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Flirting with the Law

Queer Culture beyond Transgression?

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We are no longer under the rule of law, but of grace.
Saint Paul (Romans 6:14)

I fought the law and the law won.
The Clash

Historically, queer desire has been imagined as destructive of the social order – an ultimate transgression and a quintessential crime. The figure of the queer offender has been conjured by the frequently overlapping discourses of criminology, anthropology, sexology, and most recently, psychoanalysis in both its Freudian and Lacanian versions (Hart 28). Psychological instability, latent or over criminality, and even the mark of psychosis have been linked to queer subjects' failure to subscribe to the imperatives of compulsory heterosexuality as manifested in the Oedipus complex through which sexual difference and appropriate developmental goals are inscribed in the subject's psyche. The residue of this disciplinary history through which same-sex desire has been criminalized, infantilized, and presented as corrosive of the social matrix, continues to preoccupy and titillate contemporary modes of representation.

Transgression of the limit – be it a legal, social, moral, or a religious interdiction – has been the trademark of queer desire in two ways. First and foremost, the queer outlaw served as a homophobic fantasy and thus a point of *dis*-identification for the general public.[1] As a homophobic fantasy, the queer outlaw is easily decipherable in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century popular culture through films such as *Single White Female* (1992), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Butterfly Kiss* (1995), *Talented Mister Ripley* (1999), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Monster* (2003), and more recently, *Black Swan* (2010) and Lady Gaga's *Telephone* (2010). All these examples feature psychologically unstable characters who transgress the Oedipal law through their refusal of heterosexuality and the social law through unleashing violence and, ultimately, committing an act of murder.

At the same time, and just as frequently, the queer outlaw also served as the point of self-identification for the subculture's participants. Queer culture has had a long-lasting affair with the notion of transgression. In Foucault's early writing, transgression constitutes the very essence of sexuality: every limit has to be crossed, every rule is there to be broken. Transgression is conceptualized (and romanticized) as a "nonpositive affirmation" ("Preface" 36) – a destructive force that is productive in its very destructiveness, in the havoc it wrecks on the subject's limitations. Following Canguilhem in his later work, Foucault also presented an extensive analysis of the norm and the normative, elaborating and popularizing ideas of transgression, subversion, and resistance to normativity. Influenced by Foucault's comprehensive analysis of a complex interplay between sexuality and power, contemporary queer theorists harbor profound suspicion towards the norm and towards the vision of the social predicated upon the acceptance of that norm. Edelman, Warner, Berlant, Halberstam, and Duggan can be cited as some of the most prominent critics of normativity who emphasize the queer as the unruly, disruptive force – a force of negation and transgression that is, ultimately, outside of the subject's control. These theorists oppose the views expressed by writers such as Andrew Sullivan who famously suggested that after gay marriage becomes legal, gay culture should abandon political activism and settle comfortably within the limits circumscribed by the law and the social norm. Warner responds to Sullivan's conservative vision by contending that sexuality is neces-

sarily messy, turbulent, disrespectful of laws and antagonistic to limits of any sort. He also insists that queer culture, being a culture that is organized around sexuality, has no other viable and ethical choice but to embrace this disruptive and transgressive nature of sexuality and organize politically around that fact.

More importantly, queer subcultures created iconic images of queer outlaws that have been disseminated through literature and film. Transgression of a set limit, be it a law, a moral code, or a social norm, is what often sets these narratives in motion. Most frequently, the queer outlaw figures as the disturber of heterosexual love – a threat to normativity embodied in a heterosexual family or a couple. In other scenarios, the queer character is forced to break the law because the law itself is unfair. One of the obvious examples of a law considered unfair is the infamous Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, which became the topic of many films (*Serving in Silence* [1995], *Investigator* [1999], *Common Ground* [2000], *The L Word – Season 5* [2008]), of which *The Marine* (2010) is one of the most recent examples. In such narratives, the queer outlaw is seen as a hero and the crimes committed are depicted as either justified or forgivable as crimes of passion.

But is every notion of the law and the limit always heteronormative? Are narratives of transgression necessarily "queer"? Can we avoid conceptualizing the law within the framework that constructs sexual minorities as dissidents and queer subjects as necessarily outlaw subjects? This is a difficult question to pose. In asking such a question, one has to avoid the pitfalls of conservative gay writers, such as Sullivan, who dismiss "queer transgressions" as immature, irresponsible, and even politically suicidal. At the same time, this discussion is bound to become crucial in this century as more countries grant gays and lesbians full rights of citizenship and as mainstream visibility of sexual minorities continues to increase. In this paper, I explore recent narratives of queer transgression and argue that the latest evolution of such narratives signals an attempt to redefine queer subculture's collective vision of normativity and law. By focusing on two examples in recent lesbian cinema (*The Kids are All Right* [2010] and *Lip Service* BBC3 series [2010]), I demonstrate that we have witnessed an erosion of the iconic image of a lesbian outlaw as both media events attempt to negotiate their way out of the narrative of transgression. In *The Kids*, this negotiation takes the

form of subverting (transgressing) the narrative of transgression, while *Lip Service* creates a counternarrative within which the law is no longer viewed as exclusively heteronormative. I draw examples from the lesbian tradition of independent cinema because this is the tradition I know best. It is clear to me that, despite many similarities, lesbian and gay male cinemas make two traditions that are distinct, although overlapping. Others should investigate whether my argument applies to recent gay male subcultural production.

The "Lesbian Outlaw" in *The Kids are All Right* (2010)

Released in July 2010, Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right* enjoyed solid commercial success. The film features a lesbian couple, Nic (Annette Bening) and Jules (Julianne Moore), who struggle to preserve their marriage while raising two teenage children – Joni and Laser. As reviewers noted, the film strikes a pleasant balance between familiarity and strangeness by offering a plot that is recognizable to the mainstream audience (exploring the issues of intergenerational communication, long-term commitment, and trust) yet educating that very same audience about non-traditional kinship arrangements (Shoquist). For instance, Joni and Laser have different biological mothers but are biological siblings as both "moms" used the same anonymous sperm donor. The family Cholodenko chooses to present to the mainstream audience is not a loosely defined assemblage but a tightly knit unit in which kinship ties are based on blood ties. The invisible sperm donor serves as glue that cements the family together in one tight knot of continuous blood relations, which helps the mainstream audience view is as a legitimate family (since heterosexual kinship is based on blood ties).

Even though it was directed and produced for a wide audience, *The Kids* does not break away from its subcultural origins: it is an example of the crossing over of the subcultural content into the mainstream. In other words, its foundation is within the lesbian subculture and its message is adapted for a general public. It speaks the language the subculture understands; as an act of self-representation, it is less in a dialogue with frequently homophobic representations of lesbians developed for heterosexual consumption (in the mainstream cinema) and more in tune with the tradition of indie lesbian cinema of the last two decades on which Cholodenko draws heavily. The director is also very confident about the film's place in

the larger world: she mentioned that by depicting a lesbian family with two teenage kids, she was simply "tapping into the Zeitgeist" (Karpel). This confidence is important; it is an outcome of both the increase in mainstream lesbian visibility – Ellen Degeneres, Rachel Maddow in the United States; Sarah Waters, Rhona Cameron, Sue Perkins in the UK – and also the subculture's sense of maturity and accumulated cultural wealth.

On the surface, *The Kids* is certainly not a narrative of transgression. In her interview, Cholodenko states that lesbian families are not that different from heterosexual families and trusts that the mainstream audience is ready and eager to see the normalcy of alternative family life on the big screen. In fact, the lesbian family she depicts in the film is painfully "normal." They live in a large all-American suburban home, drive an SUV, and stick to conventional gender roles with Nic (the more masculine of the two moms) being the breadwinner and Jules, the softer, more feminine of the two, being the emotional caretaker in the relationship. The couple's heteronormative lifestyle has not gone unnoticed and the film received some scornful reviews by such prominent queer theorists as Halberstam ("The Kids are Not Ok!") and Duggan ("Only the Kids Are Ok").

However, while openly embracing the normative, the film is subtly iconoclastic. Iconic images have a life of their own: they are nodes where collective desires converge and get transfixed. Iconic images frequently function as signifiers of narrative conventions – cultural shortcuts that contain a wealth of meaning. When such conventions change, these images can come under attack as signifiers of these conventions, and can be taken down as no longer relevant. What are the icons that are being dismantled in *The Kids*, if any?

The iconic representation that came under scrutiny in *The Kids* is what I propose to call "a lesbian outlaw." The outlaw figure has solidified in lesbian indie cinema gradually over the last two decades, personifying the narrative of rebellion and transgression. She comes into focus most prominently as the destroyer of heterosexual love. By winning the heart of a heterosexual woman who is either involved with or married to a man, and ultimately, by destroying their (usually stagnant, inauthentic) relationship, the lesbian outlaw affirms the potency of same-sex desire, celebrates the value of authentic life, and exposes the inherent corruption and

repressive nature of the social norm (the Law).[2] At the end of such narratives, the lesbian protagonist is either punished (in older films), or in more recent movies, rewarded for her transgression

In a transgression narrative, the key actors are Law and Desire that appear to clash but in fact are engaged in a complex dialectic in which the law gives desire its shape and agency. In his brilliant analysis of the dialectic of law and desire, Badiou explains the way prohibition simultaneously activates desire, *and* through the very same gesture, assigns it to its proper place as *transgression*:

> The law is what, by designating its object, delivers desire to its repetitive autonomy. Desire thereby attains its automatism in the form of transgression. How are we to understand transgression? There is transgression when what is prohibited – which is to say, negatively named by the law – becomes the object of a desire that lives through itself in the site and place of the subject. (79)

The dialectic of prohibition and desire is crucial in the structuring of the plot that features the lesbian outlaw. The object of the protagonist's love (or lust) is overdetermined by a rich set of overlapping prohibitions: the desired woman is heterosexual, is in a relationship, and is often made even more unattainable by the differences in class, ethnicity, religion, age, or race. To achieve her aim, the subject of desire (the outlaw) thus has to overcome several obstacles (the prohibition of homosexuality, the prohibition of adultery, differences in class, race, or age), and finally, has to face the man who steps in to defend his relationship. The narrative unfolds entirely within the domain of the Law; it is the interdiction that sets desire in motion, yet the law masquerades as the arch-nemesis of desire.

The examples are too numerous to mention – this is a narrative convention that has had a long and rich history. Cholodenko's earlier film, *High Art*, follows this convention. In *High Art*, Lucy, a lesbian artist, is firmly positioned both outside the norm and as the destroyer of heterosexual love. She is independently rich, despises authority, and breaks the rules habitually. She is also a drug addict. Lucy is explicitly sexual, daring, and disrespectful of social conventions that condemn infidelity and privilege heterosexual coupling. She acts as an agent of desire that triggers change in Syd – a hetero-

sexual woman who moves into Lucy's building with her boyfriend James, only to be swept off her feet by Lucy's charisma. Lucy dies from an overdose of cocaine at the end of the film and thus is punished for her role as the destroyer of a heterosexual relationship.

Among the recent movies that choose to celebrate the act of transgression rather than punish it, a popular British TV prison series, *Bad Girls,* provides the most dramatic example. Nikki, the show's lesbian protagonist, is an inmate sentenced to "life" in prison for murdering a police officer. Locked behind bars, she continues to antagonize the Law by disobeying correction officers' orders, inciting dissent among prisoners, and leading a full-blown prison riot. The film insists on Nikki's symbolic innocence by clarifying that her crime was one of self-defense as the policeman had tried to rape Nikki's girlfriend. The law and its representatives – police officers, correction officers, politicians, and bureaucrats – are thus coded as bad, unfair, corrupt, while Nikki's transgression, no matter how gruesome, is justified. Predictably, Nikki's heart gets captured by the most unattainable object of all – her prison wing governor Helen Stewart, a heterosexual law-abiding (and law-enforcing) woman engaged to be married. By multiplying the obstacles, the film intensifies the flow of desire leaving the spectators cheering when Helen Stewart leaves her fiancé, breaks the law by sleeping with Nikki, and then fights hard to get her inmate lover out of prison. Nikki's success is spectacular: the storyline ends with Nikki's release and the unlikely couple kissing in the streets of London. Nikki's multiple transgressions are vindicated, celebrated, and rewarded. The law is there to be broken because the law itself is corrupt. Heterosexual love is also to be destroyed because, well, it constitutes an obstacle on the path of gay love.

The Kids explicitly addresses the figure of a lesbian outlaw as iconic only to deconstruct it. The film unfolds along the lines of the same narrative convention that produced the outlaw: the quiet life of a suburban couple gets disrupted by the stranger who enters their lives – first as a friend, then as a threat. However, the film reverses the roles in a clever twist: the suburban couple is now a lesbian couple and the outsider – the destroyer of love – is now a man. Paul – the sperm donor and the biological father of both children – is brought into the family by Laser, the "moms'" teenage son who decides to track his biological father down as part of his teenage rebel-

lion against his parents. Paul is coded as a stereotypically butch lesbian (through references decipherable by the subcultural, but not mainstream viewers) and acts as an agent of desire (Ivanchikova). Like the lesbian outlaw, Paul disregards the social norm that prohibits adultery and enters an affair with Jules. Because the role of the queer outlaw – the protagonist that played such a significant role in the making of lesbian indie cinema – is now played by a heterosexual man, the plot appears both scandalous (transgressive) and retrograde (in its ostensible return to heterosexuality) to the lesbian audience (see, for instance, Halberstam, "The Kids are Not Ok!").

However, there is nothing scandalous or retrograde about this plot. Contemporary queer theory maintains that queerness is not an identity – it is more of a function that works as a disruption of heteronormativity. In a quasi-Lacanian fashion, we can express it as a formula:

Q = negation (heteronormativity).

The Kids made obvious that if queerness is a function of disruption within a narrative, a straight person can perform this function under the right circumstances. While the lesbian outlaw narrative can be described as Q (lesbian) = negation of the Law (heterosexual marriage), in *The Kids* the act of queering is performed by a heterosexual man and can be described as: Q (heterosexual male) = negation of the Law (lesbian marriage).

To dispel forthcoming objections, I would like to stress that Jules' intense sexual attraction to Paul is presented as a "queer attraction" as opposed to a heterosexual romance. Jules is drawn to Paul because of his queer qualities: his almost boyish rebelliousness, his disregard for conventions, and his overt unapologetic sexuality. A college dropout, Paul describes himself as someone who is unable to deal with authority. His lifestyle is an example of what Halberstam describes as "queer temporality" – "life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing" (*In a Queer Time and Place*, 2). Jules is not attracted to his straight masculinity and the promise of heterosexuality a relationship with a man offers. Her attraction to Paul evaporates when, in a phone conversation, he confesses the desire to create a "normal" family with Jules and the children. In a moment of comical relief, Jules exclaims: "I'm gay!" and hangs up the phone. Paul's nascent het-

eronormative desires (for a family, stability, status) serve to reaffirm (or perhaps revive) Jules' queer identity and also push Jules back into her marriage.

By making a heterosexual man fill the role of the iconic queer outlaw, the film problematized and complicated the existing narrative convention, exposed this role's constructed nature, and thus opened it up for redefinition. The figure of the home wrecker, although alluring at first, is no longer seen as heroic. Deemed an interloper, Paul is expelled, and his transgression condemned. The family, although shaken to its core by Jules' infidelity, survives nevertheless, trust is restored, and things seem to be ok again. The outlaw, whose sex appeal is recognized, is no longer celebrated. The iconic image that served as a shortcut of a narrative convention is evoked only to be unseated.

The family, especially the one based on blood ties, which in the tradition of lesbian indie cinema has been coded as strictly heterosexual, is no longer such a thing. The film rewrites the lesbian family as the site of normalcy, sentimentality, routine, and domesticity. Not immune to transgression, it is designed to survive the attack. The film tries to work out a new relationship with the norm – it does not completely embrace the normative but tests its limits, plasticity, pliability, and the capacity to accommodate alternative sexuality and kinship.

As Cholodny demonstrated in regard to women's writing, narrative conventions embody relations of power reified in the society at large. A narrative in which a lesbian is featured as a spinster who functions as the force of negativity endlessly challenging heterosexual lifestyle, loveless marriages and stifling domesticity, corresponds to the social status of lesbians and gay men as outside the law. Unable to have families of their own, they are destined to be the – either demonic or heroic – destroyers of heterosexual families. As power relations change, the conventions within the subcultural tradition are bound to change as well. When gays and lesbians are no longer excluded from the norm, the norm itself has to show plasticity and change in order to accommodate new lifestyles. Cholodenko's film makes an effort to redefine the narrative of transgression by mocking it, flipping it on its head, and thus exposes its constructed nature and versatility, but also makes obvious its limitations.

Flirting with the Law: *Lip Service* (2010)

Commissioned by BBC3 Channel, *Lip Service* – the first season of a miniseries created by Harriet Braun – provides an even better, more vivid example of the subculture's changing relationship with the normative. Broadcast in the UK in the Fall of 2010 and disseminated worldwide by its fans via youtube, the show quickly became one of the most successful and most widely discussed events of the year. *Lip Service* takes place in Glasgow and is a gritty, funny, entertaining British drama that focuses on the lives of a group of young lesbian women. Harriet Braun claims subcultural authenticity (she states that she wants to create an authentic representation of lesbian sexuality), and rather than adapting to mainstream conventions, seeks to universalize subcultural styles. The reviewers of *Lip Service* drew comparison with *The L Word* series produced in the United States; however, the show departs from its American prototype in a number of ways.

The appeal of the new series is that it is driven by characters rather than by a political agenda. The main characters of the show struggle with a variety of issues, such as trying to get their careers started, negotiating friendship and love, surviving a breakup, or starting a new relationship. One matter that they do not struggle with is being gay – homosexuality is never addressed as a political issue and is simply a fact of life for these characters. The central storyline follows Cat (Laura Fraser) who tries to get her life back together after having her heart broken by her ex-girlfriend Frankie (Ruta Gedmintas) – an angst-driven charismatic photographer. Just as Cat seems to have recovered enough emotionally to start dating again, Frankie comes back into her life to pursue her once more.

Like Paul in *The Kids*, Frankie is a citation. Glamorized by the cinematic apparatus, Frankie is visually reminiscent of Shane (an iconic character from *The L Word*) and structurally resembles the outlaw figure. Promiscuity, defiance, and disregard for conventional morality and manners situate Frankie neatly within the parameters demarcated by the transgression narrative. Although not a criminal herself, Frankie maintains proximity to the criminal world, typical of the outlaw figure. For instance, she spends the entire series trying to uncover the secret of her past only to find out that her long lost biological mother had been implicated in a murder, which lead her to abandon Frankie, and that her biological brother is a

drug dealer. Frankie's world is oversaturated with connotative markers of transgression – she has an affair with a thief, helps cover up a drug overdose, almost commits suicide, and almost gets arrested for breaking in. She also functions as "the destroyer of the couple" as she manages to jeopardize two relationships during the course of the show.

It seems that by making Frankie a central character, writer Harriet Braun expected to capitalize on the proven success of the transgression narrative in queer cinema. She warned Ruta Gedmintas (the heterosexual actress who plays Frankie) that she was destined to become a lesbian icon after the show aired (Gedmintas). It also can be argued that Braun attempted to create an icon via citation. After all, as Roland Barthes put it, beauty "cannot assert itself save in a form of a citation" (33). However, clichés employed in the creation of Frankie's character have been detected and criticized liberally by almost every reviewer and by the show's target audience. Frankie's lack of rapport with the audience is intriguing because it seems to have been unexpected. Despite the show's visual glamorization of Frankie, the audience strongly preferred Cat's new date, Sam Murray (Heather Peace). Actress Heather Peace (a lesbian in real life) who plays Sam was instantly catapulted into fame as she found herself becoming a major lesbian icon. Peace found this position of stardom highly contradictory and struggled with the idea, from initial denial ("If Ruta was gay, I don't think anyone would be paying me any attention at all" [*Cass-Maran*]) to eventual recognition and astonishment:

> "[t]he reaction to Sam has been a complete shock. … I really did think it was quite a minor role and I didn't realize there would be a reaction to Sam that has been." (*This is Me – At Home*).

Sam figures as a harbinger of an emergent plot structure in which the law is no longer seen as a heterosexual prerogative. Sam Murray is a police officer, a D.S. (detective sergeant), who really loves her job and represents, literally embodies the law. Although never in uniform, D.S. Sam Murray conveys an aura of authority, psychological maturity, and calm confidence. An openly lesbian police officer, respected by her peers, she seems to be able to stand by what

is right while having the law on her side. Cat meets Sam through an online dating site, and their first date is a disaster. Nervous Cat makes a complete fool out of herself by spouting stereotypes about police officers during their first date. Among other things, she says: "Most people think police are power-hungry homophobes who get their kicks beating up suspects. Well, obviously I don't think that, and clearly you are not like that." The show thus consciously deploys and interrogates stereotypical ideas about the police and the law. The characters frequently refer to Sam as "the cop" and try to work out their own attitudes to law enforcement:

> Becky: Cat's on a blind date with the cop.
> Frankie: Wouldn't have thought cop was Cat's thing.
> Becky: Well, she is a gay cop. She is hardly going to be some bat-wielding thug, is she?
> Frankie: So what, if you are gay it makes it right on, does it? (Frankie storms out.)

The question of whether Sam is indeed a "thug" or "right on" is vital because of the way the law and its representatives have been previously coded in lesbian cinema. The police station (Sam's workplace) is featured as a space where Cat's (and the viewer's) preconceived notions about law enforcement are teased out and redefined. Instead of figuring as a site of homophobia and oppression, it is presented as a queer space in which the viewer is invited to, literally, flirt with the law. In the scene that has acquired an iconic quality, Cat is brought into Sam's police station when she becomes a victim of mugging. Expecting to be treated heartlessly by "power-hungry homophobes" and "bat-wielding thugs," Cat is defensive and nervous. However, as Sam comes to her rescue, the police station is reoriented and inscribed as a fascinating site of lesbian desire. During a snappy exchange in which flirtation and interrogation are indistinguishable, Cat succumbs to the lure of the law and Sam asks her out on a second date. The film returns to the theme of the police station as a queer space by featuring a steamy lesbian sex scene in Sam's office (Episode 3). Importantly, Sam's lesbian identity is not an issue in her career; she introduces Cat to her co-workers as her "other half" and seeks relationship advice from her friends – male police officers at the station. Their relationship

is thus neither illicit nor surreptitious – it does not achieve its appeal through transgression.

In *Lip Service*, the Law intensifies desire (positively) through seduction rather than defining it negatively through interdiction. While preceding lesbian cinema argued with the law (military, family institution, police, government), *Lip Service* flirts with the law, sexualizes it, and invites the viewer to imagine a new relationship with the normative through the figure of Sam and Cat's relationship with Sam. The audience is encouraged to follow Cat who not only flirts with the law, but then goes on a date with the law (so to speak), has sex with the law, and ponders whether she should marry the law as well.

It is intriguing that the show's creator Harriet Braun was not sure whether this plot line was going to be successful. In an interview released in the "Extras" section of the DVD, she expresses a hope that the audience would be cheering for Cat and Frankie. She then adds rather shyly: but "maybe, I don't know, they will also be rooting for Cat and Sam." When asked whether she expected how popular Sam (and Heather Peace who played her) would become, Braun says:

> I really hoped people would like Sam as much as I did when I was writing her. I think we were also very lucky to have Heather Peace, who blew us away in her audition and has given such a fantastic performance. That said I think it was impossible for anyone to predict that Sam would become a bit of a dykon! ("Q & A")

Yet the audience's response to Sam verged on collective hysteria. Despite being a supporting rather than a lead character, Sam became the most widely discussed figure by both reviews and fans. The following excerpt from a review is representative of how the character was perceived within the subculture. Dorothy Snarker, the author of a blog titled *A Gay Gal's Guide to Popular Culture,* writes:

> So when this whole "Lip Service" business started everyone assumed Frankie's Ruta Gedmintas would be the show's resident lesbothrob. She was the "Shane" of the group (yes, yes – I know she's *not* Shane). She did all the

> moody looking through her hair and randy dropping of her skinny jeans. She was the bad girl. But a funny thing happened on the way to fandom, everyone started swooning over the good girl instead. Sure, we still love us some Frankie. But bring up Detective Sergeant Sam Murray to a group of gay ladies and you'll hear a chorus of, "*Ooooooh*, the hot cop." Yes, hot cop is hot – and ridiculously so.

Snarker's entry is representative as she notices and critiques the convention involved in the creation of the "bad girl" (Frankie) while recognizing and welcoming the energizing novelty of the "good girl" plot. In the age of Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and other social media, fan cultures can respond to the show in real time and make a real impact on the way it is perceived by other viewers. From the outset, it became clear that the audience refused to iconize Frankie who was glamorized by the cinematic apparatus. Instead, the fans engaged their own cultural apparatus in making Sam's image iconic (through Twitter and Facebook messages, collages and fan videos, fan fiction and cultural commentary). Here is an example of a Twitter board with fans commenting on the show in real time:

- DS Sam…hotter than The L Word cast, hotter than the surface of the sun, hotter than the inside of a toasted pitta bread
- DS Murry *swoon*
- If Cat chooses Frankie over amazing-perfect Sam, I am boycotting the show
- Sam is so f***ing swoon-worthy. She is literally the perfect gf. Also, every show should start with her naked
- Frankie sizing up DSSam, gurl you plz you got nothing on Sam! (Quoted by Hal)

The audience's response to the series revealed that viewers are not historically naïve or innocent; in fact, they suture their own desire onto an image, producing it as a focal point of their collective fantasies. The audience recognized narrative conventions at work as well as the cinematic apparatus that was supporting these conventions (which makes a salient point that the audience is never passively constructed by these mechanisms). Spectatorship is productive of meaning, and in the age of social media, becomes a potent

co-creator of meaning. As Mayne points out, "spectators respond to films in ways that may well be unauthorized, but nonetheless [are] meaningful, in terms other than those prescribed by the institutions of narrative cinema" (28).

Lip Service represents a turning point in narrative conventions that I call "queering the law." The experimental quality of what Braun was doing is visible throughout the show as the narrative of transgression competes with the new narrative structure. The two provide a tension that the show was never quite able to resolve. The last episode of the series features Cat's transgression as she jeopardizes her relationship with Sam by sleeping with Frankie. Frankie's role as the agent of desire and thus as a threat to the couple references the lesbian outlaw convention but fails to achieve an iconic status in the show as it competes with the new narrative structure in which the couple she is seeking to destroy is a lesbian couple and the law that she antagonizes is no longer seen as bad (homophobic, corrupt, etc). The end of the show is thus highly intriguing as Cat is left pondering whether she should be with Frankie (the outlaw) or stay with Sam (the law). Just as in *The Kids*, the outlaw's sex appeal is explicitly acknowledged, but her transgression is no longer celebrated.

The ambiguous ending agitated the audience of the show. Fearful that the structural demands of the "transgression convention" would make Braun write Sam off the series, the audience launched a campaign producing "Team Sam" t-shirts and accessories, turning actress Heather Peace into "the most famous lesbian in Great Britain" (Peace, *BirdBox 2*). Responding to the audience's anxiety over Sam's role in the next season of the show, Braun promised that there would be "a lot more of D.S. Murray" in the second season ("The GreatLezBritain Party"). The audiences' response illustrated that the subculture has grown weary of the outlaw character and is actively looking for alternatives. It also revealed the possibility of reconfiguring the relationship with the normative or the law through characters that embody the law's positive characteristics.

Flirting with the law is risky business because the subculture still maintains an ambivalent relationship with the normative. The concern that, in its encounter with the law, queer difference might be swallowed or co-opted is legitimate. Yet, it seems that the old plots that code the law as corrupt and transgression as necessary and positive do not have the same magical appeal they used to. Can we

possibly work out something we can call queernormative – not in the sense of normalizing the queer or making concessions to the law but in the sense of queering the law itself? When the law becomes queer, this new face of the law may not be that unattractive. Both *The Kids* and *Lip Service* destabilize the opposition between normativity and queerness, exploring the "queernormative," or better queerness that is no longer positioned strictly outside of the normative, not in the same way it used to be. The relationship between normative and queer becomes more complicated and presents new possibilities for writers who wish to explore the possibilities and the limits of queering the law. *Lip Service* exposed the queer law-breaker figure as outmoded and presented us with a new iconic image, creating a new alphabet of affects for a new set of social conditions. This signaled the dissolution of a certain narrative convention and our readiness for new stories where we are allowed to flirt with the law and enjoy it too.

Notes

1 See, for example, Coffman's analysis of the Papin affair.

2 Examples featuring this story line include, among many others: *When Night is Falling* (1995), *High Art* (1998), *Aimee and Jaguar* (1999), *Bad Girls Seasons 1-3* (1999-2001), *A Woman's Love* (2004), *The L Word Season 1* (2004), *Between Two Women* (2004), *Elena Undone* (2004), *I Can't Think Straight* (2007), *The World Unseen* (2008), *The Sea Purple* (2009), *Eloise* (2010).

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