

NO GLOVE LOVE



Charles Carrall + Laura Luciana
June 2024



Vanity Project
Flower Books



Vanity Project's NO GLOVE NO LOVE reader was ... a long time coming. The first [publicly declared] foray into RAW life came to fruition in the form of a provocation at Performance Space's LIVE FUTURES in 2023. There, Vanity Project had the unique opportunity to talk to old lesbians about risky sex, or 'our fucking future.' Old lesbians are some of the best people to talk about barebacking with. Vanity Project has since had a subsequent opportunity to think about GREASE in the form of lube. Of course, research is not just read, but lived, literary, and a labour of love. Charles loves bareback. And Laura, having recently taken work at a sex shop, has inherited new perspectives on the materials in it.

Which brings us from LUBE to LATEX. Think sterile glove, kinky catsuit, condom.

Really, we should be calling this NO GLOVE, JUST LOVE.



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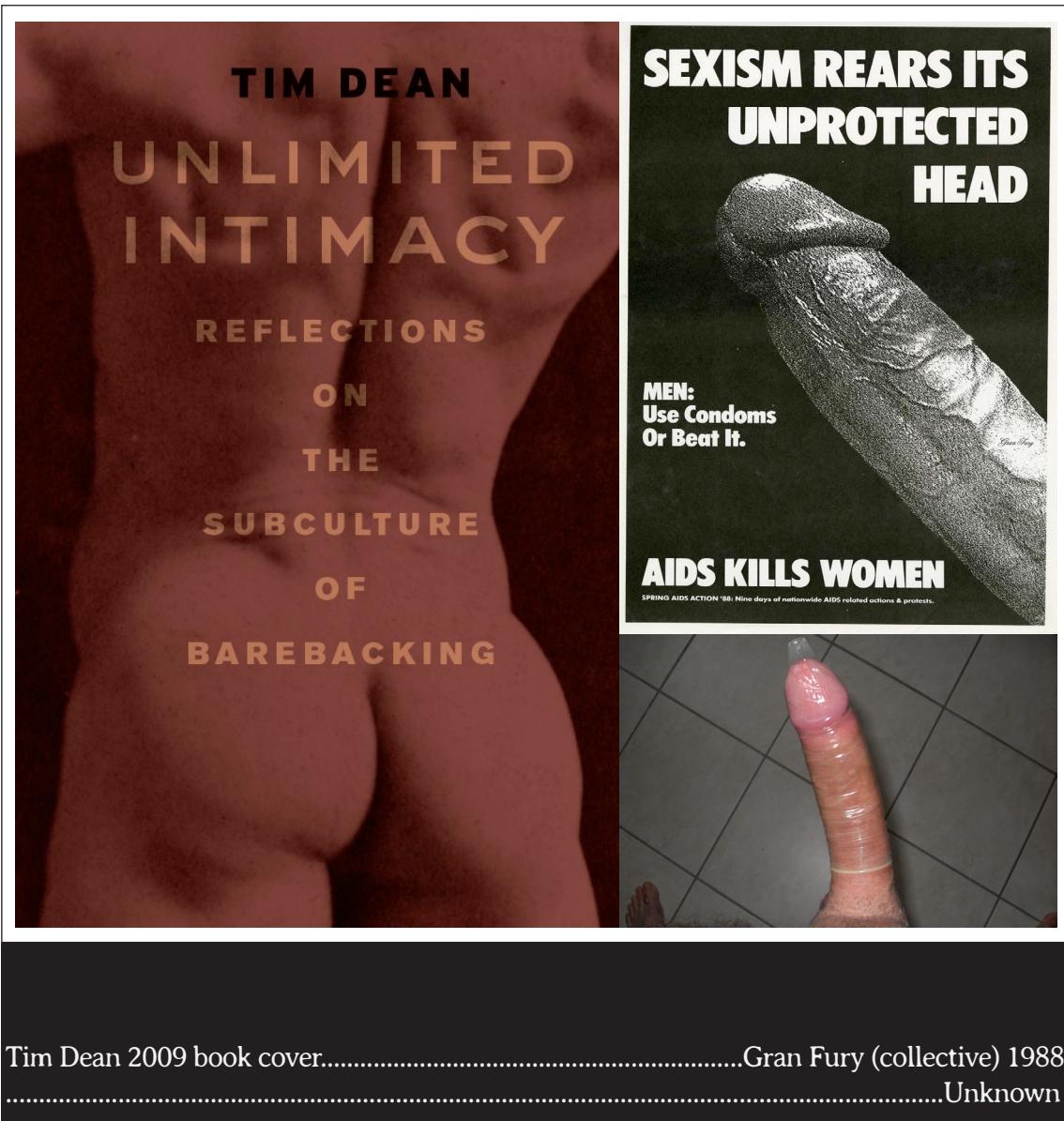
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"bb [barebacking] is natural and i always bb now, Cock belongs in ass bare!"





INTRODUCTION: CONFESSIONS OF A BAREBACKER

I like to bareback—to fuck without condoms.

Whether gay or straight, who wouldn't admit to preferring intimacy free from the muted sensations and interruptions of rubber or latex? (Even rubber and latex fetishists don't go in much for condoms.) The problem lies in the first half of this opening sentence, in the description of sex without condoms as "barebacking." Queer culture, drawing an analogy from equestrian pursuits and invoking a quintessentially North American cowboy image, has coined the term "barebacking" to describe gay men's deliberate abandonment of prophylaxis during sex. As medical sociologist Michael Scarce noted in an early report on the phenomenon, "some people use barebacking to describe all sex without condoms, but barebackers themselves define it as both the premeditation and eroticization of unprotected anal sex."¹ Although it seems important to differentiate the principled rejection of condoms during high-risk sex from ordinary rubberless fucking in which little risk is involved, I also want to maintain a sense of continuity between barebacking and regular unprotected intercourse, whether gay or straight, in order to consider the implications of regarding *all* condomless sex as barebacking. Thus I shall be using the term in both senses (to describe all sex without condoms and to describe specific subcultural practices), although I'll endeavor to clarify my usage as the argument proceeds.

"Barebacking" is now fully embedded in queer vernacular as the label for a distinct erotic preference. Yet the term barely existed prior to 1997, AIDS

1. Michael Scarce, "A Ride on the Wild Side: An HIV-Prevention Activist Goes through the Latex Looking Glass to Discover Who's Doing It Raw, and Why," *POZ*, February 1999, 52.

having rendered inconceivable the idea that gay men would intentionally relinquish protection when fucking. All that changed in the late 1990s with the advent of drug therapies that sharply reduced AIDS-related mortalities in the populations to which they're available. With the threat of death deferred, gay men's erotic practices changed again: now something called the *bareback community*—with its own Web sites, pornography, and subcultural codes—flourishes online and underground in the gay community. This book is about that change and about the profound, though barely acknowledged, cultural transformations that have accompanied it.

By seeking to define (but also to challenge definitions of) barebacking, this introduction attempts to establish how the practice of unprotected sex among men has become thoroughly socialized behavior. In the pages that follow, I explain how, in becoming the basis for a subculture, barebacking merits a less medicalized approach than it hitherto has received; it warrants, in other words, an approach that would anatomize the subculture's demographics, rituals, and underlying fantasies, rather than simply try to devise strategies for stamping it out. My argument takes an additional turn when I suggest that barebacking cannot be understood as restricted to the subculture it has created, since barebacking concerns an experience of unfettered intimacy, of overcoming the boundaries between persons, that is far from exclusive to this subculture or, indeed, to queer sexuality. After establishing the significance of barebacking as a subculture, I suggest that it also may be considered "post-subcultural." Thus I aim to describe the specificity of the subculture and to explore the methodological challenges entailed in researching stigmatized sexual behavior, but I also wish to generalize from the subculture, insofar as the issues it raises exceed those of HIV prevention and the history of North American gay male identity. Strange as it may sound to say so, this book and the subculture that it anatomizes are not principally about AIDS.

Typically the emergence of bareback subculture has been viewed as a case of pathological self-destructiveness or, at best, gross irresponsibility on the part of those who should know better. Gay journalist Charles Kaiser recently declared, "A person who is HIV-positive has no more right to unprotected intercourse than he has the right to put a bullet through another person's head."² And the playwright Larry Kramer, indefatigable on this issue, asks rhetorically, "Has it never, ever occurred to you that not using a condom is

2. Quoted in Andrew Jacobs, "Gays Debate Radical Steps to Curb Unsafe Sex," *New York Times*, February 15, 2005, A2.

tantamount to murder?"³ One prominent gender theorist, the author of an incisive critique of antipornography feminism, responded to my research no less hyperbolically by characterizing the subculture as "gay men creating death camps for themselves."

In the face of such reactions (which I have found surprisingly common among otherwise enlightened colleagues), I would like to make explicit from the start that *Unlimited Intimacy* tries to resist the easy comfort of demonizing individuals who bareback, on one hand, or the glib condemnation of the inadequacies of safe-sex education, on the other. Some commentators have tended to explain the return to risky sex as a result of the conflicting social messages that bombard gay men, as if we were essentially victims of a homophobic culture. "They internalize the homophobia of the culture around them, and act it out on their own bodies," suggests one gay journalist in his account of barebacking.⁴ Blaming bareback sex on homophobia is as politically and intellectually inadequate as blaming it on barebackers themselves. Rather than either condemning or excusing bareback sex, I would like to defer judgment about it in order to open a space in which real thinking can occur—thinking that is not constrained by assumptions about what barebacking must represent. Having written previously about sexual risk, I thought that I knew what barebacking must be about; on further investigation, I discovered that I did not. Thus my initial claim about the ethics of barebacking is that it is *unethical* to decide whether the practice should be regarded as blameworthy or otherwise before the subculture has been explored.

When I began this project, little substantial research existed on the subject. Although many articles and two books on barebacking have appeared subsequently (and, doubtless, there are more in the pipeline), none of this research considers the significance of unprotected sex as the basis for a specific subculture.⁵ Although far less pathologizing than journalistic commentary on the

3. Quoted in Johann Hari, "The New HIV Threat," *Independent*, November 7, 2005, available at http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/health_medical/article325335.ece.

4. Hari, "New HIV Threat." Although she makes a more nuanced argument, Cindy Patton also tends to blame the return to risky sex on the inadequacies of heteronormative safe-sex education. See Patton, *Fatal Advice: How Safe-Sex Education Went Wrong* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

5. See Perry N. Halkitis, Leo Wilton, and Jack Drescher, eds., *Barebacking: Psychosocial and Public Health Approaches* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Medical, 2005); Michael Shernoff, *Without Condoms: Unprotected Sex, Gay Men, and Barebacking* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and David M. Halperin, *What Do Gay Men Want? Sex, Risk, and Subjectivity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). Shernoff's volume and the studies collected in Halkitis, Wilton, and Drescher are based almost exclusively on research in New York, whereas *Unlimited Intimacy* focuses on the development of bareback subculture primarily in San Francisco.

phenomenon, recent academic work on barebacking tends to approach the behavior in individualistic terms by asking what motivates men to bareback and how they might be discouraged from doing so. This research proceeds from the assumption that, if we can understand the forces prompting such risky behavior, then we might be able to curtail it. In other words, it assumes from the outset that barebacking is pathological. Even Michael Shernoff—who at one point suggests that, “in the age of AIDS, male-male sex without condoms is sometimes normal, adaptive, understandable, explainable, and probably unstoppable as well as ethically defensible”—insists on distinguishing between bareback sex that occurs among strangers and that which occurs in a monogamous gay couple.⁶ By calling the latter “unprotected anal intercourse (UAI),” a term that no one but a tin-eared social scientist would ever use to describe his or her own erotic life, Shernoff normalizes barebacking within seroconcordant couples by shifting the stigma to casual condomless sex. He thus tacitly reinforces the perception of barebacking as pathological behavior. Media and academic discourse on the subject manifests an almost irresistible tendency toward “othering” bareback sex as deviant or pathological.⁷ In this book, by contrast, I am curious about what might be learned if bareback subculture were to be investigated without that assumption.

THE INVENTION OF BAREBACKING

In the first decade of the epidemic, Douglas Crimp wrote, in a landmark article, that sexual conservatives “insist that our promiscuity will destroy us when in fact *it is our promiscuity that will save us.*”⁸ Contending that gay men’s adoption of safer sex (using condoms with multiple partners) stemmed directly from our history of promiscuity, Crimp argued that the quality and quantity

6. Shernoff, *Without Condoms*, 28.

7. A notable exception to this tendency is J. P. Cheuvront, “High-Risk Sexual Behavior in the Treatment of HIV-Negative Patients,” *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy* 6, no. 3 (2002): 7–26, which provides a thoughtful critique of how marginalizing the sexual risk taker as a “damaged other” serves primarily to quell our own anxieties about risk and infection. See also Cheuvront, “Attaining Meaning in the Face of Sexual Risk-Taking and Risk-Taking Consequences,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 8, no. 1 (2007): 69–85. In a similar vein, Dave Holmes and Dan Warner take a nonpathologizing, psychoanalytic approach to semen exchange among men who have sex with men, arguing that many barebackers “not only desire sex with other men, but something more. It is the desire for this ‘something more’ that fouls attempts by these men to practise ‘safe sex,’ for this something more is not possible through what the health establishment has defined as safe sex.” From Holmes and Warner, “The Anatomy of a Forbidden Desire: Men, Penetration and Semen Exchange,” *Nursing Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (2005): 12–13.

8. Douglas Crimp, “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic,” in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 253, emphasis in the original.

of gay erotic experience provided unique resources for devising technologies of protection and thus of mutual care. Rather than being understood as self-destructive behavior, promiscuity could be redescribed as promoting reciprocal care and self-protection. In this line of thinking, promiscuity is not merely defended in the face of AIDS panic but is actually promoted as the route to something new. Promiscuity, in other words, concerns more than new sex partners: it also concerns new ideas and new ways of doing things. Not so much a compulsive repetition of the same, promiscuity would be a name for discovery of the new, a synonym for creativity.⁹ Sexual adventurousness gives birth to other forms of adventurousness—political, cultural, intellectual. I too wish to recommend promiscuity in this broader sense, and I will have more to say later in this introduction about how purity may be considered as an enemy of the intellect.

What might happen if we were a little more promiscuous about promiscuity itself, if we defined it more broadly, permitting promiscuity to affect all forms of attention, all those moments when our regard approaches and touches something else? That question guides this book's trajectory; I answer it directly only in the final chapter, where I consider cruising less as a localized gay male practice than as an ethical philosophy of living that is available to anyone, irrespective of gender or sexuality. In order to make that argument, however, I first want to consider promiscuity of the unequivocally sexual kind. Barebacking epitomizes promiscuous sex: it mixes bodies and semen and blood without compunction. Barebacking is the next logical step in the enterprise of gay promiscuity. To Crimp's argument we must reply that, indeed, gay men invented safer sex and risk-reduction guidelines, but now we have invented barebacking. Unprotected anal sex between men has become something different than it once was: barebacking does not represent a "relapse" or a misguided return to what gay sex before AIDS used to be. As I elaborate in chapter 2, gay pornography registers this distinction, in that porn produced during the 1970s and early '80s has been marketed for more than a decade as "pre-condom," whereas recent condomless videos are produced and marketed specifically as "bareback." Although it doubtless is true that, throughout the AIDS epidemic, some men have never used condoms for anal sex—that, in other words, safer-sex education, like any kind of education,

9. In his very interesting critique of monogamy, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips suggests, slightly differently, that promiscuity is a synonym for adaptation. See Phillips, *Monogamy* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), aphorism 100.

has never been 100 percent effective—this fact remains at best marginally relevant to my argument. Only by recognizing barebacking as an invention on the part of contemporary queers does one stand a chance of appreciating what's at stake in the way gay men fuck now.

Unaccountable though it seems at first blush, bareback subculture actually signals profound changes in the social organization of kinship and relationality. The AIDS epidemic has given gay men new opportunities for kinship, because sharing viruses has come to be understood as a mechanism of alliance, a way of forming consanguinity with strangers or friends. Through HIV, gay men have discovered that they can “breed” without women. *Unlimited Intimacy* does not take for granted what might seem obvious, namely, that bareback subculture is all about death. For some of its participants, bareback sex concerns different forms of life, reproduction, and kinship. As will become clear, barebacking isn't merely Russian-roulette sex, that is, fucking with life-and-death stakes; barebacking also raises questions that complicate how we distinguish life-giving activities from those that engender death.

UNCLOSETING HIV

Adjudications of life and death—and of kinship—are closely regulated by law. From a legal perspective, the deliberate transmission of HIV counts as a felony in the majority of states.¹⁰ Hence the tendency is to keep bareback subculture underground, to protect it with a kind of closet. Barebackers have appropriated the military's homophobic “Don't ask, don't tell” policy and applied it to HIV: when online ads for bareback parties use this phrase, they mean that any discussion of serostatus is prohibited, as is condom use. A national study of the sexual etiquette of HIV-positive people found that non-disclosure of serostatus during casual or anonymous sex is more prevalent

10. At last count, thirty-one of the forty-eight contiguous states had criminal statutes on HIV transmission. Remarkably, five states (Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, South Dakota, and Tennessee) explicitly don't require HIV transmission for conviction of the felony of “criminal transmission of HIV.” As the Illinois statute puts it, “the actual transmission of HIV is not a required element of the crime” (720 *Illinois Compiled Statutes*, sec. 5/12-16.2). It is sufficient grounds for conviction that the defendant knew he or she was HIV positive and had sex with someone without disclosing his or her serostatus, thereby neglecting to provide opportunity for consent. In all five of these states, as in most others, consenting to sex with an HIV-positive person is deemed an affirmative defense against the charge. However, the state of Missouri is unique in explicitly denying the use of a condom as a defense; according to a 2002 revision of its statute, condom use without serostatus disclosure constitutes a class B felony, “unless the victim contracts HIV from the contact, in which case it is a class A felony” (*Missouri Revised Statutes*, sec. 191.677 [2002]). See “State Criminal Statutes on HIV Transmission,” Lambda Legal Web site, available at http://www.thebody.com/lambda/criminal_law.html.



White canvas locked gloves, circa 1910. Locked gloves were used to prevent patients from harming themselves, but it has been suggested that they were particularly employed to discourage masturbation. Masturbation was considered a possible cause of insanity until as late as 1939.

Example of restraints used in Victorian mental health hospitals circa 1910

Psychiatric Services Collection

Museums Victoria Collection

Tenga Masturbation Sleeve 2012 Keith Haring 1987
Lady Gaga 2015 Masturbation Restraint 1910

COMING IN HANDY:
THE J/O SPECTACLE AND THE GAY MALE
SUBJECT IN ALMODÓVAR

EARL JACKSON, JR.

The atavistic aversion therapy against masturbation that the media inflicted upon young people in their treatment of the arrest of Paul Rubens (aka Peewee Herman) for alleged “indecent behavior” in a Florida adult movie theater is a particularly deplorable reminder of the willful illiteracy of sexual diversity promulgated as the national morality, in this case tantamount to criminal neglect and reckless endangerment. Given the AIDS pandemic and the increase in teenage pregnancies and other sexually transmitted diseases, if Rubens had done what his accusers claim, instead of making “an example” of him by ruining his career, the media should have literally promoted “Peewee” as a model of responsible sexual behavior and creative fantasizing for young people to emulate.

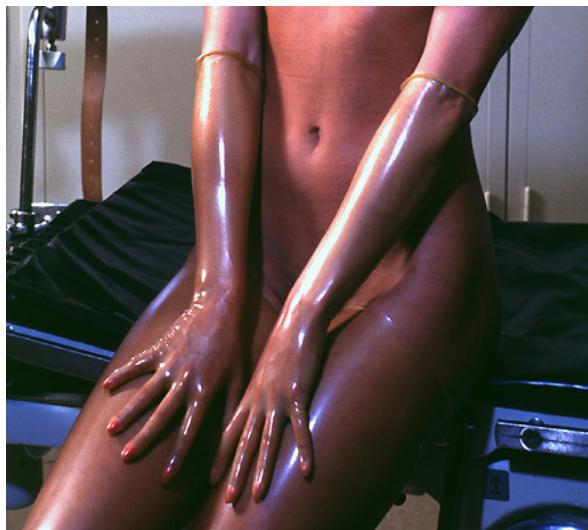
Masturbation in porn theaters is a tradition in gay male communities that provided one model for the self-conscious eroticization of safer sex practices. The theater itself serves as an environment for sexual networks that could be mobilized in response to the current public health crisis; it also showcases sexually explicit and gay-specific visual fantasies whose image repertoire has proven

vitally important to the ways in which gay men conceive and reconceive of their sexualities.¹ As attested in the works of many gay artists, the gay pornographic apparatus, moreover, informs the representational practices of contemporary gay male insurgencies. Taking as my primary texts *Law of Desire* (1986) and *Matador* (1986, U.S. release, 1987), in this essay I examine the ways in which one such artist, Pedro Almodóvar, uses structures from gay male pornographic films—and in particular films featuring displays of masturbation—as part of a confrontational construction of a gay male spectatorial subject.

Law of Desire and *Matador* lend themselves to a joint reading, having been made the same year with essentially the same principal actors. Both films, moreover, begin with scenes of masturbation; the major plots of both films are set in motion by murder (although *Law* contains far more detours and lateral plots than the murder-centered plot of *Matador*). Although only *Law* is an overtly gay film, *Matador* can be seen as a gay-oriented parody of heteropatriarchal constructions of male sexual subjectivity; both films therefore appeal to a gay male spectator as an arbiter of their intelligibility.

The differences of the two films are emblematically encapsulated in the differences between their respective opening masturbation scenes: *Law of Desire*, the act of masturbation is initially presented as part of a gay porn film under production; in *Matador*, the corresponding figure is a man masturbating in front of his VCR, watching scenes from slasher films in which women are brutally murdered. These differences are extended through their respective texts. The pornographic film of *Law* functions as a metonym for gay male sexuality and its “specular” interruption of the Freudian Oedipal “narrative” of dominant male heterosexuality that is so irreverently depicted in *Matador*.

The ordinary classification of masturbation as “autoerotic behavior” or “self-gratification” cannot accommodate the phantasmatic and libidinal trajectories through which masturbation operates as it occurs on-screen in gay porn films and in the audience, as well as in other gay male sexual venues: buddy booths, sex clubs, phone sex-lines, etc. To develop a critical understanding of these practices and their significance in Almodóvar’s films, I will first reemphasize a distinction Freud made in the *Three Essays* (1905) between “autoerotism” and “narcissism”; secondly, I intend to “deviantly reinhabit” the opposition Freud proposed in “On Narcissism: An Introduction” between “anaclitic” and “narcissistic” object-choice types. These two steps allow me to situate the psychodynamics and multiple functions of gay male masturbatory practices within an “intersubjective narcissism,” the definition of which depends upon an understanding of



Ansell TOUCHNTUFF® 69-318 Lightweight latex gloves.....Unknown
Unknown.....Soft Skin Latex collaboration with Tom of Finland 2023

RUBBER NECKING

Alison Tyler

The sex toy store was on my daily route to work—the curve of the wall of windows traveling with me, the way the silvery face of the full moon used to seem to follow me when I was a kid. I'd sit in my car, stopped in early morning Los Angeles traffic, and I'd do my best not to rubberneck.

Yet, the windows beckoned—the displays dazzling behind the shiny sheets of glass. Corsets made of cobalt satin over fine black boning. Stockings in more than a rainbow of hues—gold, fuchsia, and celadon in fishnet, patterns, and lace. Toys hanging from nets and clotheslines strung from wall to wall, like an X-rated fisherman's haul or an indecent day at the laundromat. And then there was the rubber. A whole window devoted to items made from this stretchy material, matte or shiny, glistening beneath the halogen lamps.

On lucky days, I caught sight of the tall, dark-haired man who changed the displays, watched as he rearranged items or created whole new features—themes for the holidays, or entire

windows devoted to a single color. He wore all black, all the time, like so many of the boys in West Hollywood, and he had long, glossy hair, either pulled back in a ponytail, or left down so that it partly curtained his face. He never turned to look at the traffic, paying attention to his job, creating visions out of the risqué materials; stepping back to observe, then continuing, almost as if there was no world outside of the windows.

I enjoyed the lingerie, the pretty frilly items. I liked to look at the sex toys, the cuffs and blindfolds, gags, paddles, and masks. But the rubber items, *those* were the ones that stretched over my day, snapping through my mind when I least expected it. Anything, everything, could take me back to those windows.

The lemon yellow dishwashing gloves resting innocently on the stainless-steel sink in the break room would make me think of elbow-length black rubber gloves I'd seen pinned to a wall in that window. A ball of multicolored rubber bands residing lazily on a coworker's desk would remind me of a red rubber ball gag strapped to the face of an unseeing mannequin. The burnt-licorice scent of tires as I walked through the parking garage would make me want to press my nose to the window shielding the displays and see if I could inhale the scent through that wall of glass. The visions built within me, until I could hardly wait each day to get back home to my empty apartment, to my world of privacy.

Keys thrown onto the coffee table. Pencil skirt discarded on the way down the hall. A shoe here. A shoe there. A rabid rush to the center of the mattress, to the safety of my own fantasy world.

Once on the bed, I could slow down once more, reach for the box hidden in my nightstand drawer. A shake of cornstarch from a bottle by my lamp would help those thin white rubber gloves slide on smoothly, but I would take my time anyway. Making

sure to smooth out any wrinkles, growing wetter with the caress of the rubber around each fingertip. When the gloves were fully on, I would interlace my fingers, watching rubber meet rubber.

Now, it would become more difficult to go slowly. With hands that were like someone else's, some stranger's, I would touch myself while I recreated the window displays in my mind. Fingers gliding over my breasts, I imagined the window dresser—with his long dark hair and slim body—dressing *me* in the pale orange rubber sheath he'd slid on a mannequin the week before. Or slipping me into sleek scarlet rubber boots that would reach past my knees. I could see him buckling that bright red ball gag into place between my own parted lips, knew somehow what that sensation would be like, what I would look like, gagged like that.

I spread out my favorite visions, extending them to the breaking point. Me in those boots and a matching coat made of vinyl, a coat with a sheen so bright, the vinyl surface would appear just begging to be come on. I could see the man dressing me in the full-body sleep sack made entirely of heavy-duty rubber, then pressing himself against me when I couldn't move at all, his naked body against mine clad all in rubber. The shudders would start to work through me.

What would his hands smell like after working with rubber all day?

Would I be able to lick his fingers and taste the bitterness on them?

Oh, yes, I could imagine that as well, me on my knees in front of him, sucking his finger into my mouth, swirling my tongue around it. My own fingers, encased in that thinnest sheen of rubber, would probe and tickle my clit—rubber on wetness now—until the climax came and took me away.

And then, disgusted with myself, I'd tear off the stretchy

gloves and ball them up, throwing them in a corner in a fit of temper. I'd dispose of them the next day between thumb and pointer, as if to say, "That's that. I never have to do *that* again." But I'd know the whole time that I would be driving past the store once more; know, more honestly, that a whole box of rubber gloves lay waiting in my drawer: one hundred gloves in a box, with a spare box behind, unopened, just in case.

One day, late for work, I found myself cruising toward the store with ease. No bottleneck today, which meant no rubbernecking for me, sitting in a traffic jam, watching the windows. As I drove by, I caught a quick blur of him, the dark-haired man changing the displays, peeling the orange rubber dress off the model, painstakingly revealing her plastic body as the dress begrudgingly gave way.

I craned my head to see, and that's precisely when the traffic stopped, and I slammed into the car in front of me.

L.A. drivers collect accidents like some people notch lovers on their headboards. This was a minor scrape and tussle, not even damaging enough to properly be called a fender bender, but that didn't stop the rubbernecks from watching. Didn't stop the window dresser from pausing in his motion to check out the action, so that for once I saw his full face clearly: the strong lines of his cheekbones, the glint of a silver ring in his lower lip, the dark brows, the furrow in his forehead.

I pulled my car to the side of Santa Monica Boulevard and exchanged phone numbers and insurance information with the annoyed soccer mom whose dragon-red Hummer I'd scratched. Then I sat in my car and stared at the steering wheel. Something had to give. I'd have to change my route, throw away that secret stash of rubber gloves...

Suddenly, there was a rap on the passenger window. I

Russian Fetish Journal

Issue № 12

fetisch

Романтика глазами NeoRomantik

рассказ об отечественной
фетиши-модели

Развлечения на природе

эксклюзивная фотосессия
для нашего журнала

RubberDay 13

рассказ об очередной
латексной вечеринке

Домработница

переводной латексный
рассказ

САМ
СЕБЕ
МАСТЕР
латексный
декор



Наступило лето,
выглянуло солнышко и
появилась возможность
делать фотосессии
на улице. Чем мы
тут же и воспользовались.
Представляем
вам результат общих
трудов Neoromantika,
pantyhose@man и
Katya. За что им всем
ещё раз большое
спасибо.

черных латексных костюмах.
Я попробовала себя в роли
модели. Интересное увлечение,
латекс как раз помогает
перевоплащаться.

RFJ: Что Вас больше всего
привлекает в этом материа-
ле и почему?





Valerie Steele 1996 book cover.....RuPaul for MAC Viva Glam 1994.....Y/Project
'Condom Hoodie' f/w 2018.....Unknown.....Unknown

The growing popularity of fetish fashions within the wider culture is directly related to the charisma of deviance. Evil, rebellion, danger, and pleasure exert a powerful emotional appeal. In his disturbing and original book *Seductions of Crime*, the sociologist Jack Katz argues that “all the provocatively sensual evils of ‘the night’” are powerfully charismatic. Sneaky thrills are exciting. Looking tough, evil, alien, and “bad” has a broad appeal, especially to young people. As a result, images of deviance, “whorish styles . . . torn shirts and motorcycles,” permeate popular culture because advertisers recognize that an “association with deviance” helps sell products.⁵⁷ If the fashion industry has increasingly drawn on fetishist themes, this is one important reason why.

“I do not see perversions only as disorders of a sexual nature affecting a relatively small number of people,” writes the French psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, “though their role and importance in the socio-cultural field can never be over-estimated. I see perversions more broadly, as a dimension of the human psyche in general, a temptation in the mind common to us all.”⁵⁸ Approaching the subject from a very different perspective, literary theorist Kaja Silverman agrees that “perversion poses [a challenge] to the symbolic order” because it is not only a matter of sexuality, but also a turning away “from hierarchy and genital sexuality” and even “from the paternal signifier, the ultimate ‘truth’ or ‘right.’” Perversion is, therefore, “a radical challenge to sexual difference.”⁵⁹

The “second-skin” materials of which fetish fashion is made are also significant. The human skin is one of the most important erogenous zones; it may also be conceptualized as a protective envelope, marking the body boundaries: “Reliable data exist indicating that stimulation of the skin can be reinforcing of the body boundaries.”⁶⁰ If fetishists like shiny, tight garments that tie or lace closed, this may indicate a heightened concern about body penetrability. Certainly, fetish materials dramatize the exterior (boundary) aspects of the body. Fetish fashion draws attention to the sexual aspects of the body, while simultaneously restricting access to it.

The hardening and moistening of sexual arousal seem to be implied by shiny rubberized surfaces. Whether or not the person fashionably dressed in latex is actually anxious about sexuality or bodily integrity (and in an age of AIDS, who is not anxious about body invaders?), the very *look* of hard, wet impenetrability implicitly signifies safe sex. Latex bodysuits and thigh-high boots have become “the fashion insignia of cybersex,” says Mike Saenz, the designer of a computer-generated comic book character, Donna Matrix. Saenz ascribes the “groundswell

of interest in fetishized fashions” to the way they “function as a kind of pseudo-armor and, in this age of AIDS, represent an attempt to romanticize and eroticize the use of latex barriers.”⁶¹

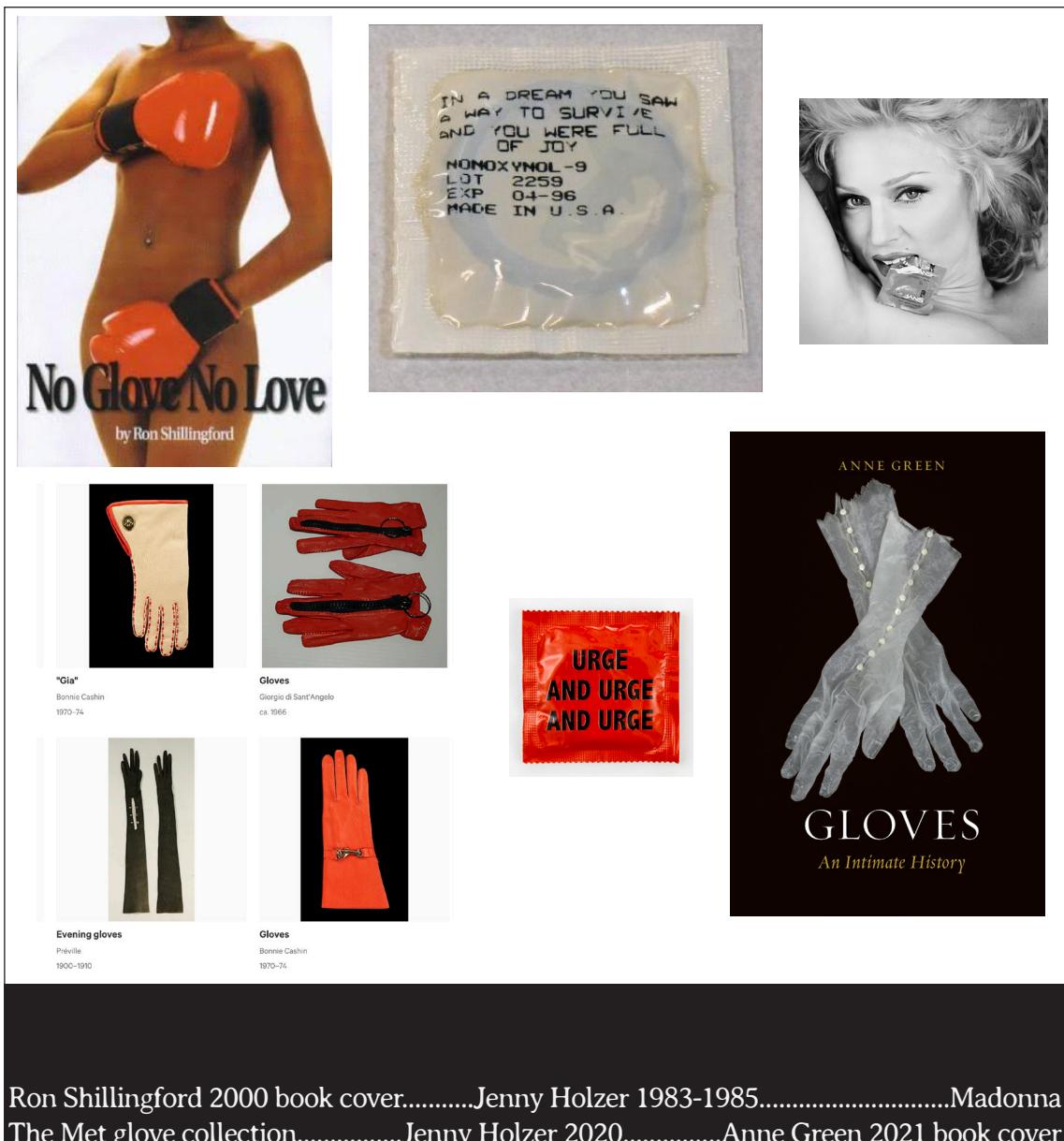
An erotic fashion is not simply one that exposes the body or exaggerates the secondary sexual characteristics. To be interpreted as erotic, a fashion must be associated in some way with the sexual marketplace—the arena in which sexual encounters take place. Fashion trendsetters, I suspect, are drawn to the *theatricality* of fetishistic eroticism, the implication that merely by wearing a particular style one becomes the kind of person to whom sexual adventures happen. We may be justified in describing the ubiquity of fetish-inspired fashion in terms of “parasexuality” or the “eroticism of demeanour.”⁶² Fetish fashion seems to talk about sexuality in ways that pose important and potentially subversive questions.

But why should fetishists be privileged as especially sexual people? Freud’s idea that perversion is the opposite of neurosis now seems mistaken; it might be more useful to characterize the perversions as “erotic neuroses.” Although fetishists repress some of their fears and conflicts, they clearly eroticize others. But the appeal of fetishism, and of “perverse” sexuality in general, rests on more than a “mistake.”

Long pathologized and demonized, the “pervert” came in time to be regarded as a “victim of circumstances” and then as someone in rebellion against the social order. From being “culturally marginal,” the “deviant” has been repositioned as an exemplar of “radical, transgressive sexuality.” Today the status of the “sexual outlaw” is widely admired. Among intellectuals, this paradigm shift reflects in part the influence of Michel Foucault, but within the wider society it is a direct result of the recent “explosion of unorthodox sexualities.”⁶³

We may be fascinated with fetishism, though, for reasons that have little to do with the actuality of sexual “perversion” (which most people know little about, anyway). Some psychiatrists have expressed dismay about the popularity of fetishistic fashions. They may be overreacting. Most people who wear black leather and fetish gear are not “into” SM or fetishism. As one sadomasochist complained,

There’s a club in Chicago . . . I’ve seen women there—generally young, in their early 20s—who will wear a chain or a very hot, kinky outfit. I’ll [ask], “Is this an expression of one of your fantasies or desires?” And they’ll say, “What?” I’ll say, “What you’re wearing is a personification of something that’s special to a lot of people, and I was wondering if you are interested in that?” And [they’ll say], “What?” All they’re doing is making fashion statements.⁶⁴





the mass production of disposable latex gloves began in the 1960s. Now they are manufactured in unimaginably large numbers and in a variety of other materials including nitrile, vinyl and thermoplastic elastomer. Nothing could be further from traditional glove-making techniques than the long rows of ceramic or aluminium hand-shaped moulds that glide through huge factories on conveyor belts, gracefully turning this way and that as they dip into a series of chemical solutions before being baked, washed, dried and brushed until a glove is peeled off each one. In July 2019 the Top Glove Corporation of Malaysia, which advertises itself as ‘The World’s Largest Manufacturer of Gloves’, reported that its factories had a combined glove production capacity of 62.7 billion pieces per annum.⁵⁰ That year, global demand for medical gloves reached 290 billion, a figure far outstripped since then as governments around the world clamoured for supplies to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such changes have an inevitable impact on those working in glove manufacture. One of the most insightful explorations of

Rows of hand-shaped moulds move through a series of factory processes to create disposable medical gloves. Hundreds of billions of disposable gloves are produced each year.



Rita Hayworth slowly removes a glove in the famous glove striptease scene from Charles Vidor's 1946 film, *Gilda*.

the direction of the vita sexualis are naturally connected with the naked hand, but with the covered foot.²⁸

‘Glove Fetishism’ nevertheless currently merits a Wikipedia entry that gives particular emphasis to the erotic pleasures of tight-fitting latex gloves, while John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* – the eighteenth-century erotic novel more commonly known as *Fanny Hill* – features ‘a grave, staid, solemn elderly gentleman’ whose glove fetishism takes a different form. His peculiarity of taste, says Fanny,

was to present me at once with a dozen pairs of the whitest kid gloves: these he would divert himself with drawing on me, and then biting off their fingers' ends; all which fooleries of a sickly appetite the old gentleman paid more liberally for than most others did for more essential favours.²⁹

Even when gloves are treated more conventionally, they retain a certain fetishistic value when used as a surrogate for a desired woman's hand or naked body, or when a hand entering or leaving a glove is depicted as an erotic act.

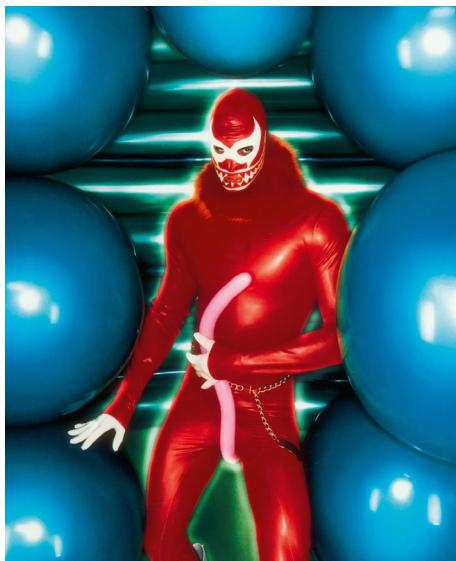
Representing a woman's desirability by means of a glove was a particularly popular device in Renaissance literature. The fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch devoted three of his *Canzoniere* to the glove of his beloved Laura, although the real focus of desire was the pink-and-white hand briefly glimpsed beneath it:

White, delicate and precious little glove,
that covered flawless ivory and fresh roses . . .
I wish I had a part of that fine veil!³⁰

But when Laura puts her glove on again – when, as the poet writes, her 'single naked hand . . . reclothes itself, to my deep sorrow' – it is the remembered glove rather than the hand that conjures up an ecstatic vision, safely distanced, of his beloved:

My luck, along with Love, had blessed me so
With an embroidery of gold and silk,
I'd almost reached the limits of my joy
By saying to myself, 'Just think who wore this!'³¹

That erotically charged relation between glove and hand is reversed in Théophile Gautier's *Une Larme du diable* (The



1/3

Safe sex kit made in Australia
OBJECT NO. 97/141/1
1993-1994

Walter van Beirendonck f/w 1995..United Colors of Benetton 1992..Louise Bourgeois 1989
Unknown.....ACON Safe Sex Kit 1993-1994

much about the Subject's own body, but rather the body of a phallic Other who dares to bareback and must therefore be impenetrable to the virus or, at the very least, rendered impossibly destructive through its harbouring. But even that phantasmatic solution can be disarmed by its own practice. The casting of actual straight men into the fantasy of the self would, then, seem to guarantee a more sustainable solution, which can be achieved by the cross-dressing of *gay man's* body for sexual purposes. I here make the confluence between the cross-dressing *gay man* and trans not as a flippant provocation, but as the theoretical culmination of the argument I have thus developed—that is, the idea of *gay man's* desire for *gay man* being an existential misnomer that could be solved through his/her renaming. Which, I argue, is precisely what *gay man* might do when s/he barebacks.

CROSS-DRESSING VIOLENCE: BAREBACKING AS SYMBOLIC DRAG

As described elsewhere,³⁰ I recently caught myself posting online ads in which I impersonate a husband looking for a “bull” to come over and play with my wife (performed by myself) while “I,” the husband, am gone. Not only that. The bull is to borrow my wife in front of a webcam so that “I” can watch the act of cuckoldry remotely and record it. Since the wife will probably ask for the bull to wear a condom, the fantasy goes, I ask the bull to discreetly pull the condom off during sex, without her noticing it. It is true, a bull originally responds to an ad that said nothing about the cross-dressing condition of the wife, but also doesn't seem to mind when such details are revealed, in the third or fourth email exchanged between us. Such a bull must be hailed away from his original, and originally normative, trajectory, it seems, so he can still be contaminated by his original normative intentions when he comes over.

When the bull arrives I am lying in bed as if trapped in this lacuna between a man I know, and who only exists in my remote impersonation of him (the husband), and a man I don't (the bull).

30 Semerene, “Playing Dead,” 235–53.

I lie there, like a little lamb, letting the men carry out their plan. I feign oblivion and obedience. I, the figurative woman, desire nothing. I lend my body to the desire of the men, which they negotiated among themselves, in my apparent/assumed absence and the insignificance of what I want.

The bull's ignorance of the fact that, in reality, the one being tricked is himself seems to hollow him out, enhancing his size, his weight, his force. By contrast, I become increasingly helpless and smaller. I need to give him an opportunity to seal the deal and take the condom off without my knowing it. For the condom to count as being off, its usage needs to be derailed mid-act. Except that the bull is the one who doesn't know. Or does he . . . but still? At the moment he begins pulling off the condom and sticking his penis back inside me I turn around and ask where the condom is. I catch him red-handed. This is where my fantasy—co-scripted by the fact that at the time I am HIV-negative and not on PrEP—ends: with the disappearance of the condom, for which no one is willing to take responsibility.

Famously, Lacan's playing with the Name-of-the-Father (*nom du père*) sound,³¹ which fixes the Father's prohibitive function, he establishes that _____, or “those who do not let themselves be caught in the symbolic deception/fiction and continue to believe their eyes are the ones who err most.”

rent sounds, phonetically, like _____ é and it is most often translated along the lines of “the non-duped err” It can also be translated as “the non-duped wander (in circles),” or quite simply, “the non-duped cruise.”³²

Maud-Yeuse Thomas notes that for a regime that exerts control through the regulation of opposites (heterosexuality-homosexuality, gay man–straight man), the figure of the cross-dresser or the transvestite occupies the domain of the lie and of dupery: “the transvestite is the ultimate pariah, especially when he [] becomes undetectable.”

³¹ The Name-of-the-Father has to do with the restraints and laws that control desire with the help of the Symbolic.

³² Slavoj Zizek, “With or Without Passion? What’s Wrong With Fundamentalism—Part I,” <http://www.lacan.com/zizpassion.htm>. Previous online citations haven’t included access dates. I’m removing this for consistency.

Thomas also associates the transvestite with the figure of the *-neur*—the wandering around (in circles) of the non-duped, which Dean links to the analog gay cruising subject, and the “sex-club patron” in particular, “who readily loses himself in a stream of bodies and whose individuality thus consists in the disappearance of individuality.”³³ Dean speaks here of a general “cruising ethos” that “conduces to this impersonalizing effect.”³⁴

The jump from gayness to T-girlhood (cross-dressing subjects assigned male at birth are largely referred to and refer to themselves as “T-girls” online) makes visible, even audible (“Hi hunny,” “How are you babe?”), the strategy of sweetness and chivalry *straight man* uses to dress the hole-making violence (can we speak of a transmaterial barebacking that requires no flesh?) of the heterosexual sex act in some kind of love scene.³⁵ Whilst the gay sex scene is often one of constraint and absence of chivalry in order to avoid any of the subjects being tainted as the more feminine object out of the two, the heterosexual sex scene forged here involves a kind of swindling, a drag of interests of another kind. As a T-girl, these men, unlike gay men, are quick to offer me things—a drink, a ride, cash, the best moment of my life, sperm, and even face pictures.

Their attempts at conveying sweetness and selflessness aim to reduce the feminine object lying before them to as weakened a state as possible in order to potentialize whatever it is that they do as sufficiently phallus-like. They err on the side of a hollow politeness that reiterates my role as literalized object and theirs as active agents, a position they hide behind a chivalry that, in the end, is its opposite. My consent will always be partial when compared to the pleasure they are sure to derive from it. And it is always a “they,” which makes themselves present in the figure of my cuckold husband or in the slew of verifications that certain hook-up sites, such as Fabswingers in the United Kingdom or Wyylde in France, allow for: heterosexually-identified men singing the praises of a T-girl’s

³³ Cited in Maud-Yeuse Thomas, “Éthnologie du Travesti(ssement),” 2, no. 1 (2014): 55. My translation.

³⁴ Dean, é, , 36. é

³⁵ Thierry Schaffauser, “Drag Queen Feminism,” , no. 1 (2014): 91. My translation.

ass or blowjob skills, essentially pitching her to fellow comrades. Their strategy seems to reiterate the masculinist fantasy that the feminine position is one that is ultimately not that pleasurable (the woman is expected to resign her self to man's pleasure if he is sneaky enough to apparently fool her), and it is particularly evident when discussing if a condom will be used or not.

The majority of heterosexually-identified men I meet online delegate that decision to the T-girl, as if only my body were vulnerable to disease. They tend to either claim it makes no difference for them or avow preferring one way or another (usually without it) but that they would be happy to do whatever as long as I (partially) consent to the sex act: "I don't care if I use one"; "I'll leave it up to you how rough you want it"; "I'm into rough sex, follow her rules of course"; "it is always up to the woman if she wants it bare or condoms"; "No rules here I follow yours!!"; "I'll satisfy your needs and desires"; "Condom or bare up to you but I do want to creampie that pussy all nite then cuddle up." Freud describes tenderness as a way of managing hostility, and he relates such a strategy to the relationship between mother and child, and married couples. In both cases, dressing violence with sweetness reveals the veneration of the person in the position of power, "their very deification" to be "opposed in the unconscious by an intense hostile tendency, so that, as we had expected, the situation of an ambivalent feeling is here realized."³⁶

The adherence to violence is sometimes done through overt speech or through association to certain subcultures whose sartorial signs and other associations (S&M, leather, uniforms, gangbangs, slings) articulate the desire for violence so that the subject doesn't have to. In fact, the admission may even be welcome in that it mimics a supposedly masculine interest in aggression. Violence, that which touches the unprotected, is exposed as the guarantor that heterosexuality has taken place. The men replying to my online ads seeking to cast a bull to have sex with a wife, who turns out to be a T-girl, often utilize violent language as a way to convince the supposed husband that they should be chosen for the job: "would def take

³⁶ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 46

[her] Down”; “have a black belt in eating pussy”; “beat that pussy up in every way possible”; “experienced Dom here to ruin her . . .”; “I will damage that white pussy”; “I’ll put [her] in [her] place because I make the rules since I’ve got the Dick”; and “You could not handle what I have.”³⁷

Barebacking in a gay *man–gay man* arrangement appears, then, as the guarantor of heterosexual violence (violence as heterosexual) for those who cannot enjoy the violence of heterosexuality proper.³⁸ A virus could indeed ravage the body despite the quality of the phallic performance by the top, or “active” sexual partner. A lethal virus is naturally priapic. If the phallus fails, as it is wont to do once it’s forced to perform, the failure of an undetectable virus to damage the body in the feminine position will never be found out, for even its alleged/apparent successful wrecking won’t show its signs but in the future, if at all.

This fantasy of violence pays respect to a fantasy that nature will take its course; the achievement of the Other’s performance (of masculinity) isn’t even needed when in the end, biology will take care of it. If there is a desire for shattering in bareback-aimed cruising it is primarily a desire for the fantasized invincibility of the phallus to be made evident by not being attestable. By the time the subject knows if transmission has taken place, she will never be able to match the virus to the culprit. She alone will bear the effects of the anonymous act. Like a mother; the virus and the phallus, like gender: copies for which there are no originals.

AEbttmBoi from Barebackrt.com, for instance, writes on his profile that “BB [barebacking] is natural and i always BB now, Cock belongs in ass bare!” He then expresses his desire to “exploit” his “hole & throat by having it stretched, fucked, RAPED, & seeded

³⁷ In TakeiWildRide’s profile on TSdating.com, he describes himself as a sucker for “passable young gorgeous girls” and feels compelled to explain the driving force behind his search in this way: “it’s not so much your parts of body type as much your face [sic] I need a chick to release all this pent up aggression & rage.” See <http://www.tsdating.com/members/TakeiWildRide/>.

³⁸ In my T-girl fantasy of cuckoldry I double down on guaranteeing heterosexual violence by managing to hail *straight man* into the scene and scripting it so that he threatens barebacking violence, so that barebacking is enacted—even if promptly aborted—as a threat.

(preferably by a group of UNCUT guys!).” His ultimate fantasy is a recurrent one in many barebacking accounts: “to be gangraped & breded [sic] by enough guys to have my boicunt & mouth leaking nut. Use & verbally degrade this worthless CumSlut // Latinos a plus /.” We can see signs of aggression the user associates with an impotence to guarantee the violence that the fantasy demands. A rape is desired not only by one, but by a group of men, potentialized by fantasies of virility attached to their race, the verbal reassurance that one is being degraded, and the visual confirmation of wreckage, as sperm flows out of his orifices like an ejaculating hemorrhage (“my boicunt & mouth leaking nut”).³⁹ Ironically, the excreting of the sperm, often associated with breeding fantasies, functions as liquid evidence of the absence of breeding. The sperm has leaked out, not gone inside some kind of phantasmic womb. In this context, the excreted sperm gains what Arnaud Alessandrin describes as “the double movement” of vomiting in its queer “incapacity to swallow and incapacity to digest.”⁴⁰

Monique Schneider speaks of the belittlement of the desired object as a condition for one to approach it. We can see this belittlement in classic hetero-sexist masculinity, in which the reducing of the feminine object is a *sine qua non* (played up in porn, but stirring the sexual practice of everyday life): “a disdainful attitude constitutes a necessary subterfuge for the temptation to love, whether it is addressed to art or women, making oneself protected against the risk of losing . . .”⁴¹

This belittlement apparatus creates a psychosomatic relationship between the symbolic violence of heterosexuality itself and the literal violence of a viral annihilation of the body. Barebacking can work as an underwriter for exacting difference through the

³⁹ See <https://www.barebackrt.com/members/view.php?id=273460>.

⁴⁰ Arnayd Alessandrin, “Les Fluides Comme Médiateurs Du Dégout: L’Exemple des Corps Trans,” in *Miroir/Miroirs* 7, no. 2 (2016): 23. My translation.

⁴¹ Monique Schneider, “Freud et Le Combat Avec L’Artiste,” in *L’Artiste et Le Psychanalyste*, ed. Joyce McDougall (Paris: PUF, 2008), 52, 53; my translation. Sylvia Payne sees the need to be pregnant in terms of the need to “have control over a feared object.” Burton Lerner, Raymond Raskin, and Elizabeth Davis, “On The Need To Be Pregnant,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 48 (1967): 288–97.

latent/phantasmatic/imagistic violence of infection. This is true for subjects under the threat of sameness (the ruse of *gay man–gay man* equality in the equation of desire), in which a difference must be found beyond ready-made genital difference, as in gay subjectivity more evidently, but not exclusively. Barebacking is fantasy material for heterosexuality as well. Even genetically locatable difference is always already under threat, as it is contingent on the fragility of repetition (of gender difference) and centred around the ever elusive phallus (the original *there where there is nothing*).

If the penis fails to mimic the invincibility of the phallus as if both were one, and we can bet that it will, we can at least count on the potential transferring of the virus as the “trick” that the active partner (man) harbours under his sleeve. Curiously, man’s promise of the great phallus and delivering the mere penis mirrors the T-girl’s own game of presenting seeming feminine lack and its accoutrements while hiding the penis, except that man knows the penis is there, and it is hers, which makes its revelation foreseeable and yearned. Horror, as such, is pre-emptively averted.

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