

Peter Lehman

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CONCLUSION



RUNNING SCARED

From Nagisa Oshima in the last chapter to Roy Orbison in this one. Their differences in culture, media, and artistic temperaments would seem to defy any connection. Oshima, a Japanese avant-garde filmmaker, pushes to extremes the conventions of various styles of filmmaking; his films are frequently obscure and inaccessible to large, general audiences. Roy Orbison was a U.S. musician known primarily for a string of rock 'n' roll Top-40 hits between 1960 and 1964. Top-40 radio was then and remains notorious for its programming inflexibility. Mass commercial appeal is essential. The work of both artists, however, centers on the issues of masculine sexuality and the male body that are central to this book. Orbison's music provides a vehicle for connecting the themes I have been exploring, and one of his biggest hits suggests a fitting title for this study.

The previous chapters analyzed a potentially bewildering variety of texts, but my intention has not been comprehensiveness or inclusiveness. To conclude with Orbison's music helps, I hope, to show the need to continue to cast the net wide in future research on the male body. It should also dispel

the tendency to make overly general statements about the monolithic nature of the representation of the male body because pop music in the early 1960s, perhaps as much as any other area of popular culture, has been the object of indiscriminating, sweeping generalizations; for many years, 1960s pop music was seen as little more than the wasteland between the time when Elvis Presley entered the army and the Beatles arrived to save rock 'n' roll. Yet it is precisely during that time that Roy Orbison created a body of work virtually unmatched for its richness and uniqueness in the history of U.S. popular music: His work touches on many of the themes that run through this book, including the polarities of a phallic spectacle of masculine power and its vulnerable, sometimes comic antithesis. The fear and anxiety about the entire masculine project that underlie these polarities are extraordinarily evident and well developed in Orbison's work.

The three years preceding Roy Orbison's death on December 6, 1989, and the years since then have seen the proliferation of a number of popular and critical discourses about this most talented and unusual singer-songwriter. Some of these discourses inflect previous ones in new ways and others introduce entirely new elements into the mix. Two books on Orbison have already appeared (*Only the Lonely: Roy Orbison's Life and Legacy* by Alan Clayson and *Dark Star: The Tragic Life Story of Roy Orbison* by Ellis Amburn) and a third is being written by Orbison's widow Barbara; three movies have been titled after his songs, which are also used on their soundtracks (the 1990 made-for-TV movie *Blue Bayou*; the 1990 box-office smash *Pretty Woman*; and the 1991 film *Only the Lonely*); two films about Orbison are in various stages of pre-production (a documentary and a theatrical feature to be produced by Warner Bros. and Home Box Office); and an all-star concert tribute was held in Los Angeles in February 1990 and cablecast later that year on Showtime. I briefly survey these things because they are related to and intersect with another discourse I wish to add to the mix: a discourse on masculinity and the male body in Orbison's music, star persona, and performance style.

After all of Orbison's hits had been written and recorded, a series of events occurred and were constructed into a discourse of tragedy that dominated Orbison's life story in the media and among the general public. The 1966 death of his first wife, Claudette, in a motorcycle accident, which occurred as she rode by Orbison's side, and the death of two of his three children in a fire in 1968 that destroyed his Nashville home were the events on which this discourse was built, and his emergency triple bypass heart surgery in

1978 quickly became part of it. Articles on the singer at the time of his death showed how extreme his image came to be. *People* magazine ran a front cover headline "The Haunted Life of Rock Legend Roy Orbison," and the tabloid *The Star* declared his death the final tragedy of a tragic life.

Recent years have also seen Orbison emerge as perhaps the most admired musician's musician in the history of rock 'n' roll. Shortly before Elvis Presley's death, he called Orbison the greatest singer in the world. As with nearly all these discourses, this one is not entirely new, though it is unprecedented in scope. This homage probably can be dated from Bruce Springsteen's 1975 reference to Orbison in "Thunder Road" on the "Born to Run" album and certainly culminated with the much celebrated and highly publicized 1988 Cinemax special *Roy Orbison and Friends: A Black and White Night* in which Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Tom Waits, and numerous other stars played and sang back-up for Orbison. The February 24, 1990, tribute concert, however, may well have been the culmination of this phenomenon when Bonnie Raitt, Emmylou Harris, k. d. lang, NRBQ, Stray Cats, Levon Helm, the Talking Heads (minus David Byrne and redubbed the Shrunken Heads), Larry Gatlin, Dwight Yoakum, Ricky Skaggs, John Fogerty, Harry Dean Stanton, Gary Busey, Patrick Swayze, Booker T. Jones, and Was (Not Was), among others, all performed versions of Orbison's songs.

His becoming a member of the Traveling Wilburys, along with Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Tom Petty, and Jeff Lynne, was related to this aspect of Orbison's career, as was his 1986 recording of *The Class of '55* with Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins. Most critics, as well as the public, were totally surprised by this outpouring of admiration for Orbison's music by fellow musicians because his work had been largely ignored and forgotten over the past twenty-five years, and Orbison had never been critically acclaimed in the way that a Bob Dylan or a George Harrison had been even during his four-year period of commercial success (1960 to 1964).

In addition to the musicians who performed and recorded with Orbison in his final years, many others—such as Bryan Ferry, David Bowie, and Neil Young—have acknowledged their respect for him. This leads me to another related discourse, which I term the discourse of hyperbole. Musicians speak about Orbison in the kind of excessive language usually reserved for fans talking about musicians. Bono, the lead singer for U2, remarked of Orbison, "He was at the time of his death the finest white pop singer on the planet" (Zimmerman 1968, 2D). Emmylou Harris, who had years earlier claimed that she never wanted to sell her house after Orbison had sung in it, called

with him and, after repeated viewings, decided it was a brilliant film. Lynch even persisted in his desire to work with Orbison and agreed to do anything to get into a recording session with him for a new version of "In Dreams." Lynch not only became co-producer of the song with Orbison and T-Bone Burnett but also became his friend. Orbison credited Lynch with profoundly revitalizing concert performances of his old songs. Lynch was even present at the tribute concert and came out on stage with Barbara Orbison for the closing group rendition of "Only the Lonely."

Bruce Springsteen's 1987 speech inducting Orbison into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame brought further public attention to this dark, sexual aspect of Orbison's music. Springsteen remarked of his first concert memory of Orbison, "He came out in dark glasses, a dark suit, and he played some dark music," music Springsteen characterized as the "underside of pop romance," which he liked to listen to "alone and in the dark."

This bizarre side of Orbison's music that Lynch and Springsteen so perceptively grasped is, I argue, part of a pervasive challenge in Orbison's career to many of the norms of dominant early 1960s rock 'n' roll, especially those norms involving masculinity and the male body. Orbison wrote songs that (as Springsteen has also observed) totally departed from the standard verse, chorus, and bridge structure of pop music. They were also difficult, if not impossible, to dance to or to be covered by amateur groups, something that further differentiated them from pop hits of the time. And Orbison sang those songs in a three-octave voice that eerily defied sexual difference as it imperceptibly soared into some of the highest notes in the history of rock 'n' roll. His 1987 duet of "Crying" with k. d. lang chillingly blends the male and female voices so that the listener is not always sure who is singing. Due to lang's boyish appearance and the use of initials rather than a first name, their live performance of this song on Johnny Carson's show even misled some viewers into thinking lang was a male. In performance, Orbison stood motionless, singing song after song without so much as a word to the audience. During his string of hits between 1960 and 1964, Orbison did not hire a publicist and was virtually unrepresented in fan magazines. Even his most successful albums ("Greatest Hits, Vols. 1 and 2") did not include any photos of him. Thus he minimized the spectacle of his body in performance and hid it from public view in the publicity discourse that normally surrounds rock stars. It is important to note that the image of him in the ever-present dark glasses did not achieve any magnitude until after his string of hits. Rather than have an image of mystery or darkness about him, he originally had no

image. An early 1960s article in *Life* magazine, which appeared at the height of his popularity, referred to him as "an anonymous celebrity."

But Orbison's body nevertheless became a troubled site of attention. Once again, Springsteen was particularly evocative when he observed that on first meeting Orbison, he felt that he could reach out and put his hand through Orbison's body. Notice how these discourses intertwine. The image of Springsteen passing his hand through Orbison's body is not unrelated to Orbison's reference to himself as someone merely passing through this world. The body was somehow insubstantial, not entirely of this world. At the Roy Orbison tribute concert, Bernie Taupin referred to Orbison as "frail," not an adjective commonly applied to rock stars.

John Belushi's late 1970s "Saturday Night Live" parody of Orbison, however, touched on what became by the 1980s the two most notable aspects of the singer's body: its immobility and the dark glasses. In the first part of the skit, Orbison's wife tries to get his attention by removing his glasses, only to find another pair beneath them. And another and another in an endless regression. The skit ends with a concert performance of "Oh, Pretty Woman." Rigid as a board, Belushi falls over while singing and playing guitar. He never misses a note as band members pick him up, and he finishes the song totally expressionless.

This exaggerated, though perceptive, version of Orbison's appearance is related to his denial of the traditional masculine position in rock 'n' roll. Most rock singers of the period, as typified by Elvis Presley, strutted around the stage, posturing in sexually aggressive and self-confident *macho* style. Something of this dichotomy can be seen in *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll* (1988), a documentary about Chuck Berry, by comparing Orbison's scenes with those of Jerry Lee Lewis, another early rocker whose performance style was acutely sexual. Lewis, with trademark cigar and bourbon in hand, talks in predictably braggadocio fashion about how Chuck Berry won his respect in a fight the two had, but Orbison quietly talks about how Berry's music influenced him as a singer and songwriter. Orbison also contributed to this discourse late in his career by referring to the early 1960s as a time, for example, when men were not supposed to cry. Coming out of his recording session of "Crying" with k. d. lang, he joked that he tried to be macho, but failed. By 1988, this discourse also begins to emerge in the press, as in the earlier cited Watrous *New York Times* review: "Of all the rock-and-roll singers of his generation, Mr. Orbison is the least obsessed with masculinity; the music and his voice and words are unmenacing and complex" (1988, 48).

Orbison's music and performance style might be more accurately described as *most* obsessed with masculinity, though with questioning and departing from its dominant late 1950s and early 1960s manifestation. Watrous is also correct that Orbison's music lacks sexual menace but it is important to distinguish this from Pat Boone's style of blandly watering down rock's sexuality to make it clean and safely middle class. Similarly, Orbison's motionless performance style cannot be reduced to a mere elimination of the usual sexual antics. Orbison's performance, in fact, evokes a fearful paralysis that starkly contrasts with traditional masculine strutting and is thus closely linked to the songs he wrote. This is perhaps most explicit in "Leah," (Roy Orbison, 1962) a dream song wherein the dreamer, diving for pearls for his lost love, suddenly begins to drown: "But something's wrong, I cannot move around / My leg is caught, its pulling me down." The very titles of songs such as "Crying" (Roy Orbison and Joe Melson, 1962) and "Running Scared" (Roy Orbison and Joe Melson, 1961) emphasize the uncharacteristic way in which his music acknowledges male fear and intense emotion. In the latter song, the singer-narrator stands fearfully immobilized by the phallic spectacle of his rival for the girl: "Then all at once he was standing there / So sure of himself, his head in the air." Instead of acting to win the girl by fighting this threat (think of the male persona evoked in "My Boyfriend's Back"), the man passively watches the drama unfold ("You turned around and walked away with me"). "Oh, Pretty Woman" (Roy Orbison and Bill Dees, 1964) originally ended with the woman walking away from the singer-narrator. Orbison agreed to change it when his producer thought it too depressing, but even the happy boy-gets-girl ending reveals total male passivity: "But wait, what do I see / Is she walking back to me?"

Similarly, in "Crying," the mere touch of a former lover's hand starts the man uncontrollably crying. These outbursts of male emotion are not limited to the lyrics in Orbison's songs; they affect the structure of the songs and Orbison's singing style. "It's Over," (Roy Orbison and Bill Dees, 1964) for example, builds to two emotional crescendos in two and a half minutes, the second more excessive than the first. Perhaps the most extreme of all these outbursts occurs in "The Crowd," (Roy Orbison and Joe Melson, 1962) which is, not coincidentally, the most operatic of all Orbison's songs, since the oft-noted operatic qualities of his music are linked to the intense outpouring of male emotion. At a time when other rockers reveled in their active desire for and control of women, and kept other emotions in check, Orbison's music

gave vent to feelings so intense that the end of a love affair sounded like the end of the world.

These aspects of male sexuality interact with the various other discourses surrounding Orbison, for if his music is unusual in that area, it is part of a much larger context wherein nearly everything about his music, star persona, and performance style defies generalizations about the rock music of his era. By not creating and circulating sexually desirable images of himself in fan magazines and on record albums, by minimizing the sexual display of his body in performance and hiding behind impenetrable dark glasses, by singing in an eerie high range, and most of all by explicitly writing songs about male anxiety and excessive emotion, Roy Orbison created a significant alternative to the sexual image of traditional male rock stars.

Nearly all of the discourses reveal a sense of difference about Orbison. What I have called the discourses of hyperbole and the musician's musician doubly reveal this. The need to speak about him in such excessive language stems from a sense of difference or uniqueness. "There will never be another singer like Roy Orbison," Bonnie Raitt said at the tribute concert. And David Hinkley wrote: "All singers have someone who sounds like them—except Orbison. No one sounds even a little like Roy Orbison" (1988, D20). But the range and spectrum of the speakers is equally revealing: How could any single musician be hailed by such a startlingly diverse group of other musicians? They range from traditional pop, country and blues, to nearly every form of rock 'n' roll including punk, new wave and new country, as well as current political folk music. Robert Hilburn commented on this aspect of Orbison's music in his *Los Angeles Times* review of the tribute concert, when he noted that "the fact that artists as varied as Emmylou Harris, John Hiatt, Booker T. Jones, Joe Ely, Cindy Bullens, Michael McDonald and members of the Talking Heads can find common ground in the music of a single writer also underscores the richness and range of Orbison's grand musical legacy" (1989, F7). Symptomatically, the few records of his that could be found in stores during the 1970s and for much of the 1980s were in the country and western section, rather than the rock section. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame long before he was inducted into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. He has been called everything from a rockabilly to a blues singer.

Nearly everything about Orbison was different. His concerts during the 1980s, for example, were virtually the same songs performed in the same

order with the same arrangements; no concession was made to the fact that these songs were twenty-five years old. He did not "update" them, nor did he present them as nostalgia, as is common among older rock singers. He performed them as classics that did not have to be updated because they were never dated to begin with. From this perspective, an Orbison concert was closer to a classical song recital, for example, than to opera. The music was everything; the stage show, nothing. Instead of surprises and changes, a nuanced appreciation of an established body of work was encouraged. The songs were interconnected through a complex sense of pacing, certain rockers supplying a necessary counterpoint to the ballads, and so on. The audience was as still and quiet as the performer. There is virtually nothing about Orbison's music, star persona, or career that was conventional, including his form of masculinity and sexuality. It is perhaps in part because of the latter that he is so deeply loved now by such artists as k. d. lang and David Lynch. The work of both of these artists challenges comfortable, traditional gender distinctions. Perhaps Orbison, more than anyone else, was surprised to end his career in such company, but it was fitting.

I have detailed elsewhere the complex function that David Lynch gives "In Dreams" in *Blue Velvet* (Lehman 1987). The song, used twice a few minutes apart, appears at a point where the distinction within the film between the dream world and the real world breaks down and at a point where perverse and ambiguous sexuality reigns. Such breakdowns between the dream world and the real world had been explicitly acknowledged in Orbison's music in such songs as "Heartache" (Roy Orbison and Bill Dees, 1968) (which he recorded twice for different labels, first for MGM in 1968 and then for Mercury in 1975), where a desiring, dreaming man cries out, "I reach out to touch you, but you're not there." On his final album, *Mystery Girl* (1989), the song "In the Real World" (Will Jennings and Richard Kerr, 1987) is a late-period reflection on "In Dreams." The perverse, sexual ambiguity, however, was something Orbison had not dealt with explicitly, though he also returned to this on the *Mystery Girl* album. In the title song, "She's a Mystery to Me" (David Evans and Paul Hewson, 1989), a woman with dark eyes leads a man into darkness where a night of ambiguously, intense, and perverse sex is only obliquely described by the provocative line, "Fallen angel cries / Then I just melt away." The song makes clear the implicit association in Orbison's music between the dark side and sexuality.

A streak of masochism runs throughout the dark sexuality of Orbison's songs. It surfaces explicitly in such songs as "Crawling Back" (Roy Orbison

and Bill Dees, 1965), where the male persona simultaneously describes the awful, painful things his lover does to him and affirms that, no matter how many times she does them, he will always come crawling back. Many of the songs, however, wallow in the much more generalized pain of loss in a manner so extreme as to imply that their male persona revels in the pleasure of his loneliness and is, in part, responsible for it. Like the men described by Gaylyn Studlar in Josef von Sternberg's films, the male personae in Orbison's songs (which are through the connection with his voice, one man—Orbison himself) seem to prefer never getting the woman or, if they do, losing her. Again, "Careless Heart" (Roy Orbison, Diane Warren, and Albert Hammond, 1989), the last song on *Mystery Girl*, makes this very clear when the male persona, "Alone with my lonely heart," acknowledges that he let it all "slip away." At the time of his death, several critics used the cliché that when listening to Orbison's songs of loneliness and lost love, "it never felt so good to hurt so bad." This feeling is in fact borne out by the underlying masochism that emerges over and over by the image of the lonely dreamer in the dark whose pain, as expressed by Orbison's beautiful voice, can only be called exquisite.

But the Orbison persona, when not reveling in the pain of a lost or unrealized love, is sometimes the object of laughter. In "Pantomime" (Roy Orbison and Bill Dees, 1966), an overlooked masterpiece from Orbison's MCM period, he makes the connection explicitly, "I play the lonely joker / I laugh when things aren't funny." This motif can be traced as far back as "The Actress" (Roy Orbison and Joe Melson, 1962), where Orbison sings, "You keep me around, to be your faithful clown / Till someone you can love comes along." Significantly, both songs develop their scenarios of love around theatrical motifs. In the latter, the clown, with full awareness, masochistically pledges his willingness to play the fateful "masquerade" to its very end, when he will be "a fool on parade." As with so many of the motifs in Orbison's work, this one also finds its most explicit expression on the self-consciously late-period *Mystery Girl*. In "The Comedians" (Elvis Costello, 1989), the male persona takes a ride on a ferris wheel with his girl friend only to find himself the victim of a cruel practical joke when she arranges to have the ride stopped, leaving him "dangling" from the top to watch her laughingly walk away with another man. "It's always something cruel that laughter drowns," he laments in a line that applies to the clown—lonely joker image that takes its place alongside the scared man and the masochistic man to complete the three main facets of the male persona in Orbison's music. Fearful, hurt,

and humiliated, the male persona in Orbison's work is a far cry from the cocky, self-confident *macho* image associated with so much rock 'n' roll, especially with Orbison's contemporaries.

In "Chicken Hearted" (Bill Justis, 1957), an odd little song that he recorded for Sun Records years before he became famous, Orbison sings of his desire to be a lover, but laments that he does not have any girls, and sings of his desire to be a hero, but laments that he does not have the nerve; he's "chicken hearted." In an unreleased version of the song, he even sings, "I'm scared of my own shadow." That song is the earliest intimation of what was to come—an unusually candid portrait of a man terrified by the conventional notions of masculinity and roles for men that lay at the heart of his culture. Nearly every significant aspect of Orbison's career circles around this problem, and nothing more so than his body and the strange inflections he would give it in various phases of his career. In the late 1980s, *Playboy* magazine did a short piece on a new cultural sensibility, which they dubbed an aesthetic of weirdness. Some of the people included are obvious choices, but alongside the obvious "weirdos" was a picture and mention of Roy Orbison. If Orbison was in any way a pioneer of a "weird" sensibility, it came from the way he enshrouded his frail body in blackness, wrapped his eyes behind ever-present dark glasses, and had the audacity to perform intensely emotional songs of male fear and pain, frequently employing a remarkable falsetto with feminine connotations, and performing as if he himself were paralyzed by the very emotions of which he sang. This was neither party music nor innocent teen music.

Orbison's songs reveal a polarity that underlies all the images I have examined in this book: In "Running Scared," the rival boy friend is described as a powerful spectacle of masculinity—"His head high in the air"; in "The Comedians," the male persona is left "dangling" high in the air, the object of female laughter. Not being able or not wanting to become the proper, powerful phallic male, the male protagonist fears becoming the vulnerable butt of the joke and the object of women's laughter and scorn. Recall the woman who laughs at Chris Cross in *Scarlet Street*, the laughs Clint Brown in *The Nothing Man* imagines others will direct as his body when they discover he does not have a penis, the laughs and contemptuous sneers of the women who tell penis-size jokes in so many recent films, and the laughs of the actual women in *Dick Talk*, who delight in recalling the inadequacies of their lesser-endowed lovers. At the opposite extreme, the shadows of the powerful, phallic male have fallen across the pages of the works analyzed in this book:

the muscular figure of Tarzan swinging through the jungles and making love to Jane, the powerful John T. Chance played by John Wayne in *Rio Bravo*, the muscled and well-endowed models of Mapplethorpe's photographs and the super-hero sex machines from hard-core pornography. Indeed, the polarized representation of men parallels that of women; representations of the mother/the whore and the phallic hero/the vulnerable, laughable failure are profoundly restrictive. At the simplest extremes, we are asked either to be in awe of the powerful spectacle of phallic male sexuality or to feel pity for, be ashamed of, or laugh at its vulnerable, failed opposite. In such a context, men as well as penises are either big or small, powerful or weak, impressive or pathetic.

The pervasive anxiety that underlies the entire spectrum of imaging the male body is, then, not surprising. Fear permeates the works analyzed in this book: The feral-child narratives either fear acknowledging the disturbing reality of male sexuality or simplistically affirm a ludicrously comfortable version of it; the Hawks films fear everything from aging to wounding that can weaken the male body; the war wounds analyzed in the works of Hemingway and Thompson reveal a fear of how the glorious activity of male combat can instantly create the opposite, emasculated men. The fear of not measuring up to a quantifiable notion of masculinity underlying these more symbolic areas achieves its literal equivalent in the anxiety about penis size, which is so pervasive in our culture. Within this fear-riddled masculinity, the real or imagined sound of laughter rings persistently.

Where there is such extensive fear of measuring up, there is an intense fear of those who are perceived to threaten this quantifiable notion of masculinity: women and homosexuals. *Rio Bravo* clearly focuses this issue. Feathers (Angie Dickinson), the "guilty" woman, threatens John T. Chance and the male group. When Chance's attempt to send her out of town fails, he orders her to conform to his notions of propriety. Indeed, much of the narrative of *Rio Lobo* is structured around the male group's attempts to leave the women behind; men are constantly dropping women off and telling them where to stay and wait. Their failure in this project is clear both when one of the women enters the jail in which the men have secluded themselves and when another appears at the shoot-out and kills the villain before the men can do so.

This fear of women surfaces in the dominating wife and treacherous mistress of *Scarlet Street*, the women in the Hawks films who will not leave when they are told to and will not stay where they are put, the sexually evaluating

women who laugh at men with their penis-size jokes, or the avenging women who kill or even castrate men in the rape-revenge films.

The oft-noted pattern of male bonding in the Hawks films also points to the unacknowledged homophobia that lurks within and beneath sexual representations of the male body. At times, disturbing homosexual aspects of male sexuality are repressed, as in Truffaut's omission of central aspects of Ingrid Bergman's diaries in *The Wild Child*. At other times, male obsessions with sexual aspects of the male body are masked by an apparent heterosexual context that drafts women into the service of male fantasy, as is the case with many of the penis-size jokes and rape-revenge films analyzed in Chapter 6. Indeed, as I suggested in my introduction, the near-total silence by heterosexual men on issues of the sexual representation of the male body is itself a symptom of homophobia; this subject, the silence seems to say, can be of interest only to gay men. But analysis of the wide variety of artistic, scientific, and medical discourses I have examined in this book belies such a notion.

Some works, such as Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* and many of Orbison's songs, supply challenging alternatives in their historical and cultural contexts. *In the Realm of the Senses* breaks with crucial assumptions about the phallic centrality of male sexuality in the widely differing cultural traditions of Japanese erotic woodblock prints and contemporary Western hard-core feature films; and Orbison's music breaks the self-confident *macho* masquerade that was such a central feature of late 1950s and early 1960s rock 'n' roll. Nevertheless, the work of both artists remains caught within phallocentric contradictions and limitations. Oshima, as I have indicated, paradoxically centers the penis in his attempt to overthrow the phallus; Orbison, in some of his songs as well as in aspects of his persona, affirms conventional ideas about women and male sexuality even as his best music cries out in anguish about the cost of such notions to heterosexual men.

If much of this book speaks about male concerns, I have also suggested that some of the same contradictions emerge from women's work. *Dick Talk* is riddled with phallocentric discourse about the importance and awesome spectacle of the highly active male body and the large penis. In contrast, the photographs and writing of Sarah Kent show a significant, if once again contradictory, effort to understand and break free of the bipolar sexual representation of the male body. The gentle male body she envisions neither tries to impress nor risks becoming the vulnerable object of humiliation. It is precisely such a notion of gentleness that is lacking in *Dick Talk* and that

Watrous invokes in his *New York Times* review of Orbison's concert when he notes the music is free of any sexual "menace."

Orbison's music, however, is not free of humiliation, and this points to the final common thread that runs through many sexual representations of the male body. In a cultural context that defines a normative masculinity and sexuality as powerfully phallic, the opposite pole of vulnerability and humiliation frequently becomes the goal of a masochistic yearning, as if many men want to be punished for the brutally powerful masculinity they attempt to embody, or want to abandon the attempt and flee from it entirely. Thus, in many of the images and situations I have analyzed, men willingly make themselves the butt of joking women and the object of brutal physical harm by revenging women. Even within the complex and profound work, *In the Realm of the Senses*, one can detect a masochistic male desire to abandon the usual male role (i.e., to die for one's country) in favor of offering oneself up entirely to a woman (i.e., to die for a woman's pleasure). Similarly, the male personae in Orbison's music seem thrilled at the moment when the woman decides her pleasure. That moment is entirely outside the man's active control—as when "Running Scared" builds in emotional torment as the singer waits to see whether the woman will turn to him or his rival, or when, in "Oh, Pretty Woman," he exclaims in near disbelief, "But wait! What I do I see / Is she walking back to me?" If she chooses the singer, her decision is in no way linked to anything he has done to ensure it; if she does not, he is left alone to revel in the pleasures of loneliness and unfulfilled dreams. In the late-period "Windsurfer" (Roy Orbison and Bill Dees, 1989) ("He said, 'Let's sail away together.' She told him, 'No, no, never, no.'"), he even kills himself over the pain of the loss. In neither scenario does he enact conventionally powerful masculine roles, preferring instead to be passively accepted or rejected.

The odd combination of Oshima and Orbison serves to highlight the need for artistic and critical work on both the literal and the symbolic dimensions of the sexual representation of the male body. Oshima's film is so explicit that it caused great controversy in the United States at the time of its release and could not be shown at all in Japan. Orbison's entire work lacks even one sexually explicit reference. Yet, as I have tried to demonstrate throughout these chapters, where the male body is involved, there is a constant tension and interplay between the literal and the symbolic. We must pay careful attention to both if we wish to understand and alter those representational practices.

I do not think that merely examining issues of masculine subjectivity and symbolic aspects of the body will suffice. If we want to understand and change the representations of the male body, we must create new images of the sexually explicit. So much of our response to the male body in films, for example, is contingent on retaining the mystique surrounding the penis, and that mystique is totally dependent on either keeping the penis covered up or carefully regulating its representation.

The significance of the interplay between the literal and the symbolic is clear if we consider the star system. It is no coincidence that when rare moments of frontal male nudity occur in the U.S. cinema, they involve actors like Richard Gere, rather than Clint Eastwood. Despite the fact that they represent different notions of the hero, conventional male hero figures like John Wayne and Clint Eastwood simply could not be shown naked. Anything we would see would cause the collapse of the powerfully phallic male sexuality their character's embody. In Richard Dyer's terms, discussed earlier, just as the penis is not a patch on the phallus, the sight of the penis would invest these star bodies with a literal quality incompatible with their symbolic characterizations. Within the European art cinema, for example, no such generic connotations accrue around the body of an actor like Gérard Depardieu, and for that reason no particular problem arises when he appears nude in such films as *1900* (1977) or when he walks around nude for extensive periods of time in *The Last Woman* (1976).

The situation becomes even more problematic if we compare stars like John Wayne and Clint Eastwood with the muscle-building stars of the 1980s, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger. In an analysis of *Pumping Iron* and *Pumping Iron II*, Christine Holmlund perceptively notes:

This is why, unlike the emphasis on tits and ass in *Pumping Iron II*, the camera never focuses on the bulge in Arnold's or Lou's bikinis or pans their naked bodies in the shower: to look might reveal too much or too little, threatening the tenuous equation established between masculinity, muscularity, and men. (1990, 45)

Although I think Holmlund's notion that there may be "too much" is mistaken, since anything is always too little where the penis-phallus relationship is involved, she perceptively draws attention to the way in which an already tenuous relationship is even more tenuous where muscle builders are concerned. For this reason, I would suggest, there is a cultural tradition of gossip about the penises of muscle builders. In the December 1978 issue of *Play-*

girl, there is a nude photograph of Richard Dubois, Mr. America of 1954, in which his genitals are exposed; the caption states that Mae West remarked of the man, "Umm . . . all that meat and no potatoes" ("X-Rated Sneak Peaks" 1978, 81). By grotesquely intensifying the symbolic phallic aspects of the body, male body builders risk tearing the mask off the facade by threatening to make conscious the realization that no man, no matter what he has, can be that impressively masculine.

It is significant that in the last few years a number of female and male artists have dealt very explicitly with penis imagery. As in the photograph that appears on the jacket of this book, Robert Flynt frequently juxtaposes rigid medical, scientific, or artistic grids or images with fluid and graceful bodies, which eloquently defy those fixed ways of understanding and representing them. The bodies he represents fit neither the stereotype of the powerful, phallic spectacle nor its opposite in pitiable vulnerability or comic failure. His works show the importance of creating new images of the male body and male sexuality.

Melody Davis has done a series of nudes that simultaneously focus attention on the genitals and yet seem remarkably free from representing them within the polarity that usually governs such photographs. Like Sarah Kent, she does not show the head of her model so that identification and narration are likewise blocked. The body and the genitals are thus objectified, but not in a conventional, judgmental fashion. Unlike Kent, she neither naturalizes her nudes by placing them in nature nor links them to the high-art tradition of such works as Michelangelo's *David*. The pictures thus fully and frankly acknowledge the photographer's erotic interest in the subject. None of the body poses involve traditional male postures; indeed, one of them shows the hips positioned in a manner with feminine connotations, not one that evokes traditional negative judgments but one that suggests that the conventional distinction between male and female nudes is overly dichotomized and rigidified. The penis is shown flaccid, semi-erect, and erect; in all states, it seems an object of contemplation, fascination, and beauty—nothing to be ashamed of or proud of, but something to be acknowledged by both men and women, heterosexual and homosexual (27). As with Flynt's photographs, one need only compare these to Mapplethorpe's to recognize her accomplishment. Davis has simultaneously produced a related series of photographs of construction sites that employs the same palladium-platinum printing technique that formally links them to the male nudes (28). Although not about the male body at all, these photographs show the need to pursue



approximately fifteen minutes, the film presents what it claims is a thousand Polaroid close-ups of male genitals and a commentary of one hundred women talking about such things as what they call penises, what they thought the first time they saw one, how they can tell by looking at a man what his penis will be like, and what they think about penis size. Visually the film is extraordinary in the range of represented penises. Within less than a minute of watching the film, the spectator becomes aware of how extremely limited and regulated all our representations of the penis are, whether they be in art, photography, cinema, or medicine. In terms of size and shape, these penises do not come close to conforming to any cultural notion of what a penis looks like; instead, they present a stunning variety that undermines the very notion of any such conformity. If one compares them with the images in modern sex education textbooks discussed in Chapter 7, one quickly realizes that the texts purportedly varied images are in fact bizarrely limited, being much more like each other than they are like the actual variety Memmell shows. As such, Memmell's work relates to Justine Hill's medical photographs in *Plain and Fancy Penis* discussed in Chapter 7. In direct opposition to much of *Dick Talk*, the women heard on the soundtrack in *Dick* speak in many voices. In the section on size, for example, we hear women who prefer small penises, women who believe there is no significant difference in the size, and women

both literal and symbolic sexual representations of the male body if we are to understand them. She says: "In the second body of work, I have focused upon construction sites which I view as psychological spaces. . . . Given that gender is a space of construction and deconstruction—both ruinous and mysteriously grand, I feel that this body of work is of kindred spirit with the male nudes" (Davis 1991).

Dick (1991), an independent film by Jo Memmell, similarly extends the work of the anonymous producers of *Dick Talk*, analyzed in Chapter 8. In

who prefer large penises. No narrator or moderator pursues her agenda, and there is no attempt to generalize along such lines as "women do not really care about size." Some care and some do not; some like big ones and some like small ones. As such, the soundtrack also helps participate in a discourse that destroys traditionally established and highly limited ways of talking about penises.

As well as paying careful attention to such alternative and frequently experimental work, future work on the sexual representation of the male body must also take into account the work of feature filmmakers who give prominent and frequently unusual treatment to it in their films. Although in this book I have not concerned myself with auteur issues, authorship studies on such directors as Paul Schrader, Paul Verhoeven, and Peter Greenaway are important areas of exploration. My analysis of *American Gigolo* in Chapter 1 points to a problem in Schrader's work that is central to such later films as *Mishima* (1985) and *Comfort of Strangers* (1991). The former film deals with a man who becomes totally preoccupied with his body, while the latter contains an extended scene in which a nude man walks around the room while a woman remains in bed and covered. Although lacking in frontal nudity, the scene bears comparison with a similar scene in *American Gigolo*. Furthermore, the film contains a remarkable scene in which the man and his girlfriend are dining in a restaurant. Although he tells her that everyone is admiring her beauty, she tells him that, on the contrary, they are looking at him. The narrative centers on another man's obsession with photographing the central male character's body, and even the casting of the young couple emphasizes the physical beauty of the young man over that of the woman.

Similarly, the scene from *Robocop* that I analyze in Chapter 6 points to many similar scenes in Verhoeven's work, including his early European work and later Hollywood films. In *Spetters* (1980), we see frontal male nudity in a scene where two young men measure their penises to see who has the bigger one; in a scene in *Turkish Delight* (1974), a young man comes out of the bathroom and masquerades for a woman waiting for him in bed by parading around with a bra and "falsies" and his penis invisibly tucked between his thighs; and in *The Fourth Man* (1979), a man has a graphic castration nightmare. The central preoccupation of such futuristic films as *Robocop* and *Total Recall* (1990) turn on the spectacle of the male body as a powerful cyborg in the former and as a powerfully muscled weightlifter (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in the latter. In *Basic Instinct* (1992), we see a shot of the body of the first murder victim with his genitals clearly centered. Indeed, the preoccupation

with the male body in Verhoeven's work is remarkably consistent, although his Dutch European Art films and his Hollywood blockbusters appear quite disparate.

Peter Greenaway's films (not discussed here) also feature a pronounced emphasis on frontal male nudity. The lover in *The Cook, the Thief, the Wife, and Her Lover* walks around nude for extended periods of time, and several men are shown nude in *Drowning by Numbers* (1987). *Prospero's Books* (1991) probably features more extensive male nudity than any other feature narrative film. Indeed, Greenaway's preoccupation with the male body and the penis surfaces in the dialogue of *Drowning by Numbers* several times. In one scene, a man sleeps naked on a bed; a woman asks the man's wife if it is true that all fat men have small penises. Just as she speaks the line, the overweight husband repositions his body in such a manner as to emphasize his penis. The moment is one of the very few in cinema where dialogue about a small penis actually accompanies the visual representation of it. A young boy in the film is preoccupied with circumcision. At one point he talks to his father about the representation of penises in an art book, and Greenaway cuts to the paintings being discussed. Later, the boy attempts to circumcise himself.

The scene in *Turkish Delight* where the man masquerades with his genitals tucked between his thighs points to another important direction for future research that departs from authorial perspectives. A similar image occurs in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) when "Buffalo Bill," a deranged killer, parades around in makeup, earrings, and a woman's robe and with his genitals tucked between his thighs. In *Kinky Business 2* (1989), a hard-core pornographic film, a highly unusual scene within the genre occurs when a woman, dissatisfied with a potential lover who has fallen asleep, puts makeup on his face and then tucks his genitals between his thighs, an act that is shown in close-up. She then gets a long mirror, which she holds up to the side of the bed; when she awakens the man, he sees his image in the mirror and has a momentary panic about losing his penis. The appearance of this exact image within the European Art Cinema, Hollywood, and hard-core pornography suggests that it holds a particular fascination for men, a fascination that equates the invisible penis with a more generalized marking of the rest of the body as feminine (e.g., the bra and "falsies," the makeup, and the transvestism). All three films were directed by men, and all offer different narrative contexts that seemingly explain and justify what we are seeing: The man in *Turkish Delight* acts playfully for a woman; the man in *Silence of the Lambs* masquer-

ables for himself in a manner that relates his sexual confusion to his criminal behavior; and the woman in *Kinky Business 2* acts out of revenge toward the man who does not satisfy her. The very diversity of these contexts suggests that they function in part as smokescreens that enable the representation of the male body with the genitals momentarily invisible.

What accounts for this persistent desire to show men without the most culturally sanctioned sign of their maleness visible? Does it represent a desire for men to be rid of the penis—phallus or a fear of such an occurrence? The answer, I believe, is both. To understand such multiple conflicting desires and fears fully, we need not only to be open to various psychoanalytic models but to clinical experience as well. Analysts report that it is not uncommon for adolescent boys to pose themselves in front of mirrors so that they may see what their own bodies look like without the genitals being visible. In some ways this act resembles Freud's analysis of the *fort/da* game because, like the infant, the young man pleasurable controls and perhaps feels a sense of mastery over the disappearance and reappearance of the object. The desire to view his body transformed into that of a woman's may have multiple levels of meaning for the young man, including castration anxiety, womb envy, and the fantasy that women may satisfy their sexual desires whenever they wish. Thus, while he must live in near-constant sexual frustration, he imagines that as a woman he would not. We should also wonder whether such images may hold any fascination or meaning for women. A woman told me that the image fascinated her by revealing how vulnerable a dangling, flaccid penis seemed, since, unlike a retracted penis, it could totally disappear in an instant, not even leaving a trace. Not surprisingly, the same image appears in Annie Leibovitz's photograph of Mark Morris. Pursuing such images of male sexuality across the works of diverse artists working in various media should complement authorial investigations of such artists as Jim Thompson and Peter Greenaway.

I want to conclude with two opposing assessments of current discourses about the penis in our culture, which appeared within a year of each other in the *Village Voice*. In an article appropriately entitled "Big: That's How the Men and Women of the Hung Jury Like It," Ellen Rapp profiles an organization devoted to matching men with large penises (no man with less than an eight-inch erection may join) with women who prefer such men. She begins her article by quoting Jim Boyd, the founder of the group: "Penis size is the scariest and most taboo subject on the planet Earth. It's scarier than Satan-

ism" (Rapp 1990, 41). Boyd makes his comment in reference to why NBC canceled a planned episode of "Cérialdo" on which he was to discuss the topic. Yet Scott Poulson-Bryant begins his review of *Dick* by noting almost the opposite: "Dicks, metaphorically or literally, are 'in.'" (Poulson-Bryant 1991, 48). Paradoxically, both perspectives may be correct. There is no doubt that the sexual representation of the male body in general and the penis in particular remains a strong cultural taboo, especially in any context involving homosexuality or women looking, objectifying, assessing, talking, or desiring. It is no coincidence that many of the recent public controversies, such as that involving Mapplethorpe's work, about the alleged pornographic nature of some art has focused on explicit sexual imagery of men. At the same time, there has been an unprecedented amount of artistic and critical work on penises, "metaphorically or literally." Indeed, this development warranted a 1990 *New York Times* article entitled "Bodies Go Public: It's Men's Turn Now" in which male nudity and penises are discussed (Williams 1990, C1, C6). *Dick Talk*, *Dick*, and Melody Davis's photographs all show artists significantly exploring and demystifying what may be the last great sexual taboo in our culture. Although the events are not causally related, I do not think it is meaningless coincidence that, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone contemporaneously has mounted a serious critique about the silence surrounding the size of the penis in human evolution, or that Justine Hill has produced a slide show aimed at addressing that aspect of the male body in liberating terms. Increasingly, art, science, and medicine provide strong evidence that we cannot maintain the silence surrounding this taboo subject. As I have shown, many women have greatly contributed to this important work, and in his ground-breaking article on the male body in the cinema, Steve Neale (1983) correctly noted that most of the previous work in that area had been done from a gay male perspective, which remains vital. The situation is now changing. It is increasingly clear that nearly everyone has a stake in this scholarly and creative investigation. In 1991, Barbara de Genevieve perceptively observed: "Phallic masculinity as a system of inflexible values created in a heterosexist and eurocentric tradition is now being undermined by a cacophony of three voices, gay men, straight men, and women" (1991, 4). It is my hope this book adds to the cacophony and contributes to breaking that silence.

In *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America* (1987), Arthur and Marilouise Kroker describe what they term "panic penis":

No longer the old male cock as the privileged sign of patriarchal power and certainly not the semiotic dream of the decentered penis which has vanished into the ideology of the phallus, but the *postmodern penis* which becomes an emblematic sign of sickness, disease, and waste. Penis burnout, then, for the end of the world. (1987, 95)

They go on to describe a modern world in which the penis is outdated anyway because sex no longer involves secretions but technological systems: "The penis, both as protuberance and ideology, is already a spent force, a residual afterimage, surplus to the requirements of a telematic society" (1987, 95). There is something dangerously attractive in this kind of postmodern, apocalyptic writing that thrives on outrageous overgeneralization. Computerized phone sex, video porn, and the other technologies the Krokeros invoke hardly justify the sweeping conclusions they draw about the outmodedness of the penis. No doubt it is tempting during the AIDS era to believe that just when we have come to fear secretions in sex, such secretions are outdated. Indeed, one might think that in a book entitled *Running Scared*, the term "panic penis" would be welcome. I have, after all, just finished arguing that fear about many things underlies the representations of male sexuality I have analyzed. Would it not be tempting to add fear of AIDS and bodily secretions to that list and herald the end of the patriarchal penis—phallus? Quite the contrary, what I fear is that in the name of postmodernism, the Krokeros have performed the oldest trick in the book: They have just concocted a new reason for not talking about the penis. Fortunately, many different artistic and scholarly voices that insistently break this silence will not be deterred. It is the scandal of patriarchy that for so long so many have believed that the sexual representation of the male body could only be of limited interest to a group patriarchy would attempt to marginalize. What we should be running scared and panicked about is not that the penis is outmoded in a postmodern world of technological sex but that, just as artists and scholars are beginning to pursue inquiries into this and other areas of sexuality, the political and cultural climate in the United States threatens to repress, censor, and disrupt that work.

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