

INTRODUCTION

The plural of demoniacal texture which opposes text to work can bring with it fundamental changes in reading, and precisely in areas where monologism appears to be the Law: certain of the “texts” of Holy Scripture traditionally recuperated by theological monism (historical and analogical) will perhaps offer themselves to a diffraction of meanings (finally, that is to say, to a materialist reading), while the Marxist interpretation of works, so far resolutely monistic, will be able to materialize itself more by pluralizing itself (if, however, the Marxist “institutions” allow it).

—*Roland Barthes*

You better work.

—*Rupaul*

This book begins by admitting to a sin, or at the very least, to an act of intellectual bad taste: It takes camp seriously. Even more appalling, it begins with the assertion that the history of the now world-engulfing experience called modernity needs to attend to a variety of critical responses beyond those called Marxism, and that camp can be understood as one such response. Compounding its offense is this book’s driving impulse to see camp as a philosophy of modernity that illuminates capital in the past five decades in ways that the “institutions of Marxism,” as Roland Barthes calls them, frequently do not. Indeed, as Barthes suggests, capital’s widening effects need to be seen as multiple and diffracted, not solely because there are a multitude of intellectual responses that can be understood as engaged forms of critique of the dynamics

of modernity (and modernization and modernisms), but because to become aware of them, we need to understand how such engagements with the effects of the political economies of profit may and may not coincide. This book situates two philosophical practices of modernity, Marxism and camp, as they each can offer assessments of capital's contradictory tendencies to enforce its defining logics of contemporary culture and political economy, and thus decides to sustain its bad taste by continually considering camp as something more than the seemingly lightweight pleasures of consumption to which it has been relegated in most of the literature on the subject.¹ In this regard, this book extracts from Barthes's comment the sense of "work" as both the open-ended object to be given to a variety of readings and work as labor—in this case, the sense of camp as a form of queer labor that has shaped a way of knowing capital in its lived dimensions within production by queer male intellectuals. In taking camp seriously, we should be clear at the beginning of this book that the legacy of Karl Marx's critique of capital and the camp intellectual work of queer men in the Western metropolis perhaps seem to have little in common, and in point of fact it may be a camp act on my part to attempt to put them together. In the former, we rediscover the somber-faced legacy of the German philosophical tradition, the heir of Kant and Hegel, going about his work of turning the world on its head and dreaming of a human society freed from the constraints of routinized labor and necessity; while the latter summons the vision of some queer men finding, in the slightest slouch of a movie heroine's hip and the snort of smoke from her flared nostril, a utopian world of plenitude and the fun to be had with the most debased of cultural forms.

Against such apparent failures of Marxism and camp to concur in their critical dimensions, *Working Like a Homosexual* proposes that Marxist and camp intellectual practices derive their energies from similar but hardly identical interests in upending, in their disparate ways, the world that capital has brought about and, further, wonders how shared features of these two ways of producing critical knowledges of modernity can be understood in relation to each other. Taking Barthes's prompt that the interpretation of contemporary culture simultaneously be grounded in the realities of life under capitalism (his insistence to become, ultimately, materialist) and be aware of the subtle and playful movements of the sign in which being materialist does not mean being vulgarly materialist, in this book I align particular features of Marxist critique with the cine-

matic visions of four queer men to suggest that both Marxist interrogations of the unstable behaviors of value *and* camp intellectual practices are occupied with similar features of modernity and capitalism. This conjoining of Marxist critical thought and camp is perhaps a heuristic device that yields an absurdity in seeing the enterprises of Marxist critique and camp play in conjunction; it remains for the reader to decide if the strategies of this book can offer a new way of thinking about what it means for scholars of Marx and for practitioners of camp (who are not solely queer men) to work alongside one another in their attempts to make sense of a world defined by profit and its value codings as they are reigned over by capital. Although I would want to trace a longer history of camp beginning in the nineteenth century with the appearance of Oscar Wilde and his philosophy of surfaces in that moment of industrialization (and extending to a number of figures on different national stages and in various moments—Marcel Proust, Sergei Eisenstein, Jean Cocteau, James Whale, Rainer Fassbinder, Pedro Almodóvar), for the scope of this project, I limit my investigations to a handful of post-World War II American filmmakers, specifically Vincente Minnelli, Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, and John Waters. Through their work I hope to demonstrate the continuities between Marxist critique and camp sensibilities and to suggest further ways in which the problem of value has been a long-standing challenge for many intellectuals, camp ones among them.

It should be clear from the outset that this is *not* a Marxist treatment of camp, in which I frame the camp object of scrutiny within a Marxist critical legacy. I avoid speaking of Marxism as the lens through which to make sense of the camp text but want to play Marx's writings and camp intellectual production (including film) one off the other to illuminate the contours of these two philosophical enterprises; in this sense, the book at hand is not an anthropology of camp beheld by a Marxist critic so much as a way of taking camp's intellectual work seriously through what we can know of capital through Marx's critique. My hope here is not simply to prioritize one form of knowledge production, either Marxism or camp, over the other, in that there are numerous hazards for deciding that the instances of camp cultural production that this book examines might be made sense of through the language of Marxist knowledge production; most significant among those pitfalls is that camp could only appear as a form of accommodation for the queer men whom I discuss. In this regard, were they situated in a more typical

Marxist ideological analysis, Minnelli, Warhol, Anger, and Waters might seem only to have offered visions of how the subjects of capital might temporarily evade capital's most deleterious effects by ironizing and dismissing the force of capital's value coding in its exploitation of human labor and the maximizing of profit. Rather than deciding in advance on this argument, which approximates a version of false consciousness (where more orthodox Marxist assessments deem such endeavors as, at best, distraction and, at worst, capitulation), I want to explore camp as a philosophy in its own right, one that offers explanations of how the relation between labor and the commodity is lived in the day-to-day by dissident sexual subjects who arrive at their own strategies for critique *and* pleasure.

It is true to say that the critical strategies contained here in the name of Marxism contain a perhaps more "rigorous" (i.e., internally coherent) program for examining the ways that language and representation are themselves caught in the value codings of capitalist cultures. It is equally important, though, to understand the tactics through which queer men of a particular historical epoch have made sense of their frequent omission from representation and sought to invent their own language to appear, in a particular critical fashion, in those complicated moments of exchange under capital. While these tactics, gathered in this book under the name of camp, are less about a larger strategy for the subversion and supersession of capital in the name of a socialist future, they reveal what it is that the camp intellectual can know about capital that a reader of Marx might not (such as the pleasures of the discarded commodity, the efforts to recuperate it and make sense of it, the kinds of historical knowledge about capital that such a commodity might reveal). Further, my examination of camp emerges less from a concern with a "progressive" narrative of gay identity of which camp seems not to have been a part, and more from the ways that camp forms a philosophy of how one can and cannot (or must and must not) participate in the labor of humans to produce the world for themselves, famously, under conditions not of their own making. This book attempts to pervert Marx (in the sense of overturning his writings in order to renew them again) through camp; the world of capitalism as Marx grasped it seems sometimes unconcerned with the ways that some subjects of capital forge their own compelling understanding of themselves within it. Simultaneously, none of the queer male figures whose works I discuss might be summoned as revolutionary figures seeking social change based on ques-

tions of social and economic justice, and the fact that many members of contemporary human societies invent representational sleights of hand to signify their social presence would, in many Marxist accounts, simply point to how we may have made the dismal truths of life under capital into something tolerable. That these subjects so seldom invoke discourses of struggle, revolution, and liberation perhaps only serves to compound matters, and it should be clear that the task of this book is not to reclaim camp simplistically as a revolutionary practice. So naive a pronouncement would only make foolish the work of camp, and the intent here is in fact to argue that the already seeming foolishness of camp—its apparent critical weightlessness, its seeming unconcern with the problems of finance capital and the subsequent international divisions of labor, in short camp’s frequent refusal to be taken seriously—allows for a critical stance to arise *because* one might never expect such an outlook to appear where it does in the queer male subcultures of the postwar United States.

Despite the apparent distance between the sober, critical assessments of more orthodox Marxist pronouncements and the playful, inconsistent strategies of camp, I would argue, we can understand camp as a tendency, indeed an insistence on, continually examining the contradictions that capital gives rise to on a daily basis, specifically through the ruptures and fluctuations of monetary and cultural value; and I would heuristically define camp as an alibi for queer men to labor within those contradictions, when paradoxically it would seem that no subject is ever prohibited from exerting him- or herself on capital’s behalf. Camp functions as an alibi (in the sense of being elsewhere) because the men whose productions this book addresses found themselves caught in a specific historical bind of entering capitalist approximations of labor’s contribution to value, and they did so during some of the most virulently homophobic periods in American history. The bind of this position may to some seem poignant and curiously outdated, while others (queers among, but they are not alone in this predicament) will see homologies with their own situations: while one is seldom prohibited from offering his or her energies to capital, the historical emergence of the category of the “homosexual” and the firm, violent strictures on claiming that social nomination as anything but a form of pathology has meant that the efforts of queer subjects *to labor, to engage in the spheres of production*, allow us to (re)discover two countervailing tendencies at work. First, the capacity to labor on the material world is the modernist predication

of every subject's social worth. Second, within the domain of production, the impulse to ensure that one's habits of desire fail to signify is the only way of surviving within the censorious regulation of sexuality that is not determined by, but too often coincides with, capital's social regulation.

"Never pay more than a dollar for anything, otherwise you just don't get as much": Value and Its Fascinations

The cumbersome name of Marxism might be too large an enterprise to distill in relation to camp, and in this book the particular insights of Marx into the unstable and dynamic fluctuations of value are the specific enterprise that I invoke in writing about Marx's legacy.² The now lengthy history of the many intellectuals who have struggled to remake the world with Marx's critique in mind challenges this project at its inception; is this the same Marxism of the revolutionary struggles of workers, the same Marxism reviled by a host of conservatizing practices around the world in different spaces at different historical moments? In short, no. Those vital legacies of Marx are not encompassed here, but this Marx is the writer who offered a knowledge that not only does capital reorganize human societies around the worth of labor in the production of commodities but its ensuing crises of value will themselves simultaneously defy explanation all the while that such explanations themselves become more necessary and more strange and bewildering. (These last we more customarily call "ideology.") The camp visions made available through the cinematic work I discuss, in point of fact, demonstrate how at odds many queer intellectuals have felt to the very revolutionary movements that would want to seize the historical stage for the emergence of a different set of social relations.³

I refrain here from rehearsing at length Marx's critical analysis of the workings of capital (value, both in terms of use and exchange, money, profit, labor, and exploitation) but instead move to his comments that are motivating for this particular theory of camp. In his critical provocations of the *Grundrisse*, Marx asserts that the political economy of capitalism is most forcefully conceived through the category of production; he then distinguishes each feature of economy (distribution, exchange, consumption) as a moment of production in order to illuminate how humans under capital are producing themselves and commodities. Working on the problem of whether exchange value could be in fact not

solely an innovation of capitalism but a historically long-standing feature of human life that capitalism has seized on in the expansion of value, he remarks that “exchange value leads an antediluvian existence,” which is not to say that it is positively true of pre- and noncapitalist societies, but that it could reside for the philosopher and the historian as a coincidental hallmark of those societies. In a remarkable passage about the status of exchange value, where he moves to include intellectual work as one of these forms of production, he writes that

the consciousness for which comprehending thought is most real in man, for which the world is only real when comprehended (and philosophical consciousness is of this nature), mistakes the movement of categories for the real act of production (which unfortunately receives only its impetus from outside), whose result is the world; that is true—here we have, however, again a tautology—in so far as the concrete aggregate, as a thought aggregate, the concrete subject of our thought, is in fact a product of thought, of comprehension; not, however, in the sense of a product of a self-emanating conception which works outside of and stands above observation and imagination, but of a conceptual working-over of observation and imagination.⁴

Consciousness produces the world through its own categories but can only produce the world of which human labor and imagination (critical imagination included) are capable. Marx carefully insists on the power of his own particularly weighted category (production) and yet also gestures to other habits of thought that might themselves *produce* knowledge that is not necessarily mystification. Of interest for my argument is Marx’s allowance that any particular abstraction (production, value, exchange) needs continually to be pressed to answer what feature of the material world it describes. This notoriously challenging question, of the relation of the world to a language that might represent it, is one that Marx takes up in the name of the appearances of value, and virtually all of the ensuing project of *Capital* can be read as the struggle to find a *universal* language of representation. Marx speaks of money’s function to “supply commodities with the material for the expression of their values, or to represent their values as magnitudes of the same denomination, qualitatively equal, and quantitatively comparable . . . it thus serves as a *universal measure of value*” (italics mine), and here he is inadvertently encompassed by his own philosophical category, giving his

project over to what Barthes calls the “monologism of the Law,” where the singularity of the category bars any perverse, aberrant, playful reading (Barthes’s “diffraction”).⁵

This is no small thing, for although labor in Marx’s work remains relatively “simple,” to use his word, throughout his critical elaborations value evades the conception of which he writes in the foregoing quotation, and indeed, to my mind, demands a “working-over of observation and imagination” on which he could only begin to speculate. Marx manages to stabilize value for his analysis by making it a function of money, in which the equivalences among commodities (where a linen coat is said to be worth a measure of wheat or iron) are measured through the seemingly universal form of money; and when money and commodities are circulating, money manages, according to Marx, to “represent only different modes of existence of value itself, the money its general mode, and the commodity its particular, or, so to say, disguised mode.”⁶ This is a startling turnabout, because here Marx argues that the commodity in fact seems to conceal something about itself, something it had not needed or managed to disguise prior to its expression as an equivalent to money.

It is tempting to say that the commodity is failing to disclose its status as an object of use, but Marx’s nostalgia for precapitalist forms of value notwithstanding, we might wonder if in fact what is concealed is the particular human exertion demanded for its making, which elsewhere Marx suggests is rendered abstract through capital’s demand for “labor-power,” that is, the demand that human exertion become interchangeable and equivalent. One might read the history of capital as, in fact, the overpowering insistence that all humans make themselves adequate for their abstraction and insertion into the processes of production. Arguing in a contrary direction, I wonder if the commodity’s status as an object with some undisclosed feature of its historical moment of production that might be revealed in its movement through exchange might not be, at least sometimes, the fact of its having been shaped by some anomalous labor and laborer, and at this point camp emerges as an expression of such concealed efforts.

The unstable status of value, famously dissatisfying for its being corralled into “use” and “exchange” and through which Marx can note the discrepancies that money itself conceals (i.e., the difference between money as form of exchange and money as profit), is probably the place where we begin to notice the long-standing fascination of queer intel-

lectuals with the commodity. Were it to move with relative ease through the processes of production and consumption in some stable register of value, there might be little interest, but in fact those processes break down both in the surfeit of sheer amount of things produced (i.e., the volume of commodities that capital is capable of putting into distribution) and in their stubborn refusal to be consumed in their totality and somehow returned to an allegedly organic form of decomposition. Instead, the value of the commodity persists to the degree that it rapidly becomes devalued, or put another way, the problem of the value of the commodity becomes more apparent when, after its initial immersion in the cycles of consumption called “fashion” (or even more temporally constrained, “fad”), it disproves a model of full and adequate consumption. This is where camp’s critical energies become engaged with the commodity form, but rather than situate camp as a form of engagement appearing at the moment in which the commodity languishes after its tour through the industrial cycle described by Marx, I want to insist that camp can also be detected in the very forms of mass culture that call attention to their own tendency to become unfashionable. In short, what if certain commodities betrayed the knowledge that they were destined to become “useless”? Is this not potentially a critical knowledge that demands that the recipient acknowledge both his or her affection for that moment after the commodity’s apparent terminus in the cycle of consumption and the wonderment that the thing embraced has been manufactured in order to arrive at this moment?

In making this claim, I have simultaneously to suggest that critical knowledge can appear in a variety of unexpected places, not least in the things of mass culture themselves, and we can thus think of the commodity (say, the film musical or the “trash” cult film) as, in a certain manner, “in drag,” as it coyly gives up some secrets about its production while withholding other knowledge from unsuspecting viewers. While there has been an emphasis on rediscovering the political dimensions of the historical avant-garde in its relation to mass-cultural forms, we should equally be at pains to discover the political dimensions of camp in the popular form as a knowledge of, and delight in, the apparent uselessness that travels with the commodity in its trajectory toward the moment after its seeming consumption.⁷ That camp’s knowledges do not emerge easily for all spectators will frustrate some readers, not least those taught to universalize themselves insistently (i.e., like most liberal subjects, to see themselves as capable of all forms of knowing); I would

argue that this is all the more tribute to camp's tactics of dissemblance, but it also allows us to remember that not all camp intellectuals are determined solely by sex/gender difference around the particular axis of male queerness.

Marx helps us to understand these figurations of value's wild fluctuations in camp productions because while we remain mindful of the long-standing confusion over the specific historical agent of camp (usually queer men, but as I discuss below, also women, teenagers, blacks), we should also keep in mind the force of production under capital, particularly in terms of how capital seeks to treat all labor as undifferentiable, even when the regimentations of industrial production demand the increased specificity of each task within the processes of production. Marx called this tendency, from the perspective of wealth, the abstraction of labor within the industrial mode:

Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter for chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only has the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form.⁸

Underlying Marx's stress on the apparent indifference toward the specificity of labor by those who profit from it is the sense that all tasks seem commensurate when performed for wages. The labor of queers within the alibi of camp, though, suggests that perhaps only the particular sensibility under scrutiny here could have had a hand in producing the films that I discuss. Homophobic social attitudes work in concert with the abstraction of labor to suppress homosexual camp style *and* specific kinds of work that are enabled by the camp emphasis on stylistic commodity differentiation, differentiation known quite often as fashion.

By theorizing camp as the result of labor by queers, this book displaces camp from being solely a hallmark of consumption to being more vitally situated in relation to the creation of profit. In this respect, I am treating camp as a strategy for being able to labor and simultaneously providing the opportunity for queers to use their labor to mark the product in ways unanticipated by Marx's account. The argument that camp emerges as a concealed knowledge that travels with some commodities begs another

question about how the labor—specifically as Marx understood that category—that “congeals” within the commodity might also be accompanied by another form of human enterprise that cannot always be directly expressed (or made tangible) through its exchange for money; in short, the nexus of labor-commodity-money-value has another feature of queer subject’s life that accompanies it—that of the frivolousness, the lack of apparent seriousness, that which we might call play and which Hannah Arendt called “work.”

Labor and Work-as-Play

In her discussion of the category of labor in *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt corrects what she sees to be a key shortcoming in Marx’s analysis: Marx, according to Arendt, fails to attend to the consequential distinction between labor and work. Ever the careful philologist, Marx seems to ignore the abiding presence (in most European languages and in the classical Hellenic philosophy to which he refers) between these two names of different human activities. Arendt insists that this omission of such a significant category signals Marx’s resistance to encompassing theoretically those endeavors that stand alongside labor, which she labels “work.” Whereas waged *labor* sponsors the production of commodities and subjects, according to Arendt, the efforts entailed by *work* are given to the production of something else, and the distinction would seem to function thus: labor is characterized as the ongoing, repetitive, dull task of scratching out a life from the world, but work appears in the acts by which humans create for themselves something recognizably outside of themselves by which they can know their relation to labor—in short, work seems something hidden from the forms of tacit and explicit compulsion to labor implied in the notion of subjectivity. Most subjects of capital are bound to capital through the regimentation of labor and the institutions of the family and school, implying that only a few can know work and its rewards. Further complicating matters is the fact that the division of labor between laborers and workers is not simply one of class but of access to forms of human endeavor (and work and its pleasures) made possible by the subjection of *others* to labor; Arendt tells us that the slaves of classical Mediterranean cultures could not *work* because their efforts secured something much more intangible, not least the apparent freedom of their overseers. She suggests that for

slaves, “what they left behind them was their master’s freedom,” a freedom, paradoxically, to work. Summarily, the necessity of labor for some subjects allows for the luxury of work for others.

Despite the impulse to see work in itself as a utopian activity, whereby communist revolution might be seen to present an alternative world of fulfilled workers, Arendt suggests that

all serious activities, irrespective of their fruits, are called labor, and every activity which is not necessary either for the life of the individual or for the life process of society is subsumed under playfulness. In these theories, which by echoing the current estimate of a laboring society on the theoretical level sharpen it and drive it into its inherent extreme, not even the “work” of the artist is left; it is dissolved into play and has lost its worldly meaning.⁹

Camp draws attention to the kinds of human activity of work that “loses its worldly meaning,” in which some queer subjects fashion themselves neither to produce in wholesale the things for consumption—although queers too must labor—nor in fact even to appear as social beings who contribute enthusiastically to the “life processes of society.” Because the prohibitions against the appearance of a language through which same-sex desire can be made to signify, camp stages the moments in which dissident same-sex subjects draw attention to the very labor (used specifically in Arendt’s terms here) required to conceal themselves, the labor to produce themselves, and the work of camp.

Arendt offers that “play” (the negation of all profit-generating labor under the auspices of capital) becomes a deceptive category of human endeavor aside from labor, in that play is perhaps more akin to the classical conception of work. The realm of work-as-play is where subjects may glimpse another kind of exertion of themselves toward the material world that labor does not and cannot encompass. Vexing to our understanding of the imbrication of labor and work-as-play as activities undertaken under capital is that they move alongside each other and—like another of Marx’s most famous concept-categories that deserves to be pulled critically asunder, that of money—they can appear to be the same thing. How, then, are we to know when we witness the *work* of camp as the labors of queer subjects are exerted in the production of the commodities of entertainment? Although queer men are largely not exempt from the conditions of labor, this book argues that their work is often disguised as precisely through what Arendt calls its “playfulness”

and through other forms of negation to labor—laziness, lack of seriousness, indifference to the formal logics of the popular commodity of the motion picture. It is tempting to label camp, then, as an exemplary form of work undertaken by queers as they sometimes distance themselves from the commodity—through the camp derision for distinctions of good and bad taste and its enactments of parody of the mass form (drag, for example)—and were this book to emphasize solely the aspects of camp that seem to dwell in the sphere of leisure and consumption, the additive function of Arendt’s notion of work would seem adequate. The problem of situating camp in relation to production, then, means combatting the confusion of labor and work—and we might most often decide that since the examples of these chapters take aim at cinema, we would continually discover the labor of queers that covers over the work of consumption. There is a further pitfall, to the degree that the emphasis on the “play” of work in Arendt’s scheme tempts one to ignore the strictures under which labor is undertaken: as mentioned previously, strictures not only on the queer laborer that are similar to those on all who labor but also on their ability to name themselves as queer. With this in mind, in this book I designate the camp valences of these texts, as they are *produced* as camp, as the marks of queer labor that allow for visions of work to emerge, if you will, in moments where these films emphasize the utopian and dystopian possibilities that can appear in relation to mass generic forms. It then becomes less coincidental that camp becomes a designation of the pleasures unleashed in the sphere of consumption of popular culture that seem unwarranted by it; camp reading practices, so amply treated in the accounts of Susan Sontag and Andrew Ross, detect the work that underpins the labor of queer intellectuals who produce the camp object.

Despite the shift in emphasis from consumption to production that this theory of camp insists on, there are several key distinctions between Marxist critique and camp play that it is helpful to identify; I would in summary fashion name a few as such:

<i>Marx</i>	<i>Camp</i>
value	cheapness
labor	work-as-play
exploitation	performance
use	misuse
history	nostalgia

If the (conventional) Marxist account of the world of capital organizes its critique through the sense that labor is the predication of value, and most labor is extended through the political economy via the use of one human by another—hence, exploitation—then the function of historical consciousness is to discover the forms of social differentiation from one form of human economic life to another, leading eventually to the eradication of class-based difference. Yet through the categories of negation beheld in camp intellectual work, we discover another version of value’s derivation: not solely through labor but through the disguised work-as-play into which queer subjects enfold labor and through which they discover that not only is exploitation the rule of their labor and work-as-play but performance itself—an enactment of a social self that engages with restrictions about the queer laborer naming himself or, more importantly, his efforts as queer—is demanded before such efforts enter the domains of production. Last, the camp forms of historical consciousness that recuperate prior moments are nostalgic ones, but nostalgia understood (as its etymology reminds us) as the pain of the past, the remembrance not of history as an act of fidelity (i.e., history as realist text) but of history as the past now situated in camp stylistics. For example, when in *Scorpio Rising* Kenneth Anger cuts footage from a historical epic about the life of Jesus into images of the biker orgy, the queer features of the life of Christ become apparent not so much as a fact of historical veracity as they do about the meanings of those popular cinematic images for contemporary erotic imaginings.

*Kitsch versus Camp, or The Discovery of the
Queer Agent of Bad Taste*

Anger’s dynamic cutting in *Scorpio Rising* from biker boy imagery to Christian figurations has been an important avant-garde landmark, but the images he handles—the pop-pietà stylings of the Jesus footage, the already frayed comics page from the newspaper, a scorpion-in-glass paperweight souvenir—could also enjoy nomination as conspicuous pieces of kitsch. Indeed, the crises that emerge around forms of social distinction that adhere to the commodity, particularly in its moment of having become passé, have vexed left intellectuals for quite some time, and while the effects of montage in this example ultimately serve to situate so much cultural debris within a larger dialectic of production and memory, there remains perhaps the sense that the flotsam of consumer-

ism might always carry with it a taint so powerful that it cannot be overcome. Kitsch was an important problem of cultural politics for the critical projects of Marxism to the degree that its historical sponsors could hardly be identified through the logics of class difference; in 1964, Susan Sontag nominated homosexuals as kitsch's intellectual agents and camp as its subcultural manifestation, effectively removing kitsch (through its renomination) to the sphere of consumption. Although kitsch and camp share a fascination with the bad object of consumption, they can hardly be considered identical, to the degree that camp stages the kitsch object in order to understand its conditions for coming into being alongside the domain of bourgeois good taste.

In their essay "Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno invoke the commercialization of culture as the dying gasp of the romantic individual, for the oppressive stylization of the culture industry, its apparent but nonexistent variation of the product, seeks to banish consciousness to the realm of consumption through repetition. "The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness," and

that factor in a work of art which enables it to transcend reality certainly cannot be detached from style; but it does not consist of the harmony actually realized, of any doubtful unity of form and content, within and without, of individual and society; it is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears: *in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity* [italics mine].¹⁰

The advent of an administered culture from above creates for itself the perfectly adequate recipients of that culture who, despite the incommensurate relation between form and content of mass culture, are said to offer little resistance. The discrepancies of the mass culture object, however, the tension between its style and its evaporating content and between its steamrolling forms of address that really seem to address no one specifically at all, are where Horkheimer and Adorno detect the possibility for the viewer who might, for other reasons, not answer the call of the culture industries. Their frustration, though, in locating the subject for whom such an object might be of intellectual interest emerges when we consider how little the queer agents of camp were invested in a form of identity they describe; in short, we might through camp reformulate their assessment as the passionate failure to strive for a compulsory identity.

In a curious diversion, Horkheimer and Adorno subsequently discuss the phenomenon of what they term “light art.” Light art is unlike mass-cultural forms in that it cannot solely be construed as ideological; it does not answer the claims on the everyday in the way that realist codes might, and it fails to ascend into the realm of bourgeois representation, but not for reasons that we might expect. The failure of light art is that its mimicry of high art carries with it the bad faith of the corporatizing spirit, the knowledge that indeed there remain subjects largely exiled from the leisure to consume the pieties of the mass form. “Serious art has been withheld from those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness, and who must be glad if they can use time not spent at the production line just to keep going,” suggest Horkheimer and Adorno.

Light art has been the shadow of autonomous art. It is the social bad conscience of serious art. The truth which the latter necessarily lacked because of its social premises gives the other the semblance of legitimacy. The division itself is the truth: it does at least express the negativity of the culture which the different spheres constitute. Least of all can the antithesis be reconciled by absorbing light into serious art, or vice versa. But that is what the culture industry attempts.¹¹

Attempts, but does not necessarily succeed at. The negation of high art, light art and its other nominations such as “amusement” or “distraction” give truth to the lie that all of mass culture’s consumers can accommodate themselves to its various operations. And notwithstanding the writers’ claims that such important deficiencies as are implied in light art become irrelevant because of the “totality of the culture industry,” their invocation of an aspect of cultural production or consumption (it remains unclear in their account) that is in excess of high art and mass culture tells us that even their analysis had to sustain a category for alternative visions.

Without any particular examples of light art that Horkheimer or Adorno might have offered, we can only speculate that they are invoking precapitalist forms of pleasure. (“Amusement and all the elements of the culture industry existed long before the latter came into existence.”)¹² There remains the possibility of distractions that pertain to pleasures not to be had within mass-cultural consumption, not simply prelapsarian but forged and vitalized in the prosaic now. Distraction might not only take the form of diversion of attention from the drudgery of work

and domesticity, but distraction from the very forms of mass culture itself when it fails to complete its address to its working-class viewers. In short, there is the possibility for some form of response not implied by mass culture, and here we discover Horkheimer and Adorno allowing for a greater latitude in kind of both production and reception of the mass form than even subsequent New Left critics such as Clement Greenberg or Dwight MacDonal would seem to have tolerated.

Indeed, subsequent revisions on Horkheimer's and Adorno's insights have detected this possibility and been quick to fend it off, for the pleasures of forging one's own reading might endanger the totality of the culture industry *and* its critiques from various quarters. Even as they argued that a more complex and complete integration of high art and mass culture was taking place (obviously, in the latter's interests), critics such as Greenberg and MacDonal forestalled alternative relations to mass culture even as they argued that varieties of reception were the hallmark of a high art, which mass forms mimic in the name of product differentiation. "Where there is an avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-garde," wrote Greenberg in the late 1930s, and his horror at the prospects of a mass culture that imitated high culture gave rise to Greenberg's formulations about kitsch.¹³ Kitsch, according to Greenberg, formed a product of industrialization that circulated widely and offered its consumers the feeling that they were participating in new democratic forms of high art. Imbedded in the marketplace and seeking, in the end, only returns on its investments, kitsch heralded a fake universalizing of cultural consumption in the name of increased wages and the expansion of leisure among the working classes. (Worth noting is that Greenberg saw both American mass culture and Soviet socialist realism as falling into the same trap, watering down the innovations of technique in avant-garde painting, music, and film, and all of this executed in such a way that recently arrived proletarians might find themselves included in "classless" nationalist discourses.) Apart from its status as a debasement of avant-garde innovations for either entertainment or propaganda, for Greenberg the primary problem with kitsch was that it contained its own aesthetic response, and yet its productive historical agent was difficult to identify without resorting to estimations of false consciousness.

The legacy of Horkheimer and Adorno's assessments, felt most extensively in the American setting in the hostile stance of most intellectuals toward popular forms until the 1960s, meant that the very complexity

of response that serves as an index of high culture had to be withheld from discussions of popular forms; the net effect of this is that no ironizing or playful engagement could be entertained, and here camp, even as a negative effect, seems a remote possibility. Exemplary in this regard are the variety of sociological approaches to matters of taste witnessed in the work of Herbert J. Gans in the United States and Pierre Bourdieu in France, where the solemn tone of the critical enterprise in Gans's and Bourdieu's writings betrays a horror at the prospect of so many football fans hoisting drinks in a dim sports bar while the masterpieces of Western art go, it would seem, largely unappreciated.¹⁴

While literary and cinematic critics have more recently theorized the possibility of differential readings, and Greenberg's analysis of kitsch may strike us fifty years hence as somewhat dogmatic in its flattening of the aesthetic response, the implications of the various analyses of taste witnessed in Greenberg, MacDonald, Gans, and Bourdieu remain symptomatic of the status of kitsch and camp for several reasons.¹⁵ First, their analyses obliquely pose the question of what *kinds* of recipients the kitsch object might and might not be able to summon to the "imbedded" kitsch response, and second, this particular strain of Marxist analysis has sustained critical responses to mass culture in the present moment that neglect the possibility of a productive agent for kitsch—someone who might be a counterpart for the queer male responsible for camp intellectual production.

Camp and kitsch have so often been seen as tantamount expressions of a particular debased version of modernist aesthetics that given my argument about the relations among camp, queer intellectuals, and the exigencies of value's representations, there appears a question about what the name of kitsch means and, more interestingly, for whom. Greenberg comments in 1939 that "it appears to me that it is necessary to examine more closely and with more originality than hitherto the relationship *between aesthetic experience as met by the specific—not the generalized—individual*, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place [*italics mine*]."¹⁶ Striking is Greenberg's omission of the specific individual whose aesthetic experience of kitsch should be taken seriously, and here we discover that it would take another twenty-five years for Sontag, in "Notes on 'Camp,'" to finally disclose an agent who might be named for kitsch's sins; so powerful was such a naming that the critical commentary on kitsch virtually disappears

after the 1960s as the topic of camp, conjoined to gay male identity politics, would now take on a political and aesthetic urgency that continues into the present moment.¹⁷ The kind of distress expressed by Greenberg and others around the specter of kitsch emerged from its inability to identify the unstated political actor who translated kitsch into the intellectual strategies of camp. Before Sontag's "Notes," kitsch could be named as a general cultural phenomenon; inadvertently, the shift from kitsch to camp as the name of a self-conscious fascination with capital's troubled value codings made the queer man into a new political figure, one who was despoiling high culture with his failed seriousness. Vivian Gornick saw a conspiracy at work by gays interested in derailing the value of a straight mass culture. Whereas Sontag might argue that "homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense," Gornick panicked at a darker tendency that she saw taking shape.¹⁸ Gornick, in a 1966 *Village Voice* article titled "It's a Queer Hand That Stokes the Campfire," outlines camp both as the unwillingness of the male homosexual to integrate into the fabric of American life and simultaneously as his revenge on bourgeois straightness for excluding him. She proffered that

popular culture is now in the hands of the homosexuals. It is homosexual taste that determines largely style, story, statement in painting, literature, dance amusements, and acquisitions for a goodly portion of the intellectual middle class. It is the texture, the atmosphere, the ideals, the notion of "camp" (a term, from its beginnings, the private property of American and English homosexuals) which currently determines middle-class taste, directs its signs, and seems to nourish its simple-minded eagerness to grind the idea of "alienation" into yet another hopelessly ironic cliché.¹⁹

Even within its paranoid dimensions, Gornick's account has the merit of allowing for camp as a force of production at work in the moment in which she writes. Placed alongside Sontag's depiction of camp as an outdated and antiquarian pursuit, "It's a Queer Hand" situates camp, primarily via pop art, as a key element of the cultural politics of the mid-1960s. Despite Gornick's trafficking in gross stereotypes of "the homosexual," which means the "pathetic," dyed, mincing effeminate homosexual man, and despite the unnoticed contradiction surrounding camp as being both the cause and effect of the alienation of the homo-

sexual from an integrative American society, Gornick does suggest that camp is not simply a feature of “small urban cliques” but is more co-extensive with metropolitan culture.

We might now understand the topic of kitsch as the expression of the revulsion of left mid-twentieth-century intellectuals at the fact that their specific array of taste choices (their habitus) was, like all such choices within the cultural landscape, specific to them as a material class formation and one in competition with the taste formations of the burgeoning working class or, even worse, with queer men. More to the point, the sense that the avant-garde was defined by the *choice* of certain paintings, sculptures, literary and musical works, and a few popular forms (some cinema, for example), for their internal complexity, their personalized languages, and their sense of the historical past, meant that other cultural forms such as kitsch were somehow more the result of a form of coercion. Sontag’s “Notes” counters this sense of aesthetic domination within kitsch by arguing that in the act of disregarding distinctions of high and low culture and good and bad taste, new possibilities, both political and exclusive at once, emerge in the landscape of commodities. Further, her assertion that “one feels that if homosexuals hadn’t more or less invented Camp, someone else would” located these possibilities in the world of queer male subcultures, quite a distance from the *Partisan Review* editorial board.²⁰

The reader attuned to the varieties of political namings around sex/gender difference in the present moment will notice that I adhere to the term “queer” when discussing the subjects of this book. I do so to historicize the moments that the book addresses, moments before the post-Stonewall identity politics that claimed the name of “gay” for the strategies of altering the social landscape through which dissident sexualities and genders have been addressed politically. Recalling these men as queer restores in some measure, I hope, the sense of their difference not only from the normative and regulatory strictures of their own historical periods but also from what we too often conceive as the present sense of what constitutes a “gay man.” The fact that Vincente Minnelli was married and enjoyed a happy family life in Hollywood, or that Andy Warhol seems to have dispensed in later life with most forms of genital sexuality in favor of the scopophilic pleasures of watching and photographing men *and* women, suggests that the complicated entanglements of erotic desires and practices are neglected by the now too cumbersome and too narrow forms of same-sex male sexuality as they are named by

the term “gay.” Alexander Doty argues that “queer” is a more productive term for understanding these entanglements of desire and cultural production by reminding us that “queer” appears as a term of negation and through its negative capacities might disclose where same-sex-desiring men have not and are not allowed to appear on the sexual and cultural landscape, not least in situations where “gay” might be the term of preference.

The tension between these two nominations, “queer” and “gay,” has other implications as well for this theory of camp, not least in that there are multitudes of queer men and queer women, adolescents, nonwhite subjects, and others who can be conceived as having their own forms of camp that this book fails to address. In historicizing the men whose work I address, I have had to sacrifice these other possibilities for conceiving of lesbian camp, feminist camp, black camp, Latino camp, and riot-grrrrl camp, to name a few such practices, as these social actors theorize and produce their own accounts of life under capital. As Paula Graham has written about feminist lesbian camp, “this means . . . that instead of tearing up porno mags in Soho in confrontation with dominant constructs of ‘woman’ as sexual object, lesbians play with and redo the heteropatriarchal language of sex in their own sweet way,”²¹ and while her account largely dwells on the possibility of female viewers interpreting dominant images of women through their forms of excess (i.e., camp as reception), Graham’s work (as well as that of other feminist writers) directs us to the possibility of thinking of about how different kinds of cultural production by blacks, women, Latinos, teenagers, and others might bear the name of camp.²²

Here it is worth recalling that the men whose works I discuss enjoyed forms of privilege, by virtue of being men and being white, not accorded to others, and the ability to smuggle camp into the production of cinema, especially Hollywood cinema, was brought about by their capacity to pass in ways that all too many other subjects cannot. Despite the weak pleadings of the current film industry, in both its more corporate and “independent” aspects, that there is greater commitment to including others in addition to white heterosexual men, we have yet to see what would seem to be camp visions (or, for that matter, any other visions) by the various groups long excluded by the industry. However, the few more recent instances available, such as Isaac Julien’s *Looking for Langston* (produced at quite a distance from Hollywood), would indicate that the longer history of such intellectual work by other than

white men could be considered to be a form of camp. There is the possibility, for example, of reading much of the 'zine writings by female adolescents as a kind of "teen camp" that comments acerbically on the homogenized and antiwoman imagery available in mass-market magazines, television, and cinema—even in using the curtailed name "'zine," such writings tamper with the sense of what constitutes a "magazine" for younger female readers.

*Inside Labor, outside Labor: Camp Consciousness
and Cinema's Attractions*

In a history of Southern California domestic architecture in the decades following World War II, architect John Chase provides us with a sense of how the film industry can be studied for its impact on habits of everyday life beyond the space of cinema's screenings, and his account leads us to wonder about how the labor of queer men allowed them to inscribe their own relation to labor and to history in such a way as to protect them from censure. In *Exterior Decoration: Hollywood's Inside-Out Houses*, Chase describes the transformation of private houses in West Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s as the movement of Hollywood cinematic style from the back lot to the front porch.²³ During the expansion of what the author calls the practice of "exterior decoration," home owners rebuilt the facades of 1920s small-scale houses by installing Doric columns, classical urns, dummy windows, and clipped topiary. Perhaps not coincidental was the fact that a large number of the renovators were queer men, many of them in the employ of the film studios and their related industries of glamour and publicity, employees skilled at the production of short-term spectacle for the mass-distributed entertainment commodity. These employees in their leisure time took matters of domestic design into their own hands by effectively making the enterprise of home improvement one that announced on the outside of their houses that a certain variety of camp consciousness had arrived in these neighborhoods. Despite the more customary association of homosexuality with the spaces of interiority, spaces associated with privacy, intimacy, and the nurturing of undisclosed social alliances, these exterior decorators inverted the concepts of inside and outside by effectively making the house into a showcase of the owner's personal aspirations for a new kind of domestic vernacular architectural language and the display of a privatized language of camp.²⁴

The capacity to envision home renovation as the site on which to build such fantastic recollections of film style might seem an unlikely place for the extension of camp labor outside the realm of industrial production, but this rendering of private spectacle into public space provides a felicitous moment in which to wonder at the labor that capital's queer subject undertakes in his quest to mark himself as what Marx called "an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society." Marx, worrying over the homogenization of labor at the behest of industrialization, is by rights speaking largely of the sphere of production as it unleashes new forms of value, and yet his sense that labor abides as that effort whereby humans produce their livelihoods and the wealth of societies is not blind to the fact that labor might also be the activity whereby humans produce themselves and their forms of consciousness and by so doing call attention to their forms of difference from one another, even in such cases, as with camp, when such attentions are fraught with potential forms of attack.

The movement of film style from soundstage to stucco-clad bungalow is one trace of camp's subtle capacity to allow its practitioners to inform the world of their ability to produce themselves as different within the socius, and here I want to play on this labor of the private subject (i.e., the subject at pains to disclose something about himself) as it becomes, in the example at hand, literally exteriorized. Given that industrialized labor is regimented in such a way as often to neglect the talents of the individual who is required to perform it—Marx calls this the "indifference" of capital to those strive on its behalf—can the subject not only attempt to mark the commodity to make it apparent that he is, even despite himself, differentiated if not individuated, but can he perform such forms of labor and work, to recall Arendt, as the disguise for such difference? In this regard, I think that here we discover that labor has different roles for its practitioners, an interiority and exteriority to it that provide both a kind of privatized reward and the more customary form of sustenance to be gained in the form of wages and so forth. Camp's relation to the cinema, as I will discuss, has an especially pointed trajectory in its capacity to designate the movement of the interiority of labor (what might also be called the subject's consciousness of his efforts) to an external manifestation; while serving to remind of the more general energies required to perform labor, camp tells of a concealed, specific condition for labor and work-as-play that may not be apparent to all who embrace the camp film. Indeed, by installing

the general (i.e., unmarked, unqueer) form of labor before the commodity's recipient, camp serves as an instance in which to wonder at the multitude of languages whereby the many different subjects of capital describe and theorize their experiences. Marx and the institutionalized readings of his theoretical enterprise have not always been helpful in recognizing these languages, given the historical vision of class difference as the sustaining force of history. Although he is hardly at fault for not anticipating the important advent of gender and sexuality for the industrial societies of capital, it does seem remarkable that Marx discounts the specificity of how subjects come to have consciousness of the conditions of their labor, and in this regard camp provides a form of knowledge production by queer subjects and others to wonder how they *live* inside their labor.

Writing in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (like *The Grundrisse* of 1857–1858, an unpublished theoretical attempt at a critique of capital), Marx speculates on how consciousness is predicated on alienation from the material world that humans shape. This is not identical to the specific form of alienation that he will attribute to the force of capital on human consciousness, but a kind of estrangement built on the sense of making something apart from himself that reminds the human laborer of his own being even as he discovers the thing he makes to be not himself but an object that takes on a kind of social life apart from that of the producer. In Marx's account, humans only come to know of themselves in the world to the degree that they understand themselves as capable of producing such objects (in the specific case of capital, commodities), which they then see apart from their mental and corporeal selves. Marx calls this the "alienation of self-consciousness" and writes that "this externalization of self-consciousness has not merely a *negative* but a *positive* significance," to the degree that it is grounded in the material sense of the subject discovering his capacity as an actor in history and in politics.²⁵ Repeatedly in this account in the 1844 writings, Marx invokes self-consciousness as corporeal and sensuous and writes that such consciousness, bound up with the objects produced outside himself, is characterized by a relation in which "to be sensuous is to suffer." Here Marx's use of "sensuousness" carries with it an older form of the word, meaning that which is known of the world with the organs of physical discernment. However, I want to diverge from an impulse for historical adherence and wonder at how he might equally now be reread to encompass a more contemporary notion of sensuousness and corpo-

reality, as sustained by erotics, and I dwell on his account to tease out its implications for the twining together of a sensuousness born of same-sex erotics and the particular functions of labor mandated under capital. Marx's recognition of human self-consciousness as "other" to itself is fundamental to his account, and it is not, as he suggests, an otherness steeped only in negation; otherness from the physical world as a thinking creature and from the social subjects who surround us has its own rewards of knowledge, and camp is one such reward, often delivered through the cinema.

In this regard, the discovery by subjects that the irregular dispersal of value under capital not only entails knowing where capital's cultural logics are fraught with incoherence but provides the opportunity for such subjects (in this specific case, queer men in the American metropolis) to offer their own visions of how even the most homogenized of expressions, such as the Hollywood film, might be tampered with. Gayatri Spivak writes of this in her reading of Marx as "the possibility of an indeterminacy rather than only a contradiction" in the procession in Marx's account from value to money to capital (and back through that chain).²⁶ These indeterminacies are precisely where camp's work, both in its similarity with labor in the processes of production (not least, of cinema) and in its critical attentions more customarily noted as forms of playful reception, find their motivation, for while there are necessary contradictions that must abide within the insistence that capital's adjudications of value (say, of "good" cinema and its bad-taste cousins) are somehow reasonable, what can so often not be determined is who might be responsible for seizing on them for a variety of productive capacities. Spivak, commenting in that writing on the problem of such failure to draw attention to those who are subjected to regimes of value within canon formation, thus proposes the question: "What subject-effects were systematically effaced and trained to efface themselves so that a canonic form might emerge?" By locating the question of value as not solely a monetary one but a monetary one that coincides with cultural value, she offers in that phrase "subject-effects" the sense that the shadow of the subject who produces lingers over the commodity, and his or her efforts might more helpfully be discussed not as the "positive" form of a socially necessary labor but within the category of *affectively* necessary labor.

Chaining affect and labor together allows us to understand how the range of responses often made visible (and audible) in camp texts un-

leashes forms of disgust, laughter, nausea, delight, and the general sense that what is being displayed is, at the very least, not in the best of possible taste; and it is precisely at those sites of indeterminacy in Marx's analysis that Spivak identifies where the occurrence of such responses seems so often to be likely. Such inappropriate emotions, which themselves have strong homologies with the status given to homosexuality within normative imaginations, are the camp expression, through its labor and its work-as-play, of how queer subjects are made to endure those reactions by others. In this regard, queer male camp is the consciousness, expressed through the terms of value in its multiple registers and fluxes (i.e., in the terms of the political economy that Marx identifies), of not only how queer men labor within the world but how they labor affectively to ward off the homophobic stances that they encounter on all too common a basis and, through their labor on the commodity, stage in deflected fashion such forms of affect again in the world.

To be conscious of this labor as that which gives rise to consciousness itself makes each human a philosopher of his or her own conditions, but such a recognition also forces us to extend Marx's critique of our political and economic conditions for life to the spheres in which we exert ourselves for something besides money. In this regard, it is worth recalling from the example of the exterior decorators of Los Angeles that their enterprises were undertaken largely within the realm of leisure and for what ends we can hardly know; even if their nonwaged efforts eventually gave rise to improved resale profit, a scheme that would make them in some Marxist visions simply petit bourgeois strivers, they could hardly know that the extravagant display of their stylistic talents would lend itself to the value codings of profit. I would propose that such camp displays allow queer laborers to recognize themselves in exteriority, to play on Marx's sense of self-consciousness, but in many instances the conditions for this recognition arise not solely in the more customarily identified sphere of production. Marx himself was never vulgarly Marxist and continually emphasized throughout his writings that consciousness itself was what he intended to apprehend. In this spirit, this project focuses on the labor of its queer subjects (Minnelli, Warhol, Anger, Waters) as their efforts often inhabited the more properly understood notions of industrial production but sometimes corrupted that distinction, in the designations of "underground" and "trash" cinema, for example, which seem to undo or at least fail to obey the strictures of

routinized, serialized production as classical Marxism would insist on that concept.

The chapters that follow are thus an attempt to demonstrate how some queer subjects have lived within their labor through camp. The density of labor demanded in the production of cinema, most usually concentrated in the form of industrial organization and divisions of the efforts demanded in scriptwriting, cinematography, lighting, acting, direction, has produced the historical phenomenon of the bulk of feature films being given over to the narrative form. This has important implications for camp's attractions to the value codings of the film form as a relatively standardized commodity, not least because of camp's displaced relation to dissident sexualities (queer male, but also female sexualities too), but also because so many of the camp examples offered in the following chapters devote considerable energies to film's non-narrative components, even when a given film seems largely organized through narrative. The most prominent of these nonnarrative features is that of film spectacle: the film image parsed, however momentarily, from its situation within a larger diegetic world of events, temporality, and causation.

Worth considering in the most general sense is why camp intellectuals have historically been drawn to the cinema; although a myriad of popular forms (comic books, pulp fiction, street fashion, pop music) have maintained their appeals to the camp imagination, cinema holds a particular form of appeal for camp intellectuals. This can be explained by recourse to the sense of cinema's capacity as the medium, *par excellence*, that visualizes—renders onto a visual register—the indeterminacies and contradictions of capital and the effects of modernity. In its dynamics and movement, cinema attempts to make value's abstractions materialize, and perhaps more than any mass medium, the cinema has lent itself to the fascination of intellectuals, camp and otherwise, who strive to make sense of the representations to which the specific political economy of capital gives rise.

Part of the concealed labor of camp on the commodity form of cinema resides in the efforts to make a film's images and sounds as something added to the recognizable conventions of narrative. Although there are instances of camp narratives, as discussed in the movement of camp melodrama into the more mainstream product of John Waters's films, camp's traces are, to my mind, most productively discovered by

wondering at those moments where narrative fails as an explanation of how a given text is formally and aesthetically conceived. In this regard, the affectively necessary labor of camp resides in the occasions where one senses that the film image has diverged from *narrative* expectations, but in ways such as the visual excess of an early Minnelli musical number or the playful corporeality (all the eating and fondling in Warhol's or Waters's films) that might easily be dismissed by even the most engaged of viewers as so much "fluff" or "bad taste." The fact that one sometimes feels about a camp text that one cannot quite locate its aberrance tells us that camp's work-as-play succinctly mimics the labor in a film's production; camp efforts accompany labor on the path of a film's production. Therefore, one way of locating camp in the sphere of production is by finding the repeated incidents of narrative filmmaking that seem to depart from the more usual expectations of visual and acoustic form. In short, we discover ourselves thinking about film genres.

Two genres in particular lend themselves to the kinds of examinations I have in mind, the film musical and the melodrama, and in each we can access forms of visual and affective extravagance. In both of these generic forms of film narrative, perhaps not coincidentally, the story revolves around the crises of heterosexuality within the constraints of capital's social formations, in the case of the musical, around romantic bonding of men and women, and in the instance of the melodrama around the ensuing familial discord produced in the wake of such pairings. In the chapters on the Freed musicals of Vincente Minnelli and the film melodramas of John Waters, I treat each of these genres at greater length, and in the chapter on Andy Warhol's films, I consider the eventual movement of Warhol's films toward (considerably loosely formed) narratives.

The production of narrative film bears scrutiny as the endeavors that Arendt considers to be labor, while the extra-added exertions, say, in the excessive forms of performance, lighting, *mise-en-scène*, more fruitfully inhabit her category of work-as-play. Like the houses of Chase's West Hollywood renovators, the structure of the commodity remains relatively intact, but many of its outward stylistic flourishes offer a clue to the additional efforts of camp as work-as-play. In this regard, camp reveals itself as a luxuriance in the inefficiencies of capital's modes of production, because despite the insistence (one that occurs often in Marx's theorizations as much as anywhere) that capital is a wholly more streamlined way to organize human labor, within the lacunae of its

modes of production, camp filmmakers find the opportunities to press the cinematic commodity into a new form of service that expresses their presence within the domain of production.

That some camp intellectuals should be drawn to the cinema reveals something of the peculiarity of that specific industrial form for allowing the work of camp to reside on the film form and, more importantly for theories of contemporary culture, to be disseminated to new and unexpected venues. Recalling Marx's compulsion to see the appearance of the commodity as multiple instances of its production, named as distribution and consumption outside the more proper sphere of production as such, the camp valences of the studio and avant-garde film travel to unanticipated arenas whereby camp might be produced, *within the sphere of consumption*, by audiences. Camp, as theorized in the present account as a knowledge about capital's changeable and volatile attributions of value, can and does migrate to recipients outside the sphere of its production. This helps to explain the intense affiliation between camp and the notion of cult-viewing formations, to the degree that when recipients of the camp film discover its alternative visions of the modern world, they attach themselves to it with a devotion not typical of the usual cinematic fare (i.e., a film's reception shares affective homologies with its production). They subsequently move that way of knowing and thinking about capital to other cultural productions, so that even when we acknowledge that a particular form—say teen pics or slasher films—seems not to have a discernible camp intellectual responsible for its making, the recipients of camp remobilize camp's attentions anew.

Given these possibilities for ascertaining how film narrative forms a site for interrogation around the questions this book asks about camp, there is another strategy, employed at greater length in my considerations of the earlier works of Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger, for considering how other meanings are forged in the editing of film images together, a kind of camp consciousness made available through film montage. If narrative is a comparatively demanding formal structure for organizing the cinematic moving image—demanding from the viewpoint that divergences from its modes of representation always beg explanations as to their motivation (artistic license, costs in production, sloppiness)—then montage must certainly be one of the least expensive (both for capital investment and for labor) techniques for mobilizing cinema against itself, and the relation between film montage and camp is worth dwelling on as a circumstance for realizing how intellec-

tually productive capital's indeterminacies and internal contradictions become when rendered on the visual plane. Perhaps an anecdote will help here, one offered from my experiences as a teacher. In the instances where I have taught montage as an expression of modernist politics (in the socialist visions of Sergei Eisenstein or in the droll antibourgeois and anticlerical visions of Luis Buñuel), the reaction produced among students is one of pleasure, expressed as outbursts of uncontrollable laughter about the movement across the edit from image to image. For a teacher of spectators schooled primarily at the hands of film continuity as the singular formal device for making sense of the reproduced moving image, this comes as a surprise, inasmuch as the bulk of contemporary television advertising is delivered within the sensibilities of montage; yet as one of my students once commented, "The ads are about the commodities, but the movies [Eisenstein et al.] are about the societies that make them." Having such socialized forms of contradiction staged before them comes as revelation, and I dwell on this moment in the work I do with students to make sense of our wonderment at how *easily* montage helps to vivify the contrary tendencies of our own lives. This "ease" of montage derives from the sense that one does not necessarily have to worry about the ordering of images as an irreducible logic, in the way that film narrative so often seems to dictate; with montage, cinema can be made to disclose with relative quickness and inventiveness—in short, *playfully*—its own conditions for being.

Metropolitan Life: Camp and Film Form

While camp forms a philosophy of modernity produced through an ongoing attention to the crises of value coding under capital, part of its labor can be ascertained as the efforts to produce commodities, notably those of the cinema. In this regard, camp is complicated by the sense that it both responds to the things of mass culture (camp as the habits of ironic reception attended to by Sontag, Ross, et al.) and simultaneously underpins forms of industrial production. This counters the more usual sense of the relation between the intellectual labor of critique and the labor demanded in industrial production, to the degree that most critical responses to capital's effects are beheld as those offered by intellectuals remote from arenas of commodity production. In the chapters that follow, I argue that camp informed the making of films, some distributed widely (i.e., Hollywood) and others more restricted in the kinds of ex-

hibition provided for them (underground and trash). Here I will outline briefly a conceptual framework for the book's chapters, seeing the examples that follow as part of how a larger dialectic of camp and production, of critique and commodity, inform each other through medium-specific qualities of cinema that this book's sites of inquiry discuss; but it is also worth mentioning that the examples in this book form only a fragment of a larger intellectual and cultural genealogy in the study of sexualities, critical thought, and modernity, what we can call metropolitan life. In the case of this book, the constellation of filmmakers is organized between two poles of American film culture, New York and Los Angeles. If we situate the camp instances of this book in relation to these two cities, we can discern them as part of an organizing tension between, in the case of the first, live performance, high art, and the ideations of effete intellectual life, and in the case of the second, the industries of popular culture and the rhetoric of mass address to the nebulous social category of "America." Vincente Minnelli, trained in the organization of stage performances in Chicago and Manhattan, marks the movement of "eastern" metropolitan culture into the Hollywood soundstage, but numerous other men shared in this migration, among them the musicians, dancers, choreographers, set designers, and cinematographers who translated the styles and performances of the live stage to studio film. In this regard, Minnelli figures as part of one generation of camp intellectuals at the twilight of the studio system; no small irony is contained, then, in the fact of Kenneth Anger's upbringing in Southern California in the 1940s and 1950s, for Anger marks a counter-direction of an experimental film practice that moved from Los Angeles to New York. Anger's fascination with film emerges in having been raised within the social world of the studio system, and his intellectual energies were devoted to producing a countercinema to Hollywood that appealed more often to New York's underground audiences of the 1960s than to those of the studios.

If New York and Los Angeles form one axis for understanding the queer cinematic tradition offered in this book, then Pittsburgh and Baltimore form satellites to that larger field between the East and West coasts. These "other" American cities, where Andy Warhol and John Waters were born and raised, tell of the fascination for queer men of the metropolis as a space of escape, and a significant part of the life of American sexual subcultures is of course played out in the movement to the anonymity of cities such as New York and Los Angeles, where queers

could not only discover larger social networks of like-minded subjects but, equally for the sake of this book, put themselves more centrally in the space of capital's dynamic movement. While the migration to the city of queer men and women is so familiar a narrative (both fictive and historical) about the liberatory possibilities contained in metropolitan life, equally significant is the chance given to queer men and women *to labor as queers*. This is not to discount queer labors undertaken in non-urban settings (they too might take the name of camp as it is understood here) but to suggest that the particular figures discussed in this book are seized on at the heart of urban modernity, in both its New York and its Los Angeles variations, as each of the figures examined in this book—Minnelli, Warhol, Anger, and Waters—marks the insistence of the camp intellectual on inserting himself into the matrices of cultural production in their most powerful venues. In this light, the metropolitan lives of these men delimit what I am calling camp, and the astute reader might conjure other spaces, other moments, other media, in which to judge whether the theoretical claims of the book are constrained by the specificity of its examples.

In chapter 1, the early film musicals directed by Vincente Minnelli are examined in regard to Minnelli's widely noted talents as a director given to the making of powerful film imagery in the context of film narrative. The fact of the Hollywood product's having historically been organized formally through the conventions of its own strong languages of film narrative can too often occlude our sense of the more general fact that cinema is, first, a visual medium, and the Minnelli Freed films often, as discussed, seem to overwhelm their narratives with a chromatically saturated and kinetic *mise-en-scène*.

Given that the historical scope of this book extends from the late 1940s to the present moment, across the immensely important period in which a more public acknowledgment of queer sexualities has emerged, it is worth considering how the examples of camp discussed in chapter 1 differ from succeeding examples in the ways that they exemplify camp intellectual work. While most of the films discussed elsewhere in this book, even those such as Kenneth Anger's earliest works, were part of a larger phenomenon related to the (relatively) increased accessibility of images and acoustic and written culture devoted to same-sex erotics, the Freed musicals of Minnelli's career seem most remote from being considered as part of the expanded public articulation of camp

that in complicated fashion forms an important element of queer male culture's increased visibility of the past four decades. Warhol, Anger, and Waters made camp films as part of that new public sphere of male homosexuality, but Minnelli's efforts seem more restricted, in their historical moment of Hollywood censorship, in their approach to male same-sex erotics. Yet because camp is so often defined by its own cautious approach to sexual themes and depictions, this may render Minnelli's efforts all the more paradoxically as perfect emblems of what this book considers camp to be—a philosophy not so much of sexuality but of commodity culture.

Whereas Minnelli's work on cinema is defined by its emphasis on visual extravagance, in chapter 2 I argue that Andy Warhol's efforts take camp fascinations with the film spectacle as a product of expenditure in an opposite direction, one based on the possibilities of a film aesthetic derived from efficiency. Warhol's films mirror, in inverted fashion, the Hollywood product, given the latter's capacity for multiple takes and the continual redeployment of technologies and personnel to alter the look and sound of a given shot. Warhol's films insist on the possibilities of a cinema that includes representation of the various conditions of its production—ambient sound, out-of-focus framing, nonprofessional acting, and in-camera editing—and the inclusion of these aleatory elements allows them to make a spectacle of their own economy.

Kenneth Anger's films, on the other hand, are characterized by a style of composition (most importantly through their editing) that must be among the most lavish of any filmmaker, and they bear the marks of extravagance that montage allows its makers. In chapter 3, I demonstrate that the visual rendering of the artist's desires (for men, for glamour, for the very love of color and dynamism in cinema itself) emerges in Anger's work as a complicated handling of film temporality as historical consciousness. If montage retains within it the dialectic sense of the collision of different historical forces, Anger relies on the camera to hold together the very forces of commodity standardization and individuation as beheld in the queer subcultures that his films depict.

Finally, I argue in chapter 4 that within the films of John Waters, the decomposition of the commodity becomes the occasion in which to renew its fascinations, most notably in the "trashing" that he insists on for the institutions of cinema, especially that of stardom. Waters returns camp filmmaking to narrative and to genre, and his films read the scene

of the contemporary household and its attempts to contain the perverse desires that it instigates within its members as the setting for his melodramas. Waters's films are "degenerate" in a quite explicit sense, for they stage the movement of dissident desires, in terms not only of erotics but of taste as well, back to the spaces that have generated it to begin with, to the strictures of marriage and bourgeois reproduction.