



Homo-erotica & Horror:
Thematic Potentials of Sport Spaces

by Alexander Glass

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'Head in the Game,' Alexander Glass, 2016

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Introduction

A body emerges from steam, from cool water, from the labour of exercise, sweat drips. A soft fabric sheet wraps around the waist of this male figure and he is protected, clothed and framed as the image of a transitory masculinity

Entering the arena of the sports space immediately conjures up pre-existing experiential ideas of what the space is for and what it means. These sites have been the locus of the athlete; either in an educative, professional or leisure setting and are crucial to the development of the concept of masculinity. For which this purpose I use Michael S. Kimmel's definition of masculinity, 'a man in power'¹. Departure from these spaces supporting this concept can be controversial. However, representations of these spaces through the media of cinema, advertising and pornography over the past century have consistently subverted the idea. The sports space has been used as a visual device for legitimately eroticising the male athletic body, presenting it as a potentially passive image, to be merely observed. This in itself, to some, is a horror.

The photographic and cinematic lens has always seen the aesthetic potential of the athlete, as Michael Koetzle wrote, 'no other subject... has been so permanently present... in the history of photography,'². Cinema's history too, is entwined with the world of contemporary sport, with the arrival of the modern Olympics and the birth of the moving image happening at almost the same moment in history³. At the time of the eleventh games, 1936 in Berlin games, Leni Riefenstahl directed *Olympia* (1936) in two parts, the second being the 'festival of beauty'. Riefenstahl's epic, despite its difficult context⁴, is a 'celebration of physical beauty and athletic prowess'⁵ (*Fig.2*) which used the one context (of the time) where the male body is a legitimate

¹ Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) p.30

² Michael Koetzle quoted in Peter Kühnst, *Physique: Classic Photographs of Naked Athletes*. (London Thames & Hudson 2004) p.6

³ The modern Olympics was first staged in 1896 and the Lumière brothers first film screened in 1895.

⁴ I do not intend to ignore the fascist imagery of *Olympia* but instead choose to focus on the qualities the Riefenstahl was seeking to represent

⁵ Taylor Downing, *Olympia*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.98

object of the erotic gaze⁶. This is a contextual device that is still used in modern cinema today. Allen Guttman writes that to refute Riefenstahl's lens 'as it were unrelated to Eros is foolishly reductionist.'⁷ Indeed the separation of the erotic from sport would be a contradiction of its history.

The ancient Greek *gymnasia* are the foundation from which our modern day sports spaces have evolved, and Eros, the god of desire and love was their patron. This implies that the basis of our developed ideology of sport is predicated on a link with eroticism. The fact that Olympic sport was a male activity for the spectacle of men sustains that it was both a homo-social⁸ and homoerotic⁹ activity. Despite this history, as Eve Sedgwick writes, there has been a 'radical discontinuous relation of homo-social and homosexual bonds'¹⁰, in the cultures (up to our own) that have followed the Greeks. Indeed mainstream attitudes of sport are centered around the belief that homoerotic desire and masculinity are a paradox¹¹. This ignores the fact that the sustained ideal image of the masculine athletic body has been adopted from this same male worshiping culture (*Fig.3*) and sport remains majoritively segregated between genders in 'the traditional practice of excluding women'¹². This belief is unsurprisingly subject to slippage.

Of course, today the sports space is far from being the exclusive preserve of the male. One can already see many of the same developments in the traditional appreciation of the female body extended into that of the female athlete. Nevertheless, the longer traditions and established trends of the sports space as a locus for the male athletic body are the principal subject of this essay.

⁶ Margret Morse, 'Sport on Television', in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches* an anthology edited by E. Ann Kaplan. (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1983) pp 37-49 (p.45)

⁷ Allen Guttman, *The Erotic in Sports*. (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996) p.114

⁸ Defined as socialising in the presence of people of the same gender, in this case men.

⁹ There is also common evidence to prove the *gymnasia* to be a site of homosexual activity.

¹⁰ Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. (New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1985) p.5

¹¹ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) p.11

¹² Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity* p.17

Brian Pronger's paradox of homoerotic desire being unable to exist within the masculine environment, occurs under the 'assumption that no-one is aware of [the sport spaces] erotic potential'¹³. However through the homoerotic lens of media, the sports space provides the ideal site for the erotic as, 'the heart of homoeroticism is the erotization of masculinity.'¹⁴ If the heteronormative perspective is to treat this potential as abject, then the unequal balance of intention creates an invisible, volatile tension.

This tension is a hallmark of the films of David DeCoteau, particularly The Brotherhood series (2001-2010). These films consistently use the frame of the sports space to exploit the erotic potential of the young athletic body. The catalyst for this objectification is an ever present supernatural threat, which lures an innocent into a 'monstrous homo-social group,'¹⁵ through increasingly homoerotic practices, whilst retaining the ostensible heterosexuality of the characters¹⁶. DeCoteau's brand of homoerotic horror, is an inversion of the traditional heterosexual male gaze of the teen horror film¹⁷. The presence of the fictional horror monster, as theorised by Robin Wood, has consistently represented the queer or other,¹⁸ as the monster regularly forms a sexual threat, disruptive to the traditional heteronormative characters.¹⁹ This connection between horror, the athletic body and homoerotic desire can all be located within the sport space.

DeCoteau was formally a porn director and his homoerotic sensibilities located to the sport space are part of a long-established tradition within homosexual pornography. As Pronger suggests, 'while quantitatively sports

¹³ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity* p.9

¹⁴ *Ibid* p.129

¹⁵ Harry M. Benshoff, "Way too gay to be ignored" in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* edited by Caroline Picart and John Browning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp.131-144 (p.132)

¹⁶ It is worth noting that DeCoteau originally denied the homosexual content of his films. Harry M. Benshoff, "Way too gay to be ignored". *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* edited by Caroline Picart and John Browning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp.131-144 (p.134)

¹⁷ As teen Horror films usually focus on the objectification of young women

¹⁸ Robin Wood. 'Repression, The Other, The Monster' in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant. (Metuchen; London Scarecrow, 1984) pp107-140 (p.108)

¹⁹ *Ibid* p.109

play a small role in the pornography industry it does nevertheless play an important one in the genre of pornography that represent men only'²⁰. The homoerotic paradox serves as fuel to the transgressive possibility of exhibiting explicit homosexual activity within these sites. As this form of sport-porn relies on these space's honest expression of homophobic power that objects to the homoerotic. Power and sex being inextricably linked,²¹ these pornographic fantasies are the logical conclusion of homoerotic potential of the sports space. However, it is understood that the transference of similar sexual propositions in reality could lead to violent catastrophe.

The distance between the explicitly erotic and reality within sports space representation has suffered further confusion through its use within advertising. From Bruce Weber's Tom Hintnaus Calvin Klein underwear campaign (*Fig.4*) in the 1980's, to the locker room centric images of Rafael Nadal for Tommy Hilfiger (2015)(*Fig.5*), both the sports star and the sports space have become the arena of the new world of male sexual objectification. This is a return to the understanding, as an erotic of objectification, of 'the model of Greek... perfection'²². The mainstream heterosexual gaze has begun understand their heterosexual sporting heroes as valid images of sexual power. In turn with the advent of social media, (in particular *Instagram*) the gaze has now been turned inward on heterosexual male appreciation of his own athletic erotic potential. The sports space selfie has become the narcissistic new self-aware representation of the male image.

For the purpose of this essay I will separate sport spaces into four key areas; The swimming pool as the site of bodily discovery, the showers as the site of erotic anxiety, the gym as the site of bodily transformation and the locker room as the site of transition. These sites have been chosen for their frequency of media portrayal and the commonality in their use as legitimising places of male objectification or violence within the genre of

²⁰ Brian Pronger, 'The Homoerotic Space of Sport in Pornography' in *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience* edited by Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale, (London Routledge, 2004) pp. 132-150 (p140)

²¹ Michel Foucault; translated by Robert Hurley. *The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1990) p.83

²² David Coad. *The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality and Sport*. (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press; Bristol: University Presses Marketing, 2008) p.150

horror. Throughout this essay the object of the towel serves to connect the spaces through its own image significance to the spaces. It is a transitory, sanitising and intimate object which appears frequently within narratives of desire. It suggests nudity whilst only teasing the idea of it, it touches where the viewer's eyes cannot. It becomes an object of suggestion, frustration and serves to frame the male body throughout most if not all visual representations of sports spaces.

Through these depictions, it is the intersection between homo-erotica and horror, that forms the basis of this essay's investigation, as it does for my own practical enquiry as a sculptor (Fig.1). Slavoj Žižek has said that 'cinema is the ultimate pervert art. It doesn't give you what you desire, it tells you how to desire.'²³ With this in mind I will aim to take his claim further, by suggesting that all medias representation of sport spaces is pervert art. By hovering between the potential for sex and violence²⁴ it has served to provide a paradoxical relationship within these spaces.



Fig.2: *Olympia Part One Festival of Nations*, dir, Leni Riefenstahl, 1939



Fig.3: *The Discobolus of Myron*, Unknown Artist, c460-450BC

²³ *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, dir: Sophie Fiennes, 2006 (15:12)

²⁴ Allen Guttmann, *The Erotic in Sports*. p.10



Fig.4: Tom Hintnaus for Calvin Klein, Bruce Weber, 1982

Chapter 1: The Swimming pool

It sits on the edge of the pool waiting for the body, waiting to absorb the liquid, waiting to be pressed against him as the water cascades

Dive in. The swimming pool is a potent cultural image. Ian Gordon attributes its resonance, to the fact that 'everyone has... had the experience of swimming in a public pool, ...be it warming or chilling, happy or (often) humiliating'²⁵. This implicitly describes the precarious connotations that the pool has come to represent; the private pool being a symbol of luxury and the public being one an institution. Regardless of the separation of public and private, the pool's image serves the cinematic narrative purpose of discovering the body *in all it's forms*. This notion has the possibility of being entirely polarized, as Thomas Leuween writes 'Eros and Thanatos'²⁶ occupy the two antithetical components of the complex sensation we call swimming.'²⁷ The revealing costumes set against its formal geometry has the potential to erotically frame the athletic body. Conversely the 'floating corpse and 'pools form an almost inseparable cinematic entity.'²⁸ This convention of the lens revealing the body through the pool is how I will investigate it's potential for the homoerotic and for horror.

Richard Dyer writes in his history of the 1950's Hollywood male pin-up, that the pool 'was a typical domain for the display of the Hollywood star body.'²⁹ It created a legitimising scenario of activity for the star. The position of the pool being as a site of activity is crucial to the sexualisation of the male body. As Dyer has continued, 'a man's athletic body may be... admired, but only on the condition that it has been acquired through sports not labour.'³⁰ This is a convention that both retains the stars masculinity within their idyllic



Fig.5: Rafael Nadal 'It all comes off', Tommy Hilfiger, 2015

²⁵ Ian Gordon and Simon Inglis. *Great lengths: The historic Indoor Swimming Pools of Britain* (London: English Heritage, 2009) p.15

²⁶ Thanatos is the personification of death

²⁷ Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999) pg.2

²⁸ *Ibid* p.158

²⁹ Christopher Brown, 'Mad About the Boy? Hollywood Stardom and Masculinity Subverted in The Swimmer', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Volume 29 (Issue 4) pp356-365 (p.358)

³⁰ Richard Dyer. *Stars*. (London: BFI Pub, 1986). p.39

Californian lifestyle. The practise of 'candid' poolside photographs served the development of sex symbol status for actors such as Cary Grant (Fig.6) & Rock Hudson (Fig.7), with their bodies becoming the subject of wide appeal. The technique that was continued by the more subversive and explicitly homoerotic media outlet of *Physique Pictorial* (1951-1990), created by Bob Mizer. Although it existed under a thinly veiled pretence of fitness appreciation, this was the first all-nude all-male magazine which erotically exploited the same body-image culture of which Hudson and Grant were the paramours. Mizer's photographs took direct inspiration from classic Greek statuary, but more importantly & recurrently, used the pool as a locus with which to create homoerotic imagery whilst avoiding the strict censorship standards of the time (Fig.8).

David Hockney, the artist who iconified the Californian swimming pool. noted on his visit to Mizer's, 'its run by a wonderful complete madman and he has a tacky swimming pool surrounded by Hollywood Greek plaster statues.'³¹ Hockney credits *Physique Pictorial* as the inspiration for the beginning his more prevalent homosexual themes of the 1960's; themes which are recurrently located around the swimming pool. *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (1972) (Fig.9), depicts two male figures at the site of the pool, one stands with an apparent gaze of desire focused on the body. The gaze that becomes the lens with which to view all of Hockney's pool works. As Monika Keska writes, these works provide 'an artificial paradise, inhabited by homosexual couples,'³² an architectural space of liquidity providing the perfect frame for encountering a desirable body.

Hockney's vision of the pool has become an integral part of the visual code of seduction within cinema, especially within queer cinema where pools scenes are ubiquitous.³³ Many, notably *Milk* (2008) (Fig.10), have been directly influenced by Hockney's imagery. The moments of entrance and exit to the pool are commonly used as methods of discovery for the sexual power of a swimmers body. Recurrently filmed in slow-motion, diving scenes serve

³¹ Nikos Stangos. *David Hockney by David Hockney*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977) p.98

³² Monika Keska 'Filming the Splash' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* edited by Christopher Brown and Pam Hirsh. (Oxford; New York; Peter Lang 2014) pp145-156 (pg.146)

³³ Pam Hirsh 'Introduction' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* edited by Christopher Brown and Pam Hirsh. (Oxford; New York; Peter Lang 2014) pp1-19 (pg.17)

as coded imagery of the potential orgasmic power of the male body which as John Fiske writes, functions to 'erotize power... [and] extend the moment of climax,'³⁴. Similar technique and imagery are seen in the music video for Kylie Minogue's single *Slow* (2003)(Fig.11 & Fig.12)³⁵, visually contributing to a song about seduction and the extension of pleasure, whilst glorifying the visual power of the male body.

Seduction at the site of the pool is not limited to the homoerotic gaze. In mainstream heteronormative cinemas, the swimmer's exodus from the pool as water cascades off his muscular body is frequently coupled with an (often farcically) awe-filled female gaze. This 'sensuous gaze... equals that of the camera's eye'³⁶ and varieties of this moment are abundant; from the teen genre, in *Picture This* (2008) (Fig.13 & Fig.14) to the the romance-drama *Little Children* (2006) (Fig.15 & Fig.16). In other scenes it's the pool's theatrical lighting that contributes to the sultry atmosphere of seduction, as in *Cruel Intentions* (1999), where the underwater illumination spotlights the alluring face of Ryan Phillippe's Sebastian (Fig.17). For queer cinema however, as Pam Hirsh writes, the pool is 'depicted as a space in which conventional distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual desire become blurred.'³⁷ In the short film *Dare* (2005)³⁸, which shares the same sensuous lighting of *Cruel Intentions* (Fig.18), the pool provides a homo-social location in which the character of Ben can act upon his homoerotic desire, a move that is established as only possible within the fluid 'space of bodily and sexual metamorphosis.'³⁹

Encountering the swimming pool in reality is rarely as idyllic as media presents it. The swimming pool as a site of education asks young men in their most volatile and vulnerable teenage years to present themselves in a scenario which requires almost complete nakedness. 'With speedos showing more [flesh] than they hide,'⁴⁰ it is unsurprising that a common

³⁴ John Fiske, *Television Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1989) p.219

³⁵ This appears to reference the diving scene of Riefenstahl's *Olympia*

³⁶ Fernando Berns. 'Cartographies of Desire' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* edited by Christopher Brown and Pam Hirsh. (Oxford; New York; Peter Lang 2014) pp229-238 (p229)

³⁷ Pam Hirsh 'Introduction' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* pg.17

³⁸ Later adapted to a feature length film in 2009

³⁹ Pam Hirsh 'Introduction' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* pg.18

⁴⁰ Fernando Berns. 'Cartographies of Desire' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* p.230

experience of the space is humiliation. As Berns describes, 'in western society masculinity is often symbolically understood by the size of sexual masculine attributes,'⁴¹ and the skin-tight nature of speedos invites comparison that can 'reduce [a] persons masculinity'⁴². For this reason, the brand Speedo, (which is synonymous with swimwear), has had a dichotomous symbolic representation. One of athletic swimming professionalism and the other a source of adolescent homophobic mockery. The accentuation of the male genitalia being linked to a homoerotic intent, a link that Speedo have been keen to avoid, as when Brian Pronger requested permission to re-print the Olympic swimmer Victor Davis' advertising campaign in *The Arena of Masculinity*, he was issued a 'terse refusal'⁴³ on the grounds of the books homosexual context. The brand preferred to focus on the better performance yielded by their product, a recent campaign advising that 'there's fit and there's Speedo Fit'⁴⁴ (Fig.19). Despite this, as Christine Schmidt describes, Speedos have 'played a role in glorifying the male body,'⁴⁵ and in doing so have made sex symbols of the athletes who wear them. This is true of Olympians in particular, as 'the swimsuit needs the body to play a leading role.'⁴⁶ The swimsuit's paragon body is frequently and legitimately displayed as that of Olympic diver. The fact that three out of four of the British diving medal winners at the Rio 2016 have previously appeared as the cover stars for popular gay publications, seems to solidify the swimwear's homoerotic appeal.

The distance between the popular image of homoerotic potential and homosexual pornography is never great, and though the swimming pool features far less than other sports spaces, it is still an apparent trope. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that gay pornography's as it is understood today began in California, the home of the private swimming pool, but I

⁴¹ Ibid p.230

⁴² Ibid p.230

⁴³ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity* p.192

⁴⁴ *There's Fit and There's Speedo Fit* [Advertisement] Available at <http://www.peterbaileyproductions.com/LN/theres-fit-and-theres-speedo-fit/> (Accessed: 23 September 2016).

⁴⁵ Christine Schmidt *The Swimsuit: Fashion from Poolside to Catwalk*. (London: Berg Publishers, 2012) p.116

⁴⁶ Ibid p.115

would suggest that it establishes an environment where the slippage⁴⁷ between the homoerotic and the explicit can be fluid, A fundamental need of the pornographic sports space in order to draw a thread of plausibility between fantasy and reality.

Swimwear and the erotic potential of the pool provide the perfect narrative device for David DeCoteau's own horror-fantasy filmic genre. In *Leeches!* (2003) & *Brotherhood II: Young Warlocks* (2001) the pool acts as a thematic conduit that enables a threat whilst objectifying the young male actors. For *Brotherhood II* the pool is the stage for DeCoteau's trademark heterosexual/homoerotic ritual, in which the alpha male warlock requires the sharing of fluids to distribute out his supernatural powers (Fig.20), the removal of the element of competition in the 'shared water marks intimacy.'⁴⁸ One which, as the plot progresses, is revealed to be a seductive and monstrous manipulation. *Leeches!*, in which the eponymous monsters are created by a swim-teams use of steroids, opens with a lingering gaze over the muscular body of Josh Henderson's character Jason as he prepares to dive into the pool. As Berns describes, 'the image of the male body being slowly inspected by... the camera... always generates a destabilizing gaze,'⁴⁹ one which is legitimised through the setting, but given the context of horror can easily be coded as a sexual threat, something encouraged by DeCoteau. As the giant leeches kill their way through the all male swim-team, and the deaths become increasingly vicious, the final act culminates with the strongest of the swim-team luring the monsters into the swimming pool with the promise of his body, only to end up electrocuting both the leeches and the boy in a bloody image of catastrophe (Fig.21).

The climax of violence in the pool is something seen in cinema since *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) with discovery of the floating body of Joe Gillis (Fig.22), the former lover of Norma Desmond. The floating corpse frequently being a result of a crime of passion, as Leeuwen writes 'in the movies...at least, there is hardly a pool to be found that is not intrinsically connected to death and

⁴⁷ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity* p.151

⁴⁸ Fernando Berns. 'Cartographies of Desire' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* p.232

⁴⁹ Ibid p.234

love'.⁵⁰ *Swimfan* (2002) (Fig.23), continues this connection, with an obsessive murderess killing her beloved's swim-team competitor, leaving the body to be discovered in a high school pool. The consequence of these murders acts to taint the pool's image of purity and desire. It is an image of corruption and failure that also appears in Elmgreen and Dragset's installation *Death of a Collector* (2008) (Fig.24), where it is exactly the promise of the wealth and beauty of a pool, that makes the 'collector's' presented death, the more isolating and pitiful.

If the purity of the pool's image is corruptible, then so are the bodies that use it through the horror of time. In John Cheever's *The Swimmer* (1964) later adapted to a film of the same name (1968), both the pools and the swimmer, Ned Merrill (played by Burt Lancaster)(Fig.25), serve as critiques of 'the dream of artifice'.⁵¹ The constructed luxury of the pool frames a body that relies on its both its physical and visual power. As Ned, attempts to 'swim' home through his neighbour's pools, the audience becomes increasingly aware of the failings of these ideas. When Ned's character faults come to light so does his physical weakness. The result is 'pitiful paddling'⁵² as he struggles to finish his journey, becoming less and less welcome in a hierarchical pool system. The struggle of Ned Merrill in *The Swimmer* is made further pathetic by the 1992's Levi's advert of the same name which features an athletic young model, diving through the same condensed plot to the overall attraction of everyone who sees him (Fig.26), in this case both the body and the pool become devices of desire for the marketing of the Levi's product. Even in the original movie the pool's function as a facilitator of desire cannot be avoided as Christopher Brown writes, 'after all, for a film to have its star spend his entire screen time in speedos would seem to suggest that there evidently was something worth gazing at'.⁵³

⁵⁰ Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the pond: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool*. p.156

⁵¹ Axel Anderson 'The Artifice of Modernity', in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* edited by Christopher Brown and Pam Hirsh. (Oxford; New York; Peter Lang 2014) pp77-89 (p.86)

⁵² Christopher Brown 'The Pool of The Swimmer' in *The Cinema of the Swimming Pool* edited by Christopher Brown and Pam Hirsh. (Oxford; New York; Peter Lang 2014) pp92-100 (p.96)

⁵³ Christopher Brown, 'Mad About the Boy? Hollywood Stardom and Masculinity Subverted in *The Swimmer*' p.359

The swimming pool in all its representations acts as a frame to focus in on the qualities of the swimmers that enter and exit its tempting liquidity, but as much as the pool can offer visual and experiential pleasure it also provides the potential for failure, danger and death. Its constant use as a tool for desire has resulted in it, as Jack Halberstam wrote, 'function[ing] as a fetish, a saturated symbol of luxury',⁵⁴ doomed to represent two dichotomous notions; death and desire, horror and erotica.

⁵⁴ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) pg.111

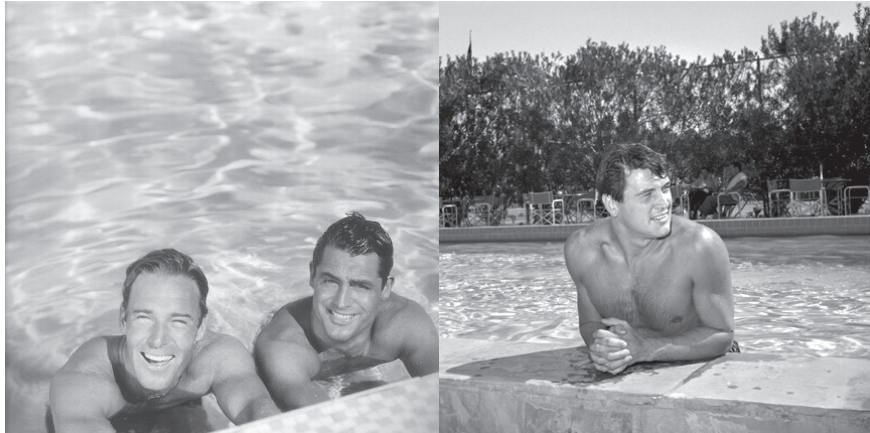


Fig.6: Cary Grant & Randolph Scott, Unknown Photographer, 1935 & Fig.7: Rock Hudson, Bill Anderson, 1954



Fig. 9: Portrait of an Artist (pool with two figures), David Hockney, 1972



Fig.8: Richard Dubois, Bob Mizer, 1953



Fig.10: Milk, dir, Gus Van Sant, 2008



Fig.11: *Slow*, dir, Baillie Walsh, 2003



Fig.13: *Picture This*, dir, Stephen Herek, 2008



Fig.12: *Slow*, dir, Baillie Walsh, 2003



Fig.14: *Picture This*, dir, Stephen Herek, 2008



Fig.15: *Little Children*, dir, Todd Field, 2006



Fig.17: *Cruel Intentions*, dir, Robert Kumble, 1999



Fig.16: *Little Children*, dir, Todd Field, 2006



Fig.18: *Dare*, dir, Adam Salky, 2005



Fig.19: 'There's Fit and There's Speedo Fit,' Jonathan Armstrong, 2016



Fig.21: *Leeches!*, dir, David DeCoteau, 2003



Fig.20: *Brotherhood II: Young Warlocks*, dir, David DeCoteau, 2001



Fig.22: *Sunset Boulevard*, dir, Billy Wilder, 1950



Fig.23: *Swimfan*, dir, John Polson, 2002



Fig.25: *The Swimmer*, dir, Robert Kumble, 1968



Fig.24: *Death of a Collector*, Elmgreen & Dragset, 2008



Fig.26: *The Swimmer [Levi's Commercial]*, dir, Rooney Carruthers, 1992

Chapter 2: The Showers

The body steps in to the the showers and the towel hangs on a hook, anticipating the steam, the chlorine and the heat as it rises

Hit the Showers. In the rituals of sport, the act of showering comes after physical exercise, as a means of cleansing the the external and internal fluids from the body. The shower, in it's intimacy, has the potential to be the most erotic site of the sports spaces. However, its cinematic presence tinges it with images of murderous or sexual violence; the most infamous of which being the murder of Marion Crane in *Psycho* (1960). However, in the communal showers of the male sport-space the creation of anxiety frequently comes in in the form of an unknown or unwanted objectifying gaze. If this gaze is perceived to be homoerotic then the results can be discomforting. However, if the observer and the observed have similar intentions, as is the case of Will Beckwith of Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library*, the shower can become a space of aesthetic and sexual intrigue, as he 'observed the strange variety of physical forms which were making their lingering transit back to the clothed world'.⁵⁵

Brian Pronger describes the shower as, 'simultaneously a place for the exhibition and viewing of naked bodies'.⁵⁶ For the lenses of media this is not always the case, as the situation becomes a chance to display the possibility of the complete male-nude whilst often only alluding to the existence of nudity within it's pretense. The visual representation of male nudity being stuck in a cyclical problem, as the idea of the phallus appearing, 'is still marked as being of extraordinary significance'.⁵⁷ A significance that so rarely occurs, therefore maintaining it's mythic status. Separated from their 'masculine' genitalia, the male bodies of cinema must be completed by the speculation of the viewer. Ruth Barcan writes that, 'the nude body is never naked, if naked means stripped of meaning'.⁵⁸ For these bodies the meaning

of nudity is a state of visible 'lack'⁵⁹ leaving them open to the persecution of outside forces.

Sexual violence in the communal shower is contained in a constant and concerning popular joke 'don't drop the soap'; implying, that if a man is to bend over in the shower he is offering himself up as a viable sexual object. This 'joke' resonates cinematically in the prison shower, with *American History X* (1998) (Fig.27) using the it as a site of rape and dis-empowerment of the hyper-masculine neo-Nazi Derek Vinyard. In popular opinion male rape is a 'defining characteristic of the prison experience',⁶⁰ something which Helen Eingenberg writes is 'not substantiated by the empirical data'.⁶¹ In the representation of the communal shower of the sports-space through the film *Lucas* (1986), a similar form of masculine domination takes place. Lucas, played by Corey Haim, is attacked in the shower after refusing to show the correct amount of respect to an older member of his football-team (Fig.28). He suffers an obscured act of violence, which amounts at the very least to an assault. In these cases of vulnerability to violence within in the sports shower or the prison shower, they both are shown to originate from the perpetrators need to display power over their victims, rather than an act of homosexual desire. The result is a horrific perversion through extreme masculinity.

Ruth Barcan has continued to suggest that 'the symbolic and potentially experiential connection between nudity and anxiety allows nakedness to become a weapon'.⁶² In the previous cases and when used as a device by David DeCoteau this is a weapon used against the body. The erotic and violent potential of the shower is another common trope within DeCoteau's films. In *The Frightening* (2002) and *Leeches!*, slow-motion shots of glistening athletic bodies lathering themselves occur just before fatal attacks. These scenes work to strengthen Reid Gilbert's theory that 'when it is put on view as a sexual object, the male body is invariably punished'.⁶³ The homoerotic nature of these scenes creates a destabilising tension that

⁵⁹ *Ibid* p.139

⁶⁰ Helen Eigenberg & Agnes Baro, 'If you drop the soap you're on your own', *Sexuality and Culture*, Autumn 2003 Volume 7 (Issue 4) pp56-89 (p.57)

⁶¹ *Ibid* p.58

⁶² Ruth Barcan *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*. p.132

⁶³ Gilbert Reid "That's Why I Go to the Gym": *Sexual Identity and the Body of the Male Performer* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3209071> (accessed 26 May 2016) p.8

⁵⁵ Alan Hollinghurst. *The Swimming Pool Library*. (London: Penguin Books, 1989) p.25

⁵⁶ Brian Pronger, 'The Homoerotic Space of Sport in Pornography' in *Sites of Sport: Space, Place* p.149

⁵⁷ Peter Lehman, *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. (New York; London: Routledge, 2001) p.39

⁵⁸ Ruth Barcan *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*. (Oxford: Berg, 2004) p.9

appears to validate the violence. This tension is something taken even further in *Nightmare On Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985), in which the monster Freddie Kruger inhabiting the body of a young student Jesse sadistically tortures and murders the homosexually coded sport coach in the school showers (Fig.29). Apparently validating the homoerotic paradox, as the object homosexuality is violently rejected from the heterosexual space.

It is exactly the heterosexual masculine anxiety of the shower space that make it so pliable to pornographic representations. As Will Beckwith narrates when watching pornography in *The Swimming Pool Library*, 'before we knew where we were, one of them was jacking off in the shower.'⁶⁴ The showers homo-social nudity acts as an easy point of departure to the homoerotic. The more that sexual desire is seemingly forbidden from a sites reality, the more powerful the subversion. In reality the communal shower is dominated by the heterosexual power of the sports space which both refuses and fuels the homoerotic desire, thus creating the separation that pornography and the homoerotic paradox needs. This leads to 'erotic fantasizing with pornography as a way of exploring that desire',⁶⁵ a desire which must otherwise be entirely suppressed.

The depiction of showering male bodies in cinema is rarely as explicit as that of pornography, however, the showers use serves to establish a desirable body. As Barcan writes, 'the beautiful body is an asset in a commodity culture'.⁶⁶ As an image the body increases the revenue of desire for an actor or indeed an entire film. As director Adam Wingard explains in the DVD commentary for *The Guest* (2014), he knew that Dan Stevens character's shower scene would 'be a major selling point for the film',⁶⁷ rendering his muscled shining body an item of value for the films marketing (Fig.30). The division of who finds this body erotic becomes irrelevant in the face of purchasing power. The promise of the reveal of the Stevens' body operates as a potential publicity event, but this promise can never be entirely fulfilled. As remarked before, the phallus of the star will rarely be seen and if it is 'it

⁶⁴ Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming Pool Library*. p.52

⁶⁵ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*. p.127

⁶⁶ Ruth Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*. p.124

⁶⁷ *The Guest*, dir: Adam Wingard, 2014 (27:41)

had better be a impressive spectacle,⁶⁸ lest it fall prey to it's own myth. The cinematic representation of the shower then must always purposely obscure the genitalia of the bather through cut off shots or the conveniently placed towel. Giving the audience desire to see but as Slavoj Žižek says 'keeping it a safe distance'⁶⁹ in order to maintain the need for it.

Through the representative imagery of the shower violent or sexual, the awareness of the gaze within it has become a political problem. Arguments for the exclusion of homosexuals from athletics and military service often coalesced around this issue. A common reasoning is, 'that I don't want to worry about a gay guy staring at me'. This is a suggestion that appears to support Laura Mulvey's argument that 'the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibition alike'.⁷⁰ The fear of this gaze is not continued through the lenses of media. Once the image is created the audience is of little concern as long as the image is popular. For the straight athlete in the shower however, this concern of the gaze is an ironic one. As the reality of an objectifying gaze is merely a subversion of the classical structure in which 'men posses the gaze and women are it's subject'.⁷¹ That isn't to say that the fear is irrational for, as Pronger writes, 'when a gay man looks at another man in the showers... it is never from the position of power'.⁷² The fear of an aggressive response will always be present.

As David Hockney said 'the interest in showers is obvious: the whole body is always in view and in movement, usually gracefully, as the bather is caressing his own body'.⁷³ The shower is a space and activity that is a focal point is the body and for the cinematic lens this is the ideal erotisation of it's stars. The communal shower then becomes a site of problematic representation and vulnerability, the presence of multiple masculine bodies creating a struggle for visual superiority and a stage for both hidden sexualities and reactive violence.

⁶⁸ Peter Lehman *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. p.26

⁶⁹ *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, dir: Sophie Fiennes, 2006 (35:12)

⁷⁰ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) p.12

⁷¹ Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*.

(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007) p.2

⁷² Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity* p.204

⁷³ Nikos Stangos. *David Hockney by David Hockney*. p.99



Fig.27: *American History X*, dir, Tony Kaye, 1998



Fig.29: *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, dir, Jack Sholder, 1985



Fig.28: *Lucas*, dir, David Seltzer, 1986



Fig.30: *The Guest*, dir, Adam Wingard, 2014

Chapter 3: The Gym

Sweat, heat and testosterone, the towel absorbs it all, the body moves, pumps and squeeze out the juices that it was made for

Progress. For the male body to be eroticised it must always be seen to be active and in a progressive state of transformation. Therefore, the gym becomes a site of constant physical competition with the visual expectation of the 'body beautiful'. This expectation which is founded in the ancient Greek notion of *arête*, the 'embodiment of mind and body in perfect harmony'.⁷⁴ The Greek image of ideal masculinity still holds power within the site of the gymnasium. The pursuit of this can be a gratifying one, as George of Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* yearns, 'If only one could spend one's entire life in this state of easy-going physical democracy'. Equally, it can become a site of monstrous obsession, as displayed by *American Psycho's* Patrick Bateman. His primary way to prove his masculinity, as Barry Glassner suggests is 'through athletics and muscularity'.⁷⁵ With traditional masculinity objecting to the homoerotic, the gym is caught in a representative problem. The contemporary gym so often forgets its historic connection to Eros and the homoerotic. It is depicted as a site of masculine power that rejects the perceived 'femininity' of weakness. This rejection which only oils the slippage into the potentially homoerotic. As Jane Russell's character in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) ironically questions of the gym 'is anyone here for love?'⁷⁶ (Fig.31). The evident answer is only for the love of the male image ideal.

It is important to note when discussing the gym and its function that, as Erick Alvarez explains, 'is that women did not create the male body ideal'.⁷⁷ The ancient *gymnasia* and the Olympic games were strictly for the engagement and spectatorship of men. The fact that the patronage of artisans, who created the classical statues, mostly came from men in power also, this suggests that the classical images of the gymnasium were born from the

⁷⁴ Erick Alveraz, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture*. (New York; London: Routledge, 2008) p.7

⁷⁵ Barry Glassner 'Men and Muscles' in *Men's Lives*, edited by Michael S. Kimmel & Michael A. Messner.. (Boston; London Allyn & Bacon, 2001) pp.240-260 (p.2.54)

⁷⁶ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, dir: Howard Hawks, 1953

⁷⁷ Erick Alveraz, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture* p.21

homoerotic eye.⁷⁸ Furthermore, etymologically gymnasium means 'place to exercise naked' a condition that was met in the ancient Olympics as well as the training sites. One of the few possible reasons for 'athletic nudity [is] the increased ability to appreciate the beauty of male bodies'.⁷⁹ With all this evidence it is difficult to separate the origin of the ideals of the gymnasium from the homoerotic even if the tradition of the *erastes/eromenos* relationship⁸⁰ is ignored. This leaves the modern representation of the space in a state of ironic ignorance.

The origin of modern gym culture is often attributed to Eugen Sandow (Fig.32) and Bernarr Macfadden (Fig.33), who through circulated photographs of their impressive bodies in Hellenic statuesque poses gave rise to the phenomenon that was *Physical Culture*. Macfadden and Sandow both published their own books of photographs celebrating the achievement of their bodies. This gave rise to both competitive body building and the legitimising foundation for Bob Mizer's *Physique Pictorial*, of which, 'the whole operation was predicated on bodybuilding as a channel... and at the same time a camouflage'⁸¹ for erotising the male body. The mainstream body building competitions ignored the aesthetic sport's possibility for homo-erotica, despite as Mark Simpson writes, the body builder by definition being 'someone intent on creating on a body that he desires'⁸²

Ironically, the most revered body building competition is called *Mr. Olympia* (1965-), which in the very title references its homoerotic Greek predecessors. The most famous competitor is Arnold Schwarzenegger who as Simpson continues 'mobilized a new narcissistic but fiercely heterosexual masculinity'.⁸³ In the documentary film *Pumping Iron* (1977), which follows Arnold through his gym routines and competitions, the viewer is bombarded

⁷⁸ Barry Glassner 'Men and Muscles' in *Men's Live's* p.256

⁷⁹ David Coad. *The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality and Sport* p.145

⁸⁰ This refers to the ancient Greek tradition of a mentor and student partnership who would engage in sexual relations as well as education.

⁸¹ Thomas Waugh Hard to Imagine: *Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their beginnings to Stonewall*, (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996) p.176

⁸² Mark Simpson. *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity*. (London: Cassell, 1994) p.30

⁸³ *Ibid* p.24

with images of his articulating flesh (Fig.34). Arnold describes his body as feeling 'so tight it feels like it might explode any minute,'⁸⁴ but even these comments don't portray anything other than a heterosexual environment. Brian Pronger argues of aesthetic sports, including body building, that they are the 'least masculine because they involve the lowest degree of aggression.'⁸⁵ There is another form of aggression happening in the body building act, as it is a violent purge of supposed 'feminine' traits to create an extreme vision of masculinity within a homo-social environment. As Eve Sedgwick has written on homo-social activities that they are often 'characterized by intense homophobia'.⁸⁶ If the heterosexuality of the body-builder was in any doubt, then the casting of Schwarzenegger's body in the films *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Commando* (1985) (Fig.35) defined his masculinity through 'ritualized scenes of conflict',⁸⁷ which as Yvonne Tasker writes, only serves to displace eroticism around the male body with horrific violence.⁸⁸

The violence of the gym, suggests the more pain the more fluid released from the body the greater the success of the gym session. It is something that requires the participants to give all the physical and mental energy for. The resulting strength is then equated to a feeling of invincibility. This is a feeling that proves fatal in the teen horror death-fest *Final Destination 3* (2006), where the Lewis Romero character exclaims whilst sweating and 'pumping' heavy weights, 'fuck death,'⁸⁹ as his skull is crushed by the supernaturally sabotaged exercise machine (Fig.36). The untimely death of this athletic body, is something which Professor Frankenstein of *I was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), would have mourned. The homosexually coded doctor seeks to create a teenager of his own outside of heteronormative modes of conception; a teenager made from parts of recently deceased young men. 'All those fine athletic bodies, all those hours

⁸⁴ *Pumping Iron*, dir: George Butler, 1977 (10:27)

⁸⁵ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*. p.20

⁸⁶ Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men* p.1

⁸⁷ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: gender, genre and the action cinema*. (London: Routledge, 2000) p.115

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.115

⁸⁹ *Final Destination 3*, dir: James Wong, 2006 (45:40)

of training,'⁹⁰ that Frankenstein refuses to waste. When the teenage monster is created, he is eased into his patchwork body through rhythmic exercise (Fig.37). The doctor believes this will prepare him for the outside world and watches on pleased with the form. The teenage monster boy's isolating and monotonous conditions drive him on a murderous rampage, as Germaine Greer suggests 'if society produces no legitimate outlet for a boy's sexuality it will be expressed in ways that are chaotic and destructive'.⁹¹ The gymnastic exercise serves as a poor substitute for receptive carnal pleasure.

The promise of the gym is to transform. As Marcia Ian writes, bodybuilding 'is the will to build a better or at least, a different body,'⁹² but this is not limited to the physical or visual. As for the homosexual male, transformative possibility of the gym gives mental and cultural strength. Homosexuality and weakness have been historically characterised as linked and the gym offers a space to dissolve this conception. In the modern 'gay' gym the irony of the masculine/homoerotic paradox is at its most potent. As Bernarr Macfadden said, 'it lies with you whether you shall be a strong virile animal or a miserable crawling worm'.⁹³ Choosing to use the gym acts as an aggressive rejection of a belittling perception. This is why as Eric Alveraz suggests, gyms have become a focal point for a large part of the modern gay community. They serve as both a space, 'where bodies are made to fit'⁹⁴ into the visual conception of masculinity and where they are constructed as an erotic object of desire.

Homosexual pornography's link to the gym is not just a parallel of the gay community's desire for the gym built body. As Eric Alvarez writes pornographic 'videos and magazines of the 1970's and 80's were influential

⁹⁰ Harry M. Benshoff, "Way too gay to be ignored". *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* p.147

⁹¹ Germaine Greer, *The Boy*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003) p.59

⁹² Marcia Ian. 'When is a Body Not a Body? When It's a Building', in *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* edited by Joel Sanders. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1996) pp.188-205 (p.188)

⁹³ Barry Glassner 'Men and Muscles' in *Men's Lives*, p.252

⁹⁴ Caroline Fusco. 'The Space that (In)Difference Makes' in *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience* edited by Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale, (London Routledge, 2004) pp.159-157 (p.172)

in the muscle boy ideal becoming a conventional idea.⁹⁵ As muscle is considered to be a symbol of masculine power, the subversion of that symbolism through explicit homosexual acts is a foundation of homoerotic desire. A fantasy that is expressed in *The Bigger the Better* (1984)(Fig.38), where a young student arrives at his teacher's home, under the 'heterosexual' pretence of being shown new exercises in a home gym, an activity that inevitably transitions from muscle worship to intercourse. It is an unremarkable pornographic narrative and, as Brian Pronger writes, through 'it's delimitation of homoerotic types, pornography has contributed to the refinement of homoerotic taste,'⁹⁶ thereby creating a homosexual culture obsessed with the image of the manufactured muscle man.

The obsessive ethos of the gym image as told by *American Psycho's* Patrick Bateman is 'you can always be thinner...look better'.⁹⁷ This is suggesting that the job of building the body is never done, which in itself is a message doomed to failure. No matter what body building culture suggests, the human form has its limits physically and through the inevitability of deterioration. Despite this the ethos remains, with films such as *Magic Mike* (2012) increasingly using the image of the gym built body (Fig.39) and equating it to the male erotic appeal. The power of the strippers' body in this film is completely owed to its visual qualities and not through its physical strength. This is supposedly subverts the tradition of the gaze.⁹⁸ Cinematic history has always objectified the male body but modern mainstream cinema is now explicit in doing so. This perhaps explains the large increase in spending on gyms; one report revealing a 44% growth in the UK between the financial year of 2014 and 2015.⁹⁹ This growth also appears to correlate with the surge in numbers of men diagnosed with eating disorders.¹⁰⁰ With a

⁹⁵ Erick Alveraz, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture*, p.71

⁹⁶ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*, p.128

⁹⁷ Bret Easton Ellis. *American Psycho*. (London: Picador, 2011) p.358

⁹⁸ Despite this there is still a clear representation of the male characters of the film displaying their power over women through aggressive sexuality

⁹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/aug/18/uk-gym-membership-spending-up-by-44-per-cent> (accessed 22 September 2016)

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/lifestyle/health/buff-male-stars-like-zac-7542260> (accessed 20 September 2016)

recent Gymbox advertisement inviting gym-goers to 'destroy yourself,'¹⁰¹ (Fig.40), the space of the gym has the potential to develop a frightening philosophy for the transformation of the male form.

The Gym, as a site of metamorphosis, intends to create the 'body beautiful' but the obsessive competitive need for it can construct something monstrous instead. The horror of the representation of gym ideology in films such as *Pumping Iron* is the need to reject weakness. For body builders to remain masculine in their aesthetic sport it requires the 'banishment of homosexuality,'¹⁰² the act of which becomes a masochistic 'punishment'. However, it can't be ignored that the homo-erotic is at the heart of the gyms history. Where men build their own image into one they perceive as desirable the potential for the homoerotic gaze exists. As Germaine Greer, has written of Eros, the ancient patron of the gymnasium, he was 'a god of such power that, as love unmans the strongest of men, he overcame Hercules himself'.¹⁰³ This is personification of desire overcoming the paragon of masculine strength. Desire is the core of the gym.

¹⁰¹ http://adsoftheworld.com/media/outdoor/gymbox_new_ways_5 (accessed 24 September 2016)

¹⁰² Mark Simpson. *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity*. p.29

¹⁰³ Germaine Greer. *The Boy* p.110



Fig.31: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, dir, Howard Hawks, 1953



Fig.34: *Pumping Iron*, dir, George Butler, 1977

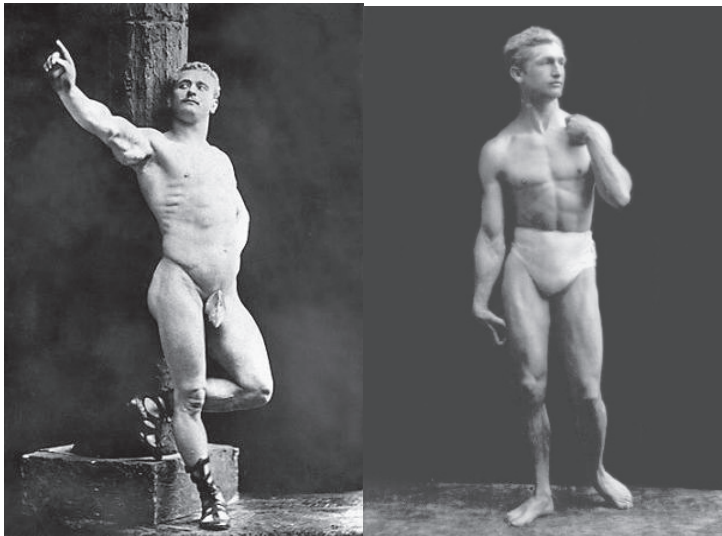


Fig.32: *Eugene Sandow Posing*, Unknown Photographer, c1893 & Fig.33: *Bernarr Macfadden as David*, Unknown Photographer, c1918



Fig.35: *Commando*, dir, Mark L. Lester, 1985



Fig.36: *Final Destination 3*, dir, James Wong, 2006



Fig.38: *The Bigger the Better*, dir, Matt Sterling, 1984



Fig.39: *Magic Mike*, dir, Steven Soderbergh, 2012



Fig.37: *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*, dir, Herbert L. Stock, 1957



Fig.40: 'Destroy Yourself', Albion GymBox, 2015

Chapter 4: The Locker Room

*It drips saturated with use as it holds on guarding the body
accomplished in its task*

Time to change. A site of transition, the locker room has always offered the male bodies a pause between the sports space and the life beyond it; the sports team changing into a group of individuals. The erotic power the locker room represents is in the moment of tension between the expectation and the reveal of the body. If an unwanted gaze should fall on the body in the macho environment, shame and violence can often follow. However, in recent culture the anxiety over the homoerotic gaze has changed and it now appears that the heterosexual masculine gaze is seeing the male body just as much as the homoerotic sees it. The space of homoerotic horror has, perhaps become a space of further heterosexual power.

The pervasive presence of locker room scenes in heterocentric movies, such as *American Pie* (1999) (Fig.41) or *Top Gun* (1986) (Fig.42), demonstrates for male characters to engaging in competitive macho banter about physical prowess or the girls that exist outside of the sports space, therefore solidifying the predetermined heterosexuality. The presence of the homoerotic or the feminine serves as a joke of the space. However, when the locker room is given the context of horror these abject factors are what stalk the men. In *The Faculty* (1998), where an alien species schemes to take control of the bodies of high school students, the final confrontation and unveiling of the alien Queen sees the monstrous spectacle of the naked female invading the hetero-male 'safe' space of the locker room (Fig.43). In *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), the traditional cinematic state of the male body existing between the 'voyeurism and exhibitionism,'¹⁰⁴ of the camera/actor relationship, is subverted. Ryan Phillippe's character Barry senses the discomforting presence of an unknown gaze (Fig.44). The camera acts as the stalking eye which as Dennis Giles discusses, also 'involves the

viewer in a structure of fetishism.'¹⁰⁵ The heterosexual Barry, aware of this observation, becomes aggravated and runs scared from the space.

The heteronormative associations of the locker room are often utilized in the films of David DeCoteau, to retain the ostensible heterosexuality of his characters. However, the space's ability to capture bodies unguarded, produces the perfect moment for homoerotic conflict, as seen in *Brotherhood II* (Fig.45). Moreover, as Mary Douglas wrote in *Purity and Danger*, 'danger lies in transitional states,'¹⁰⁶ where the body is most vulnerable to persecuting forces. This is a trope in scenes within *The Covenant* (2006), a film which directly borrows from the DeCoteau format in a higher budget production, a sign itself perhaps of changing attitudes to explicit male objectification (Fig.46). In *The Covenant*, an athletic homosexual group of Warlocks are pursued by an outsider, who proves his worth after successfully humiliating an explicitly homophobic attacker half dressed in the locker room (Fig.47). Whilst, as Pronger writes of these moments, 'both Eros and irony are at work in the locker-room [scene],'¹⁰⁷ the historic homophobia of the space still materialises.

As a construct of modern masculinity the locker room image is created with the acknowledgement of homophobia, but as Erick Alveraz explains, 'it was exactly in the locker room that [homosexual men] first experience strong sexual urges,'¹⁰⁸ the awareness and proximity of male bodies creating an environment of potentially unwanted desire for all parties; for some, 'a place of shame and fear,'¹⁰⁹ for others, a space of ocular power. Pronger's suggestion is that this 'homophobia is an important constituent in the [sports space] construction of desire,'¹¹⁰ as it produces a more aggressive form of masculinity. This coupled with its transitional exposure, means that the locker room is the most fertile ground for the homosexual pornographic

¹⁰⁵ Dennis Giles. 'Conditions of Pleasure in Horror Cinema' in *Planks of Reason: Essay on the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant. (Metuchen; London Scarecrow, 1984) pp36-48 (p.42)

¹⁰⁶ Mary Douglas quoted in Germaine Greer. *The Boy*. p.21

¹⁰⁷ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*. p. 209

¹⁰⁸ Erick Alveraz, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture* p.248

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* p.250

¹¹⁰ Brian Pronger, 'The Homoerotic Space of Sport in Pornography' in *Sites of Sport: Space* p.151

¹⁰⁴ Erick Alveraz, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture*. p.255

reading. 'The masculine association of the locker room allows for a slide into homosexual sex that does not commit the character to a gay identity,'¹¹¹ but instead forms an easy evolution from the homo-social to the homoerotic. This pornographic version of the space is a subversion of the realities culture, but nonetheless when 'one can disguise homoerotic desire in the orthodox masculine façade of the straight locker room,'¹¹² the potential for holding the idea exists.

Projecting the sexual power of the male athlete through locker rooms is now a major part of underwear advertising. As athletes such as David Beckham and Rafael Nadal pose for luxury brands, the gaze on sporting heroes offers up a pleasure for all which is not just the homoerotic. This gaze that begins to refute Richard Dyer's claim of the objective male as active within the gaze structure, as David Coad writes, 'men's underwear adverts are based on the model as a passive object,'¹¹³ but still frequently 'requiring athletic props',¹¹⁴ i.e. of the sports space, as in Nadal's 2015 Tommy Hilfiger campaign (Fig.48). Where Nadal strips to his underwear in the locker room looking directly into the camera not just returning the spectators gaze 'but overwhelming it with ...arrogance or an uncaring sexually potent gaze.'¹¹⁵ The same gaze is seen in Dolce & Gabbana's 2006 underwear campaign which features members of the Italian national football team all staring down the camera, their bodies glistening with 'sweat' (Fig.49). Coad suggests that this isn't just an exhibitionism for the female or homoerotic gaze but that 'they are exhibiting their bodies to each other,'¹¹⁶ in a form of heterosexual competition of who can exhibit the most sexually potent image. The sporting heroes have knowingly returning to their ancient Greek status of idols of eroticism. This appears to have had effect the 'metrosexualising the [men],'¹¹⁷ who admire them by making themselves aware of their own erotic potential.

Proof of this is seen in the popularity of brands such as UnderArmour and Nike Pro, whose skin tight clothing is marketed under as performance

¹¹¹ *Ibid* p.153

¹¹² Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*. p.209

¹¹³ David Coad. *The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality and Sport* p.113

¹¹⁴ Dyer, Richard, 'Don't Look Now', *Screen*, Volume 23 1982 (Issue3-4) pp61-73 (p.62)

¹¹⁵ Gilbert Reid "That's Why I Go to the Gym" p.8

¹¹⁶ David Coad. *The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality and Sport* p.112

¹¹⁷ *ibid* p.116

enhancing whilst revealing the definition of the wearers muscles (Fig.50 & Fig.51). The resulting image is one of a 'clothed nude.'¹¹⁸ A legging effect that, despite recent opinion, has historically been as Mary Schoeser writes a 'predominant means of expressing masculine power,'¹¹⁹ in a visual equation of muscularity and supremacy. The clothing serves the vanity of the wearer whilst seemingly referencing the 'nude athletes of ancient Greece,'¹²⁰ in a contemporary fashion. As Pat Kirkham suggests of consumer appeal, 'within advertising the appearance and presentation of the product is at least as important as the product itself,'¹²¹ and, in the visually competitive environment of the modern locker room, UnderArmour offers to assist the bodies presentation to those around it.

In a world of social media, digital self presentation has become a significant way of communicating status. For men using *Instagram* there is now an awareness of the 'complete power'¹²² they have of their image and how it is seen in comparison to other men's profiles. The 'slippage' that 'has occurred in the male gaze,'¹²³ has turned it inward with men 'increasingly aware of themselves as objects of desire.'¹²⁴ A projection of this belief in through social media is in the locker room selfie (Fig.52), which acts as visual and real-time proof that exercise has been done and the body, with it's erotic potential is in a progressive state of physical transitioning. The erotic gaze is being willed by the object of desire towards itself.

The self-aware inward erotic gaze is now part of masculine heterosexual culture; the homoerotic images of the locker room no longer being mainly proliferated by cinematic or homosexual media. In so doing, the locker room has transitioned from a site of cultural homophobia to a representative

¹¹⁸ Mary Schoeser. 'Legging it', in *The Gendered Object* edited by Pat Kirkham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) pp.131-336 (p.134)

¹¹⁹ *Ibid* p.133

¹²⁰ *Ibid* p.135

¹²¹ Pat Kirkham. 'Cosmetics: a Clinique Case Study, in *The Gendered Object* edited by Pat Kirkham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) pp.196-199 (p.197)

¹²² <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/elsevier/instagram-motives-for-its-use-and-relationship-to-narcissism-and-4a0ZJDnvtF> (accessed 19 September 2016)

¹²³ Winchester, Oliver 'The Pleasures of Spectatorship' in *Fashion V Sport*, edited by Ligaya Salazar (London: V&A, 2008) pp.103-105 (p.103)

¹²⁴ *Ibid* p.103

awareness of its sexual power, to, perhaps, the shock of a now outdated masculinity. This change is built on an important condition; the objectified male must always be in control of his own objectification or the state of horror remains.



Fig.41: *American Pie*, dir, Paul Weitz, 1999



Fig.42: *Top Gun*, dir, Tony Scott, 1986



Fig.43: *The Faculty*, dir, Robert Rodriguez, 1998



Fig.45: *Brotherhood II: Young Warlocks*, dir, David DeCoteau, 2001



Fig.44: *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, dir, Jim Gillespie, 1997



Fig.46: *The Covenant*, dir, Renny Harlin, 2006



Fig.47: *The Covenant*, dir, Renny Harlin, 2006



Fig.48: Rafael Nadal 'It all comes off', Tommy Hilfiger, 2015



Fig.49: *Italian National Team* for Dolce & Gabbana, Dolce & Gabbana, 2006

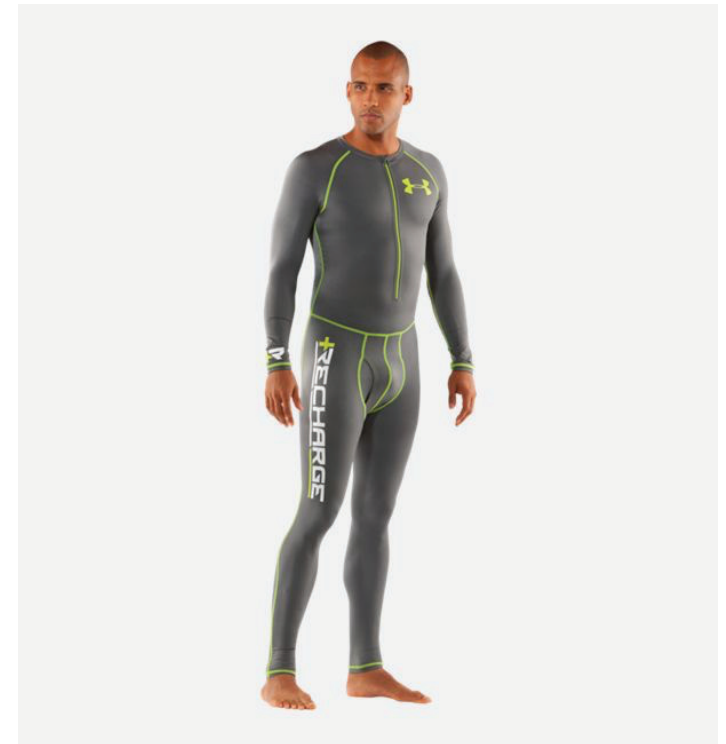


Fig.50: *Men's Recharge Suit*, Under Armour, 2010



Fig.51: *High Compression, Nike Pro, 2016*



Fig.52: *The takeover #2016, Daniel Blake, 2016*

Conclusion

...after all this, the towel lies used, dirty and abandoned on the floor.

The ubiquity of the sports space experience provides an established visual ground for exploring themes of masculinity through the cinematic or the artistic. Something which my sculptural practice through re-presenting the iconography of these spaces seeks to do (Fig.1 & Fig.53). Amongst these thematic potentials homo-erotica and horror are two of the most common. Their intersections are seen through the frequency in which the same sites are used for objectifying the male body in romantic cinema, advertising and pornography as they are in threatening it in the genre of horror. The swimming pool, the showers, the gym and the locker room, all have visual histories of both the creation of masculine power and the destruction of it.

It is clear that through the Greek origination of these spaces that the homoerotic perception forms the basis for both our current male body ideals but also the concept of the sports space itself; desire and the gym being inseparable from one another. It is 'desire' which advertising and pornography has exploited, using the sports space's potential to display the athletic bodies within them. This in-turn has affected the way that bodies are seen and how men see each other. The sports space has become a site of visual competition as much as it has always been a physical one. As Brian Pronger writes, 'muscles have become the erotic embodiment of the gay ironic sensibility,'¹²⁵ in an attempt to subvert the conflicting equation of homosexuality with weakness. The locker rooms which were filled with shame for the gay man, can now be taken with a form of ownership. As Bataille suggests, 'shame... gave birth to eroticism'¹²⁶ and in turn eroticism has given birth to a new perception.

The erotic potential of these sport spaces is now a mainstream one, something that can be proved through the modern advertising of men's underwear. As male consumers increasingly buy luxury underwear brands,

¹²⁵ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity* p.11

¹²⁶ Georges Bataille; translated by Mary Dalwood. *Eroticism: Death & Sensuality*. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986) p.31

who advertise through sexualised male bodies, 'objectification and commercialization cannot possibly occur without social approval and desirability.'¹²⁷ The images of the heterosexual sporting heroes telling the men that admire them; that visual appreciation of the male body is not just acceptable but that it is a masculine activity. Men are now creating themselves in the image of their heroes through the medium of social media as Mike Featherstone explains, 'we want to be a picture not just be in them, and so when I look at a picture I am also looking at myself at a way I might be.'¹²⁸ Cinema too is increasingly less covert with treatment of the male body with films such as *Magic Mike* and it's sequel *Magic Mike XXL* (2015) flagrantly treating the constructed male body as visual object of sexual power. Even the homoerotic-horror genre has made it's way in to the mainstream with Renny Harlin's DeCoteau inspired *The Covenant* earning \$37,256,954¹²⁹ through international box-offices. The sports space and their more destabilising potentials have become a common awareness.

In these spaces discussed, homo-erotica and horror have met through the subversion of heterosexual power. The fear of heterosexual masculinity is to be made weak, and the sites in where the strength of masculine image is constructed is exactly where it is most vulnerable, as it incites the homoerotic and leaves the body exposed. As Reid Gilbert writes, 'when it is put on view as a sexual object, the male body is invariably punished,'¹³⁰ but this is not the always case. It is only when the male image is not in control of its own objectification that it is punished, punishes others or punishes itself. The sports space provides an open field for these horrors and these desires, but the representations through any lens are never quite reality, something the lens distances, because it needs to. As Slavoj Žižek has said, 'perhaps the ultimate horror of a desire...is to be fully filled in, met, so that I desire no longer.'¹³¹ The object of desire is seen in the space, through a screen by a viewer and neither the homoerotic nor the horrific can be truly attained.

¹²⁷ Erick Alvarez, *Muscle Boys: Gay Gym Culture* p.90

¹²⁸ Mike Featherstone quoted in Ruth Barcan *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy* p.210

¹²⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Covenant_\(film\)#Box_office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Covenant_(film)#Box_office) (accessed 20 September 2016)

¹³⁰ Gilbert Reid "That's Why I Go to the Gym", p.8

¹³¹ The Pervert's Guide to Ideology, dir: Sophie Fiennes, 2012 (14:58)

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