

Western family romance' (Ibid.: 21) that is central to psychoanalysis and to phallogentrism more generally. What we have then, is fetishisms, or, to paraphrase Irigaray, this fetishism which is not one.

NOTES

1. *Mkisi* is the singular of *minkisi*.
2. For a discussion of the latter, see Gamman and Makinen (1994) pp. 18–27.
3. See section 4 of *Capital*, Vol. I, entitled 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof'.
4. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, first published in 1899.
5. *History and Class Consciousness*, published in 1923.
6. First published in 1988 in Louise Rose's 'Freud and Fetishism: Previously Unpublished Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 57.
7. Weege - born Arthur Felling - a New York-based photographer famous for his depictions of crime and brutality, also used this method of gaining access to crime and/or accident scenes before they had been cleared. In one sense, then, the figure of Vaughan could be interpreted as a commentary on the fetishising of death and disaster by photographer's such as Weege, and increasingly so, by mainstream media.
8. For example, *The Parasite Murders*, also known as *Shivers*, and *They Came From Within* (1974), and *Dead Zone* (1983).
9. For a more wide-ranging and detailed account of why it is that female fetishism is a contradiction in terms, see Grosz (1995) pp. 149–54.
10. For a detailed critique of the phallogentric inability to imagine difference beyond the limits of what Irigaray refers to as and economy of the same, see de Lauretis (1988).
11. For a significantly different approach to the question of lesbian fetishism, see de Lauretis (1994).
12. In her foray into the dildo debates Heather Findlay raises some interesting and important questions concerning the dangers of conflating the lesbian and Freud's fetishist, particularly given that the latter is misogynistic in his belief in women's castration, his understanding of sexual difference in terms of women's deficiency, and his aversion to the female genitals. See Findlay (1996) pp. 157–9.
13. As found in Mapplethorpe (1982: 1986).
14. Bhabha (1996)
15. Fanon (1970)

Queering Popular Culture

IN THIS CHAPTER WE WILL examine the ways in which the relation between queer (and/or Queer Theory) and popular culture has been, or could be, configured. But, first, it is important to note that there is no single correct way to queer popular culture. Rather, the queering of popular culture has taken multifarious forms, has focused on different issues, and has drawn on a range of theoretical positions, often to contradictory or conflicting ends. In this chapter I will discuss some of the questions that are raised when we ponder what queer(y)ing popular culture might mean, how it might be practised, and what the implications of various practices might be.

I want to begin with a quote from Jean Genet in which he states that 'standing before the work of art requires you to act... The tension you bring to the work of art is an action' (cited in Doty 1993: 1). What this suggests is that one's relation to works of art, to texts, if you like - whether these are literary, televisual, filmic, photographic, or whatever - involves something other than passive reception. We are never simply consumers of popular cultural texts, but in and through our very reading of them we actively (re)create them. So, drawing on the model of textuality developed by Roland Barthes¹ and others, we could say that the relation between reader and text is one which goes beyond the assumed dichotomies of passive/active, consumption/production, subject/object, reading/writing, and so on. We are always, as Foucault would claim, implicated in the production of meaning and identity, and hence are both agents and effects of systems of power/knowledge. Given this, it seems valid to claim that the relationship between Queer Theory and popular culture is both political and cultural. Queering popular culture involves a range of reading/writing

practices that are political insofar as they seek to expose and problematise the means by which sexuality is textually constituted in relation to dominant notions of gender. And Queer Theory is cultural insofar as it concerns itself with the ways in which cultural texts – books, films, television programs, magazines, political manifestos, scientific theories, and so on – (in)form our understandings and experiences of sexuality and subjectivity. Queering popular culture, then, involves critically engaging with cultural artefacts in order to explore the ways in which meaning and identity is (inter)textually (re)produced. But, whilst this notion of queering popular culture may sound pretty straightforward, the question of how we go about this is not quite as easily answered. The four main approaches that we are going to consider in this chapter are concerned with audience and reception theories, theories of 'the gaze', the notion and practice of 'camp', and what might be thought of as a sort of guerrilla tactics. In one sense, each of these approaches to queering popular culture could be said to share resonances with the others, and in another, they are significantly different, and at times, seemingly incompatible. What I want to do now is briefly outline each approach.

Audience and reception theories are concerned with the ways in which audiences receive and respond to texts. Traditionally this has involved identifying audiences and categorising them as, for example, 'women readers', 'lesbian viewers', 'teenager readers', and so on. So, for example, in some analyses of the reception of particular popular cultural texts an examination is undertaken of the differences between men's and women's responses to pornographic magazines. Others explore the differences between black women's and white women's responses to films, sitcoms, and so on, in which black women are either non-existent, or play a peripheral role. Others examine the ways in which daytime soap-operas or Mills & Boon romances are engaged with by 'housewives', or women of a particular age and class. Whilst these studies are important, the main criticism aimed against them is that they tend to homogenize groups such as 'women', 'black women', 'middle-aged, working-class housewives', and so on.² Moreover, it has been claimed by theorists such as Alexander Doty that these kinds of analyses overlook the complex ways in which certain reception strategies are shared by otherwise disparate groups and individuals (1993: 2).

It is for this reason that Doty proposes 'queerness' as a mass

culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity' (Ibid.: 2). What interests Doty is not so much how or why gays and/or lesbians read and respond to texts differently to so-called heterosexuals, but rather, the possibility that texts assumed to be heteronormative may contain queer elements, and/or that straight-identifying people can, and do, experience what he calls 'queer moments' when engaging with such texts. Whilst Doty is not explicit about exactly what might constitute these so-called 'queer moments' it seems feasible to think of them as perhaps akin to the experience of what Freud refers to as 'the uncanny'. For Freud, the uncanny is tantamount to the return of the repressed, and thus, one might argue that the uncanny constitutes the recognition of the absurd but nevertheless life-producing effects of heteronormativity, founded as it is on dichotomous logic. In other words, the 'queer moments' that Doty refers to could be described as moments of narrative disruption which destabilise heteronormativity, and the meanings and identities it engenders, by bringing to light all that is disavowed by, and yet integral to, heteronormative logic.

Doty goes on to explain that 'queer readings and positions can [and do] become modified or change over time as people, cultures, and politics change' (Ibid.: 8), thereby suggesting that queerness does not reside in the text, but rather is produced in and through the ever-changing relations between texts, readers, and the world. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Doty's methodology compels him to imply otherwise. For example, in his discussion of the musical number 'The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat' in Busby Berkeley's *The Gang's All Here*, Doty describes the number as one in which 'Carmen Miranda triggers an all-woman group masturbation fantasia involving banana dildos and foot fetishism' (Ibid.: 13). Being a great fan of Busby Berkeley musicals, I was delighted to come across a piece of writing in which such films are treated as something other than ridiculous. However, I am not quite convinced that this so-called description of one of my favourite numbers is altogether apt. On the one hand it could explain why, without my knowing it, this particular number has always appealed to me so much, but on the other, I'm reluctant to concede that the colour, glamour, and excitance – the aesthetic pleasure, if you like – of this scene is simply reducible to the covert presence of banana dildos and foot fetishism. In short, what I want to suggest is that it is not so much the case that this scene is, in itself, queer, but

rather, that for Dohy, the viewing of it constitutes a queer moment. In other words, queer does not function here as a label that one can appropriately (or otherwise) apply to (the essence of) a particular text. Rather than functioning as a noun, queer can be used as a verb, that is, to describe a process, a movement between viewer, text, and world, that reinscribes (or queers) each and the relations between them.

Despite the misgivings outlined above, many viewers and critics believe it is theoretically and politically productive to attempt to locate the queer elements and undercurrents in specific texts. Such an approach to queer textuality is apparent in the 1995 film *The Celluloid Closet*, directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. The film is based on a book entitled *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981) written by Vito Russo (a gay activist, and co-founder of ACT-UP) – a text which Andy Medhurst has described as ‘an impressive act of gay archaeology’ (cited in Drukman 1995: 86). Russo, to a much greater extent than Dohy, could be said to practise a particular form of queering popular culture, which is perhaps best described as ‘spot the queer’ in which the primary aim is to discover the (repressed) homosexual or homoerotic elements (the ‘dirty secrets’) contained in mainstream cinematic texts. What motivates Russo’s attempts to ‘out’ such texts – or at least specific aspects of them – is apparent in the following quotation. Russo writes:

The big lie about lesbians and gay men is that we do not exist. The story of the ways in which gayness has been defined in American film is the story of the ways in which we have been defined in America. As expressed on screen, America was a dream which had no room for the existence of homosexuals. And when the fact of our existence became unavoidable, we were reflected on screen and off as dirty secrets. We have cooperated for a very long time in the maintenance of our own invisibility. And now the party is over. (cited in GLAAD 1996: 1)³

Russo, who died in 1990 before the release of the film version of his book, wrote a number of articles on the relation of film to the construction of (homosexual) identity, which were published in *The Advocate*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Village Voice*. In his book, Russo explores the way in which the ‘invisibility’ of gays and lesbians affects reading practices. He does this through elaborating the notion of a ‘gay sensibility’ or gay savvy as that which allows gays to ‘detect “reality” about sexual pleasures even when [they are] obfuscated by a smoke-screen of “appearance”’ (Drukman 1995: 87).

The film version of *The Celluloid Closet* repeats this ‘archaeological’ gesture, by attempting to unearth queer moments in Hollywood films, and thus to destabilise their heterocentric foundations. As a consequence most people who have seen *The Celluloid Closet* are unable to view *Ben Hur*,⁴ *Calamity Jane*,⁵ *The Maltese Falcon*,⁶ *Red River*,⁷ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*,⁸ or *Rebecca*,⁹ in quite the same way ever again. This is an important approach that has been significant in the development of gay and lesbian engagements with popular culture. It has, for example, allowed discussion of the different ways in which different people read certain scenes in relation to their own lives and their own perceived position in the world. Its limitation, however, is that it seems to imply, at least on one level, that cultural critics can, like good detectives, discover the queer content – the ‘reality’ as Drukman puts it – which has supposedly been veiled over or obfuscated within mainstream cinematic narratives.

The notion of so-called ‘gay sensibility’ as a potentially transgressive response to marginalisation, and vilification, inevitably leads us to a consideration of what is often referred to as ‘camp’. As Andy Medhurst notes:

[Camp] is a part of gay men’s daily lives, one of the ways in which we (sic) have managed to make sense of a world which at best tolerates and at worst exterminates us, a method for negotiating our way through what Jonathan Dollimore has called ‘the lived contradictions of subordination’... Camp is one of our most fearsome weapons... and one of our most enriching experiences. (1997: 275)

For Medhurst, camp is a practice, a ‘relationship between queens and their circumstances’ (Ibid.: 276) that is firmly rooted in gay male culture. It is a survival strategy that, as Medhurst’s fondly recounted tales of the ‘in your face’ queer antics of Jane/Wayne County, and of himself and his close circle of queens and divas demonstrates, is at once political and pleasurable.

So, how does one recognise camp when one sees it? Camp is most often associated with parody, exaggeration, theatricality, humour, and insofar as it foregrounds the performative character of gender, sexuality, race, class, and so on, it functions – at least potentially – to denaturalise, or queer, heteronormative notions of identity, as Esther Newton noted in her landmark study of female impersonators.¹⁰ It was perhaps Susan Sontag’s analysis of camp as ‘a sensibility that, among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous’ (1966: 276) that jettisoned the term into the realm of

popular culture and away from its roots in gay male subcultures. Sontag's now somewhat notorious essay 'Notes on "Camp"' (reprinted the concept as a playful, ironic, aesthetic strategy that anyone could deploy in order to upset conservative beliefs, practices, and forms of representation. Consequently, camp, Medhurst claims, is now absolutely everywhere' (1997: 289). It has become, as Jon Savage notes, 'an all-pervasive ingredient in a pop culture [that] has become reified, ironised, once-removed from the impulses that called it into being' (cited in Druksman 1995: 88). The fear, then, is that in and through its commercialisation, camp may have lost its subversive edge, or at least its ties to a specifically gay, lesbian, or queer politics. Whether or not this is the case is debatable, nevertheless, critics continue to use this term in order to explore the ways in which particular texts, or elements thereof, queer – in the broadest sense of the term – heteronormative values, beliefs, and institutions.

In an article entitled 'Holy Homosexuality Batman!: Camp and Corporate Capitalism in *Batman Forever*', Freya Johnson examines the ways in which *Batman Forever* functions in and through camp techniques of mirroring and exaggeration which simultaneously 'trouble' or denaturalise heteronormative institutions and enable their survival as artificial. Johnson begins her article with a quote from a psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, who, in 1953 in a text entitled *Seduction of the Innocent*, warned parents and lawmakers of 'the "factually proven" method by which comic books turned innocent children into homosexually and pederastically inclined deviants and perverts' (cited in Johnson 1995: 1). Wertham, disturbed by what he saw as 'a subtle atmosphere of homoeroticism which pervades the adventure of the mature "Batman", and his young friend "Robin"', makes a list of the signifiers that seem to imply that this relationship may not be a healthy one. These include the fact that Bruce Wayne, an unmarried 'socialite' and 'Dick' Grayson, his much younger ward, 'live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred' (Ibid.: 1). In effect what Wertham does, is to search for what we, following Doy, might think of as queer moments or queer signifiers, and as much as Werther's politics is opposed to Johnson's, her task could be described similarly.

As I said, Johnson's focus is *Batman Forever* which, she claims, is saturated with campness, and/or with queer signification. Whilst, as Johnson sees it, camp homoerotic encounters between the

Caped Crusaders abound and are juxtaposed to the sterile heterosexual 'love-scenes' with Nicole Kidman in which Val Kilmer (Batman) remains fully clothed, the villain of the piece – Jim Carrey's Riddler, who prances around in a sparkly tarta and bright green jorjard screaming 'Spank Me!' – is 'much much campier' (Ibid.: 2). The Riddler's overtly queer behaviour draws the audience's attention away from the homoerotic electricity between the heroes and invites the misreading that "if the bad guy's gay, the good guys must be straight" (Ibid.: 2). Further, argues Johnson, the film aligns 'Bad Capitalism' with 'Bad Sexuality' embodied in the figure of the Riddler and opposes this to 'Good/Democratic Corporate Capitalism' which is aligned with the rejection of bad sex (and of the Riddler's/Nygmá's advances) and embodied in the figure of Bruce Wayne. In short, Johnson suggests that in this text 'Bat-Camp' as she calls it, functions to eclipse the anti-normative potential of the more radical elements of camp that are nevertheless at work here. 'Bat-Camp', she says, converts what 'Sontag once termed a "secret sensibility" into a mass market symbolic currency' (1995: 5) by drawing attention to its own artificiality, its own status as a vehicle for mass marketing, and thereby flattering the media-savvy postmodern audience. In effect, then, it seems that camp may have not only lost its subversive edge – as many gay theorists post-Sontag feared it would – but worse still, has ironically become a successful strategy with which to market heteronormative values and lifestyles.

But, despite Johnson's reading of camp as it functions in *Batman Forever*, there are those who claim that this particular sensibility, or set of textual strategies, continues to have queer currency even in so-called mainstream (con)texts. One such example is Judith Halberstam's reading of what she refers to as 'English abject masculinity films' of the 1990s, in a paper entitled 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings' (2001). But before we look at Halberstam's thesis in more detail, I want to locate it within the debate about whether there has been, or could be, something called 'lesbian camp'. To cut a very long story short, there are, on the one hand, those who claim that lesbian camp does exist and that butch/femme role playing and female-to-male transvestism are evidence of this. On the other, there are those who argue that given that gay men and lesbians have, historically speaking, been positioned significantly differently in relation to dominant discourses and social institutions, the use of an umbrella term that

conflates the practices and positions of the two groups and overlooks the differences between them, is highly problematic.¹²

In her analysis of what she refers to as 'kinging', Halberstam carefully avoids the pro/anti logic of the polarised positions outlined above, arguing instead, that:

While camp may have originated in and may be peculiar to drag-queen cultures, it also travels as a cultural style and allows for a gay counter-public site to influence and ironize the depiction of femininity in mainstream venues... [C]amp shows up in many sites that are not gay, as an aesthetic mode detached from one type of identity. (2001: 427)

In similar ways, Halberstam claims, kinging – the hyperbolic and yet heterogeneous performance of masculinities – could be said to exceed the boundaries of lesbian and transgender subcultures and to circulate independently of the drag-king act itself (Ibid.: 427). Hence the existence of, for example, the figure of Austin Powers, 'international man of mystery', who Halberstam suggests 'represents a variation of dragging masculinity', and 'is marked irredeemably as queer' (Ibid.: 245). In other words, *Austin Powers, International Man of Mystery* – as an exemplar of what Halberstam refers to as the 'new king comedies' – not only poignantly illustrates Judith Butler's claim that gender is the product of repeated, culturally specific, gestures or performances, but also shows that masculinity (like femininity) is an ideal(!) that can never be achieved, but which men must nevertheless anxiously attempt to (re)produce if the 'heterosexual matrix'¹³ is to remain intact. And insofar as *Austin Powers, International Man of Mystery*, draws on, and further parodies, the *Carry On* image of two interdependent aspects of masculinity embodied in the figures of Sid James (homophobic) and Kenneth Williams (homeroetic), Mike Myers, Halberstam claims, 'exposes English masculinity as a peculiar combination of camp and compulsory heterosexuality' (Ibid.: 442). Or, to put it more simply, the effect of camp, or kinging – at least in Halberstam's reading of this particular text – is to denaturalise, and/or queer masculinity, and the heteronormative institutions that are informed by, and inform, gender and sexuality.

According to Steven Druksman, camp could be thought of as a "means" or a "method" for the gay gaze' (1995: 88). As the title of his (1995) article 'The Gay Gaze, or Why I Want My MTV' suggests, Druksman's aim is to elaborate a notion of the 'gay gaze' which would queer heterocentric accounts of the relationship

between viewing practices and modes of desire. In order to understand Druksman's project, we must first turn to Laura Mulvey's (1975) landmark essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema',¹⁴ which, many would claim, began the still on-going debates on the gaze.

As those familiar with film theory will know, the gaze is a theoretical concept which has been used in a range of many and varied attempts to think through the relation between ways of seeing and ways of being. Theories of the gaze raise the question of how we look, and what the relation is between ways of looking and the (re)production of gender identity. In her account of the gaze Mulvey drew on the psychoanalytic notions of scopophilia, ego-identification, and fetishism in order to analyse the relation between sexual difference and the production and consumption of Hollywood films. In short, Mulvey argued that classic Hollywood cinema was primarily (in)formed by an attempt to satisfy the unconscious desires of male viewers.

In the article Mulvey identifies three types of looking. The first of these is the look of the camera as it records the filmic events. Mulvey argues that this is inherently voyeuristic and male. The second is the look of the characters in the film at each other. Mulvey suggests that most films tend to be edited in such a way that the male characters do most of the looking, and the female characters are, more often than not, looked at. Men, then, are the active subjects of most films whereas women are the passive objects. The third is the look of the spectator, and this, claims Mulvey, is directed or shaped by the first two looks. Since the spectator can only see what the camera shows, then the spectator is forced to identify with what Mulvey calls 'the male gaze'. She says:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (1989a: 19)

Mulvey supports these claims by drawing on various psychoanalytic concepts to argue that woman (as she is represented in Hollywood films) connotes something that the male gaze continually circles

around but disavows, that is, her castration or lack. Thus she suggests that the glamour of women in film is linked to castration anxiety and provides the male viewer with a fetishistic object in and through which he can both acknowledge and disavow or displace such anxieties. The gaze then, as a fetishistic form of scopophilic pleasure, belongs, Mulvey, following Freud, concludes, to the male alone.¹⁵ In 1981, in response to calls for an explanation of female viewing pleasure – a phenomenon whose very existence was negated in Mulvey's original conception of the gaze – Mulvey published another paper entitled 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"'. Here she argues that whilst the female spectator may (cross-) identify with the (male) subject of the film, this is achieved with some level of difficulty through what she calls 'visual transvestism', that is, the female spectator's temporary 'masculinisation' in memory of her so-called active phase.¹⁶ Consequently, Mulvey's model of the gaze has been accused of remaining caught up in, and reproducing, phallogocentric, hetero-centric, and/or eurocentric logic. Moreover, if, as was suggested in the previous chapter, women also fetishise, then the foundation of Mulvey's account of the gaze becomes untenable.

There have since been many attempts to rework Mulvey's theory of the gaze and to address its shortcomings. Mary Anne Doane, for example, has argued that female viewing positions may well be multiple and much more fluid than Mulvey recognises.¹⁷ As we saw in the previous chapter, Kobena Mercer demonstrates that race and ethnicity impact significantly on viewing practices. As Z. Isling Nataf notes, insofar as the black lesbian spectator 'has a schizophrenic relationship' (1995: 61) with mainstream cinema she can, and often does, radically misread and thus subvert dominant meanings and the institutions they support. In this sense, claims Nataf, such spectators queer mainstream texts by elaborating camp subtexts which work against the grain. Theorists such as Richard Dyer,¹⁸ Andy Medhurst,¹⁹ and Yvonne Tasker²⁰ have all convincingly argued that male bodies are also objectified in cinema, and that this is increasingly the case. And, Dyer,²¹ Jackie Stacey,²² and, as I said, Drukman, have explored the feasibility of a theory of gay and/or lesbian spectatorship.

For Drukman, who openly acknowledges that subject positions are ultimately undecidable, the elaboration of a taxonomy of gay male spectatorship is nevertheless politically necessary despite the obvious pitfalls – that is, the tendency to homogenise and

universalise gayness, and to therefore overlook the complex ways in which certain reception strategies are shared, as Dory has noted, by otherwise disparate groups and individuals (1993: 2). Drukman, who, unlike many other contemporary theorists, believes that psychoanalytic theory can be appropriated as a political weapon, draws on Mulvey's work, but raises the question of where/how the gay male spectator is, or can be, situated in the scenario that Mulvey envisages: as he puts it: 'if one is not a male heterosexual spectator, why pay the price for the ticket?' (1995: 84). It is Drukman's contention that 'for the gay male spectator, the object of scopophilic pleasure is the man [whilst in Mulvey's schema it is the woman] and the subject of ego-identification is... in constant flux between the woman and the man' (Ibid.: 84–5). What enables Drukman to make this claim – rather than, as we might suppose, the claim that the male who is subjected to the gaze of the gay male viewer becomes objectified, and thus feminised – is the notion of transitivity outlined in Mulvey's (1981) article. For Drukman, the 'gaze-shifting' character of transitivity shares resonances with the notion of a gay sensibility that 'enables the twist of traditional Oedipal narrative', and it is this possibility, says Drukman 'that makes the gay male want to gaze at all' (1995: 87). For Drukman, then, the gay gaze is less an empirical phenomenon that can be pinned down and explained, than a sort of shifting process that (at least potentially) engenders the multiplication of meanings and identities, and thus undermines the logic of Sameness that is central to heteronormative accounts of sexual (in)difference. But if, as Diana Fuss claims, 'because subject-positions are multiple, shifting and changeable, readers can occupy several "I-slots" at the same time' (1989: 35), it seems unnecessary, perhaps even misguided, to refer to the phenomenon Drukman discusses as the 'gay gaze' – a term that implies the existence of a unified, singular and identifiable ontological category (gayness).

For many theorists, particularly those more influenced by the work of Foucault than by psychoanalysis, any attempt to identify a specific form of the gaze – particularly the queer gaze – is decidedly unqueer in as much as such a task necessarily presumes the viability of identity categories. Consequently, Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman suggest that cultural critics and queer theorists focus not on identities, but on identifications, which, they claim, 'are multiple, contradictory, shifting, oscillating, inconsistent, and fluid' (1995: 45), rather than fixed and singular, as Mulvey's

thesis implies. Whilst they acknowledge that texts do position viewers/readers, or at least could be said to construct 'preferred readings', in and through the use of a range of textual mechanisms, Evans and Gammann are nevertheless of the opinion that all texts, even those that have 'overt heterosexual narratives', 'can be viewed queerly' (Ibid.: 46). This claim is supported, it seems to me, in the queer re-readings of Barbie that now abound and that have been discussed in much detail by Erica Rand, and Lucinda Ebersole and Richard Peabody.

The task that Rand sets herself in *Barbie's Queer Accessories* is 'to determine how and why such products transmit value [and meaning] in order to design effective strategies of cultural activism' (1995: 8). For Rand, Mattel (the company that has produced Barbie for the past thirty odd years) is an exemplar of successful hegemonic heteronormative discourse. Mattel, she argues, promotes compulsory heterosexuality by representing it as natural, as a *fait accompli*, promotes capitalism by glamourising a character with a necessarily outrageous amount of apparently unearned disposable income, and promotes ageism and racism by suggesting that the epitome of feminine beauty and desirability is white, thin, and young (Ibid.: 8-9). Given this, Rand is compelled to explore the queer potential of the seemingly conservative figure of Barbie.

The title of Rand's book - *Barbie's Queer Accessories* - refers to all those who have, at some time in their lives, engaged with Barbie and thus invested this figure with a range of meanings, identities, desires, and fears. Of interest to us, however, is those who Rand claims 'act as accessories to the crime of helping Barbie escape from the straight world into which Mattel has tried to enclose her' (Ibid.: 11), who 'queer Barbie's intended meanings by giving her queer artifactual and narrative accessories' (Ibid.: 12). One of the most interesting examples that Rand discusses is the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO),²⁸ who, in 1993, procured a number of 'Teen Talk Barbies' and 'Talking Duke GI Joe' dolls and switched their voice-boxes. The group then returned the dolls to the shelves of a local department store and included in the boxes the phone numbers of local television stations so that horrified shoppers would make public their outrage at purchasing an effeminate GI Joe or a butch Barbie. The campaign was successful and the BLO did indeed get national media coverage. One article in *The New York Times* described the dolls as 'A mutant colony of Barbies-on-steroids who roar things like "Attack!", "Vengeance is

mine!", and "Eat lead, Cobra!". The emasculated GI Joes meanwhile, twitter "Will we ever have enough clothes?", and "Let's plan our dream wedding!"' (cited in Ibid.: 159).

The BLO's queering of popular culture - what I am going to refer to as a form of guerrilla tactics - achieves a number of things. First, the voice-box switch reveals, through a denaturalisation of the relation between woman and 'femininity' (connoted by an interest in fashion, and marriage) and man and 'masculinity' (connoted by a warrior-like attitude), the artificiality or social-constructedness of gender. Second, it simultaneously draws our attention to the extent to which these idea(s) about gender become consolidated, and thus rendered invisible, in and through the everyday practices in which we are all implicated. In other words, the guerrilla tactics employed by the BLO seem to nicely illustrate Cherry Smith's claim that queer 'defines a strategy, an attitude... a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality, and the family' (1996: 280). But, if we cast our minds back to Chapter 3 we may remember Lisa Duggan's description of queer as a radical potentiality that is sometimes realised and sometimes not. Rand also addresses this issue, raising the question of if, and how, it might be possible to ensure the subversiveness of particular queer strategies or guerrilla tactics. In response to this question we would do well to keep in mind the distinction between performance and performativity discussed in Chapter 5.

For Butler, the term performativity refers to a precondition of subjectivity, it is that which constitutes subjectivity in and through relations with others and with a world. Performance, on the other hand, is most often used to refer to a set of actions which a pre-sumably always already constituted subject intentionally and knowingly choreographs, in some cases for subversive means. But, if we follow Butler's logic insofar as any performance presupposes performativity, intentional forms of subversion will always be open to multiple meanings, to being (re)read/(re)written. Rand gives an example of this when she cites the case of the Barbie slasher who, as we saw in Chapter 5, somewhat ambiguously mutilated two dozen Barbies by slashing their breasts and crotches and leaving them in public places. So if, as Halperin suggests, queer practice constitutes 'a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance' (1995: 62), how do we interpret and evaluate the kinds of guerrilla

tactics undertaken by, in this case, the BLO? In the final chapter of *Barbie's Queer Accessories*, Rand writes:

If we measure cultural interventions and strategies of resistance by whether they catalyze big social changes by themselves and fast Barbie subversions, like most, will not pass the test: you can't shoot down an antigay referendum by wheaptasting Subversive Barbie all over the state of Oregon... But, if we measure resistance and [queer] transformation in smaller increments, Barbie's subversibility and visible cracks matter a lot. It matters that lots of people recognize and think about Mattel's silences, camouflages, and dubious claims, and come prepared to a Barbie subversion that uses Mattel's line to expose social injustice by drawing connections that they might not have considered before. (1995: 161)

For Rand, then, queer activism necessarily involves engaging with the discourses, the institutions and ideal(s), the products and practices, that one identifies as inextricably bound up with heteronormativity. It involves 'remain[ing] within [heteronormative] consciousness and... proceed[ing] to dismantle it, to weaken it, to break it down on the spot, as we would do with a lump of sugar by steeping it in water' (Barthes 1977: 63). In other words, rather than presuming that it is possible to entirely destroy heteronormativity, or to exist somehow outside of it, Rand proffers, what we might think of as a deconstructive account of the queering of popular culture in which any strategy will necessarily produce heterogeneous and unpredictable effects.

Given the claim made by various theorists throughout this chapter that all texts are open to interpretation and thus all are potentially queer, I want to turn now to a somewhat notorious counter-cultural comic strip – that could be said to constitute an example of guerrilla tactics – created by Diane DiMassa and entitled *Hothead Paisan Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist*. Hothead, the Italian-American homicidal homegirl heroine of the piece, who is most often to be found toting guns, machetes and other such implements in her assault on hetero-patriarchy, is described by Lia Kiessling in the following way: 'She's Pippi Longstocking with more firepower than Rambo ever dreamed of. She's got a bigger mouth than Howard Stern could ever hope for. She's shed more blood than Freddy Krueger and Jason combined. And she has absolutely no balls.'²⁴ Consequently, for some, Hothead Paisan may seem to represent nothing more than a graphic and offensive reaffirmation of all that is most horrific about hetero-patriarchal

power and violence. Indeed, it is this sort of interpretation that led Canada Customs to confiscate shipments of the zinc and to ban its sale in Canada on the grounds that it constitutes hate literature. Others have argued, however, that rather than literally promoting violence Hothead 'delegitimises the symbolic power of the "straight white male"' (Dean 1997: 200) as a paradigm for hetero-patriarchy, through graphic castration – and, in fact, this could well be the threat that institutions such as Canada Customs cannot tolerate.

In all of the strips Hothead finds herself in a hostile heteronormative world in which she is not only marginalised, but constantly assaulted by doctors, newsreaders, advertisers, Neo-Nazis, misogynists, 'femme-bots', homophobes, educators, and so on, all of whom she responds to with murderous rage. The question, to recast a concern of Audrey Lourde's, is whether or not it is possible to use the (symbolic) father's tools to dismantle the father's house. Can Hothead's violence undermine dominant systems of power/knowledge, or, does her behaviour undermine the gains made by feminist and gay and lesbian movements? Should we read Hothead as a queer political satire, a revenge fantasy that is deadly only at a metaphorical level, but deadly nevertheless, or, should we read the text as a reactive attempt to reverse dominant hierarchies that ultimately fails to challenge the logic against which it is apparently opposed, and in fact perpetuates it?

Kathleen Martindale proposes that the theoretical underpinnings of DiMassa's text are not, as some may presume, 'the post-identarian queer theory of Judith Butler or the anti-essentialism of Diana Fuss – but the "lesbian chauvinism" of Mary Daly and Valerie Solanis,²⁵ particularly [the latter's] 1967 SCUM (Society For Cutting Up Men) Manifesto'²⁶ (1997: 70). The thrust of Solanis' Manifesto, which, as Martindale notes, Hothead is shown reading in one particular strip, is that women should destroy the male sex, since, because of his innate deviance and vagina/womb envy, he, is responsible for – amongst other things – war, money, marriage and prostitution, mental illness, prejudice, hate and violence, conformity, censorship, and, in short, making 'the world a shippile'. Whilst it may be valid to claim that Hothead seems to be driven by an equally excessive rage, it could also be said that Hothead's rancour, unlike Solanis', is vented not so much at men, but at what we might think of as the Law of the Phallus.

In a psychoanalytic reading of *Hothead Paisan* Gabrielle Dean

argues that just as feminist psychoanalytic theorists have attempted to explode Lacan's claim that the Phallus and the penis are not indexically related, so too does Hothead. In issue 12, for example, a series of stereotypical males, all making various complaints about their treatment in an earlier issue, are lined up beside a phallic pillar. The pillar which bears the inscription 'For God, For Country, for Penis' then proceeds to be blown-up by a couple of dykes with a classic cartoon box of TNT whose laughter overtakes the entire frames (Dean 1997: 200). This is just one of many examples, claims Dean, of Hothead's attempt to reinscribe sexual difference in and through a kind of guerrilla practice that 'visibly dislocate[s] the phallus, and thus the chain of meaning emanating from its fixed position' (Ibid.: 201). She goes on to explain that the text 'articulates a countersubjectivity, a relation to the symbolic order that is, at times, successfully oppositional' but, she stresses, does not 'function by outright negation of the existing symbolic order' (Ibid.: 201). In Dean's opinion, Hothead inhabits and thus infiltrates the symbolic order in much the same way as water infuses a lump of sugar that has been immersed in it, breaking it down, changing its structure, and simultaneously being changed by it.

More particularly, Dean claims that because lesbian desire cannot be represented in psychoanalytic terms except as a form of disavowal that leads to a masculinity complex (that is, as a stereotype of the phallic woman), then the only option for the (always already) 'phallicised dyke' is to take up this fetishised position – which is itself the result of disavowal on the part of the phallogocentric imaginary – and simultaneously accept and repudiate it. The task, she says, is to 'occupy the stereotype, in the sense of a military occupation, a guerrilla colonization; to fetishize this fetish... in order to both identify with it and reject it' (Ibid.: 207). And this, she argues, is exactly what Hothead does. Thus Dean reads Hothead's rage not as constituted by a desire for the phallus, but by a desire to *resignify* or to queer the phallus; Hothead wants control over signification (Ibid.: 209–10), and more particularly, over the ways in which subjectivity, sexuality, and social relations, are constituted in through the relation to this so-called Transcendental Signified (the Phallus) which Lacan claims defines each subject's access to the Symbolic Order.

Whilst this particular approach to queering popular culture, unlike the strategies discussed earlier, involves the explicit production of alternative images, each of the approaches in different

ways, and to varying degrees, read/(re)write 'mainstream' culture for resistory purposes. Whether or not, the various engagements do queer popular culture and the discourses that inform it, is, of course, open to debate. But then how could it be otherwise?

NOTES

1. See Barthes (1990: 1994; 1995).
2. For a more detailed discussion of the positive and negative aspects of this sort of approach see O'Sullivan *et al.* (1983).
3. See www.glaad.org/glaad/news/9603/vito-russo.html Vito Russo was one of the founders of GLAAD (the Gay Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), and the associated Center for the Study of Media and Society.
4. 1959, directed by William Wyler.
5. 1953, directed by David Butler.
6. 1931, directed by Roy del Ruth and based on a novel by Dashiell Hammett.
7. 1948, directed by Howard Hawks.
8. 1953, directed by Howard Hawks and based on a novel by Anita Loos.
9. 1940, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and based on a novel by Daphne du Maurier.
10. See Newton (1972).
11. The following writers have all commented on Sonjag's use of the term camp: Dollimore (1983); Dyer (1992a); Medhurst (1997); Meyer (1994); Miller (1993).
12. See, for example, Davy (1994); Graham (1995); Medhurst (1997); and Robertson (1996).
13. See Chapter 5 for an explanation of this term coined by Butler.
14. It is important to note that Mulvey's essay was published at a time when feminists were extremely concerned with what they saw as the objectification of women in all forms of media. The issue of representation, and its relation to gender has, since the popularisation of postmodernism, taken quite a different turn.
15. Linda Williams (1999) argues against Mulvey's claim that the work of fetishisation is always the same, and claims that Freud's scenario of the little boy's encounter with the his mother's genitals is significantly different from the experience of classic Hollywood narrative. That is, in the Freudian schema, the phase prior to the girl's relinquishing of her mother as her primary love object, and the replacement of the ('active') clitoris as the primary erotogenic zone with the ('passive') vagina. For an account of the Oedipal development of females, see Freud (1931).
- 16.

17. See Doane (1982); (1988/9).
18. Dyer (1992b)
19. Medhurst (1985)
20. Tasker (1993)
21. Dyer (1987)
22. Stacey (1988)
23. For more information on the Barbie Liberation Organisation, see www.artmark.com/blo.html
24. www.charlatan.cabletron.ca/jan23_97/arts/
25. For a cinematic account of Valerie Solanis' infamous attack on Andy Warhol, see *I Shot Andy Warhol*, written and directed by Mary Harron.
26. The SCUM Manifesto is available at: www.enviroink.org/orgs/coe/essermions/scum.html and also at www.bcn.net/~jpiazza/scum.htm

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