THREE

VORACIOUS ANDROGYNES: THE VAMPIRE LESTAT ON MTV

INSATIABLE NARCISSISM

In chapter 1, I built on the theoretical perspectives of recent feminist studies of women's historical shopping practices to argue that the socioeconomic disfranchisement of teenagers as consuming subjects involved a genuine cultural empowerment—one that has generated considerable adult anxiety over threats posed to the normative policing of adolescent desire and agency. While the inculcation of a consumerist ethos in youth ultimately served the profit motives of capitalists, it also activated youthful fantasy and appetite within public spaces (shopping malls, video arcades, cineplexes) that provided opportunities for self-determination and communal exchange distinct from the "legitimate" jurisdictions of school and family. It is thus, I argued, insufficiently dialectical merely to deplore the capitalist valorization of youthful desire without attending also to its mobilizing of teenagers as potentially autonomous social subjects.

In the spirit of this argument, then, I would like to return to my critique in chapter 2 of the socially and economically reactionary positioning of the yuppie vampire in order to consider the dialectically progressive aspects of the figure's cultural articulation. Such an analysis must move beyond, even while incorporating, a condemnation of the yuppie vampire's erotically predatory consumption, acknowledging too how this figure has served to crystallize the latent utopianism of consumerist pleasure seeking, the lust for a better—a sensually richer, more aesthetically gratifying—world. More specifically, it must recognize how the yuppie vampire has, in its association with a utopia of eroticized consumption, come to provide an energizing cultural investment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual consumers. Indeed, Anne Rice's novels and Tony Scott's film *The Hunger* exude a powerful homoerotic charge that unsettles the normative assumption of a monolithically "straight" consumer culture.

That the figure of the vampire trades on a logic of gender ambiguity has become a critical commonplace, especially in studies of its manifestation in Victorian culture, where it functioned as a powerful textual site of "homosexual panic."1 As Christopher Craft has argued in his analysis of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the sexuality of the vampire is inherently ambiguous because it is expressed orally, combining qualities of the masculine (penetrative teeth) and the feminine (enveloping lips), and thus generating a profound "erotic ambivalence" that destabilizes the representation of sexual roles.2 The aggressive orality of the vampire involves an eroticization of images of consumption, one that several Freudian critics have traced to infantile roots,3 but which may also be seen to evoke historical consumerism specifically. The vampire's pleasure derives from biting and drinking—in other words, from acquiring and consuming—an activity that has replaced the libidinal charge of conventional genital sexuality. But what from a Freudian perspective might seem a regression in fact involves a potent dissemination of nonheterosexually configured desire: the actual gender—and thus, by implication, the sexual object choice—of the vampire is, finally, irrelevant to its enactment of an eroticized consumption. Ultimately, vampires are voracious androgynes driven by an indiscriminate longing.

Predictably, the Victorian vampire story—including *Dracula* (1897) and J. Sheridan LeFanu's short story "Carmilla" (1872), with its lesbian vampire—figured this erotic ambivalence as a dire threat, however implicitly seductive, a pattern most twentieth-century treatments have tended to follow. Richard Dyer provides an excellent historical overview of the "vampirism as homosexuality" theme, arguing that the forms of pleasure that vampire texts generally provided gay and lesbian readers involved either reading "self-oppressively" by identifying with the threatened sexual order or "identifying with the vampire in some sort" and "thrilling to [its] extraordinary power." Yet the latter strategy required interpreting against the narrative grain in "most vampire tales up to the 1970s," because "in no case does the vampire tell his/her own story" until Rice's *Interview*, which is narrated by Louis. As Dyer argues, this "shift in the position of the narrator vis-a-vis vampirism is surely analogous with the shift, and insistence upon it, from lesbians and gay men as persons who are spoken about to persons who speak for themselves."4

Thus, even if Rice's novels and films such as *The Hunger* are disturbingly ideological in their celebration of the heedless arrogance of the new consumption classes, their detachment from the smothering structures of family life (something the working-class vampire text *Martin*
could not effect) and their affirmative portrayal of a self-confident urban subculture organized around alternative forms of erotic bonding (Rice's vampires pair off almost exclusively in same-sex couples, while the vampires in The Hunger are bisexual) converged with the assertive consolidation of a gay rights/pride movement, with which these texts were often overtly articulated. In her biography of Rice, Katherine Ramsland has shown how, from high school on, "gay men . . . inspired in [Rice] a strong feeling of kinship," exhibiting "courage in the face of prejudice. As people reinventing themselves from outsiders to insiders in gay communities, they were heroes" to her. In depicting the vampire relationships in Interview, Rice explicitly invited readers to appeal to emergent gay audiences, a purpose at which she was so successful that when the novel was being filmed in 1993–94, her fans impelled her to mount a public attack on the producers for reportedly diluting its homoerotic content. My own experience teaching her work has shown me how wildly popular it is with young gay and bisexual readers (male and female) seeking a positive portrayal of their ownawning sense of identity. As with the recent rehabilitation of the epithet queer as a polemical self-description by the current generation of gay activists, gay youth seem to find in the otherworldliness and unapologetic peculiarity of Rice's vampires a vindication of their own disdain for conventional sexual roles. As Judith Johnson has observed, Rice's novels read less like works of horror literature than like boldly libidinous dreams, "homoerotic fantasies of sexual and artificial paradises." The same could be said of the film The Hunger, not only because of its frank portrayal of lesbianism but also due to the presence of David Bowie and Catherine Deneuve, stars famous for projecting an ambiguous, highly androgynous, sexual appeal to multiple audiences—gay, lesbian, and bisexual as well as straight. As Leedom Medovoi has observed, "Bowie was perhaps the first to construct [elaborate] narratives of a rebel who shocked by confusing identities, . . . explicitly reconceptualized rock rebellion as threatening a straight world . . . with one's sexual undecidability . . . . This threat parallels, and arguably was mediated by, the gay liberationist struggle in the early seventies to dismantle rigid gender distinctions in favor of a more polymorphously perverse sexual order." The film's unusual casting also implicates it in the tripartite logic of the cultural paradigm of consuming youth, since both Bowie and Deneuve are famous for (1) marketing consumer objects—rock albums, skin lotions—to youth audiences; (2) maintaining a preternaturally youthful appearance into middle age; and (3) evoking a dream of eternal youth in their persons and in their product messages. Thus, The Hunger, like Rice's novels, captures the complex nexus of class, gender, and generation that gives the figure of the yuppie vampire its tremendous ideological power, combining as it does fantasies of social wealth, sexual freedom, and youthful potency.

In short, the yuppie vampire, like so many icons of popular culture, contains both progressive and reactionary elements, and it is imperative (if at times quite difficult) to disentangle them from one another. If, on the one hand, the figure allegorizes the social enfranchisement of the new bourgeoisie, emphatically affirming their consumerist values and behaviors as the quasi-divine right of a superior class of beings; it also suggests the emergence into public visibility of alternative sexual communities whose desires are traditionally been suppressed—in mainstream culture and in the conventional vampire story—but which must now be recognized and acknowledged. What mediates between these class and gender positionings is the category of youth: for the yuppie vampire conceived both as a member of the new bourgeoisie and as a polymorphously perverse androgynous youth is the imaginary promise of consumption, its utopian subject (since the one who consumes is youthful) and also its utopian object (since youth is what is consumed). During the 1970s and 1980s, the period of the yuppie vampire's popular consolidation, this ideological nexus was also visible in the domain of advertising, as marketers—following the post-Fordist logic of segmenting the commodity audience into factions defined by values and lifestyle—began actively to solicit middle-class gay and lesbian consumers via strategies that mobilized homoerotic imagery and encoded latent "homosexual" messages. The basic approach of these ads involved appealing to consumerist narcissism by fetishizing images of sleek young bodies living a dream of glamorous influence and perpetual adolescence, a titillating Calvin Klein fantasy (Klein being one of the pioneers of the form). In the process, the ads blurred clear distinctions between "straight" and "gay" consumers, since all were linked in their common narcissism: the consumer's desire to be young and beautiful was conflated with the desire to possess youth and beauty as incarnated in the beguiling models. As Mark Simpson has argued, mirrors were often used, especially in aftershave ads, to cement this narcissistic bond, since the "mirror-perspective allows us to desire the model narcissistically in such a way that it is also our hand that strokes his face, just as much as it is our face that is stroked." In his study of male fashion and hygiene ads, Andrew Wernick observes that contemporary advertising's engagement of narcissism "is
especially norm-breaking” in that “the homo-erotic desire that is always implicit in taking oneself as a sexual object . . . is here fully exposed.” While these ads usually provided what Wernick calls “a crucial heterosexual cover”—in other words, a possibility for the straight consumer to disavow the implicit homoeroticism of the situation—the readings they permitted were nonetheless calculatedly ambiguous, “letting the consumers place themselves in the ad from a whole variety of positions.”10 The scenarios constructed were so generalized in terms of consumer fantasy that they seemed to incite a free-floating desire, a libidinous impulse beyond the stratifications of sexual orientation—thus suggesting Bourdieu’s analysis of the new bourgeoisie’s “dream of social flying.” As one can see, it is extremely difficult to tease out the sexual implications of these ads from their class significations, precisely because the new bourgeoisie was the first capitalist class with a comprehensive eroticism of consumption: the commodity’s lust for the money in their pockets no longer needed to be furtive, since it was so obviously and wholeheartedly reciprocated.

As might be expected, the metaphories of consumer vampirism canvassed in chapter 1 were deployed by critics of advertising to describe the operations and effects of these polymorphously perverse ads. The language of Simpson’s essay, for example, is rife with vampiric images, as when he argues that by “feeding [the male consumer’s] longing for the idealized [youthful] form,” homoerotic advertising “ensures that desire is never satisfied and that the consumer never loses his appetite.”11 Diana Fuss makes the vampire metaphor explicit in her essay “Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look,” wherein she argues that the dissemination of homoeroticism via advertising practices “provides a socially sanctioned structure in which women are encouraged to consume, in voyeuristic if not vampiristic fashion, the images of other women.” This structure operates through what Fuss calls “vampiric identification”: the “homospectatorial look” encoded in fashion imagery forces female viewers “to assume the position of lesbian vampires . . . The spectatorial relation of the woman to her image serially displayed across the pages of fashion magazines is structurally vampiric.” This relation is enforced by the photographic apparatus, which basically “functions as a mass producer of corpses, embalming each subject and fixating its image.”12 Thus, the capitalist market, in its ceaseless hunger for profit, infects the consumer with its own vampiric appetites, in the process conflating relations based on voyeurism, narcissism, and homoeroticism with specifically consumerist desires and pleasures.

According to John Fekete, in a discussion clearly influenced by Jean Baudrillard’s attack on consumption as a form of dead social labor, the structural vampirism analyzed by Fuss is not merely a condition of contemporary advertising but is essential to the valorization process of late capitalism. Saturated as it is with “hyperreal sign-values and value-signs, potentialities without end,” this system seems to inhabit “a flickering half-life, anemic, parasitic, and thirsty for real bodily fluids. Insubstantial, dematerialized, dead value joins up with insubstantial, disseminated, dead power in a panic passion of resurrection through the fresh blood of desire which, upon commutative transfusion, ever recedes into a bloodless and dis-oriented desire of desire. It is not inappropriate to speak here, at least in tendency, of a culture of vampire value.”13 In other words, the morbid accumulation process of advanced capitalism, ever greedy for the “fresh blood of desire,” mandates the pathological predation of youthful energy. We thus encounter here another face of the logic of consumer vampirism described in chapter 1: the critique of the interpellation of youth-as-subjects into a consumer system has shifted into a critique of this system’s consumption of youth-as-substance. Homoerotic imagery provides the fangs of this consumerist extraction, the generalized mechanism of purchase upon the androgynous throat of youth.14 From this critical perspective, then, the homoeroticism circulating in contemporary consumer culture—which is crystallized in the yuppie vampire text—is potentially pernicious, an enforcement of narcissistic self-regard that propels consumers into the draining embrace of power.

A text that effectively allegorizes this sharp critique is John Rechy’s novel The Vampires (1971). Published five years prior to Rice’s Interview, the book set the tone for the yuppie vampire tradition to come: evoking a lushly sensual narrative world, the story chronicles the erotic doings of a group of languid, androgynous predators (a major difference, however, is that Rechy’s eponymous “vampires” are merely metaphorical: the tale has a Gothic atmosphere but no overtly supernatural elements). In a mansion on a secluded island, a morose assortment of beautiful people play out a breathless series of sadomasochistic games at the behest of their host, Richard, a fabulously wealthy scoundrel who “need[s] lives to feed on.”15 This self-styled master vampire is the incarnation of a culture drunk on a brew of voyeurism, narcissism, fetishism, and homoeroticism; indeed, these psychic dispositions are the very tools he uses to manipulate and dominate his guests. Chief among his victims is his onetime mistress, Joja, whom Richard years before had infected with his own “wailing emptiness” by means of an erotic bite, a “ritualistic initiation performed by his mouth on her neck” (p. 36; emphasis in original).
Impelled by an unquenchable hunger, "ravenous-thoughts gnawing... insistently now at her mind" (p. 18), Joja has spent the years apart from Richard pursuing a succession of disposable "youngmen," whose sexual intensity allows her to experience the brief illusion of vitality. "Youth had extended its lease to her," she muses as she gazes into a mirror. "But how much longer?" (p. 35). In fact, Joja is little more than a "beautiful lifeless spectacle" (p. 20), condemned—like everyone else Richard touches—to "endless nights of hunting" for a satisfaction that never comes (p. 257).

While the specific target of Rechy's ferocious satire is the facile sexual utopianism of the 1960s—"The countess bodies. Victims. The sexual war. A graveyard of sex" (p. 237)—his book can also be read as a critique of the homoerotic narcissism that marked the advertising strategies of the following decades. Indeed, the novel forges a link between these critical targets in their mutual fetishization of the "young, young sensual body" (p. 240)—in youth objectified, openly and emphatically (note the verbal repetition), as an erotic substance to be ceaselessly circulated and hedonistically enjoyed. The term youngmen, which Rechy coined in his first novel, City of Night (1963), and has used throughout his career, signifies alluring prepubescent males whose physical beauty is either sexually exploited by predatory others or willfully deployed for purposes of narcissistic pleasure (or both). It is a useful coinage in that it suggests that contemporary popular culture's objectification of youthful masculinity, through the homoerotic lures of slick advertisements, is implicitly linked with the gritty eroticism of a gay underworld, where male physical beauty may be literally purchased. One of the novel's central youngmen, Blue, for example, is a street hustler who has actually transformed his body into a profitable object: he is thus the living embodiment of Marx's image of the seductive commodity, his physical charms calling out to the money in his clients' pockets.

Ultimately, Blue's casual eagerness to 'prostitute himself,' 'slightly surly in the assurance of his desirability' (p. 18), is merely a screen for his own narcissism: "it was other people desiring me—their desire of me, just that, turned me on, like they were mirrors" (p. 172). Blue's status as both subject and object of desire makes him the perfect incarnation of consumer narcissism: a "depraved angel" (p. 5), his beauty the spur to a "terrible insatiability" (p. 158) in himself and others, he has come to take a perverse pleasure in the alienation of his erotic being, in the dead labor of his own sexual energy. Ironically, as if reflecting an impoverishment of agency at the heart of consumer narcissism, this seemingly virile youngman is impotent, the legacy of an abortive encounter with the only person he ever truly loved (other than himself). Scorned by the object of his desire, Blue has withdrawn into a sullen self-absorption, no longer needing physical contact with others but still craving the affirmation that he is himself desired. At the end, his spiritual emptiness exposed during the course of Richard's savage games, he seeks refuge in his reflected image, only to be rebuffed by "the cold, impassive surface" of the glass; as another character comments, "Even the mirror rejects him" (p. 244). Ultimately, Blue is the victim, not of Richard, but of a social system that "lives on the symbolic blood of others" (p. 79), a system defined by a simple exploitative relation: "a body. And eyes staring at it" (p. 133). These eyes, coldly registering an almost abstract lust, define the novel's basic concept of vampirism—the visual ingestion of youthful male beauty: "sorrowful, black-painted eyes devoured the spectacle of the incredibly sexual boy" (p. 9).

To his credit, Rechy does not essentialize this psychic structure but, like Fuss, locates its dead labor of voyeuristic consumption in a technological apparatus—"the leering eye of the camera" (p. 139). Despite the Gothic isolation of its island setting, the novel consistently registers the social presence of communications media—especially marginal genres such as stag loops and art-house cinema. Indeed, Rechy shows the imbrication of these seemingly disparate forms in his subtle allusions to the filmmaking career of Andy Warhol, references focused in the character of Bravo, whose "androgyneous beauty had made him an idolized superstar of underground films" (p. 12). The terms underground and superstar evoke Warhol's notorious Factory, productions of the 1960s, with their gritty vision of decadent banality and their parody of the Hollywood star system; Bravo would fit comfortably indeed into movies such as Chelsea Girls (1966) or Lonesome Cowboys (1967).16

While her name seems to invoke Warholian "superstar" Viva, Bravo's butch S&M aesthetic—she wears knee-high boots and carries a bullwhip—suggests another denizen of the Factory scene, Mary Woronov, whose memoir of her years with Warhol, Swimming Underground, reads like a true-life version of Rechy's novel. Populated by extravagant, narcissistic poses whose social experience consists largely of playing complicated games of seduction and exploitation at the whim of a mysterious impresario, the ineffable Andy, Woronov's book shows that the central metaphor animating Rechy's novel was eerily appropriate:

People were calling us the undead, vampires, me and my little brothers of the night, with our lips pressed against the neck of the city, sucking the energy out of scene after scene. We left each party
behind like a wasted corpse, raped and carelessly tossed aside. . . . Andy was the worst, taking on five and six parties a night. He even looked like a vampire: white, empty, waiting to be filled, incapable of satisfaction. He was the white worm—always hungry, always cold, never still, always twisting. His favorite lair was still the balcony of the Dom [a dance club], and my favorite place was right next to him, watching the sea of swirling bodies flop about below us like fish in a net. Suspended from our cave ceiling, Andy and I hung like bats, often mesmerized by the same dancer. That night we were watching a blond girl.\textsuperscript{17}

Woronov’s evocation of Warhol and herself as blasé voyeurs waiting to drop like vampire leeches onto beautiful young strangers dovetails with Rechy’s portrait of Richard and his guest as “bored people involved in jaded games,” striving hopelessly to sate the “horrible emptiness” within them.\textsuperscript{18}

Woronov’s metaphor has recently been taken up by British author Kim Newman in his novella \textit{Andy Warhol’s Dracula} (1999), in which the eponymous artist appears as a literal vampire.\textsuperscript{19} With his “pale, almost-albino face, simultaneously babyish and ancient,” his “goggle-like dark glasses, hypnotic black holes where eyes should be,” and “the slavic monotone of his whispery voice,” Warhol seems to possess all the “attributes of a classical vampire” (pp. 13–14). More significantly, his artistic work of the 1960s and 1970s, especially his underground films, are “steeped in the atmosphere of vampirism,” with their visual torpor and zombified performances (p. 19). Echoing Fuss and Rechy, Newman asserts that, for Warhol, “the film camera, like the silkscreen or the polaroid, was a vampire machine, a process for turning life into frozen death, perfect and reproducible” (p. 34). In this context, the fact that Warhol called his studio a “Factory” suggests the continuing relevance of Marx’s analysis of undead labor for analyzing (sub)cultural consumption.

In Newman’s rampantly intertextual treatment, Warhol’s fusion of high fashion with street culture is figured as a class conflict that specifically links yuppy and slacker vampires: Punkish Rudy Pasko, from Skipp and Spector’s novel, \textit{The Light at the End}, appears as a cutaneous figure akin to Renfield in \textit{Dracula}, while Rice’s stylish Lestat de Lioncourt is an arbiter of Parisian haute couture; that elegant couple from \textit{The Hunger}, Bowie and Deneuve, put in a brief appearance at a party thrown by Blanca Jagger, while the grungy protagonist of \textit{Poppy Britten’s Lost Souls} offers Warhol a sip from his drug-laced veins. This epochal collision of new-class vampires is figured dialectically: on the one hand, Warhol’s infamous mingling with junkies and hustlers seems to pit him against the snooty rich, whose portraits he cynically churns out in his Factory; on the other hand, his relationship with these lowlife slackers is driven by a vampiric exploitation, as he manipulates and casually disposes of them to serve his own “dreadful glamour” (p. 12). Moreover, the tension between these poles embodies a historical “style war,” a cultural battle between punk and disco—another divide uneasily straddled by the undead Andy. The punks’ nihilistic “slow suicide” seems to justify their deaths at the hands of the vampire elite, whose love for dance floors and glitter balls symbolizes an urge “to live forever, to aspire to an immortality of consumption” (p. 18). Ultimately, “Andy leech off them all, left them drained or transformed, using them without letting them touch him, never distinguishing between the commodities he could only coax from other people: money, love, blood, inspiration, devotion, death” (p. 12). Warhol’s mastery of undead technologies and his proprietorship of a vampiric Factory—not to mention his infamous aspiration to be a “machine”—make him appear the perfect incarnation of the vampire-cyborg, though Newman does not explicitly develop this connection.

In any event, the metaphor shared by Rechy and Woronov—and brilliantly literalized by Newman—is more than a fortuitous coincidence, since Warhol and his Factory were largely responsible for introducing into mainstream culture the iconography of homoerotic narcissism that Rechy deploys and critiques as implicitly vampiric. Warhol’s films and photographs, with their blankly gloating gaze at the bodies of languid, androgynous youth, powerfully fused, under the aegis of an avant-gardist aesthetic, the previously segregated visual rhetorics of gay “physique pictorials” and high-fashion advertising. The result was diffused through American popular culture largely through the agency of \textit{Interview} magazine, which Warhol founded in 1969. By promoting the early work of gay photographers such as Christopher Makos and Robert Mapplethorpe, \textit{Interview} ensured that imagery once available only in plain brown wrappers from obscure studios in New York and Los Angeles could now be found at every major newsstand. As a result of the platform the magazine provided, Bruce Weber has become one of the most sought-after photographers for fashion layouts geared toward youth consumption, including ad campaigns for Calvin Klein and Abercrombie & Fitch that were marked by a strikingly overt homoerotic voyeurism. Weber’s magazine spreads and calendars propel into mainstream youth culture Warhol’s
libidinous iconography of pouty, narcissistic superstars, especially his ogling objectification of masculine beauty in the figure of erstwhile teenage hustler Joe Dallesandro. Indeed, Weber’s work seems designed to pose the same question as did the poster for the 1968 film Flesh (directed by Warhol protégé Paul Morrissey), which featured, under a dreamy photo of Dallesandro, the query, “Can a boy be too pretty?” As if to cement the connection, a middle-aged Dallesandro has recently been featured in a Calvin Klein advertisement.20

Critical concerns about the vampiric implications of this visual regime of homoerotic narcissism exploded into a full-fledged moral panic in 1995, with the release of two Calvin Klein ad campaigns: first, for its unisex fragrance, CK1, and then for its line of designer jeans. Shot by fashion photographer Steven Meisel,21 both were saturation campaigns—run in magazines, on billboards, and on television—that depicted scantily clad youths in sexually suggestive situations. Set in an empty, brightly lit chamber, the CK1 ads featured a group of slender, androgynous teens slouching and grappling with an air of erotic insouciance compounded with perilous boredom, thus evoking the listless, amorphous carnality of Warhol’s Factory productions. The viewer is voyeuristically invited to contemplate this idly shifting sea of pubescent flesh, the free-floating fantasy scenario reinforced by the utter decontextualization of the ads’ stark white environment (fig. 6).22

By contrast, the jeans campaign reinscribed a social backdrop for the consumer’s appropriative gaze, and it was precisely this recontextualization that led to an eruption of moral outrage at the ads’ representation of youthful eroticism. Essentially, the ads evoked the drab aesthetics of amateur or low-budget pornography with an explicitness that was really quite astonishing. Bob Garfield, in an article in Advertising Age magazine, summarizes one of the television spots:

“You have a lovely body,” says an unseen, middle-aged interviewer from the back of a makeshift, rumpus room set. The background is cheap w德尔wood paneling, the only prop a step-ladder on a soiled carpet. The subject is a long-haired teen-age boy in a pair of black CK jeans and a black vest, but no shirt.

“Mmm hmm,” the boy agrees.

“Do you like your body?” the older man asks.

“Yeah, I like it.”

“Mmm hmm... Well,” the interviewer says, leeringly, “those jeans look reeeeaal good on you.”

Figure 6. The visual regime of homoeroticism narcissism. Image from Calvin Klein’s CK1 ad campaign.

The effect, says Garfield, is of viewing “chickenhawk porn”: “It is one thing to toy with the nation’s libido, as Calvin Klein has been doing for the better part of two decades,” he pronounces. “But to portray children as sex toys parading before adults is the line that cannot be crossed.”23

The campaign’s evocation of a shabby teen-porn underworld rather
predictably provoked widespread furor. Moral watchdogs such as the Reverend Donald Wildmon, head of the American Family Association, blasted the ads as nothing short of child pornography; the FBI and the Justice Department conducted investigations into their potential illegality; and TV talk shows debated the question, “Did Calvin Klein Go Too Far?” Commentators as diverse as President Bill Clinton and Camille Paglia deplored the ads as tasteless, offensive trash, at times calling to mind the extravagant critical attacks mounted against early Warhol films. Stung by the criticism, the corporation decided to pull the campaign, though it attempted to defend itself by arguing that the ads merely displayed the glamour of young people in everyday situations—a defense of which Warhol himself would likely have been proud.14

In effect, the campaign and the controversy surrounding it amounted to a return of the Warholian repressed (fig. 7)—to a shocked public perception of the origins of contemporary advertising’s homoerotic narcissism in the underground film tradition of the 1960s and the teenage-beefcake posing loops upon which it drew. The critics’ exaggerated horror at the imagined sexual predation of children served as a way to deflect the more difficult acknowledgment of the viewer’s voyeuristic complicity in the “queer” subcultural scenario, as a disavowal that such scenarios had historically helped to constitute the libidinal economy of mainstream marketing culture. As Garfield’s comments indicate, the fact that Calvin Klein and other vendors of commodities might “toy with the nation’s libido” is not in itself a problem; this, after all, is their job, since sex is the very medium of buying and selling. This ad “crosses the line” not because it communicates a longing for youth that conflates a narcissistic fantasy of identification (“I like it [my body]”) with a homoerotic fantasy of possession (“those jeans look reeeally good on you”), since this is howsecond-wave advertising aimed at the new bourgeoisie essentially functions. Rather, it crosses the line because it dispels the crucial “heterosexual cover” that inoculates straight consumers against the more ambiguous seductions of commodity culture.

As Mark Simpson argues, ads that bank on the consumer’s homoerotic narcissism also work to repress their necessary dependence upon specifically homosexual desire: “the signification of heterosexuality” in homoerotic ads “is used to draw a veil over the queer reading while exploiting it at the same time.” Yet, as Fuss points out, “in order to eradicate or evaporate the homoerotic desire, the visual field must first produce it, thereby permitting, in socially regulated form, the articulation of lesbian desire within the identifiability move [of narcissism] itself.” There is thus an implicit “homosexualization of the viewing position” generated by this advertising system, which is what makes the Calvin Klein jeans campaign at once so compelling and so disturbing for the culture at large: this campaign essentially mets that system and those who eagerly consume its playful pleasures.

It is in the development of this theme that cultural critics have tended to mobilize the more affirmative metaphors of consumer vampirism, arguing for the potentially progressive effects of homoerotic advertising. While decrying the commodification of “lesbian masquerade as legitimate high-style fashion” because it works to depoliticize lesbianism into a mere lifestyle option, Danac Clark also claims that the dissemination of queer codes throughout commodity culture increases the agency of lesbian consumers, permitting them to reappropriate these codes “in combination with other products/fashions to act as new signifiers for lesbian identification or ironic commentaries on heterosexual culture.” A more subversively deconstructive agenda has been advanced by the group Queer Nation, which claims that the implicit homosexualization of contemporary consumer culture undermines the very ground of sexual difference itself. Thus, this group’s cultural-political practice has sought to refashion capitalist texts, objects, and spaces in order to

Figure 7. The return of the Warholian repressed. Left, Joe Dallesandro in the poster for Andy Warhol’s Love of Orandles; right, Joel West in Calvin Klein underwear advertisement.
exploit the psychic unboundedness of consumers who depend upon products to articulate, produce, and satisfy their desires. Queer Nation tactically uses the hyper-spaces created by the corporeal trademark, the metropolitan parade, the shopping mall, print media, and finally advertising, to recognize and take advantage of the consumer's pleasure in vicarious identification. In this guise the group commandeers permeable sites, apparently apolitical spaces through which the public circulates in a pleasurable, consensual exchange of bodies, products, identities, and information. Yet it abandons the conciliatory mode... The Queer Nation corporate strategy—to reveal to the consumer desires he/she didn't know he/she had, to make his/her identification with the product "homosexuality" both an unsettling and a pleasurable experience—makes consumer pleasure central to the transformation of public culture, thus linking the utopian promises of the commodity with those of the nation.27

To recur to distinctions elaborated in chapter 1, Queer Nation's strategy activates the metaphors of Dracula's ruthless predation and dictatorial control, but of the Lost Boys' playful aggression and changeable identity. Indeed, we are now in a position to appreciate the simmering homoeroticism of the latter film, the seductive appeal of whose eponymous adolescents, with their slick leather outfits and pouty sensuality, need not be restricted by gender. When David breathlessly means for Michael to "join us," the solicitation clearly has an erotic edge.28 The Lost Boys' militant inversion of the Santa Carla boardwalk may even be seen to converge with Queer Nation's "mall visibility actions," which aggressively "disrupt the antiseptic sexual surface of the malls, exposing them as sites of any number of explicitly sexualized exchanges" with persons and/or commodities. The Lost Boys, like the "Queer Shopping Network," understand "the most basic of advertising strategies: sex sells. In this case, though, sex sells not substitutions for bodily pleasures—a car, a luxury scarf—but the capacity of the body itself to experience unofficial pleasures."29

Of course, to elicit this interpretation of The Lost Boys requires something of an interventionist reading, since that movie, like its antecedents in Victorian fiction, ultimately provides a heterosexual resolution of the homoerotic "threat" of vampirism. Like the working-class vampire text it essentially is, the film cannot escape fully the power of the family to structure and command desire, though it stages the necessary decision between vampiric freedom and familial bonds perhaps more starkly than any other single work (a pointed contrast for teenagers viewing the film at mall multiplexes, surrounded by the manifold seductions of consumer culture). A film that better illuminates the dual metaphors of consumer vampirism as they apply to the latent homoeroticism of commodity culture is Tony Scott's The Hunger, which effectively captures both sides of the metaphorical dialectic, showing how narcissistic objectification and utopian eroticism function together within the libidinal economy of the yuppie vampire text. These contrasting possibilities are evoked by the ambiguity of the title itself, since to hunger suggests both self-centered rapacity and aspirant longing—a wish to devour or to dream. In either case, the animating focus of the desire is youth, conceived at once as a consuming subject and a consumable object.

The Consuming Hunger of Ziggy Stardust
The Hunger's opening scene is eerily reminiscent of Woronov's evocation of Warhol and herself at the Dom: a pair of vampiric voyeurs—here, John and Miriam Blaylock—lurk in the shadowy balcony above a disco's dance floor (fig. 8), casually cruising for their latest victims, a punkish young couple clad in leather. Repairing to the couple's apartment, their dreamy seduction soon becomes brutal predation: following a brief bit of foreplay, John and Miriam slit the youths' throats and feast on their blood. The sequence is photographed and edited very much like a music video (at that time a relatively new form; first-time filmmaker Scott had in fact previously directed music videos as well as television commercials, and he brought this background to the visual organization of The Hunger): Goth-rock band Bauhaus croons "Bela Lugosi's Dead" as smoke swirls sinuously around pale faces framed in chic sunglasses; languid slow motion gives way to rapid-fire cuts as fragmented body parts—lips, breasts, thighs—loom into the light; finally, a breathless collage of violent imagery, including shots of a caged monkey cannibalizing its companion, culminates the scene. Conveying narrative detail in a stylish and highly compressed form, this opening sequence briskly sketches the basic character and lifestyle of the Blaylocks—their air of self-absorption, their ultrasmart look, the feral cravings burning beneath their sleek exteriors. In the words of one critic, it was "as though MTV and Vogue magazine had conspired to remake Dracula as soft core porn."30 Suddenly, the swanky-pop aesthetic of Warhol's Interview—the trend-setting fashion layouts, the (homo)erotic frankness, the images of glamorous (super)stars identifiable by single names (Bowie, Deneuve)—had achieved filmic expression.

This aesthetic encodes a class-based fantasy, capturing the idealized
self-image of the new bourgeoisie—and, indeed, it has proven quite easy for critics to attack the film on these grounds. Nina Auerbach, for example, has argued that The Hunger’s vision of vampirism incarnates “the competitive business ethos that reigned over America in the 1980s,” the era of Reaganite selfishness: its vampires are defined “not [by] their powers, but [by] their assets”—“jewelry, furniture, lavish houses in glamorous cities, leather clothes.” Yet the film represents not a cynical embrace of this consumerist ethos but rather a satiric take on the ideology of youthful narcissism that underpins it. It is certain true that the Blaylocks live in yuppie splendor, in a four-story townhouse in Manhattan crammed with priceless objets d’art, the gathered plunder of centuries. Yet neither their wealth nor even their undead can protect them from temporal decline—from the ravages of age that make a mockery of their pretense to leisurely immortality. Specifically, they cannot protect John; Miriam seems, by contrast, relatively immune to physical decay, though her many lovers have, one by one over millennia stretching back to ancient Egypt, abruptly succumbed—after a few centuries of well-preserved youth—to an accelerated aging process that withers them horribly within hours.

The basic plot of the film involves John’s baffled, angry reactions to this rapid onset of senescence; his and Miriam’s separate efforts to gain the aid of a scientific expert on aging, Sarah Roberts; and Miriam’s eventual decision to replace John as her lover with Sarah, whom she playfully courts and seduces (after consigning a superannuated but still-living John to a shackled coffin in the attic). In the story, then, Miriam is the central figure: the one who truly enjoys an eternity of youth and who generously promises this boon to others. But her promise, it turns out, is a lie, as John discovers when his hair begins falling out, his skin sag-
glamour, trendiness, eroticism, and appeal to '80s youth-cultism.' Thus, just as with The Lost Boys, The Hunger seems curiously divided in its purposes, seeking to arraign the manipulative mendacity of consumer youth culture while at the same time playfully flaunting its own complicity in this system. Yet this seeming contradiction deserves to be read dialectically: while the movie bitterly deplores the insincerity of consumerist promises, it also acknowledges the deep-seated longings they authentically express. Obviously, the guarantee of a literal eternity of youth is a brazen lie, yet the aspirations to leisurely freedom and a quickening intensity of pleasure that the phrase "forever young" encodes comprise the hidden utopian truth of consumption, a desirous hunger that the film affirms even as it rebukes the darker cravings to which, under capitalism, it is necessarily joined.

This dialectical complexity is evidenced most clearly in the scenes involving Miriam's seduction of Sarah (fig. 9). The first of these is unquestionably one of the most dreamily homoerotic in contemporary popular film, as the two women embrace and couple to the soaring coloratura of the "Flower Duet" from Léo Delibes's opera, Lakmé. In fact, the song is important not only for the lyrical atmosphere it provides but also for its narrative content, as the following exchange reveals:

SARAH: What's that piece you're playing?
MIRIAM: It's Lakmé by Delibes. Lakmé is a Brahmin princess in India. She has a slave named Mallika. In a magical garden they sing how they followed the stream to its source, gliding over the water.
SARAH: Is it a love song?
MIRIAM: I told you. It was sung by two women.
SARAH: It sounds like a love song.
MIRIAM: Then I suppose that's what it is.
SARAH: Are you making a pass at me, Mrs. Blaylock?
MIRIAM: Miriam.
SARAH: Miriam.
MIRIAM: Not that I'm aware of, Sarah.

The music, played for purposes of seduction (despite Miriam's coy demurrals), affirms an idyllic, almost timeless homoerotic bond—a bond whose utopian dimensions are suggested by Miriam's glowing imagery: united in a "magical garden," their movements together as sinuously sweet as if they were "gliding," the two women share an indelible primal experience—"they followed the stream to its source." This "stream" is vivified in the ecstatic fluid exchange that takes place during their love-making as Miriam first drinks from Sarah's veins, then nurtures Sarah with her own deathless blood. The scene thus culminates in a powerfully utopian image of consumption, one that is vampiric and yet reciprocal—in other words, not a unilateral exploitation, but a mutual liberality that is transfiguring and joyous.

As this scene and those that follow it make clear, the casting of Catherine Deneuve is as important as that of Bowie to the film's figuration of consumer eroticism. Deneuve, an icon of glamour and sexual ambiguity whose commercial appeal at the time was enormous (she has marketed, most famously in this country, Chanel perfume and Oil of Olay), infects a young consumer with her vampirically homoerotic allure, causing a transformation that is experienced as liberating by its "victim" and as subversively threatening by members of the "straight" world. This heterosexual anxiety is evidenced in the following scene, set in the restaurant of an athletic club, in which Sarah's boyfriend, Tom, suspicious about her three-hour "conversation" with Miriam, demands to know "what the hell's wrong with [her]" and suggests that she see a doctor. Meanwhile, Sarah is covertly ogling a pair of mobile female swimmers in the indoor pool below their window, clearly harking back to her rapturously "fluid" experience with Miriam. When Tom goes on to express shock that Miriam has given Sarah, whom she only just met, an expensive present (a golden pendant that, as Miriam explains, symbolizes eternal life), Sarah could be describing Deneuve herself as much as Miriam when she responds, "That's the kind of woman she is. She's European." As Nicola Nixon argues, not only Deneuve and Bowie but the entire film
seem to exude a “potentially transgressive homoeroticism” that communicates to its viewers “the genuine allure of immortality and eternal youth.”

The critical problem—one of which the film seems quite aware—is that this utopian appeal is entirely confounded with a pernicious class logic. Miriam's sexual courtship of Sarah is also a class seduction, a conflation of libidinal and political economies. Impressed by the luxurious appointments of the townhouse (“You have so many beautiful things”), Sarah indulges a museful fantasy of Miriam’s lifestyle: “Lunches and dinners and cocktail parties at the Museum of Modern Art.” For her part, Miriam is more than happy to play upscale tour guide (“That's Florentine. Five hundred years old”), confidently affirming a self-centered world of privatized consumption (“You would consider me mostly idle, I'm afraid. My time is my own”). The class allegory here is identical to that in Rice's Interview: in Bourdieu's terms, the new bourgeoisie eagerly mimics, though always with a vague sense of parodic inadequacy, the sumptuary tastes of an imaginary aristocracy. “I don't like sherry,” says Sarah, feeling self-consciously gauche; “I think you'll like this one,” Miriam silkily replies. In this context, the homoeroticism into which Miriam initiates Sarah may be seen as merely another high-class “taste,” a recusant privilege of uppified leisure.

This connection is cleverly established by the various economic/erotic connotations sparked off by the sherry itself. First, Sarah spills some of the liquid onto her blouse, leaving a small stain, which leads directly to her disrobing by Miriam and their dreamy sex play; the sherry is thus a foretokening of the “fluid” sexuality—and the blood—they will soon share. Then, in the following scene with Tom, Sarah orders a glass of sherry at the restaurant—obviously in gloating memory of her liaison with Miriam—and when reminded that she doesn't like the drink, responds with a secretive smile, “I know”—thus affirming that her “tastes” have now been radically transformed. Finally, after her first vampiric feeding (on, alas, poor hapless Tom), Sarah slinks coyly into Miriam's presence, a lusty leer on her face and an even larger red stain—this time of blood—on her blouse, thereby suggesting her accession to the exalted (vampiric) gentry who view humans as mere prey. These “fluid” linkages forge a signifying chain that connects homoerotic desire, a yuppie lifestyle, and the violent assertion of categorical superiority, thus potentially defanging (as it were) the liberatory subversiveness of the film's figuration of alternative sexuality by conflating it with an invidious class privilege.

This reading gains support from the fact that the lesbian bond between Sarah and Miriam abruptly shades into a fierce competitive struggle, in which Miriam asserts her ownership of Sarah (“You belong to me”)—an unequal power relation that was always implicit in the “love song” of the princess Lakmé and her slave Mallika—while Sarah disgustedly condemns Miriam's deviant allure (“You're crazy”). The struggle between the two women culminates when Sarah, realizing she can never escape from Miriam's erotic/predatory clutches, plunges a blade into her own throat in an attempt to take her undead life, thus rejecting the consumerist bounty—and perhaps, by implication, the homoerotic experience—that Miriam has offered her.

Yet here the film does something rather strange—something that has persistently baffled its critics. In a significant change from the ending of Whitley Strieber's novel, wherein Miriam simply entombs Sarah with her other moribund lovers and moves on with her glamorous life, the film has Miriam, as a result of Sarah's violent rejection, finally getting her comeuppance. In a scene shot, once again, like a music video (filled with slow-motion images of blowing lace curtains and doves flying), Miriam finds herself besieged by the decomposing horde of her abandoned former lovers, whose assault somehow precipitates in her the same fate they themselves had suffered: within mere minutes, Miriam's miraculously preserved youth and beauty crumble away into the gruesome semblance of a shrieking skeleton. In an elliptically brief coda, set sometime in the future, we see Sarah, magically restored to undead life, standing on the balcony of a chic high-rise apartment, flanked by (one presumes) two of her own vampire lovers—a teenage boy and girl.

Other than permitting the familiar genre ending in which the vampire-villain crumbles spectacularly into dust, the film's concluding sequence really makes little sense in terms of a purely narrative logic—hence the consistent critical opprobrium it has received. But if read in terms of the social allegory I argue for here, The Hunger's mysterious conclusion takes on powerful resonance. Since Sarah is the first ever to refuse the gift of eternal youth, the fact that her action angrily rouses Miriam's castoff lovers suggests what amounts to a consumer revolt, an uprising against the alluring but disillusioning promises of consumption. In the face of this popular rebellion, the consumer system cannot sustain the narcissistic ideology that governs it, and Miriam withers away. Her power, in short, is entirely dependent upon—indeed, ultimately derives from—the self-objectifying (un)dead labor of the mass of consumers she seduces and betrays; when they refuse to be her slaves—when they reject the preening narcissism of consuming youth—she ceases to be their master. But the genuine boon of consumption—of desire perpetually
refreshed and satisfied—does not die with her, but rather survives in the community of lovers Sarah initiates, a community that clearly retains the homoerotic possibilities Miriam had evoked (Sarah kisses her female lover at the end). Moreover, it is possible that this new sexual-political order has moved beyond the sterile narcissism of Miriam’s regime of consumption; certainly, in its triadic (and perhaps expansive) structure, it has transcended the narrow model of the yuppy couple that Miriam had sustained through the centuries. What this reading suggests is that it is possible to imagine a situation in which the utopian (homo)eroticism of contemporary consumer culture might potentially be de-linked from the narcissistic objectification and predatory exploitation that currently limits and constrains it, yoking its liberatory sexual promise to a pernicious class logic.

But this reading is, alas, too utopian, since the film in fact cannily hedges its bets. In the first place, the system Miriam represents has not been entirely superseded, since Sarah keeps the woman’s undead body chained in a coffin in her own attic. And Sarah’s vampire lifestyle, too, in many ways seems to mirror Miriam’s own: most obviously, her apartment is lushly appointed, and we can infer that she has at last acceded to the new bourgeois privilege she had previously envied. Perhaps she has done no more than replace Miriam in an ongoing cycle of cynical exploitation. This, indeed, is Auerbach’s reading: Sarah’s “distinctive style, her rhythm, her decor, all have turned into Miriam’s,” though in Reagan’s competitive America, there can be “room for only one at the top.”

Yet I think what makes the movie—and not just its oddly ambiguous finale—so potent is that, like The Last Boy, it brilliantly encapsulates both the positive and negative metaphors of consumer vampirism, showing that the mobilization of utopian desires within consumer culture is deeply confounded with (psychological and social) structures of exploitation. This dialectical imbrication is embodied in one of the film’s central images: the ankub. Worn as a pendant bestowed by Miriam on each of her successive lovers, the ancient Egyptian symbol represents eternal life; yet it is also a dire weapon, sheathing a blade that is used by the vampires to slash the throats of their prey. Focused in this ambivalent image, the historical project of consuming youth might seem merely an arrested dialectic, a simple conflation of progressive and dystopian possibilities, yet the vampire texts that have subsequently built upon The Hunger have pressed forward its dual metaphors of consumer vampirism—especially as they relate to a vein of popular homoeroticism—in rich and challenging ways.

But before discussing these successor texts, I would like to briefly consider another important connection between The Hunger and contemporary youth culture. If (as I argued in chapter 2) Rice’s Interview with the Vampire had tended to obscure the technological bases of youth consumption, then The Hunger, largely through its shrewd casting, introduced into the yuppy vampire tradition a focus on the consumer apparatuses that incite and mobilize youthful desire. The participation of Bowie in particular was crucial in establishing this connection, since his presence—along with the film’s imagery and style of editing—evoked the instrumentality of music video, a form then in its infancy. Moreover, Bowie’s own career provided an extratextual backdrop that undoubtedly fed into The Hunger’s popular reception. By the time of the film’s release, the performer had undergone a series of spectacular (and quite calculated) alterations in his public persona, radical makeovers that seemed to symbolize the protean wiles of the youth fashion industry itself. Indeed, everything about Bowie, from his sexuality to his appearance, was slippery and changeable, such that to consume the musical and filmic commodities generated by this ceaselessly shape-shifting performer was, in some measure, to consume youth itself as deviant, androgynous, mutable substance.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Bowie’s evolving incarnations came to feature mutant tricksters, otherworldly beings like the alien Ziggy Stardust, who in the early 1970s stood as an emblem of provocative, willful self-fashioning. This flamboyant role fused “queer” ambiguity (Bowie came out as gay to the music press at this time) with glamorous self-adornment, thus consolidating within the sphere of youth musical culture the paradigm of homoerotic narcissism soon to emerge in the arena of popular advertising. The gender-bending, fashion-conscious “glitter rock” pioneered by Bowie (and other artists of the period such as Marc Bolan and Iggy Pop) was, as Van Cleave has pointed out, basically a refinement of Warhol’s campy superstar aesthetic, a “conversion of Warholian/Factory premises for a mass audience.” Bowie himself, in his ongoing masque of sleck, stylish postures, seemed to embody not only a polymorphous sexuality but a capricious fluidity of identity; according to Iain Chambers, Bowie essentially vivified “the continual sign production of the mass media,” that kaleidoscope of possibilities “coming out of the radio, the record grooves, the headphones; off the adverts, the television screen.”

This conflation of Bowie’s crafty role-playing with the technical apparatuses of the mass media was pithily captured in Nicolas Roeg’s film The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976). In this work of science fiction,
living in a film... It annoyed me that the media had suddenly managed to penetrate people's lives so much that you couldn't escape from someone a million miles away, someone totally remote... You know they're miles away, in a studio somewhere in London—but they get inside you. It's kind of a claustrophobic feeling where everything's brought together by the media... It was like I was living in the most advanced film there ever was. (pp. 74–75)

Jason's story employs a complex rhetoric of intimacy and distance, objectification and interiority to express how personal experience and media images have become confusingly entwined. Though he knows that Bowie is just a person "in a studio somewhere in London," he finds himself unable (like Renfield in Dracula) to shake "a kind of godlike fear" of Bowie's seeming omnipresence, a fear focused in a photographic image of him "calmingly observing everything that's going on" (pp. 74–75). Nor can he suppress an unquenchable desire for this image, for its serenity and power. Jason's life is dominated by Bowie, who is at once a palpable presence and "these crazy images rushing past," "bizarre imaginings" (ibid.).

Of course, these confessional musings can be easily dismissed as evidence of paranoid schizophrenia, which they likely are; yet Jason's vision of a consciousness invaded, colonized, and occupied by media imagery neatly dovetails with the draconian critiques of popular youth culture canvassed in chapter 1. One could easily imagine critics such as Stuart Ewen or W. F. Haug denouncing Jason's fixation on Bowie in the very terms the young man himself deploys: as an insidious form of psychic violence—"horrible really when you think about it" (p. 75)—effected by image technologies. Moreover, like those critics, Jason conflates vampiric and cybernetic metaphors to describe the operations of this system, evoking the dead labor of social consumption as an alienated power embodied in media apparatuses: "I... had a sort of feeling that the world was run by zombies and everyone was trying to find a way through... the power of the medium he was involved in, all that technology and everything... That's why I don't have a telly at the moment, I'm totally sick of it all. I'm looking for some real people" (ibid.).

Yet this principled rejection of Bowie's vampiric image—a rejection that extends (as with Grandpa in The Lost Boys) to a Luddite refusal of the technological regime of consumption itself—is consistently undermined by the seductive fascination of the image world obvious throughout Jason's story. Again and again, "real people"—those touchstones of
authentic connection Jason claims to seek—emerge as banal, merely human, beside the divine Bowie, a "super-being" equipped with an "extra magic" that others can "somehow never manage to emulate" (pp. 75–76). Bowie's beckoning presence seems designed to incite "some fantastic trip in my life. . . . I like going from one life form to another" (p. 76). As music critic Jon Savage has observed, Bowie seemed to many of his young fans the very "promise, the premise of pop and teen fashion," offering the radical possibility of "self-re-creation": "overnight, you can be transformed into something superhuman." While Jason finally rejects the lure of this transformation, its promise still retains a tantalizing power. "I think if I saw him in the street now I don't know how I'd cope," he concludes.44

Just like the youth-culture critics, Jason's problem is that his blanket condemnation of consumption makes no distinction between its capacity for exploitation and its genuine utopian appeal. As a result, the latter continues to haunt Jason's critique in the form of a febrile yearning, a liberating potential Bowie's image seems to express even as it perniciously dominates the young man's consciousness. In short, an implicit logic of cyborgization—of technologically mediated empowerment and transmutation—is confusingly entangled, in Jason's confession, with an anguish of resistance to vampiric predation and control. This same confusion marks the outpourings of another Bowie fan, Marnie, though her remarks are closer than Jason's to an endorsement of cybernetic transformation. Like Jason, Marnie desires Bowie with an almost apocalyptic force; moreover, her desire is explicitly sexual in nature, as her hallucinatory record of a dream experience testifies. Unconsciously evoking the more affirmative metaphysics of consumer vampirism, Marnie's story mixes desire with terror, gentle fantasy with cannibalistic horror; her flesh feeds Bowie, who returns the bounty in a eucharistic offering, leaving both imaginably transformed: "He swooped me up in his arms and licked open a door and we were on a beautiful tropical beach. He took me to a waterfall and we made love. . . . And then something unexpected happened. . . . [He] scratched off my breasts with his nails and ate them, and then I saw them just grow again. . . . Afterwords he tried to coax me into eating different parts of him saying how it was going to make us so much stronger than we were now" (p. 88).

While her tone is wary and ambivalent, Marnie's rhetoric eschews metaphors of invasion and colonization in favor of images of incorporation and metamorphosis. Unlike Jason's tale, which ultimately devolves into a cautionary fable of the evils of image worship and the need for genuine human connection, Marnie's story bespeaks a libidinal investment in consumption that cannot be quelled, however painful the personal cost. For Marnie, it is not quite so easy to resist the media technology. "I was trying to turn the telly off and he [Bowie] had the remote control in his hands and when I tried to get it away from him he had it in his other hand" (p. 89). While clearly recognizing the ravenous vampirism of the system ("He can do anything and get away with it and I can't stop him" [p. 90]), Marnie embraces it nonetheless, seeking the rejuvenating energies it provides even as it preys upon her. At one point in her dream Marnie herself sprouts "vampire teeth," with which she keeps "prying his arm from his head" (p. 89): in essence, her youthful consumption involves a consumption of youthful, of Bowie's transfiguring power. Yet this power, though objectified in Bowie, emanates, finally, from the depths of the consuming subject herself. "I was having a baby and they were telling me to push and this sort of light came out of my vagina and it was Bowie" (ibid.).

The complicated dream exchange between Marnie and Bowie seems to activate a potential for transcendence in the system, a dialectical capacity to move beyond unilateral exploitation, thereby making both the consumer and the apparatus of consumption "so much stronger" than they currently are. And yet this beyond is never fully attained; it "coaxes," but remains always madly out of reach: "If you try to get through to him he won't let you," she complains (p. 90). Although Marnie's dream in the end cannot liberate the cyborg trapped within the vampire, it does seem to grasp, in fact quite poignantly, the simpering contradiction between them that marks the contemporary process of consumption. And it is Bowie himself—as icon, as commodity, as object of fantasy and desire—who represents this contradiction in all its baffling complexity. As Marnie observes, "It was like he had a split personality" (p. 88).

TWO QUEER NATIONS

Bowie's appearance in The Hunger not only marked a crucial stage in the evolution of the youth-consumer vampire, implicitly registering the convergence of this figure with a cybernetic logic; it also exerted a profound influence on subsequent vampire texts. Indeed, Bowie seemed the perfect model of an aristocratically decadent yuppy vampire, with his "golden blaze of lissome gesture, seraphic facial expression, satin hair;" the "entrancing rhythm" of his movements, his "lithe androgynous beauty"—rapturous descriptions that derive not from the fevered musings gathered in Starbox, but from an essay that appeared in the November 1983 issue of Vogue magazine. Entitled "David Bowie and the End of Gender," it was written by Anne Rice.45 In this virtual love let-
ter to the performer, Rice extravagantly praises Bowie's alluring androgyne—"his elegant and feline guises," the alchemy of his subtle strength and yielding beauty—which seems to hold out to contemporary youth the possibility of gender transformation, a welcome message, since for young people "change isn't so much frightening as essential."

It was shortly after producing this article that Rice began to write The Vampire Lestat, whose eponymous protagonist is a notoriously androgynous rock star, so it is hardly a stretch to presume a connection. In fact, it is very likely that Bowie's appearance in The Hunger was responsible for spawning a boom in the curious subgenre of the rock-and-roll vampire story, whose other entries include S. P. Somtow's Vampire's Vacation (1984), Nancy A. Collins's Tempter (1990), and Poppy Z. Brite's Lost Souls (1992), as well as the films Vamp (1986) and Rockula (1990). Interestingly, this subgenre has cut across the yuppie-slacker dialectic in provocative ways—a subject I will explore below.

Collectively, these texts played subversively on the long history of adult criticism of rock music as promoting licentious sexuality and rampant gender-bending among its youthful consumers, a critique that came to focus specifically, during the early 1980s, on the medium of rock videos. The Music Television (MTV) cable network debuted to an enthusiastic youthful reception in 1981 and had soon come to warehouse the entire spectrum of youth consumption, hawking not only albums but also hygiene products, comestibles, sports equipment, and forms of fashion—including fashionable identities. Indeed, by the mid-1980s, MTV seemed to represent consumerism in its most full-blown form, a point remarked by E. Ann Kaplan, author of the first critical book on the network: "MTV, more than any other television, may be said to be about consumption. It evokes a kind of hypnotic trance in which the spectator is suspended in a state of unsatisfied desire but forever under the illusion of imminent satisfaction through some kind of purchase."

Unsurprisingly, this seductive appeal drew the wary attention of social conservatives: as the Calvin Center study Dancing in the Dark rather delicately put it, because "MTV captures the interest and reflects and shapes the sensibilities of youth ... the channel merits serious adult concern." This concern was evidenced in an outpouring of conservative diatribes against the cynical allure of music videos, stern scoldings for misspent leisure that generally activated the "negative" metaphors of consumer vampirism in which adolescent spectators were depicted as spellbound victims of an evil Pied Piper—the swarming mallrats of the video arcades now transformed into privatized televsional consumers. Indeed, anxiety over the fact that the wanton imagery of the youth-

consumer system had managed to infiltrate the sanctum of the home provided this critique with much of its apoplectic edge. Critics were essentially decrying what amounted to the accomplishment of Max's vampiric plan in The Lost Boys—the invasion of the family dwelling by an apparatus of consumption that promised in youth an insubordinate sense of consumerist autonomy and gave rise to fantasies of an alternative community.

Of course, there was nothing new about a self-righteous campaign against the insidious influence of rock music—these have dogged the form since the lascivious keenings of Little Richard first reverberated through suburban teenage bedrooms in the 1950s—but the conjoining, in the 1980s, of lyrical content with video image under the aegis of a sleek and sophisticated commercialism seemed to up the ante of parental hysteria. The basic point at issue had already been prefigured by Bowie himself in 1972, when he proudly claimed that contemporary rock culture was forging "a new kind of person... a child who will be so exposed to the media that he will be lost to his parents by the time he is 12." When a gauntlet like this has been so boldly thrown down, it is hardly surprising that parents would eventually take it up; and, in 1985, two well-placed parents—Tipper Gore and Susan Baker (wife of then-Treasury Secretary James Baker)—founded the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) to combat the vile seductions of "shock rock," including especially its manifestations on MTV. Gore's book Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society (1987) alternated alarmist rhetoric about the unchecked proliferation of sexually explicit and violent imagery in contemporary youth culture with firm guidelines for adult supervision of young people's leisure and consumption. The latter included mininuclei on how to control one's TV set and VCR—as if these beacons, in a scenario worthy of the film Poltergeist (1982), had unleashed wild supernatural forces into family living rooms and now required the sober ministrations of an exorcist.

This metaphor is hardly an exaggeration, since when it came specifically to heavy-metal music and videos, Gore herself invoked Satan as the seducer of youth—a thesis that was meticulously (not to say fanatically) pursued by Carl Raschke, a tabloid "expert" on "cults," in his book Painted Black (1990). According to Raschke, occult forces, their "social effect or influence... amplified through the television component of rock video, particularly the kind that is run regularly on MTV," had put an entire generation of teens at risk of satanic contamination. Representing a "new morbidity" (p. 165) that mixed "pubescent hormones with... [images of] suicide, whippings, bondage, bisexuality, nihilism,
black magic, vampirism, werewolves, cannibalism, disembowelment," and so on (p. 168), heavy-metal music and videos were "cementing a neural bond with all stripes of alienated adolescence" (p. 166) and thus threatening the legitimacy of parental control—even with "paricide itself" (p. 168)." Raschke's indictment of the resultant "Dionysian frenzy" (p. 173) indiscriminately conflated violent acts, sexual "deviance," and supernaturalism in a millenarian scenario of youth's spectacular degeneracy. Similar attacks had been launched against Bowie's glitter rock in the 1970s, and they would be trotted out again in the 1990s to indict "Goth" musical culture; but it was in the 1980s that the criticisms focused centrally on MTV's role as demonic impresario.

Perhaps the most visible (if not risible) of these critiques appears in Allan Bloom's best-selling screed The Closing of the American Mind (1988). According to Bloom, the phosphor-dot swarm of music video is "a muddy stream where only monsters can swim. A glance at the videos that project images on the wall of Plato's cave since MTV took it over suffices to prove this." Bemoaning the decay of civilized values—especially of wholesomely sublimated sexuality—in the licentious excesses of rock music culture, Bloom evokes an apocalyptic vision of cultural decadence that localizes Raschke's sprawling arraignment of Satanic evil in a single mundane image:

Picture a thirteen-year-old boy sitting in the living room of his family home...watching MTV. He...is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy ever known to mankind; science has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvelous, lifelike electronic sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. And in what does progress culminate? A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in [sic] imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy."

To his credit, Bloom attempts to distinguish here between the technical apparatus of consumption, evidence of historical progress, and the vampiric seductions it broadcasts, proof of social regression; but his essential conservatism renders him incapable of resolving this contradiction (which is, in any case, only sketchily formulated). Paraphrasing Fredric Jameson, Bloom's position is one of "right puritanism"; in his view, the problem is youth's rampant hedonism, its deviant and un-monitored pleasure-seeking, to whose ends the technical system has been grossly perverted. Essentially, Bloom gives us a slightly more hysterical version of Daniel Bell's influential argument about the tension in modern capitalism between an ascetic ethos of production (the Promethean agency responsible for "the most productive economy ever known to mankind") and the hedonistic tendencies of consumption (that irresponsible impulse to enjoy "a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy"). Yet despite his narrowness of viewpoint, the figure Bloom asks us to "picture" is indeed a powerful one: the youthful cyborg as homoerotic narcissist, whose "orgasmic rhythms" are provoked and amplified by high technology—in short, Zygy Stardust himself, now comfortably ensconced in every suburban living room.

A similar vision of misspent adolescent libido has been evoked, though in a more laudatory register, in arguments that deploy the "positive" metaphors of consumer vampirism when discussing the effects of MTV on contemporary youth. Predictably enough, John Fiske has spearheaded this critical faction, taking Bloom's basic conceit and reversing its tenor, from censure to celebration. "MTV is orgasm," he rapturously proclaims, "when signifiers explode in pleasure in the body in an excess of the physical. No ideology, no social control can organize an orgasm. Only freedom can." Connecting music videos with other youthful pleasures such as "breakdancing, rock and roll, drugs, surfing, sex, video games," Fiske defends the form for its "radical, potential," its assault on everything bourgeois culture holds dear: aesthetic realism, the rational ego, adult propriety. Though a creation of capitalism just as children are creatures of their parents, MTV is, a rebellious offspring: it is the punkish "safety pin through the nose, the army uniform worn to deny authority.""

Fiske's effusive rhetoric, a delirious mix of poststructuralist jouissance and advertising hype, is shared by many defenders of music television: Brian A. Chang praises MTV as uniquely "capable of transgressing the familial closure and hence leading the parade of chromatic festivals across the surface of the social," while Dan Rubey deploys the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque in depicting MTV as "participatory, open to everyone; it endorses freedom and equality, reversal of social hierarchy; it is oriented to the future, not the past."

These sorts of arguments generally assume that the playful visual spectacle of MTV automatically licenses a subversive identity in its youthful consumers, an impish resistance to authority not unlike the mercurial agency of the Lost Boys. MTV's lush provender of fantasy, its almost carnal pervasion of the adolescent imaginary, promotes a radical, democratic self-
fashioning, a tantalizing diffusion of sexual/social possibility—one for which the hungering erotic ambivalence of the vampire (conceived here as mischievous trickster rather than as scheming despot) functions as an apt metaphor.

This position is valuable in that it resists the monolithically negative critiques of Raschke and Bloom, but unfortunately it goes too far in the opposite direction, failing to recognize the ways in which music video—especially as institutionalized on MTV—serves the interests not of its consumers but of corporate capital. The basic problem, again, is that Fiske and his ilk tend toward an undialectical, either-or logic, assuming that if MTV has some subversive effects then it must be a subversive medium in toto. In fact, of course, MTV is no different from any other institution of consumption (e.g., the shopping mall or the video arcade): while it may disseminate socially progressive possibilities, it remains bound within a system of market relations. These relations ensure that the pursuit of pleasure by youthful consumers takes place under circumstances not of their own making; as a result, the metaphorical "orgasm" experienced in the consumption of music video is, contrary to Fiske, unfree, since it is not only a simple release but also a binding of libidinal energy, a yoking of pleasure to the service of profit. This is not to say that true release does not occur, but merely to circumscribe its force: it is thus entirely possible for youth, via MTV, to enjoy a liberation from the gender (and other) constraints dictated by their parent culture, while at the same time entering ever more deeply into a commercial system that objectifies and recuperates their rebellious desires.

In his discussion of gender imagery in "glam metal" music videos, Robert Walser offers a more balanced perspective than either Bloom or Fiske. Arguing that the activation of feminine codes of self-adornment by male performers and fans has a utopian function, since it trades on a "free play of androgynous fantasy [that] shakes up the underlying categories that structure social experience," Walser stresses that this freedom operates within a commercial regime ever eager to capitalize upon its radical possibilities. Yet despite the fact that "mass culture may colonize existing [gender] tensions and ambiguities for consumer purposes," MTV's dissemination of images of long-haired boys in elaborate makeup reflects "a concern with shifting boundaries of gender and reality that cannot simply be disregarded [sic] as nothing but inauthentic or commodified fantasies."62 This complexity—in which the commodity-form of music video serves as both a springboard for change and a horizon of constraint—is why it is always important to focus on the doubleness of the vampire as a metaphor for youth consumption, since it marks a system that is, inextricably, both exploitative and empowering. In short, the cybernetic enhancements of Ziggy Stardust and the vampiric predations of John Blaylock are two sides of the same youth/culture coin.

Rice's Vampire Lestat, one of the best-selling novels of 1985, reflects this doubleness in its glamorous portrait of rock-star vampire Lestat de Lioncourt. Reprising his role from Interview, Lestat here narrates his own life story, figuring as both a gender-bending pathbreaker in American popular culture and a shameless apostle for post-Fordist capitalism. He is, in brief, an agent of liberation and an exploiter, and the signal achievement of the novel is to show these contradictory roles as necessarily conjoined. This ambivalence is built into Lestat's position as a "Rock Superstar," as an appropriate role for him to adopt, since, as he asserts, there is "something vampiric about rock music": while its plangent "electricity" and "dissolving" harmonies suggest a yearning transformation, it is also deeply "eloquent of dread" (p. 6). The music's duplicitous tone reflects its status as a commodity, in which form it gives earnest voice to youth's inchoate longings and cynically capitalizes upon them. Lestat's genius, like Timmy Valentine's in Vampire Function, is to package himself explicitly as a vampire, though while Timmy seemed uncomfortable with this commercialized posture, Lestat revels in it. "I was always so good at being a monster!" he boasts (p. 18). His unapologetic visibility as a wanna-fan allows him to celebrate his predatory superiority while at the same time metaphorically expressing a subcultural deviance that marks him as implicitly queer. In the process, he at once feeds and feeds upon his youthful fans' desires.

Driven by "a wave of preternatural and remorseless ambition" (p. 12), Lestat decides to tell his life story by means of a chain of interdependent, mutually lucrative commodities. As befits MTV's complexly ramified youth-consumer regime, Lestat's project of self-promotion—"stretching its electronic tentacles" (p. 52)—encompasses not only an autobiography (ostensibly the very text we are reading), but also a series of twelve music videos along with his band's first album and their concert debut at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. The videos themselves—lush stagings of tracks from the album with titles like "The Children of Darkness," "The Grand Sabbath," and "The Dance of Les Innocents"—are, to judge by the foreground story of the novel that they relate in condensed form, onerous reveries mixing historical episodes of mythic quest and romantic adventure with intense sensual bondings between Lestat and other men, human and vampire. In short, they amount to an audiovisual concept album combining the aesthetics of glam metal and glitter rock, a sort of cross between Iron Maiden's Number of the Beast.
(1982) and Bowie’s *Scary Monsters* (1980). The commodity chain in which they figure is dizzyingly self-reflexive, to the point that the book itself—titled *The Vampire Lestat* in the narrative world as well—may be seen as essentially a novelization of the video cycle contained within it. “What is important,” asserts Lestat, the mastermind behind this interlocking profit machine, “is that it be orchestrated”: together, the various products “must create a fame that will carry my name and my voice to the remotest parts of the world” (p. 14).

While this ambition points to Lestat’s self-aggrandizing narcissism, with the resultant revenue stream enriching him just as human blood does, his plan also has a more “progressive” purpose: to flush out hiding his fellow vampires, who for centuries have inhabited a shadowy underworld invisible to their human prey. “I wanted mortals to know about us,” Lestat affirms. “I wanted to proclaim [us] to the world” (p. 17). He had attempted a similar revelation earlier in his career, as a performer at the Théâtre des Vampires in eighteenth-century Paris, but the audience had been unprepared, responding with hostility and fear to the display of his supernatural gifts. Other vampires too had been scandalized, especially since, during those revolutionary times, the despised aristocracy were often symbolized as predatory bloodsuckers deserving extermination, and vampires generally dreaded guilt by association. At the Cow Palace concert that culminates the novel, however, the teenage fans greet Lestat with rapt devotion: when he boasts to the “sea of screaming youngsters” (p. 533), “I AM EVIL! EVIL! . . . I WANT TO DRINK UP YOUR SOULS,” the kids respond with “Ecstasy, delirium” (p. 539). His fellow vampires remain wary of the sudden publicity, conspire against him from their havens in campy bars on San Francisco’s Castro Street.

This last bit of evidence clinches the fact that Lestat’s story is essentially an allegory of the cultural politics of gay identity, played out within youth-musical culture. As Lestat remarks at the start of the novel, after decades spent literally underground, “I came out into the twentieth century” (p. 4; emphasis added). His broadcast of “the forbidden truth” (p. 12) of his identity to the rock-and-roll world is an act akin to Bowie’s defiant (if commercially motivated) announcement of his homosexuality in the 1970s, an affirmation of queer desire as expressed in the figure of the androgynous performer. While previous centuries had been unprepared for this unveiling, contemporary youth culture embraces it, laughing cheerfully at the notion that there is anything truly “evil” about Lestat’s “vampirism.” Indeed, youth culture generally would appear to be more open-minded than Lestat’s fellow vampires, who seemingly prefer to remain a closeted, stigmatized minority—that is, save for the “youngest” of the vampire elite, the “cruelest fledglings” who have taken to imitating Lestat’s postures and styles of dress (p. 539).

By “coming out,” Lestat has essentially prompted a generational struggle within the vampire community—a resistance, perhaps, to his willful commodification of their lifestyle. For it is fairly obvious that, like Bowie’s adoption of extraterrestrial personae in his 1970s incarnations, Lestat’s vampirism provides a transparent metaphorical cover for the smuggling of “deviant” eroticism into the mainstream of youth consumption, a diffusion facilitated by the “electronic tentacles” of the MTV apparatus. As Andrew Goodwin observes, music video is a form whose commodity status tends to produce a “structured ambiguity that is designed to cater to an increasingly heterogenous audience” of teenagers—gay, lesbian, and bisexual as well as straight. Like Queer Nation, Lestat stages his own version of a “mall visibility action,” occupying the multiple sites of commodity culture in an unapologetic assertion of his “queer” presence, in the process activating the implicit queer-ness—the latent homoeroticism—within consumer youth culture itself.

Lestat’s career also cleverly tweaks the views of those conservative critics who allege that music video induces satanic contamination. For not only does Lestat proudly identify himself as a literal occult entity, but he also heads up a garage band of “beguilingly androgynous and even a little savage” performers who, prior to Lestat’s joining their ranks, had already dubbed themselves “Satan’s Night Out.” The closing concert scene is geared to spur the most paranoid fantasies of cultural conservatives and nervous parents, as Lestat teases his delirious fans by promising to “convert” them to his insidious “lifestyle”: “HOW MANY OF YOU WOULD BE VAMPIRES?” he calls out, and the assembled throng responds with a “childish exuberance pouring forth from young mouths and young bodies . . . an uninhibited wash of something that felt like love.” The hysterical alarmism of the chapter on rock concerts in Tipper Gore’s *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society*—a chapter entitled “Rockin’ and Shockin’ in the Concert Free-for-All Zone”—might very well have been inspired by the final scene of *The Vampire Lestat*.

As Simon Frith confirms, for some decades now “our understanding of what makes music and musicians sexy, has depended on a confusion of sexual address”—a confusion the vampire, with its erotic ambivalence, has been expressing in popular culture for more than a century and which the yuppy vampire text has emphatically valorized. If Bowie provided one historical model for Lestat’s gender-bending appeal, a more proximate influence on Rice’s imagination could well have been
Frankie Goes to Hollywood, an openly commercial, openly gay British duo whose first album *Welcome to the Pleasuredome* not only spun out one of the best-selling singles of 1984, “Relax”—promptly banned by the BBC for its amorphous carnality—but also provided a perfect neon-etched title for the enclosed-yet-welcoming bazaar and the localized-yet-floating eroticism of the music video mallworld. Frankie, like Lestat, crystallizes the long history of libidinal utopianism that has animated youth consumption under Fordism, but both also capture this yearning in all its post-Fordist contradictions: the legitimation of alternative sexual identities within contemporary commodity culture has occurred side by side with the consolidation of exclusionary class identities, with the opulent yuppie on one side and the disenfranchised slacker on the other.

Lestat clearly belongs to the former cohort; indeed, Rice’s allegory—like *The Hunger*’s—is so potent precisely because it connects its progressive treatment of gender with an invidious class logic. Lestat’s “coming out” in the opening pages is explicitly into post-Fordist terrain—where, as he asserts, the “dark dreary industrial world I’d gone to sleep on had burnt itself out finally.” This, in Lestat’s view, is a positive development, since it means that “the old bourgeois prudery and conformity had lost their hold on the American mind,” making people “adventurous and erotic again the way they’d been in the old days, before the great middle-class revolutions of the late 1700s.” Thus, the surly audience at the Théâtre des Vampires had been quite correct in their suspicions of Lestat, since when reborn as a yuppie vampire he proudly identifies himself as an aristocratic reversion, incarnating “a certain joie de vivre that the middle-class revolutionaries [had] called decadence in the past” (p. 8).

This original imputation of “decadence” had powerfully confused issues of gender and class: to the middle-class revolutionaries, aristocrats were androgynous predators whose entire lifestyle stood opposed to the stolid values of industrial production and sexual reproduction that they, the heterosexual bourgeoisie, embodied. Now, with the advent of a post-industrial world, the values of the aristocracy could be boldly affirmed once again, their “queer” sensuality side by side with their arrogant assumption of economic and cultural mastery.

Yet Lestat (and perhaps Rice herself) is unwilling to admit the exclusionary nature of this affirmation of post-Fordist enfranchisement; paradoxically, what Lestat finally affirms is a vision of aristocratic populism: “The old aristocratic sensuality now belonged to everybody. It was wed to the promises of the middle-class revolution, and all people had a right to love and to luxury and to graceful things” (p. 8). In short, the bourgeois industrial epoch, with its puritanical valorization of production, had effectively eliminated poverty and want; its asceticism had perhaps been necessary in order to achieve these ends, but such an attitude has now become anachronistic in the face of generalized prosperity. Instead, hedonistic celebration is the order of the day, and Lestat’s vampiric senses revel in the commodity world surrounding him: “Department stores had become palaces of near Oriental loveliness—merchandise displayed amid soft tinted carpeting, eerie music, amber light. In the all-night drugstores, bottles of violet and green shampoo gleamed like gems on the sparkling glass shelves. . . . I gazed stupefied at computers and telephones as pure in form and color as nature’s most exotic shells” (pp. 8–9).

The problem with this happy celebration of post-Fordist affluence is, as we have seen, that its boon was in fact unequally distributed—that the social enfranchisement of the new bourgeoisie came at the expense of traditional laboring classes within a general horizon of economic crisis. Thus, Lestat’s fantasy world, where “[d]ock laborers went home at night to swim in their heated backyard pools” and “[c]harwomen and plumbers changed at the end of the day into exquisitely cut manufactured clothes” (p. 8), is little more than a comforting ideological posture rationalizing post-Fordist inequities. Lestat fails to perceive how his own success might be tied up with the social frustration of others—even of his fans, those eager “youngsters in their Halloween vampire clothes, faces gleaming with artificial blood, some wearing floppy yellow wigs, some with black rings around their eyes to make them all the more innocent and ghastly” (p. 335). It is quite possible that these kids, like Martin with his novelty items, may purchase Lestat’s spin-off properties seeking a refuge from their dead-end lives, a desperate “magical solution.” As Frith has observed of Frankie Goes to Hollywood’s success—a success that came during the depths of the U.K.’s own crisis of de-industrialization,

The Tory solution to Britain’s economic recession is a new version of the nineteenth century’s two nations. Growth is now supposed to come from the leisure goods industries. The new jobs will be low skilled and low paid; the non-affluent will service the affluent; the new working-class will work on other people’s leisure. . . . Frankie—who come, after all, from Britain’s most devastated city [Liverpool]—capture better than anyone else the neurosis of a society told, amid the wastelands of dead factories and eked-out social security, that the solution to our problems is to have fun.
With the waning of the phantasmic energies of the "Reagan revival" and the growing apprehension of declining living standards, the indulgent lifestyle of the yuppie vampire came gradually to seem not only less attractive but, perhaps more to the point, less available to youth since the heyday of Frankie and Lestat. This doleful fact is one that contemporary slacker vampire texts have been quick to harp upon, often by engaging Rice's Vampire Lestat in pointed dialogue. Probably the most significant of these responses is Poppy Z. Brite's Lost Souls, a novel that has had a subcultural acclaim to rival Rice's best-selling success.  

Lost Souls is perhaps the furthest point yet reached on the yuppie-slacker dialectic, seeming at times almost a synthesis of Martin and Interview with the Vampire. Like Martin, Brite's vampires are aimless, working-class kids who know that they are basically unwanted, superfluous, disposable; but unlike Martin, they don't even have family to fall back upon. Like Louis and Lestat, they are openly gay and sleekly androgynous, but they crash in flop houses instead of opulent flats. Seemingly less members of a privileged urban subculture than the drifting queer paeans of a Gus Van Sant movie, they are literal children of the night, traveling in feral packs. "The essence of childhood lost," their philosophy is one of stark disillusionment, a slacker credo in extremis: "when you have too much faith in anything, it is bound to hurt you. Too much faith in anything will suck you dry. In this way, all the world is a vampire." (p. 161).

The narrative representative of this nihilistic viewpoint is a fifteen-year-old waif named, appropriately, Nothing. The "true child of night," Nothing seems to capture "the soul of all the thin children who wore black, who traced their eyes in kohl and stared out their windows waiting for the sun to set. This boy looked as if he had been raised in the back room of some hole-in-the-wall nightclub, fed on bread soaked in milk and whiskey, the bones of his face shaped fine by hunger. That was the word for this child: hungry" (p. 222; emphasis in original). When we first meet Nothing, he is drifting aimlessly amid an affectless crowd of doped-up suburban posers, fabricating a tenuous identity out of horror stories and Goth music, "black t-shirts and leather jackets and smudgy makeup shoplifted from the drugstore at the mall" (p. 73), meanwhile longing for some exalted form of being that he cannot even name. One day, while bored to death in class, Nothing catches sight of a black van passing on the highway—its radio blaring Bowie's Ziggy Stardust—and it seems to signal to him a world of intense, vivid pleasure, inspiring him to run away from home to seek it out. This van, in fact, contains an all-male cohort of homoerotic vampires, the patriarch of whom, Zillah, is Nothing's long-lost father. Nothing, it seems, is himself a fledgling vampire, whose latent need for blood has begun to blossom with adolescence. His pubescent discovery of his secret inclination functions as an even clearer coming-out allegory than Lestat's public announcement of his vampirism, since when he is finally united with his undead kin (who pick him up while hitchhiking), they tutor him not only in the finer points of blood drinking but of gay sex as well.

Together, the entire giddy throng sets off in their van to locate a small-time Southern rock band named Lost Souls? (among Nothing's prized possession's is a bootleg tape of their music). It is in her handling of this subplot that Brite engages in her most obvious critique of Rice, since to her teen-punk vamps MTV seems a distant universe of cynical glitz ultimately less interesting than raucous garage bands playing in backwoods dives. In fact, mainstream bands—those who, like Lestat, rely on extended commodity chains—emerge as vampiric in a negative sense, as implicit exploiters. In an early scene, before he has met up with his vampire clan, Nothing is engaged in a desultory act of oral sex with a teenage friend named Laine, whose major defining characteristic is his feyish obsession with The Cure, the Goth-rock band that has enjoyed the greatest mainstream success. This success came with their 1987 album Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me, which included among its various spin-offs a glossy poster of the album cover, a copy of which Laine has tacked up above his bed. Lying there, Nothing finds himself staring at lead singer "Robert Smith's lips enlarged several thousand times, smeared with hot orange-red lipstick, shiny and sexual. Nothing wished he could fall into them, could slide down Robert Smith's throat and curl up safe in his belly" (p. 32). The commodity world The Cure—and, by implication, Lestat—represents seems to promise pleasure and freedom, but in fact it threatens vampirically to absorb the consumer, to suck him in (as it were). In counterpart, the novel projects the low-budget, socially marginal world of Lost Souls, who have no official spin-offs but only pirated tapes passed reverently from hand to hand. The problem is thus not the technological medium per se, not the apparatus that captures and conveys the music to its devoted consumers, but rather specifically its corporate organization and the social hierarchy it subverts.

If the object of consumption differs in these two models, so, too, does the consuming subject. For whereas the commodified Goth music Laine enjoys seems metaphorically to hunt down and leech upon a passive consumer, the subcultural music of Lost Souls must be actively pursued. Indeed, the lyrics of the one song quoted in the novel emphasize this sense of agency: "Does your road go no place? / Does it go someplace
where you can’t see? / If you follow it anyway, / It might just lead you here to me” (p. 74). Compare this low-key invitation to the stentorian, domineering lyrics of Lestat: “YOU CAN’T RESIST THE LORDS OF NIGHT / THEY HAVE NO MERCY ON YOUR PLAIGHT . . . IN LOVE, WE WILL TAKE YOU / AND IN RAPTURE, WE’LL BREAK YOU,” and so on.”

Lost Souls, by virtue of its status as a slacker vampire text, shows tremendous skepticism toward the yuppie pretensions of Lestat and the commodity world he represents; yet in its endorsement of the dreamy homoeroticism this world promotes, Brite’s novel also shows how the slacker vampire text has learned and borrowed from its despised yuppie cousin. The question mark in the band’s name is the perfect registration of this ambivalence, querying whether contemporary youth are genuinely lost souls, deserted by a cynical post-Fordism, or “queer” wanderers whose seeming decadence involves a bold affirmation of suppressed desires.

What the twin traditions of the yuppie and slacker vampire show is the tremendous pliability of the figure as a metaphor for socioeconomic and cultural processes. This pliability has extended to cover, in a wandering trajectory of texts spread over twenty years, both of Frith’s “two nations” of post-Fordist possibility: of new bourgeois privilege and new underclass privation, two distinct but dialectically imbricated forms of consuming hunger. And, just as the yuppie vampire has facilitated crossover traffic between straight and gay (bourgeois) worlds, so, too, does the slacker vampire highlight affinities between disparate (proletarianized) races. Mutually locked out of the receding consumerist bounty, Brite’s Lost Souls are siblings under the skin of the deraçinated ethnic street kids of the contemporary inner-city gang story in its fictive and filmic variants.

A good example of the crossover is Jess Mowry’s novel of African-American teens in Oakland, Way Past Cool (1992), in which the author explicitly evokes his roving squadrons of latchkey kids as “children of the night” subsisting in the interstices of a cruelly evolving economy. One of these strays is described as “a strange sort of boy, so delicate-looking yet so totally self-sufficient; like a prototype of something new or a re-program of something very old that was better equipped to survive, Evolution in action. The shape of things to come. Shape changers. Weren’t werewolves called children of the night?” The shimmer of the supernatural functions here—and indeed throughout the novel—almost as a redemptive deliverance from an otherwise brutally impoverished experience, thus remarking the stubborn persistence of a utopian impulse even in this bleakest of contexts. However, despite the occult image (“werewolves”), this passage’s technobiological rhetoric (“prototype,” “re-program,” “evolution”) and science-fictional projection of futurity (“the shape of things to come”) signals the emergence of the cyborg. In the next three chapters, I move to a consideration of the implications of this figure for post-Fordist youth culture.
in the 1970s United States; her analysis, while fascinating, does not amount to a systematic investigation (or critique) of the yuppie vampire in Rice's text.


23. As David Punter has observed in his *Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume 2: The Modern Gothic* (New York: Longman, 1996), these vampiric strollers are "the very image of the *flâneur*" of Baudelaire and Benjamin (p. 162); they are thus the urban precursors of the suburban mall-browsing vampires discussed in chapter 1.


28. See, for example, John Skipp and Craig Spector's *The Light at the End* (New York: Bantam, 1989; Poppy Z. Brite's *Last Stake* (New York: Delacorte, 1992), discussed in chapter 3; and Laurell K. Hamilton's *Ch� Vampyre* series, beginning with *Guilty Pleasures* (New York: Ace, 1993). See also films such as *Near Dark* and *The Addiction* (1995).

29. See, for example, Tanith Lee's *Blood Opera* sequence—*Dark Dance* (1991), *Personal Darkness* (1993), and *Darkness, I* (1994)—and Elaine Bergstrom's *Astraeus* series, which began with *Shattered Glass* (1989). See also films such as *The Hunger* and *Nagisa* (1994). 


37. Billson's cultural prescience in crafting this series of ads is extraordinary when one considers the recent television commercial for Ray-Ban sunglasses, run frequently on MTV, that depicts a flock of trendy teen vampires languidly sunning themselves and mocking one of their number who, foolish enough not to wear his shades, is promptly burned to a crisp.


41. Ibid., pp. 91–92.


CHAPTER THREE


8. Leroem Medlovuv, "Mapping the Rebel Image: Postmodernism and the Mas-

33. Though Deneuve herself has denied being a lesbian—at one point even suing a lesbian magazine that had used her last name for her title (see David W. Dunlap, "For Lesbian Magazine, a Question of Image," New York Times, 8 January 1996, late edition, p. 41)—she continues to receive coverage in the gay press as a lesbian icon: see Judy Wierer, "Deneuve," Advocate [35 July 1995]: 50–55. Much more extensive, however, is mainstream treatment of Deneuve as a paradigm of glamour and beauty: see, for example, "Catherine Deneuve: What Follows Perfection?" Vogue 176, no. 10 (October 1998): 106.


35. See, for example, Jewelle Gomez, "Recasting the Mythology: Writing Vampire Fiction," in Gordon and Hollinger, eds., Blood Read, pp. 85–93, which argues that the film "falls apart at the end so completely that little analysis can be made of the characters or the intent" (p. 89).


40. Fredric Jameson has interpreted this scene as signaling postmodernism's epochal challenge to the individual subject to (metaphorically) "grow new organs," thus permitting a more encompassing perspective on a fragmented culture: see Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 31.


42. Fred Vermorel and Judy Vermorel, Stardust: The Secret Fantasies of Fame (London: Comet, 1983). Subsequent references appear in the text. The individual fans whose writings are featured in the book are identified only by first names, which are pseudonymous.


44. Vermorel and Vermorel, Stardust, p. 77.

45. Anne Rice, "David Bowie and the End of Gender," Vogue (November 1983); reprinted in Thomesen and Gutman, eds., The Bowie Companion, pp. 183–86; the quotations are from pp. 184 and 185.

46. Ibid., pp. 186, 183.

47. Rice herself has claimed that she modeled Lestat, at least in terms of his sonorous voice, on the Doors' Jim Morrison (Ramsterdam, Prion of the Night, p. 261)—another potent figure in the pantheon of youth-culture vampirism, since a poster of his face also presides over the Lost Boys' underground lair.


50. Linda Martini and Kerry Segrave's Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll (New York: Da Capo, 1999) amply details this fractions history.


53. Tipper Gore, Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society (New York: Bantam, 1988), pp. 54–55. A similar view was voiced in a book authored by the head of the American Family Association, Rev. Donald Wildmon, whose title perfectly captures the anxious, almost paranoia response of social conservatives to the unmonitored intrusion of television: Home Invaders (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1988). A decade later, as we have seen, Wildmon would be campaigning against Calvin Klein advertisements as child pornography.


55. Attacks on heavy metal as a corrupt nest of satanic vice were myriad during the 1980s; a good overview of the scare is Jeffrey S. Victor's Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Controversial Legend (Chicago: Open Court, 1993). For an ideological defense of heavy metal's flirtation with occult morbidity, see Donna Gaines, "For the Love of Death: The Spirituality of Death Metal," Rock and Roll Quarterly (Fall 1993): 15–19.

56. There is, of course, an aesthetic continuity linking these forms of music. Glitter rock, in the person of Alice Cooper, strongly influenced what came to be known as "glam metal"—heavy-metal music played by androgynous, glitzy performers (on Cooper's career, see Cagle, Reconstructing Pop/Subculture, pp. 117–27)—and Goth
70. Ibid., p. 176.
74. Brite has become a doyenne of the Gothic scene in New Orleans—where Rice also resides—in large part because, according to Mick Mercer, "Brite seems believable where Rice doesn't," since he "does similar things in reality" to what is depicted in her books (Hex Files: *The Goth Bible* [Woodstock, N.Y.: Overview, 1997], pp. 170–71). In short, her fans view Brite as committed to the Gothic/vampire lifestyle, whereas Rice merely profits from it. For an excellent discussion of Brite's relationship to a broad spectrum of Gothic texts dealing with subculture and sexuality, see Trevor Holmes, "Coming Out of the Closet: Gay Males and Queer Goths in Contemporary Vampire Fiction," in *Blood Road*, ed. Gordon and Hollinger, pp. 169–88 (especially pp. 181–83); also see Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (New York: North Point, 1998), which analyzes Brite's fiction within the context of contemporary Gothic music and film culture (pp. 359–69).
76. Brite's vision of a private of vampires traveling the highways in a stolen black van is almost certainly an allusion to the 1987 film *Near Dark*, with its pack of roadbound bloodsuckers. It is also a slashier echo of the Beat ethos of the 1950s, when hitching the road involved a counter-cultural rejection of mainstream society. For more on this subject, see my discussion of the post-Forordic road novel in chapter five.
77. Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, p. 537.

CHAPTER FOUR
3. Ibid.
7. Webster, *Theories of the Information Society*, p. 156; emphasis added.
8. On the transition to "batch" or "just-in-time" production lines, see Andrew
ROB LATHAM

CONSUMING YOUTH

VAMPIRES, CYBORGs, AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION

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