



Review Essay. Interrupted Pleasure: A Foucauldian Reading of Hard Core / A Hard Core
(Mis)Reading of Foucault
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Review Essay

**Interrupted Pleasure: A Foucauldian Reading of Hard Core /
A Hard Core (Mis)Reading of Foucault**

John Champagne

Many recent “common sense” discussions of censorship—the kind featured on popular afternoon talk shows in particular—figure certain genealogical traces of the 1986 Meese Commission’s report on pornography.¹ Specifically, one is more likely to hear on these shows some kind of causal link being posited between “pornographic” or “obscene” texts and the physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse of women. I recently witnessed a concerned father express to Sally Jessy Raphael his worry that his daughter might be compelled, as a result of listening to Madonna’s song “Hanky Panky,” to engage in sadomasochistic sexual practices. At least two things are worth noting here about this “popular” construction of the relationship between texts as “cause” and behavior as “effect”: (1) this model, adopted by religious rightists in the case of both the Meese Commission and more recent debates, is one which has in some sense been

Book Reviewed: Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

1. Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, *Final Report*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1986).

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made possible by a long-standing tradition of cultural criticism on the Left—the model, à la Frankfurt School, which sees popular culture as evidence of the “false consciousness” of “the masses”; (2) what this model in turn makes possible is a certain strange alliance between religious rightists and “antipornography” feminists.

In her recent book *Hard Core*, Linda Williams interrogates this problematic alliance between feminists against pornography and the “moral majority conservatives” who made up the Meese Commission,² arguing that such an alliance casts woman in the role of “absolute victim of history,” with man—played by the Meese Commission—acting as her rescuer (*HC*, 21). Although I would not fault the “anticensorship” position Williams takes in *Hard Core*, I am uncomfortable with the logic the text uses to stake out the parameters of that position. For all its claims to be a “feminist revision” of pornography, much of *Hard Core* reads like the same old story. Its essentializing of porno texts in its references to porno’s “phallic point of origin” (*HC*, 279) and its contention that “until very recently pornography . . . was inevitably a male speculation on the difference of female desire and pleasure” (*HC*, 275); its elimination of a space for gay or lesbian pornography, or gay or lesbian readings of “straight” pornography; its model of intellectual work, which seems primarily to be a mere reversal of the “false consciousness” model, substituting the authorization of pleasure for the (former) de-authorization of pleasure—all serve to re-inscribe *Hard Core* within a series of all too familiar disciplinary practices.

Before arguing this critique of the text at length, I will interrupt *Hard Core*’s “same old story” with a different one, a story assembled from the later fictions of Michel Foucault.³ Specifically, I will read a number of texts written after the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*,⁴ texts that figure pleasure as producible through what Foucault has termed “technologies of the self.”⁵ I want to take a certain pleasure in reading pornography, as well as other discursive practices associated with the gay ghetto, as technologies of the self, practices that contain certain conditions of possibility for the “invention” of oneself as gay. I will read these (largely under-read) texts

2. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 16; hereafter cited in my text as *HC*.

3. I am using the term “fiction” here after Foucault and will expound on this shortly.

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978); hereafter cited in my text as *HOS*.

5. See Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

of Foucault's to produce a reading of *Hard Core* that draws attention to that text's forcible exclusion of other readings of pornography, exclusions accomplished via the mobilization of certain largely unexamined essentialist positions. I will read both *Hard Core* and pornography through Foucault's later texts for at least two reasons: (1) they allow for the production of a reading of pornography outside the circuit of relentlessly Oedipal readings offered by psychoanalytic feminism in general, and *Hard Core* in particular;⁶ (2) they are under-read in *Hard Core*. In fact, a kind of continuity between the various volumes of *The History of Sexuality* is posited by Williams in her account of Foucault's project as an analysis of "the different power/knowledge conjunctions operating in the modern age" (*HC*, 35). This continuity is at least called into question in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, to which I would now like to turn.⁷

In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault recounts the "reorganization" of his study of the history of sexuality around the formation of "a hermeneutics of the self" (*UOP*, 6). He originally envisioned his six-volume study as "a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture" (*UOP*, 4). But when he attempted to study this third aspect of the experience of sexuality—"the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects"—Foucault realized that what was required was "a historical and critical study dealing with desire and the desiring subject" (*UOP*, 5).

Foucault's interest in exploring the means by which different historical subjects constitute themselves as subjects of desire is taken up in a number of the later texts and in numerous interviews conducted in the last few years of his life. In one such interview, Foucault explains the necessity of examining the *different* cultural and historical "modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject" (*UOP*, 6). Foucault insists that the subject is to be understood as a "form" that "is not above all or always identical to itself."⁸ This means

6. I know of no feminist psychoanalytic readings of pornography that are not Oedipal readings, whether that Oedipus is figured as "pre-" or otherwise.

7. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); hereafter cited in my text as *UOP*.

8. Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 10; hereafter cited in my text as ECS.

that (1) subjects are constituted differently in different discursive situations; and (2) different forms of relationships with the self are established through these different modalities of subjectivity: “You do not have towards yourself the same kind of relationships when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes and votes or speaks up in a meeting, and when you try to fulfill your desires in a sexual relationship.”⁹

Additionally, Foucault attempts, in his discussion of practices of self-making, to distance his account of constituting oneself as a subject from any humanist notion of self “discovery.” Foucault is not suggesting that subjects are “free” to “create” themselves at will. Although he is, in fact, interested in the way subjects constitute themselves “in an active fashion, by the practices of self,” he is careful to insist that these practices are nevertheless “not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group” (ECS, 11). Foucault’s use of the word “technologies” to describe the means by which subjects constitute themselves emphasizes that this process of self-making is not “natural” but is something done to the self, performed on the self. It also suggests the radically antihumanist notion of the body as a set of relations for experimentation and invention that may be exercised for the purposes of constituting the self.

Throughout the last four years of his life, Foucault gave a number of interviews in the international gay and lesbian press in which he discussed gay sexuality as a historical occasion for self-making.¹⁰ For Foucault, homosexuality represents one of the “patterns” “proposed, suggested and imposed” on subjects by culture. But this discourse of homosexuality contains certain possibilities for the formation and transformation of a self. As Foucault argues, “To be ‘gay’ I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life.”¹¹ The discourse of the homosexual provides a cultural

9. I just want to note here that this description of the subject has almost nothing in common with psychoanalytic film theory’s account of the subject; thus, I wonder, in a text like *Hard Core*, which combines so many different methodologies—who is the subject? What kind of subject does this text construct?

10. I will, throughout this essay, be using the terms “gay” and “homosexual” interchangeably and as inclusive of lesbians when appropriate, since this is my understanding of how these terms are used by Foucault in the interviews. For a somewhat differently inflected discussion of these interviews, see Ed Cohen, “Foucauldian necrologies: ‘gay’ ‘politics’? politically gay,” *Textual Practices* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 87–101.

11. Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *Foucault Live*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer,

and historical opportunity for the subject it constitutes to invent a not-yet-imagined manner of being (FWL, 206).

Foucault terms the “work” involved in defining and developing a gay way of life a “homosexual *askesis*” (FWL, 206). This “homosexual *askesis*” seeks to use the historical and cultural position of the homosexual to challenge currently existing cultural conceptions of both the relation of the self to others and of the self to the self, and to invent new forms of culture. About currently existing social relations, Foucault observes:

In effect, we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only relations possible are extremely few, extremely simplified, and extremely poor. We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage.¹²

Gay sexuality provides a historic occasion through which sexuality might be used “to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships” (FWL, 204). In addition to suggesting the historical contingency of certain forms of social relations such as marriage and the nuclear family, it suggests the possibility of a number of “alternative” relations—monogamous sexual relationships outside the institution of marriage, same-sex friendships that include sexual activity, sexual encounters with strangers, sex with multiple partners simultaneously, “serial” monogamy, and other as yet unimagined relations. Foucault asks, “How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices?” (FWL, 206). This is the question gay sexuality poses for itself and for the culture at large.

Foucault is not suggesting that homosexuality automatically brings with it these new relational forms. Rather, homosexuality provides the conditions of possibility for a culture that might invent new ways of relating and types of existence (STS, 37). Because the historical and cultural position of the gay subject provides only the conditions of possibility for new forms of relations, Foucault argues that what the gay “movement” needs is an “art of life” that would emphasize the way homosexuality might challenge culture’s “shrinking of the relational fabric” (STS, 37). He suggests, “We have

trans. John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 207; hereafter cited in my text as FWL.

12. Gilles Barbadette, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will: A Conversation with Michel Foucault,” trans. Brendan Lemon, *Christopher Street* 64 (May 1982): 37; hereafter cited in my text as STS.

to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation."¹³

In these interviews, Foucault is careful to combine this call for a homosexual askesis with a critique of certain humanist notions of the gay subject. He especially wants to take issue with "essentialist" notions of gay subjectivity that would posit a gay "identity" as something the subject "discovers" in him- or herself, as opposed to a cultural construction arising from the deployment of sexuality. Thus, Foucault warns, it is necessary to distrust the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to such "existential" questions as "Who am I?" and "What do I secretly desire?" He says, "The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of sex" (a "truth" implanted as an instrument-effect of the historical deployment of sexuality), "but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships" (FWL, 203–4). Foucault suggests that gay subjects must "work" at "becoming" gay (SPP, 27). This "becoming" gay involves not the "discovery" of one's sexual "essence" but the "invention of oneself as gay," an invention that is possible due to the historical and cultural positioning of the (subjugated) subject of the discourse of the homosexual.

Foucault calls into question a humanist gay and lesbian liberation that would seek *primarily* to extend to homosexuals the "fundamental" rights of heterosexuals. Foucault warns, "If what we want to do is create a new way of life, then the question of individual rights is not pertinent. . . . Rather than arguing that rights are fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right which permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions" (STS, 37). To those who suggest that gays and lesbians ought to have the right to enter into the currently existing network of relational institutions, such as marriage, the family, and so forth, Foucault responds that, rather than introducing homosexuality into the general norm of social relations, gay and lesbian liberation should encourage gay subjects to "escape as much as possible from the type of relations which society proposes for us and try to create in the empty space where we are new relational possibilities" (STS, 37).

Following Foucault's call to read gay culture in terms of an askesis, a

13. Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson, "Michel Foucault, An Interview: Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity," *The Advocate* 400 (August 7, 1984): 27; hereafter cited in my text as SPP.

(non-humanist) attempt to make the self, I will now turn to specific “salient” aspects of the urban gay ghetto lifestyle. I want to propose a reading of certain discursive practices circulating within the ghetto as “technologies of the self,” practices that suggest opportunities for “becoming” gay. My intention is to understand them as modes of being, means by which certain gay subjects manage or conduct themselves from within the order of self-formation known as homosexuality. I will at times argue for a reading of these practices directly from Foucault’s interviews in the gay press. At other times, I will extend Foucault’s analysis to practices he did not discuss by name, fashioning other fictions from his. I offer this analysis in this particular context because I think it suggests a very different way of imagining pornography from the one offered by Williams in *Hard Core*. *Hard Core*’s analysis claims to mobilize “Foucauldian descriptions of power, pleasure, and discourse” (*HC*, 6) drawn primarily from the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. This prevents the analysis from taking into account how the texts following this first volume might modify our understanding of “Foucauldian” descriptions of these things. Additionally, I would suggest that there are moments in *Hard Core* which figure power, in particular, in a way that owes little or nothing to Foucault. There are, in fact, in Williams’s text, genealogical traces of a description of power that Foucault explicitly *rejects* in both the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (*HOS*, 92–102) and other later texts. To offer just one example: following an analysis of S-M pornography, Williams argues for naming “the perverse fantasies that inform these films” as *sadomasochistic*. She chooses this name to differentiate her analysis from certain “celebrations” of masochism that “forget . . . where ultimate power lies” (*HC*, 217). It is difficult to imagine how it is possible to formulate, from within a Foucauldian description of power, this phrase “where ultimate power lies,” since in Foucault’s model of power, power can never be “ultimate,” nor can it “lie” in any one place (*ECS*, 10–12). For Foucault, power exists as a series of strategic relations characterized by their reversibility. To say that power resides in any one place is to misunderstand the “strictly relational character of power relationships” (*HOS*, 95).

Before arguing for an “alternative” reading of pornography through a discussion of gay technologies of the self, I have to insist on an understanding of these technologies as discursive practices that suggest certain conditions of possibility for self-making. In other words, I am not attempting to diagnose the “real” or to make claims about what “real” gay people “really” do. To do so would be to re-inscribe Foucault’s intellectual project

within a discursive system that he explicitly sought to problematize throughout his work. In an interview with Lucette Finas, Foucault refers to his work in the history of sexuality as “fiction”:

I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or “manufactures” something that does not as yet exist, that is, “fictions” it.¹⁴

This notion of intellectual work as “fiction” is especially productive when used to imagine gay technologies of the self in that it prevents such a discussion from recapitulating certain essentialist positions. Specifically, a refusal to discuss the “reality” of gay subjects prevents an account of these technologies from lapsing into essentialist definitions of gay identity. In order to account for what gay subjects “really” do, one must have some mechanism for determining who is “really” gay. A non-essentialist understanding of sexual identity as a function of discursive practices disallows the formulation of such a mechanism. It is only in particular discursive situations that a subject is constituted as gay. There is no reality outside discourse where a subject *could* constitute him- or herself, or be constituted as, gay. To state the problem another way: as Andrea Fraser argues in a recent interview, “The ‘identities’ we speak are neither true nor false but operative, signifying in the particular moments of their articulation.”¹⁵ To speak of what “real” gay people “really” do would be to reconstitute the problem of sexual identities along the lines of truth or falsehood. It is exactly this kind of essentializing of gay and lesbian subjects that, I will argue, blocks *Hard Core* from considering either gay or lesbian pornography or gay or lesbian readings of “straight” porno texts.

Additionally, any discussion of “the real” inevitably produces a pursuit of origins, “the real” being figured as that place where things “happen.” As Foucault warns in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” such a pursuit of the origin is necessarily essentialist, an attempt

to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search [for the

14. Michel Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Collin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 193.

15. The V-Girls, “A Conversation with OCTOBER,” *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 126.

origin] assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to “that which was already there,” the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity.¹⁶

Opposed to this search for origin is the work of the genealogist, who finds “behind things . . . not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.”¹⁷ Any “fictive,” “non-essentialist” account of gay technologies of the self must necessarily be genealogical and not caught up in the search for origins. I have already suggested how *Hard Core*, in its positing of pornography’s “phallic origins,” necessarily essentializes the porno text as “inevitably” a male speculation on female difference. I will argue this at length in the latter half of this essay.

Finally, the act of diagnosing “the real” has historically belonged to what Foucault terms “the universal intellectual.” This “universal” intellectual, derived historically from the model of the jurist, the “man who invoked the universality of a just law,”¹⁸ stood in the position of “speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice” (TAP, 126). In contradistinction to this “universal” intellectual, Foucault proposes the “specific” intellectual. “Specific” intellectuals work “not in the modality of the ‘universal’ . . . but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family and sexual relations)” (TAP, 126). This “specific” intellectual, rather than speaking from a position of mastery over truth, has a specific, “local” position that allows him or her to be involved in what Foucault terms the constituting of “a new politics of truth.” The goal of the specific intellectual is not the emancipation of some “immanent” truth but instead consists of “detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (TAP, 133). I want to assert here, in this fiction, that, in his interviews in the gay and lesbian press, Foucault is acting as a “local” intellectual, constructing “fictions” that may “detach” the power of truth from its current regime.

16. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 142.

17. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 142.

18. Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge*, 128; hereafter cited in my text as TAP.

The desire to diagnose “the real” may be genealogically linked to the model of the “universal” intellectual, who sees his or her intellectual project as one of revealing to “the masses” their “false consciousness” that prevents them from discovering the “real” conditions of their existence. It is this model that, as I argued at the beginning of this essay, animates much recent discussion of the issue of censorship. (Recall the father who fears his daughter will be seduced by Madonna’s lyrics into “really” engaging in S-M sex.) Most, if not all, ideology critique, whether it be directed toward “fictive” texts or the “real,” is made possible by a “false consciousness” model. I would argue that this is true of even the most “progressive” methods of textual analysis that perform ideology critique in order to *authorize* for others certain readings of texts. The assumption under which this textual analysis is operating is still one in which “the masses” need to be told that they *can* locate “ideologically correct” forms of pleasure in texts that may “on the surface” appear to be “regressive.” Here again, *Hard Core* comes to mind, since much of the text reads as an attempt to convince female spectators that they can find pleasure in pornography and still be “ideologically correct.” The text seems to assume that certain spectators do not know that they are allowed to find pleasure in pornography and that they need someone to help them gain knowledge of the pleasures they might locate in pornography.

Concerning the model of intellectual work as the laying bare of “false consciousness,” Foucault has argued that “the problem is not changing people’s consciousnesses—or what’s in their heads—but the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth” (TAP, 133). The events of May 1968 seemed particularly instructive to Foucault in this regard. In a discussion with Gilles Deleuze entitled “Intellectuals and Power,” Foucault argues that the “universal” intellectual discovered, as a result of the events of May, the fact that

the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge. . . . Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power—the idea of their responsibility for “consciousness” and discourse forms part of the system.¹⁹

19. Michel Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 207.

A discussion of gay technologies of the self as practices that “really” happen would necessarily reenact, in its diagnosis of the “real,” this position of the “universal” intellectual. Obviously, I am attempting to reject such a position here. It would be especially disheartening to see gay and lesbian intellectuals reenacting this position, considering the fact that gay and lesbian subjects have so often witnessed the discourses and knowledges of their community invalidated by the current regime of truth.

This rather long digression explaining why I would argue here, after Foucault, on a reading of the gay practices of the self described in this text as “fictions,” may seem belabored. Yet one of the most common responses to Foucault’s interviews in the gay press is the objection that gay people do not “really” behave in the way Foucault suggests.²⁰ I hope to have argued here that this kind of objection represents only a very partial reading of Foucault’s intellectual project and that it also manifests what Joan Copjec has called, in a somewhat different, but related, context, an impatience before discourse.²¹ This impatience, supposedly motivated by a political urgency—the logic being “If we know the real, we can change it”—is made possible itself, I contend, by the current regime of truth and represents not a move to the outside of that regime but a re-inscription of some of its enabling fictions. In the face of that current regime, I would like provisionally to suggest that (“fictive”) gay and lesbian intellectuals refuse all discussion of the real in an attempt to foreclose the reentry into their intellectual work of certain humanist, essentialist “truths.”

The gay practices of the self I will now examine through an exploration of Foucault’s above-mentioned interviews include a number of disparate procedures I will name as efforts to “de-Oedipalize” the body; practices of gay S-M; practices associated with the baths; and gay pornographic photos and film. These practices are not mutually exclusive; I differentiate between them primarily for the purpose of analysis. I would especially insist that, in order to consider gay pornography in particular as a practice of the self, it must be read from within the larger discursive network of these

20. This was, in fact, one of the objections raised when I presented an earlier draft of this paper at the 1990 Society for Cinema Studies Conference, May 23–28, Washington, D.C.

21. Joan Copjec, response to the question of the female spectator, *Camera Obscura* 20/21 (May–Sept. 1989): 122–23. Although Copjec and I have similar hesitations about this impatience before discourse, we understand the problem somewhat differently. She objects in feminist theory to a certain “Foucauldization” of Lacan; I object to the attempts to “Lacanize” Foucault. See the discussion of Foucault and Linda Williams’s use of the term “implantation of perversions” in the latter part of this essay.

other technologies of the self, and not simply as “film text.” In other words, by situating pornography within a range of related discursive practices—related through this act of analysis—I want to reject the isolation of film as textual object that so often takes place in the discipline of film studies under the rubric of an attentiveness to “cinematic specificity.” (This is, in fact, how *Hard Core*’s analysis proceeds, concentrating primarily on “close readings” of porno texts.) Although the concept of cinematic specificity, in its isolation of a particular object of study, makes possible a number of disciplinary practices such as close readings, the creation of film scholars, the development of a canon of texts, and so forth, I want to question, through a reading of pornography as one among many gay practices of the self, the efficacy of this concept in this particular context.

The “De-Oedipalization” of the Body

In a number of interviews, Foucault notes, through a reading of certain practices within the gay ghetto, the historical potential in gay sexuality to make of the body “a field of production for extraordinarily polymorphous pleasure.”²² This practice of “de-Oedipalizing” the body—Oedipus understood here as the cultural and historical genital organization of sexuality—proceeds in two directions simultaneously: it seeks to eroticize areas of the body other than the genitals while simultaneously attempting to de-sexualize physical pleasure itself, creating, through the negation of sexual pleasure, new forms of physical pleasure (LGS, 32–35).²³ Foucault reads S-M sex as a particularly privileged network of discourses for the production of the de-Oedipalized body (LGS, 34; SPP, 27–28).

There are a number of discursive practices circulating within the gay ghetto that may be read as efforts to de-Oedipalize the gay body, practices that Foucault does not always mention by name. These discourses appear in a number of different discursive arenas simultaneously—on the bodies of members of the ghetto, in practices of S-M sex, in “pornographic” books, photographs, and films. They include, but are not limited to: body shaving, especially the shaving of the testicles; the manipulation of the testicles and/or penis through the use of cock rings; anal sex; manipulation of

22. Jean Le Bitoux, “Michel Foucault, Le gai savoir,” *Mec* 5 (June, 1988): 33; hereafter cited in my text as LGS. I am greatly indebted to Gerard Koskovich for making me aware of this interview and to Michael West for providing the translation.

23. See also Gallagher and Wilson, “Michel Foucault, An Interview”; and James O’Higgins, “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act,” in *Foucault Live*, 211–31.

the anus with objects; nipple piercing and clamping; spanking and/or pummeling certain areas of the body; the manipulation of the skin through the application of hot wax; fistfucking; and water sports.²⁴ Some of these practices are represented in a wide variety of representations circulating within the ghetto. Others appear much more infrequently. What is especially interesting to note about these technologies is the fact that they are done *to* the self and are often accomplished through the intervention of devices. In other words, they foreground the production of pleasure as an “unnatural” act and refuse certain humanist understandings of sexual desire and excitation as resulting from “natural” biological urges and drives. Instead, these technologies insist on pleasure as arising from willed manipulations of the body.

S-M Sex

Foucault is especially interested in reading S-M sex as a site through which to analyze strategic relations of power. In response to the question of what S-M may teach us about the relationship of pleasure to power, Foucault remarks that what strikes him about S-M is how different it is from social power:

What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation that has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very pervasive in courts, codes and so on. All that means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid. (SPP, 29)

In contradistinction to social power, where strategic relations are fixed, S-M represents a strategic relation that is always fluid. “Of course there are roles,” Foucault insists, “but everybody knows very well that those roles can be reversed. . . . Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game” (SPP, 29–30). Foucault rejects the idea that S-M is a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structure of power. Instead, he calls it “an acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure.”

24. Although I am speaking primarily of practices associated with the gay male community, certain similar discursive practices may be located in the lesbian community as well. For a discussion of these practices, see Susie Bright, *Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1990). This text also discusses lesbian S-M and pornography.

Foucault sees S-M as a process of invention that uses strategic relationships as a source of pleasure. It is “the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously” (SPP, 27), a technology of the self applied to the body, and a means for the gay subject to invent himself and his body as gay.

The Baths

In a discussion of the sexual activities that occur at the baths, Foucault casts the processes of gay self-making there as “the affirmation of non-identity.” Foucault reads, in the baths, the potential for “de-subjectifying” oneself, for “de-subjugating oneself to a certain point, perhaps not radically, but certainly significantly.” At the baths, gay subjects are “reduced” to “nothing else but other bodies with which combinations and creations of pleasure are made possible. You quit being held prisoner by your own face, your own past, your own identity” (LGS, 36).

This affirmation of nonidentity represents for Foucault a kind of care for the self in that it is the condition of possibility for a certain kind of pleasure which Foucault calls “de-sexualized.” He says, “It’s a very important experience, inventing shared pleasures together as one wants. Sometimes the result is a sort of de-sexualization, a kind of deep-sea dive, if you will, so complete that it leaves you with no appetite at all, without any kind of residual desire” (LGS, 36).

Gay Pornography

The de-Oedipalization of the body, S-M sex, and the sexual practices of the baths are some of the discourses that meet in photographic and cinematic pornography. Although I deliberately want to suspend here a “textual analysis” of gay pornography, I would like to offer a few remarks that will consider gay pornography as a technology of self-making.

As I have already suggested, Foucault characterizes one aspect of a homosexual askesis as the formulation, through sexual practices, of a new relational system. Specifically, Foucault suggests, “We must escape and help others escape the two ready-made formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers’ fusion of identities” (FWL, 206). In the specific historical circumstances of its reception, gay pornography acted as a site for the conditions of possibility of new relational systems. The typical account of the film spectator offered by psychoanalytic film theory—silent, immobile,

repressing his “exhibitionism,” engaging in covert, yet authorized, forms of “voyeurism,” isolated, experiencing “displaced” forms of sexual gratification—is laughably inadequate to an understanding of the spectator of gay pornography. Gay porno theaters were places where men met to have sex with other men. Like the baths, they provided the attendees with multiple opportunities for pleasure. The actual film text was hardly the “focus” of the porno experience. Rather, we may imagine the film as a concurrent discourse of sexuality, a discourse that undoubtedly aided in the production of pleasure but certainly not the only one available to members of the porno audience. This formulation of the place of the film text in the porno experience suggests the limited value of close analyses of gay porno films, if these analyses are not undertaken in tandem with analyses of concurrent discourses of gay sexuality and the discursive processes of self-making that were “enunciated” simultaneously with the porno text’s enunciation. (Obviously, these same observations may be extended to analyses of “straight” pornography in general, and particularly, to the kinds of “close readings” of porno texts offered in *Hard Core*.) As a place for the proliferation of bodily pleasures, the porno theater made possible certain conditions for processes of gay self-making. It in fact represented, like the baths, a kind of “underground” “institutionalization” of the possibilities of a certain homosexual askesis.

If I may now interrupt the pleasurable unfolding of this story about pornography, I will return to *Hard Core* and tell another story—that “same old story” I read in *Hard Core* when I read it through Foucault’s later texts. In her text, Linda Williams explicitly refrains from any consideration of gay or lesbian pornography: “Because lesbian and gay pornography do not address me personally, their initial mapping as genres properly belongs to those who can read them better” (*HC*, 7). Yet Williams is also reluctant to locate gay and lesbian pornography “outside” more “mainstream” representations of the erotic. She suggests, “Minority pornographies should not be bracketed as utterly separate and distinct. While they are different from heterosexual pornography, they nevertheless belong to the overall ‘speaking sex’ phenomenon in modern Western societies” (*HC*, 7).²⁵

When Foucault, someone who presumably could read gay porno “better” than Williams, at least according to the criteria she herself estab-

25. This phrase “‘speaking sex’ phenomenon” is Williams’s shorthand for Foucault’s argument, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, that there has occurred since the Age of Reason “a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse” around sexuality (*HOS*, 34).

lishes, was asked if in fact “the salient aspects of what we call the [gay] ghetto—porn movies, clubs for S-M or fistfucking, and so forth”—represented “merely an extension into another sphere of the general proliferation of sexual discourses since the 19th Century,” he argued that what is more important to consider is the “*innovations* that those practices imply” (SPP, 27).

I cite Foucault here not to suggest that gay pornography is “utterly separate and distinct” from straight pornography—whatever that may mean. Rather, I would like to question Williams’s desire to read *all* pornography as primarily an instance of the desire to “make sex speak.” This move to essentialize pornography, as well as its audience—suggested in Williams’s belief that gay and lesbian people are, by virtue of “being” gay or lesbian, better equipped to read gay and lesbian pornography²⁶—is emblematic of a whole series of moves in the text. For all its claims to use “Foucauldian descriptions of power, pleasure, and discourse,” *Hard Core* produces a reading of pornography in terms antithetical to those invoked by Foucault in the above-mentioned interviews. The kinds of essentializing processes enacted in *Hard Core* have little to do with Foucault’s intellectual project, and are, I will argue, much more symptomatic of film studies’ desires to diagnose “the real.” Foucault’s understanding of his work as “fictions” is very much opposed to *Hard Core*’s project of exploring “the *very nature* [my emphasis] of the cinematic apparatus and spectatorship” (HC, 188). Some may object that I am making too much of this phrase, but I want to argue that these kinds of semantic traces are important to an understanding of both the text and the disciplinary practices it enacts, practices locatable in essentialism. And yet *Hard Core* represents—or better, *because* of this, it represents—some of the best work the discipline of film studies has produced on “straight” pornography.

Williams locates the “goal” of her text as the tracing of “the changing meaning and function of the genre of pornography in its specific, visual, cinematic form” (HC, 3). She asserts that knowledge “of how power and pleasure function in discourses in which women’s bodies are the object of knowledge” is “crucial to any efforts to alter the dominance of male power and pleasure in the culture at large” (HC, x). She hopes that “this study will

26. I think I understand Williams’s political intentions here, which are, I assume, a refusal to adopt a kind of universalizing discourse associated with non-feminist criticism. But noting the essentializing moments in her construction of the gay and lesbian subject is not a matter of questioning her intentions but rather a matter of describing the effects of that construction.

be of intellectual and political use to those who . . . [wish to consider] what pornography is and what it has offered" its viewers (*HC*, xi).

Hard Core's declaration of its goals and purposes figures certain traces of *both* the "specific" and "universal intellectual/false consciousness" model of intellectual work. Its political intervention may be described as "local" in its attempts to speak to women about sexual pleasure, and its desire to be of use-value parallels Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's metaphor of theory as tool, a metaphor offered in their conversation entitled "Intellectuals and Power."²⁷ But *Hard Core's* desire to "alter" male power and pleasure sounds much like the universal intellectual's desire to mold the political will of others.²⁸ Similarly, its desire to account for and explain both male and female heterosexual spectators' pleasure in pornography, and to authorize women in particular to seek out pleasure in pornography, sounds much like the "universal" intellectual's goal of "revealing" to "the masses" what they don't know.

The text begins with Williams's recounting of how her experience of watching porno films changed her understanding of them. Initially assuming that pornography would demonstrate "a total objectification of the female body," she found, "in fact, that these apparently self-evident texts were fraught with contradiction. The most important of these conflicts was the difficulty hard-core films have in figuring the visual 'knowledge' of women's pleasure. Although the genre as a whole seems to be engaged in a quest for incontrovertible 'moving' visual evidence of sexual pleasure in general, and women's pleasure in particular, this is precisely what hard core could never guarantee" (*HC*, x).

Williams's declaration that she "was wrong" about pornography reads as an attempt to ground the authority of the text in such humanist notions as "authenticity" and "experience"—notions problematized over and over again by poststructuralism's critique of the metaphysical subject, who is both maker of meaning and place where meaning resides. But it seems required that the text make some sort of appeal to the authenticity of experience in order to bracket off a criticism of its methodology—close readings of texts that are incapable of accounting genealogically for their own conditions of possibility. That is, essentialist readings, readings that theorize the act of reading as a process in which one "sees" what is "in" the

27. Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," 208.

28. Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," in *Foucault Live*, 305. Foucault states here, "The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they must do. By what right would he do so? . . . The work of an intellectual is not to mold the political will of others."

text, rather than reading as “produced” through the mobilization of particular discursive practices. This essentialist conception of the reading process and text extends to Williams’s account of the reader, allowing Williams to claim that, because heterosexual pornography has begun to address the woman consumer, and because she is a woman and a heterosexual, she may very well be pornography’s “ideal” spectator (*HC*, 7). The assumption here is that anyone who “is” a woman and “is” heterosexual would “naturally” read these texts “rightly.” Not only does this formulation throw us back on essentialist conceptions of identity but it also erases other discursive modalities that may be mobilized in the process of reading—particularly, those modalities named by “class” and “ethnicity” or “race.”

What seems particularly telling in Williams’s construction of her experience of reading pornography is the fact that her own movement from what might be called a “univocal” or “monolithic” reading of porno texts to a reading of texts in terms of “contradiction” parallels that of cinema studies as a discipline. Film studies in general, and feminist film criticism in particular, has, over the past fifteen years, moved from an examination of “stereotypical” images of women, to the question of the enunciation of woman in the text as either fetish or source of scopophilic, voyeuristic pleasure,²⁹ to an understanding of the figuration of woman in particular—and a text’s “ideologies” in general—as “fraught with contradiction.” In other words, the discipline has “progressed” from reading texts as ideologically “regressive” to reading texts in terms of the “contradictory” ideologies they may articulate—“contradictory” ideologies often figured as arising from “real” contradictions in the social. An exemplary instance of this movement in the discipline to read for contradiction are the various re-readings over the past fifteen years of Hitchcock’s films, from Laura Mulvey’s reading of *Vertigo* as articulating a masculine, sadistic gaze “oscillating between voyeurism and fetishistic fascination,”³⁰ to Tania Modleski’s reading of this same film as articulating a gaze that moves between “masculine” and “feminine” identifications.³¹

It is obvious why feminist film theory would move to reading for contradictions. This movement makes possible a number of things. First, it is a means of recuperating texts previously constructed as “ideologically

29. The relevant text here is Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 305–15. This is probably the most highly anthologized essay within the discipline.

30. Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure,” 312.

31. Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1988).

regressive”; second, it is an attempt to theorize female spectatorial pleasure as something other than a “regressive” “masochism.” Additionally, it serves to rescue the field from the endless succession of Mulvian readings of Hollywood films to which the discipline once seemed doomed. What is most troubling about this disciplinary strategy of reading for contradiction, however, is that it exists in a kind of specular relation to the Frankfurt School approach to popular culture: instead of being positioned as a “bad cop” who de-authorizes and disallows pleasure (as in the past), the intellectual is now positioned as the “good cop” who authorizes certain kinds of previously discredited forms of spectatorial pleasure. But in either case, the intellectual is still acting as a kind of pleasure police. The question is—in whose name, and in whose interests, are these cops speaking? Do we still imagine the role of the intellectual as that of educating “the masses” about their pleasure?

Most problematic in Williams’s description of texts as contradictory is her desire to locate these contradictions in the texts themselves rather than to see them arising from the particular practices of reading brought to bear on the texts. There is an enormous difference between saying texts can be read for contradictions, fissures, gaps—a position usually associated with “deconstructive” readings—and saying that texts make visible contradictions in the social or that they *are* contradictory due to conditions in “the real.” Although not all feminist criticism posits this relationship between “the text” and “the real”—and certain incarnations of Lacanian-based criticism have been especially careful to avoid this equation—much ideological criticism in film studies posits some kind of (however mediated) deterministic model between texts and “the real.” What has happened is that film studies’ account of that “reality” has become progressively broader. In other words, a greater number of determinants—“economic, social, cultural and ideological”³² now “determine” the film text.

If one were to construct a genealogy of this practice in cinema studies of reading for contradictions, two of the relevant texts would be Althusser’s essay “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses,”³³ and Fredric Jameson’s *Political Unconscious*.³⁴ It is thus no coincidence that

32. This phrase comes from the jury’s citation to the prize winner of the 1989 Jay Leyda Prize in Cinema Studies. It appeared in *Cinema Journal* 29, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 75.

33. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 122–73.

34. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

both of these texts are cited approvingly in *Hard Core*. Jameson's readings of generic texts as instances in which "iconography and narrative work together to intensify oppositions and contradictions that exist within a culture, in order to seek imaginary forms of resolution" (*HC*, 128) make possible Williams's account of a film like *Deep Throat* as one which "on the one hand" "undeniably" attempts "to represent the climax of a heterosexual act in entirely phallic terms," while "on the other hand" confesses, in its hyperbolic use of phallic imagery—particularly the "money shot," a trope in porno in which the male withdraws from the female and ejaculates outside her body—a certain "uneasiness" about this "previous standard for representation of pleasure" (*HC*, 119).

Although Williams insists that these readings for contradiction are not based on a reflection model in which contradictions in the social are mirrored in the text (*HC*, 129), there is the assumption in *Hard Core* that "real" contradictions in the social are "reworked" in genres like pornography and embodied in pornographic texts.³⁵ Thus Williams is able to argue that changing conceptions of female pleasure in the social—changes rather facetiously demonstrated by brief references to the work of Masters and Johnson, which is cited as evidence of the "new prominence" the clitoris received in the 1970s (*HC*, 113)—"produce" *Deep Throat*'s "contradictory subtext."

The problem with Williams's (and, I would argue, Jameson's) analyses of generic texts is that they posit the possibility of knowledge of "the real." We are thus presented with a version of history that reads all too much like the same old story, a version in which the relationship between texts and "the real" is once again figured not as "fiction" but as an account of what "really" happened. One of the (all too familiar) effects necessitated by this construction of the relationship between texts and "the real" is an account of history that is relentlessly teleological. Although Williams claims that her account of history in *Hard Core* is "not a true history" (*HC*, 7), it is not because she posits the impossibility of such a thing—rather, the writing of a "much more detailed textual, historical, and sociological inquiry" remains to be done (*HC*, 268–69). She also attempts to ward off the criticism that *Hard Core* presents a teleological view of history by claiming that "my argument is simply that hard core [pornography] has changed

35. It should be noted that some of the essentialist positions in Williams's text are made possible by her discussion of pornography as a *genre*. I would argue that there is, in the field of cinema studies, very little analysis of genre that is not marked by essentialism.

(*HC*, 269). This strikes me as an extremely disingenuous moment in the text, coming as it does at the conclusion of a study that casts history in terms of development (*HC*, 267), that reads all pornography as an instance of “making sex speak,” and that locates pornography as “emerging” from a nineteenth-century quest for knowledge of the body and continues that quest throughout its history.

This teleological view of history is demonstrated in Williams’s reading of the above-mentioned “money shot.” According to her, the money shot “can only reflect back to the male gaze that purports to want knowledge of the woman’s pleasure the man’s own climax” (*HC*, 94). How is this intention being imputed to the “male gaze”? Through a teleological version of history, in which cinema in general and hard core in particular “originate” in photographer Eadweard Muybridge’s “fetishized” representations of the female body and “climax” in the money shot. Thus Williams is able to conclude that “with the money shot we appear to arrive at what the cinematic will-to-knowledge had relentlessly pursued ever since” Muybridge’s motion studies: “the visual evidence of the mechanical ‘truth’ of bodily pleasure caught in involuntary spasm” (*HC*, 100–101).

What is particularly noteworthy about this teleology is that it “climaxes” in “the gaze” directed toward the *male* body; in other words, it suggests a set of conclusions opposite to those offered by *Hard Core*: that the money shot is not in fact a fetishized substitute for visual evidence of female pleasure but the apotheosis of the search for male knowledge of male pleasure—which is, after all, no more “self-evident” or “visible” than female pleasure. It also suggests, contrary to Williams, that the “animating male fantasy” of hard-core cinema is not the impossible attempt to capture visually the “orgasmic excitement” of the female body (*HC*, 50) but the equally impossible attempt to convey to men knowledge of their own bodily pleasure. For unless *Hard Core* is falling victim to the very logic it purports to deconstruct, the text cannot assume that male pleasure is any more “visible” than female pleasure.

My point is, of course, not that this latter construction of the money shot is the “right” one. Rather, I want to emphasize the fact that Williams’s analysis is made possible by a number of essentialist assumptions: that pornography is, throughout most, if not all, of its history, a way of speaking about sex constructed by men and directed toward the bodies of women; that male sexuality is (culturally) visible, self-evident, not in need of explanation, while female sexuality is invisible, a mystery, in need of explanation; that pornography reveals its origins in nineteenth-century motion studies of

the human body; that reading pornography's historically "changing meaning and function" (*HC*, 3) is primarily a matter of enacting (admittedly, often elegant) close readings of porno texts and conjecturing about their relationship to the real.

Most, if not all, of these assumptions could, I would argue, be traced to disciplinary practices within film studies, made possible as they are by such discursive constructs as "the male gaze"; film as evidence of ideological contradictions within "the real"; history as "what happened"; and close readings of texts as accounts of what is "in" the text rather than as discursive practices that delimit and define what can possibly be read in a text. Many, if not all, of these constructions may be traced back genealogically to one of the "founding" "fictions" of the discipline—the desire to diagnose that "very nature of the cinematic apparatus and spectatorship."³⁶

Williams's stated methodology is emblematic of cinema studies' desire to explore the "real" conditions of film and its spectators. Williams describes that methodology as

feminist re-visionism in tension with several other approaches: psychoanalytic theories of sexuality and sexual identity; Marxist theories of reification, utopia, and the sexual marketplace; Foucauldian descriptions of power, pleasure, and discourse; and recent work on mass culture. (*HC*, 5–6)

One of the most obvious problems with this kind of eclecticism is that it combines discursive practices that constitute their objects of study in radically different and often opposing manners. As I have argued above, the combination of (supposedly) "Foucauldian descriptions of power, pleasure, and discourse" with certain idealist and essentialist disciplinary practices produces an analysis that not only bears very little resemblance to Foucault's intellectual project but appears at moments to be, as the philosophers say, "incoherent." I have argued elsewhere that the marriage of Foucault to psychoanalysis in *Hard Core* produces a number of incoherences

36. Discussions of the "essence" and "nature" of cinema are common in the "classical" period of film theory. See, for example, Germaine Dulac, "The Essence of Cinema: The Visual Idea," in *The Avant-Garde Film, A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), 36–42; Jean Epstein, "The Essence of Cinema," in *The Avant-Garde Film*, 24–25; André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 17–22; Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

around the phrase “the implantation of perversions”—a phrase that Williams uses from Foucault—one of the effects of which is to transform Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis into a psychoanalytic method of diagnosing the “perverse” aspects of “the apparatus.”³⁷ To cite just one instance: near the conclusion of *Hard Core*, Williams argues:

The money shot can thus be regarded as a perverse substitute for more direct representations of genital pleasure, just as cinematic deployments of voyeurism can be regarded as a perverse substitute for more direct connections with sexual objects. Given the increased institutionalization of both perversions in the mass media generally, it has seemed appropriate to speak of them in the context of Foucault’s notion of the historical “implantation of perversions.” (*HC*, 271)

This kind of analysis of cinematic tropes as “perverse” owes little or nothing to Foucault. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues for an understanding of “the perverse” as a function of historically specific discursive practices (*HOS*, 36–49). Williams’s more psychoanalytic understanding of the term suggests a kind of ahistoricity explicitly rejected by Foucault. For Foucault, “the perverse” is not a substitute for anything. It does not describe the “swerving away” of genital sexuality from its “original object” (*HC*, 272) as it does for Williams. Additionally, Williams’s diagnosing, through psychoanalytic feminist film theory, of certain cinematic tropes as perverse must necessarily cover over the fact that this type of analysis itself “implants” perversions where there were none previously. In other words, a genealogical investigation of cinema studies as a discipline might locate the discursive moment when certain “perversions” were “implanted,” with the help of psychoanalysis, in “the apparatus” by film theory. Voyeurism is not a “perversion” until it is so marked by a discursive practice, just as looking itself is not “voyeurism” until the discipline of psychoanalysis discursively constructs it as such.

Similarly, *Hard Core*’s uniting of Marx and (Williams’s particularly idiosyncratic version of) Lacanian psychoanalysis in the account of the money shot produces both Marx and Williams herself as fetishists. To call, after Marx, the money shot a substitute for “the more straightforward exchange between prostitute and john, where the consumer does, at least

37. John Champagne, “Towards a Homosexual *Askesis*: Foucault and Gay Pornography” (Paper delivered at the 1990 Society for Cinema Studies Conference, May 23–28, Washington, D.C.).

momentarily, possess the 'goods' " (*HC*, 107) is to fall victim, according to a Lacanian analysis, to the very process one purports to describe—fetishism. For only a fetishist could imagine the always-doomed-to-failure sexual relation³⁸ as a momentary possession of the other. Similarly, to call, through a Marxian reading, the money shot "another 'memorial to lack' right where we might most expect to see presence and fullness" (*HC*, 114) is to identify oneself, through a Lacanian reading, as a fetishist—for only a fetishist would expect to see "presence and fullness" in the money shot. Unless we are going to differentiate between degrees of fetishism—substitutes of substitutes—fetishism seems to have, contrary to Williams, little explanatory power when applied to the money shot (*HC*, 271). If in fact "anything and everything can come to stand in for the original object of desire," as Williams insists, little is explained when the money shot is called a fetishized representation of more direct representations of genital interaction, which are themselves fetishized representations of the sexual act, which is itself a fetish of the "lost object." But perhaps it is a question of determining "politically correct" forms of fetishism—the money shot being a "regressive" fetish, and "real" sex being a "progressive" one.

Some may object that Williams's description of the money shot as fetish owes more to Freud than to Lacan. It is true that Lacan is not invoked in this chapter by name. Yet at other times in the text, Lacanian concepts are drawn on. The problem is compounded by Williams's refusal to explore "the particulars of the Freudian and Lacanian problematic" (*HC*, 286, n. 4), her reliance in other parts of the book on a cinematic notion of fetishism indebted to various readings of Lacan, and her combination in *Hard Core* of wildly conflicting psychoanalytic approaches—Freudian, Lacanian, Deleuzian, and object-relations theory. Emblematic of this "incoherent" methodology is the moment when Williams invokes both Lacanian and object-relations theory to argue the "most basic psychoanalytic premise that original objects are lost" (*HC*, 272)—as if it is of little theoretical consequence that these varying psychoanalyses construct this premise in radically different ways and to radically different ends.

Williams's methodology is representative of film studies' desire to diagnose "the real" of spectatorship by constructing a totalizing model that will once and for all explain the relationship of "the spectator" to "the apparatus." Rather than understanding any model of spectatorship as a "fic-

38. See Jacqueline Rose, "Feminine Sexuality—Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne," in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1989), 70–71.

tive” discursive practice that produces different conditions of possibility, film studies has attempted to supplant previously discarded models with new ones in hopes that one or another of them will finally account for the real “historical” conditions of spectatorship. Thus, at conferences and in its journals, the discipline stages a series of religious wars around these models—cognitive theory versus psychoanalysis, formalism versus Marxism, and so forth. It is as if the discipline itself has fallen victim to the very “fiction” it once imputed to the camera—the desire to gaze on the real. As the apparatus supposedly seduces the eye into believing in the reality of appearance, so the endless spectatorship wars seduce the film theorist into believing that he or she can account for the “real” conditions of spectatorship.

There is an interesting moment near the beginning of *Hard Core* that I would like to read here as an exhibition of film theory’s seduction by the very fiction it purports to describe. Williams answers the question of why no still photographs appear in *Hard Core*, which is, after all, a text on film:

The problem is that there is no getting around the ability of such [sexually explicit] images, especially if quoted out of context, to leap off the page to move viewers and thus to prove too facily whatever “truths” of sex seem most immediately apparent. Rather than run the risk of having a few quoted images stand out too boldly against the ground of my attempts to read whole texts and the context of a genre, and rather than offer up images that could be read either as or against pornography, I forgo the luxury of illustration. (*HC*, 32–33)

In a text in which numerous descriptions of filmed sexual acts appear, this fear of “moving” readers through images suggests an almost quasi-religious faith in the visible. Although the text never questions its ability to “contain” the “excesses” of its prose, it dare not risk the presentation of images, which can’t, according to its own logic, be tied down as easily. In this privileging of the affective power of images over prose, the text mirrors the metaphysical subject’s conviction that language represents merely a “trace” of the real, and so is less present, less “dangerous,” than either speech or photographic images. There is also a kind of anti-Foucauldian moment here, an attempt to prevent readers from inventing themselves as sexual subjects in ways not condoned by the implied author. And yet, there is also, in the first sentence of the passage, the acknowledgment that “there is no getting around” the abilities of subjects to use pornographic images in “inappropriate” ways.

Hard Core, with its summa of methodologies, represents an attempt

by the discipline of cinema studies to ward off a Foucauldian critique of the desire to describe the real. It suggests that what is required of the discipline (and its disciples) is not an examination of its religious attachment to “the real” but a kind of super-religion that can describe “the real” more fully. It thus comes as no surprise that *Hard Core* should reap certain disciplinary rewards. The book was a finalist for both the 1989 Jay Leyda Prize in Cinema Studies and the 1989 Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize. The winner of both prizes was Thomas Elsaesser’s *New German Cinema, A History*. About this text, the jury for the Leyda Prize wrote, “His [Elsaesser’s] historiography, in its non-linearity, demonstrates the way in which this important body of films was determined by the conflicting demands of economic, social, cultural and ideological forces, and by a unique national agenda of legitimation.”³⁹ The jury’s citation is instructive in terms of what it suggests about the discipline of cinema studies. The emphasis on history (as opposed to genealogy), the construction of the film text as being “determined” by “conflicting” (contradictory?) forces in “the real,” “the real” itself being composed of a multiple, ever expanding field of determinants (economic, social, cultural, ideological, political)—all of these figure a certain similarity between Elsaesser’s project and the one I have read here in Williams’s *Hard Core*. Apparently, the same old story is getting even older. In any case, the citation is suggestive of what the discipline values. Especially interesting is the nod toward “non-linear” history—a gesture I read genealogically as an attempt by the discipline to interpolate with as much facility as possible Foucault’s concept of discontinuity offered in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.⁴⁰ It is this very facility of interpolation that Foucault’s intellectual project draws to our attention and asks us to reconsider as we undertake our own projects as writers of “fictions.”

39. *Cinema Journal*, 75.

40. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).