

Outlooks

Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual
Cultures

Edited by

Peter Home, and Reina Lewis



Outlooks

Outlooks reveals the rich and diverse contribution that visible and confident lesbian and gay publics have made to the visual world. Asking such questions as whether there is a need for a specifically queer perspective on past art, how have lesbian and gay artists responded to the AIDS crisis and society's attempts to censor homosexual art, *Outlooks* analyses the involvement of lesbians and gay men in visual culture.

Offering a sense of something shared with others, this volume provides a space for lesbian and gay artists to exhibit their work and discuss its relationship to society. In critical essays, it allows for a wide ranging theoretical and historical discussion of the activities of lesbian and gay men as consumers and producers of art and shows how much has been missed by a heterosexist approach to art history and the study of culture.

Richly illustrated with over forty images, many the work of the contributors, the book includes statements by contemporary lesbian and gay artists, photographers and performers as well as critical articles by art historians, cultural theorists and lesbian and gay activists.

Emmanuel Cooper on Francis Bacon
Richard Dellamora on Warhol and postmodernism
Sunil Gupta on race and queer art
Richard Kaye on the gay icon of Saint Sebastian
Wendy Leeks on Ingres and the lesbian viewer
Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley on lesbians and the fashion spread
Thaïs Morgan on lesbianism and nineteenth-century aestheticism
Carl Stychin on the censorship of lesbian and gay art
Simon Watney on the visual poetics of mourning

With statements from contemporary artists: Robert Farber, Sadie Lee, Veronica Slater, Lawrence Steger and Iris Moore, Matthew Stradling, and Cherry Smyth on Tessa Boffin.

The editors, **Peter Horne** and **Reina Lewis**, both teach in the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of East London.

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Contents

List of figures vii

Notes on contributors ix

Acknowledgements xii

Introduction: *Re-framed—inscribing lesbian, gay and queer presences in visual culture*

Peter Horne and Reina Lewis 1

PART I QUEERING ART HISTORY

Chapter One

Queer spectacles

Emmanuel Cooper 13

Chapter Two

Absent bodies/absent subjects: *the political unconscious of postmodernism*

Richard Dellamora 28

Chapter Three

Out of the maid's room: *Dora, Stratonice and the lesbian analyst*

Wendy Leeks 48

Chapter Four

Perverse male bodies: *Simeon Solomon and Algernon Charles Swinburne*

Thaïs E. Morgan 61

Chapter Five

Losing his religion: *Saint Sebastian as contemporary gay martyr*

Richard A. Kaye 86

PART II PRACTITIONERS' STATEMENTS

Chapter Six

Dyke! Fag! Centurion! Whore! *An appreciation of Tessa Boffin*

Cherry Smyth 109

Chapter Seven

The art of accompaniment

Robert Farber 113

Chapter Eight

Lesbian artist?

Sadie Lee 120

Chapter Nine

Negotiating genres

Veronica Slater 126

Chapter Ten

Rough trade: *notes towards sharing mascara*

Lawrence Steger and Iris Moore 132

Chapter Eleven

The aura of timelessness

Matthew Stradling 139

PART III PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Chapter Twelve

Promoting a sexuality: *law and lesbian and gay visual culture in America*

Carl F. Stychin 147

Chapter Thirteen

These waves of dying friends: *gay men, AIDS, and multiple loss*

Simon Watney 159

Chapter Fourteen

Culture wars: *race and queer art*

Sunil Gupta 170

Chapter Fifteen

Ad(dressing) the dyke: *lesbian looks and lesbians looking*

Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley 178

Figures

1.1	Francis Bacon, <i>Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror</i> (1967–8).	25
2.1	Vincent van Gogh, <i>Old Shoes with Laces</i> (1886).	33
2.2	Dust jacket of Fredric Jameson's <i>Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</i> (1991).	37
2.3	Andy Warhol, <i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i> (1963).	39
2.4	Walker Evans, <i>Sharecropper's Family, Hale County, Alabama</i> (1936).	40
2.5	Andy Warhol, <i>Young Rauschenberg #1</i> (1962).	41
2.6	Publicity still of Montgomery Clift.	42
3.1	J.A.D.Ingres, <i>Antiochus and Stratonice</i> (1840).	53
4.1	Simeon Solomon, <i>Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene</i> (1864).	66
4.2	Simeon Solomon, <i>The Bride, The Bridegroom and Sad Love</i> (1865).	68
4.3	Simeon Solomon, <i>The Song of Solomon</i> (1868).	69
4.4	Simeon Solomon, <i>Spartan Boys about to be Scourged at the Altar of Diana</i> (1865).	71
4.5	Simeon Solomon, <i>A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep</i> (1871).	76
5.1	F.Holland Day, <i>Saint Sebastian</i> (c. 1906).	92
5.2	F.Holland Day, <i>Saint Sebastian</i> (c. 1906).	92
5.3	Federico García Lorca, <i>Saint Sebastien</i> (c. 1927).	94
5.4	Pierre and Gilles, <i>Saint Sebastian</i> (1987).	95
5.5	Performance artist Ron Athey, in <i>Martyrs and Saints</i> (1994).	99
5.6	David Wojnarowicz, <i>Bad Moon Rising</i> (1989).	100
6.1	Tessa Boffin, <i>The Knight's Move</i> (1991).	110
7.1	Robert Farber, <i>Western Blot No. 14</i> (1992).	114
7.2	Robert Farber, <i>Western Blot No. 19</i> (1993).	118
8.1	Sadie Lee, <i>Erect</i> (1991).	121
8.2	Sadie Lee, <i>La Butch en Chemise</i> (1992).	123
9.1	Veronica Slater, <i>Angel Lust, no. 2 (Wings of Desire)</i> (spring 1993).	127
9.2	Veronica Slater, <i>Visions of Paradise, no. 5</i> (summer 1991).	129
9.3	Veronica Slater, <i>Entombment, no. 1</i> (summer 1994).	130
10.1	<i>Lawrence Steger and Iris Moore.</i>	133
10.2 and 10.3	<i>Rough Trade i and ii.</i>	134–5
11.1	Matthew Stradling, <i>The Weeping Flesh</i> (1991).	141
11.2	Matthew Stradling, <i>The Wound</i> (1993).	142
13.1	Gran Fury, stickers (<i>left</i> 1988, <i>right</i> 1990).	163
13.2	Shop window, Old Compton Street, London, February 1994.	166
13.3	Interior, Maison Bertaux, Soho, London, February 1994.	167

13.4	Shop window with obituaries, Hudson Street, New York, 1990.	168
14.1	Mumtaz Karimjee, from the series 'In Search of Self' (1989).	173
14.2	Ingrid Pollard.	174
14.3	Rotimi Fani-Kayode, untitled (1988).	175
14.4	Ajamu, untitled (1992).	176
15.1	<i>Looking Butch.</i>	184
15.2	<i>Gendered Couples.</i>	186
15.3	<i>Lesbian Moments.</i>	186
15.4	<i>Twinning.</i>	187
15.5	<i>Overt Pleasures?</i>	187

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Cherry Smyth is a journalist and author of *Queer Notions* (Scarlet Press, 1992). She is co-curator of the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and author of the first study of contemporary lesbian visual art, *Damn Fine Art by New Lesbian Artists* (Cassell, 1996).

Lawrence Steger is a video and performance artist whose solo performances have been presented widely in the United States and in the former West Germany. He collaborated with Iris Moore on the performance piece *Rough Trade* and with the video artist Suzie Silver on various works. His video collaboration with Patrick Siemer, *It Never Was You* was premiered at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 1995 and has toured extensively. He has received numerous grants and awards from city arts funding bodies in the United States.

Matthew Stradling studied painting at St Martin's School of Art and gained an MFA from the University of Reading. His work has been included in various national exhibitions and he has had several solo shows in London, notably 'Luxuria' at Battersea Arts Centre and 'Penetralia' at the Edge Gallery. His work has been collected by Derek Jarman, Marc Almond and the Princess Anita of Malaysia. He now works from a studio in north London.

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Tessa Boffin had decided to write a piece for this book shortly before she died in 1994. We are extremely grateful to Cherry Smyth for agreeing to write the article in Tessa's stead. We were particularly pleased that Tessa chose to write about her performance practice rather than her photography and that Cherry was able to continue with this focus.

Sadly, we also have to commemorate the death of another contributor to this book: Robert Farber died of AIDS late in 1995. We are particularly pleased that he was able to finish his chapter, and modify it to reflect on his experiences as his illness grew more serious. From our contact with him we know he will be greatly missed for his humour and strength, as well as for his outstanding work.

Introduction

Re-framed—inscribing lesbian, gay and queer presences in visual culture

Peter Horne and Reina Lewis

This book is an exploration on the part of artists, art historians, critics and theorists of how we might inscribe lesbian and gay sexualities, identities and desires into accounts of past and current artistic production and its reception. It takes the reader into accounts of the past ([Part I](#)), into statements by practising artists of the present day ([Part II](#)), and into discussions of a broad range of contemporary visual cultures that includes photography and the consumption of popular culture, as well as the traditional categories of fine art ([Part III](#)). These interconnecting parts share a concern with the relationship between visual theory and our understanding of sexual categories. This is characterized in various ways: art historians insert a queer perspective into the consumption and historiography of past art; contemporary artists refer to, quote and adapt the codes and styles of past artists; lesbians read same-sex pleasures into fashion magazines in a way that is both with and against the grain of ostensibly heterosexual imagery. In these and other ways, contributors to this book remove the presumption of a heterosexual viewer, construct alternative traditions and find means of inscribing a queer presence in the play of spectatorship to be accessed within the product, whatever the sexual identity of the artist/producer who created the work or the heterosexual postulations of the text.

In recent years, the term queer has re-emerged as some people's preferred description of themselves and/or their work. Queer has sometimes been defined by its transgressive difference from what are perceived as heterosexist norms. It has also been taken to encompass a variety of desires and hybrid identities, countenancing elements of play and sexual practice, which also transgress the norms of what some have seen as more ostensibly 'politically correct' forms of gay and lesbian identity. In the construction of what has come to be known as queer theory, the work of Judith Butler has been influential in articulating a sense of lesbianism as a contingent category. She argues that lesbianism does not express an inner essence but is rather a meaning produced in opposition to dominant forms of gender, forms which are given the effect of being natural by virtue of the repetition of their performance (Butler 1991). Butler opposes the idea that the lesbian can be defined in relation to prior regulatory notions; rather, she understands herself as someone who is eligible for the category of lesbian because of an attraction to the dissolution of the boundaries that identify what is masculine, feminine or even heterosexual. Moreover, Butler argues that what is signified by the terms heterosexual, lesbian or queer will change over time. Once all gendered identities are seen as performative and transitory, the heterosexual is not uniquely separated from the lesbian or gay. The adoption of lesbian or gay or queer identities throws up the kinds of contradictions and instabilities that the regulatory definition of gender as natural tries to suppress.

This book, while retaining lesbian and gay in its title, is aligned to queer in that we would also see all sexual identities as contingent and transitory, in the sense of being formed in active

(though not necessarily conscious) response to dominant identificatory norms which themselves need to be deconstructed. But we consider that the terms lesbian and gay still denote identities with which more people wish to be affiliated. Also, queer is currently discovering its own history. In this process points of continuity between queer and lesbian and gay visual histories are emerging as well as points of difference. This book is poised at this particular cusp. It is driven by the dynamic of a double movement: it addresses lesbian and gay visual cultures in a way which foregrounds art produced by lesbian and gay, or queer, artists but also goes beyond that to attend to the potentially queer reception of visual material from the past and the present, regardless of its sexual point of origin. This creates a space to consider the production of queer meanings, since in a heterosexist society the queer reader has often to be ever resourceful and imaginative in the production of alternative sexual pleasures. One form that this imagining takes is the envisaging of other gay readers: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick illustrates this in the *Epistemology of the Closet* when she invites the reader to consider a solitary gay listener to a Judy Garland song, marooned in middle America away from the urban gay cultures, imagining other consumers enjoying similar pleasures of self-identification in the music (Sedgwick 1991:144). This vision of camp appreciation as the assumption of shared pleasures points to the importance of cultural production in the formation of lesbian and gay identities. It also points to the ways in which both identity and community may have to be thought of differently in the case of lesbian and gay experiences. Camp is but one form of twentieth-century gay culture. This book hopefully also offers further senses of something shared with others, be it a visual code, a way of reading, or a question about the dominance of heterosexuality. Both readers and their envisaged others may be variously identified as lesbian, gay or queer: categories which may themselves be interpreted in a number of different ways. What is common in all these discussions is the sense that in modern cultures the presence and meaning of same-sex desires are inseparable from modes of power, which both censure and produce sexualized identities, whatever their provisionality. This volume wishes to put these issues at the centre of visual enquiry in an intervention that encompasses artistic production, cultural activism and the academy.

The past twenty years have seen the growth of interdisciplinary and radical academic work which has addressed the issues of power and culture in modern societies. Questions of class, gender and ethnicity have been at the cutting edge of much of this exciting cultural theory, linked to both the development of university departments of cultural studies, and the various revisions of the previously autonomous disciplines. Attention to these concerns has entered the realm of the art historian and the critic, though often with a greater delay than in other areas. Revisions, such as the social history of art and feminist art history, have found that their need to re-inscribe class and gender has not been met simply by identifying the role of working-class or women artists. Rather, this type of re-inclusion has itself raised methodological questions about writing, power and historiography. One might expect the strategies for the inclusion of lesbian, gay or queer sexualities within the narratives of modern culture to raise similar questions about the paradigms of explanation and analysis. Instead, there is often a resistance to re-addressing theory in the light of these sexualities. This tendency is even present in some postmodern theory. Postmodernism is often characterized in terms of a dislocation or decentring of the major forms of modernist representation and the loss of those grand narratives of modernity which implied an unproblematic sense of progress (even, or especially, if this is achieved through struggles between opposing forces propelling the action). In one dominant version, that of Fredric Jameson (1991), discussed here by Richard Dellamora, emphasis is placed on the loss of agency produced by the dissolution of individual and spatial boundaries in the disengaged experience of the (post) modern world of electronic media. Some postmodern theory is haunted by such senses of loss.

The view from the position of those marginalized or made peripheral within the previously

dominant narratives of modernism and modernity is often quite different (see [Mercer 1994](#)). Gay art theorists, such as Douglas Crimp, have seen the resource which postmodernism offers (Crimp and Rolston 1990). The dissolution of the sense of difference between high and popular cultures and the defence of appropriation as an aesthetic strategy have provided lesbian and gay activists with the theories and practices to be used in a new assertive politics of the street in the vital visual art of AIDS demonstrations. Similarly artists have used the mixing of codes and media within postmodern practice to explore new ethnic identities unconnected to imperialist and colonialist narratives of origin. In the experience of the diaspora there is a felt need to recognize difference but also to challenge the primitivism and Orientalism that has had such an enduring presence in modern and modernist western visual cultures. One of the potentials of postmodern theory is to challenge the idea of modernity's clean break with past discourses of subordination and exclusion. Yet, it is all too common for the postmodern theorist who is not lesbian or gay to ignore the implications of new sexualities and new negotiations of issues concerning power and the image. This is redressed by Dellamora's intervention in this debate within this volume. The tendency in some postmodern theory to write out (homo)sexuality is even more disturbing when we recognize that one of the main contributions of academic revisions and activist polemics has been to constitute visual theory as a field that cannot but be concerned with the engendering and racialization of the gaze.

In this light, lesbian/gay/queer theorists are in an advantageous position. Rather than regretting the loss of a putative centre in a sovereign subject who is implicitly white, male and heterosexual, they frequently weigh the supposed losses of postmodernism against the benefits of postmodern permission to pleasure and habits of appropriation that account for much of the vivacity of contemporary gay culture. Indeed, one could say that lesbians and gays have always had to be postmodern in the sense of having to form identities out of appropriations and adaptations of existing codes, not least in order to resist definition and co-option by medical and legal discourse.

Strategies for the inclusion of sexuality within the narratives of modern culture are unsettling to the existing paradigms and raise difficult questions of the categories to be used. How are we imagining the gay, lesbian or queer identities and modes of spectatorship that animate this book? When we first told someone that we were editing a book on lesbian and gay sexuality and visual culture, he (a heterosexual man) asked us if we were going to be 'outing' past artists? There was a sense of threat involved in such an expectation, and an assumption that it would be natural for a book on lesbian and gay art history to simply reclaim past and present visual artists as lesbian or gay, and that the meaning of such terms would be obvious. Anyone remotely concerned with lesbian and gay or queer theory would know that the application of these categories to past and present artists is contentious and the politics of outing, in any case, debatable. However the idea of outing artists, or the provision of spaces within which artists can come out on their own terms, is important. Unlike the case of feminist art history, where the putatively gendered subject of the woman artist is always out,¹ the lesbian and gay artist, critic, historian and reader is often rendered invisible unless they make a point of coming out. However, 'coming out' and 'outing' can imply a rather uniform notion of a closet which is present in the same way for all, and a simplified idea of self-affirmation in escaping from it. This model has been accused of setting a white male middle-class agenda which is inappropriate to the experience of those negotiating complex identities or occupying several different identities in different contexts (Smyth 1992). There is also a problem about what one would be outing artists as. If the term homosexual is a modern medicalized construction, only invented by the sexologists of the latter part of the nineteenth century, so the liberationist idea of the gay identity can only be applied to those involved in the cultures of the moment of gay liberation and after. Moreover, recent theory has questioned assumptions in the use of these terms, in so far as they imply a political identity resting on self-recognition and the liberation of a unified inner self (Butler 1991).

Still, the desire to discover past gay and lesbian artists, to produce a tradition, to invent a

history, is understandable: a need that this book recognizes, but also problematizes. Obviously, all the practitioners in this book are happy to be identified with a project of this title (and some that we approached were not); being in this volume, is one way of coming out. But this does not imply that the contributors to this volume all make the same identification with any of the terms lesbian, gay or queer, or interpret the meaning of these terms in the same way. Several artists in this book would wish to be known as artists who are lesbian, gay or queer, and whose sexuality is relevant to their work, but they would not necessarily wish to be known under the composite terms lesbian artist or gay artist. These latter terms seem to foreclose meanings and restrict their audience. However, whether or not they wish to be so labelled, they also find that the identification of their work as the product of a 'gay' artist may still determine meanings even where the artist is not using codes which are exclusively gay: Sadie Lee's paintings of female nudes aroused censure in Manchester City Art Gallery, because the work was identified as lesbian-produced, unlike the other (presumed male-produced) canonical nudes in the gallery. Thus artists not intending to restrict their work to a gay audience may find their work bound to their sexual identity, whether they like it or not.

As well as attempting to reach a wide audience without having the work's meanings confined by the artist's sexuality, artists also deploy visual strategies that will be particularly accessible to specific viewing communities. The production of images which are multicode, gives gay readers a privileged access, without prohibiting more general meanings. Veronica Slater's use of a Gluck self-portrait references a gay iconography that allows a privileged access to the visually literate gay reader who recognizes both the lesbian identity of the quoted artist and the lesbian codes of the Gluck image. This, of course, demonstrates that the desire to tie meanings to a point of origin in a sexualized personality can operate for the lesbian and gay reader as well. But these meanings may be found in alternative traditions, or sets of codes recognizable to those accustomed to the exclusions of dominant homophobic cultures. The constructions of such interpretive communities can be seen as a collective expression of negotiated identities rather than as the immediate outlet of true sexuality assumed in common sense.

Rather than just outing individual artists, it is possible in the analysis of certain historical contexts to discern the emergence of codes, used by more than one artist, to construct alternative meanings. This approach, which tends here and elsewhere (Dellamora 1990) to centre on the nineteenth century, demonstrates how dominant models are reused by homosexuals to formulate alternative identities and spectatorial positions, often by appropriating existing mainstream myths and images. Thaïs Morgan discusses how the homoerotic 'monoculture' of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with which Swinburne and Solomon were associated found expression in the appropriation of lesbian themes from Sappho (already popular as a Greek 'classic') and homosocial narratives from the Bible. This type of approach may not out individuals as gay (Swinburne's sexual orientation can only be guessed at, for example) but looks at the codes that artists of diverse sexualities have used in forming oppositional strategies to the restriction of gender categories. This is not intelligible outside of a social context—particular formations of homophobia provide the occasion for the emergence of different gay codes envisaging different values and identities. As Morgan demonstrates, the exchange of and response to images, poems and letters was a fundamental device in the 1860s and 1870s through which were constructed perverse and homosexual identities and through which individuals could articulate their shifting allegiance to or denial of (as was the case with Swinburne's denunciation of Solomon) counterhegemonic socio-sexual identities in circulation. Also in this volume, Richard Kaye traces the process by which Saint Sebastian was appropriated and constructed as a gay icon, emphasizing how the Saint's significance altered as gay identities and agendas were differently constructed in different periods.

The ways in which artists and readers relate to dominant cultural forms can vary. Kaye's

reading of the shifting cultural codes used to represent Saint Sebastian demonstrates how the gay significance of iconography is read through negotiation with dominant/high cultural meanings. Other work, in contrast, can be understood as a more straightforward rejection of dominant forms, drawing on other codes generated within gay cultures, as in the output of Andy Warhol's Factory. Here, the gay artist's opposition to what was experienced as the masculinist forms of the dominant aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism found an alternative visual resource in the camp appreciation of popular culture. Later gay artists, including some in this volume, continue to find that the protocols of Abstract Expressionism taught in their art education excluded a sense of themselves as gay or as having alternative aesthetic sensibilities, and have often turned back to the codes of the nineteenth century. Some, like Matthew Stradling, have re-used both the gay icon of Saint Sebastian and the gay-coded stylistics of Aestheticism to articulate a late-twentieth-century gay sensibility. However, others like Robert Farber have found an enormous resource in a practice and discourse like Abstract Expressionism which values authenticity. Indeed, the very emphasis on gesture and origin which some find obliterating, in the context of AIDS can be transformed into an ethos of testimony and presence in the face of potential annihilation. What makes Farber's work so telling is the way that he deployed different forms of record: transforming the self-referentiality of Abstract Expressionism into a painterly form that can accommodate and interact with the record of contemporary AIDS activism and a recall of how past forms of mourning found a collective expression. The AIDS pandemic has produced a need to build new forms and cultures of mourning that speak to the particularity of the AIDS experience and how this has repositioned or questioned accepted personal and professional wisdom about the expression of grief and its representability. Simon Watney here analyses the specific effects of AIDS on male gay communities. In particular, he considers the impact of shared multiple losses and the need this creates to find appropriate forms, both personal and collective, for expressing grief and making public witness, as well as educating a population composed of individuals with very different histories of the virus and the syndrome.

This volume is concerned in some ways with how artists conceive their work (not least in our artists' statements), but also with how meanings are produced by readers. If we no longer see the author in the role of owner of the text's meaning, we can locate the generation of meaning in the interaction between reader/viewer and text. This allows for both the specificity of different reading positions and for the interaction of subversive readings with dominant or preferred meanings. It thus becomes possible to analyse how the queer reader can find queer pleasures in texts which may appear to be ostensibly heterosexual. This process of reading against the grain is one that recognizes the preferred, or in this case heterosexual, meaning of the text at the same time as it realizes the possibilities of alternative pleasures. The interaction of subordinate and dominant/ heterosexual meanings in the case of diverse images is examined in this volume by Wendy Leeks, Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley. They discuss how the lesbian viewer, who has assumptions different from those of a paradigmatically heterosexual female viewer, may make distinctively lesbian readings at the same time as she shares pleasures that might previously have been assumed to be heterosexual alone. It may not be that the lesbian viewer simply makes subversive readings, but that the possibility of a shared lesbian/same-sex pleasure was already there in the text. Is this a deviant reading of the dominant against the dominant, or did the dominant always have the deviant within it? In other words, queer reading does not aim to discover a gay origin but to trace the spaces for multiple readings within the text. In this way, Leeks re-reads Ingres's *Stratonice* series to analyse how the images produce the possibility of a lesbian visual pleasure. The recognition of the suppressed female knowledges and gazes in Freud's case study of 'Dora' in his 'Fragment of an analysis' is used to open up the paintings to new possible readings: Leeks identifies the marginalized female gazes

within the picture plane to argue that there is already encoded within the Ingres series the availability of a position for an active female/lesbian viewer. Similarly, Lewis and Rolley re-examine psychoanalytic theories of narcissism to see how the ostensibly same-sex space of the fashion magazine produces homoerotic codes and permits a lesbian pleasure that can simultaneously desire to be and to have the beautiful female model that is the object of the woman reader's desiring gaze.

Another approach concerned with the viewer's response takes homophobia itself as the object of study. Carl Stychin, Richard Dellamora and Emmanuel Cooper all assess how the operation of homophobia within both dominant and even supposedly radical cultures can paradoxically destabilize the terms of the heterosexual dominance they seek to uphold. For radical discourses this throws texts into contradiction and causes problems of analysis. Dellamora, for instance, argues that Fredric Jameson actually stymies his own project by his need to disavow the body and homosexuality. His suppression of the homoerotic character of camp leads him to ignore a model of agency that would resolve his (political) problem of the non-agency of the postmodern split un-subject. As Stychin and a number of artists emphasize, we must also attend to the explicit forms of censorship that homophobia produces. Attempts at suppression and other overt uses of power can, in fact, give publicity to the queer work that they want to stifle. As Stychin demonstrates in his discussion of the controversy over the American National Endowments for the Arts funding policy, the internal instabilities of homophobic anxiety call into question the security of the very heterosexual identities that Senator Helms and others seek to defend. It is no coincidence that so much of the moral panic in America has centred on the visual arts; it is not just sex acts but their representation that endangers the mythically pure 'America'. Both homophobic and gay discourse presuppose that representation is central to the formation and maintenance of identity. Stychin is specifically concerned with how the law, which appears as an arbitrator rather than a producer, is itself another form of representation. It is in this context of shifting terms—which change not just from our own efforts, activisms and theories, but also in response to attack and the need to counter-define—that writers and artists are choosing how to identify themselves and their work.

The analysis of the effects of the power to censor must be matched by attention to other processes which have stifled the plurality of voices, even within cultures of opposition. One reason for the popularity and political purchase of queer is that it promises the inclusion of those previously excluded. Although the earlier lesbian and gay movements wanted to question all forms of sexuality, they have come to be seen by some as formations that marginalized difference in the production of a gay 'ethnic' identity that in practice was white, middle-class and male. Such a response ignores the attempts of black and white lesbian and gay activists to acknowledge and deal with exclusions, and to recognize the difficulties of negotiating the demands and appeals of often conflicting sexual and ethnic identities. In the 1990s, queer has been associated with a willingness both within and beyond the gay movement to recognize diverse and contradictory sexualities and lifestyles. With this recognition and the gaining of more cultural spaces for the exhibition of black art, there is new work being produced which explores and challenges sexual and ethnic identities. In some cases, this uses aesthetic codes actively to construct new hybrid entities, and in others it pushes at the limits of identity itself in work which is not easily contained within existing formulae for sexuality and ethnicity. This cultural activity is not happening in a political and material vacuum; Sunil Gupta's essay explores the ways in which black and Asian artists in Britain have found or fought for spaces within which to explore these issues of sexuality and identity. He traces a development from the context of funding by the Labour-controlled Greater London Council, which in the early 1980s embraced a rainbow coalition of previously marginalized constituencies, to new international contexts offered by exchange and communication within and beyond Europe. With these changing points of reference, new communities of reading visual images are emerging.

The present moment is one in which developments identified as queer are encouraging new perspectives on past work. For Emmanuel Cooper, it is possible to look back and assess how current queer work was anticipated by artists who have either been at odds with the modernist tradition or can be reclaimed in a queer perspective now that their sexuality can be more freely discussed. Cooper's analysis of the posthumous outing of Francis Bacon reveals not only the effort that critics previously made to 'in' an artist who was always out for anyone who wished to see it, but also reconsiders twentieth-century art in relation to an emergent aesthetic of transgression, desire and the body which was present in past practice and is now receiving more overt attention.

As seen in this volume, gays and lesbians have often looked back with a sense of transformative possibility: camp and gay plundering of the past is not just nostalgia, but marks an active reincorporation that is self-knowing. While, as Kaye argues, the appropriation of Saint Sebastian pre-dates the postmodern, his reactivation as a plague saint at the time of AIDS illustrates the strategic provisionality of (gay) identities: the categories we use now are necessary to make sense in the world, but not only do they not relate to any essential 'us', they may signify different things at different times. Similarly, Stradling and Lee re-examine gay visual codes to find new contemporary meanings with a self-knowing narcissism whose irony disputes the possibility of an essential truth or a singular gaze. In other words, recognition of one's own processes denotes a self-conscious subjectivity that, like camp, does not yearn for authenticity. For Stradling, the representation of an idealized, eroticized body foregrounds the pleasures of the nude and links the rarefied realm of fine art to the denigrated sphere of the pornographic. The beautiful, if anguished, bodies of aestheticism may speak to a gay sensibility, but as Stradling comments at the close of his piece, this idealization is being reconsidered in the context of AIDS. For Slater, the context of AIDS along with that of the family, produces a representation of the body that is not idealized, but is mutable and temporal. The disintegration of the ideal male body, like her complex positioning of the female body, speaks to a physicality that is fragile and compromised. Here, again, the physicality of paint re-enters as a trace and an object in its own right. For Stradling, and Lee also, the decision to paint rather than use more 'modern' technologies, offers a route into a visual past that other means would obscure. They share a tendency to paint portraits whose monumentality is postmodern in its self-conscious construction of a facade, creating personae that are dressed up and self-knowing, ironically offering the temptation of the (fantasized) truth of an individual.

Contestation over the authenticity of gendered bodies and the fixity of individual natures is elaborated further in the performance work of Iris Moore and Lawrence Steger, and Tessa Boffin. In the case of Moore and Steger, the interchangeability of the gendered roles in their collaboration calls into question the stability of all forms of identity and of the popular cultural images they appropriate. The famous Sharon Stone knicker(less)scene from *Basic Instinct* takes on a whole new meaning when alternatively reproduced by a woman and a gay man, resituating revisionist strategies that aimed mainly to reverse a (gender or class) bias. The performative identifications staged in this new type of work question all the terms of social identification. Tessa Boffin's self-presentation as lesbian boy and queer dyke, described here by Cherry Smyth, signalled the sort of gender-fuck identifications that queer might offer lesbians (like the gender-fuck that gay liberation offered gay men). Tessa's masquerade performance of lesbian drag both offered the materiality of her body and denied any attempt to make a single truth of it. Whereas male gender-fucking at the time of gay liberation was frequently criticized as a misogynist parody of femininity, now, parody is not only fashionable but critically respectable. Once femininity and masculinity are both seen as forms of masquerade naturalized by repetition, women can parody femininity as well. Though we wonder, in the light of the mainly male popular cultural take-up of transvestism (Kurt Cobain *et al.*), whether the radical potential of new queer gender-fuck will turn out to have its transgressiveness assimilated by the dominant. New forms of masquerade have further radical purposes: for artists

such as Lawrence Steger and Iris Moore, it is clear that masquerade offers not only a radical critique of gendered and sexualized positionalities, but also challenges the way that audiences read. The desire to produce an author as owner of the text and origin of its meaning is frustrated when the two performers can take either role or speak any part, not wanting to produce a formal play, but creating a series of unique events. This challenge to the ownership of fixed meanings allows them to experience a temporary relief from the burden of authorship and gender while they watch the other perform 'their' part. In the circulation of positions within such performances, disruptive and disorderly desires are envisaged in a queer intervention into hegemonic, often masculinist, representations of gender.

A postmodernist emphasis on pleasure, combined with this new queer interest in performance and spectatorship suggests possibilities for a cultural analysis that moves beyond the critique of objectification to a belief in the pleasure and potentials of looking and voyeurism. In terms of the female gaze, this context marks a shift that allows us to discuss how lesbians and women look for or with pleasure at other women, without being simply re-appropriated as masculinist. Queer has great potential for visual theory, particularly when it is conceived as a new mode of spectatorship. However, while some would see queer spectatorship as untrammelled by previous notions of identity, we think that it is important to consider how queer as a mode of viewing may itself be differently inflected by the agent's experience of being positioned by pre-existent regulatory discourses or, equally, of assuming identities developed in resistance.

It is significant that the emergence of an interest in the performative is linked to the issue of AIDS. The AIDS context electrifies the depiction of the body and adds an urgency to the need to recognize the diversity of activities and identifications: when being realistic about who does what with whom can save lives, the need to accept the shifts of sexualized object choice are crucial. For Boffin, this was a political imperative that meant focusing on fantasy as well as reality. With the development of safe sex material the erotic re-emerges as both a product of and vehicle for safe gay sex, illustrating the changing but crucial role of representation in the formation of sexualized identities. This is typical of the processes by which lesbian and gay readers find and create meanings from diverse visual sources. The exercise of and reflection upon this gaze in themselves produce new spaces for the articulation of homoerotic pleasures.

This volume is in part one such space; it is a space in which artists can come out in terms that they choose and make statements about their work, some entering into a form of communication different from their usual, primarily visual, discourse. It also provides a space to consider theoretically and historically the activities of lesbians and gay men as viewers responding to artists' adoption of the existing canon of high culture. And it gives space to consider the creation of communities of viewing in the development of new canons and codes for representing and questioning sexual identities, formed and reformed in resistance to heterosexual norms and to the homophobia that is analysed in several pieces. It is also a space for the historians, critics and artists to consider their own positions as spectators (see also Davis 1994:5), sharing with other lesbian, gay or queer viewers an intent to find visual pleasures and give scope to fantasy and desire.

Note

- 1 Though we recognise that some of the early work of feminist art history did require the effective 'outing' of women artists in the struggle to re-attribute to women their mis-attributed work. See Greer 1979 and Parker and Pollock 1981.