

Tinker, Soldier, Sailor, Thief: Discourse and Identity in Narratives of Criminality, Risk Taking and the Visual Representations and Appropriations of the Male Sexual Outlaw as a gay fantasy figure - from Art and Literature to Fashion imagery

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Abstract:

This article examines the subject and visual representation of the gay fantasy figure, with specific reference to the male sexual outlaw character and its embodiment in the archetypes of the sailor and male hustler, and their fantasmatic performance in fashion editorials and advertising campaigns. It will focus on themes of homoeroticism, narratives of sexual danger, duality and adornment (with specific reference to tattooed bodies), and will provide an overview of the fascination with rough trade type that gay artists and audiences share, and the dichotomy of 'good and evil' and 'tragic and comic' in these artists' subversive rendition of homo-hetero desire. The starting points for this article are two seminal works on the Male Sexual Outlaw as a central focal point for their audiences' desire: Jean Genet's novel *Querelle de Brest* (1947, illustrated by Jean Cocteau) and Philip-Lorca diCorcia's series of photographs titled *Hustlers* (1990-1992). By focusing on the figures of the professional mariner and the male prostitute, and incorporating underlying references to the male-dominated shady underworlds they supposedly inhabit and a life lived on the margins of society, the work investigates the representation and desire for sexually dominant man from within the canon of western white gay male art.

Keywords:

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spectatorship

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fantasy figure

prostitution

1. Introduction

Since the late 1980s fashion images have been employed not only as a vehicle for selling clothes but also as an experimental platform for addressing critical issues surrounding gender identity and body representations; for challenging gender stereotypes and for highlighting the role of fashion and photography in the construction of desire. About a decade earlier artists and photographers witnessed the rise of consumerism perpetuated by mass media and postmodern discourses, and photography and other lens-based mediums coming into their own and evolving into legitimate high-art forms. Commercial photographers and creative directors began to focus less on representations of beauty ideals as manifestations of fashion and came to rely more on the representations of lifestyles, imbuing their work with narrative elements inspired by film and literature. The fashion spread had become a site of articulation of various identities and representations, both cultural and subcultural, conveying the medium's ability to soak up and reflect the social shifts and materialistic desires of the times. Though they arguably follow the same general formula of objectification and the erroneous presumption of hegemonic heterosexuality, contemporary men and women's high-fashion magazines differ in how they narrate society's behavioural expectations of male and female characteristics, and how they generate desire by amplifying the prospect of sexual identity. In the case of women's high-fashion magazines, women are invited to look at images of other women but also of men, so they actively participate in the act of observing/appreciating/enjoying/desiring both male and female subjects. The intention, from a heteronormative perspective, is for the female readers to aspire to look like the women, and possess the men they see represented on the pages of the magazine. This process is significantly different in the case of men's high-fashion magazines where men, confronted with a depiction of male gender or social roles in a fabricated world devoid of women, are explicitly invited to look at images of other men almost exclusively. For the homosexual male consumer of such fashion images the experience is rooted in a spectatorial familiarity and identification with a synoptical collage of traditional, male-only gay fantasy scenarios. The article questions what picture of homosexuality these commercial appropriations of "gay styles" paint, and how heterosexual male readers might absorb it. It focuses not on homosexual as opposed to heterosexual spectatorship, but on what Diana Fuss calls '[...] the homosexualisation of the viewing position itself [...]' (Fuss 1992: 736) as shaped by contemporary men's fashion photography and the gay cultural symbol it presents us with. As an extension of this idea the article will discuss menswear editorials and advertising campaigns that specifically seek to appropriate the iconography and essence of pre-AIDS gay subculture by fabricating and fashioning queer nostalgia and old-fashioned gay archetypes.

2. The "Handsome Sailor"

Billy Budd, Sailor is a Herman Melville novella, which was posthumously published in 1924. The theme of homoerotic desire is weaved into Melville's story (which takes place in the year 1797) and his depiction of good and evil binaries as embodied by Billy Budd – an attractive sailor aboard the British naval warship HMS Bellipotent, and John Claggart – the ship's Master-at-Arms. Dana Sliva frames her argument in *Exploring Homoeroticism in Herman Melville's Novella Billy Budd, Sailor* (Silva 2006) through and around Graham Robb's study of nineteenth century societal attitude toward homosexuality, establishing that fundamentally, as a product of the Victorian code of morality – with its penchant for secrecy and self-denial – this attitude was rooted in intolerance, determined by class and informed by a popular view of the elite in total control of society. However, since ocean-going vessels were purely autonomous entities and were not entirely governed by Victorian society's standards, the confined space on board a ship frequently accommodated tolerant attitudes toward same-sex desires and sexual activity among sailors. Reiterating this, Melville himself stated that, 'What too many seamen are when ashore is very well known; but what some of them become when completely cut off from shore indulgences can hardly be imagined by landmen' (Bromell 1993: 74). With *Billy Budd*'s unnamed narrator reflecting on how 'Passion, and passion in its profoundest, is not a thing demanding a palatial stage whereon to play its part' (Melville 1998: 257) the specific setting of the HMS Bellipotent sets the scene for Melville's transgressive story about social hierarchy, the self-destructive nature of homosexual desire and the relationship between power and sexual desire among men. Twenty years after the publication of *Billy Budd, Sailor*, the French poet, bookseller and publisher Adrienne Monnier gave French novelist Jean Genet a copy of the book. According to biographer Edmund White, 'Soon afterwards Genet sold it but possibly not before he had read it' (White 1993: 335). At the time Genet was already working on *Querelle of Brest*, a novel about Georges Querelle – a handsome young sailor, and the skewed relationships that he forges with other men, especially with his Superior Officer, Lt. Seblon. Genet's initial narrative was constructed around themes of hidden same-sex desires, subordination and crime that were remarkably similar to Billy Budd and '[...] can be

read as a response to Billy Budd' (ibid. 1993: 335), and his intensely dark and convoluted, onanistic gay fantasy and riotous celebration of sodomy, betrayal and guiltless murder, was published in 1947, accompanied by twenty-nine salacious illustrations by Jean Cocteau. Genet labels the character of thief and cold-blooded murderer Querelle the 'hero' of the book (Genet 1994: 6), celebrating his young character's physical prowess, energy and audacity – 'having attained the limits of danger' (ibid. 1994: 92), and his ability to morph his social and sexual public identity according to his existential needs. Querelle towers at the other end of Seblon's shadowy, masochistic existence, representing consciousness, identity and the binary of self/other, in the conflict between socially imposed gender roles and one's personal (and hidden) desires or aspirations, leading to a precarious dual existence (Plunka 1992: 104-105).

Querelle shares nothing of Billy Budd's angelic innocence or moral decency and uses his sexual allure to seduce, manipulate or control those around him. Genet's description of Querelle's fashion sense and styling also alludes to this duality as he presents us with contradictory adjectives: we learn that Querelle's blue jeans were either purchased or stolen, his '[...] highly polished black shoes [...]' are '[...] cracked and crinkled [...]' and though his turtleneck jumper is white, it is made of '[...] slightly soiled wool' (ibid. 1994: 12). Plunka adds a description of Querelle's dandyism, '[...] refusing to allow any other sailor to wear the beret at the same angle in which he himself tips the hat' (Plunka 1992: 110). In direct contrast to Querelle's male hustler gear is Billy Budd's almost martyr-like garb of '[...] white jumper and white duck trousers, each more or less soiled [...]' observed by the narrator to ultimately forecast Billy's fate as 'he is already in his shroud or the garments that shall serve him in lieu of one' (Melville 1998: 288). Frank Episale states that 'Genet's *Querelle* brought Melville's *Billy Budd* out of the closet in a genuinely subversive way, and exposed the coded homoeroticism of the all-male naval vessel inhabited by men and boys in tight white pants to a wider, largely heterosexual, audience' (Episale, 2006). As a visual extension to Genet's morally challenging narrative were Cocteau's erotically charged illustrations, featuring Breton-striped and bell bottomed sailors, in various states of undress and in the process of having sex with one another. Cocteau's technically remarkable and thematically explicit line-drawings leave very little to the imagination in their depiction of rough and coarse men engaged in oral, anal and masturbatory sex acts, or in prostituting their working-class bodies. Those are larger-than-life, muscular characters, endowed with larger-than-life penises, exaggerated to comical cartoon proportions and inflated to the point of caricature. There is a certain air of fantasy to the scenes, even when the sailors are depicted engaged in existential street corner hustling, as Cocteau draws them floating in a deliberately blank, white background (Guedras 1999). Cocteau's drawings had a tremendous influence on visual interpretations and manifestations of the archetype of the sailor as a homosexual fantasy figure in the subsequent work of a number of gay artists such as Samuel Steward and Pierre et Gilles, and also on the fashioned male body in the editorial and advertising images discussed later. The subversive nature of Genet's fictional world, his concern for the artifice and his stylized, self-reflective and self-conscious prose, his preoccupations and recurring themes such as role-playing, alienation and otherness, gender and gender identity, radical politics and political activism and his strong iconoclastic tendencies provided fertile ground for controversial German film-maker Rainer Werner Fassbinder who was working on a film adaptation of *Querelle of Brest* in the early-Eighties. Fassbinder made bold artistic decisions in his book-to-big screen adaptation – expressing his deep disregard to the novel's narrative, which he publicly labelled 'a sort of third-rate police story' (Ringer 2001: 148). He mixed up the story, placed the stylized action in a studio which was stuffed with symbolic sets (looking like cardboard cut-outs), bathed it in artificial lights, and shot it in intensely bright, expressive colours, with an English spoken dialogue – playing on the idea that this film (and the vile sequence of events that it chronicles) is theatrically fictive (ibid. 2001: 2-14). The film was posthumously released in 1982 after Fassbinder's death from a drug overdose and became an art-house success, especially considering it was a gay themed film. Over time it had arguably become etched into the collective gay men's cultural consciousness mainly due to the film's "look" – its memorable production design, art direction and costume design – taking as their starting point the camp, homemade Technicolor aesthetic of Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger and James Bidgood, in addition to the influence of Cocteau's vision of outrageously sexual, beefcake sailors. Loren Ringer has made similar links between gay underground culture aesthetics and the film's successful evocation of Genet's sensory world, its style and visual direction, pointing out 'The soft red and orange lighting which [...] harkens to the lighting of gay bath-houses and cruise bars.' She cites Al Lavalley who calls it '[...] a kind of theatre of sex, that is not very different in design or dress styles from the leather bars [...] in New York [...]' (ibid. 2001: 149).

3. A hustle here and a hustle there

Querelle was the first literary manifestation of the working-class sailor as part-time male prostitute. According to Julie Matthaei's research about the social construction of sexuality by the division of labour, in the nineteenth-twentieth century workers and wage labourers, especially soldiers and sailors were considered to be low earners, and it was not unheard of for young men of such working-class group to supplement their earnings by selling their bodies sexually in order to raise their income, or so they could gain access to "the better life" (Matthaei 1997: 143). Barry Reay draws

strong connections between sailors and male prostitution in his study of masculine sex trade in modern America. As much as the fictional figure of the sailor featuring as the main character in a range of literary and visual sources, Reay also points to its real-life incarnation being a particular object of desire for major post-war American artists and authors – a case of a personal, living fixation morphing into imaginary characters and works of art. Authors and poets Samuel Delany, Jim Carroll, John Cheever, Hart Crane, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Glenway Wescott, Charles Henri Ford, Richard Bruce Nugent, Wallace Thurman and Edmund White; film-makers George Cukor and Kenneth Anger; artists photographers Andy Warhol, Carl Van Vechten, George Platt Lynes, Samuel Steward, Pavel Tchelitchev, Paul Cadmus, Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley – all featured sexually suggestive, even explicit sailor and male hustler imagery and narratives in their work as well as referred to and documented their sexual adventures and encounters with “rough trade” – a butch and heterosexually-identified working-class male prostitute (Haggerty 1999: 887). *Fireworks* (1947), Kenneth Anger's earliest existing film celebrated the archetype of the sailor and male hustler as gay fantasy figures, reflecting the artist's inner world, his dreams and desires and suggesting the film-maker (and the personal encounter between film-maker and subjects) as subject of what we see on the screen – a cinematic language Anger shared with early twenty-first century underground film-makers. Nearly two decades after the film was released film-makers began to give more emphasis to representations of gay male culture and the objectification of the male body rather than the evocation and contemplation of their inner experiences. Alongside commercial success such as Warhol's *My Hustler* and John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*, the hustler featured as a significant delinquent figure, alongside that of the sailor, in the development of gay underground films and cultural imagery (Lay 2009: 28-29). Michael Moon's research about narratives of urban alienation and the gritty male street hustler character in 1960s American films cites Richard Dyer's suggestion that this character's appearance in literary work created in the same decade came to be representative of the maladies of the secular American society of the time: criminality, substance abuse, homelessness and prostitution (Moon 1998: 18). ‘Hustlers are for watching,’ Reay explicitly states, writing that the hustler is ‘the figure of desire in the highly charged yet not necessarily realized encounter,’ and that this encounter ‘may take place in the street, but also on [...] the photographic print, and in painting and sculpture’ (Reay 2010: 188–189). In his *Hustlers* series (1990–1992), which was shot in and around Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, American photographer Philip-Lorca diCorcia featured male prostitutes who agreed to pose for his camera for an amount roughly the same as what they would charge for their sexual services (between \$20 to \$40). Looking back at the series diCorcia acknowledges that the subject of male prostitution was only one aspect of the work that also aims to consider the ways in which both American society and gay American men perceive homosexual identity, alongside the photographic medium's capability of telling truths. Depicted in a variety of locations including street corners, diners, parking lots and cheap motel rooms, the hustlers were identified in the titles of the photographs by their name, age, hometown and the fee they were paid for posing for diCorcia's large format view camera – young men who came to Hollywood from all over the United States in the hope of finding a new, more attractive or lucrative life. Whether they are gay, bisexual, or heterosexual (“gay-for-pay”), the actual sexual orientation of the subjects is not revealed in the captioned photographs, which heightens the enigmatic aspects of the work. The self-consciously postmodernist photographic mode and technique blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, the real and the artifice, power and subordination, as diCorcia portrayal of real people in elaborately staged and fabricated, “everyday” scenes establishes narratives that are constantly slipping from a documentary code to an interpretative one. Most of the subjects are gazing off into the middle distance and rarely look at the camera or explicitly acknowledge the viewer – displaying a weary, jaded detachment in the fading LA light, their vacant expressions ‘[...] create a feeling of rudderless, dispirited anomie that was emblematic of the larger society’ (Lubow 2013). Despite these alienation devices, and the series possessing the characteristics of traditional documentary photography (the subjects' authenticity; the relatively grim scenarios) the photographs are visually seductive, profitable art-world commodities, closely resembling movie stills in how they utilize the visual language of film rather than still photography. Those deliberate narratives are consciously left opaque, conflicting with the large-scale production involving locations, sets, actors (Hollywood wannabes in diCorcia's case) and mix of natural and artificial light. Peter Galassi, former Chief Curator of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York described the *Hustlers* photographs as paradoxically mixing these apparently clashing principles and ‘[...] operating in the gap between postmodern fiction and documentary fact, between slick convention and fresh perception, they deliver a powerful emotional charge’ (Galassi 1995).

4. Rose tinted trade

It's established that gay and lesbian individuals (rather than gay and lesbian lifestyles and culture) have had a big impact on the fashion and visual culture industries, but the rise in gay and lesbian visibility in the media and the portrayal of gay and lesbian characters in popular culture have also brought attention to the idea of gay and lesbian people as consumers. The gap between social invisibility and gay/queer subjects seems, if anything, to have narrowed down since Rosemary Hennessy's 1995 analysis of the relationship between social visibility, sexual identity and commodity culture and at least within academic work and contemporary western thought much has been discussed and written about with regard to the

social and legal aspects of gay and lesbian identity. Though critical thinking attempted to interpret and reframe a range of gay and lesbian experiences from different social classes (research has been conducted concerning prostitution, labour and other forms of servitude), what still prevails when it comes to visual representation in the mainstream media is the image of the gay subject as a white middle-class consumer. The myth of the white, urban and affluent homosexual is propelled by gay characters in television series such as *Will & Grace*; *Desperate Housewives*; *Grey's Anatomy*; *Sex and the City*; *Brothers & Sisters* and *Modern Family* and in commercial advertising. In recent years, diverse brands from drug manufacturer Tylenol to eyewear company Ray-Ban; alcoholic beverage companies Miller Beers, Absolut Vodka and Skyy Vodka; clothing and accessories retailers Banana Republic and The Gap; fashion companies Diesel and Liz Claiborne; furniture and home accessories company Ikea; American Airlines; and luxury fashion houses Dolce & Gabbana and Givenchy have all alluded to or represented gay and lesbian lifestyle in their advertising campaigns. With the exception of Dolce & Gabbana and Givenchy those ad images feature white middle-class subjects. Perhaps in response to an increased number in readership, menswear magazines (by now catering for both gay and straight male audiences), have expanded since the early nineties on the traditional and limited range of male kinds represented in fashion imagery (the Entrepreneur, Sportsman, Traveller and the occasional Arty type) to include forms of alternative masculinities, lifestyles and queer fantasy scenarios, highlighting men/male bodies as subjects/sexualized objects. In terms of fashion photography it was probably the work of Steven Klein, especially his Tom of Finland-inspired underwear campaign imagery for C-IN2 (2007) that drew attention to the change in cultural standards and the inclusion of male nudity and scenarios of blatant sexuality, humiliation, torture, injury and explicit male subordination in both women and men's fashion editorials (Coad 2008: 109-117). Though it seems like the men's underwear genre and pink-dollar brands such as Calvin Klein Underwear, DSQUARED2 Underwear and the aforementioned C-IN2 might naturally lend themselves to Klein and his photographic studies of polymorphic sexual behaviour, it is the work he shot for luxury brands such as Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen and Dolce & Gabbana (targeting males and females of all sexual persuasions) that questions Andrew Cooper's assumption (articulated through a set of social relations) in the context of contemporary visual representations. Cooper refers to Connell (1995), Halkitis (2000) and Yingling (1991) and other body of published research on the subject in outlining the process of defining a "gay masculinity" and the role of HIV/AIDS had in establishing the heterosexual perceptions of gay male identity representation in this processes. He places an importance on queer theory's attention to the production of a diverse sexual identity order, but highlights the problem in using the term "Queer" in the context of individual lives as it may be perceived as defining "the unconventional" through the assumption of heterosexual hegemony. Cooper stresses gay men's potential for confronting and disrupting predominant identities through '[...] creativity, innovation and playfulness [...] for example through camp' (Cooper 1990: 12-37). This has clearly been one of the intentions behind the provocative body of work Steven Klein has been making since the late nineties, arguably sharing some of Fassbinder's stylistic methodology. As I have outlined in a previous section Fassbinder's disruption of Genet's narrative (*Querelle* is a novel about the enactment of male homosexual desire where none of the characters identify themselves as being gay) and the breakdown of the audience cinematic experience through the use of postmodernist self-referential techniques; garishly surreal and extravagant design and cinematography; and emphasis on camp performances of excessive magnitude, has succeeded in contributing to a discourse on gay male identity formation in connection with social relations, and stylistically influenced queer high-fashion designers, film and image-makers.

In a similar extravagant manner French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier's *Le Male* perfume ads (1995-present) feature a selection of models in the role of the ideal "Handsome Sailor" and reference narrative elements that seem to be plucked directly from Genet's incendiary, theatrical world of prostitutes, thieves and murderers. The campaign, which was shot by influential image-maker Jean-Baptiste Mondino, evokes an air of ambiguity about masculine identity, and signalled a shift in the portrayal of masculinity in print media, especially in how it presented men as purely sexual objects. The images feature a cast of cartoonlike sailors, more well groomed Popeye than weather-beaten Will Adams, and propose a playful masquerade of masculinity, reflecting an articulation of the hegemonic ideal gay body, a masculine combination of a powerfully built "grown-up" body, with a young-looking, boyish face (Baker 2006: 228). With their tattoos appearing more like kids' temporary stickers, the work of a make up artist rather than that of a port-town tattoo parlour, these are metrosexual men (who might even fancy other men) dressing up as sailors for a fantasy role-playing game. In an interview with Thierry-Maxime Lorient, Curator of *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk* (2011), Gaultier – one of a very few openly gay or lesbian French celebrities – acknowledges the influence of the figure of the rebellious sailor; Genet's cast of marginal characters; and also the impact Fassbinder's adaptation of *Querelle* on his design sensibilities. He also refers to a number of cultural icons that eventually became the greatest artistic influence on the "Gaultier universe" amongst them Popeye and Tom of Finland – suggesting humour, playfulness and a sense of nostalgia for old-fashioned gay sexual culture, and pronounces the character of *Querelle* '[...] the ultimate sailor, a hypersexualized gay symbol, a fantasy, an icon, a form of virility that could be ambiguous [...]' (Lorient and

Gaultier 2011: 39). The following analysis focuses on the campaign and expands on a point Denis M Provencher made about duality and role-playing aspects as particular motifs of the *Le Male* campaign. In his research on the construction of homosexuality in contemporary French popular culture Provencher considers a homoerotic image depicting an arm wrestling match between a manly sailor and his more effeminate double (portrayed by the same model), which the audiences are invited to voyeuristically watch through a metal studded, naval ship porthole (Provencher 2012: 66-68). The scene is theatrically framed, revealing the hidden, secretive character of the lower-deck cabin space where twins/brothers/lovers/performers become both exposed and excluded from audiences/others, reinforcing the narcissistic, homoerotic elements as essential expressions of sexual desire. The sailors are facing each other and intensely staring into each other's eyes, flexing biceps muscles, their interlocking fingers form a fist-shaped heart. The sailor twins also embody narcissistic love of, and desire for the self as double – time stops as lovers gaze at each other's eyes intensely, each projecting his own internal sexual identity conflict onto the other. Provencher points to the significance of their body adornment and clothing in establishing the audiences' reading of their sex-role orientation. On the left is the masculine, striped jersey sailor – or rough trade type, with his nose-ringed, raging tiger tattoo, clutching an opened metal can which is the perfume outer packaging (perhaps a nod to Popeye's tin can). He is wearing a sailor cap and a single, silver hoop earring. On the right is a handsome shirtless guy, his same and opposite other, an old-school style heart and scroll tattoo decorates his left bicep in which the word "Love" is spelt. He is wearing a sailor cap and a more elaborate set of three silver hoop earrings. Next to him is a feminised pump atomizer version of the *Le Male* perfume bottle. Shaped like a muscular male torso, a snug sailor's T-shirt covering the chest, the object is given human attributes. *Le Male* has been "outed" and the sailors are fighting for his body – as trophy. The entire scene brings to mind the fight scene between Querelle and his brother Robert – his double and 'exact replica' (Genet 1992: 17), who is enraged by his brother's homosexuality and sexual relationship with Norbert – the owner of a brothel, and Madame Lysiane's husband, who is Robert's lover (ibid. 1992: 119-125). Genet reminds us that the masculine Norbert tends to lose his 'true manliness' (ibid. 1992: 125) in the presences of Querelle, and that the bond of these two men prompted a 'secret, invisible' universe '[...] that totally excluded the idea of woman' (ibid. 1992: 126). In Fassbinder's film adaptation of Querelle, Norbert (Nono) was played by Günther Kaufmann, who was discovered by Fassbinder and became his lover. Kaufmann's heavy physique is encased in a snug, black wife-beater, his manly frame reminiscent of the *Le Male* perfume bottle; his character's sexual duality evidenced by the bottle's masculine and feminine design characteristics.

The notion of the male body-as-commodity for trade is embedded in another homoerotic narrative for a commercial (*Le Vestiaire*, 2007), featuring a small group of young "sailors" or actors in the role of sailors taking off their identical white sailor caps, sailor pants and sailor-striped sweaters and dressing up in identical black suits and white shirts, inside what appears to be a cross between a small men's locker room and a nightclub toilet, as the camera – like an overexcited fan – wanders freely in slow-motion and lingers on their half-naked or partially clothed bodies. To the sumptuous sound of the *Casta Diva* aria from Bellini's *Norma* (in the opera the aria represents a call for peace in a narrative that focuses on loyalty and betrayal between men and women) the *Le Male* perfume bottle is rapidly changing hands as the men are spraying themselves liberally with perfume. A sense of togetherness, of locker room camaraderie permeates the atmosphere, as the guys pat each other athletes-style on the face or back, playfully teasing one another. This appears to be some sort of self-imitation orgy in which the *Le Male* perfume bottle (the toy) has a significant role of a shared erotic body among men that undress out of their costume-like uniform only to be dressed up again in other identical outfits. Mixed with the aria is the sound of chatter and laughter by an unseen male "audience," emphasising the notion that what we are watching is the suggestive performance by an all male cast. The sequence ends with a line-up as the men, who until now were apparently unaware of being watched, revert to direct their self-assured gaze back at the audience, as the surveilled become surveyors. Ringer highlights the inter-connectedness of similar motifs of games, role-playing and sexual anarchy in Genet's *Querelle*, describing a similar mood as '[...] a cross between a bacchanalian love feast and a modern-day (but pre-Aids) Gay bathhouse' where 'Body parts come together to play and in their merriment, display a certain amount of play' with a '[...] sense of movement, perpetual action on the sexual stage of life' (Ringer 2001: 125). Narcissism, recklessness and the mirror image are evident in a print ad version of the campaign, where an ice-cold, androgynous looking *Le Male* – epitomised by a model dressed in sailor-striped wifebeater, is seen photographed from behind looking in a mirror at his own reflection, his deliberating stare projected back at the viewer through the mirror. He is standing at the sink of a neon-lit men's toilet room flanked on either side by two partially dressed, slouching models. One of the models is directing a suggestive, flirtatious gaze out of the picture to the viewer; the other looks up pensively to Heaven. The blond, clean-shaven and more effeminate, angelic-looking model to the left signifies morality and sexual purity; the stubbled, dark-haired model to the right – the lure of carnal pleasures and material desire. The position of the models' hands also reinforces the idea of symbolic posture. Right hand casually inside his trouser pocket, *Le Male* strikes an effortless dandy pose. The blond model sits with his crossed hands resting lightly in his lap, whereas the dark-haired model reclines on the tiled surface of the sink with his left hand clenching the edge of the counter and right hand (and

most of his lower body) cropped out of frame. *Le Male* stands between God and the Devil, the Apollonian and Dionysian, between *Billy Budd* and *Querelle*.

Gaultier has acknowledged gay man's obsessive preoccupation with, and desire of straight males and the allure of working-class masculinity when he talks about the figure of the beautiful sailor: 'With their tattoos, sailors are also associated with the bad boy image, which I love, the Casanova on the fringes of society with a mistress or lover in every port!' (Loriot and Gaultier 2011: 39). Gaultier relishes in the romantic fantasy of life at sea, focusing on the elements of freedom, movement and sexual promiscuity rather than the hardship of labour and homelessness. 'The uniforms are so gorgeous and can be very elegant. I particularly like sailor pants, which I've adapted in many of my men's and women's collections [...] When I created the Dada collection, Fassbinder's film had just come out. So I got the idea to combine corsets and sailorstyle tops, two powerful symbols of seduction' (ibid.). Gaultier combined corsets and sailor tops in another narrative for a 30 second commercial (*Le Rendez vous*, 2000) – evoking duality; role-playing and masquerade; gender as performance; risk-taking; public sex and voyeurism – albeit with a dissatisfying conclusion (if you're a gay man), manipulating the audience and the subversion of their expectations. To the faint rattle sound of glass against glass, a hand is seen pushing aside a crystal bead curtain. Through the gap a bar is revealed, bathed in blue neon light. The bar's men only clientele are all sailors, either leaning against the wall or drinking at the bar counter. As a single sailor, shot from behind and head cropped out of the frame, is moving slowly through the opening into the bar, we can notice another bead curtain hung over another doorway at the far end of the bar, a red hue emanating from it. The first twenty seconds of the commercial look and feel like Tom of Finland meets Almodovar-esque camp and fashion runway show glamour. In an atmosphere of heightened, almost palpable sexual tension everything points to and reference gay sexual culture: the all-male blue neon-lit bar full of rampant sailors; the red-lit backroom where the action take place; the crystal bead gay sauna curtains; the camera – alternating between the sailor and sailors POV checking each other out as they do the opposite sex, while the viewer is invited to actively participate in the act of blatant gay bar cruising. As the newcomer sailor, bold as brass, minces his way through the crowd of sailors, the camera focuses on the thinness of his waist and his small, rather feminine derriere, tightly encased in white sailor pants which are tied at the back. During his walk the sailor's androgynous face is briefly revealed, staring confidently back at the viewer. As he reaches the far end of the bar he pushes aside the transparent pink crystal bead curtain to reveal another chamber – a red-lit backroom where another single sailor is lying on a green sofa in an inviting pose. The camera POV is now that of the visitor, getting closer to the sofa and the young man reclining on it until their lips meet in a kiss. His torso shot from behind, the sailor is taking off his sailor-striped shirt to reveal a flesh-coloured corset, and for a brief second the viewer anticipates a particular development – the climax to a challenging narrative of same-sex desire, corsetry and constricted men's bodies, public sex and voyeurism down in the belly of a ship – 'an exotic space where male union might even be the norm' (Yingling 1990: 24). But then – seen immediately from the front – the sailor takes off his white sailor cap revealing that he is, in fact, a she – a strikingly beautiful woman with a magnificent blonde mane of hair. What we thought was a reversed sexual identity is nothing more than a straight man's fantasy of a woman, passing herself off as a man and sneaking into a military base to have sex with soldiers.

A number of recent editorials¹ continue the appropriation of the iconography of desire associated with gay masculinities by directly referencing *Querelle de Brest* and *Hustlers* and proposing same-sex desire and fluid ideas of gender acting – blurring the line between homo and hetero and glamorizing homelessness, prostitution, criminality and seediness in the process. The bodies of sailors and male prostitutes are presented in those editorials as commodities, or emblems of forbidden sexual desire, set against the backdrop of urbanity and desolation. The photographs employ an extensive palette characterised by the lurid hues of garish neon signs, both night-time and daylight scenarios suggesting a similar nightmarish urban adventure. The photographers behind the photo shoots² take a similar aesthetic approach to Fassbinder's adaptation of Genet's *Querelle* and diCorcia's *Hustlers* with a highly stylized use of saturated colour – rejecting naturalism and making the real seem sensual and decadence, a figment of a fevered imagination. Since these days one is more likely to find male escorts online rather than on the streets, what is problematic in these editorials' proposition is how the nostalgic appropriation of gay subculture (which has in itself a potential for queering the appearances of heterosexual hegemony) ends up representing a gay identity as a fixed marginalized territory (in a bleak Genetian manner). Dyer, in his study of films by or about lesbians and gay men considers the perceptions of Genet's work 'a gift to homophobia, easily appropriated as the living proof of how sick, neurotic and degraded homosexuals are' (Dyer 2013: 87). Like American poet Hart Crane or Mexican-American street hustler turned novelist John Rechy, Genet explicitly outcasts gay male identity and primarily associates it with the working class and, to a certain extent, with the power to question, redefine, or revolutionise the predominant patriarchal notions of desire – positioning homosexual desire as 'fundamentally disruptive rather than harmonious' (Yingling, 1990: 30). Placing fashion in the context of culture and evoking gay masculinity and desire as sexually reckless, histrionic, excessive and performed by a cast of Fassbinderian social outsiders united in their sick perversion, positions modern gay identity on the wrong side of the

moral doubles of good and evil. In addition, the grim reality of similar, real-life narratives is obscured by the notion of these fashion images being used as a vehicle for selling clothes by an industry dominated by artifice. Cooper notes that 'A key aspect of performance [...] is the role of the 'audience' (Cooper 1990: 69), and the question that seeks to pose itself here is who is the audience and what is their perception of such deceptive spectacles. In the wake of the increase in risky behaviour within the gay male community which is manifesting itself in the growing popularity of unprotected sex and the return of representations of male homosexual subculture (the Tom of Finland type, gay "bear look" dictating current fashion trends within the gay male community) it is necessary to question the ambivalent value of male bodies served as currency in fashion image-making and the relevance and validity of such representations for both a gay and straight audience of fashion consumers. Our debate should address how to represent and negotiate a gay male identity and same-sex desire in the context of the "promiscuous," and who has the "right," or at least the authority, to create those images.

Notes

¹ *Rose Tinted* (Vogue Hommes International, Spring/Summer 09); *The Angels Have Gone* (Arena Homme +, Winter/Spring '10/11); *Shore Leave* (Vogue Hommes International, Spring/Summer 2011); *Querelle* (Schön! Magazine, 2011); *Querelle* (Arena Homme +, 2012) and *American Hustle* editorial (Interview Magazine, January 2014); *On the L.A. Make* (Arena Homme +, 2014).

² Cedric Buchet; Willy Vanderperre; Glen Luchford; Dimitris Theocharis; Matthias Vriens-Mcgrath; Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott, Alice Hawkins, respectively.

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