

I Read It for the Articles

By
Bri Christie

A thesis presented to OCAD University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Criticism and Curatorial Practice. Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2026.

Creative Commons Copyright Notice

I Read It for the Articles © 2026 by Bri Christie is licensed under the Creative Commons CC BY 4.5 Canada License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially.

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Notices:

You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation.

No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material.

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I authorize OCAD University to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public. I further authorize OCAD University to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Abstract

This thesis outlines a differential ontology of the *Playboy* Bunny/Playmate to challenge dominant interpretations of women's representation and the construction of fantasy imagery in the famed publication. Feminist debates about women's representation in *Playboy* have generally interpreted its imagery through the lens of sexual objectification or, conversely, as evidence of women's sexual agency and liberation in the postwar era. Drawing on Kant's ontology this project interrogates the categorical limits of these feminist accounts, which largely consist of two positions that I refer to as the "Bunny-as-object" and the "Bunny-as-subject." I argue that the Bunny disrupts the subject-object binary insofar as she is a meticulously constructed image designed to uphold *Playboy's* postwar consumerist fantasy. To move beyond this binary framework, I suggest a third ontological category for consideration: the image. This project develops a post-structuralist account of the Bunny image using the media and cultural theory of Jean Baudrillard. My study implements a semiotic approach, conducting a close visual and textual analysis of pictorials, covers, and centerfolds from *Playboy's* heyday (focusing on the 1960s), to trace how the magazine's aesthetic codes and editorial framing produce an image of Baudrillard's third order born of the male imagination.

Acknowledgments

Thanks, first, to my committee: to my primary supervisor, Dr. Michael Prokopow, for his guidance and immense support for my pursuit of this unconventional subject. The completion of this project is indebted to his belief in its merit and to the generous amount of time he has invested in both my research and my development as a scholar. I don't believe I would have been able to take on such a project under anyone else's supervision; to Dr. Helmut Reichenbacher, for serving as my secondary advisor and offering invaluable feedback and advice across many iterations of what started as a completely different independent study that, after watching MTV land on the moon and listening to the entirety of The Buggles' debut album, ultimately became this thesis; and to Dr. Natalie Coulter, my external, for her time, support, and insightful contributions.

I am grateful to Dr. Amish Morell and Dr. Jim Drobnick for their continued support of my (not strictly art) writing and further academic endeavours in media and cultural studies.

I would also like to offer my enduring gratitude to Dr. Carrie Pitzulo for taking the time to meet with me during the early stages of this project. Her work on *Playboy* and thoughtful feedback have been integral to the progression of my research.

Special thanks to David Burns, of David Burns Antiques, for supplying me with most of my primary source material and listening to me blab on, humouring my enthusiasm for *Playboy* history, though he knows far better than I; and to Hugh Hefner's widow, Crystal Harris, for chatting with me, listening to my stories about the precarity of male fantasies over Instagram DM, and taking an interest in my work.

This project owes its existence to the late Dr. George Wagner, whose work first introduced me to *Playboy* scholarship; only later did I learn that he had previously chaired the department where I began studying the subject in my undergrad.

Ironically, I have come to find through this project on American cultural ephemera that my research is deeply Canadian, so I would also like to acknowledge *Playboy's*—and my own—favorite Canadian, *the high priest of pop cult and metaphysician of media*, Marshall McLuhan, whose theory has become the focus of my future research endeavours; along with Pamela Gordon, *Playboy's* first Canadian Playmate, Miss March 1962, whose centerfold spread declared that her main aspiration was to further her education at the very same undergrad institution that sparked my interest in this research. I was unfortunately unable to find any records that corroborate her enrollment at the university. But with the support of those mentioned above, and the knowledge gained from this project, I am hopeful that in the future I get the chance to study there again... to attend enough times for the both of us.

And, lastly, before I begin, I would like to acknowledge and answer Margaret Atwood's illustrious probe from her 1993 novel *The Robber Bride*, set in the same city in which I wrote this thesis, and which remained present in my mind throughout its composition: "Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies?" I can confidently say that there is not a single doubt in my mind the answer is anything but yes.

Land Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge that this thesis research was written and defended on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. These are the ancestral territories of many nations, including the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat who are the original owners and custodians of Tkaronto and its greater surrounding area.

My academic thinking about my object of study began on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) First Nation.

The magazine was conceived and produced on the ancestral homeland and traditional territories of the Bodéwadm̄miakiwen (Potawatomi), the Odawa, and the Ojibwe peoples. Furthermore, production continued on the west coast on the ancestral land of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples.

Table of Contents

Creative Commons Copyright Notice.....	ii
Author’s Declaration.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Land Acknowledgment.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
Introduction: Playbill.....	1
Contents for the Men’s Entertainment Magazine (Overview).....	8
Chapter 1: A Matter of Simple Duplicity.....	14
Chapter 2: How to Read A Book Superficially.....	28
Chapter 3: Symbolic Sex.....	38
Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography.....	59

Introduction: Playbill

It is quite the handy cover for when the wife finds those ‘girly magazines’ hidden under the mattress or behind some paint cans in the garage—one of the oldest lines in the book, a wisecrack that lands best with a wink, a shrug, and maybe even a cocktail in hand to help sell the story. Sure, *Playboy* loves an extemporaneous joke,¹ but do not be fooled... *I Read It for the Articles* is much more than a punchline. It might even be *Playboy*’s greatest party trick. What became a cliché sleight-of-speech is actually the tool that disguised the magazine’s voyeurism as intellectualism. The euphemism acted as a veil, allowing readers to indulge in erotic visual consumption while maintaining the illusion of sophistication. The magazine was able to pull it off because each issue did indeed feature serious journalism, noteworthy literary content, and interviews that helped shape countless philosophical and political conversations. These articles lent *Playboy* its cultural alibi; but even in spite of the high-brow prose, everybody knows that the writing was hardly the main attraction... hence the wink. The title of this work winks twice. Or, perhaps, more accurately, it is meant to be a double entendre—that both cites and complicates the cultural script from which it originates. So, perhaps obviously, I do not intend on talking about the articles all that much. I, like the men of subscriptions past, am interested in the visuals.

But rest assured, my reasons for pursuing this study are not salacious, so—in the parlance of the time—get your mind out of the gutter, because this is strictly intellectual voyeurism. And I swear, it is not a joke this time. With that said, *Playboy* never managed solemnly, and I see no reason to outperform it there. It would be disingenuous to compose this thesis in a conventional academic register. Instead, to maintain a crucial distance from my object of study, it begins by letting you, dear reader, in on *Playboy*’s favourite joke. What is at stake here are the visual and aesthetic elements that aid in masquerading the magazine’s fantasy as reality—the effect of a construction that begins, inevitably, with the text. Following

¹ Reference to *Playboy’s Penthouse* first episode when Hugh Hefner introduces Lenny Bruce who “is especially well known for his extemporaneous and ad-lib jokes” quoted in *Playboy’s Penthouse*, Season 1, Episode 1, “Episode #1.1,” directed by Don Rushton and Carl Tubbs, October 24, 1959, Syndication, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwN09HzpYBQ>.

Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogue theory, specifically his account of unidirectional double-voiced discourse,² this analysis adopts the magazine's idiom as method. Much like the project's title, this is not a fortuitous choice.

An analysis of the non-neutrality of images necessitates an equivalent skepticism towards the idea of the neutrality of language. My nod through narration and nomenclature is how I let *Playboy* handle its own irony. The intent is not to reproduce the magazine's style for its own sake, but to keep its rhetorical address present through stylization as a means of working from within *Playboy*'s mode of representation. This foregrounds its mythic verbiage to create what Bakhtin calls an *image of a language*.³ True to form, each chapter takes its name from an actual article or feature found in the issues examined throughout this study.⁴ The text likewise mimics its editorial wit and diction. I borrow *Playboy*'s language on the condition that its use encapsulates both my own scholarly intent and the magazine's determinative point of view. Use of this double-voice facilitates "mutual illumination"⁵ of my purposes, of exposing the mechanics of fantasy, and *Playboy*'s purposes, of creating the mechanics of fantasy, to serve our shared aim of making the fantasy comprehensible.

Accordingly, and so as to not give a false impression, in accordance with the magazine's editorial structure, the outline and contents of my argument shall follow the Playbill's⁶ preliminary address. This thesis takes the written origin of every issue as its starting point because *Playboy*'s prose is the codifying basis of its visual mythology. Textual signification is the first barrier between the signified fantasy and the putative visual referent. The magazine's projective tone aided by wry language established a hedonistic atmosphere that made endless the range of possibilities one could dream up when looking at the concomitant pages. By the time the photograph comes into view, any references to the real are

² "Unidirectional double-voiced discourse" refers to a narrative form in which the author (me) takes on the subject's (*Playboy*'s) voice to offer commentary on the matter. Please note that the purpose and logistics of this are detailed on the following page; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 198.

³ Pam Morris, ed., *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 113.

⁴ Except for Chapter 1 "A Matter of Simple Duplicity" which comes from an article in March 1963. This title remains from the proposal phase of the project in which I sought to examine more than three issues. Duplicitous is simply too accurate of a word for describing *Playboy* to give up; Marguerite de Navarre, "A Matter of Simple Duplicity," adapted by Paul J. Gillette, *Playboy*, March 1963, 115.

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 362.

⁶ Each issue of *Playboy* magazine features a "Playbill" in the first few pages—between some advertisements and prior to the table of contents—to introduce and contextualize that issue's featured articles, contributors, and other content.

overwritten by, what will soon become clear is, *Playboy*'s—Chekhov's—gun.⁷ This extended to the articles as well. The publication crafted a narrative so enchanting the subject matter was almost incidental. It was the verisimilitude in the magazine's rhetoric that made whatever it presented engaging and believable, and thus proved crucial for world-building.

Among the vanguard who ventured down the *Playboy* rabbit hole, journalist and historian Thomas Weyr observed this in the very first issue featuring Marilyn Monroe. He asked: "Could text add anything to such a picture beyond meaningless leer?"⁸ Founder and editor Hugh Hefner proved that it could. In its earliest iterations, it was his prose that set *Playboy* apart from other magazines. Similar publications, like *Hustler* and *Penthouse*, were far raunchier, selling photographs of graphic scenes and simulated sex acts. *Playboy* distinguished itself from what was denounced as the smut of other men's magazines, offering something remarkably different. There were naked women, of course, but sex itself was systemically removed from any real-life context. Simply put, much was left to the imagination. The true art of it all was Hefner's imposition onto the photograph. As Weyr argues, "he was good at counterpunching myth, at taking face-value acceptance and rearranging the pieces so that old information came out fresh, vital, important. [...] Hefner wanted to challenge a reader's perception [and] impart the secrets he knew."⁹

Hefner was above all else a visual editor. But his first intervention was textual, not aesthetic. *Playboy* did not shoot the original Marilyn photos, and they look nothing like the usual *Playboy* fare.¹⁰ Even so, a few well-paced lines were enough for Hefner to claim them as his own. The blonde starlet was pictured completely nude, kneeling in the classic pin-up 'S' pose,¹¹ but Hefner wrote nothing of those particular photographs... though they were supposed to be the magazine's entire selling point.¹² Instead, he tells the reader what one should imagine her to be: "More than either face or body, it's what little

⁷ I invoke Anton Chekhov's "Chekhov's gun" to allude to the fact that elements introduced early in the magazine's narrative later reveal significant structural importance and ideological payoff.

⁸ Thomas Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 9.

⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁰ Which will become clear as this thesis progresses.

¹¹ Her torso and hips are angled to produce the 'serpentine curve' for which the pose is named, as seen in "What Makes Marilyn," *Playboy*, December 1953, 18.

¹² The cover of *Playboy*'s first issue reads "first time in any magazine FULL COLOR the famous MARILYN MONROE NUDE" *Playboy*. December 1953, Cover.

Norma Jean has learned to do with both. Caruso, they say, could break a wine glass with his voice. Marilyn shatters whole rows of beer steins with a single, seductive look. And when she turns and slowly undulates out of a room, seismographs pick up quivers a thousand miles away.”¹³ What the reader encounters on the next page is, in effect, phantasmal. With his words, Hefner conjures up an image that signifies something more than the photograph’s indexical claim to reality as evidence of a naked body before the camera.

His writing conveyed that he was never really all that interested in these women’s bodies. They were the substrate, and myth needs remarkably little to take hold. Or as Hefner put it, “her curves really aren’t *that* spectacular.”¹⁴ Yet, she was the “most natural choice in the world” for *Playboy*’s prototype Playmate aka the *Sweetheart of the Month*. He dubbed her “natural sex personified.”¹⁵ Not because of her body, but because of how she fashioned herself: Norma Jean became Marilyn, and Marilyn became “the undisputed love goddess of [that] particular generation.”¹⁶ He gave it away from the very first issue. The spread was titled *What Makes Marilyn*, and just in case that was not clear enough, he added that she was “the real article.”¹⁷ So, perhaps the men who read between the centerfolds are still laughing and I am only reinforcing the punchline. But given that the publication is often cited as proof of the age-old adage that ‘sex sells,’ it is clear that there is still much more to unpack here, so I suppose the burden of explanation falls to me.

The reality is the company dealt in wish-fulfillment, peddling something that was close enough to touch, yet always slightly out of reach. What Hefner’s magazine merchandised was a fantastical appendage of the American Dream. Right from the first pages, the magazine’s sales pitch read like secular gospel: “If you’re a man between 18 and 80, Playboy is meant for you. If you like your entertainment served up with humor, sophistication and spice, Playboy will become a very special favourite.”¹⁸ Hefner

¹³ “What Makes Marilyn,” 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 17; 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 18.

¹⁸ “Volume I, Number I,” *Playboy*, December 1953, 3.

continues, “Playboy will emphasize entertainment,”¹⁹ extending a promise of salvation and paradise to his readers, if only they would subscribe. Under the auspices of the centerfold, *Playboy* sought to promote a new kind of manhood. Gone was the rugged man’s man of old; in his place stood a man whose bravado owed more to brains than brawn. The *Playboy* man is an intellect who enjoys quiet discussions on “Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, and sex.”²⁰ With disproportionate emphasis on the latter... or perhaps, more aptly, on the lack thereof? Because the pictorials really were “all culture, no nature...”²¹

Depictions of the most natural state one can exist in are recoded into a hyper-stylized fantasy. The glossy photographs of nubile young women frolicking in the nude, staged in whimsical settings carefully decorated top to bottom with playful props curiously appear overwhelmingly static and artificial. The hermetic quality of *Playboy*’s pictures is deliberate. Detached from real intimacy and sexual subjectivity, they elicit far more than just a dirty thought. It functions as a structuring device that transforms what was once the female body into an aestheticized image that simulates the desires of Hefner’s wildest dreams. The girls who grace the pages of *Playboy* are not mere representations of any *real* women, or of any reality whatsoever. Rather these *images*, as I use the term, “give reality to what’s inside of them by turning it into something that’s outside of them [in new and delightful guises].”^{22,23} In turn “woman” is further othered, beyond object, relegated to the role of ‘*Bunny*’ (for these purposes, specifically referring to any depiction of a ‘lifelike’ woman featured in the magazine as a Playmate centerfold, on the cover, or in a pictorial; not the cartoon women e.g., Le Roy Neiman’s “Femlin” character, Playboy Club waitresses, the logo, or the Mr. Playboy character).²⁴

Hefner remarked in an interview to journalist Oriana Fallaci that he adopted the term ‘Bunny’ to classify his Playmates and cover girls because:

the rabbit, the bunny, in America has a sexual meaning;

¹⁹ Ibid. 3.

²⁰ Ibid. 3.

²¹ Carina Chocano, “Bunnies,” in *You Play the Girl* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 5.

²² John Sack, “The Handwriting on the Wall,” *Playboy*, January 1960, 84.

²³ Arthur Knight, “Far Out Films,” *Playboy*, April 1960, 50.

²⁴ The Femlin is a small cartoon woman designed by artist Le Roy Neiman, who is always getting into trouble on the joke pages of the magazine; Playboy Clubs (which will be expanded upon later on) have Bunny cocktail waitresses who don a corset, ears, and a tail to serve food and drinks; the Mr. Playboy character (created by *Playboy*’s Art Director Arthur Paul’s wife Bea Paul) is a male rabbit character, who initially the publication’s mascot as he was a rabbit-reflection of Hefner.

and I chose it because it's a fresh animal, shy, vivacious, jumping—sexy. First it smells you, then it escapes, then it comes back, and you feel like caressing it, playing with it. A girl resembles a bunny. Joyful, joking. Consider the kind of girl we made popular: the Playmate of the Month. She is never sophisticated, a girl you cannot really have. She is a young, healthy, simple girl—the girl next door . . . We are not interested in the mysterious, difficult woman, the femme fatale who wears elegant underwear, with lace, and she is sad, and somehow mentally filthy. The Playboy girl has no lace, no underwear, she is naked, well-washed with soap and water, and she is happy. . . The Bunnies . . . are . . . *inaccessible and familiar, like the Statue of Liberty*.²⁵

He acknowledges that the Bunny is something you can never have, his 'girl next door' is a thing of make-believe. The magazine's founder knows that the Bunnies featured in *Playboy* bear shockingly little resemblance to any women that exist beyond the page. They are a visual allegory. A derivative creation, like Eve from Adam's rib: she is born from the male imagination and embedded within a heterosexual masculine lifestyle narrative that divorces the image from any kind of lived mutual sexual experience.

Critics and preachers²⁶ of the running gag about "reading it for the articles" seem to overlook the refined appeal of the magazine's visuals. For those in on the joke, the photos remain a taboo; for the weary moralists, they are taboo as well—and proof, besides, that "no decent girl would expose herself the way these girls do."²⁷ The moral verdict on both sides amounts to overwhelming disapproval. Although, reducing the pictorials to smut is an unfair assessment. In fact, I would argue that the images are just as intellectual as the articles. *Playboy's* crown jewel, the Bunny image, transcends representation of real female sexual subjectivity or subjugation. She is instead a surface onto which Hefner projects his fantasies. Though she is literally front and center in the magazine, her existence remains peripheral within *Playboy's* vision. If ever she is severed from the aestheticized environment that sustains the mechanics of simulation, the image of the Bunny ceases to exist.

²⁵ Hugh Hefner quoted in Oriana Fallaci, "Hugh Hefner: I Am in the Center of the World," in *The Egoists* (New York: Henry Regnery Company, 1966), 118-119.

²⁶ Title of Chapter 5 in Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*.

²⁷ Mrs. Robert Carlson quoted in "Dear Playboy: Playboy — Pro and Con" *Playboy*. October 1962. 30.

Playboy, knowing that there are no Bunnies in the real world, relies on a distinct, mythic third element to bring the fantasy to life. The illusive nature of this third element is precisely why the traditional moral binary of sexual objectification versus liberation is insufficient to accurately assess *Playboy's* visuals. This project contends that the *Playboy* Bunny is neither subject nor object because her proper ontological classification is that of the hyperreal image, for she is meticulously constructed to appear natural and 'real' in service of upholding a puritanical masculine ideological fantasy. Her role in *Playboy's* fantasy world is engendered by a relational dynamic that operates across and through multiple actors and effects to create a phantasm more real than reality. I therefore propose a third category to account for the profound absence of reality the publication has concealed: the image. I argue that the Bunny mustn't be understood or evaluated as simply an indexical figure of a woman within the frame, for she herself is the framing device, the image in its entirety, and formed from the very thing that makes *Playboy Playboy*. Recognizing her as such and demystifying the fantasy factory that feeds men illusory images of success, sex, and selfhood is necessary to move beyond reductive debates about women's role in the world of *Playboy*.

Contents for the Men's Entertainment Magazine (Overview)

Before proceeding with my disquisition, I first offer a provocation: what exactly is the content of a “men’s entertainment magazine”? As one might reasonably expect, most critics, preachers, and the lay public typically identify “women” as the content in question. However, scholars largely concur that “girly” imagery is strategically included in publications like *Playboy* to entice the reader into a lifestyle of extravagant consumption by aligning consumer goods with sexual prowess.²⁸ The presence of “women” served only to legitimize these buying practices as part of the ideal postwar masculine identity. *Playboy* sought to sell the dream life—with the caveat, of course, however surreptitious it may be, that the ladies came separately. In other words, the correct answer to the above question is “fantasy,” which is to be conceived here as constitutive of heterosexual masculine desire insofar as it designates the object(s) of desire.²⁹ Nonetheless, questions persist regarding how the magazine’s use of this imagery ought to be classified.

Scholarly and critical discourse has predominately assigned the Bunny to one of two categories: subject or object. Although opposed, both the “object” position (henceforth referred to as “Bunny-as-object”), most commonly associated with second wave feminists like Gloria Steinem,³⁰ and the “subject” position (similarly referred to hereon out as “Bunny-as-subject”), a more recent advancement from feminist historian Carrie Pitzulo,³¹ evaluate the Bunny as an indexical representation of women.³² The binary model of classification is largely focused on the socio-political conditions under which real-life women have posed for *Playboy* and how their likeness as Bunnies influences perceptions of women’s roles in society. These readings of the Bunny expose a greater limitation in *Playboy* studies, where the effects of the magazine’s reception and the social impact of its visuals are privileged over analysis of the aesthetic strategies through which those effects are produced.

²⁸ Gail Dines, “I Buy It for the Articles,” in *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 254–262.; Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth, and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*.

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008),. 134.

³⁰ Gloria Steinem, “What Playboy Doesn’t Know About Women Could Fill a Book,” *McCall’s*, October 1970, 139–140.

³¹ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*.

³² Real women—be they individual or symbolic of the entire gender.

This thesis addresses these limitations by examining the aesthetic strategies the magazine uses to produce the image of a fantasy “woman,” whose bodily referent is effaced to such an extent that *Playboy*’s masculine mythology supersedes the reality of what it means to exist as a woman in the eyes of men. My analysis is centered on two main issues. One is formal and ontological, how the Bunny imagery is produced and by what means does it engender a male fantasy, appearing more real than reality. The second is differential and deconstructive, why the nature of this production evades binary classification. This project endeavours to depart from traditional socio-political approaches to these problems in favour of adopting post-structuralist and formalist perspectives. The material is evaluated as editorial photography rather than treating it strictly as historical or cultural ephemera to situate this study within established conventions in art criticism that focus on interpreting the meaning of images.

The aforementioned *image of a fantasy “woman”* is how the term *Bunny* is to be understood in this context. My definition takes Hefner’s words and images at face value to account for the archetypal inference in his earlier description of the epithet. The human/woman/bunny metaphor appeals to an archetype rather than any actual person(s). Hefner does not describe any specific individual woman with discernible traits. His explication instead speaks to a figure plucked from obscurity and interpolated into *Playboy*’s fantasy world. What makes a Bunny a Bunny, as will be argued here, is not found in the girl who poses for the photographs. To be more precise, whenever the term *Bunny* is used, it is, unless otherwise specified, in reference to an inter-image archetype reproduced in the magazine’s ‘girly’ imagery consisting of the entire visual content of the picture plane; the term may also be used in reference to an intra-image specific Bunny reproduction of the inter-image archetype in my examinations of specific photographs.

To allow for a congruent, comparative reading of *Playboy*’s editorial practices, this study—a multidisciplinary exercise in media and gender history, cultural studies, and visual analysis—will conduct close visual and textual analyses of pictorials, covers, and Playmate centerfolds from the

magazine's heyday,³³ focusing predominantly on the 1960s. This scope represents the time period in which *Playboy* came into its own by solidifying its unique artistic identity with, what I will call *Playboy's* Bunny formula—which made the appeal of any depicted bodily referent entirely contingent upon the magazine's intervention. Special attention to the 1960s is warranted given that it wasn't until the early 60s that Bunny imagery regularly appeared on the cover of the magazine, prior to that were illustrations, many of which featured the Mr. Playboy rabbit character; and according to *TIME* magazine's 1967 profile on Hefner, *Playboy's* 'ordinary, and average, but well-endowed in a wholesome sort of way' Bunny motif originated in its July 1955 issue with the first 'girl next door' Playmate "Janet Pilgram."³⁴

Given the parameters of this study, it is not feasible to survey every issue published between January 1960 to December 1969. Instead, because the Bunny imagery in each individual issue of *Playboy* varies in its specific visual content, the project adopts a case study approach. Close readings will be limited to three issues, December 1963, February 1962, and September 1967; to allow for in-depth analysis of *Playboy's* Bunny imagery, evaluated against the criteria that define the ontological classifications of subject, object, and image.³⁵ These issues were selected based on their ability to reflect typical instances of the magazine's image-making practices and editorial conventions; what *Playboy* editor Jim Peterson explains as that which "reflect[s] Hefner's taste of what the ideal American woman looks like."³⁶ The study treats these issues as illustrative cases through which to examine the consistency of the visual and textual structure—in the abovementioned variations of imagery—or the "Bunny formula."

In selecting issues, I also considered how many times a model has appeared in the magazine;

³³ The magazine was most popular from its inception in 1953 to 1979; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 12.

³⁴ The fictitious "Janet Pilgram" (a pseudonym Hefner picked for his then girlfriend and employee Charlaine Karalus) introduced the idea that "Playmates are all around you: the new secretary at your office, the doe-eyed beauty who sat opposite you at lunch yesterday, the girl who sells you shirts and ties at your favorite store." She worked as a subscription manager for *Playboy* and agreed to pose "just this once" in exchange for a new addressograph for the office; see "Playboy's Office Playmate: Pictorial," *Playboy*. July 1955, 26–27; "Miss July: playboy's playmate of the month," *Playboy*. July 1955, 28; Russell Miller, *Bunny: The Real Story of Playboy* (New York: New American Library, 1988), 51.

³⁵ However, it should be noted that there will be a fourth brief close reading of the October 1980 issue to further justify the 1960s scope by way of contrast, highlighting wavering cultural attitudes towards sex post-heyday.

³⁶ Jim Peterson quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 44.

accordingly, the study only examines issues in which it is her first cover, centerfold, or pictorial appearance in order to avoid any instance of confounding effects arising from prior familiarity with the model, and to stay true to Hefner's vision of fantasy, of which he explains that "you *don't* need a professional model. There's an extra added attraction to the fact that your fair subject [has no] [...] modeling experience, professional or amateur [...] [This is] [p]erfect for our purpose."³⁷

Additionally, mention should be made of *Playboy's* model selection criteria, which Peterson outlines "in order of importance, [as] beauty, figure, background."³⁸ Likewise, this study engages with the same aspects in assessing the Bunny, as she has been defined earlier, though not in the same hierarchical order described by Peterson. Here, these elements will be treated as individual components that are, together, evaluated based on their capacity to produce the Bunny's ontological configuration. For the purposes of this study, beauty is better understood as *Playboy's* aesthetic imposition and arrangement of various elements present in the Bunny image; figure refers to the model, and background refers to the setting.

Do keep in mind that this sample reflects the lack of racial diversity in the first few decades of the magazine. Although *Playboy* was often considered progressive, especially in regard to racial equality; as Pitzulo points out, Hefner was credited with "advancing the careers of Black entertainers and [...] challenging segregation," its visual focus was overwhelmingly young, white, and blonde women, "reflecting Hefner's personal taste [...] and larger cultural ideals."³⁹ Early depictions of women of colour certainly teetered the line of being racial caricatures.⁴⁰ Considering the dismal representation for women of colour, a more in-depth analysis of race and representation is pertinent. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the Bunny is understood as a formal, ontological essence,

³⁷"Photographing Your Own Playmate: Miss June." Pictorial in *Playboy*. June 1958, 35.

³⁸ Jim Peterson quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 44.

³⁹ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 64; 63.

⁴⁰ In August 1964, the first Asian Playmate was dubbed the "China Doll" and an "Oriental Charmer" to "intentionally" highlight her heritage to "make her more appealing." cited in *Ibid.* 61; Thomas Weyr notes, Hefner was also incredibly wary about "depicting [Black] women for white delectation," cited in Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 142. which helps explain the delay in including Jennifer Jackson, the first Black Playmate, until the following March. And it wasn't until six years later that a Black woman, Darine Stern, appeared on the cover. After that, only one more woman of colour appeared during the 1960s, Jean Bell in October 1969; While Black women were otherwise sporadically featured as Bunnies, no Black 'Playmate of the Year,'⁴⁰ was selected until Renee Tenison in June 1990.; "Playmate of the Year" is an honour given to one Bunny at the end of the year. The Playmate of the Year is selected by Hefner (though, in later years, he made his choice based on a reader vote) from all of the Bunnies featured as centerfolds from the previous year (e.g. the 1990 PMOY was selected from the 1989 Playmates).

such that the specific identity of the human subject featured as the figure—racialized or otherwise—nonetheless remains contingent on its structural function.

Each chapter develops the argument in parallel with the magazine’s gradual reveal of the centerfold. I begin with the requisite task of contextualizing and deconstructing the origins of fantasy within *Playboy*’s language to reproduce the anticipatory frontmatter of the magazine.⁴¹ What ensues mirrors the bulk of the magazine’s intellectually provocative content in the form of ontological and formal analysis of existing socio-political categories. The first two chapters outline the Bunny-as-object and Bunny-as-subject respectively, drawing on feminist theories of women’s representation advanced by Barbara L. Fredrickson, Tomi-Ann Roberts, Scott Anderson, and Gail Dines, applying Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of ideology and fantasy, and using Kant’s definitions of “object” and “subject” to differentiate the mechanics of fantasy production from the extrapolation of that fantasy as reality, so as to deconstruct the binary model. A theoretical “centerfold” is revealed in the third chapter, where I advance the necessary and sufficient conditions under which something is classifiable as a Bunny, informed by Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality, especially his ‘Disneyland’ model. With these conditions, I outline a working definition of what I call “Bunny-as-image” to explain the structuring archetypal role of the Bunny image within *Playboy*’s representational system.

The nature of this work obliges me to acknowledge that this criticism thesis diverts from the conventions of image-based study in the Kantian aesthetic tradition, particularly in its relative neglect of aesthetic judgement and the *Critique of Judgement*. This choice is heavily informed by Arthur Danto’s plea for an ontology of art in *What Art Is*, which holds that art as we know it, post modernity, is “beyond the reach” of Kant’s primary aesthetic theory of taste.⁴² In emphasizing the distinction between epistemological questioning and ontological questioning (i.e. knowing whether something is

⁴¹ This progression is also a nod to Kant’s *Prolegomena* text.

⁴² Arthur C. Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 5.

art versus what it is to be a work of art),⁴³ Danto has set a precedent for the viability of other Kantian theory in assessing images and artwork, since apprehension of the latter allows us to better understand the former. Because this project seeks to analyze images for aesthetic purposes which have thus far mostly only been examined for socio-political ends, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* offers the most suitable ontological framework. It allows existing sociopolitical analyses of the Bunny to be situated in and tested against the transcendental conditions that make such representations, and interpretations of the sign's meaning, possible in the first place.

With the extensive theoretical ground covered here, it is important to note that my project does not investigate the lived experiences of *Playboy*'s models or readers. Although it focuses on normative representations of gender shaped by patriarchal and capitalist ideals, it does not attempt to evaluate *Playboy* in moral terms, nor does it seek to determine whether the magazine ultimately harms or empowers real-life women. It is also important to emphasize that, although some of the language used in this text reflects the abrasive, oftentimes misogynistic cultural and ideological perspectives of the predominantly male contributors whom I am interrogating, my use of certain terms or colloquialisms is not an endorsement of such perspectives. Moreover, while acknowledging that the Bunny imagery is a product of a particular postwar legal and cultural climate, subject to volatile obscenity laws,⁴⁴ this thesis does not engage in in-depth analysis of those regulatory contexts or offer an extensive historical account of the magazine's inception. Rather, the thesis is confined to analyzing an ontology of the formal, aesthetic mechanisms through which the Bunny image is constructed within the magazine's representational system.

⁴³Ibid. 116.

⁴⁴ See final footnote for more on Hefner's obscenity charges.

Chapter 1: A Matter of Simple Duplicity

Playboy perfected the art of saying one thing and selling another. This charade operated on two different registers: one of sophistication and wit for the reader, and another of staunch sexual liberation—mediated by fantasy—allegedly in favour of the fairer sex. In moving intercourse from the bedroom to the coffee table,⁴⁵ the magazine reframed eroticism as a matter of taste rather than intimacy. This intervention changed the public's attitudes toward sex and, by extension, toward women. The Bunny became especially controversial, though rarely was she granted any complexity. The figure was ostensibly caught in a trap between subject and object. And, despite the novelty of sexual and women's liberation movements, critical reception of the Bunny returned to an age-old problem of philosophical inquiry: how to make sense of the apparent duality of the human being as both subject and object. This dichotomy dictates that the subject be figured as agentive, while the object is defined by its subjugation and utility to the reader. To assign the Bunny to either category is to impose a fixed meaning, leaving little room for the ambiguity and artifice that sustains her. Understanding this is crucial to establish the conditions under which the Bunny has been read and misread.

To move beyond this binary conjecture I must first outline the terms of the Bunny's interpretation. The category of *object* provides the most immediate point of entry, as objectification has long been one of the dominant frameworks through which women's representation has been theorized. Gloria Steinem's critique of *Playboy* represents the historically dominant reading of the Bunny as a woman turned *actual* object for the purpose of male sexual gratification. In a 1970 *McCall's* interview with Hefner, Steinem accused him of reducing women to disposable objects, stating that *Playboy* has "made woman objects [sic], more easily exchanged than sports cars. It's like being on a meat hook. And by *Playboy* standards, women are objects that become more useless with age."⁴⁶ Her criticism is indicative of the ideological stakes of the Bunny-as-object. She went so far as to claim that "there are

⁴⁵ Dines, "I Buy It for the Articles," 254.

⁴⁶ Steinem, "What Playboy Doesn't Know," 139.

times when a woman reading *Playboy* feels a little like a Jew reading a Nazi manual,”⁴⁷ clearly articulating her understanding of *Playboy* as a regime that tyrannizes women. The extremity of this analogy speaks to the depth of Steinem’s conviction that *Playboy*’s Bunny is fundamentally anti-woman. The ideological issue is clear; however, the categorical error remains implicit. Her rhetorical use of *object* treats objecthood as an intrinsic property of the image and its figure rather than as an effect produced through the process of objectification outside of the photograph.

For the sake of argument, let us take Steinem at her word and entertain the idea that, in the context of a physical medium such as the magazine, objectification describes a representational harm that entails an ontological shift in being from subject to object. Such a claim requires an explicit definition of what exactly an object is. In the Kantian sense, objects cannot exist independently of representations,⁴⁸ which are only given to us through the mind’s structuring of experience. For the purposes of this analysis, I use “representation” somewhat interchangeably with Kant’s use of the word, referring to both the mental apprehension of an object and to its manifestation within the pictorial field. Kant similarly distinguishes between representations as intuitions, which are the singular means by which objects are sensible to subjects, and concepts, which are the general means through which objects are thought. An object comes to be only when a manifold of intuition is unified under a concept.⁴⁹ The mind organizes raw sensory data (e.g. colours, shapes) to apprehend what exactly is being perceived. If objecthood depends on the unification of a manifold within representation, then the Bunny cannot be understood as a determinate object that precedes this process. For she does not enter representation as a given intuition to which a concept is subsequently applied.

Before hopping too far ahead, I must address the oddity of my ontological positioning. In discussions of objectification, Kant is typically invoked through his moral injunction of treating people as means to an end.⁵⁰ However, applying a strictly ethical formulation becomes a bit more complicated in

⁴⁷ Ibid. 139.

⁴⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Friedrich Max Müller, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 24.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 87.

⁵⁰ Discussed in Scott Anderson, “Objectification: A 21st-Century Reassessment,” *Current Controversies in Political Philosophy*(2015): 100–116.

the case of *Playboy*. Not only are the magazine's moral intentions murky due to its Byzantine sexual politics—simultaneously championing women's sexual liberation while indulging male sexual desires—the medium of delivery is itself an object, and therefore cannot be the bearer of moral intention. It is far from controversial to suggest that an inanimate object such as the magazine is devoid of the necessary agency to qualify as a morally responsible agent, regardless of what its properties may be. Albeit moral intention is more often than not attributed to Hefner and other editorial actors involved in the production of the image. Imputing intention to the producers of the image, however, does not explain the ontological status of that which does not exist prior to its representation as such.

The lexicon of representation is particularly important here, as it provides the vocabulary adopted in later theories of sexual objectification that align with Steinem's understanding of what it means to be an object. Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts define objectification as occurring “whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as capable of representing her. [...] When objectified, women are treated as bodies—and in particular, as bodies that exist for the pleasure of others.”⁵¹ Fredrickson and Roberts' framework paints objectification as a social condition in which women are reduced to the sum of their parts and understood only in their utility to another, presumably male, person.

This suggests that a photograph in the magazine refers back to a real woman whose body, once pictured, becomes isolated from her personhood insofar as the image is taken to correspond to an external objectifying reality. Yet without specifying the agent responsible for objectification, this account still remains vulnerable to Steinem's category mistake. Either objectification is understood as externally enacted by the viewer, assigning agency to the reader, or it is attributed to the image itself as a product of *Playboy's* editorial practices. Each position offers a plausible account of harm, yet neither adequately explains the possibility of the Bunny as a concept under which multiple appearances can be recognized as the same object of representation, nor how objectification can operate independently of individual intent.

⁵¹ Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, “Objectification Theory,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997): 175–176.

Connecting ontological claims about objects and sociological claims about objectification requires an account of symbolic objectification to understand the broader cultural and perceptual effects of representation. Scott Anderson distinguishes between immediate forms of objectification enacted upon particular individuals and symbolic objectification, the latter being more appropriate for analyzing instances of representation. Anderson describes symbolic objectification as the representation of people—or, more often, classes of people—as appropriately treated like objects, independent of any particular act of interpersonal use or harm.⁵² Unlike Fredrickson and Roberts’ immediate notion of objectification, that involves instrumentalizing a woman as an individual, symbolic objectification depicts bodies as fungible or passively available within an all-encompassing system of representation.

Such depictions need not correspond to or even reference any particular person; instead they work to establish social norms that are concerned with how bodies are understood and treated.⁵³ This distinction makes it possible to differentiate representational forms that conflate symbolic objectification with immediate bodily availability from those that sustain objectification within representation, especially that which is removed from the real. The Bunny-as-object does not make this differentiation. This omission may well be deliberate since Anderson later clarifies that “a single act may give rise to both forms of objectification simultaneously, [though] they need not always occur together.”⁵⁴ It’s worth noting that this ambiguity in Steinem’s treatment of the Bunny as an object stems from a larger conflation of lived experience and representation, informed by her own personal encounters with Hefner and his company⁵⁵ and the growing anti-porn sentiment within the second-wave feminist movement.⁵⁶ To Steinem, almost all of the women involved with *Playboy* came to represent this widespread social dynamic in which androcentric sexual representation is inextricably linked to women’s “second-class status in American society.”⁵⁷ The conditions of objectification are presumed to be inherent to the Bunny’s representation

⁵² Anderson, “Objectification,” 105.

⁵³ Ibid. 105.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 105.

⁵⁵ Gloria Steinem’s ongoing feud with Hefner began when she went undercover at the Playboy club in Chicago as a Bunny-waitress for her breakout exposé in *SHOW* magazine titled “A Bunny’s Tale” in May 1963. The two exchanged heated letters for some time before Steinem eventually interviewed Hefner in 1970 for *McCall’s* for her article “What Playboy Doesn’t Know About Women Could Fill a Book”; Steven Watts, *Mr. Playboy: Hugh Hefner and the American Dream* (La Vergne, TN: Turner Publishing, 2009), 241.

⁵⁶ Watts, *Mr. Playboy*, 236–238.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 239.

because her recognizability across depictions constitutes her as an interchangeable figure across images, regardless of who is looking or intending to objectify.

In many such cases of pornography, this is palpable. I am not here to suggest that objectification is some farcical or inconsequential thing. Objectification can succeed symbolically and socially even when objecthood fails ontologically. In spite of that, the fundamental limitation of the Bunny-as-object is that it misrecognizes an ontological impasse about what the image is as a strictly intersubjective problem. Strictly speaking, what is considered X-rated imagery—or that which is lascivious and pornographic—flagrantly aims to reduce women to explicit objects of sex. Its meaning penetrates, becoming literal, immediate, and pretty much spent the moment the fucking starts. It has no intention of deferring the sexual gratification it promises because the representation of women is organized around sexual use. The objectified woman becomes consumable both in form and function.

Under these circumstances what the representation signifies is then entirely exhausted by the objectifying act inflicted upon the objectified person. This is owing to the fact that objectification effectively reaches climax by permitting all meaning-making participants, including the viewer, to treat another person or themselves as subservient, violable, and fundamentally devoid of subjectivity.⁵⁸ Hefner himself was aware of and against such displays of objectification, protesting “there is relatively little appeal in a nude that has no name [...] [it] is as interesting as a beautiful chair is, but as a human being, no [...] she’s not just a rag o’ bone and hank o’ hair. She’s a living breathing human being.”⁵⁹ When objectification is fully realized there is no ambiguity in the relation between the viewer and the objectified. Porn leaves little to the imagination in its relentless pursuit of the money shot. But *Playboy* is not porn. This is widely recognized by many feminist scholars, including Anderson, who situates the magazine within a broader continuum of sexual representations, treating its mode of objectification as distinct from explicit or violent representations of sexual use like that of pornography.⁶⁰ Still he infers that

⁵⁸ Anderson, “Objectification,” 109.

⁵⁹ Hugh Hefner quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 50.

⁶⁰ Anderson, “Objectification,” 105.

the Bunny representations nonetheless “lack a full complement of human qualities [so they] tend to produce a social understanding of women inferior to men.”⁶¹

Though he does speak to the complexities of symbolic messages in sexual imagery, Anderson does not outright address how *Playboy*'s reliance on narrative and the personification of the Bunny could potentially complicate straightforward attempts to attribute objectification to the magazine's editorial vision. Gail Dines draws a clearer distinction between the former two cases, claiming that what pornography advertises is the woman, via explicit codes and conventions, as *the* commodity. Whereas ‘men's entertainment’ like *Playboy* commodifies a ‘lifestyle’ that warrants the consumption of superfluous goods as a means of “capturing the ultimate prize commodity: lots and lots of attractive, young, big-breasted women, just like the ones masturbated to in the centerfold.”⁶²

Commodification and objectification operate in tandem: once objectified the woman is stripped of her status as a person; commodification takes that a step further by assigning the objectified woman economic value. Positioning the woman as the product is, as Dines' suggests, fundamentally distinct from using sexualized representations of women to confer erotic appeal upon commodities for the purpose of attracting male consumers.⁶³ That is to say, *Playboy* dangles a carrot on a stick, which is a far cry from Steinem's “meat on a hook” claim. Be that as it may, sending readers on a wild Bunny chase—all while knowing not one of the innumerable products *Playboy* advertises could deliver her—ought to be recognized as one of the magazine's more insidious acts of duplicity. Even if one should bed the real-life woman photographed in the pictorial, they would still never have encountered a Bunny, for Hefner's “girl you cannot really have” is not material in nature. As will shortly become clear, the Bunny's existence relies on a symbolic reception beyond the scope of external actuality.

A Bunny is not a body, nor is she a woman. To describe the women pictured in *Playboy* only as objectified is insufficient, for what appears in the magazine is not observable in lived reality, by the reader or the presumed objectified subject. This is not to say that these images are socially inert; however,

⁶¹ Ibid. 106

⁶² Dines, “I Buy It for the Articles,” 254.

⁶³ Ibid. 255-257.

the depiction of the Bunny cannot be conflated with the experiences of real three-dimensional women because what assumes the form of a woman is mimetic of something dreamed up by Hefner; and in these circumstances, the depicted woman figure is severed from the real, empirical effects of objectification. The confusion is understandable though, given that the Bunny formula seems to emulate the principal mode of objectification in its “endless variety and monotonous similarity.”⁶⁴ Yet this resemblance is only ideologically functional insofar as it is first ontologically formal.

To clarify this distinction, it is useful to return to Fredrickson and Roberts’ account of objectification. The defining feature of sexual objectification is treating a person, or the figuration of a person, as a body for sexual use. Contrarily, the Bunny image reorganizes sexual desire around anticipation rather than use. She is defined by this prolepsis which codifies her through visual and textual narrative. This is what makes her recognizable and reproducible as a symbol. The body is one element among many; what makes her a Bunny is how the body is mediated to adhere to *Playboy*’s aesthetic archetype. Absent this system of mediation, the photographed woman would remain only a body, not a Bunny. The body alone cannot enact the stylization that produces the Bunny. The Bunny’s erotic disposition is reified only through aesthetic imposition. A woman’s naked body in isolation would not suffice to make a Bunny pictorial. Hefner claims, “photographing a naked girl, against a white wall, [and] hid[ing] her head, [...] not mention[ing] her name [...] brings sadness with it, a sort of dirtiness that becomes evident even on a naked body.”⁶⁵ He additionally maintains that this is why *Playboy* isn’t “interested in straight nudes [...], what [the magazine] want[s] is a sophisticated semi-nude.”⁶⁶

Miss December 1963, Donna Michelle, epitomized *Playboy*’s refusal of overt nakedness in favour of a ‘sophisticated semi-nude’ as the magazine’s ideal of beauty and female sexual attractiveness; a standard that dictates the terms of refiguration as per an androcentric imagination. The December 1963 anniversary issue greets readers with *Playboy*’s “own rabbit’s bussed cheek [that] comes with the

⁶⁴ Gayle Rubin cited in Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson quoted in Fredrickson and Roberts, “Objectification Theory,” 174.

⁶⁵ Hugh Hefner quoted in Fallaci, *Egoists*, 119.

⁶⁶ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 46.

compliments of December's puckered Playmate, Donna Michelle, celebrating Playboy's 10th birthday."⁶⁷ In her first appearance *Playboy's* rhetoric presents Michelle as a gift to readers. And while upon first glance, this act can seem objectifying, importantly and calculatedly, all that is depicted thus far is her face. This is entirely counterintuitive to our understanding of an objectified representation. Typically what is considered to be objectifying visual media emphasizes women's bodies. This is quantified by Fredrickson and Roberts in terms of relative facial prominence; "men tend to be portrayed in print media and artwork with an emphasis on the head and face, with greater facial detail, women tend to be portrayed with an emphasis on the body."⁶⁸ Scholars refer to this phenomenon as face-ism, which subsequently results in the body-ism of women.⁶⁹ If face-ism privileges male representation through facial emphasis, and body-ism entails the portrayal of women as bodies, what then do we make of the prominent depiction of a female face?

In Donna Michelle's case, the emphasis on her borderline theatrical facial expression renders the immediate objectification model inadequate, for there is no body in the frame, all viewers see is a headshot from the neck upward. Such an approach could, however, be interpreted as problematic in other cases: Fredrickson and Roberts warn of the objectifying gaze in visual media that depicts interpersonal and social encounters between men and women.⁷⁰ Although the criteria does not specify whether or not a lone headshot constitutes objectification, Michelle's conspicuously flirtatious pose in this image is explicitly identified as the "anchored drift."⁷¹ With her eyes glanced off to the side and brows raised, she seems a bit coy, almost as if she was teasing he who opened the first page. Interpretation here relies on the viewer, and is validated by the absence of male presence. The determining factor in whether or not objectification occurs is the depiction of a male figure: when a woman is depicted looking off into the distance, a man looking directly at her alters the dynamic of the image and signifies her as secondary for she is said to be "mentally drifting from the scene."⁷² The focus then is on the man's interpretive

⁶⁷ "Playbill" *Playboy*. December 1963, 3.

⁶⁸ Fredrickson and Roberts, "Objectification Theory," 176.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 176.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 176.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 176.

⁷² *Ibid.* 176.

authority, whatever it may be, and how the woman relates to it. *Playboy* understands this visual arrangement well and flouts to circumvent it.

There are several thousand ways to show a pretty girl half-naked, but *Playboy*'s strategy was to do so in a way that conjured male presence through absence. In eliminating the perceived threat of competition from another man, however fictitious he may be, the fantasy encodes itself into the pictorials without arduous intervention. Incorporating props like a second glass next to the martini shaker, a necktie hanging off the bed, or a pipe on the nightstand⁷³ into the milieu implies that a male companion is the only thing that the Bunny is missing. And *Playboy* wants us to know that her male companion could very well be you, dear reader. This is minimum intercession delivering maximum effect. It's a situation that intentionally suggests the *possibility* of seduction.⁷⁴

The weight of potential serves a dual purpose: the obvious being, to allow the reader to occupy the role where "the camera becomes [the] guy who is present, but unseen;"⁷⁵ and more latent, to call attention to the uncertainty in situations readers undoubtedly face in real life. The message was that sex, both in *Playboy* and in life, was never guaranteed, but that wouldn't stop him from coming back for more. Truth be told, this is what makes it all the more enticing. Donna gave the *Playboy* logo a kiss, but as far as the reader knows, the next one might be meant for him. Her expression heavily implies importance on what remains unseen, a hint that good things come to those who wait.

The intelligibility of this possible seduction exists only in relation to a male companion who is not pictured; the Bunny's representation is displaced onto a purely relational function that depends solely on the reader. Though she is animated by gestures and expressions that direct the viewer toward an imagined male presence, this is only to give the appearance that control resides with the figure. The 'will she, won't she' tension signifies that the power lies in the image's capacity to suggest possibility without ever doing the deed. What the reader encounters, then, is not simply an objectified figure; this is someone,

⁷³ Carlye Adler, "Hugh Hefner Playboy Enterprises in 1953 I Didn't Really Fully Appreciate What I Had Created. It Was the First Successful Magazine for Young, Single Men," *CNN Money*, September 1, 2003, https://money.cnn.com/magazines/fsb/fsb_archive/2003/09/01/350793/index.htm.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 41.

and something, that sets the terms of desire. Much to the reader's surprise, the someone is not the Bunny. It is Hefner and the editorial team that constructed her. Editorial intervention plays the active role in regulating the dynamics of desire. The Bunny imagery merely serves as a structuring device.

Playboy's narrative relies on ambiguity to keep the figure suggestive rather than a determinate sexual representation. Ambiguity is how *Playboy* got away with so much. Excess uncertainty developed a very deliberate formula which served to personify the symbol rather than deliberately objectify a woman. The Bunny was to be situated in natural, 'everyday' surroundings, "preparing for a dinner date, getting ready for bed, rising in the morning, or any of the hundreds of things that a smart sophisticated career girl might be doing in semi-dress..."⁷⁶ The classic Playmate pictorial setup is arranged to make subdued exposure appear natural. As nudity is part of everyday life, if not the most natural thing in the world. The image thus naturalizes its own artifice.

It begins with a portrait of Miss whatever-month, followed by three or four 'personality' shots with accompanying text, reaches its centerpiece in the centerfold, and finally, the spread concludes with some denouement remarks and a few more personality pictures. The personality shots act as a secondary narrative structuring device, inviting the readers into the life and character of the Bunny, undeniably distinguishing her from the pornographic because the things she is doing are of no use, nor of any sexual significance, to the reader. They are staged as self-directed and incidental; it appears as though she is doing these things for herself, taking on a life of her own. The—mostly-clothed—photos are meant to maintain a kind of candid innocence, corroborated with personal anecdotes and biographical notes that divulge ambitions, quirks, and hobbies—details that are in part embellished by editors⁷⁷ to convey authenticity. Although, I am inclined to suggest these embellishments further expose the paradox of manufacturing what must appear natural. I, nonetheless, recognize that the effect was one of accessibility: a Playmate maintained the same social status as the reader. The kind of ordinary girl readers might very well meet in real life.

⁷⁶ Hugh Hefner quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 46.

⁷⁷ Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 202.

It turns out, even a *Prima Donna* could be an ordinary girl. Donna Michelle's pictorial worked to produce an effect of humanization, describing the eighteen-year-old UCLA student as "an offbeat beauty with a mind and style that is emphatically her own."⁷⁸ She is well educated, determined, with hopes and dreams that *appear to be* inimitably hers. These photographs situate her in the world of art and culture, the same world as, perhaps, the reader. Before her body is ever revealed in the centerfold, readers see her in tights and a leotard at the ballet barre, stretching, and leaping into an arabesque. Other photographs show her washing her car in Los Angeles, paging through LPs, and tossing a ball on the beach. Here, readers see that Michelle could just as easily be a girl at the office or co-ed as a Playmate. She's the *girl next door*. In the process of humanizing her, *Playboy* assures the reader that Michelle is more than just a body, she is talented, cultured, wholesome. She is a perfectly harmonized production of post-war American social norms, supplemented with some added psycho-sexual familiarity. This is something which men can recognize and relate to.

Relatability was a big deal. Carrying the epithet of taste and propriety for the everyman was, if anything, a tad bit idiomatic—on the nose of the American dream. Excuse the tautology, but it worked. Realized in its utmost expression in the centerfold par excellence. Down to the literal mechanics of the magazine: it's not just peeling back the cover, or thumbing through the pages, "that centerfold, that foldout, is that tactile experience of opening something, and revealing something,"⁷⁹ which proved integral to the enchantment. The centerfold pictures staged various degrees of undress; the centerfold pages staged various degrees of unfold—or, to quote *Playboy's* favourite media theorist, Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message."⁸⁰ And the message is by no means reducible to unitary objectification.

If the medium was the message, there remains the question of what exactly were the ontological properties of that message? Should we accept that objectification is not an intrinsic property of

⁷⁸ "Primadonna" *Playboy*. December 1963. 136.

⁷⁹ Jasin Buhrmester, Former *Playboy* Editor quoted in *American Playboy: The Hugh Hefner Story*, season 1, episode 3, "Becoming Mr. Playboy," directed by Richard Lopez, written by Brian Burstein, Steven David, and Tim W. Kelly, April 7, 2017, Amazon Prime Video.

⁸⁰ Marshall McLuhan quoted in "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," *Playboy*, March 1969; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London: Sphere Books, 1971), 9.

representation? If so, then the image cannot be treated as an object. Objects cannot produce representational effects in isolation. The Bunny can insofar as the image operates as a representational inter-image structure. Other proponents of the Bunny-as-object, like Marie Torre, understand this, at least as a matter of fantasy. She notes, quoting a reverend, that “the magazine manipulate[s] basic human interests, twisting and distorting those interests to create something unreal which it tries to sell as reality.”⁸¹ *Playboy* was selling something that exists only as a figment of the male imagination. Not sex, and certainly not “woman objects.”

This conflation raises a bigger question about the relationship between representation and reality. An inadvertent ode to Kant appears in the pages of the magazine calling attention to this very conundrum:

The world's most imaginative thinkers [...] have assumed that cognition is the very service of the imagination, and that an awareness of a non-material reality is an absolutely essential step before the discovery of the “forms of things unknown” [...]. Direct experience is but the raw material of life – the outward phenomena that man invests with meaning in with his symbolic configurations, his artificial tools for grappling with the interplay of spirit and matter.

Kant provides the orientation: “instead of human knowledge being shaped to reality, it is our human judgment which determines whatever it is to have the character of being reality for us.” [...] [T]he view of reality offered by your magazine is a spurious reality.⁸²

If the image does not connect to actual experience, it remains a “mere play of representations”⁸³ that appear indistinguishable from a dream.⁸⁴ Kant’s definition of the image as a “product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination”⁸⁵ is a useful starting point for explaining how these unreal representations come to be understood as reality within a fantasy production apparatus. Unity, the combining of parts into a singular whole, is illusory as it does not belong to one’s apprehension of the image alone or any single element of its appearance. This is why the image must be understood as a composite.

⁸¹ Marie Torre, “A Woman Looks at the Girly-Girly Magazines,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1963, 42–43.

⁸² *Playboy* reader John Downey quoted in “Dear Playboy: Spurious Reality” *Playboy*, February 1964, 43.

⁸³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 159.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 626.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 116.

A coherent appearance is produced by the mediation of the figure and the surrounding elements of the scene rather than by a singular object or an objectified figure. As in a game of *I Spy*, recognition of Miss December 1963 is apprehended through the accumulation of partial cues: she is pictured in a bedroom next to an ornate painted panel, with one hand resting on top. Only one of her breasts is exposed. She has a bouffant hairstyle and wears satin slippers. In the other hand she holds a decorative throw pillow positioned to cover her from waist down, to between her hips. She looks directly at the viewer, leaning slightly on the panel she holds. With one hip pushed outward, her weight shifts onto her back leg in a natural contrapposto stance, her front leg stays languid. Above her, there is a crystal chandelier, behind her is a red curtain. The image defines its figure through a compositional heterarchy, requiring the viewer to piece things together through accumulation and inference. Instant apprehension is not possible nor rewarded; if Kant had a soft spot for centerfolds, he might call the Bunny a regulative prize.^{86, 87}

Fittingly, if ironically, this falls within the bounds of what Kant describes as perverted reason or *preversa ratio*: the viewer reverses the proper order of investigation, according to which intuition must precede the concept. Unity is instead fabricated from surrounding artifice⁸⁸ and this purposive arrangement is mistaken for the intrinsic property of an isolated subject, confusing the mediation of the representational system with the natural existence of a thing.⁸⁹ I take this to be a Promethean kind of concealment. The most natural thing for a girl to do⁹⁰ when someone enters the room, in the absence of clothing, is to reach for the nearest object for cover. Donna's concealment seems unencumbered, even as it remains entirely situational: when no garments persist to stand in the way, imminent exposure is implied, though, it depends on a delicate visual balance of access and restraint. Another duplicitous gesture on *Playboy's* part, it transforms the act of looking into an exercise of arrangement and anticipation. This begs the question not of when, but if. Hefner's creation is designed "to keep it sexy but

⁸⁶ Kant's regulative principle is a rule of reason that organizes cognition without constituting an object of knowledge; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 146.

⁸⁷ Kant would *not* have a soft spot for centerfolds; he was notoriously apathetic in discussions of sex noted in Alan Soble, "Kant and Sexual Perversion," *Monist* 86, no. 1 (2003): 55–89, <http://doi.org/10.5840/monist20038614>.

⁸⁸ Artifice here is used to refer to *hypostasised*, "the concept of such a supreme intelligence, though being in itself entirely inscrutable, is determined anthropomorphically, and aims are afterwards imposed on nature violently and dictatorially, instead of looking for them by means of physical investigation." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 555.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 555.

⁹⁰ Reference to a quote from Playmate of the Year 1976 Lisa Blake in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 35.

acceptable.”⁹¹ As he explains, “We’ll want the breasts exposed, and yet covered,”⁹² so that visual emphasis remains in the scene, not on the body. The Bunny cannot be separated from the surrounding visual elements, of which she is inextricably bound, but the viewer nonetheless holds that her egress is possible.

Nearly a decade later, in the March 1971 issue, psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim cites Kant’s claim that “aesthetic pleasure of the highest order comes from the fact that the artist creates a unity out of a variety of elements,”⁹³ in his discussion of the utopian vision of social and sexual harmony imagined by many affluent middle-class American men,⁹⁴ like the ones that read *Playboy*. Following Bettelheim, I contend that *Playboy* affirms this Kantian point of view—especially given its proclivity for compositional imagery. The Bunny is manufactured by *Playboy*’s aesthetic interventions, and is thus defined by the representational system that created her. It is incorrect to ascribe to her the real, lived experiences of any woman, pictured or otherwise because she is not the figure alone. She is multiple elements that together create something immaterial in nature which cannot be brought under the conditions of real possible experience.

Her appearance does not correspond with a determinate concept, instead, the ‘girl next door’ idealizes familiarity and accessibility through this fantastical imagery. She is meant to remind the viewer of the women he has encountered in his life conformed to the terms of his own fantasies. It is a standardized mode of individual representation that is mass-produced in such a way it appears as though it is custom made. The ambiguity inherent to the photographs compels the viewer to insert himself and complete the image through projection. The Bunny is not reducible to the photographed woman because “Bunny” is the composite effect of *Playboy*’s entire visual system; to describe her as objectified is to mistake a part for the whole.

⁹¹ Hugh Hefner quoted in Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life*, 41.

⁹² *Ibid.* 41.

⁹³ Bruno Bettelheim, “The Roots of Radicalism,” *Playboy*, March 1971, 208.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 208.

Chapter 2: How to Read A Book Superficially

Be they critical of objectification or preachers of subjectification, most people react to the pictures in *Playboy* as if they are taking a Rorschach test. Whether full of reverential awe⁹⁵ or outright disdain, they see what they want to see.⁹⁶ If the Bunny, in a perpetual state of undress, looks vaguely enough like a body-object and plays like one on the page, it makes sense that many a critic would write her off as an object. Following centuries of perfunctory pattern recognition, it is not difficult to mistake resemblance for convention in women's representation, especially when the image invites consumption. Still, the charge of objectification is not entirely without merit. Although it errs by treating the figure as coterminous with the entire image and fails to acknowledge that the resulting picture foregrounds the composition, not the woman who posed for the photos, it nonetheless recognizes the 'man-madness' of it all... which in turn poses a problem for *Playboy*.

The only way the magazine can sell a dream is by making it feel real because fantasy is only immanent when its construction is disavowed. Should there be a collective awareness among readers of the Bunny's man-made nature, the fantasy will no longer resonate. Slavoj Žižek explains that there exists a constitutive gap between what, in this case, *Playboy* readers recognize as reality, what he calls explicit symbolic texture, and the various artificial elements which sustain their perception of that reality, the so-called phantasmic background.⁹⁷ He describes the operation of sustaining the fantasy as a veiling as opposed to the masking of reality because at some level the reader is implicitly aware of these artificial elements, but the gap is manipulated in such a way that the reader is psychically incentivised to overlook his awareness. This works well in practice. The reader wants to be invested in his own beliefs of who he is and how the world works. The beliefs that serve him preoccupy his mind. He becomes too distracted by his own interests to care about where exactly the Bunny came from or what exactly she really is. He is the focus of his own fantasy.

⁹⁵ Mortimer Adler, "How to Read a Book Superficially," *Playboy*, December 1963, 115.

⁹⁶ Unnamed *Playboy* editor quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 37.

⁹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 24.

This exercise of self-indulgence was certainly not lost on *Playboy*, as Hefner made clear in his response to objectification criticisms, “we can’t agree... that photographs turn people into objects and that the appeal such photos may have derives from or perpetuates a desire to possess. A desire to enjoy—perhaps. But we have always opposed the idea that enjoyment of another person... can be properly based on ownership or domination.”⁹⁸ The magazine is well aware that trapping a Bunny comes across as disingenuous since visible coercion undermines desire. Instead, it uses visual and rhetorical devices—such as her apparent eagerness and freedom of choice—to create a symbolic texture that allows the reader to perceive his engagement with the magazine as enjoyment, that is, by way of not being domineering, a mutual desire. These compositional strategies are responsible for the libidinous qualities of the image that readers attribute to women’s natural inclinations. When the Bunny is portrayed to be enthusiastic and present of her own volition—to pose naked for the magazine, and therefore pose naked for the reader—it signifies that she wants to be seen and desired. More importantly, the appearance of a woman’s active participation signifies to the reader that she desires him in return.

Even so, no matter how clear the signs, *Playboy* still relies on its readers wanting to believe them. The magazine preys upon his desire to want and be wanted, which is so strong that the reader is willing to overlook the reality of projecting this desire onto a non-human object, the physical magazine, and, according to Žižek, reasons this behaviour as follows: “I know very well that [these images are not real because they are in a magazine produced for mass-consumption and therefore the Bunny cannot be expressing her sexual interest in me personally], but I desperately want to believe that [if I was there with her, she would desire me since I want her and want her to want me, and I read the magazine and lead a *Playboy* lifestyle, so she must want me].”⁹⁹ The tacit potential for winning her desire simply because he’s adopted *Playboy’s Philosophy*¹⁰⁰ ultimately translates to proof that the reader’s own desirability is not so far removed from real life.

⁹⁸ Hugh Hefner quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 36.

⁹⁹ Žižek’s formulation “I know very well but...” appears across multiple texts, though this specific quote is taken from Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 114.

¹⁰⁰ Referencing Hefner’s ongoing “Playboy Philosophy” feature in the magazine that eventually became a book; Hugh Hefner, *The Playboy Philosophy* (Chicago: HMH Pub. Co, 1963)

The formal utility of these visual and rhetorical devices, however, does not preclude them from being politicized. Given the magazine's progressive politics and the rise of women's liberation movements, the decision to assign the Bunny subjectivity took on a great deal of ideological significance. Hefner was adamant that the Bunny is a perspicuous symbol of sexual freedom and equality.¹⁰¹ Any woman who thought otherwise were, to him, "militant man-haters [who] do their level worst to distort the distinctions between male and female and to discredit the legitimate grievances of American women."¹⁰² Therein lies the problem with the subject-object dichotomy: both positions remain preoccupied with the same question of what the Bunny means for women's representation at large. But this question is far too narrow to account for the ontological effects of the image at stake in this thesis.

Žižek identifies the limitations of the binary model in the same vein, writing "the ontological paradox - scandal, even - of these phenomena (whose psychoanalytic name, of course, *fantasy*) lies in the fact that they subvert the standard opposition of 'subjective' and 'objective': of course, fantasy is by definition not 'objective' (in the naive sense of 'existing independently of the subject's perceptions'); however, it is not 'subjective' either (in the sense of being reducible to the subject's consciously experienced intuitions)."¹⁰³ What he instead describes as the "bizarre category of the objectively subjective"¹⁰⁴ speaks to the structural displacement of reality enacted by fantasy. To appear convincing, the fantasy staged within the image provokes the perceiving subject, the reader, to project his own subjectivity onto the figure. This projection of subjectivity onto the figure within the image preserves *Playboy's* hedonistic, ideologically masculine modus operandi by staging the appearance of mutual attraction.

The subject position should be understood only as another function of the same ideological system that gives rise to objectification. It assumes that agency can be exercised within representation, careless of the fact that representation itself is already a mediation of power. Images are not neutral

¹⁰¹ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 155.

¹⁰² Morton Hunt, "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig!" *Playboy*, May 1970, 95.

¹⁰³ Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 155.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 155.

spaces. External forces dictate the terms of what can appear, how it appears, and who can appear at all. Any appearance of agency exercised within them is merely an effect of the system it supposedly resists. The objectification reading stops at appearances; the subject position inverts them with the illusion of choice so as to grant women the agency to participate in and enjoy their own subjugation.¹⁰⁵ Žižek helps elucidate why this inversion is often offered as the corrective to objectification, reminding us that “an ideological edifice can be undermined by a too-literal identification, which is why its successful functioning requires a minimal distance from its explicit rules.”¹⁰⁶ The Bunny-as-subject reading accounts for *Playboy*’s contributions to the sexual liberation movement, described by feminist historian Carrie Pitzulo as “quasi-feminist,”¹⁰⁷ in order to distance itself from the vulgar disparity of Bunnies existing purely for male enjoyment.

Against both chauvinist and radical women’s-lib creed, Hefner’s brand of feminism sought compromise within existing social structures by promoting gender equality without radically changing male pleasure or authority. The magazine mobilized women’s voices, most notably Helen Gurley Brown¹⁰⁸ editor of *Cosmopolitan* and author of *Sex and the Single Girl*, to spout rhetoric of agency and independence as a means of deflecting charges of misogyny. *Playboy* was thus able to market its lifestyle as mutually beneficial under the guise of promoting women’s sexual subjectivity. When a man’s pleasure appears to correspond with a woman’s ‘choice,’ the woman is made out to be an equal participant in any potential sexual exchange, especially those which occur outside of marriage.¹⁰⁹

Pitzulo draws on theologian Herbert R. Richardson to argue for the feminist viability of the subject position, Richardson explains, “what is especially unusual about the Playboy-Playmate symbolism is that the sexually attractive woman is here conceived as a friend and equal... The Playmate is the girl from whom all the aggressive aspects of human sexuality have been removed.... [She] is not of interest simply for her sexual functions alone.... she is ... the Playboy’s all-day, all-night pal... The [egalitarian],

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 29

¹⁰⁷ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Brown was a close personal friend of Hefner and the first woman to be interviewed in *Playboy* in 1963. It has often been said that she made *Cosmo* into “the female version of *Playboy*”; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 134.

¹⁰⁹ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 25.

non-aggressive relation between the Playboy and the Playmate stresses the similarity between the two. He enjoys sex, she enjoys sex.”¹¹⁰ Richardson and Pitzulo’s appeal to equality positions Playmate imagery as evidence of a reciprocal interest in sex, which marks a significant departure from the pre and postwar ideal of women’s sexual passivity. In light of this historical context, *Playboy*’s bachelor fantasy can seem very progressive.

Nonetheless, the subject position fundamentally assumes that the woman photographed is the agent enacting the performance of the image such that the gestures effectuating the Bunny’s coquettish disposition are taken to be the intent of a subject external to the frame. Which consequently imputes the image’s erotic disposition to her, simply because she posed for the photographs. The payoff of this positioning is, much to *Playboy*’s delight, double: it tells women that nice girls like sex too,¹¹¹ and conveys to the men that these nice girls like *them*. This ultimately leads readers to believe that the girl next door in their own lives likely feels the same. Both corollaries give the impression that male hedonism and women’s rights are no longer at odds, and all in all serve the same end. Attributing the production of the image to the figure it depicts conflates the source of intention and the site of appearance. In conjunction, they are taken as the basis of a cohesive pseudo-feminist narrative. This is why proponents of *Playboy*’s feminist repute like Pitzulo and Richardson reduce these two distinct consequences to pure empirical experience.

Even though the Bunny-as-subject view nominally distinguishes between address and attribution, it ultimately relies on a transitive relationship between woman, image, and its effects for the sake of ideological convenience. This amounts to a fallacious conception of subjectivity. True subjectivity, as per Kant, is not reducible to appearance, nor to the effects that appearance produces because the empirical self is not interchangeable with the transcendental conditions that make experience possible. What is formally referred to as *empirical apperception* is the everchanging inner-consciousness of the subject.¹¹² It consists of the psychological and affective states that make up one’s inner-self. For Kant, this

¹¹⁰ Herbert Richardson quoted in *Ibid.* 41.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 6.

¹¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 153.

dimension of subjectivity constitutes the content of existence, that which appears in experience within the sensible world, and is therefore determined by causality.¹¹³ This suggests that the Bunny-as-subject position is logically inconsistent. If the woman is the Bunny, the Bunny is the image, and the image is its ideological effects, then those effects can no longer be causally attributed because transitive equivocation both requires and negates causality.

Equivocation is a semantic problem. For the argument to retain any sort of limpidity, the terms being used must have different meanings within different contexts. What is woman is both person and figure; what is image is then representation and causal origin; and the effects become equally produced outcomes and defining properties. This leaves us with a series of false equivalences from which it follows that if the figure is defined by its properties, the woman is, inevitably, both identical to and the producer of the effects of the image. Causality necessitates that the cause to be prior to and distinct from the effect. To equate the woman's identity with the ideological connotation of the image is to completely erase this necessary causal distinction, and logically entails de-subjectification.¹¹⁴

Remedying this contradiction requires recognizing that the content of existence is intrinsically derivative of its form. There must be another force at play to actively condition a—presumed—subject's capacity for agency and enable the possibility of choice. This component of subjectivity is the pure, original and unchangeable consciousness Kant describes as *transcendental apperception*.¹¹⁵ Otherwise called the "I think," the transcendental subject is the impersonal and rational form that conditions the possibility of action without being reducible to its effects. It exists only as thought and is entirely a priori. This is *the principle of the unity of experience*¹¹⁶ that precedes sensory data to connect all empirical perceptions into a coherent, singular understanding of the world. Images belong to the domain of appearances and therefore cannot sustain this function. Transcendental apperception cannot be made visible in an image since it does not appear visible outside of the image as this is what provides the

¹¹³ Ibid. 228.

¹¹⁴ If cause and effect are logically distinct, then identification of the subject with the image's ideological hang ups removes that distinction. The subject is thereby treated as an effect rather than a cause, which effectively eliminates its status as an independent term.

¹¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 136.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 306.

structure for perception itself. Kant calls this perfectly empty representation.¹¹⁷ The form cannot be represented by nor inferred from what is shown. The image is a product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination¹¹⁸ that can never capture a true representation of the determining power that created it.

To mistake the image for the source of its own production is to commit the Kantian error of subreption, a deliberate misrepresentation.¹¹⁹ This is, as Kant describes it, that “which leads us to represent the formal principle as constitutive, and to think that unity is hypostasised.”¹²⁰ With respect to the Bunny-as-subject, this brings us back to Žižek’s identification of the gap and my earlier point that fantasy must simulate reality in order to auspiciously sell a consumer lifestyle. There is a certain irony in the fact that *Playboy*’s success in connecting their Bunny-tales with everyday life hinges on this deliberate epistemic failure. Hefner believed that personalizing the centerfolds through stories of models’ families and aspirations would humanize them and make “female sexuality a joyous and normal experience, so that there was nothing unusual about a woman who celebrated her own sensuality.”¹²¹ The phantasmic background creates the conditions under which the reader can believe that what he’s seeing might be real. He has to believe that the Bunny could be a real woman, because if she is real, then access to her is easily attained by purchasing whatever is for sale on the next page.

Playboy’s attempt at leporine subjectification should accordingly be understood as leading a real-life subject, the reader, to a misrecognition of the *real* object of desire. Žižek exposes this transcendental trick through Kantian analogy, comparing the psychoanalytic fantasy to transcendental schematism. In place of a true transcendental subject, the fantasy materialized in the image provides formal coordinates through a specific, in this case, visual catalyst to organize the reader’s desire, just as Kant’s schematism mediates between abstract concepts and sensible intuitions by providing a formal rule of the imagination which organizes the phenomenal appearance of objects.¹²² The phenomenal appearance of (real)woman-

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 250-251.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 145-146.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 365.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 365.

¹²¹ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 39.

¹²² Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 7-8.

as-transcendental-author-of-male-fantasy, or Bunny as *true* subject, achieves a state of schema through staging. The magazine stages various manufactured elements within the image with the intention of guiding the reader to concoct his own formula for interpretation based off the visual, textual, and inferential information he is provided.

Nowhere is this transcendental bunny-trail more blatant than in the case of *Playboy's* "great delight,"¹²³ Cynthia Maddox. She worked full-time as a secretary at the magazine's Chicago office, part-time as a *Playboy* model, and dated Hefner.^{124, 125} Maddox was enigmatic in how remarkably ordinary she was. Her public persona and private life exemplified the everyday woman the magazine wanted its readers to see as newly sexually empowered. These were the very office girls, neighbours, stewardesses, waitresses, and classmates that Hefner insisted could be found in abundance.¹²⁶ Even more than her proximity to readers as a *Playboy* employee, Hefner's romantic relationship with Maddox served as a testament to the values promoted in the magazine. Their dalliance was touted as less aspirational and more so confirmation of the efficacy of *Playboy's* methods for finding a mate. Instead of chasing a woman, the *Playboy* man, through urbane erudition and flagrant consumption, makes himself the object of pursuit, entering the gaities and ardors of seduction as an equal.

Maddox offers a revealing illustration of what Žižek helps us recognize as the putative proof of male desirability. *Playboy* wants its audience to believe that she was just like any other girl at the office, which means that if Hefner could capture her attention with his cultivated charm, so too could you, dear reader. But we must be careful here not to miss the point: the reward on offer is not Maddox herself, nor even the fantasy of access to women like her. Instead, the reward reaped for literally buying into a consumer identity that upholds a more palatable version of patriarchy—from which *Playboy* so lucratively profited¹²⁷—is reassurance: the "obscene surplus-enjoyment"¹²⁸ that comes with the belief that he, the reader, already occupies the position of the man who is desired. Paradigmatic here is the February

¹²³ "Playbill" *Playboy*. February 1962. 5.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 5.

¹²⁵ Hugh Hefner quoted in Bill Zehme, "Hef's Girlfriends: A Romantic Retrospective," *Playboy*, November 2012, 114.

¹²⁶ Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 50.

¹²⁷ Noted in Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth, and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 152.

¹²⁸ Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, xiii.

1962 issue, for which the obvious choice for the cover could be no other than Hefner's own Valentine, offering several forms of access to the reader's own desire for recognition as the beloved subject.¹²⁹

Hailed as the “bouncy bonbon 20-year-old Valentine confection,”¹³⁰ Maddox adorns the cover's parchment white background, reminiscent of blank cardstock poised for a love letter, in a long white dress with a low scoop neckline. The monthly features are handwritten to her right and the *Playboy* masthead is bright red above her. Her décolletage is, tastefully, exposed as the left strap of her dress hangs off her shoulder. Her body language is relaxed and inviting, in typical *Playboy* fashion, her hips are slightly angled in contrapposto. She is wearing red lipstick and bold eyeliner. Her hair is short, Jean-Harlow-blond, and styled in a popular 1960s flip-style coiffure. She holds two Valentine's cards: one, decorated with *Playboy*'s bunny head logo and a heart, held up just below eye level, covering the lower half of her face, while her eyes remain straight so as to meet the viewer's gaze; the other is held down by her inner thigh, revealing the inside of the card to be marked with a kiss in red lipstick.

Constructed, unmistakably, as an epistolary *mise-en-scène*, the cover, like any surreptitious *billet-doux*, reads as an intimate address to the viewer. Against the plain cardstock background, Maddox is isolated as the primary visual focus of the image. Despite the handwritten indexical details that guide interpretation by evoking something akin to Hallmark, her salience distracts the reader from any trace of external authorial presence so that the image can maintain the appearance of subjective spontaneity. One can easily deduce—from the red kiss mark and the culprit staring directly at the viewer looking as though she has been caught red-handed in red lipstick—that Maddox is the author of the card, and since the cover, too, is a card, this appearance of reflexive spontaneity suggests that she must also be the author of the image on the cover. In the context of, what is heavily inferred to be, private communication, the viewer is made to feel as though he caught her in the act of writing something meant for his, her aspiring lover's, eyes only. The image exudes intimacy because the semiotic labour of each individual scene-setting detail becomes, by itself, so minuscule that it recedes behind Maddox's presence.

¹²⁹ Reference to Žižek's use of beloved “fixation of the beloved object” in *Ibid.* 115.

¹³⁰ “Playbill,” February 1962. 5.

This is, of course, by design. And, though it may be counterintuitive to Žižek’s advice on ‘love at first sight,’ it does not require the reader take a second look.¹³¹ The—presumably male—reader is not meant to register all the little details individually apart from *Playboy*’s narrative context. Fantasy is most effective when a multitude of properties are reduced to a single dominant characteristic to set off a libidinal trigger.^{132,133} Only then will the reader ignore the complexities of individual artificial elements within the image and accept the whole as an indexical representation of reality. Moreover, the elements we consider to be artificial are never obviously so. They consist in forms of unrestricted manipulation of the gap between what readers believe to be real and what is real, inclusive of artificial production.

The magazine’s subjectification endeavour is incredibly effective when, in the words of *Playboy*’s many a time featured philosopher Mortimer Adler, you “ingest their germinal ideas without chomping the surrounding chaff.”¹³⁴ Simply put, one consumes the image on a superficial level when the magazine’s strategic mediation is ignored. Such a way of reading is advantageous to *Playboy* because the illusion of transcendental authorship perpetuates ideological legitimacy and psychic comfort for men, with the added benefit of incipient social reinforcement among women. Social reality, in this ideal realization, ultimately comes to reflect the fantasy in the image—though the image undergoes no ontological change by which it might register or absorb that reality.

We are left, then, with the same categorical conflation discussed in the previous chapter, only replicated in anthropomorphic form. As with the Bunny-as-object, the belief that the Bunny-as-subject is a real woman relies on her isolation from the constitutive context of *Playboy*’s representational system. The difference here is that, with the attribution of agency, she is said to determine what was previously said to determine her. But the agency so attributed originates in the representational system of which she is only an effect; what is produced by a system cannot precede it as its source and thus fails to meet the metaphysical conditions of subjectivity. Ontological error persists in mistaking the effect for its cause.

¹³¹ Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 160.

¹³² *Ibid.* 53.

¹³³ Chekhov’s Gun goes off!!

¹³⁴ Adler, “How to Read a Book,” 115.

Chapter 3: Symbolic Sex

The previous chapters' discussions of the ontological limitations inherent to the subject-object dichotomy leave us with no choice but to confront what can only be described as the '*giant hare in the room*': if objectification fails by mistaking a figure for an entire composition and subjectification fails by mistaking an effect of this compositional product for its cause, the question becomes what the necessary and sufficient conditions are that a category must satisfy to adequately assess the ontology of *Playboy*'s Bunny? Or, in simpler terms, if not subject or object, what framework ought to be used to understand what the Bunny is and how she comes to exist? Interestingly, we need look no further than the oft-invoked comparison of Hefner's company to Walt Disney's. What I shall provisionally refer to as the 'Disney model'—the implications of which will be elaborated on later—was most notably discussed in J. Anthony Lukas' 1972 *New York Times* article, "The 'Alternative Life-Style' Of Playboys and Playmates."¹³⁵

In his article, Lukas mulls over the plausibility of the Playboy corporation operating as an "industrial giant which conceives, communicates and popularizes a way of life through its magazines, books, records and films and then provides many of the things needed to live that life[.] Or an entertainment cartel which goes beyond simply selling fantasies as an escape from life but tries to sell those very fantasies as a way of life[.]"¹³⁶ He draws the conclusion that there exists at least one such company that sets a precedent for this way of doing business: the Walt Disney empire.¹³⁷ The Walt Disney company is very well known for its fantasy exploits. Lukas cites Disney's films, comic books, records, television shows, product lines, as well as its "built controlled environments"¹³⁸ like the Disneyland and Disneyworld theme parks, hotels and restaurants as examples of offerings which allow the public to live out the Disney fantasy of childhood make-believe free from the constraints of the real-

¹³⁵ It is mentioned in the article that this comparison has previously been discussed by others, namely historian and TIME journalist Richard Schickel, and is, at the time of its publication, proudly acknowledged by the magazine, and Hefner personally, in which they refer to its hotels and clubs as "Disneyland for adults." In J. Anthony Lukas, "The Alternative Life-Style of Playboys and Playmates," *New York Times*, June 11, 1972.

¹³⁶ Lukas, "Alternative Life-Style."

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

world.¹³⁹ As suggested in previous chapters, *Playboy*'s merchandising in the magazine and various other ventures—like the Playboy key clubs and hotels across the world¹⁴⁰—along with Hefner's personal residences, the 'Chicago Mansion'¹⁴¹ in Chicago, Illinois and 'Playboy Mansion West' in Los Angeles, California, provide readers, Playboy club 'keyholder' members, and partygoers with a similar 'dream come true' experience.¹⁴²

Lukas continues his discussion comparing the upbringings, work ethics, interests, and worldviews of the Bunny's benevolent keeper and the man behind the mouse before arriving at the more salient issue of sex and reality. While needless to say there is an absence of sex in Disney's world of "child-like wonder,"¹⁴³ Lukas' discussion peaks on this matter because he calls attention to the shared puritanical ideology acting as the basis of Disney's and Hefner's respective fantasy productions—where sex is, incontestably, at least for rhetorical effect, *'the dirtiest thing known to man.'*¹⁴⁴ Lukas notes, paraphrasing Peter Schrag's 1971 book *The Decline of the WASP*, that Disney's ideology is rooted in antisemitism,¹⁴⁵ and Hefner's, despite being very publicly supportive of American Jewish communities,¹⁴⁶ exhibits the same White Anglo-Saxon Protestant purity values.¹⁴⁷ He further contends that both men "exemplify the puritanical compulsion to order the world, to control, [and] to clean up,"¹⁴⁸ expressly referring to Hefner as a "compulsive sanitizer."¹⁴⁹

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ From 1960 to 1991 Playboy had 'member's only' clubs (26 in the US; 1 in Canada; 4 Japan; 1 in the Philippines; 1 in Jamaica; 1 in the UK), many of which operated as resorts and casinos, with their most notable feature being a 'Playmate Bar' where the Bunny waitresses would serve guests food and drinks. Bruce Handy, "A Bunny Thing Happened: An Oral History of the Playboy Clubs," *Vanity Fair*. (April 22 2011), https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/05/playboy-clubs201105?srsId=AfmBOoof8gkLyYF2h0ZkPA_3DsMubrDE2nacqcV9AUtZQe7xkhlWK6u5

¹⁴¹ Hefner's Chicago Penthouse Apartment was referred to as a 'mansion' in many of the magazine's 'bachelor pad' architectural features. Mentioned in Lukas, "Alternative Life-Style."; see also "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment: Modern Living," *Playboy*. September 1956, 53–60; "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment: Modern Living," *Playboy*. October 1956, 65–70; "Playboy's Town House: Modern Living," *Playboy*. May 1962. 83–92, 105; and my personal favourite "Playboy's Progress," *Playboy*. May 1954, 22–23.

¹⁴² Hefner was well known for creating a "party-time atmosphere" in his homes, clubs, and hotels, immersing attendees into the "Playboy lifestyle." Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Intentionally kept out of sight in both contexts. Furthermore, with respect to Disney, think of the princesses' happily ever after instead of consummating their marriages.

¹⁴⁵ Lukas, "Alternative Life-Style."

¹⁴⁶ Hefner was a staunch civil rights activist who "personally and publicly supported civil rights and equality, and in fact quit a job with the Chicago Cartoon Company in 1949 due in part to his employer's anti-Semitic and racist hiring practices"; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 61.

¹⁴⁷ Lukas, "Alternative Life-Style."

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The weight of this claim becomes much clearer as Lukas elaborates on how this compulsion manifests in similar ways across the disparate figures represented in the *Playboy* and Disney productions, writing:

For Disney's animals and Hefner's women are intriguingly similar. At first glance, Mickey Mouse may have seemed a curious choice for a starring role in Disney's bright, upbeat world. After all, mice are rodents: dirty, smell denizens of earth's dark places. But, [...] "in the mouse, as he was conceived by Disney, all conflict that the animal's real nature might have caused was resolved by an act of creative will: reality was simply ignored. Mickey was a clean mouse." Playboy's women are clean women. Just as Disney sanitized his rodents, so Hefner has sanitized his Playmates. No warts, wrinkles or other blemishes—and no internal wrinkles, quirks or complexities—mar their ivory perfection. Just as Disney's animals (particularly his ubiquitous chipmunks, squirrels and rabbits) are always bouncy, cuddly, cute and innocent, so are Hefner's bunnies. And if Disney makes his animals behave not in the way animals really behave in nature, but the way they would if they were human, so Hefner makes his women look and behave not like real women but the way adolescent men, in their fantasies, want women to be.¹⁵⁰

On the whole, both Hefner and Disney's critters are devoid of any of the animalistic inclinations present in the woodland creatures from which they get their names.

To understand better the puritanical significance of the anthopo/theriomorphic metaphor,¹⁵¹ let us return to Mickey specifically, for he looms much larger than Jessica and Roger Rabbit, Thumper, The White Rabbit, or even Oswald the Lucky Rabbit within Disney's cinematic universe, making him of comparable stature to *Playboy's* cover, centerfold, and pictorial Bunny in its 'print paradise.' Taking this into account, it is necessary to consider how the words "unclean," "dirty," or "filthy" refer to both literal indexical and compounding symbolic meaning. As indicated in the article, in many cultures, rodents are believed to be unclean and disease-ridden—this idea dates all the way back to their perceived role in the Black Death.¹⁵² Mickey, however, ignores this reality. The king of rodents is, as Lukas puts it, "a clean mouse." His cleanliness was so appealing that, according to his close personal friend and Disney animator

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ My language moving forward will reflect the level of misogyny inherent in the dehumanization of women concurrent with the humanization of animals.

¹⁵² In the western world at least; Anne Hardy, "The Under-Appreciated Rodent: Harbingers of Plague from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 171–85, https://doi.org/10.1162/jinh_a_01408.

Ward Kimball, Walt “loved Mickey Mouse more than any woman [he had] ever known”¹⁵³... including his own wife.

Kimball’s quote is pertinent here because he prefaces this recollection of Disney’s words by explaining how, unlike Hefner who was notorious for having many,¹⁵⁴ Walt had no extramarital affairs: “he had a wife and that was it...I’d swear Walt didn’t have broads on the side because it would have taken too much of his time.”¹⁵⁵ While I do not speculate on the exact reason for this, Walt Disney’s purity appears to extend beyond the animal realm into a broader cultural ideology. For reasons of tact, I will draw this connection between rodents and sex in the form of a euphemism, to put it delicately: rodents aren’t the only living beings believed to carry diseases. Extramarital abstinence, in light of a greater love for one’s work than one’s wife, may thusly be interpreted in alignment with a broader puritanical mythology, in which pre- and extramarital sexual activity is associated with contamination, as sexually transmitted infections have, like rodents at the time of the Black Death, similarly resulted in stigmatization of unwed fornicators and the adulterous crowd.¹⁵⁶

With that in mind, it is well worth mentioning that, curiously, though they are often mistaken to be, rabbits are not rodents. Unlike mice, rabbits are not commonly perceived as carriers of disease. This distinction is actually quite telling. To recall the introduction, Hefner begins to define the Bunny by claiming “the rabbit, the bunny, in America has a sexual meaning,” though he never specifies what exactly that meaning entails. Read in the context of the Disney model, his withholding is more significant than it initially lets on. So far, we have established that our cultural reality presumes that we will encounter disease-ridden rodents and, to borrow from Žižek, whose words effectively capture the cultural condemnation of said ‘unwed fornicators’ and ‘adulterers,’ “whores [who] deserve [to be stigmatized

¹⁵³ Ward Kimball Interview quoted in Walter Wagner, “The Wonderful World of Walt Disney,” in *You Must Remember This: Oral Reminiscences of the Real Hollywood* (New York: Putnam, 1975).

¹⁵⁴ He first had an affair with his best friend’s girlfriend in high school in 1944; he then cheated on his first wife Millie, whom he met shortly after graduation, years after she was first unfaithful to him in 1948; after leaving Millie, Hefner became quite the infidel; the most relevant case of infidelity for this thesis is Cynthia Maddox, who complained in *The Most* in 1963, “I’ve been dating Hef for about a year. He dates other girls and I don’t like it. He knows I don’t like it.” paraphrased from/quoted in Watts, *Mr. Playboy*, 202.

¹⁵⁵ Kimball quoted in Wagner, “Wonderful World of Walt Disney.”

¹⁵⁶ Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12.

because] they are [...] dirty.”¹⁵⁷ It follows then that our culture also presumes we might encounter other similarly preconceived notions of reality should we come across a (b)Bunny.¹⁵⁸ As the common colloquialism has it, (b)Bunnies “fuck like rabbits.”

Kimball’s anecdote is germane to this point because Disney’s abstinence illustrates the pervasiveness of puritanical ideology: indexical associations with the threat of disease can extend symbolically into real-world sexual practices, such that “dirtiness” becomes, in the case of the rabbit, a compounded connotation for unbridled sexuality, despite the sign’s initial indexical neutrality. This indexical purity or neutrality allows Hefner to exploit the dual nature of the sign as a means of distorting reality. Hypersexual symbolism is coupled with, what Hefner describes as, the literal “fresh[ness of the] animal, [that is] shy, vivacious, [and] jumping.” Hefner’s not-so-inconspicuous inference matters because there is an indexical innocence to the bunny that completely contradicts the cultural reality of the sign’s “dirty” symbolism. In accepting the indexical and symbolic connotations despite their contradiction, Hefner acknowledges the unreal nature of the ‘purified’ sign. Like the rest of the Disney model demonstrates (i.e. a clean, shiny, happy talking bipedal mouse that wears gloves, shoes, and pants), a purified sign is incompatible with reality and, as Hefner puts it, something “you can never really have.”

In practice, Hefner insisted that his Bunny have “a reputation as unblemished as her body.”¹⁵⁹ Journalist Russell Miller expands this thought in his book, arguing: “The cute fresh-faced [...] all-American [...] Playmate was the greatest imaginable turn-on for Americans accustomed to anonymous pin-ups with knowing eyes and come-hither expressions, threatening broads[.] The attraction of the Playmate was the absence of threat.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, the presence of purity and innocence. Hefner didn’t want his Bunny “too nude[, or to look like] she’s been around a while.”¹⁶¹ For the compulsive sanitizer, it is requisite that the Bunny be “well washed” of any “whorish” compounded cultural stigma.¹⁶² Just as Disney sought to

¹⁵⁷ “whore” being a derogatory term for sexually promiscuous woman; The original quotation reads: “that is to say, when the narrative of their ordeal was either dismissed as fantasizing, or perceived as a sign of their complicity (whores deserve it, they are stigmatized, dirty...)” in Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 227.

¹⁵⁸ Referring to both the general sign bunny and *Playboy*’s Bunny sign.

¹⁵⁹ Hugh Hefner quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 49.

¹⁶⁰ Miller, *Bunny*. cited in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 49.

¹⁶¹ Hugh Hefner quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 49.

¹⁶² Furthermore, the “whore” is not necessarily dirty on the outside and well-washed does not necessarily mean completely physically clean it is the compounded cultural meaning denoting an assessment of the woman’s purity rather than a literal explanation of her state of bodily cleanliness.

“keep clean any environment he inhabited,”¹⁶³ even in the presence of vermin. The puritan values shared by *Playboy* and Disney reveal a consistent pattern where a representation is produced independently of a reality in which its opposing qualities are mutually exclusive.

What makes this comparison and the conclusions we have drawn from it significant is that it begins to clarify the conditions under which the Bunny can be said to exist in a *tertium quid* category. Having established the cultural connection between *Playboy* and Disney, we may now proceed to the model’s more *unreal* ontological implications. Neither Lukas nor any of his journalistic predecessors can be credited with introducing the world to the philosophical consequences that stem from the fantastical unreality of Disney’s production. Indeed, the true Disney model, or the ‘Disneyland model,’¹⁶⁴ was formally articulated nine years later by French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard argues that Disney “is the perfect model for all the entangled orders of simulacra,”¹⁶⁵ by which he means Disney aids in illustrating what happens when reality and representation become indistinguishable from one another.

As the world shifted from modernity into the postmodern—around the same time *Playboy* hit the magazine stands—what became of representation, according to Baudrillard, was its complete and utter loss of any corresponding origin or reality. He explains that the world, particularly America, has become more real than real, or ‘hyperreal,’ and is now composed of varying orders of representation, simulation, and simulacra: (1) sacramental or that which is the *profound reflection of reality*; (2) maleficence or that which *masks and denatures a profound reality*; (3) sorcery or that which *masks the absence of a profound reality*; and (4) that which *has no relation to any reality whatsoever* or *pure simulacrum*.¹⁶⁶

Baudrillard’s orders explain how representations have supplanted reality. Our perception of the real has been distorted to such an extent that the difference between reality and representation is no longer discernible. If we recall earlier discussion of Žižek, it stands to reason that this manipulation has no

¹⁶³ Lukas, “Alternative Life-Style.”

¹⁶⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023), 12.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 12.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 6

necessary bearing on a subject's experience of reality, since what truly is 'real' is never directly encountered in the first place. It is important to note, however, that reality here is considered only in relation to its opposition to and structuration through symbolic signification and imaginary representation.¹⁶⁷ From this perspective, the omnipresent structuring fantasy veil functions as a 'glue' which holds together the fabric of hyperreality. It does not matter whether what is experienced as real is grounded in some external actuality or if it is entirely self-contained within a representation, since experience of reality—or lack thereof—will always be perceived relative to imaginary representations, distracting the subject from recognizing any loss of the real.

Baudrillard explains that Disney is his perfect model of the 'entangled' orders because it is:

a play of illusions and phantasms [...] [, t]his imaginary world is supposed to ensure the success of the [fantasy] operation. But what attracts crowds most is without a doubt the social microcosm, *the religious*, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys. [...] The only phantasmagoria in this imaginary crowd lies in the tenderness and warmth of the crowd, and in the sufficient and excessive number of gadgets necessary to create the multitudinous effect. [...] [T]his frozen, childlike world is [...] conceived [...] [as] the objective profile of America, down to the morphology of individuals [...]: [...] the [...] idealized transposition of a contradictory reality.^{168,169}

Similar to *Playboy*, Disney offers a real experience of the imaginary. However, Baudrillard identifies Walt's production as the "prototype" for simulation because, unlike *Playboy*, most everyone is aware of Disney's artificiality. We see the best—and sometimes worst—of ourselves in Disney's fairytales and fables. It is a representation of what we wish we were and hope that we can be that allows us to hide from facing what we truly are.

Disney is the ideal reality: animals sing to you and help mend your clothes, villains are visibly so, and the good guys always win in the end. By presenting the magic kingdom in direct opposition to what

¹⁶⁷ We must take into consideration Baudrillard's rejection of the Lacanian assumption taken up by Žižek that there still exists an underlying reality; Louis-Paul Willis, "'Hey! What Did You Do to the World?': Conceptualizing the Real with Baudrillard and Žižek," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016): 63–87.

¹⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 12.

¹⁶⁹ Though Baudrillard expressly refers to Disneyland in California, I use Disney more generally to encapsulate the fantasy immersion present within the entire media empire, as is the case with *Playboy*.

lies beyond it, Disney reinforces belief in the real.¹⁷⁰ For instance, next to Jessica Rabbit, Donna Michelle and Cynthia Maddox appear to be faithful copies of reality.¹⁷¹ When the border between the real-world and Disney's imaginary one appears to be so clearly defined, little attention is paid to how real reality actually is. Nonetheless, what Baudrillard considers the true illusion is actually this demarcation that places the obvious fake in opposition with what we believe to be real; for focusing on such an explicit division between real and fake conceals the extent to which our reality is simulated.¹⁷² It is crucial to bear in mind that Disney is a deterrence machine, and therefore a prototype of a negative function; whereby what is explicitly marked as imaginary is expelled as "waste" from the hyperreal orders,¹⁷³ then confined to a separate space so that it can persist without disturbing the closed system of simulation, in which what was formerly real is now preceded by copies. Though imagination is not entirely exhausted, nothing remains outside the simulation to be imagined, save for what already exists as imaginary. This is the clean mouse's *'dirty little secret.'*¹⁷⁴

Unsurprisingly, the ever so duplicitous *Playboy* is in on the same secret. In the (hyper)real-world, as Baudrillard gives fair warning, "all the sexual, psychic, somatic recycling institutes [...] belong to [that] same order."¹⁷⁵ What he calls "recycling institutes" describe the production apparatuses that extract experiences of what were once natural things from our lived reality and 'recycle' or reprocess them into controlled, hyperreal forms. While Disney exiles its creatures to a far far away land, *Playboy* pulls its Bunny out from the hyperreal (recycling institute) hat. It is a positive application of the model's negative function. Which is to say, *Playboy* does not by any means sequester the imaginary. It instead works to naturalize its simulated forms out in the open, embedding them into the real.

¹⁷⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 12.

¹⁷¹ That is to say they seemingly belong to the first order, ordinary girls compared to Jessica Rabbit's impossible hourglass figure which happens to be featured on the cover of the magazine; "we've transformed our September Playmate, Laura Richmond, into Toontown's seductress Jessica Rabbit, torch-singing star of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. What an eyeful!" quoted in "Cover Story." *Playboy*. November 1988, 5.

¹⁷² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 13.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* 13.

¹⁷⁴ Referencing Žižek's use of the term; "Nevertheless, despite the public character of Nazi anti-Semitism, the relationship between the two levels, the text of the public ideology and its 'obscene' superego supplement, remained fully operative: Nazis themselves treated the Holocaust as a kind of collective 'dirty secret' in Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 71.

¹⁷⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 13.

Consider that, in 1965, when *Playboy* was accused by two religious leaders of “misrepresenting sex and ruining men’s expectations of “real” women,”¹⁷⁶ the magazine asserted that “there is something strange, antisexual and sad in the view that a beautiful woman isn’t as ‘human’ as one who is average or less in appearance. We know that a body sweats, emits, has odors, pubic hair, pimples and breasts that sag; our readers know it, too.”¹⁷⁷ On another occasion, *Playboy* argued that its “Playmates were glorified [...] romantic, erotic images for straight men.”¹⁷⁸ This telling use of language should be kept in mind from this point onward. Right from the rabbit’s mouth we learn that, like Disney, *Playboy* is not prone to concealing the existence of an external reality; it incorporates our awareness of the imperfect real into its operation because the simulation persists independent of our absolute belief (i.e. “I know very well... but...”). However, the primary difference between the two productions lies in what they do with that awareness. Conceding the existence of the ‘undesirable’ natural functions of a human body works to *Playboy*’s advantage by way of establishing credibility. In acknowledging that somewhere out there exists a real the magazine nonetheless maintains that what is unreal is just as if not more real than the acknowledged real. This acknowledgment effectively permits the magazine to displace what it initially acknowledges as real in favour of a more coherent and desirable image.

Of the utmost importance here is *Playboy*’s word choice. Use of the term *image* to describe their production in the above quote warrants closer attention as we begin developing a working definition for the ‘Bunny-as-image.’ For our purposes, ‘image’ has already been defined, in the words of two separate 1960 *Playboy* articles, which together in full read as, that which “give[s] reality to what’s inside of them by turning it into something that’s outside of them. To make an idea more real, even to pretend to act it out”¹⁷⁹ “by using [...] distorti[on] that do[es] not destroy reality so much as give it back to us in new and delightful guises.”¹⁸⁰ Read alongside Baudrillard, it becomes increasingly clear that *Playboy*’s image, in making itself both more real than real and returning to us a new unreality, is not a secondary

¹⁷⁶ Reverend William R Moors paraphrased in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 36.

¹⁷⁷ Unnamed *Playboy* editor responding to Reverend William R Moors quoted in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 36.

¹⁷⁸ Unnamed *Playboy* editor responding to Reverend J. Benton White quoted in *Ibid.* 36.

¹⁷⁹ Sack, “Handwriting on the Wall,” 84.

¹⁸⁰ Knight, “Far Out Films,” 50.

representation of an external reality. What follows does not typically dictate what precedes. Traditionally, if we use the Platonic/realist metaphysical model,¹⁸¹ a copy can only exist if we have an original. This aligns with Baudrillard's sacramental order: we have the primary referent which produces ontologically distinct copies (or images) as its secondary representation. And meaning of these secondary representations exists only insofar as it is found in a primary referent.

This Platonic reasoning returns us to the earlier misrecognition of cause-and-effect attribution in the Bunny-as-subject because, similarly, in this formulation, the referent is the cause and the image is its effect. Nonetheless, as established in the previous section, this is not applicable to the Bunny. To give reality to what's inside the image by morphing it into something that is outside the image in a new appearance is to fundamentally alter the chain of causality. In *Playboy's* 'glorified,' 'romantic,' 'erotic' formulation, the image is no longer an effect of the referent and instead comes to determine the referent as a condition of its possibility.

To develop more fully this chain of possibilities let us circle back to unglorified, unromantic, and nonerotic explicit nude photographs, as briefly outlined in the Bunny-as-object discussion. As it just so happens, Jean Baudrillard takes up this discussion relative to the forlorn possibilities of later '*Playboy pictures*' in his 1983 *Art Forum* article "What Are You Doing After the Orgy?" Conducive to bringing this text into my discussion is the explicit mention of its divergent scope; given the nearly twenty-year gap, the images he scrutinizes significantly differ from those published during the magazine's heyday, which are the primary focus of this thesis. Therefore Baudrillard's analysis will be used here only as a meta-counter example to further establish what our Bunny does not do. These kinds of photographs, which feature fully exposed nude figures are considered the 'soft core'¹⁸² middle ground between erotic images¹⁸³ and, what was earlier alluded to be, 'hardcore' which necessitates the explicit depiction of a—often penetrative—sex

¹⁸¹Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 4-5.

¹⁸² As defined in Vincent Barnett, "History of Softcore Pornography," in *Encyclopedia of Sexuality and Gender* (2021): 1–11.

¹⁸³ Otherwise called erotica, which is defined (in the 1950s) as "something more elevated and exclusive than pornography" in Simon Hardy, "Pornography and Erotica," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 3540–3542, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosp059>.

act.¹⁸⁴ To avoid any unnecessary confusion, I will refer to this newfangled version of *Playboy*'s pictures as the *X-rated-Bunny*.¹⁸⁵

In response to the question "Playboy pictures[,] are you attracted to them?"¹⁸⁶ Baudrillard explains that in an encounter with the X-rated-Bunny, "all the eye beholds [...] is a piece of ass [...] which has nothing to do with the formulation of an image."¹⁸⁷ Take for example October 1980's "Girls of Canada" pictorial, in which we see pictured thirty-one women—*who prove that there is much more to Canada than mukluks and hockey pucks*—in various states of exposure, the most of which is—legs spread—full frontal visibility.¹⁸⁸ With this lock stock and barrel exposure, there is no requisite "look of seduction"¹⁸⁹ that, "suggests its own disappearance at any moment" (as in Hefner's description, "first it smells you, then it escapes, then it comes back"), which according to Baudrillard, all images must have.¹⁹⁰ The photos fail to conceal and therefore also reveal their content; their *beauty, figures, and backgrounds* are an immediate and vulgar¹⁹¹ display, depicted as "an empty scene where nothing happens and yet [...] the viewfinder [is full]."¹⁹² Baudrillard suggests further that, "the naked body does not play hide and seek; like any ordinary object, it is there to begin with, it is very simply there, without any spark of potential absence, in that state of radical disillusion which is pure presence. [Though,] even this has nothing to do with presence, since real presence implies absence."¹⁹³ With an abundance of visibility, there is no room left to hide the 'demarcation' of mediation, without which there is nothing there.

The X-rated-Bunny is the end of the image. She represents the point at which the relationship between representation and referent completely collapses. To be maintained, an image must do one of two things: (1) point back to a primary referent, or (2) preserve what Baudrillard describes as the "magic of

¹⁸⁴ As the term is used the survey conducted in Catherine Itzin, "'Entertainment for Men': What It Is and What It Means," in *Pornography: Women, Violence, and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 27–34.

¹⁸⁵ Hugh Hefner long resisted the move to more explicit depictions (since the 'pubic wars' with Penthouse in the early 1970s) though by the late 1970s the company was facing significant financial pressures, and thus to 'keep up' with an increasingly sexualized culture, the magazine digressed from the original Bunny formula that made them famous to peddling what Hefner once called "pornographic crap"; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 68, 171.

¹⁸⁶ Jean Baudrillard, "What Are You Doing After the Orgy?" *Artforum*, October 1983. 43.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 43.

¹⁸⁸ "Girls of Canada." *Playboy*. October 1980. 144.

¹⁸⁹ Baudrillard, "After the Orgy," 43.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 43.

¹⁹¹ Referring to the vulva, though a misreading as 'vulgar,' is applicable nonetheless.

¹⁹² Baudrillard, "After the Orgy," 43.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* 43.

disappearance” such that there still exists a clear distinction between what is revealed and what necessarily remains hidden.¹⁹⁴ The X-rated-Bunny does neither. She does not function as a secondary representation of a distinct prior reality, as in *Playboy*’s interpretation of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s observation that “Canada[ian women] will always be ‘more than a sum of [the nations’] parts,’”¹⁹⁵ because no such reality can be said to precede the X-rated “Girls of Canada” simulacrum.

Trudeau’s remark appeals to the idea that Canada as a country, and women as the people in that country, possess a depth beyond what is immediately visible—that is, hockey pucks, mukluks, beavers, and bucks with massive racks—which the image would typically be expected to capture. Put in a way Trudeau might have appreciated, these thirty-one “great reasons to visit Canada”¹⁹⁶ are completely flattened, much like many extra-provincial assumptions about Saskatchewan. Amid an excess of presence, and in lieu of absence, these *north-of-the-border misses*¹⁹⁷ can do nothing but lay bare their ‘seductive secrets’ and sever the requisite representational relation to any referent, in that they only verify the “obscenity of accuracy” in their complete full-frontal exposure and their “useless objectivity” as a surface with no signifying function beyond being seen.¹⁹⁸ There is no meaning, cause, or effect apart from immediacy in this taxonomic *desertion* of the real.¹⁹⁹

I call attention to *Playboy*’s terminally²⁰⁰ hyperreal later years to demonstrate a degenerate case of the positive application of the negative function—that is to say, the point at which the Bunny’s necessary conditions are no longer satisfied. In the case of the Bunny these conditions are present, though difficult to immediately isolate when the image is apprehended as a coherent fantasy. In the degenerate X-rated-Bunny, however, they become more readily apparent, as evidenced by the degree to which the photograph changes in their absence. In juxtaposing the Bunny with the ontological object and subject, as well as the X-rated hyperreal ‘point of no return,’²⁰¹ I have tacitly outlined the individually necessary and jointly

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 43.

¹⁹⁵ Former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau quoted in “‘Girls of Canada,” 151.

¹⁹⁶ “Girls of Canada,” 146.

¹⁹⁷ Moniker borrowed from *Playboy*’s first Canadian Playmate, Pamela Gordon in “Hail, Columbia!,” *Playboy*, March 1962, 69.

¹⁹⁸ Baudrillard, “After the Orgy,” 43.

¹⁹⁹ Reference to Baudrillard’s use of “desert of the real” in the introduction of Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

²⁰⁰ Reference to the point at which all meaning is lost in representation discussed in “Value’s Last Tango” in Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 148–151.

²⁰¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 100.

sufficient conditions that must be satisfied for something to be a Bunny, which can be summarized as follows: the Bunny (an intra-Playmate/covergirl/pictorial fantasy “woman” archetype) can be said to exist if and only if (1) she is a composite effect of various aesthetic elements irreducible to the sole presence of a bodily referent; (2) this effect is produced by *Playboy*’s mediation and is independent of the depicted subject as she exists outside the composition; and (3) mediation remains hidden behind what is immediately visible in the composition, such that the Bunny appears to be natural insofar as these constitutive conditions are present but not perceptible.

Any “natural” appearance that can be experienced in external actuality (as one does when apprehending the *Playboy* fantasy) must come from either someone or something that exists out in the real-world; the only possible alternative, if not an experience of someone or something, is that the appearance is produced from within. When we consider the notion of a self-contained appearance relative to a photograph, the earlier *Playboy* definition of image becomes operative. What appears in a photograph has the power to produce its own reality in appearance by making its content seem externally real through experience of that appearance as such. This is the difference between a photograph and an image. While a photograph inside the magazine is a tangible, physical medium, and thus an ontological object, it is not ontologically equivalent to the image it bears because the image exists only as it appears whereas the object exists out in the world, appearance notwithstanding.

While the ontological qualities of the photograph are not what is at issue here, this distinction between object and image is useful in clarifying the structure of the ontological image.²⁰² Before peeling back the final page to reveal what is, in effect, the Bunny’s “theoretical centerfold,” or so-called ontological essence, the conditions for the Bunny’s existence must be mapped onto this expanded structure of the image. The image structure, and with it the conditions of *Bunnyhood*, is especially evident in the case of the “well-structured beauty with a unique talent for projecting her personality in any

²⁰²The image is the effect i.e. the fantasy operation discussed by Žižek; consider Kant’s earlier definition of image as a “product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination” in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 116.

medium,”²⁰³ Angela Dorian, Miss September 1967. Appropriately, in the Žižekian sense,²⁰⁴ dubbed the “Screen Gem,” Dorian takes her name in the great *Playboy* tradition of distortion. Like the original girl next door “Janet Pilgram” before her, Dorian is a pseudonym.²⁰⁵ The brunette Dorian was actually blonde bombshell and exploitation film star Victoria Vetri.

Film historian Tom Lisanti suggests in his book *Glamour Girls of Sixties Hollywood* that Vetri’s *nom de screen* reflected the pervasiveness of puritanical ideology—the same one promoted by Disney and Hefner—across the American media industry. He explains that, being of Italian heritage, Vetri had been typecast “in supporting ethnic roles on television.”²⁰⁶ To project the “sanitized” *image* of an all-American girl, the then-unknown “shapely brunette with the 36-21-35 figure doffed her top”²⁰⁷ for *Playboy* “thinking it would give her a career boost.”²⁰⁸ “Dorian’s” centerfold thus becomes, at least by way of anecdotal significance, a particularly telling example of an idea Hefner had articulated twelve years earlier, when he “picked [the name] Pilgram for its puritan implications.”²⁰⁹

This visually manifests in her centerfold where Dorian appears outside ‘in the buff,’ sprawled across a woven hammock somewhere in the idyllic, verdant bluffs of costal California. Though the local flora and fauna is out of focus to evoke a dreamlike landscape, reminiscent of no specific place. She appears as though she could be anywhere—even the reader’s own backyard. Blurring the beauty of nature foregrounds Dorian in the image. Her ‘au naturel’ appearance appears more natural than the region’s native vegetation. One leg is extended across the hammock; the other is raised and bent at the knee, covering her own ‘most intimate region.’ Her breasts are completely exposed, though only one is clearly visible to the reader from this angle. Both arms are raised above her head, holding onto the hammock; presumably so she does not fall out, for it is possible the reader imagines Dorian moving and turning her head to meet his gaze. Looking directly into the camera, her head is tilted and her hair hangs off the hammock. Her

²⁰³ “Screen Gem” in *Playboy*. September 1967. 126.

²⁰⁴ This will be elaborated on shortly.

²⁰⁵ Changing models named to sound “more appealing or all-American” was common practice for the magazine; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 49.

²⁰⁶ Tom Lisanti, “Victoria Vetri,” in *Glamour Girls of Sixties Hollywood* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 334.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 334.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 334.

²⁰⁹ Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 202.

expression conveys a feigned candidness of the typical *Playboy* fare; Dorian looks as though she's been caught in some ritualistic act of weekend relaxation—perhaps what one imagines to be the budding actress' day off from her typical busy on set/audition schedule.²¹⁰

Despite the foregrounded focus on Dorian's body, *Playboy*'s "Screen Gem" actually follows its typical "crown jewel" Bunny formula much more closely than one might initially think. The above aside, making reference to Žižek in relation to the name of this centerfold spread, alludes to his definition of fantasy as "*the very screen the separates desire from drive: it tells the story which allows the subject to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire.*"²¹¹ This is exactly what takes place in this image of Dorian. Though her body appears to be foregrounded, the appearance is upheld by the elements surrounding the bodily referent to create the "screen (gem)" fantasy.

The reader's attention is directed towards what he thinks he *desires* (Dorian). However, what *drives* him towards that perceived desire (*Playboy*'s mediation) only covers up the fact that there is no real object, for there has been a primordial loss of that which was never actually there to begin with. There is neither Bunny-as-subject, nor Bunny-as-object, only the (Bunny-as-)image as it appears: the blurred background removes reality, making Dorian's bodily referent the focus of the fantasy, as the reader can believe should he encounter his desire he would lose sight of everything else in the presence of the *gem* he treasures most; the hammock physically supports bodily referent, but more importantly, through semiotic support, it signals leisure and relaxation, naturalizing the scene in a private setting the reader has to causally come across, because it is entirely plausible that a television actress who "doesn't [herself] own a set,"²¹² for reasons of finding the 'small screen' only banal preparation for its larger cinematic counterpart,²¹³ would be spending her time lounging outdoors.

Moreover, the effect of the image is not limited to the single centerfold photograph. The surrounding black and white photographs of Dorian putting makeup on in the mirror, holding a business

²¹⁰ "Screen Gem," 126.

²¹¹ Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 43.

²¹² "Screen Gem," 126.

²¹³ *Ibid.* 126.

card while on the phone—presumably with the agent who gave her that card—doing a ‘table-read’ of a script, her latest headshot, and a press appearance at the *LA Times* annual Riverside car races, along with two other nude pictorial photographs of her covering herself with pillows as she lies across a couch—alluding to the time-honoured “casting” euphemism—convey a sense of the busy lifestyle the actress leads and needs an escape from. *Playboy* wants its subscribers to know that, of course, it is you dear reader, who could provide Miss Dorian with that escape. Though, in actuality, the primordial loss is the real-world existence of Angela Dorian, the reader believes the only thing missing from this Bunny’s fantasy-world is him. This is not an effect that can be credited to the bodily referent alone. The magazine’s mediary sanitation efforts allow readers to “mar the ivory [all-American girl] perfection” of California native actress Angela Dorian, born Victoria Vetri to Italian immigrant parents.²¹⁴

Playboy’s puritan ‘cultural dissonance’ is “well-structured” indeed. So much so that “Dorian” did not even exist a year outside of *Playboy*,²¹⁵ since “Victoria Vetri’s” ‘big-break’ came only a month after her second magazine appearance.²¹⁶ In June 1968, she hit the ‘big screen’ as “Terry Gionoffrio” in Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby*. After that, she reverted back to her given name at Polanski’s insistence, who even wrote Victoria into the script, having Rosemary (played by actress Mia Farrow) “mistake her for actress ‘Victoria Vetri.’”²¹⁷ Dorian’s success as a Playmate and Vetri’s success as actress are completely independent of one another.²¹⁸ One could even say that *Playboy*’s production contained “Dorian” to its own pages, because this is what the Bunny image does. In the image, all metaphysics are lost²¹⁹: the Bunny appears to be a real-life woman to the reader while the fantasy he perceives is artificial.

Playboy is Disney inverted, Baudrillard’s third order of simulation. The image appears to refer to “Dorian,” and through her “actress Victoria Vetri.” But the meaning, or ability to elicit *Playboy*’s fantasy, does not depend on Dorian/Vetri at all; she is completely irrelevant to image as it would still be a Bunny if she were replaced with some other bodily referent. “Dorian” is Baudrillard’s “mask of any profound

²¹⁴ Lisanti, “Victoria Vetri,” 335.

²¹⁵ Though she did revert back to that name for some minor television appearances. Ibid. 335.

²¹⁶ She won “Playmate of the Year” in 1968 appearing on the cover and in the PMOY pictorial spread of the May issue. Ibid. 335.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 334.

²¹⁸ Crediting Polanski with launching her career is more accurate than crediting Hefner or *Playboy*.

²¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2.

reality,” she appears to be the referent which makes the image seem as though it features a specific, real person. In truth, the image is self-referential. Its only referent is *Playboy*’s aesthetic conventions. There is nothing real hidden behind those conventions, they are only masked by a product of themselves, Dorian who has also been created by in accordance with these conventions, to hide the otherwise overwhelming absence of reality.

Her body is meticulously staged by *Playboy*. As Art director, Authur Paul, explains in *TIME* magazine’s profile on Hefner, the goal is to “think clean,” “none of the nudes have ever looks as if she had just indulged in sex, or were just about to.”^{220, 221} And general physical appearance of the models, as it appears in the magazine, is handpicked by Hefner to ensure the *Playboy* standard is met. The article continues, “the right nude is [selected] from among hundreds of transparencies.”²²² Hefner adds, they do not want a “shot [that] makes the girl look too Hollywoodish.”²²³ For his models, “he likes the young, pouty type without complications or excessive intelligence.”²²⁴ Though he was also quoted in a letter to *Playboy* photographer Hal Adams clarifying “all the necessary Playmate elements [include]: a sex situation which also had a touch of humor to it,²²⁵ a nice composition in the picture, a soft, sophisticated look, and a girl herself who was both smart and sexy appearing.”²²⁶ The models’ lack “excessive intelligence,” but the Bunny is “both smart and sexy *appearing*.” Dorain’s accompanying text is especially enlightening to this apparent contradiction because it is clear the “a unique talent for projecting [...] personality in any medium,” is one held only by Hefner and his editorial team.

There is no true ‘look’ to the models. Besides being well-endowed,²²⁷ these girls are otherwise ordinary. A 1958 article “Photographing your own Playmate,” lets readers in on some of *Playboy*’s fantasy photography secrets that turn these ordinary women into the Bunny, “lighting should be kept sweet and

²²⁰ “Think Clean,” 80.

²²¹ *Playboy* Art Director Art Paul quoted in Ibid. 80.

²²² “Think Clean,” 80.

²²³ Hugh Hefner quoted in Ibid. 80.

²²⁴ “Think Clean,” 80.

²²⁵ The idea of “sex situation” does not negate the above quote concerning post/pre sex appearance considering how often Hefner has placed emphasis on possibility.

²²⁶ Hugh Hefner quoted in a letter to Hal Adams, November 19, 1955. cited in Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 47.

²²⁷ “Think Clean,” 80.

simple”²²⁸; diffused overhead lighting, a key light positioned above the model at a 45-degree angle, and a fill light placed near the camera, with exposure set around 1/30 at f/5.6.²²⁹ The article also stresses the importance of “simple props [to] add interest to a picture.”²³⁰ A variety of props are tested with a variety of poses to test the most effective combination for a successful spread.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, some coverage is “extremely useful in Playmate photography: though [barely there] it affords a psychological protection that the model would not feel is she were entirely nude.”²³¹ When comfortable, models appear more natural and spontaneous, that appearance makes “the best Playmate shots.”²³² The magazine affirms what Baudrillard suggests is necessary of the images, that “certain parts are visible while others are not [...] visible parts render the other invisible: in which a kind of rhythm of emergence and secrecy sets in a flotation line of between the imaginary and the ostensible.”²³³ The “best” shots are the ones that leave something to the imagination.

When the figure is only partially exposed the reader is left to focus on what he perceives to be missing. In this case, what is missing is exciting. It is a secret that only he can reveal by inserting himself into the fantasy scene. He projects onto the image oblivious to the fact that what the image actually hides are the otherwise contrived conditions of mediation that produce her appearance. This is the “positive” deterrence mechanism built into the fantasy which ultimately produces the overall natural appearance of the Bunny. And the Bunny is nothing if not produced. Feigned naturalness through composition, mediation, and concealment yields only conclusion: the Bunny is the image.

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, the most useful framework for understanding the Bunny and how she comes to exist is one that treats her as an ideological *and* aesthetic *production*. Understood relative to Kant, Baudrillard, and Žižek’s theoretical perspectives, it becomes evident that the Bunny is not simply a case of ideological meaning projected onto a simple representation of the real, like what is assumed by the Bunny-as-object and Bunny-as-subject frameworks. She is instead

²²⁸ “Photographing Your Own Playmate,” 38.

²²⁹ Ibid. 38.

²³⁰ Ibid. 37.

²³¹ Ibid. 38.

²³² Ibid. 38.

²³³ Baudrillard, “After the Orgy?” 43.

the hyperreal effect of a mediated composition, created by *Playboy* to convey their ideological fantasy by concealing the utter lack of reality present in the magazine's imagery. Thus the best possible way to classify *Playboy*'s Bunny is as a Baudrillardian third order image, what can henceforth be called the *Bunny-as-image*.

Conclusion

Like the work of Marshall McLuhan, who *Playboy* once waggishly called “the worst prose stylist since Immanuel Kant,” this deliberately over-aphoristic treatise—full of “hip quips” and “academic jargon,” mimicking the magazine’s own wit and form—goes to show that writing style need not impede theoretical substance.²³⁴ However tongue-in-cheek it may be, I call attention to this sentiment, expressed in the May 1967 issue, because within the context of the publication’s extensive intellectual engagement, it speaks to the ingenuity of McLuhan and Kant’s conceptual work, attesting to their status as some of the most appreciated thinkers in the pages of *Playboy*, up there with the likes of Slavoj Žižek,²³⁵ Carrie Pitzulo,²³⁶ and Hugh Hefner himself.^{237, 238} Though curiously missing from mention across the magazine’s entire publication run is most influential postmodernist, Jean Baudrillard.

The only thing I make of this absence, much like everything else done by *Playboy*, is that it was not a fortuitous choice. Unlike other philosophers *Playboy* could placidly showcase, inclusion of Baudrillard’s theory risks exposing the structure the supports the magazine’s entire fantasy world. Even the supposed enemy—radical feminists—posed less of a threat to its operation, and were often brought in for conversation.²³⁹ But Baudrillard could not be so easily absorbed. It has thus been my intent in this thesis to take up that omission and unveil what *Playboy* never—overtly—would.

To this end, I have asked what the Bunny is and how she operates within the *Playboy* inter-image system, rather than limiting my analysis strictly to what she represents outside of it. In changing the question, I have sought to move beyond dominant socio-political readings that reduce the Bunny to a fixed meaning. My purpose has been to highlight the inadequacies in existing categories of assessment that fail to account for the conditions of the Bunny’s production. This matters because it demonstrates that what is

²³⁴ In full the quote reads “The worse prose stylist since Immanuel Kant, McLuhan offers an exasperating mixture of hip quips and academic jargon, a kind of sociology-rock fed out on tape from an opium-eating computer, each new version a rehash job.” In “Playboy After Hours: Books,” review of *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967), by Marshall McLuhan, *Playboy*. May 1967, 42–44.

²³⁵ Žižek was a frequent contributor and editor for the publication. He has been featured as an essayist in multiple issues: “Thy Neighbor’s Life,” *Playboy*. June 2012. 80–83; “What Is a Brand?” *Playboy*. January/February 2014. 23–34; and credited as an editor: from 2012 to 2015.

²³⁶ Pitzulo’s feature in *Playboy*; “The Bunny Mystique: a new book explores this magazine’s role in shaping sexual mores” *Playboy*. June 2011, 132–133.

²³⁷ Gail Dines also mentioned in the magazine for debating the author in James R. Peterson. “The Playboy Forum: Porn Wars,” *Playboy*. August 2000. 59.

²³⁸ Thomas Weyr’s *Reaching for Paradise* is mentioned as well in *Playboy*. May 1980. 109; *Playboy*. January 1989. 7.; and *Playboy*. May 1990 51.

²³⁹ *Playboy* has platformed many influential feminist thinkers in its interviews e.g. “Playboy Interview: Germaine Greer,” *Playboy*. January 1972, 61–82; “Playboy Interview: Betty Friedan,” *Playboy*. September 1992, 51–62, 149; “Playboy Interview: Camille Paglia,” *Playboy*. May 1995, 51–64; “Playboy After Hours: Books” positive review of *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), by Susan Brownmiller, *Playboy*. October 1975, 36.

truly powerful about the *Playboy* fantasy can be found in its construction and manipulation of perception and meaning, not referential representations of the real-world. *Playboy* is an exemplary model of Baudrillard's hyperreality. It is no wonder Hefner was such a strong admirer of Walt Disney.

Above all else, this study has been an exploration in the semiotics of postwar heterosexual male fantasy. *Playboy's* images and text work together to convey its postwar puritan masculinist ideology, it cannot be done by one without the other. This is, in part, why the Bunny cannot be deemed a subjectified or objectified woman. I have done my best from tip to tail to foreground language in this project as a means of demonstrating how composition, mediation, and concealment as a means of eliciting fantasy does not rely on what is immediately apprehended (otherwise called the overall visual appearance) alone. Thus we cannot assess the Bunny through what she may represent when isolated from the system that produces her and placed in the realm of the real.

I read *Playboy* for the visuals and, perhaps exactly like the men of subscriptions past, I found that to make an image is to reveal just enough to let imagination conceal the fact of its own ideological making.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰As this project follows a very long pop-culture-laden thread, here is one final note to consider: looming mentions of puritan/Nazi ideology throughout the text (i.e. Steinem, Disney, Žižek) are heeded in punk band the Dead Kennedys' song, "Nazi Punks Fuck Off," which contains the lyrics: "You ain't no better than the bouncers / We ain't trying to be police / When you ape the cops it ain't anarchy / Nazi Punks / Nazi punks / Nazi punks—fuck off!" quoted in Charles M. Young, "Skank or Die," *Playboy*. June 1984, 198. Like staunch anti-censorship advocate Hefner who was "arrested [...] for 'publishing and distributing an obscene publication' [...] the June [1963] issue of *Playboy* [for] the picture store on film star Jayne Mansfield nude in bed and bubble bath scenes for her latest contribution to cinematic art" because unlike other *Playboy* pictures a man was (barely) featured in the photos with Jayne, discussed in Hugh M. Hefner "The Playboy Philosophy: Part 12" in *Playboy*. November 1963, 49. the lead singer of the band, Jello Biafra, faced obscenity charges, of which *Playboy* wrote, "what punk rock couldn't do with sexually explicit lyrics it has managed to accomplish with a sexually explicit poster [Jello Biafra] busted for 'distributing harmful material to minors' the poster, by H. R. Giger is titled *Penis landscape* and comes [...] inside the Dead Kennedys' 1985 LP *Frankenchrist*." in "The Playboy Forum: Dead Liberties," *Playboy*. October 1986, 49. Furthermore, give thought to the DK song "Terminal Preppie" off the same album as "Nazi Punks Fuck Off," *Plastic Surgery Disasters/In God We Trust Inc.* (1982), contains the lyrics: "I want a wife with tits / Who just smiles all the time / In my centerfold world / Filled with Springsteen and wine" satirizes men who subscribe to the *Playboy* ideology, those who only desire a woman for her surface level appearance and sex appeal, careless of genuine depth or substance—like the Bunny! Yet, duplicitously, like "Playboy" Hefner, Biafra too was fond of "young, thin blond[e]s with super-sized breasts"; see *D. H Peligro Dreadnaught: King of Afropunk* (Los Angeles: A Barnacle Book, 2013), 68. on Biafra's marriage to large-chested Theresa Soder; and Helen Redmond, "King of the Creeps: Hugh Hefner," *Prostitution Research & Education*, November 18 2010, <https://prostitutionresearch.com/king-of-the-creeps-hugh-hefner/> further confirming this project's many a time mention of Hefner's, and therefore *Playboy's*, "tits on a stick" preference in women. All that to say, *Playboy's* Bunny is one of the clearest examples of the depths to which ideological fantasy can penetrate a self-contained, superficial image.

Bibliography

- Addis, Don. "Symbolic Sex: Humor." *Playboy*. December 1963. 149.
- Adler, Carlye. "Hugh Hefner Playboy Enterprises in 1953 I Didn't Really Fully Appreciate What I Had Created. It Was the First Successful Magazine for Young, Single Men." *CNN Money*, September 1, 2003. https://money.cnn.com/magazines/fsb/fsb_archive/2003/09/01/350793/index.htm.
- Adler, Mortimer. "How to Read a Book Superficially." *Playboy*. December 1963. 115–122, 196–199.
- American Playboy: The Hugh Hefner Story*. Season 1, Episode 3, "Becoming Mr. Playboy." Directed by Richard Lopez. Written by Brian Burstein Steven David Tim W Kelly. April 7, 2017. Amazon Prime Video.
- Anderson, Scott. "Objectification: A 21st-Century Reassessment." *Current Controversies in Political Philosophy* (2015): 100–116. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203123806-6>.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- . *The Dialogic Imagination*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Barnett, Vincent. "History of Softcore Pornography." In *Encyclopedia of Sexuality and Gender*, 1–11, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59531-3_99-1.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023.
- . "What Are You Doing After the Orgy?" *Artforum*. October 1983. 42–46.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. "The Roots of Radicalism." *Playboy*. March 1971. 106, 124, 206–208.
- Brandt, Allan M. *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- "China Doll: playboy's playmate of the month." *Playboy*. August 1964. 72–77.
- Chocano, Carina. "Bunnies." In *You Play the Girl: On Playboy Bunnies, Stepford Wives, Train Wrecks, and Other Mixed Messages*, 3–16. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
- "Cover Story." *Playboy*. November 1988. 5.
- Danto, Arthur C. *What Art Is*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- "Dear Playboy: Playboy — Pro and Con." *Playboy*. October 1962. 30–32.

- Dines, Gail. "I Buy It for the Articles: Playboy Magazine and the Sexualization of Consumerism." In *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, edited by Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, 254–262. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.
- Fallaci, Oriana. "Hugh Hefner: I Am in the Center of the World." In *The Egoists: 16 Surprising Interviews*, 113–124. New York: Henry Regnery Company, 1966.
- Fraterrigo, Elizabeth. *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997): 173–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>.
- "Girls of Canada: Pictorial." *Playboy*. October 1980. 146–151.
- "Hail, Columbia!: playboy's playmate of the month." *Playboy*. March 1962. 66–71.
- Hefner, Hugh M. *The Playboy Philosophy*. Chicago: HMH Pub. Co, 1963.
- . "The Playboy Philosophy: Part 12." *Playboy*. November 1963. 49–74, 148–150.
- Handy, Bruce. "A Bunny Thing Happened: An Oral History of the Playboy Clubs," *Vanity Fair*. April 22 2011. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/05/playboy-clubs>
201105?srsId=AfmBOoof8gkLyYF2h0ZkPA_3DsMubrDE2nacqcV9AUtZQe7xkhlWK6u5
- Hardy, Anne. "The Under-Appreciated Rodent: Harbingers of Plague from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 171–85. https://doi.org/10.1162/jinh_a_01408.
- Hardy, Simon. "Pornography and Erotica." In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by George Ritzer, 3540–3542. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosp059>.
- Hunt, Morton. "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig!" *Playboy*. May 1970. 95–96, 102–104, 202–209.
- Itzin, Catherine. "'Entertainment for Men': What It Is and What It Means." In *Pornography: Women, Violence, and Civil Liberties*, 27–34. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Friedrich Max Müller. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Knight, Arthur. "Far Out Films." *Playboy*. April 1960. 42–44, 46, 50, 58, 85.
- Lisanti, Tom. "Victoria Verti" In *Glamour Girls of Sixties Hollywood: Seventy-Five Profiles*, 334–336. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008.

- Lukas, J. Anthony. "The Alternative Life-Style of Playboys and Playmates." *New York Times*, June 11, 1972. <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/06/11/archives/the-alternative-lifestyle-of-playboys-and-playmates-playboysempire.html?searchResultPosition=2>
- "Magazines: Think Clean." *TIME*. March 3 1967. 76–82.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. London: Sphere Books, 1971.
- Miller, Russell. *Bunny: The Real Story of Playboy*. New York: New American Library, 1988.
- "Miss July: playboy's playmate of the month," *Playboy*. July 1955. 28.
- Morris, Pam, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Navarre, Marguerite de. "A Matter of Simple Duplicity." Adapted by Paul J. Gillette. *Playboy*. March 1963. 115.
- Osgerby, Bill. *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth, and Leisure-Style in Modern America*. Oxford: Berg, 2006.
- Peligro, D. H. *Dreadnaught: King of Afropunk*. Los Angeles: A Barnacle Book, 2013.
- Peterson, James R. "The Playboy Forum: Porn Wars," *Playboy*. August 2000. 59.
- "Photographing Your Own Playmate: Miss June." *Playboy*. June 1958. 35–43.
- Pitzulo, Carrie. *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- "Playbill." *Playboy*. February 1962. 5.
- "Playbill." *Playboy*. December 1963. 3.
- Playboy*. December 1953. Cover.
- Playboy*. February 1962. Cover.
- Playboy*. November 1988. Cover.
- "Playboy After Hours: Books" review of *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), by Susan Brownmiller, *Playboy*. October 1975, 36.
- "Playboy After Hours: Books" Review of *The Medium Is the Massage* by Marshall McLuhan. *Playboy*. May 1967. 42–44.
- "Playboy Interview: Betty Friedan." *Playboy*. September 1992. 51–62, 149.
- "Playboy Interview: Camille Paglia." *Playboy*. May 1995. 51–64.
- "Playboy Interview: Germaine Greer." *Playboy*. January 1972, 61–82.
- "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan." *Playboy*. March 1969. 53–74, 158.

- “Playboy’s Penthouse Apartment: Modern Living,” *Playboy*. September 1956, 53–60.
- ”Playboy’s Penthouse Apartment: Modern Living,” *Playboy*. October 1956, 65–70.
- “Playboy’s Progress,” *Playboy*. May 1954. 22–23.
- “Playboy’s Town House: Modern Living,” *Playboy*. May 1962. 83–92, 105.
- “Playboy’s Office Playmate: Pictorial,” *Playboy*. July 1955, 26–27.
- Playboy’s Penthouse*, Season 1, Episode 1, “Episode #1.1.” Directed by Don Rushton and Carl Tubbs. October 24, 1959. Syndication. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwN09HzpYBQ>
- “Primadonna: playboy’s playmate of the month” *Playboy*. December 1963, 136–141.
- “Portrait of Jenny: playboy’s playmate of the month.” *Playboy*. March 1965. 88–93.
- Sack, John. “The Handwriting on the Wall.” *Playboy*. January 1960. 39–40, 50, 83–84.
- “Screen Gem: playboy’s playmate of the month.” *Playboy*. September 1967. 126–133.
- Soble, Alan. “Kant and Sexual Perversion.” *Monist* 86, no. 1 (2003): 55–89.
<http://doi.org/10.5840/monist20038614>.
- Steinem, Gloria. “A Bunny’s Tale: Show’s First Exposé for Intelligent People.” *SHOW*. May 1963. 90–93, 114–115.
- . “What Playboy Doesn’t Know About Women Could Fill A Book.” Interview by Gloria Steinem. *McCall’s*. October 1970. 139–140.
- “Terminal Preppie,” track 3 on Dead Kennedys, *Plastic Surgery Disasters/ In God We Trust, Inc.*, Alternative Tentacles, 1982.
- “The Bunny Mystique: A New Book Explores this Magazine’s Role in Shaping Sexual Mores.” *Playboy*. June 2011. 132–133.
- “The Playboy Forum: Spurious Reality.” *Playboy*. February 1964. 42–43.
- “The Playboy Forum: Dead Liberties.” *Playboy*. October 1986. 49.
- Torre, Marie. “A Woman Looks at the Girly-Girly Magazines.” *Cosmopolitan*. May 1963. 42–47.
- Redmond, Helen. “King of the Creeps: Hugh Hefner.” Prostitution Research & Education, November 18, 2010. <https://prostitutionresearch.com/king-of-the-creeps-hugh-hefner/>.
- Wagner, Walter. “The Wonderful World of Walt Disney.” In *You Must Remember This: Oral Reminiscences of the Real Hollywood*. New York: Putnam, 1975.
- Watts, Steven. *Mr. Playboy: Hugh Hefner and the American Dream*. La Vergne, TN: Turner Publishing, 2009.

Weyr, Thomas. *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America*. New York: Times Books, 1978.

Willis, Louis-Paul. ““Hey! What Did You Do to the World?”: Conceptualizing the Real with Baudrillard and Žižek.” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016): 63–87.

“What Makes Marilyn” *Playboy*. December 1953. 17–19.

“Volume I, Number I” *Playboy*. December 1953. 3.

Young, Charles M. “Skank or Die.” *Playboy*. June 1984. 96, 190–198.

Zehme, Bill. “Hef’s Girlfriends: A Romantic Retrospective.” *Playboy*. November 2012. 112–121.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso, 1997.

———. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 2008.

———. “Thy Neighbor’s Life.” *Playboy*. June 2012. 80–83.

———. “What Is a Brand?” *Playboy*. January/February 2014. 121, 256–257.