

# **Contesting the Sacred and the Profane:**

## **A Semiotic Analysis of the Logic of Queer Practice\***

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### **Abstract**

This paper uses semiotic theory to analyze the logic of the practices that define queerness in everyday life. To follow this purpose, this paper considers that culture can be defined as a container for the meaning-making strategies and forms of behavior that people employ to carry out their daily routines. Thus, culture itself is one huge code constituting a signifying network that unites individual signs into a cohesive circuitry of intertwined meanings. In advance, this paper also focuses on the genealogical relationships among different disciplines such as semiotics, ethnomethodology, cultural psychology and ideology in Marxist tradition. The reason is this paper insists that

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\* I would like to thank Professor Michael Apple, Francois Tochon and anonymous reviewers for their powerful comments on earlier versions of this paper. One reviewer has suggested that I should dig out deep evidences in queer's everyday life such as historical development of queer culture, queer politics about body/mind, and similarities as well as differences between identity politics and queer politics to make my argument stronger. I appreciate this suggestion very much, but I confess that I do not make numerous substantial changes owing to the lack of real ethnographic research.

semiotic analysis must be in search of outer and inner codes at all kinds of abstract and concrete levels. Thus, the disciplines of ethnomethodology, cultural psychology, and Marxist tradition have an elective affinity with semiotics. Through the relevant semiotics discussion, this paper points out that the sacred and the profane comprise a prevalent dichotomy in current straight and queer cultures. Meanwhile, this paper also does not think this dichotomy is very stable or fixable and emphasizes the power and resistance are the double sides of the same coin. Resistance takes the form of a reverse discourse in the process of contesting the sacred and the profane.

**Keywords: queer, semiotics, logic of practice**

*The theatrical face is not painted, it is written... it is the act of writing which subjugates the pictural gesture, so that to paint is never anything but to inscribe. This theatrical face consists of two substances: the white of the paper, the black of the inscription (Barthes, 1982: 88).*

*The prolog: Of masks, grotesque dresses, and other interesting codes in queer's everyday life*

*To analyze heterosexual ideologies as a form of translation makes explicit the rules implicit in a given culture, a task that, in relation to the logic of queer practice in everyday life, is the focus of this paper. The logic of queer practice is socially constituted in the sense not just that it is constructed as an object of knowledge or discourse but also that it is culturally shaped in its actual practices and behavior. The logic of practice is the strongest cultural signifier, which is mapped into areas of social value. For instance, we live with certain stereotype of gendered clothing and decorations in everyday life, which are also representative of certain social orders or logics of practice. Like the spectrum of color in straight men's dress is limited to plain colors such as black, gray and white. Of course, in my eyes, this is the process of gender-disciplining or the formation of heterosexual hegemony. However, these rules do not absolutely determine behavior and they may be broken down. On the one hand, dresses, hairstyles and so on are disciplined codes; and on the other hand, they sometimes become emancipated codes in some social situations like queer parade. In queer parade, dress or cross-dressing (the act of putting on the clothes of the opposite biological sex) is a deliberate and intentional act. That is, dress can be regarded as part of the body and desire to resist the social order which always*

*be taken-for-granted in heterosexual hegemony. According to these interesting codes in queer's everyday life, I will focus on semiotic analysis to inquire into the logic of queer practice in everyday lives. Semiotic theory opens a door for us to better recognize the metaphoric and ironic stances of the queer situation. In short, I will build up the theoretical debates about how cultural mechanisms construct the logic of queer practices and reproduce its representation in everyday life. However, I have to remind readers that the real purpose in this paper is not to create grounded argument from concrete research in the way that parallels the actions of qualitative researchers, who portray everyday action in certain setting. On the contrary, my purpose in this paper is to build a theoretical spectrum for cultural analysis in queer issues.*

## **I. Introduction**

Despite the continuing exploration of queer issues across many disciplines in recent years, there is no denying that the popular image of queerness as a negative thing has persisted—for instance, through the derogatory labeling of gay men as effeminate and lesbians as masculine deviants. Such biased views illustrate the tendency in the U.S. and many other countries to conflate gender and sexual orientation and to obfuscate the socially constructed and relational nature of femininity and masculinity despite the very complex meanings that the term "queer"<sup>1</sup> bears. Broadly defined, "queer" means to

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<sup>1</sup> From a historical viewpoint, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries in Western society, the notion of sexual attraction between men had three features: such attraction indicated a sexual category to which a man either did or did not belong; it went

differ in some odd way from what is usual or normal, to be strange, curious, peculiar, or unexpected. More narrowly defined, particularly by gay rights activists in the U.S. over the last few decades, it refers to any person who differs from the white heterosexual norm—lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgendered people, and sexual "aberrants" of all sorts with hybrid<sup>2</sup> identities of class, race, and ethnicity. In this paper, I prefer the term "queer" to mean "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed, or in other ways 'queer' because of one's sexual identity or sexual orientation."

In this paper, I use semiotic theory to analyze the logic of the practices that define queerness in everyday life. My discursive position is that all knowledge in everyday life is relative: a thing is known to exist or not exist only in relation to other things, or their absence; it is constructed from some point of view. What is at issue is the overall "discursive fact"; that is, the way in which sexual orientation is "put into discourse." Knowledge exists as knowledge only in terms of some universe of discourse, some system of meaning, and some institutional epistemology. That is, knowledge itself is comprised of certain

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along with other, non-sexual qualities; it was humanly (morally, medically, socially) problematic. Men of this kind were queers (or fogs, froci, poofs, Schwule, tapettes, etc)(Dyer, 2002: 1).

<sup>2</sup> Originally an anthropological interpretation of the relationship between Westernization and local culture—"hybrid" referred to the idea that indigenous cultures are not simply destroyed but combined and merged with Western cultures through a process of adaptation. If there are no pure cultures, then hybridity is a general component of cultural diffusion (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000: 168). In other words, the notion of hybridity suggests—most importantly in relation to race and ethnicity—that identities are not pure but rather the product of mixing, fusion, and creolization. In this paper, I enlarge this notion in the domain of sexuality.

viewpoints no matter what is found at the micro level (discourse) or macro level (of system or epistemology). Symbol systems cannot, ultimately, ground themselves, yet any theory or method of approach derives its status as “knowledge” or “correct procedure” in terms of one symbol system or another. In this respect, it is impossible to separate knowledge from power or sociocultural context. In my opinion, those symbol systems will affect and conduct our logic of practice in everyday life. That is, they result in a logic of practice that creates a process of routinization in everyday affairs which excludes the questioning of doxa.<sup>3</sup> Under these circumstances, the politicization of the category "heterosexual" could start from questioning whether or not one is “responsible” for being heterosexual. In semiotic thinking, sex or gender is already culturally constructed in the “opposites” of femininity and masculinity. Butler (1990: 17) argues that heterosexualizing desire necessitates “oppositions between feminine and masculine that in turn make some gender identities seem like developmental failure or logical impossibilities.” In short, for an opposite to exert its ideological force, sex and gender as well as sexual orientation must come in forced-choice pairs—female/male, feminine/masculine, and gay/straight.

The cultural construction of such opposites as feminine/masculine occurs in myriad ways. Rogers and Garrett (2002: 47-48) describe this opposition using Boyle’s term “sexual dysfunction nomenclature,” which revolves around the

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<sup>3</sup> The term was proposed by Bourdieu (1977). “Doxa” means that one's experience of the "natural world" is taken for granted. In other words, every established order produces the naturalization of its arbitrariness; for instance, that many people regard queerness as disgusting is one instance of doxa.

construction of an autonomous, performance-oriented male sexuality that can be used as a means of dominating women. Female sexuality (as is necessary in such a system of meaning) is the reverse of this: receptive, dependent, feeling-oriented, and presented as problematic when it does not conform to a male ideal of sexual practice. Heterosexual intercourse is at the center of this system, and sexual dysfunction is largely defined in terms of the extent to which a practice impedes the system or its completion in orgasm. As Foucault (1978) argues, the creation of sexual categories such as heterosexual, homosexual, pedophile, and transvestite comprise a form of social control. Through the confinement of legitimate sexuality to heterosexuality and the family, and through the marginalization of other forms of sexual expression, the social behavior of the individual is controlled in the service of the social order.

To sum up, what the term “queer,” and being queer, confronts is a sexual order characterized by the normalization and expectation of straightness, and the fear, hatred, and intolerance of queerness. But as I point out above, many people with same-sex attractions identify as queer in an effort to dismantle and then reconstruct the meanings of their own relationships. “Queer” can be used as a willful, political term that slyly parodies mainstream homophobic heterosexual rhetoric. Saying “I’m queer and proud of it” is thus a way of taking charge of a seemingly negative, homophobic term and calling it one’s own, against the everyday prejudicial terms and overall sign system, and even, of course, in preemption of homophobic usage. Because of its ambiguous previous meaning (odd, curious) and the transgressively positioned present gay meaning of “queer,” homophobes have had a difficult time using

the term negatively. "Gay," on the other hand, may be too cheery and prosaic to be very transgressive. It has a campy quaintness to it but not the suggestion of danger or mystery that underlies "queer." But even transgressive practices can have defensive and yielding aspects to them.

In spite of the fact that queerness has great potential to transgress values and norms set by heterosexual-centered ideology, heterosexism still clearly occupies the dominant position. On the one hand, outside of queer subcultures or the racial, education, or class privileges of some queers (if white, educated, affluent)<sup>4</sup>, queer men generally fall at the bottom of the male hierarchy, in part because they show that men do not have to be heterosexual, do not have to couple with women, and do not have to display hegemonic masculine values. On the other hand, societies try to convince or force queer men to be heterosexual in order for them to be "real" men. Queer men, in other words, disrupt the male identity, and in so doing threaten patriarchy and the privilege of the man/women sexual dyad in which man is on top. Not surprisingly, "gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity.... Hence, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. And hence...the ferocity of homophobic attacks" (Connell, 1995: 78). As a result, mainstream heterosexual, masculine social practices have contributed to the oppression of sexual minorities who experiment with the arrangements of their personal, sexual lives. However, the transformation of hegemonic discourses into social practice, and the fitting of these values and norms into

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<sup>4</sup> That is, even within queerness, there is still a "sexual hierarchy"--the concept proposed by Gayle Rubin (1992).



everyday life, requires the so-called suturing<sup>5</sup> process through relevant social devices such as education, religion, and so on. That is, a certain discourse can only become oppressive via social practices, and in the same way, social practices and the people practicing them can become oppressive. But it is impossible to arrive wholly at hegemonic suture; in fact, oppression/dominance and anti-oppression/resistance exist at one and the same time. These days, most social relations are still organized around heterosexuality. For example, the social side of sports is fundamentally heterosexual. However, the more heterosexuality asserts itself, the greater the potential for cracks in the ideological armament to appear, so to speak. When a young male athlete socializes with his teammates, inside or outside the locker room, talk is often about sex with girls. Such talk always borders on caricature, can easily sound like parody, and, in its excessiveness, seems to imply an uneasiness with what might lie underneath it—heterosexual inadequacy, failure to perform, a smaller-than-asserted manhood, a non-masculine self. Bars, clubs, or athletic dances held to mark the end of a sporting season or a school victory are always heterosexual functions (Pronger, 1992: 48), but this does not mean that homosexual things are not being done and thought. If anything, males in sports are hypersensitive to homosexual and homoerotic issues because their practices so closely parallel the

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of the “suture” is taken from psychoanalysis. The term indicates the relations of the subject to the chain of its discourse; it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 89) consider hegemonic practices to be suturing insofar as their field of operation is determined by the openness of the social, by the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier. That is, any hegemony is built on the phantasm of self-identity, and suturing subjects into a representational system.

heterosexual antithesis. Anyway, the queer issue is still unspeakable or seldom mentioned in everyday life, but this silence is bound to have symbolic implications in the hierarchy of what is a valorized code or sign and what is not.

## II. Semiotics and code/sign/text

Now that I have introduced my key terms and concepts, a broader question still remains: What is semiotics and what can it say about queerness?<sup>6</sup> Eco (1976) has defined semiotics in this interesting way: “the discipline studying everything that can be used in order to lie.” According to Eco, if “something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot, in fact, be used to tell at all.” That is, the sign is a lie because it is something standing for something else, and semiotics is a mode of knowledge, of understanding the world as a system of relations whose basic unit is “the sign”—that is, semiotics studies the nature of representation (Gottdiener, 1995: 4). Semiotically speaking, culture can be defined as a container for the meaning-making strategies and forms of behavior that people employ to carry out their daily routines. Humans transmit what they have learned through the cultural codes that undergird the customs, traditions, languages, art works, and scientific practices that fill the world’s cultural

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<sup>6</sup> In Mertz’s analysis, there are four traditions in semiotic studies. These include token-level mediation (Peirce), the linguistic mediation of psychological process (Vygotsky), languages mediating sociocultural thought (Whorf), and language-as-system mediation in culture (Saussure/Prague school) (Mertz, 1985: 10-13). I mainly follow Saussure’s approach in which language or code is inherently social, not to be understood apart from social context. My referential texts come from Danesi, Eco and Gottdiener.

containers (Danesi, 1999: 24). Thus, culture itself is one huge code constituting a signifying network that unites individual signs into a cohesive circuitry of intertwined meanings. This shows that the means used by different disciplines to construct signification resemble each other. These means have a structural impact on the meaning one gives to one's identity and practice in everyday life.

Danesi (1999: 19) proposes three principles of semiotic analysis. The first is that all systems of everyday life have tribal roots; the second principle states that systems of everyday life tend to influence people's notions of what is natural in human behavior; the third principle asserts that systems of everyday life influence worldviews. Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (1986: 2) put forth very similar ideas and define the common background as follows: (1) semiotics studies signs relating to the recognition of the social and natural environment of an individual and his or her internal world; (2) systems of signification can be understood and elaborated upon through metalinguistic operations; and (3) systems of signification themselves encompass denotative signs as well as the values socially ascribed to them. In other words, semiotics does not merely refer to the metaphysical sign, code and text; rather, it also has material conditions that really make it into a socio-semiotics. Gottdiener (1995: 30-31) points out the importance of a socio-semiotic analysis, which includes the symbolic "material articulation"; that is, the study of signs and social contexts that help explain symbolic relations. Moreover, signification is constrained by the forces of power in society.

Materializing culture<sup>7</sup> is the condensation of past knowledge and ideologies that have materialized techniques, modes of desire, and knowledge for social control. That is, systems of signs are articulated with cultural values or ideology as connotative codes. Meaning arises from the endless play of signifiers, because every sign is defined by another sign. Thus, the semiotic debate does not consist of textual analysis alone, but should also be an inquiry into the ways in which signs and codes function in everyday life. For instance, while many other minorities have gradually obtained social acceptance--the social position of black people in the U.S. had been improved than past two or three decades--queers still largely remain outside the spectrum of political correctness. Thus, it is no surprise that "hate crimes" and moral speech codes legitimate in campus that deal with sexuality and gender under heterosexual hegemony. In everyday life, few people any longer or seldom use words such as nigger, kike, gook, or wop to label racial minorities. Yet, fag, faggot, fairy, and homo are used by many in a derogatory manner without hesitation. "Queer," however, is not used derogatively at all; it is still a transgressive word over which gays maintain much socio-political control. Yet through the use of other terms, like those above, queerness is surrounded in a sea of negative language and labeled as a moral disease in the spoken code of conservative state apparatuses such as schools, corporations, and churches, as well as in popular culture, where

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<sup>7</sup> This idea comes from an insight in Raymond Williams' *Communications*. In this book, Williams (1962: 9, 12) mentions that "the institution and forms in which ideas, information, and attitudes are transmitted and received...can become embodied in institutions which are then very powerful in social effect."

this symbolic violence functions in everyday life without being seriously contested. Of course, symbolic violence may be one expression of, or a way of understanding and trying to justify, larger social violence. In other words, signs are not always easily recognizable without positioning them within social context. A social sign operates in the hierarchy of a discourse and as part of a social value system formalized by practices and interaction in the real world.

Semiotic analysis is concerned with cultural forms, focusing on the process of sign production—the signing rather than the signs themselves; the indicating rather than the indications; the inscribing rather than the inscription. For example, the production of stereotypes provides obvious clues to how the sign system of heterosexuality/homosexuality operates in social practice. Dyer (1984) argues that stereotypes have the function of ordering the world around us. Stereotyping works in society both to establish and to maintain the hegemony of the dominant group and to marginalize and exclude other social groups, such as homosexuals. That is, stereotypes produce sharp, narrow oppositions between social groups in order to maintain clear boundaries. Thus, stereotypes have normative and dynamic implications. Stereotypes of gays and lesbians, such as “the queen” and “the dyke,” reproduce norms of gendered heterosexuality because they indicate that the homosexual man or woman falls short of the heterosexual norm.<sup>8</sup> Yet there is no denying that these terms also have a

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<sup>8</sup> Within semiotics, everything is analyzed through binary oppositions such as truth-error, good-evil, spirit-body, nature-culture, heterosexual-homosexual, straight-queer, and so on. The stereotype of “the queen” is the effeminate man, and that of the dyke is the mannish

history of parody and campy fun when used by gays and lesbians. In addition, stereotypes can also be introduced through iconography. Codes in dressing, gestures, or stylistic décor—e.g., clip-on earrings—can at a glance invoke the homosexuality of a character. Visual and verbal stereotypes, precisely because they attempt to make clear-cut distinctions in a world where there is always an excess of meaning as well as ambiguity and chaos, may point, for instance, to queerness in immediately negative ways, but they also can serve as a springboard to the pleasures of subversion.

In the following discussion about queerness, I will focus on the genealogical relationships among different disciplines such as semiotics, ethnomethodology, cultural psychology and Marxism. With regard to the semiotic method, metaphor and irony play key roles in our inquiry into queerness in everyday life. Brown (1977), for instance, regards metaphor and irony as a logic of discovery. Metaphor is ubiquitous in human life since we must see things in certain ways before we talk about them, describe or explain them. We understand metaphor when we see the meaning of a particular focus through the meanings belonging to the values frame. In addition, Brown says that metaphor is about seeing something from the viewpoint of something else, which means that all knowledge is metaphoric. Seeing metaphor as more essential than a mere decoration, we can view it as a way of experiencing facts and of giving life or

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woman (please refer to the seminal Australian film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* or current Taiwanese film *Splendid Float*.) However, I would like to emphasize that these dichotomies lead us into an analytical trap by reducing fruitful possibilities of interpretation. It seems too naïve to interpret gay men based solely on the presence or absence of masculinity.

reality to them by making them objects of experience (Brown, 1977: 77-78). Therefore, Brown (1977: 84-85) says that “to unmask metaphors that have become myths requires negative insight<sup>9</sup> and circumspection; to create new metaphors is a leap of the imagination. It not only demands that we say no to the organization of experience as it has been given to us in preordained categories; it also requires us to rearrange cognition into new forms and associations. The new metaphor, then, is not merely a substitution of a term from one frame to another...instead, the metaphor in a fundamental way creates the facts and provides a definition of what the essential quality of an experience must be.” By contrast, irony is a metaphor of opposites, a seeing of something from the viewpoint of its antithesis. To be ironic is to take something from its conventional context and place it in an opposite one” (Brown, 1977: 172). In fact, irony is a way of moving from conventional

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<sup>9</sup> In Sontag’s terms, we would need to create a new vision that is a so-called “negative epiphany.” Sontag (1977: 3-23) observes: “Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood. To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power.” Thus, Sontag proposed an alternative way of thinking: we need the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph (Sontag, 1977: 19). In the same way, while examining any code, we need to go beyond code itself and say no to doxa, then discuss the code’s relationship with everyday life. After all, queerness is part of a larger sexuality, and understanding the oppression of queerness requires examining the relationship between queer implications and other social institutions and cultural ideas. For example, understanding the marginalization of queer students requires looking not only at queer codes and heterosexist interactions in school, but heterosexual-hegemonic structures and phallogocentric (i.e., masculine-centered) ideology.

paradigms to original ones. In other words, metaphor is a *studium* as a way of seeing, and irony is a *punctum*<sup>10</sup> to compare with binary codes like queer/straight and female/male. For example, many nations do not allow gay and bisexual men to donate blood because they are an at-risk group, semiotically, they may have "dirty" blood. In semiotic thinking, blood donation is a *studium* which presents one way of knowing about queer folks situated in the dark closet, and the stereotype of dirty blood hidden in this event is a *punctum* which verifies the heterosexist moral panic.

How do the concepts of *studium* and *punctum* become realized in any dynamic situation, beyond the current static textual description? In my opinion, semiotic analysis must be in search of outer and inner codes at all kinds of abstract and concrete levels. Thus, one could argue that the disciplines of ethnomethodology and cultural psychology have an elective affinity with semiotics. Ethnomethodology sets out to uncover the methods and social competence that we employ in constructing our sense of social reality. Ethnomethodology makes the methods and tacit knowledge that members possess into a topic for analysis. What ethnomethodologists seek to do is to analyze accounts provided by members in particular

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<sup>10</sup> These two terms come from Roland Barthes' (1981: 25-27) analysis of photography, in which he proposes these two elements: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* doesn't mean, at least not immediately, study, but application to a thing, a taste for someone; it is a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment without special acuity. That is, *studium* is a way of seeing (knowing); by contrast, *punctum* is a sting, a speck, a cut, a little hole and a cast of the dice. Barthes writes that "a photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me, but also bruises me, is poignant to me." In other words, *punctum* is the starting point for comparison.



contexts. Ethnomethodologists have sought to reveal the recurring members' more universal methods of "doing" social life. For example, Garfinkel claims to have revealed the existence of these methods by noting the outcome of informal experiments in which he encouraged his students to act as lodgers in their own homes. What these and similar experiments demonstrate is the existence of the taken-for-granted assumptions in social interaction, and also the indexicality of members' accounts (Garfinkel, 1967: 11). Garfinkel's assumption is that something can be learned about what is normally taken for granted by studying what happens when there are violations. Queers take their own sexual preference for granted, but they cannot assume that others will. Thus, certain of a society's paradigms about gender<sup>11</sup> are revealed when we find certain that social criteria are applied through relevant social events or social conflicts--i.e., homophobia--to determine gender identity. In other words, for ethnomethodologists, reflexivity, along with indexicality, is a key constituent property of social action, a problematic phenomenon woven into the fabric of the organized activities of everyday life. Thus, ethnomethodology assists semiotics in exploring the value boundaries of everyday life.

In contrast, the task of cultural psychology is to inquire into the inner codes which are constructed through certain

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<sup>11</sup> Garfinkel points out that our "natural" attitudes toward gender consist of the following: (1) There are two, and only two, genders (female and male); (2) One's gender is invariant (if you are male now, you always were male and you always will be male); (3) Genitals are the essential sign of gender (a female is a person with a vagina; a male is a person with a penis.); (4) The male/female dichotomy is a natural one (males and females exist independently of scientists' criteria for being male or female) (Garfinkel, 1967: 122-128).

standpoints. But I have to clarify some popular misunderstandings about cultural psychology: Cultural psychology is not general psychology, not cross-cultural psychology, not psychological anthropology, and not ethnopsychology; on the contrary, cultural psychology an inquiry into the social construction of intentional worlds. Shweder (1990: 1-3) defines it as the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permeate the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self and emotion. It is also the study of the ways in which subject and object, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground, practitioner and practice live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly compose each other. That is, cultural psychology is the study of personal functioning in a particular intentional world. Shweder (1990: 17) says that “the aim of cultural psychology is to examine the different kinds of things that continually happen in social interaction and in social practice as the intentionality of a person meets the intentionality of a world, and as they jointly facilitate, express, repress, stabilize, transform, and defend each other through and throughout the life of a person or the life of a world.” In other words, cultural psychology assists semiotics in the analysis of how queerness can be constructed in an intentional world and how these negative codes like froci, poofs and so on can be realized in everyday life.

Beside ethnomethodology and cultural psychology, the concepts of sign and code in semiotics would, from a Marxian perspective, be regarded as “ideology.” Ideology consists of a set of interconnected beliefs and their associated attitudes,

shared and used by members of a group or population, that relate to problematic aspects of social and political topics. These beliefs have an explicit evaluative and implicit behavioral component. Like most definitions, the Marxian definition of ideology pays attention to such issues as: (1) the links among beliefs and attitudes, which indicate that an ideology is part of an interpretive system, and (2) the relevance of ideological beliefs in guiding people's conceptions of and actions in the social and political realm (Fine & Sandstrom, 1993: 24). Moreover, the concept of ideology is similar to that of the "frame" proposed by Goffman: people define and organize their experiences using socially established meanings, and they focus on those events which have key meanings for participants and thereby provide a new framed reality (Goffman, 1974: 44). Holding a set of beliefs is not sufficient for action; for a frame or an ideology to work, experience must be defined so as to suggest that the collective action needed to put beliefs into place is legitimate. Framing a situation through a socially sanctioned, transformative experience based on relevant pedagogic or social devices makes latent beliefs a basis for action in a process by which the participants laminate their primary framework (Goffman, 1974: 82). Insofar as a community agrees on the need to put these beliefs into practice and on the times at which to do so, collective power is enhanced and ideology becomes socially cemented.

When semiotic analysis is articulated using the concept of ideology or ideas culled from cultural psychology or ethnomethodology, any sign or code must be linked to power relations, and the codes or signs will come to life in the form of a text. As Foucault (1970: xx) notes, "the fundamental codes of

culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its value, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for every man [sic], from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.” One such fundamental code is heterosexuality, which carries social information through what Smith (1990) terms “apparatuses of ruling.” Codes always expose their own sense of camouflage, so unmasking the code places the subject at the level of invader, the one who ruptures a fragile transparency that then needs to challenge the social order. According to Barthes (1977:155-164), texts are always paradoxical, and are not comprehensive but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, and carrying-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy. This means that the text requires its reader to try to abolish the distance between writing and reading, not by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining both text and reader in a single signifying practice. Such a practice would deconstruct any text or code as a social phenomenon that can be read for what it conceals about its fundamental values. In addition, although Barthes did not argue this, Agger (2000: 16) considers a text to be a deliberate authorial product, and to have an internal logic that imposes its own meaning on the text. Texts can be viewed, then, as an interplay between authorial intent and the structuring logic of the language game in use. It allows us to read and write a particular social phenomenon as a text driven by certain political and social interests. So, how on earth does a text mean something? I think a text produces meaning through the reading or observation of social phenomena, and that this is an act between reader and text that also can reflect, deliberate, and even redefine or rewrite all

possible meanings of the social phenomena in question. Thus a social phenomenon can become what I call a text based on readers and on their attitudes and standpoints toward the social phenomenon, so that any social phenomenon can become a text, especially a text containing problematic power relations.<sup>12</sup> A certain social phenomenon such as homophobia can be read by someone as a text, and meanings beyond the common sense ones are commonly read into a context. Thus, we can reveal the heterosexist hegemony and the logic of queer practice through reading text and context.

Through metaphoric and ironic distances in semiotics, then, we can not only “unmask” our actions, but also reveal unsuspected levels and methods of meaning and self-presentation. The logic of practice is not seen as simply “out there,” a fact independent of any consciousness. Thus, we need the concept of abduction,<sup>13</sup> like Peirce points out the

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<sup>12</sup> This process is what I would call a radical hermeneutics. Caputo (1987: 198, 209, 291) defines it by saying that, “if this is to be described as a dialectic, let it be a negative dialectic whose point is to give no comfort or place to hide. In this way one raises the tension and deepens the resonance of what I call here radical hermeneutics... radical hermeneutics cultivates an acute sense of the contingency of all social, historical, linguistic structures, an appreciation of their constituted character, this character as effects. The task of radical hermeneutics is not to decipher the speaker beneath the mask but to alter us to the distance which separates them—and then to preserve and keep it open.” Agger (1991: 67-70) presents a similar idea, writing that radical hermeneutics emphasizes that reading is writing itself, and thus politics. The goal of a radical hermeneutics conceived as a mode of writing and reading is to historicize textuality in a way that shows the temporality of its conception as a process of authorial artifice. In other words, it must engage the reauthorized version in dispute about social possibilities, refusing the ontologizing accounts congealed in current discourses. In the same way, we need to adopt a radical attitude toward the doxa of queerness, and this can also be a radical hermeneutics.

<sup>13</sup> Scheff (1990: 31) considers Peirce’s formulation to be one that cuts

significance of the rapid shuttling back and forth between observation and imagination. Abduction is the process which enables participants to understand incredibly complex meanings in context. Next, employing a semiotic approach based on the perspectives discussed above, I take a deeper look at queer practices.

### III. The Semiotics of Queer Practice

Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* is an interesting novel about being queer. The story takes place during World War II and is about a young Japanese man who slowly discovers that he is different from his classmates and friends. He realizes that he is homosexual, and to survive he hides behind a mask of social propriety while secretly learning what he can about the homosexual world (Mishima, 1958). The mask, face, dress and body of queerness are the starting points for a semiotic analysis of queerness. Goffman (1959: 19) says that a mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves; the mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. However, popular images of gay men are often limited to portrayals of a weak masculinity and sissy temperament. Expressions of homophobia are commonplace, with homophobia defined as “a terror

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across the more conventional ideas of induction and deduction. In effective social interaction and thought, one not only observes (induction) and imagines (deduction) but also constantly (in micro-seconds) checks one against the other. He thought abduction should be used in a verifiable way: make verbatim recordings of the data available so that the reader can check the researcher's interpretations against the original text. This procedure may resolve the controversy surrounding thick description (the quarrel between qualitative and quantitative viewpoints).

surrounding feelings of love for members of the same sex and thereby a hatred of those feelings in others.” The dialogue in a documentary film *The Celluloid Closet*<sup>14</sup> provides a good example of heterosexual white men:

*Dude, you turned fag on me, or what?*

*Oh, you're a big, tough country faggot, ain't yuh?*

*What do you faggots want?*

*You hear me, you fuckin' faggots?!*

*Fuck you, faggot!*

*Fuck you, queer!*

*Who is this faggot?*

*You bald-headed, flatfoot faggot! (qtd from Kumashiro, 1999: 29)*

This uncontested use of “fag” and “faggot” reflects not only a denigration of anything associated with queer sexuality and genders, but also a normalization of heterosexuality and the so-called proper gender. Furthermore, the queer body is not only a practical locus of social control; it is also a cultural text; that is, a body on which the central rules of a culture are inscribed and reinforced. Gottdiener (1995: 210) writes that, as a general category of socialization, gender appearance is a powerful mechanism for organizing, integrating and enforcing patterns of social interaction. For example, the straight world tells us that if we are not masculine we are homosexual; that to

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<sup>14</sup> *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* is Vito Russo's definitive, highly acclaimed, landmark work on the portrayal of homosexuals in film. The book itself was subsequently turned into a film in 1996. This book was closely linked to the gay and lesbian movement, and has since caused queer folks to look differently in and at film. Russo's re-visionary look is invaluable not only for the political dimension that it gives to films about queerness, but also for writing a history of a hitherto ignored group (Smelik, 2000: 133).

be homosexual means to be not-masculine.

Some evidence such as queer march can be found by looking at "clothing texts" like those I mentioned in the opening note. Danesi (1999: 149) argues that, in the system of everyday life, clothing also functions as signs organized into various dress codes that are interconnected meaningfully with the order codes of this system of everyday life. The dress code, like any of the codes within the system of everyday life, can also be used to beguile, seduce, mock, lie, and deceive. The general concept of gay men's dress has been marked by an effeminate image to project and reflect their sexuality. For schoolteachers in particular, there is a politics of clothing along these lines. Middleton (1998: 12) writes that politics is incorporated "Right down to the clothes, even to the colors used in the clothing. It's very bold, black, white. The staff were very much into power dressing and I found it really scary." This suggests that homophobia may also lead to the policing of teachers' dress. As one gay teacher told me in my past research: "The principal still comments on my dress and appearance, as he regards formal clothing such as a white shirt and black trousers with leather shoes to be the only proper dress. He criticized my work clothing because I wear very tight clothes to exhibit my body. And I have dyed hair as well as clip-on earrings." What's more, a uniform, in my mind, implies compulsory heterosexuality because it represents desexualization that limits where homosexuals can be themselves—to private spaces at best. But we should not forget that uniforms also carry the obverse implication; that is, they can also encourage an atmosphere of androgyny and role-playing, or of escapism from set social roles. Rich (1980) calls the first aspect "compulsory



heterosexuality”--a systematic set of institutional and cultural standards on how to appear to be heterosexual, with established potential punishments or loss of privilege for being or appearing to be homosexual. Thus, gays' diverse sexualities—in their manifestation in dress, appearance, appeal, looks, age, bodily habitus—continue to be read by many heterosexual people as stigma<sup>15</sup> of non-heterosexuality. Barthes (1983: 14) states that “clothing text represents and naturally fulfills a didactic function: the one who knows all there is behind the jumbled or incomplete appearance of the visible forms; thus, it constitutes a technique of opening the invisible, where one could almost rediscover, in secular form, the sacred halo of divinatory texts.”

Beside the clothes, body is also an important code in discourses about the complex of heterosexuality and homosexuality. For example, the penis is highly, though crudely, symbolic of masculinity and male privilege. Kumashiro (2000: 133) contends that, in the context of the United States, physical attacks against queer men's genitals symbolize a retaliation against their perceived betrayal of the masculine privilege of penis ownership. Although penis-size jokes seem to acknowledge that not all penises are in fact so much the same, small, retracted, shriveled penises are pathetic objects of

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<sup>15</sup> According to Goffman's (1963:1-19) analysis, the term “stigma” originally referred to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier; “stigma” is really a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype. We use specific stigma, such as “cripple,” “bastard,” “moron” in our daily discourse, as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving a second thought to the original meaning. In other words, in social situations with an individual known or perceived to have a stigma, we are likely, then, to employ categorizations that do not fit.

ridicule, unworthy of being worshiped. Sometimes penis-size jokes purposely stop before the dangerous limit of what men actually become angry. However, talking about the penis involves talking about a lot more than just the penis. The certain evidence for this is laid out in Fanon's book, *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Four Negroes with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral. They would be unable to leave the building until their erections had subsided... one is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis" (Fanon, 1967:169-170). In this vein, Fanon brings race into this issue. In addition, symbolic meaning of the penis realizes in all kinds of forms in everyday life: surely a better example of hegemonic penis-power would be something like the (recently castrated) World Trade Center towers.

In everyday life, men's sport and heterosexuality/masculinity are always articulated. For instance, male sports, illustrated in any text, embody strong phallic characteristics, particularly by showing figurative erection close-ups to reinforce heterosexual-centered mythology. The models strike spatially dominating poses, have physically sturdy bodies, wear bikini briefs, and so forth—characteristics that all evoke the current paradigm of masculine appearance. People who have bodies that match their gender identity take their bodies for granted in their process of identity formation. A gender-normative man, for example, one whose gender identity and sex are aligned the way observers expect, who is somehow targeted as "unmasculine"—as a wimp, a coward, a faggot, etc.—can respond by either ignoring the insult or by taking some action that would be judged masculine or manly in order

to prove the instigator wrong. In other words, the body is the so-called punctum to distinguish value boundaries between strong masculinity/heterosexuality and weak masculinity/homosexuality (We also need to make some room for more slight tinges of queerness in everyday heterosexuals; for instance, many models whom are certainly gays in muscle and fitness magazines have the ideal bodies that would shield them from denigration. However, this is not the main focus in this paper).

However, a considerable number of gay men have made a conscious effort to utilize their clothing to express the masculine nature of their identity. Both hetero and homo sexualities can embody a hypermasculinity, but some gay men have adopted manly attire and demeanor as a means of expressing a new sense of self, and in adopting this look they have aimed to enhance their physical attractiveness and express their improved self-esteem (Cole, 2000: 93). Nowadays, as mainstream attitudes towards homosexuality have become more liberal, so too has the spectrum of gay iconography opened up to a broader, straight audience, many of whom may be envious of the glamour of gay clothes (Cole, 2000: 186). It must be kept in mind, too, that there are some right-wing and Republican gays and lesbians in the U.S., and the statistic that 10% of married men are closeted homosexuals or bisexual is commonly circulated in the mass media. By and large, the codes have become confused, and fashion, it seems, has become a post-modern cornucopia of ironic differentiation and indifference, in which readings of style are either informed or indifferent. Many gay men no longer feel the need to define their identities through choice of dress. In other words, the

representation and containment of gender by clothing and other visual systems offers gender as a construction susceptible to manipulation by cross-dressing, masquerade, and décor. For instance, transvestism is a phenomenon which transgresses the fundamental male/female distinction and its social order. This suggests that it has been considered by societies throughout history as an anti-social act. Experimentation with clothing offered a means of exploring that sense of difference. However, recently, it seems that dress codes have come to stabilize identity more than upset it, to point out how the identity that dress solidifies is both single and shared. In short, dress codes in the context of queerness involve domination and resistance at the same time, and we are currently in a period in which gay dress codes are being reincorporated into the straight world.

#### **IV. The Queer Sacred And Profane: A Classification Of Signs**

I believe that the sacred and the profane comprise a prevalent dichotomy in queer writing, and that in queer issues no tool is more fundamental, no bias more important than this sexualized concept.<sup>16</sup> Durkheim maintains that the acts of exclusion found in the categorizing activity of beliefs and rites form a process of sacralization that has both ancient and modern

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu (1993: 32) follows Durkheim's argument and expands this symbolic system into social relations. He writes: "This is understandable when it is seen that it applies relational thinking not only to symbolic systems, whether language (like Saussure) or myth (like Levi-Strauss), or any set of symbolic objects, e.g. clothing, literary works, etc., but also to the social relations of which these symbolic systems are a more or less transformed expression."

manifestations. In this opposition, the sacred represents rationality and mysteriousness, the profane represents irrationality and intelligibility (Durkheim, 1995: 54). Applying this dichotomy to queer issues, heterosexuality is sacred and central to the manufacture of hegemonic masculinity, especially in western culture. As Connell (1987:186) points out: “the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual.” Hegemonic masculinity tends to reflect and reinforce, rather than challenge, the present order of gender or sexual orientation. This is because when men publicly display an interest in sexual representations of women they can exclude not only homosexual crisis but they can also affirm their masculine normality. When heterosexuality serves as a ticket to male legitimacy, heterosexual status itself becomes a badge of superiority, and this feeds the already rampant homophobia and heterosexism. For instance, males use sport and representations of sport to mark their bodies as strong, agile, powerful, and active, traits commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity due to sport is conversely used to exclude those who are not masculine enough (Connell, 1987).<sup>17</sup>

Besides the complex of the sacred and the profane,

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<sup>17</sup> However, sports may not always be able to serve the function of masculine preservation, for some of the ways in which men practice sporting activities may signify homosexuality. Davis (1997: 61) pointed out that sports are one of the few social arenas in U.S. society where men are allowed to touch other men. Men usually participate in and watch sports in a homosocial environment. Male sports spectators look at, scrutinize, appreciate, and even worship the bodies of other men. In other words, hegemonic-masculine men’s sporting practices can be seen as conveying homosexual connotations. For more, refer to Messner (1992) and Pronger (1990).

Durkheim (1938: 47-58) also distinguishes between the normal and the pathological, defined as “those which conform to given standards and those which ought to be different—in other words, normal and pathological phenomena.” We shall call “normal” those social conditions which are most generally distributed, and the others morbid or pathological. Durkheim argues that a collective sense of moral bondedness, enacted through ritual and ceremony, is what holds society together. Durkheim tested this thesis at just those points where social order breaks: where the conscious collective is weak we should find deviation and disorder; where it is normal we should find low rates of social pathology. In other words, the normal can be understood through the abnormal. In the same way, to identify oneself as heterosexual would not be possible if the concept of homosexuality did not exist.

However, I maintain that we need to be aware of the notion of relative place in the social order when talking about the logic of practices. Douglas (1966: 35) thinks that if we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter which is out of place. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Where there is dirt, there is system. The idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises congruence with more obviously symbolic systems of purity. Mary Douglas proposes some examples about dirt, such as food spattered on clothing, clothing lying on chairs, under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. Because the symbolic moral order can be mapped in this way, queer issues perhaps can be more easily represented in the arts or the film industry, but it is still difficult for the queer to

occupy a legitimate position within the educational field due to the relatively conservative nature of the latter's places.

In other words, the social order functions within boundaries of trans-situational or rule-like common sense. For example, in the game of baseball, certain actions are fouls, strikes, or home runs because the rules of the game define them as necessary for the playing of baseball. To seek to explain social actions without reference to their rule-bounded character is to cease to treat them as social. Of course, the avoidance of speaking about queer issues in schools is the inevitable result of the naturalization of “a sense of common social rules.” As Bourdieu (1977: 164) says in *Outline of a Theory of Practices*: “Every established order tends to produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness.” Bourdieu (1990: 53) describes the means of practice as “habitus”: “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an expression of the operations necessary in order to attain them.” It is not merely an inner condition but, rather, processual, relational, a dialectic of self and society. Moreover, a wider societal context also socializes and facilitates people to believe that heterosexuality is natural, universal, and compelling, and thus most people take this belief for granted without any question—namely, it is doxa. Thus, representations do not simply serve as vehicles to affirm heterosexuality—they help to legitimate the ideology of mandatory heterosexuality. It is a false ideology that all people naturally are, or should be, heterosexual. Elements of social

structure and culture that are rooted in this ideology oppress queer folks. As Foucault (1978: 4) puts it, "repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know."

The most important aspect of understanding queerness is looking at why sex has been constituted as a problem of truth, and to discuss the interplay of this code in which the two are identified with each other. As Foucault writes in *History of Sexuality*, "the essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable: in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth" (Foucault, 1978: 56). In other words, representation implies classification—the organization of the meanings captured and conveyed by signs, codes, and texts into categories.

However, how were these heterosexual-centered discourses used to support power relations? How was the action of power relations modified by their very exercise, entailing a strengthening of some terms and a weakening of others? How were these power relations linked to one another according to the logic of practices? Why do we believe these categories to be the regime of truth, or why do we make believe these rules to be truth without any struggle? Foucault called the internalization of rules "governmentality"; "governmentality of the self by oneself in its articulation in relation with others" (Foucault, 1997a: 88). In this sense, one of the main purposes of sex politics has been to internalize self-discipline. This expectation



of self-regulation and self-discipline is set according to expectations of social norms. The act of power is defined as a relational power, “that is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon actions: an action upon an action, on existing action, or on those which may arise in the present or the future”(Foucault, 1997b: 220). This concept of power, which arises from actions, embodies a relationship of power over the Other. In other words, body was given prominence because it is inscribed with the manner of its regulation. In addition, for Bourdieu (1984), the body is not merely a code, but also a form of psychical capital that can be further converted to attain other forms of capital—economic, social and cultural. Importantly, some bodily forms are deemed to have higher symbolic value than others, for example, a heterosexual, masculine male body carries a high status. The symbolic value attached to particular bodily forms thus has implications for an individual’s sense of identity and the ways in which the body is a site of struggle in strategies of distinction, a site for the making of difference. Central to this struggle for distinction is the capacity of the dominant group to define their own bodies as superior, as “valuable bodies.” In other words, the dichotomy of sacred and profane always exists in everyday life. For example, homophobia has reflected an unconscious societal fear, and principles of morality have been clothed in the garb of immorality.

But I do not think this dichotomy is very stable or fixable, for we should not forget Foucault's (1978: 95) observation: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” Resistance, I believe, takes the form of a

reverse discourse in the process of contesting the sacred and the profane—when, for instance, homosexuality speaks on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturalness” be acknowledged. This particular reverse discourse has been tied to real social action in the form of the feminist, gay liberation and other movements that have grown out of 1960s organizing efforts and rest on a conception of politics in which every position must be constructed and negotiated. In other words, discourses have to be transformed into practices, and discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.

Bakhtin (1981) proposes that the multivocal aspects of the sign can be added to such an argument. He notes that in Saussure’s model the signifier and signified possess equal status in an exchange relation. This means that senders and receivers are links in a static, univocal relation where the message simply passes from the sender and is unmodified by the receiver. In contrast, Bakhtin’s view is similar to Peirce’s: receivers using the cognitive interpretant, which is a dynamic and problematic process of association, mediate all signs. Meaning for Bakhtin is multivocal, and does not lie within the sign, but in the relation between signs. In other words, signification is a social process that involves polysemy and an active search for meaning among participants. So Bakhtin retains an interest in the global relation of culture, which he conceives as a dialogic relation of multivocality involving an active sender and receiver, or producer and consumer.<sup>18</sup> From

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<sup>18</sup> This argument is similar to the encoding/decoding model proposed by Hall. This model is based on the idea that producers encode meanings

this point of view, as I mentioned above, queer relationships are not merely oppressed, and, meanwhile, they promise more than sex-for-free; they promise body, love and desire for free, relationships for free, and companionship for free. How did this reverse discourse become possible? Again, I believe it depends on a continual process of contesting the sacred and the profane.

## **V. Contesting The Sacred And The Profane: Practices Of Compliance Or Euphemism**

As I touched upon already, dress embodies powers of reversal. Although the soft or sissy disposition is always discriminated against, it is not fixed and unchangeable. Today, the new tendency is the so-called “feminization of male youth cultures.” That is, a focus on the exterior styles of male hair, skin, and clothing, along with products to enhance them, which was previously largely a feminine domain, is gaining widespread acceptance. In a discussion of transvestism, Wickman (2001: 137) describes it as a phenomenon with a double-edged potential for the individual. The explicit discourse of transvestism is about leisurely fun, but there is also a basically positive notion of courage and a recurring concern for other people’s reactions. In my mind, when queer folks exhibit their dresses, bodies and desires to disturb the binary codes of straight and queer, they also perform the possibility of carnival. As Bakhtin (1984: 10) says, “as opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrates temporary

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in texts, while audience members decode the texts to create meaning (Hall, 1984). The meanings of texts grow out of the interrelationships between production, the texts themselves, and consumption and the wider sociocultural environment.

liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete.”

Bakhtin would have called these disobeyed bodies grotesque ones, metaphorically and ironically, against the oppressive bodies constructed by heterosexism. Bakhtin writes that “in grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egoistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body. We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people’s character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable” (Bakhtin, 1984:19). In other words, grotesque realism uses the material body-flesh conceptualized as corpulent excess to represent the world. It also images the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as-yet-unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. Queer dress and the body, as discussed in this essay, offer grotesque

images in metaphor, which help us to search for the social construction of sexuality; queer dress and the body also seem like puncta (Barthes's technical term, mentioned above), which helps us to understand the hegemonic mechanism of heterosexism.

Most important of all, many queer folks work out their identities in a variety of quickly changing situations, in the fluidity of homosexuality. Pronger (1992: 46) used gay jocks as a case study to discuss the ways in which gay athletes attend sports training or experience exercise; he found substantial fluidity in their application of sex categories to themselves. Gay men contextualize their experiences, and they apply culturally received categories of homosexuality in different ways at different times and in different circumstances. For example, the fluidity of homosexuality may actually be enhanced when a gay man passes as a straight man. In short, some logics of practice are carried off successfully with complete dishonesty, others with complete honesty. This argument reminds me of Goffman's concept of the front and back stage. He contends, "It will be convenient to label as front that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance... one may take the term 'personal front' to refer to the other items of expressive equipment: insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like" (Goffman,

1959: 22-24). By contrast, the back is full of the possibility of reversal.

In other words, we should not ignore the importance of this self-selected identity of queer folks. In my view, this logic of queer practice has two different meanings: compliance and euphemism. Kelman (1958:53) notes: “compliance can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from another person or group. He adopts the induced behavior not because he believes in its content but because he expects to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval by conforming. This the satisfaction derived from compliance is due to the social effect of accepting influence.” In contrast, the euphemistic action is a political, tactful disguise to avoid direct conflict with ruling elites and the direct naming of an unpleasant, painful, or frightening reality. Scott (1990: 152-153) describes euphemism as “an accurate way to describe what happens to a hidden transcript when it is expressed in a power-laden situation by an actor who wishes to avoid the sanctions that direct statement will bring... What is left in the public transcript is an allusion to profanity without a full accomplishment of it.” Thus, following Williams (1977), compliance is the residual cultural form, and euphemistic action is the emergent one.

## VI. Conclusion

Many heterosexual men and women have a passing curiosity about homosexuality, and that is not such a bad thing for queer folks. At the very least, it compels them to reflect on the signs, discourses and practices of sexuality. In my mind, this process of the long revolution seems like a process of conversion. Berger (1967: 50-51) defined conversion as individual transference into a different world. The individual who wishes to convert must dissociate himself from those individuals or groups that constituted the plausibility structure of his past (religious) reality, and associate himself all the more intensively and exclusively with those who serve to maintain his new one. This can be a long, painful process. Foucault called this “the grey morning of tolerance” that seemed to be dawning for a diversity of sexual practices that could never be wholly welcomed or welcoming (Foucault, 1982). This long revolution is also the transformation of a cultural configuration.

Finally, I believe that semiotics opens a door for us to better recognize the metaphorical and ironic stances of the queer situation. But I have to confess that it still has some blind spots in reality, because it focuses overmuch on binary codes. In fact, queerness is more complex, as the concept of the fuzzy logic of practical sense proposed by Bourdieu suggests; human social practices always embody intentionality without intention, knowledge without cognitive intent, the prereflective,

infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it. Bourdieu (1984: 471) asserts that, “Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby their values are objectively constituted, tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they refused, adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defined them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy pronounces on them... thus, the conservation of social order is decisively reinforced by what Durkheim called logical conformity.” Social reality appears to be bleak in regard to agency; the only resolution, really, is continual contesting of the sacred and the profane without ending.



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# 神聖與世俗的異議：

## 酷兒實行邏輯的符號學分析

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### 摘要

本文採用符號學的觀點分析在日常生活中，對酷兒議題所展現的實行邏輯。基於這樣的目的，本文的前提認為文化乃是意義生產與型塑行為的容器，這也是人們在日常生活的例行實行中所採行的依據。因此，文化的本身就是個巨大的符碼，這構成了一指示的網絡，整合個體的符號至相互凝結的意義之上。其次，在相關理論的探討上，本文分析符號學、俗民方法論、文化心理學與馬派意識形態論述之間的系譜關係，認為符號學的探討必須掌握內外在此的符號於抽象與具體的層次上。因此，俗民方法論、文化心理學與意識形態的概念可以強化符號學的分析。基於符號學的啟發，本文指出目前異性戀與酷兒之間的區分，正是建立在神聖與世俗的二分之上，但是本文並不認為這樣的二分是絕對地穩固，並且強調權力與抗拒往往是一體的兩面。因此，抗拒異性戀霸權乃是一種對神聖與世俗異議的倒轉論述。

關鍵字：酷兒、符號學、實行邏輯

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