppressive power relations, and that the flirting with fascist iconography infers the fascistic tendencies of gay male subjectivity. Finally, Healy concludes that because the skinhead refutes identification with a gay identity, the skinhead character is emblematic of internalized homophobia. What Healy fails to acknowledge in this criticism of *No Skin Off My Ass* is how the paradoxical strategies used by LaBruce are consistently self-conscious and explicitly defined as a means of subverting notions of gay male subjectivity. *No Skin Off My Ass* emphasizes a crisis in gay male identity, wherein both neoconservative mainstream values and the accepted gay alternatives fail to radically rethink notions of gay male subjectivity. In its fusion then of the antithetical aesthetics of punk and camp, what *No Skin Off My Ass* does, Viegener argues, is work “to unravel some of the cultural contradictions in which Queers find themselves”. Viegener describes this dilemma further, suggesting:

Post-Stonewall identity politics do not seem to hold sway when they are disarticulated through the engagement of subcultural style, particularly because the whole way the subject is constructed is called into question. To the camp doubt about which self to
adore, punk aesthetics and the eros of abjection and negation also prompt oneself to doubt which self (the bourgeois, the libertine, the demimondaine?) to despise.¹⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, Healy is even more critical of LaBruce’s tactics in Skin Flick. As Healy maintains: “[Skin Flick]…is yet another symptom of that dodgy belief that, because they were once an oppressed minority, homosexuals have the right to do whatever they want and offend whoever they want in order to get their end away”.¹⁵⁸ Healy’s statement would seem to demonstrate the difficulty of attempting a simple articulation of Skin Flick’s representations and signifying capacity. Its fetishization of the skinhead is at once abhorrent and gratuitously camp, a violent pastiche and a revelation of realism. In an attempt to further develop some of the conflicting positions outlined in No Skin Off My Ass, this analysis of the Queer skinhead will now look more closely at the intertextual play of codes LaBruce deploys in Skin Flick. Operating as almost a sequel to No Skin Off My Ass, and a response to what subsequently became a defining gay subcultural style, Skin Flick finds LaBruce returning to what Scott Treleaven describes as “the simple incisive premise which launch his career: every faggot loves a man in uniform”.¹⁵⁹
SKIN FLICK: THE DIALECTICS OF VIOLENCE & EROTICISM

In the aestheticization of sexual orientation and its derivative fetishism, Skin Flick [Fig.8] follows two lines of narrative representation: Against the sexual, criminal, and violent episodes of a skinhead gang, set to a background of generic punk music, is an equally clichéd depiction of gay male video pornography, portraying an unfaithful, mixed-racial, bourgeois gay couple. Both narratives converge when the skin gang breaks into the couple’s apartment and gang rape the black partner. Skin Flick functions paradoxically in that it both glamorizes the rebelliousness and marginality of the skinhead image, and yet seemingly condemns its violent and self-destructive behaviour. Indeed the film stock parallels this paradoxical treatment of the skinhead, fluctuating between the gritty realism of 16mm, and the lurid coloration of conventional videotape, intensifying the schism, by stylistically combining the traditions and mediums of experimental documentary and video pornography. This not only acts to situate the dialectic of violence and eroticism in the construction of gay male subjectivity, but also offers a visual methodology for emphasizing context. It also highlights the systemic and dynamic relations inherent in representational strategies that depict gay male subjects in gay male pornography.

In reviewing the textual codes of Skin Flick, this investigation is focussed on three principals themes and lines of narrative representation. Each denote an intervention into dominant understandings of gay male subjectivity, and will be utilized to illustrate the arguments and conceptual concerns that have emerged thus far in an investigation of the Queer skinhead. The analysis begins by investigating the paradoxical relationship between homosexual identity and homosexual behaviour; moving then to an exploration of the celebration of masculinity which incites a violent denial of homosexuality and subjugation of the feminine; and finally toward an examination of the link between sexual identity and national identity. In exploring the shifting relationships between these themes and lines of narrative representation, this analysis seeks to further investigate the implication LaBruce’s depictions of Queer skinheads have on the construction of gay male subjectivity at both a structural and dynamic level.
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For LaBruce the narrative trajectory of *Skin Flick* is structured around an investigation of the manner in which,

…homosexuality has traditionally fetishized images of cruelty, domination, authority, and power, including the military, police, and fascist figures, and at the same time comments on the phenomenon of homosexual behaviour for occurring in extreme right wing and paramilitary organizations which is not identified by its participants in any way as being ‘gay’ or part of ‘gay culture’. It also functions as a straightforward fuck movie.\(^{160}\)

Given LaBruce’s final objective, the Berlin-based gay video production company Cazzo’s\(^{161}\) commissioning of *Skin Flick* suited the film’s attempt to operate within a context of gay male pornography. For LaBruce gay male pornography is, in both its design and execution, “already fascist, with its slick monolithic aesthetics, its cold production-line uniformity, and its easy propagandistic appropriation of the gay agenda”.\(^{162}\) In addition, *Skin Flick*’s fetishization of fascist imagery foregrounds how the aesthetics of race dynamics in gay male pornography are often explicitly fetishistic and imperialist, in that non-white subjects are presented with the assumption of a white audience. For LaBruce then, “the homosexual fetishization of frankly fascist imagery is merely taking modern gay porn to its logical conclusion”.\(^{163}\)

By setting the narrative of *Skin Flick* in London, LaBruce’s representations also operate within an already established sexual economy of Queer appropriations of the skinheads. As Healy has described, a large part of British gay culture has remained “so interested in skinhead masculinity that elements of the skinhead look have been staples in the urban gay male’s wardrobe since the mid-Eighties”.\(^{164}\) LaBruce is conscious of the extent to which the skinhead image has been co-opted by European gay male subculture, so much so, that LaBruce regards it as testimony to the popularization of the look made with *No Skin Off My Ass*. As LaBruce describes, with a hint of guilt, for prompting such a popularization:
Imagine my surprise when I realized that a large segment of the gay population in England now wear Fred Perry or Ben Sherman sports shirts, braces, rolled up jeans and Doc Martens, and sport bald heads. Skinhead attire, in fact, has become the clone of the nineties. Of course the irony is that I may have had more than little to do with the trend, popularizing the look in my first feature *No Skin Off My Ass*, which was particularly successful in England in the early part of the decade. It’s Frankenstein all over again. The sad thing is, these nae mates cunts – if you’ll pardon the Irvine Welshism – think they’re real skinheads. Delude, Martha, delude.\(^{165}\)

*Skin Flick* begins its problematization of the relationship between homosexual identity and homosexual behaviour in the construction of a queerbashing sequence. The scene begins with a lone man walking down a secluded path, before being dragged into a cemetery and brutally beaten by the skin gang leader Dieter, and his partner Dirk. LaBruce undertakes the role of the victim, whose dress codes and mannerisms render the subject as a potential “queer” victim. By slowing down the speed of the film and attaching a quasi-erotic instrumental soundtrack, the queerbashing sequence takes on a sexual subtext. While the gang’s stance that homosexuals “should be sent to the gas chamber” may have motivated the attack, an element of arousal underlines the violence. This eroticism is played out as the scene concludes with Dieter and Dirk kissing and masturbating over the victim’s battered and bleeding body. For LaBruce, this scene in which two skinheads who are not gay identified, who are represented as homophobic and yet engage sexually with each other characterizes *Skin Flick*’s interrogation of gay male subculture. LaBruce states: “The scene sums up the project of *Skin Flick* - the difference between homosexual behaviour and homosexual identity, the former actually being able to exist as something which is hostile towards the latter and might even want to annihilate it”.\(^{166}\)

If homosexual behaviour threatens to annihilate the construction of homosexual identity, LaBruce deploys the conventions of homosocial behaviour in the characterization of Dieter and Dirk’s relationship, to critique the notion of *straight acting* that dominates the masculinization of gay male subjects. In *Skin Flick* male homosociality is experienced specifically at the level of aggression, violence and crime, as we witness Dieter and Dirk
wandering through the streets of London tackling each other, kicking over bins and stealing food. What *Skin Flick*’s characterization of homosocial behaviour reveals, is not only the performative nature of male identities, but also the homoeroticism that is sublimated in what passes for normative male behaviour. Indeed we could additionally read a montage sequence of the actors shaving their heads at the beginning of the film as the physical preparation these subjects must undertake to enable *Skin Flick*’s phantasmatic trajectory to unfold. Therefore, the type of masculinity depicted in *Skin Flick* can be read as artifice, as a stylized form of drag or masquerade, whose fetishistic excess problematize the skinhead’s rhetoric of a natural masculinity.

This process of masquerade is also contingent to Dieter and Dirk’s defining of their relationship as “mates”. In a mock-interview sequence, LaBruce as director and interviewer probes the manner in which both characters construct this relationship, and how both differentiate behaviour from identity to highlight notions of masquerade. As Dieter responds:

- **Dieter**: no we’re not faggots
- **Bruce La Bruce**: but you live together right?
- **Dirk**: yeah
- **La Bruce**: how long have you been living together?
- **Dirk**: oh, like for three years
- **La Bruce**: you sleep in the same bed?
- **Dieter**: yeah
- **La Bruce**: but you’re not boyfriends?
- **Dirk**: no
- **Dieter**: we’re just mates

The dynamics between homosocial and homosexual behaviour, and indeed the obscuring of any differentiation, is also distinguished in the character of Cameltoe, whom we are lead to believe is gang member Reinholt’s girlfriend. Cameltoe is the only visible female character throughout the film, and after Dieter, Dirk and Manfred arrive at Reinholt’s
apartment, Cameltoe is forcibly removed. The skin gang’s treatment of the Cameltoe highlights how such hypermasculine representation in gay male subculture paradoxically disavows the feminine, and yet requires the presence of women and heterosexual relations in order to form strategies of homosocial desire.

Signifiers of ethnicity and religion further complicate Dieter and Dirk’s relationship. While Dieter is identified as English, Dirk is revealed to be Israeli and from a Jewish background. In a bizarre confession Dirk cautions LaBruce about his religious patronage: “Don’t tell Dieter I’m Jewish. He doesn’t know. Whenever we’re having a shower together I’m putting my hands in front of my dick so he won’t see I don’t have a foreskin”. If knowledge of Dirk’s circumcision threatens to destroy Dirk and Dieter’s relationship, the sexual interrelationship among the other members creates a volatile continuum of cultural and political associations. Added to the Englishmen (Dieter) and the Israeli (Dirk) the gang also includes a German (Wolfgang), who engages sexually with a Russian (Reinholt) and a Swiss (Manfred). Given the hostile histories between such ethnic groups, the coupling of particular members infers another problem in the paradoxical relationship between homosexual behaviour and identity. Reinholt’s observation about a recurring dream, in which he performs oral sex on a German man, places these cultural anxieties in the context of sexual interaction. Interspersed with Reinholt’s voice, LaBruce depicts Reinholt performing oral sex on Wolfgang. As Reinholt narrates:

I always had this weird dream about sucking German cock. And it was just always one of my strongest dreams and desires. And now I am so happy that my dreams came true, and every time I put German cock in my mouth I think that probably his dad or grandfather I guess, was trying to kill my grandfather. Just like fifty years ago. And now it’s all changed – now we’re doing totally different things.

Reinholt’s dream identifies the transformation of such cultural anxieties in the gay male subcultural fetishization of the Queer skinhead. What it also demonstrates is how the configuration of masculine images like that of the Queer skinhead confuses distinctions between oppressors and the oppressed. As LaBruce states, *Skin Flick* “plays with the notion
of identity, whether sexual or national or racial, and the intersection of race, class, and sexual identification become extremely complex". Reinholt articulates further desire for the oppressor in a poem that details his childhood desire to function as a sex slave, as “a live in toilet”. Reinholt continues:

My life and body would be undividedly at his disposal. I would sleep like a dog between his legs. I would become his live-in toilet and wake up in the middle of the night because he’d piss in my mouth instead of running to the pisser. And not only piss by the way. I’d wake him up by inviting his hard strong sleep-hardened cock into my vagina of a mouth. I could no longer survive without it. He forbid me to wear clothes and would feed me only his tasty feces and sweet sperm. I would eat and swallow all of it without leftovers. I’d quickly get use to this diet and wouldn’t even think about other food. I don’t know what I’d do if he’d tell his parents that he was tired of me, and that he wanted another slave. I’d probably kill us both, starting with him. I would shove my arm up his arse to the elbow, dismantle and tear is inner and eat his wriggling, squiggling entrails. And then I’d die of nostalgia and hunger: my life as a live-in toilet.

Reinholt goes further to describe this sense of cultural betrayal tied to a desire to be raped by German soldiers. In “the story of betrayal” that follows he yearns again desperately for “a single whiff of fascist cock”, to be sexually possessed by his social and political oppressor. For Reinholt, this desire stems from his cultural understanding that “Germans [soldiers] were more refined, they smelled of cologne, changed their underwear, and took sex more seriously”. Reinholt describes the consequence of such fetishistic desires to be dominated, as having “Nazi German sperm mixed into a fucked-up cocktail with my Communist Russian blood” Yet in his self-consciousness, Reinholt reasons no apology for his actions and desires. Reinholt concludes, “I know what I am doing. I am treason, infidelity – it is mine. I treacherize like god. I betray like Satan”.

If the celebration of masculinity is to be asserted through violent behaviour, Skin Flick suggests such a process must therefore entail a denial of homosexuality and a subjugation of
the feminine. While Cameltoe’s violent exclusion elucidates the skin gang’s subjugation of the feminine, and the queerbashing sequence illustrates the extent to which homosexuality will be opposed, the characterization and character development of Manfred further develops an opposition in the internalization of homophobia through disassociating the effeminate. More so than the other members of the skin gang, Manfred’s characterization perhaps makes him closest to embodying the stereotypic signifiers associated with homosexual effeminacy and the figure of the 'sissy body'. Bradley Boney describes *effeminacy* as “a culturally and historically produced category, unintelligible except in its oppositional relationship to ‘maleness’” and that the sissy body functions as “the recognizable signifier of potential male homosexuality”. Manfred’s visible clumsiness, the inability to maintain physical control is one aspect of this identification with the sissy body and his effeminacy. This is made apparent as he constantly trips over himself, breaks his shoelaces and in the scene where he spills a entire container over while trying to replicate Dieter and Dirk’s successful robbery at the fruit market.

Sedgwick’s analysis of the effeminate gay male subject reveals how the effeminate gay male subject has been positioned as the “haunting abject” of both gay, and larger hegemonic cultures, and how the construction of effeminaphobia has become intrinsic to gay male subculture’s disavowing of the dominant notions that any male subject "who desires a man must by definition be feminine [and vice versa]" As a result, Sedgwick argues:

…the eclipse of the effeminate boy from adult gay discourse would represent more than a damaging theoretical gap; it would represent a mode of annihilating homophobic, gynephobic, and pedophobic hatred internalized and made central to gay-affirmative analysis. The effeminate boy would come to function as the discrediting open secret of many politicized adult gay men.

For the other skin gang members, Manfred is “a virgin pussyboy” who needs to be initiated to remain part of the group. As Dieter tells Manfred “you’ll have to lose your cherry sooner or later”. Manfred maintains his heterosexuality, declaring, “I’m not no pussyboy. Stop calling me that. I’m not a faggot”. However, Manfred’s heterosexuality only remains intact
till confronted in Reinholt’s lounge room with the presence of Dieter and Dirk kissing and Wolfgang and Reinholt engaging in oral sex. In what becomes the central sex sequence of the film, this scene also functions as Manfred’s initiation into both the skin gang and homosexuality. Indeed Manfred’s initiation can be considered in relation to notions of bastardisation and acts of sexual initiation, which have been staples of fascist ideology in enforcing bonds of loyalty.

*Skin Flick* litters its scenes with signifiers that endow the narrative with specific context. These visual signifiers are used strategically to contextualize the sex within a skinhead narrative. Dieter and Dirk’s principal sex scene is enacted on a giant Union Jack bed spread, and the bedroom walls are adorned with a giant graffitied poster reading the skinhead adage “spirit of ‘69”, and a film poster for Stanley Kubrik’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). During the cottaging sequence graffiti throughout the toilets sets up a subversive blurring of skinhead, pornographic and gay subcultural contexts. On the entrance to the door text reads “Germans dicks are the biggest / Germans are the biggest dicks”, on the main walls the skinhead greeting “Oi!” and the neo-nazi skinhead band “Skrewdriver”. Above the sink “All cops are bent bastards”, above the urinals “Plot does matter”, and in a further play on the conventions of gay male pornography, Wolfgang’s facial expressions during ejaculation are filmed in the reflection of a mirror that has “you look like shit” scrawled across it. The use of racist iconography in Manfred, Reinholt and Wolfgang’s threesome also suggests the fascist context for which LaBruce’s pornography is directly being situated.

Such signifiers then foster close links between social, sexual and national identities. Another example of how this signification operates is in Manfred’s solo masturbation sequence. The scene takes place in a room littered with signifiers of Fascism - portraits of Mussolini and Hitler adorn the walls and various Nazi emblems and artefacts are scattered throughout the room. In this scene Manfred begins masturbating over some heterosexual porn, unfulfilled with its content, he turns to a copy of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kempf*, and continues to masturbate, finally ejaculating over the book. LaBruce intentionally makes the distinction between veneration, and desecration, in Manfred’s treatment of such an emblem of Fascist power, unclear. As LaBruce states:
… it is a scene which is meant to turn you on and off at the same time. Is he jerking off on this object as a kind of reverence to it, or is he defiling it? Is it sacred or profane? In terms of sexuality, and in particular homosexuality, sometimes the line between the two is distinctly blurry.

In the double coding of these binaries, the connection between fascism and pornography and the links between sexual and national identities are also realized in the exposition of *Skin Flick’s* rape sequence. This link is most evident in that the sequence is bracketed by footage of three members of the skin gang reciting their respective national anthems. Before the skinhead gang breaks into the couple’s apartment Reinholt recites "Gimn Rossiyskaya Federatsiya", the Russian national anthem; while collecting the couple’s money and possessions, Wolfgang is seen singing “Deutschland Uber Alles”; and at the conclusion of the film Dirk sings “HaTikvah”, the Israeli National Anthem.

What problematizes this rape sequence even further, is how *Skin Flick* characterizes the black character Leroy as being sexually submissive. Leroy describes this tension when suggesting: “you’d be surprised at all the flak I get for living with a white boy. Some of my black friends…call me coconut – you know, dark on the outside, white on the inside”. Of the rape sequence and problematical characterization of Leroy, LaBruce states:

“I think some black people take offence because you're not meant to represent black characters that way. He's a black gay man who likes white men exclusively, and he's basically a bottom [that is, sexually "passive"]. Blacks in porno are traditionally represented as these sexual potentates, virile, aggressive people, which in a way is racist too. So I decided to make a character you're not supposed to represent - a black guy who's into [dominant] white men, getting raped by a gang of skinheads. Is this his ultimate nightmare or his ultimate fantasy?”

Indeed in contrasting notions of class and consumption, the sexual interaction between the bourgeoisie couple is characterized as starkly different from that of the skin gang. An
example of this can be seen in LaBruce’s alternation between footage of the skin gang drinking beer for dinner, while the bourgeois couple eats sushi. Furthermore, the only sexual sequence between the couple involves relatively conservative forms of sexual practice. Leroy is depicted shrimping Karl, which might point to his subservient nature, but perhaps also infers a similarity between the soft delicate (vanilla) aspects of toe sucking and the middle-class status of the couple. In other scenes, both Leroy and Karl have sex with other men, and again LaBruce alternates between these scenes, between Leroy having sex with a plumber, and Karl in an anonymous encounter with Wolfgang to emphasize the difference between the types of gay sex had by skins and the bourgeois couple.

After the rape, the narrative of *Skin Flick* descends confusingly into a fantasy sequence were Karl rapes Dieter to avenge the rape of Leroy. At gunpoint Dieter is forced unconvincingly to engage in oral and anal sex, in a scene in which the actions of the white bourgeois protagonist might be considered an effect of the conditioning of gay male subculture. If the desire for men is concerned with an evocation of the masculine and disavowing of the feminine, then Karl’s actions materialize the masculinist fantasy of domination. The desire to identify with the (skinhead) oppressor proves so enticing that in the closing sequences Leroy is seen walking down a busy street and notices his (we would presume) now ex-boyfriend Karl transformed, and dressed as a skinhead. LaBruce’s editing obscures a clear delineation of Karl’s body, which might been seen then as suggesting Leroy’s inability to discern the difference between his boyfriend and the Neo-Nazi skinhead who had previously terrorized him. The conflation between both highlights the how the standardized appearance of the skinhead can render the same disturbing effects.
TOWARDS A THEORY OF GAY MALE SUBJECTIVITY

To attempt a definitive conclusion here would be to contradict the objectives I have foreground in this dissertation’s reconceptualisation of “Queer” and “skinhead” signifiers. In a sense this analysis sought only to preface a need for criticality in addressing the operation of these fixed signifiers within a hegemonic normalcy, and thence stage a series of questions in which to consider the double coding and signification of the Queer skinhead. Another central consideration of this analysis, was the question of how gay male subjects relate to a range of masculinities and sexual identifications, and how the representational strategies utilized by gay male subculture might affect an understanding of gay male subjectivities. Consequently, this research was conceived in terms of presenting a series of speculative narratives rather than asserting a didactic mode of interpretation.

However, from the arguments raised, we might reflect on some of the implications drawn from Queer appropriations of the skinhead. This might also lead to speculation on how these implications might rupture normative masculinity, as well as the hypermasculinity displayed in gay male subcultural practices. Furthermore, by evaluating the effects and conditions in which such appropriations function within the discourses of gay male pornography, we might also consider future directions in which such investigations of gay male subjectivity can be directed.

Subcultural style as Hebdige notes, is “an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation”. From this, we might contend that the Queer skinhead’s stylistic deployment of phallic signifiers represents a temporary obstruction to those dominant gender paradigms, for which gay male subjects are positioned on the terrain of femininity. Excluded from masculinity by forms of heterosexist oppression, the skinhead’s phallicism enables gay male subjects to seize a previously unobtainable, sexually dominant and anti-feminine masculinity. In fetishizing masculinity, and thence these extreme forms of masculine representation, the gay male subject is able to acquire social agency by means of the Phallus. Yet in fracturing such gender paradigms, Queer appropriations also reveal normative masculinity to be performative, at once learnt and
constructed. The façade of masculinity is exposed, and this revelation locates the skinhead’s masculinity within the tenuous and fragile interplay of binaries such as homosocial/homosexual and authentic/inauthentic.

Indeed in approaching the image of the original skinhead, not only is masculinity revealed as performative, but the skinhead’s phallic rule is contested, as the image is discovered to coexist within the same disempowered epistemological spaces of the oppressed. By recounting the presence of homosexuals within a history of the skinhead, the skinhead’s claim to heterosexuality is challenged, in narrating its use of the shaved head within a visual experience of trauma, the skinhead’s status as an oppressor is problematized. Finally, by reconsidering its associations to the youth subcultural styles of black migrants, the skinhead is revealed to be premised on a pastiche of already marginalized forms of masculinity.

The question remains, does the skinhead’s emasculation obliterate the success of gay male subculture’s project of re-masculinization? While in the context of academic discourse it might be easy to consider the Queer skinhead as “queering” the skinhead, or indeed operating as a doubly marginalized form of masculinity, its dissemination within public spaces might incur a very different reception. Given the historical and political significance of the skinhead, the Queer skinhead might equally be interpreted as denoting a violent and fascistic identity, even by members of the gay community where the image retains a visible sexual currency. And herein lies the difficulty of this image, for if the ability to recontextualise the skinhead by resignification proves problematical for a fetishized identity within a minority subculture, how does one read the Queer skinhead? Indeed how does a subject differentiate the straight skinhead from the Queer skinhead, the right-wing skinhead from the left-wing skinhead? Would such a differentiation constitute any change in meaning, given that the Queer skinhead, even within a sexual context, still prescribes to a desire for an ‘authentic’, and therefore fundamentally aggressive masculinity?

The complexity of subject positions in both the intention and reception of Queer skinheads makes an understanding of its signification extremely difficult. In its association to discourses of fascism, both directly and indirectly, the Queer skinhead aggravates any
definitive reading of gay male subjectivity. It derides an essentialist construction of gay identity, prompting a re-evaluation of how we construct and define gay male subjects and subjectivity.

What the materialization of the Queer skinhead attests to furthermore is how the hypermasculinity of gay male subjects extends beyond appearance to describe the sexual nature of hypermasculinity. In the context of Queer skinheads, this is localized within the power dynamics of sadomasochism, a site where the Queer skinhead represents as reservoir of sexualised potential, potent because of its potentiality for violence. The deployment of the Queer skinhead in gay male pornography further illustrates this tension between desire and danger, cultivating an abjuration of homosexuality and femininity in place of a reverence for heteronormative masculinity. As LaBruce’s Skin Flick suggests, the violent characteristic of the skinhead is not sublimated, but outwardly eroticised to disturbing effect. In critiquing the interconnections between desire and identification, LaBruce problematizes any simple understanding of the relationship between homosexual identity and homosexual behaviour, and draws particular attention to the racial dimension of gay male eroticism.

What all this might point to is how gay male subjectivity operates at the intersection of an aesthetic, social, and political experience. The figure of the Queer skinhead might also suggest a speculative link between the sexual development of gay male subjects, which transpires within a culture that directs violence against the homosexual body, and the fetishization of violence in gay male sexual imaginaries. Given that gay male subjects are appropriating an image of masculinity already over-coded with issues of masculine trauma and anxiety, we might consider how representations of Queer skinheads could function, to use Stiles’ terms, as a cultural effect of trauma. As Stiles also elaborates about the effects of trauma, “Where such continuous peril exists, trauma is constant. The task is to undermine its invisibility. For its concealed conditions, its silences, are the spaces in which the destruction of trauma multiply”.175

Given that research into traumatogenesis has been centered on making the etiology and pathogenesis of trauma invisible, the task then is to identify its origins and development. In
this light, we might suggest that the signifiers of trauma associated with the sexual identification of gay male subjects are made highly visible in representations of Queer skinheads. Trauma is then reproduced in the concealed conditions of gay male subculture, and then mimicked in the representational strategies used in gay male pornography.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I utilized the notion of *fault lines* to describe the precarious relationship between violence and eroticism within the social construction of gay male subjectivity. To this I would suggest not only do hegemonic conceptions of gender and sexuality scrape against their margins, but that wedged in-between, the Queer skinhead functions as a threshold, as a catalyst for the unstitching of gay male subjectivity.
NOTES


2 I utilize the phrase *signifying practice* as termed by Julia Kristeva and as deployed by Dick Hebdige in conceptualising the notion of subcultural style as a signifying practice. As Kristeva suggests: “The setting in place, or constitution of a system of signs requires the identity of a speaking subject in a social institution which the subject recognizes as the support of its identity. The traversing of the system takes place when the speaking subject is put in process and cuts across, at an angle as it were, the social institutions in which it had previously recognised itself. It thus coincides with the moment of social rupture, renovation and revolution”. (Kristeva cited in Hebdige 1979: 165) See: Dick Hebdige (1979) ‘Style As A Signifying Practice’ in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Routledge, 117-127.

3 *Skin Flick / Skin Gang* was initially titled *Gang of 4Skins*, and during production bore the subtitles of *Even Skinheads get the Blues* (parodying Gus Van Sant’s film *Even Cowgirls get the Blues*(1993)) and *A Comedy of Aryans*. It is important to note that while LaBruce retained complete artistic control over *Skin Flick*, the German porn company Cazzo was responsible for the editing of *Skin Gang*. While the formats of both texts are similar, a number of key scenes in *Skin Flick* were edited out of *Skin Gang*. It is my contention that an investigation of the film’s textual codes requires a comparative analysis of both films, and as such the analysis presented in this dissertation is derived from a textual analysis of both films.


6 Healy does however concede that geography dictates an individual’s ability to decode the “skinhead” as “gay”. If we were to consider the Queer skinhead within an Australian context, the minimal presence of skinhead signifiers within gay male subcultures would make such a decoding ostensibly impossible. While the establishment of the Internet E-Group “Sydney Gay Skinheads” enjoys a membership of 157, the presence of skinhead signifiers within an Australian context is limited to Neo-Nazi and White Power movements. Of these, groups such as Southern Cross Hammer Skinheads (Sydney) and White Australian Resistance (Melbourne) have maintained a significant presence since the early 1990s. For further information concerning these particular groups of skinheads within an Australian context see: Anti-Defamation League (1995) *The Skinhead International: A Worldwide Survey of Neo-Nazi Skinheads*, New York: Anti-Defamation League
8 The Christopher Street Day poster existed as part of a broader project of addressing racism in Germany during 2001. The advertising and marketing agency Scholz & Friends co-initiated the “Deutsche gegen Rechte-Gewalt” (Germans Against Right-Wing Violence) campaign which consisted of coloured German men wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan “Ich bin stolz ein Deutscher zu sein” (I am proud to be German). The campaign can be viewed at <www.deutschegengenrechtergewalt.com>.


11 I utilize the term *homosocial* here as characterized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to describe the consolidation of masculinity through gender sameness, which is structured around hostility to homosexuality. See: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia University Press.


An extension to Cunningham’s definition of Queer would be to discuss the multiplicity of subject positions that can be derived from Queer readings of cultural texts and narrative codes. Alexander Doty’s, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993), suggests that a “queering” can occur in three specific areas. In the influences during the production of the texts, through historically specific readings and uses of the texts by self-identified Queer subjects, and by adopting reception positions that can be considered “queer” in some way, regardless of the subject’s sexual and gender allegiance. (Doty 1993: xi) See: Alexander Doty (1993) *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, xi-xix., 1-38.


14 The failure I infer here is premised on Jacques Derrida’s theory of *dangerous supplementarity* that operates in the construction of binary opposites. Derrida argues that the relationship between the dominant and the supplementary term points to an impossibility within language, stating: “each of the two significations is by turn effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other” (Derrida, 1976: 145) While both terms are positioned as opposites, and hence exterior to each other, both paradoxically require each other in order to signify at all. See: Jacques Derrida (1976) ‘…That Dangerous Supplement…’ in *Of Grammatology*, (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 141-164.
This dissertation seeks to foreground the term ‘Queer’ as significantly different in meaning from the term ‘gay’. It is my contention that Queer appropriations of the skinhead come closer to the term ‘Queer’ as they trouble the expectations of binary structures that govern hegemonic gender and sexuality that the term ‘gay’ fails to execute. Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to foreground a differentiation between the signifier queer, without a capital and Queer, with a capital. I utilize “Queer” with a capital to signify contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered subjects and / or other politically associated non-normative sexualities. Alternatively, “queer” cited without capital I argue signifies the categories of sexual otherness that all non-culturally sanctified sexualities, gender and behaviors are situated. Therefore, I make this differentiation to preclude the inclusion of such practices as pedophilia and rape that within this differentiation a non-capitalized “queer” would denote.


Sedgwick adds further that there remains something “inextinguishable” about Queer. Sedgwick states: “Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant”. (Sedgwick 1994: xxi emphasis in text)

I utilize the Lacanian term *imago* here as characterized by Catherine Waldby to connote not a real biological body, but rather, “the morphology of the body, the configuration of its flesh, its boundaries and the relationship between parts, in an indissociable relationship with its psychic investment by the subject who lives that body”. (Waldby 1995: 268) See: Catherine Waldby (1995) ‘Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body’ in Elizabeth Grosz & Elspeth Probyn (eds.) *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, London: Routledge, 266-277

An extension here would be to discuss how Sedgwick shifts the essentialist / constructivist debate to a question of minoritizing / universalizing gender and sexuality. Sedgwick argues modern sexual definitions are structured by an incoherence concerning gender. This incoherence develops out of debates that theorize homosexuality “as an issue only for a minority of (distinctly lesbian or gay) individuals, or instead as an issue that cuts across every locus of agency and subjectivity in the culture”. (Sedgwick 1994: xii) Specifically Sedgwick argues current conceptualizations of homosexuality involve two contradictory gender models: an inversion model that locates homosexuality both biologically and culturally at the thresholds of genders, and the notion of gender separatism that concludes homosexuality to be a ‘natural’ response to homosociality. See: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: University of California Press
I utilize the term *heterosexist* throughout this dissertation to denote those ideological systems within cultures that deny, denigrate, and stigmatize non-heterosexual forms of behavior and identity. Unlike the term *homophobia*, which describes individual anti-gay attitudes and behaviors, I utilize the notion of heterosexism to refer to the patterns of hegemonic ideologies that institutionalize the oppression of non-heterosexual subjects.


Star (1982) 134. (emphasis in text)


I use the phrase *phantasmatic constructs* here as characterized by Butler. As Butler argues: “The "real" and the "sexually factic" are phantasmatic constructs - illusions of substance - that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can. What, then, enables the exposure of the rift between the phantasmatic and the real whereby the real admits itself as phantasmatic? Does this offer the possibility for a repetition that is not fully constrained by the injunction to reconsolidate naturalized identities? Just as bodily surfaces are enacted as the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself”. (Butler 1990:146)


I use the term *pastiche* here to denote Fredric Jameson’s conceptualization of pastiche as an imitation that ridicules the notion of an original, but which is significantly different to parody. As Jameson states: “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style…but it is a neutral mask of mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse”. (Jameson 1983: 141) See: Fredric Jameson (1983) ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Popular Culture*, Port Townsend: Bay Press, 111-125

General sociological readings of the skinhead link its conception to October 1968 when a large presence of aggressive ‘skinheads’ was noted in attendance at the Great Vietnam Solidarity March in London. Marshall suggests a later date of 1969 (hence the adage ‘spirit of 69’) to identify the term skinhead within general circulation, but adds further that the visual signifiers of boots and crops were seen in Mod circles as early as 1964.

An extension here would be to address Stewart Home’s analysis of the musical genre Oi as an example of attempts to emasculate the skinhead by highlighting the figure’s exaggerated performance of masculinity. Utilizing genre theory, Home suggests “rather than being stable and static, PUNK ROCK is fluid and its boundaries are subject to ongoing renegotiation”. (Home 1995: 9) Such renegotiation enables Home to analyze the PUNK ROCK sub genre of Oi to reveal how the exaggerated masculinity of White Power skinhead bands such as Skrewdriver climaxed in its opposite – *campness*. See: Stewart Home (1996) ‘Hail Hail Rock ‘N’ Roll: Skrewdriver and the Degeneration of the Punk Rock Dialectic’ in *Crank Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock*, Hove: Codex Press, 94-107.


It has been argued that the onset of industrialization required a shift from the ‘communal male’ whose values were grounded in sharing resources, to a competitive male whose main values were (and remain) the predatory accumulation of personal power and wealth. See: Michael Kimmel (1996) *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, New York: The Free Press


Representations of this sort of social violence against Queer subjects are not uncommon within cinematic representations of (straight) skinheads. Randolph Kret’s *Pariah* (1998) however posits an interesting detour from such characterizations of the (straight) skinhead as oppressor and the Queer victim as oppressed. In a strange narrative transgression, having been brutally bashed by the film’s skinhead gang, a gay couple locates the gang’s house and return armed with a large group of Queer vigilantes to enact revenge.

Marshall also adds of the skinhead’s reasoning for racial violence: “The colour of their skin made them easy scapegoats for the problems facing a country that might have won the war but that had obviously lost the peace. Asians were seen as competition against jobs and housing at a time and heavy industry were being lost and traditional working-class communities were under attack by town planners intent on throwing up high-rise flats. That, together with the fact that they didn’t fight back, made them a ready target or a smack in the mouth”. (Marshall 1991: 36)


Stiles (1996) 44.


Stiles (1996) 44.

The crucified skin design has been co-opted by different skinhead factions with significantly different meanings. Both neo-nazi and anti-racist skinheads have appropriated the design to signify the working –class struggle. The design has also been used a threatening symbol amongst skinheads or to signify that an individual has either served time in prison or committed a murder. Another extension to the history of this symbol is Furbank’s biography as a highly visible skinhead who revealed to the English music newspaper NME (New Musical Express) that he was bisexual.

For in-depth history and analysis of the music that has been characterized as skinhead reggae see: Marc Griffiths (1995) Boss Sounds: Classical Skinhead Reggae, Dunoon: ST. Publishing

The Rude Boy look centered on suit pants whose hem was shortened to above the ankle, and the sleeve length above the wrist. Highly polished shoes, wrap around shades and a crop topped off the Rude Boy’s dress codes. For an in dept analysis of the image of the rude boy see: Norman C. Stolzoff (2000) Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica, Durham: Duke University Press


57 Healy (1996) 197.


The acceptance of Queer skinhead by other skinheads is often a difficult undertaking given that there are so many understandings of what it means to be a skinhead. As the Queer skinhead Skinx articulates on his Website, this problem operates such that: “there are bonehead skinheads who will tell you that you can’t be a real skinhead if you aren’t a racist. Then there are a number of SHARP skins who although virulently anti-fascist, will tell you that you can’t be a real skinhead because you are a homo…then you hear it from
some because you make more than a minimum wage. And finally you hear you are too old”. Skinx (2001) cited from <http://www.skinx.com/skin.htm>


61 The Queer Skinhead Brotherhood is an Internet-based group of North American gay and Queer skinheads. It was founded in 1996 and its homepage suggests the QSB “welcome[s] skins of all political persuasion, gender and colors”. <http://www.io.com/~qsb/>

62 Haines (1998) Skinning The Queer

63 Haines (1998) Skinning The Queer

64 Butler (1993) 99.


67 In challenging the skinhead through parody, Bell et al. deploy Butler’s theorization of how heterosexual modes of behaviour in lesbian and gay subculture operate as a “site of parodic contest and display that robs compulsory heterosexuality of its claim to naturalness and originality”. See: Butler (1993) 146.


71 Butler (1990) 141. (my emphasis)

72 Butler (1990) 137.

73 Butler (1990) 110.
An extension here to the genealogy of gay male subcultures would be to discuss John D’Emilio’s analysis of the relationship between the regulatory practices of the armed forced and the foundation of gay and lesbian geographies in the United States. As D’Emilio contends, many men and women who received section eight or “blue” discharges after World War II settled in American port cities where they formed the nuclei of emerging gay communities. See: John D’Emilio (1983) *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.


Bell et al. (1994) 32.

Martin Levine argues that the sex-negative rhetoric caused by the onset of AIDS signaled a radical transformation in the relationship gay male subjects had with the clone look. The exaggerated masculinity and promiscuous sexual practices that were often characteristic of the clone were perceived as partly accountable for the AIDS crisis, such that there was a vast rejection of the look. Levine argues that it was in this shift that the eroticisation of the beautiful young boy was reintroduced. See: Martin P. Levine (1998) *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*, New York: New York University Press.


Healy (1996) 14. (my emphasis)


Another argument surrounding the masculinization of gay male subjects is that the dress codes of masculine identities in the commercial gay scene exist within a context driven by capitalism. Appropriating these images is paramount then to also buying into the capitalist consumerism that is responsible for also oppressing Queer subjects. For an in-depth analysis between commerce and Queer identities see: Rosemary Hennessey (2000) *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, London: Routledge.


88 Dyer (1992) 132. (see footnote 10)

89 I utilize the term phallicism to denote the erotic veneration of phalluses or phallic objects and subsequently utilize the term phallocentric to denote an excessive preoccupation with masculinity and the male body and phallocratic as the imbuing of phallus with political and social power.


95 I utilize the phrase heterosexual matrix as termed by Butler to refer to a “grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized…to characterize hegemonic discursive / epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practices of heterosexuality”. (Butler, 1990: 151 – see footnote 6)


Mulvey (1975) 11.

Mulvey (1975) 14.


Foucault in Macey (1993) 368-9. (my emphasis)


123 Sontag (1983)

124 Sontag (1983)

125 Healy (1999) 56.

126 Healy (1999) 56.

127 Healy (1999) 56.


129 Another gay-identified Fascist is Martin Webster who undertook the position of national organizer for the National Front during the 1970s. Webster was outed as a homosexual by John Tyndall, the then British National Party Leader, and cites this as the reason for splitting from the National Front in 1980. In Germany at least two postwar Nazi leaders, Michael Kühnen and Ewald Althans, have been noted to have lead secret gay lives.

130 “Strength Through Oi!” was released by Decco Records UK together with Sound Magazine in 1981. The title mirrors the Aryan Slogan “Strength Through Joy”. Furthermore, the term Oi! took its name from The Cockney Reject’s track “Oi! Oi! Oi!” and replaced the customary “one, two, three” that would precede a song.
I utilize Theweleit’s notion of *self-maintenance* as characterized in the suggestion that the fascist soldier’s violence was a form of identity-maintenance, which “subsume[d] sexual drives under drives of self-maintenance: external objects were abandoned. (Theweleit 1989: 278)

Theweleit (1989) 313.


Marek Kohn (1989) ‘The Best Uniforms’ in Angela McRobbie (ed.) *Zoot Suits and Second Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 144. Kohn also adds both skinheads and Nazis shared similar romanticized conceptions of masculine strength and the physicality of the male body. Kohn states, “in embracing the ideas of strength and physical idealism, they aligned themselves with a movement that professed to share these ideas”. (Kohn 1989: 143)

Sontag (1983)


Despite the failure of *Swastika Knights*, other male-orientated gay racialist groups survive via a permutable network of personal and private web pages, bulletin boards and e-zines. Americans dominate the network, which appears to have evolved out of the Nazi fetish scene, yet handfuls are European. I would argue there remain scarcely any differentiation between organized networks of gay-orientated Neo-Nazi groups and the Neo-Nazi fetish scene.


Healy (1996) 143.

I utilize the terms *text* and *textual* as conceptualized by Roland Barthes to infer that *Skin Flick* is a work which is indeterminate, open-ended, and endlessly subject to reinterpretation. Barthes deploys this term to distinguish from the term “work” which is generally prescribed a determinate meaning. Barthes describes this notion of the textual as: “... a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture”. (Barthes 1977: 146) See: Roland Barthes (1977) *Image-Music-Text*, Glasgow: Fontana


LaBruce himself often cites the fanzine *J.D*s as launching the Queercore (or Homocore) movement. LaBruce describes the Queercore movement as being the “bastard child of two, once exciting, underground movements, gay and punk...the little bugger who knew how to boost the best from both worlds”. (LaBruce, 1997: 15) For an analysis of the function and meaning of the term see: Dennis Cooper (1996) ‘Queercore’ in Donald Morton (ed.) *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader*, Boulder: Westview Press, 292-296.

Jürgen Brüning’s short film *Er hat ne Glatze und ist Rasist, Er ist schwul unde ein Faschist* (He Is Bold and He Is Racist, He Is Gay and He Is a Fascist) (1994) alternates between interviews and scenes of gay men in skinhead attire. In positioning such appropriations as a dangerous attempt to counterphobically react against neo-nazi violence, the film reaches its apex when an animation of swirling penises closes in to form a swastika. As an insidious warning Brüning quotes Brecht, cautioning the viewer: “Be careful what kind of skin you pull back, you never know what sort of head will appear”. What interests me about Brüning’s film is how in reevaluating the construction of homosexual identity, Brüning locates the real possibility of danger that is sublimated in Queer appropriations of the skinhead.


LaBruce, ‘No Skin Off My Ass’ in Noam Gonick (1997) *Bruce LaBruce: Ride, Queer, Ride!*, Toronto: Plug In Editions, 176. (my emphasis)

LaBruce in Gonick (1997) 177.
I use the phrase *claiming skin* here as utilized by Haines to characterize the active self-identification process undertaken by Queer skinheads. However, Haines’ ethnographical studies of Queer skinhead discourse on the Internet highlights a difference in the approaches made by European and American Queer skinheads. As Haines states: “…in Britain one typically becomes a skinhead through the rather neutral process of doing what slightly older friends are doing and being accepted by them. The use of the phrase *claiming skin* in North America suggests that for Americans becoming a skinhead is much more of a conscious decision, and one that is likely to be taken in isolation rather than with the support of a skinhead peer group”. (Haines 1999 – my emphasis)

Indeed I’m sure LaBruce would be quite happy with Healy’s criticisms, as LaBruce maintains: “I am not now, nor have I ever been, a likely candidate for the position of GLAAD poster child”. (LaBruce 1997: 12) [GLAAD is the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation campaign for positive lesbian and gay role models and the banning of negative ones in American media.]

The aesthetics of Camp position identity, especially gender identity as an impersonation, a role, as Susan Sontag describes “Being-as-Playing-a-role”. (Sontag 1983: 280) It challenges and ridicules the rigidly defined patriarchal structures of male and female, by drawing attention to the performative nature of gender. Yet as Sontag argues camp should also be understood as a sensibility as distinct from an idea, “It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre”. (Sontag 1983: 280) See: Susan Sontag (1990) ‘Notes on Camp’ in *Against Interpretation and other Essays*, New York: Anchor Books, 275-292.
Scott Treleaven (2000) ‘Every Faggot Loves a Fascist: Nazi Skins in Love in LaBruce’s Skin Flick’ in Steven Reinke & Tom Taylor (eds.) A Decade of Artists’ Film and Video, YYZ Books and Pleasure Dome, Toronto, 39.

LaBruce cited in Tanner (1999)

The production house of Cazzo is without a doubt the largest producer of skinhead related gay pornography. To view the Cazzo back catalogue see: <www.cazzofilm.com>


LaBruce also cites the genesis of Skin Flick as originating with a proposed collaborative project with artist Attila Richard Lukacs that was never realized. Lukacs frequently paints the skinhead as a symbol co-opted by gay male subculture and fetishized to invoke specific types of masculine desire. Configured within technical discourses that recall the traditions of European painting, Lukacs’ representations characterize an ambivalent gay male subjectivity. As Lawrence Chua states: “The Skinhead figures that emerge are at once monks and rabid wolves, working-class heroes and deluded proto-fascists fallen from the sky. There are even some middle-class imitators thrown in for the sake of realism” (Chua 1989:136) Lukacs’ configures these representations with a complete absence of circumstances that might constitute the political and sexual identities of the depicted Queer skinheads. Instead they are derived and operate personal fascination and eroticism. As Lukacs states: “I started dealing with them as an erotic or sexual fascination...they were guys that, to be honest, I would rather have had in bed”. (Lukacs cited in Bell, 1994: 61) See: Lawrence Chua (1989) ‘49th Parallel Gallery, New York’ in Flash Arts (International Edition), n148 October, 133-4 – Celina Bell (1994) ‘Skinhead Esthetics’ in Maclean’s, v107 n9, February, 61.


LaBruce cited in Tanner (2000)

An extension here would be to discuss the implication of Reinholt and Cameltoe’s primary sex sequence, which remains the only simulated scene throughout the entire film. The exaggeration of such sexual acts might also be considered as a strategy that denaturalises heterosexuality.

LaBruce cited in Tanner (2000)
Indeed the film’s producers were so concerned with LaBruce’s characterization of Manfred that at many times they asked LaBruce to tone down what was perceived as Manfred’s effeminacy.


As extension here might be to make a comparative analysis of the rape scene in Skin Flick with that in LaBruce’s Hustler White (1996) that each interrogate the representation and critique of racial power within pornographic narratives. In what is almost a reversal of the racial dynamics of Skin Flick’s rape sequence, in Hustler White the character of Kevin Kramer is gang-raped by an all-black group of hustlers. Like the rape of Leroy, the issue of consent is problematized in the rape of Kevin. As the owner Ms. Glass (Vaginal Crème Davis in his “male drag” character of Buster Boote) asserts: “So you think you were raped? My dear, that wasn’t rape. That was merely an exercise in Black Power.” The knowledge that the character of Kevin is played by not only an international gay porn star, but “the top bottom [that is, sexually passive] currently working in the business” (LaBruce 1997: 109) also complicated an understanding of this sequence.


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