
INTRODUCTION

What is the relationship between homosexuality, cultural modernism, and modernity? How does the queer subject come to occupy such a central and, in many respects, contradictory place in the modern world? What role does capitalism play in the development of modern gay and lesbian identities? This book takes up these questions by using the figure of the dandy to propose a theory of how and why gay and lesbian subjects became heroes of modern life.¹ My analysis focuses on six icons of modernism: the nineteenth-century, Wildean dandy; the fin-de-siècle decadent Sapphist; the “mannish” lesbian dandy; the queer, black dandy of the Harlem Renaissance; the gutter dandy or queer junkie in cold war America; and the Warholian “Pop” dandy. Oscar Wilde and Andy Warhol are bookends for my project because both use tropes of dandyism to show how the “secret” of the commodity produces (in different ways, in different times, and on different levels) modern gay identity as a dialectical contradiction between the “seen” and the “unseen”—what Michel Foucault has famously described as “the open secret.”

But how, I ask, did homosexuality and secrecy become entangled in the first place? How has queer identity come to be defined as a paradox of visibility? When I first posed these questions it seemed logical to turn to the late nineteenth-century medicalization of homosexuality, which ushered in an era of new visibility for marginalized and “perverse” sexualities. For the story of the invention of the homosexual is usually told within the context of the rise of late nineteenth-century sexology. In Foucault’s well-known formulation in *The History of Sexuality*, the religious category of “sodomite” was transformed into the medical and psychiatric category of “homosexual” by sexologists such

as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. What had once been an immoral act that any sinner might indulge in was transformed in 1868 into an abnormal identity characterized by a congenital “hermaphroditism of the soul.” As Foucault famously puts it, “the homosexual was now a species” (43). But why did doctors define a norm through sexuality at this particular historical moment? Foucault himself asks but never answers a crucial question: was the creation of the homosexual and other perverse sexual types “motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?” (36–37).

This book responds to Foucault’s question by demonstrating that theories of sexuality and theories of the commodity have been mutually invested since the late nineteenth century. Rather than seeing the medical and psychiatric invention of the homosexual and the new boom in production and consumption as discrete events, this study theorizes the emergence of gay/lesbian identity—particularly the dandy’s aestheticized cultivation of enjoyment—in relation to capitalism’s increasing investment in producing and regulating desire and pleasure.² Historians and theorists of sexuality have demonstrated that two seemingly paradoxical developments—the destabilization of gender boundaries and reification of sexuality into the narrow and oppositional hetero/homo binary—were overdetermined by political, economic, and social shifts distinctive to the late nineteenth century (Birken; Chauncey; Dean *Sexuality*; D’Emilio; D’Emilio and Freedman; Hennessy; Katz). These shifts were primarily but not exclusively grounded in the contradictions of capitalist production, which sought both to produce desire and control the “unruly” possibilities it engendered (Hennessy 102). I therefore regard the gay subject as emerging out of the specifically modern, capitalist contradiction between the public world of production and industry and the private world of consumption and pleasure. Although recent scholarship has argued that the rise of consumer culture (or the “consumer revolution”) can be traced to the eighteenth century or even earlier, the widespread distribution of “consumer goods” does not single-handedly facilitate the production of uniquely modern types of consuming and desiring subjects.³ The late nineteenth-century reorganization of social life around consumerism made the commodity and its contradictions the focal point of a new world order, engendering a distinctly modern epistemology of the subject. It is not until 1870 that the rise of mass markets, mass media, and advertising “displaced unmet needs into new desires,” creating an apparent contradiction between rationalization and reification and modernity’s disruptive and unlimited expansion of desire (Hennessy 99). Furthermore, the historical opposition between production and consumption took on a new significance with the advent of industrialism and mass consumption, which both consolidated and extended capitalism’s fundamental division between appearance and essence.⁴

The well-known formulation of homosexuality as an “open secret”—a paradoxical synthesis of invisibility and visibility—links the logic of the queer to the logic of the commodity, making gay and lesbian identity a privileged emblem for capitalism’s contradiction between hidden, inner relations and the visibility of outward appearances. In his theory of commodity fetishism, Karl Marx famously describes this split between what appears to be and what really is as the “secret” of the commodity-form; in other words, the commodity’s “mysterious” character is the result of a system of exchange that mystifies social relations, so that relations between people take the form of relations between things. Marx locates the historically specific experience of alienation in this social reality, in which commodities control the producers instead of being controlled by them. Building on Marx’s work, Georg Lukács argues that the two aspects of commodity fetishism I have just described—the essential objectification of human relations and the appearance of the independence of the world of things—penetrate all forms of subjectivity and daily life under capitalism. Lukács’s analysis enables us to see that the diverse ideological effects of the commodity’s universal dominance—or, as Fredric Jameson puts it, the “strategies of containment” capitalism necessitates—“can be unmasked only by confrontation with the ideal of totality which they at once imply and repress” (*Political Unconscious* 53).⁵ As my study seeks to demonstrate, the commodity’s drive to dominate the culture of modernity—which engenders the phenomenon of reification—is still the “specific problem for our age, the age of modern capitalism” (Lukács 84).

There is an unfortunate tendency in contemporary theory and politics to be suspicious of or even hostile to any focus on social totality, as though acknowledging the existence of a constitutive, determining structure (however complexly theorized) inevitably erases or subsumes difference, particularity, and asymmetry. But social totalities always exist in and through their connections with multiple complexes; they are not undifferentiated wholes (Mészáros 65). Recognizing the centrality of the logic of commodification in modern social life is not equivalent to conceptualizing capitalism as monolithic or fetishizing economics as mechanistically all-determining. In fact, the Marxist concept of dialectics famously critiques the economic determinism of political economy by positing that the totality of capitalist society can only be grasped in specific and complex mediations (or interconnections) that are always changing.⁶ Building on this dialectical approach, I seek to open up a space for thinking about the connectedness of concepts and categories that are usually divorced. My goal is to theorize the multiple and complex interconnections between seemingly separate spheres of modern life, particularly the social world and the realm of personal life or “lifestyle.” The dandy’s heroic modernism interests me because it is not simply a glorification of lifestyle—a retreat from politics and history into a separate, personal realm of art and

beauty—but rather an attempt to challenge these sedimented distinctions. Throughout this study, I pay attention to the intricate ways in which culture, the aesthetic, and the erotic are mediated by commodity relations in modern society. By examining the ongoing process of interaction between queer identity and the commodity-form, I offer a rethinking of those models of modernity that separate the aesthetic/erotic from the economic, and models that render the first set of terms epiphenomenal.

My effort to capture the complex interrelation of culture and society draws upon a major insight of the Frankfurt school: culture must be regarded as a site of social production that is neither epiphenomenal nor fully autonomous (Jay 54). Following this line of thinking—which seeks to bridge social divisions—I do not characterize modern capitalist society as inauthentic or reductively repressive, nor do I regard modernity fatalistically.⁷ At various points in this study, I demonstrate the positive possibilities for queer cultural and artistic production to revalue the erotic and reconfigure categories like “reification,” “blackness,” and “commodity aesthetics.” Nevertheless, my project is not to show how gay and lesbian people subvert or otherwise challenge the exigencies of capitalist oppression. Although queerness is not represented here as only or primarily a disruptive force in modern culture, I do not theorize gay and lesbian identities or queer artistic production as simply effects of capitalist reification, where the latter is conceptualized in empirical rather than dialectical terms. To the contrary, my readings of artists such as Renée Vivien, William S. Burroughs, and Andy Warhol demonstrate that queer aesthetics can and do offer a *promesse de bonheur* in a society that commodifies desire and subordinates freedom and happiness in the name of progress.⁸ This is not an utopian claim since, as Herbert Marcuse argues, the contradiction between freedom and oppression constitutes a “dialectic of liberation” at the heart of capitalism: “the apparently inseparable unity—inseparable for the system—of productivity and destruction, of satisfaction of needs and repression, of liberty within a system of servitude” (“Liberation” 280). My argument is that dandies and other queer heroes of modern life are iconic because they mobilize capitalism’s simultaneous capacities for reification and liberation.

Although the *concept* of the “modern” is, as Terry Eagleton has put it, “a kind of permanent ontological possibility” that disrupts historical periodization, I use this term in the more specific sense of the modernizing project that thinkers such as Max Weber, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer have associated with the history and tradition of the Enlightenment (63). I do not believe any account or definition of “modernity” can be understood apart from the development and imperatives of capital accumulation. While it is important to recognize the analytical and sociohistorical differences between modernity and capitalism, this study will provide evidence for the ways in

which these social formations are fundamentally linked. I follow Adorno and Horkheimer in viewing capitalism as—to borrow Peter Wagner’s succinct formulation—“a one-dimensional elaboration of the Enlightenment promise, and thus the particular version of modernity that has become dominant” (4). Because the dialectical approach of the Frankfurt school is crucial to the theory of modernity I have been elaborating, I resist the tendency of some theorists to separate “good” and “bad” aspects of modernity. (The most famous articulation of such a separation is no doubt Habermas’s “Modernity—An Incomplete Project.”) My goal instead is to illuminate capitalism’s fundamental and profound contradictions, which makes modernity both a simultaneously destructive and creative force, producing the paradoxical experience of modern life as repressive and progressive.

To say that capitalism and modernity are interrelated forms of social experience is not to deny that there are important reasons for maintaining the analytical distinction between these categories as well as their cultural and ideological expressions. In what follows, I do not subsume capitalism under modernity (as modernization theories tend to), nor do I subsume modernity under capitalism. While some Marxist accounts have found the latter move rather too tempting, I would argue against it. I do so not because this perspective collapses the temporal and historical specificities of these categories and so “naturalizes” capitalism, as Ellen Meiksins Wood claims, but rather because certain features of modernity—such as the rise of the modern nation-state—cannot be assimilated to capitalism, as Wood herself persuasively demonstrates. The central contradictions with which this study is concerned—appearance/essence and public/private—are actualized through particular social relations that bring into focus their manifest connections. At the same time, it is crucial to note that the contradiction between appearance and essence is produced by the capitalist mode of production, whereas the public/private split more properly belongs to the social processes of modernity, since the division of the modern world into public and private spheres is characteristic of the modern nation-state. The dual function of these contradictions directs our attention to my argument about homosexuality and modernity; as we shall see, the queer dandy becomes a privileged emblem of the modern by incorporating contradictions that are specific to the internal relations of both capitalism and modernity.

This understanding of queer identity enables me to address the structural basis for a key problem overlooked in the recent efflorescence of lesbian and gay studies: the simultaneous positioning of the queer subject as a privileged emblem of the modern and as a dissident in revolt against modern society. Although both lesbian and gay identities are located at the opposite poles of modernity by a wide range of theorists, cultural critics, and historians, I know of no other study that remarks upon or attempts to account for the contradictory notions of gay subjectivity that proliferate in modern culture. The figures

of the lesbian and the male homosexual are depicted as, on the one hand, distinctly modern subversions of sex and gender norms and, on the other, as subjects who stand in opposition to the industrialization and commodification of modern life. My study aims to bring these opposing models of queer identity together by showing them to be inextricably bound up with each other, and inextricably bound up with the histories of capitalism and social modernity. I see gay identity itself as paradigmatic of a new and distinctly modern form of consciousness that is constructed around the public/private binary. This divided and contradictory form of subjectivity emerged in relation to the modern (particularly European) nation-state and was ultimately intensified by capitalist forces, which further estranged the “personal” from the “social” and “political.” As Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* demonstrates, the queer dandy in particular is a privileged emblem for this twofold subject who is radically split between public and private. By demonstrating the interrelation of rationalization (the public world of production, market imperatives, and work) and erotics (the private world of feelings, consumption, and pleasure) in gay and lesbian identities, my study constructs a materialist account of modern queer consciousness that challenges and revises tendencies to oppose “private” eroticism and the systems of value that govern “public” interests.

My claim about the paradigmatic and contradictory place of the queer subject in modern culture is indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s influential argument for the centrality of “the epistemology of the closet” in modern Western culture. According to Sedgwick, the figures of “the closet” and “coming out”—both uniquely indicative for homophobia in a way that is distinct from other oppressions (*Epistemology of the Closet* 75)—are the most recognizable emblems for the nexus of visibility and secrecy that makes queer identity indispensable to modern cultural organization:

I want to argue that a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation that has swirled around issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century, in Europe and the United States, has been impelled by the distinctively indicative relation of homosexuality to wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and public, that were and are critically problematic for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large. (*Epistemology of the Closet* 71)

Sedgwick persuasively demonstrates how the pervasive, “epistemologically charged” (72) oppositions of secrecy/disclosure and public/private have a gay (particularly male) specificity. Although her work provides evidence for the importance of queerness in the construction of modern subjectivity, she does not address the context of capital and, like Foucault, she deliberately avoids positing causes for the institution of modern sexual identities (*Epistemology of the Closet*

9). Nevertheless, Sedgwick's analysis helps us to see how gay identity emerged as the embodiment of capitalist modernity's constitutive contradictions (public/private, work/play, appearance/essence), and thus became the twentieth century's most contested and yet symptomatic form of modern subjectivity.

By using the figure of the dandy to address the modern constitution of gay and lesbian subjectivities, I do not aspire to encapsulate the entirety of gay people's experiences of modernity in this project. My more specific goal is to illuminate various dialectical images of homosexuality that picture the dandy as a queer hero of modern life. I have chosen to focus my project on dandyism because it directly engages the issues that are at the conceptual center of the book—visibility, commodification, modernity, decadence, and desire—embodying a relation to capitalism that is at once rebellious and complicit. The figure of the dandy also attains a unique stature because of his centrality in accounts of modernity and homosexuality. "The last spark of heroism amid decadence," dandyism and its contradictions have defined modern gay identity since the turn of the century (Baudelaire, *Painter of Modern Life* 28–29). This is not to say that the dandy always has been gay or thought to have been gay. For Beau Brummell and the Regency dandies of the early nineteenth century, for example, there was not a clear-cut association of effeminate dandyism and same-sex desire. But, as Alan Sinfield and Ed Cohen have convincingly argued, after Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895, the effeminate dandy was linked to the homosexual in the public imagination. My study of modern dandyism begins at this moment, after which it became impossible not to think of the dandy as queer. Demonstrating the power of this cultural logic, lesbian artists—such as Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, Radclyffe Hall, and Renée Vivien—drew upon the traditions of dandyism and decadent aestheticism "as part of a desire to make a newly emerging lesbian identity publicly visible" (Elliott and Wallace 19).

The dandy for me is not a frozen or unchanging figure. Paying attention to questions of historical specificity and variation, I am particularly interested in highlighting the ways in which queer dandyism and capitalism have changed over time. I wish to emphasize that registering such distinctions is always, in my view, a method of mediation in and of itself. Throughout this study, I treat sexuality and the commodity-form as internally related phenomena that take different forms within the same historical and temporal process. While I strive to attend to the complexity and differentiation between and among forms of dandyism and queer desire, my goal is to articulate certain historical and theoretical consistencies through which queer dandyism's specific contradictions have been realized. I do so in an effort to grasp the consolidations and continuities of identity-political formations—not to deny difference, but to defetishize it. From this perspective, my criticism deliberately strives to materialize an apparently paradoxical theory of modern gay identity:

I offer a historicizing narrative about queer dandyism that is not grounded in a continuum of historical progress but rather in sedimented images—what Walter Benjamin has famously conceptualized as “dialectics at a standstill.”⁹ This means that, at certain moments in my argument, I take the risk of deprivileging contradiction’s more dynamic elements in order to capture a nonnarrative dialectic that inhabits unique constellations of images.

In my effort to illuminate dialectical images of the dandy, my study combines British, French, and American literary texts, cultural history, visual culture, and critical theory from the *fin de siècle* to the present. I steer away from organizing my argument and readings around discrete disciplinary objects; instead, I present readers with a juxtaposition of forms, genres, traditions, and discourses that reflects my interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture. In large measure, this move is authorized by well-recognized work in modernist studies that has demonstrated the affiliations between various forms of artistic and literary modernisms as transnational phenomena. This is not to reinforce traditional accounts of modernism as the aesthetic production of a cosmopolitan, international *avant-garde*, since the tension between nationalism and internationalism, or the local and the global, is one fundamental feature of both modernism and modernity. Nor do I discount the complex role of national cultures and politics in the production and reception of modernist works. In fact, I am especially fascinated by distinctively American forms of cultural modernism that appear in the twentieth century—such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Beat movement—and how these movements redirect modernism’s Eurocentered slant by resisting the hegemony of European *avant-garde* aesthetics. While my analysis focuses on aesthetic modernism, I hope the afterword’s engagement with the “new dandyism” in contemporary popular culture will encourage readers to think about modernism and mass culture in dialectical terms. My interest in the tropes of dandyism is not only or simply historical, but also theoretical and political. I therefore ask readers to be mindful of the implicit interplay of past, present, and future that gives rise to the dialectical images I examine here. For it is the pressures and possibilities of the present that are contained within the last century’s modern queer icons.



Conceptualizing the logic of the queer in relation to the structural contradictions of capitalism helps us to understand the intersections and affiliations between modes of cultural critique that are too often segregated in contemporary theory and politics. By investigating the connections between theories of gay/lesbian identity and theories of commodity culture, this book aims to challenge the critical commonplace that opposes class and queerness as forms

of social theory and political struggle. The widening of the rift between Marxism and other elements of the left in recent years has positioned queer and Marxist theories as at best unrelated, at worst antagonistic, forms of social critique. Queer theorists, committed to a fundamentally postmodernist politics of difference and the destabilization of overarching narratives, have been suspicious of Marxism's emphasis on the determining force of class and its privileging of the economic over the erotic. In their view, this framework inevitably subordinates queer politics to the project of class struggle. Under-scoring the importance of a social totality, Marxists, meanwhile, have criticized queer theorists' inattentiveness to the material determinations and social inequalities that shape all identity formations—including sexual identities—under global capitalism, making pleasure and sexual agency more available to some than others.

However, recent work by authors such as Eric O. Clarke, Kevin Floyd, Rosemary Hennessy, Matthew Tinkcom, and Amy Villarejo suggest that a distinctly queer brand of Marxism may be taking root in contemporary criticism.¹⁰ This emergent body of criticism shares with the sociologist Henning Bech a conception of gay identity as fundamentally dialectical. In his work *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* (Danish edition, 1987; English translation, 1997), Bech argues persuasively for the distinctive relationship between urban modernity and homosexuality, emphasizing the fundamentally dialectical character of gay identity. Although he does not link his theory of "absent homosexuality" to the commodity-form, my own analysis of queer identity as a dialectical contradiction has much in common with his view of homosexuality as a dialectic between presence and absence (Bech 38, 81). While my project draws upon Bech's insights, its more specific goal is to account for the contradictions that shape queer subjectivity.

While this book provides an argument for a materialist conception of sexuality, it does not survey scholarship that falls under the rubric of Marxist or materialist queer studies. Nor do I offer an introduction to the history of dandyism or to the various intellectual, artistic, and bohemian versions of dandyism that have dared to take beauty, pleasure, and refinement seriously since the nineteenth century. Instead, I work *within* a materialist framework to make a theoretical argument about the role of queer dandies in cultural modernism and constructions of modern subjectivity. I am invested in a dialectical method that approaches forms of cultural production immanently (from within) in order to expose what they leave unsaid: their inconsistencies, interconnections, and contradictions. This means that I strive to examine my objects of analysis on their own terms, while simultaneously linking the logic of aporias governing a particular text to the social relations that shape it. My goal is not to reconcile culture to society in any simple or reductive way, but rather to expose the complexities and irreconcilabilities of an individual work

of art. I therefore heed Adorno's admonition for the cultural critic: "A successful work, according to immanent criticism, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (*Prisms* 32). This is, I believe, a crucial argument to make in light of certain dematerializing trends in queer studies, which present gay and lesbian identities as fluid and heterogeneous but also ultimately enigmatic and unknowable. By linking contradiction and nonidentity to the logic of capital, we are able to account for the dialectic that defines gay and lesbian subject formation: the queer as both in revolt against modernity and as a privileged emblem of the modern.

This analysis is based on the argument that gay male and lesbian identity formations are mutually constitutive. Since the 1970s, scholarship about gay and lesbian identities, cultures, and communities has seldom investigated or elaborated the cross-gender ties that the critical and pedagogical framework of "gay and lesbian studies" clearly seems to suggest. There are, of course, historical and political reasons for the divide between gay and lesbian criticisms and its persistence in contemporary queer studies. Gay male theories have often subsumed gender under sexuality, failing to account for—or sometimes even to acknowledge—the specific struggles facing lesbians. Conversely, lesbian theories, which emerged in relation to the politics of lesbian-feminism, have tended to privilege gender over sexuality and focused on developing lesbian studies as a separate, women-centered practice. My point here is not to disavow the complexity of these critical knowledges, or the connections between them. For example, in the academy, the institutionalization of gay and lesbian/queer studies has in many respects emerged out of women's and gender studies, suggesting a structural link between these fields. Nevertheless, gay male and lesbian discourses have overwhelmingly failed to consider such mutual investments as they relate to the process of identity formation and definition. In the field of literary criticism, the conceptualization of separate gay male and lesbian literary traditions is, I would argue, symptomatic of this division. Only in researching this project did I discover (quite unexpectedly) the fertile connections between lesbian and gay male engagements with tropes of dandyism and decadence.

Wary of contemporary queer theory's tendency to bypass material contextualization, including the gendered context of commodity relations, I distinguish between constructions of same-sex desire that are primarily male and those that are primarily female at various points in this study. In so doing, I make an effort to analyze the specificity of gay male and lesbian identities and experiences. For example, I am especially interested in demonstrating how a lesbian modernist such as Renée Vivien both inhabits and subverts the traditions of dandyism and decadence, linking artifice to nature in order to con-

ceptualize lesbian desire outside the bounds of masculine authority and bourgeois society. At the same time, I am committed to examining the cross-gender connections between male homosexuality and lesbianism as forms of personal, social, and political identification. By studying such subjectivities together, we can, I contend, better see the inner contradictions and dynamics that give rise to modern gay and lesbian identities. It is for this reason that the title of my work refers to “queer” identities and desires, despite the theoretical, historical, and political difficulties this term presents. Since this project begins in the late nineteenth century, we must confront another problem with no established solutions: how to name the homosexual at a time when, in Alan Sinfield’s memorable phrase, the love that dare not speak its name “hardly *had* a name” (3). By the end of the nineteenth century, “homosexual” had been adopted by both sexologists and homosexuals themselves (Weeks 102), and “queer” had become a slang word for homosexual (Showalter 112). Despite its different meanings over the last century, I use “queer” to define a distinctly modern formation of same-sex identification and desire that is characteristic of both the late nineteenth century and twentieth century. “Gay,” of course, has its origins in the post-Stonewall movement for gay and lesbian liberation, and is, strictly speaking, anachronistic in a late nineteenth or early twentieth-century context. However, I employ this term synonymously with “homosexual,” “lesbian,” and “queer” because it has increasingly been applied as an “overarching label” by scholars (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 17).

I begin my study with Oscar Wilde’s inaugural figuration of what I call the “dialectics of dandyism.” This chapter seeks to rethink the pervasive definition of dandyism as a sincere and studied effort to be, as Wilde himself might put it, as superficial and artificial as possible. Associated with the “feminization” of modern culture, this notion of dandyism as a devotion to surface presents the dandy as a privileged figure in the development of modern cultural forms precisely because the dandified aesthete’s cultivation of beauty, style, and pleasure embraces the erotics and aesthetics of the commodity. However, I argue that the stereotypical image of the dandy as the embodiment of style over substance—a preoccupation with artifice that seeks to liberate form from content—fails to account for the dialectical character of gay male dandyism as Wilde theorizes it in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Building on a wide range of histories and cultural criticism that present the late nineteenth-century dandy as the premier model of modern gay subjectivity, I use Marx’s theory of the “secret” of the commodity to illuminate the “secret” of gay identity as Oscar Wilde presents it in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In this way, I offer an alternative to the prevalent notion that dandies like Wilde’s Dorian Gray privilege style over substance, and appearance over essence. Arguing instead for a dialectical conception of gay male identity, I show how Wilde defines the dandy as an unremitting struggle between visible appearance and concealed

reality. As I demonstrate, this ongoing dialectic is the “secret” of that distinctly modern form of split subjectivity we now call gay.

In chapter 2, I take up the work of the expatriate English poet Renée Vivien in order to examine the fin-de-siècle figure of the decadent Sapphist or “perverse” lesbian, an icon of modernism who has much in common with the dandy. Vivien’s immersion in the decadent movement provides a clear link between the aestheticism of the homosexual dandy and the artificiality of the perverse lesbian. Vivien’s poetry interests me because of its complex contradictions, which present an apparently paradoxical reworking of the Baudelairean “flower of evil” through a utopian politics of Sapphic revival. Whereas her decadent work defines the lesbian as a spectacle of artifice and perversity, her work that invokes Sappho and ancient Lesbos uses bright images of female freedom to move toward a more affirmative conception of lesbian desire. Departing from the critical propensity to separate these opposing poetics, I demonstrate that while Vivien’s decadent poetry critiques the world in ruins that is bourgeois society, this nightmarish vision always coalesces with her utopian vision of Lesbos as the location of an authentic and liberated female sexuality. An unlikely synthesis of the decadent movement’s fantasy image of the ultramodern, artificial lesbian and a naturalized and heroic vision of Sapphism, Vivien’s decadent Sapphist is a shimmering, negative embodiment of the utopian possibility contained within a modern world in decline.

Extending my argument about the lesbian as an icon of modernism, chapter 3 looks at our most enduring stereotype of lesbian identity, the “mannish lesbian.” Signaling an apparent break from the decadence of the nineteenth-century dandy and the lesbian *fleur du mal*, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) frames masculine lesbian identity as a repudiation of decadence and femininity; nevertheless, in seeking to fashion the mannish lesbian as the apotheosis of bourgeois respectability, Hall draws upon the figuration of the leisured, dandified aesthete. Yet because she grounds her work on new medical definitions of homosexuality as “sexual inversion,” she articulates a conception of queer dandyism that manifests its essential contradictions in a new way. Unlike the Wildean dandy, for example, who seeks to dispense with the body and nature, Hall’s lesbian dandy is defined primarily in relation to these categories. For precisely this reason, many literary and cultural critics have argued that Hall’s novel seeks to naturalize same-sex love in order to gain social acceptance for homosexuals and lesbians. However, the trope of sexual inversion does not erase the oppositions I have been defining as constitutive of modern gay and lesbian identities, primarily appearance/essence, production/consumption, and artifice/nature. As we shall see, Hall’s account of the mannish lesbian as “a fact in nature” actually produces this new subject as the very embodiment of modernity’s contradictions.

Chapter 4 turns to a less prominent modernist icon, the queer black dandy who circulates in the literary and artistic production of the Harlem Renaissance. One of my central claims is that the African American dandy's revision of nineteenth-century, European models of dandyism and decadence serves a strategic purpose; by appropriating the self-consciously decadent aesthetic of the Wildean dandy, Renaissance writers and artists such as Wallace Thurman and Richard Bruce Nugent critique the cult of authenticity surrounding the cultural construction of blackness. In the visual art of Nugent and Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* (1932), the queer figure of the black dandy protests against the commodification of black identity that dominated the so-called Negro craze of the 1920s. In so doing, he disrupts both the fetishizing of the primitive that propels "Harlemania" and the nostalgia for African origins that infuses the New Negro movement. The queer black dandy's rebellion against the culture of capitalism gives birth to a new aesthetic that combines the naturalized simplicity and vigor of primitivism with the artifice of decadence—making legible a distinctly African American incarnation of the new forms of desire, identity, and community emerging in modern, urban culture.

Chapter 5 seeks to account for the paradox of visibility at the heart of a new postwar logic that links homosexuality and addiction in the figure of the queer junkie. This paradox makes William Burroughs's form of gutter dandyism a privileged emblem for the contradictions that define gay and lesbian identity in cold war America. An incarnation of the open secret, queer identity during this period is an object of surveillance that eludes containment, making it both hypervisible and invisible. My goal is to show how this contradictory logic of visibility is embedded in the logic of capital—specifically, the imperatives of postwar Fordism and the crisis of masculinity it eventuated. Like other outlaw masculinities of the Beat movement, Burroughs's gutter dandy reinforces and mobilizes postwar anxieties about feminization; he is in rebellion against the penetration of male subjectivity by the commodity-form even as he is represented as a perverse, feminized subject in the gender ideology of the cold war consensus. This figure inhabits a contradiction between the reification and dehumanization of everyday life and modernity's promise of liberation (through an aesthetics of perception and transgressive eroticism). Moreover, the opposition between invisibility and hypervisibility that defines this Burroughsian icon is an extension of the appearance/essence split that, as I have earlier argued, is at once paradigmatic of the queer and the commodity. The twin imperatives of secrecy and disclosure acquire a new form in cold war America due to the porousness and instability of the boundaries between public and private in postwar society. In the cold war culture of surveillance and containment, the secret takes on a more undefined and paranoid form, making queer identity hypervisible in its imperceptibility. As we shall see, this produces a new dialectic in the figure of the gutter dandy.

Continuing and extending my focus on postwar masculinity, my final chapter analyzes the artistic production and dandified persona of Andy Warhol by examining the artist's engagement with questions of desire, aesthetics, and commodification. It draws on a wide range of materials from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s including Warhol's films, writings, collections, commercial art, Pop paintings, and private and public drawings. My argument situates the artist's work within both gay subcultural styles and the reorganization of masculinity that was one aspect of American society's shift to Fordist models of mass production and consumption. I take up this project by focusing on Warhol's two stylistic strategies for addressing the different but related problems of masculine identity and artmaking in commodity culture: "camp" and a sensibility I call "outlaw masculinity." I show how these aesthetic strategies challenge the increasing penetration of capital into American society while also embracing the liberatory potential of a queer commodity aesthetics. Celebrating an improbable form of dandyism grounded in the Pop sensibility, Warhol proposes new queer relation to the commodity-form that combines the rationalizing force of the economic with the libidinal energy of the sensuous/aesthetic.

At the core of this project is my belief that queer cultural production has much to tell us about the contradictions of capitalist modernity and what it means to be modern. By focusing on queer dandyism and its changing relation to the sphere of the commodity, my project aims to trace the themes of dandyism and decadence as they travel across time and place and register differences in region, gender, class, and race. Because I see these themes as especially salient to both gay male and lesbian identity formations, all my subsequent chapters build on the opening argument I make about the nineteenth-century gay male dandy. Nevertheless, although I frame figures as disparate as Radclyffe Hall's mannish lesbian and William S. Burroughs's queer junkie in terms of the thematics of dandyism and decadence, I do not theorize any of these twentieth-century figures as mere extensions of that earlier model of dandyism. I am most interested in the ways in which the central contradictions of dandyism are transformed by the successors of the Wildean dandy. In all my readings, I strive to pay attention to the new and various forms that modern queer consciousness takes. Simultaneously, I emphasize that the contradictions embodied in queer subjectivity at any particular historical moment are never discontinuous from those that shaped earlier models of sexual regulation, reification, and resistance.