Men and Masculinities

Last Laughs : Batman, Masculinity, and the Technology of Abjection

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Last Laughs

Batman, Masculinity, and
the Technology of Abjection

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Because it deals with a male "superhero," Tim Burton's 1989 film Batman *inevitably thematizes certain issues concerning masculinity. Specifically, Burton's film foregrounds an anxious relation among "armored" masculine subjectivity, the male body, and the mechanisms of photographic and cinematic representation. The close reading of* Batman *presented here argues that the film articulates a specifically masculinist anxiety about the very medium of cinema, a constitutive unease about a mass cultural "technology of abjection" that both threatens and enforces the boundaries of normative, heterosexual masculinity. By thematizing its own material engulfment in the "feminizing" mass culture it attempts to transcend,* Batman *complicates the very terms of masculinity on which it insists.*

Key words: Tim Burton, Batman, masculinity, abjection, mass culture, photography, anxiety, psychoanalysis

"To destroy transcendence, there must be laughter."

—Georges Bataille

In an essay on *Batman* in the film journal *Screen*, Andrew Ross (1990) writes the following about the film's opening sequence:

> Behind the title credits, the camera creeps, dips and skates through the bowel-like spaces between the contours of the bat ancestral crest, tracing out a symbol that seems to be as old and universal as nature itself. The code of nature then gives way to the code of the social. (P. 30)

I would like to dwell on this passage—not Ross's, but the passage or defile through which the camera initially creeps. For if we agree with Ross that there is something "bowel-like" about the interiority of the bat symbol that the camera probes, then we can posit a different significance to the camera's symbolic tracing than that which Ross considers. We can begin to see how Burton's film foregrounds an anxious relation among "armored" masculine subjectivity, the male body, and the camera. In the close reading of *Batman* presented here, I will argue that the film articulates a specifically masculinist

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anxiety about the very mechanisms of photographic and cinematic represen-
tation, a constitutive unease about a mass cultural "technology of abjection"
that both threatens and works to enforce the boundaries of normative, hetero-
sexual masculinity.[1]

In his last sentence—"The code of nature then gives way to the code of the
social"—Ross refers to the camera's cut from the bat symbol to the streets of
Gotham City. But since symbols themselves are not natural but social, as
Ross very well knows, I will let his sentence refer to a "giving way" that
occurs within the opening credit sequence. There, the camera moves lugubri-
ously—and disorientingly, so that we have no idea where we are or what we
are viewing—through a bowelish interior, then emerges from that space and
reflects back on it as a site of origin: a scene, we might say, of cloacal birth.[2]
The camera distances itself, clears itself, from its own cloacal origin and then
represents the site as sight, as simultaneously an identifiable symbol and a
symbol of identity.

The camera thus provokes and then assuages anxiety, narrating its (and
our) passage from a lost, expelled, and helpless objecthood to a subjective
position of symbolic mastery. In Lacanian terms, the camera can be said to
narrate the alienating expulsion from the real, which Lacan says resists sym-
bolization absolutely, into the imaginary and the symbolic, thus illuminating
what Kaja Silverman (1992), in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, calls "the
representational system through which the subject is accommodated to the
Name-of-the-Father" (p. 34). Given such accommodation, it is appropriate
that it is at this very moment—when the previously unrecognizable matter of
the rectal defile through which the camera had moved becomes distanced and
discernable as a symbol, and we know where we have been and what we are
looking at—that the name of the film's putative symbolic master, its director,
appears in the credits.

But there is more. Lacan (1970) suggests that "It is necessary to find the
subject as a lost object. More precisely this lost object is the support of the
subject and in many cases is a more abject thing than you may care to con-
sider" (p. 189). If the credit sequence narrates the transition from the real to
the symbolic, from lost object to self-located subject, from passivity to activ-
ity, it also narrates the overcoming of an abject historical trauma, thus seem-
ingly reasserting what Silverman (1992) calls "our dominant fiction," which
"calls upon the male subject to see himself . . . only through the mediation of
images of an unimpaired masculinity" (p. 42). However, in tracing the tracing
of a symbol, the credit sequence may leave more traces of abjection and
trauma than any unimpaired masculinity may care to consider.

Silverman (1992) writes that the dominant fiction's "most central signifier
of unity is the (paternal) family, and its primary signifier of privilege the phal-
lus" (p. 34). In so far as the credit sequence illustrates the separation from and
mastery over a maternally coded, cloacal real through the process of symboli-
zation, we can, from a Lacanian perspective, view the bat symbol as a phallic

signifier, an image of unimpaired masculinity.[3] But the phallus and the unity of the paternal family that it upholds are threatened in the immediate post-credit sequence. There, Dad, Mom, and Junior are lost and overwhelmed in a dangerous and dangerously sexualized (i.e., there's a hooker) section of Gotham, and Dad cannot successfully hail a cab. This inability not only feminizes Dad, as all inabilities and disempowerments conventionally will in patriarchal representation, but also threatens his privileged racial identity since—as Ross (1990) points out and as West (1993) (for one) attests from experience—it is, in reality, black men who have trouble getting cabs in New York City.[4] Desperately asserting "I know where we are!" Dad takes the family down an alley, and in that dark defile, he is laid low by some sickly looking robbers, a scene that Batman witnesses from a great height. The scene has a particular resonance for Batman/Bruce Wayne, for, as we later find out, it was in this very vicinity, just outside the Monarch Theatre, that his own parents were murdered when he was a child.

Commenting on this aspect of Batman's narrative prehistory, Michael Brody (1995) writes that "Freud's work on psychic trauma remains valuable in understanding [the young Bruce Wayne's] mental state" after witnessing his parents' murder. "Freud wrote about the flooding of the psychic apparatus with large amounts of stimuli and the helplessness experienced when the ego is overwhelmed. . . . The suddenness of the flood . . . cause[s] a shattering of the illusion of invulnerability" (pp. 172-73).[5] Brody suggests that "Wayne's vow to fight crime is a compensatory wish" and that "he acted out this wish in the movie's first scene. There is a conversion from the passive child to an active mastery of the adult Batman who now renders the robbers helpless" (p. 174).

The key Freudian text concerning such conversion is *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and the most relevant moment in that text is Freud's well-known description of the *fort/da* game, in which his grandson throws away and then retrieves a wooden reel by means of the string attached to it. Freud interprets this game of "gone" (*fort*) and "here" (*da*) as one in which the boy compensated himself for his own renunciation of his mother's body "by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach" (Freud 1953-74, 18:15). Freud

> gets the impression that the child turned his experience into a game from another motive. At the outset he was in a passive situation—he was overpow-ered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery. (Freud 1953-74, 18:16)

The *fort/da* game is particularly relevant to the opening scenes of *Batman*, for it is exactly this game of disappearance and return that he plays with the two robbers on the rooftop: he makes the first vanish by kicking him through

a closed door, and he uses his bat line to snag and retrieve the second, who is trying to escape. This crook Batman holds over the edge of the abyss, threatening to let him drop, and it is at this moment of complete mastery that he announces his identity: "I'm Batman," he whispers, and then spares the man, flinging him aside. This intrication of articulated identity with the ability to let or not let something drop at will is important, and the relevance of the *fort/da* itself continues throughout the film, for there are numerous scenes of Batman employing his line to snag a villain, to hoist himself out of danger, or to rescue (or control) the body of Vicki Vale (Kim Bassinger).

In my book *Male Matters* (Thomas 1996), I juxtapose Freud's discussions of the *fort/da* game with his insistence on the universality among children of a cloacal theory of birth. I suggest that the cloaca theory helps account for the abject or expelled status of that "lost object" that Lacan says is the phantasmatic support of the subject, and I argue that the "instinct for mastery" that motivates the *fort/da* game may also be motivated by the boy's desire to overcome his feeling of helpless and abject passivity by symbolizing the mother's body as a small, passive, controllable object. In so doing, I suggest, the boy attempts to disavow not only his own dependency on the mother, and any figuration of the mother as an active subjective agent, but also an anxious feeling of a deep ontological shittiness at the core of subjective existence itself. The *fort/da* game, in other words, is implicated not only with the boy's phantasy of having been produced through the mother's bowels, and his foreclosure of that phantasy, but also with his own struggles to secure identity through the control of his bowels.

However, the success of this anally symbolic enterprise is only ever partial, and the feeling of what I call "scatontological anxiety" may continue to haunt the construction site of any symbolically secured masculine identity. This haunting remains in effect, I argue, because identity cannot be secured without recourse to modes of representation—speech, writing, image production, including photography and cinema—that inevitably transform the representing subject *back* into a represented object. And this production, this transforming *back*, can be a phantasmatic falling back, a dissolution of ego boundaries, a traumatizing *Durchfall* (a German word that means failure, falling through, and the involuntary emptying of the bowels). Thus, the image of "unimpaired masculinity," the self-produced, self-representational image of the actively "self-made man," is haunted by the earlier phantasmatic image of having been a passively and cloacally (m)other-made child. In other words, the *image* of unimpaired masculinity through which the dominant fiction supposedly guarantees itself is ultimately unable to overcome historical trauma, and it fails to do so precisely by virtue of *being* a produced image.

Although this inability is inscribed in any linguistic or representational practice, it is particularly apparent in photography and hence cinema. In an article called "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," Diana Fuss (1992)

refers to photography as "the very technology of abjection." She writes that the "intimate codependency of fashion, fetishism, photography, and femininity suggests that in the dominant regime of fashion photography, femininity is itself an accessory [that] operates as a repository for culture's representational waste" (p. 720). Suggesting that abjection "is the psychical equivalent of photography's mechanical transformation of subjects into objects," Fuss cites Roland Barthes (1981) to the effect that "the Photograph . . . represents that very subtle moment when . . . I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death. . . . I am truly becoming a specter" (p. 14). Photography, Fuss continues, thus "functions as a mass producer of corpses, embalming each subject by captivating and fixing its image" (p. 729).

Batman can be read as an uncanny explication of these comments by Fuss (1992) and Barthes (1981), for, as we shall now begin to see, the film is very much concerned with phantasmatic relations among photography, femininity, human and cultural waste, racial "darkness," and the mass production of images, commodities, and corpses. Indeed, after having shown us a particular instance of historical trauma and its overcoming, *Batman* will begin quite conspicuously to foreground its own troubled fascination with the photographic image and to suggest the "traumatizing" capacities of photography itself.

Immediately following the scene in which Batman announces his identity, throws the robber aside, and vanishes into the night, the camera cuts to a Gotham town hall meeting, a scene that is dominated by a huge black-and-white poster of district attorney Harvey Dent, played by Billy Dee Williams (a significant figure in the racial semiotics of blockbuster casting, following his injection by George Lucas into the Star Wars trilogy in a bid to attract black audiences). After a few words by Commissioner Gordon (Pat Hingle) and by Dent, the camera cuts to a large black-and-white photograph of Alicia (Jerry Hall). Zooming out, panning right, and tilting down, the camera reveals an apartment wall dominated by glamour shots of Alicia; the first of many televisions, this one tuned to Harvey Dent's face and speech; and the pre-Joker Jack Napier (Nicholson) reclining in a plush chair. To Dent's promise to make Gotham safe for decent people, Jack responds "Decent people shouldn't live here—they'd be happier someplace else." He is shuffling a deck of cards (i.e., playing with a pile of mass-produced images), his feet resting on a coffee table.

In fact, as a close overhead shot makes a point of informing us, Jack's feet rest on a *Vogue* magazine cover and thus on the image of a woman's face, a face metonymically linked to Alicia's since she not only apparently is a fashion model but is played by one. Jack's gesture of contempt toward Alicia's face is significant not only because he later facially disfigures her but also because of the way mass-produced photographic imagery itself is beginning to be linked in *Batman*'s imaginary with cultural marginality, with matters of

femininity, racial difference, and waste: the two scenes work to associate the black-and-white images of a black man and a white woman with what might end up on the bottom of a white man's shoe. Significantly, however, the second scene also implicates Jack, by virtue of his own arrogant, preening narcissism in front of the mirror, in the very realm of the imaginary that he would prefer to abject. Thus, the film foregrounds a crucial paradox: images and representation both threaten the dominant fiction of unimpaired masculinity and constitute the indispensable supports of that fiction. Thus, images and the production of images must—like laughter, like the sphincter, like the reel of the *fort/da*—be subject to constant surveillance and control.[6]

The next scene but one elaborates on the phantasmatic relations among the mass-production of images, cultural marginality, and the matters bodies produce. Reporter Alexander Knox (Robert Wuhl) enters the *Gotham Globe* newsroom to the taunts of his colleagues, who ridicule his interest in the Batman story. "What a dick," he mutters of one. Then, on seeing a set of female gams propped up on his desk, he purrs "Hello legs!" Visually and aurally, the newspaper-reading Vicki Vale is thus introduced as a body-in-fragments, and the juxtaposition of the words "dick" and "legs" underscores the Lacanian point that the woman cannot "have" the phallus but must be the phallus for the man.

But a more interesting series of juxtapositions follows: when Vale says to Knox "I'm reading your stuff," Knox follows with "Well, I'm reading yours," thus connecting mass-produced written material with the "stuff" of feminine sexuality.[7] When Vale introduces herself, Knox recognizes her as a photographer for *Vogue* (which, along with her initial reclining posture, which is similar to Jack's, links her to the scene in Alicia's apartment) and says, "If you want me to pose nude, you're gonna need a long lens." But this ostensibly phallic brag has the opposite of its intended effect, not only because Vale ignores it and not only because of Lacan's (1977) suggestion that "virile display in the human being itself seem[s] feminine" (p. 291), but because, in the deep logic of the film's imaginary, to subject masculine identity to a feminizing photographic gaze is to expose its vulnerability to abjection. Vale, who like Batman himself has a sort of double life, immediately underscores this point by showing Knox her serious camera work: a *Time* magazine cover of the aftermath of the revolution in "Corto Maltese," a photograph of a dead male body face down in the mud. Vale's duplicity connects the *Vogue* and the *Time* covers, bringing together the notion of feminine/fashion photography as the repository of culture's representational waste and of photography in general as a technology of abjection that wastes masculinity, transforming male bodies into corpses. Staring at the *Time* cover, and using a word whose repetition seems to signal something other than a limited vocabulary, Knox mutters, "A girl could get hurt doing this stuff." But given the fact that he has already feminized himself by offering his body to Vale's photographic gaze, Knox may here be unwittingly referring less to Vale than to himself: to get

hurt, to get wasted, to get *shot* (by gun or by camera) is to be othered, demas-
culinized, abjected, turned into an object, "a girl." In any case, Knox and Vale
team up to pursue the Batman story. "I like . . . bats," admits Vale, as if she
were owning up to some dark sexual fetish.

This scene concluded, the camera cuts to another mass-produced photo-
graphic image of Harvey Dent's face, this time on the front page of a *Gotham
Globe* lying on the desk of crime boss Carl Grissom (Jack Palance). This shot
of yet another cover links Dent's African-American face with the *Vogue* and
Time covers and thus with the haunting specters of femininity, abjection,
waste, mud, and death that seem to be the main worries of *Batman*'s phantas-
matic subtext.[8] In a shot that is amplified later when Joker uses an mechanical
boxing glove to punch out a televised image of Dent's face—and that evi-
dences the film's literal iconoclasm, an inevitably masochistic aggression
against images that is here displaced onto the racialized other—Grissom
brings his fist down on the newspaper. The camera zooms out to reveal Jack
Napier once again reclining in a chair, playing with his deck. A remarkable
sequence follows. In a close point-of-view shot, Jack holds up a joker, and we
hear a low mechanical noise that resembles intestinal grumbling. As Jack
lowers the card, the camera brings the background into focus to reveal the fig-
ure of Alicia emerging from the elevator. Having returned from a shopping
spree and "come up from below," she is laden with designer shopping bags
that signify her conspicuous consumption of (presumably) overpriced and
frivolous junk. By this juxtaposition, the image of the Joker's face is meto-
nymically associated with Alicia's overly photographed, overly consumptive
body and thus, by implication, with all of the preceding images of femininity,
racial difference, abjection, waste, and death.[9]

We will return to Joker's face and its glaring significations. First, let's con-
sider Batman/Bruce Wayne's relation to the technology of abjection. The
sequence in Wayne Manor articulates a concern with that technology (spe-
cifically, with matters of surveillance and retrieval) as well as a concern with
questions of identity-uncertainty and, importantly, of value (specifically,
with the ambiguous symbolic value of money). To raise money for the
Gotham bicentennial celebration, Wayne has converted his mansion to a
casino, so the scene begins with shots of extravagantly gambling Gothamites
shooting craps, letting their dice and their chips fall where they may. In our
first glimpse of the unmasked Michael Keaton as Bruce Wayne, Vicki Vale,
not knowing who he is, asks if he can tell her "which one of these guys is
Bruce Wayne." He replies that he is not sure, a reply that contrasts with the
certainty of his "I'm Batman" proclamation to the dangling crook and so
hints at a particular uncertainty or ambiguity lying beneath the Batman
armature.

Armature—and questions of identity, sexuality, and value—are all fore-
grounded shortly thereafter when Knox and Vale wander into Wayne's
museum of body armor. Some interesting dialogue ensues. "Look at this

stuff!" says Knox. "Who is this guy?" Vale, reiterating the stuffy subtext, observes, "He gives to all these humanitarian causes, and then collects all this *stuff*," after which comment she lets out a laugh (this laughter-provoking contrast between the humanitarian, or the vulnerably human, and the defensively armored male body is important and will be emphasized again later in the film). The conversation is then sexualized, or at least phallicized: Knox comments on Wayne's appeal to "chicks," saying "they like him for his big charity balls," to which Vale adds, "and don't forget his *very* large bankroll." However, as was the case with Knox's earlier big-dick assertion, these monetary metaphors (which are also inevitably *representational* metaphors, since both money and metaphor are forms of representation) covertly undercut the qualities of phallic hugeness they ascribe. For if Wayne's phallus is made of money, it is made of *stuff* that has an unstable, or at least transmutable, social and psychosymbolic value. Most obviously, we might note here Freud's (1953-74) contention that an "ancient interest in faeces"—that is, a pre-Oedipal and pre-phallic interest—can be sublimatedly "transformed into the high valuation of *gold* and *money*" (vol. 22, p. 100). The potentially "low" connotations of high monetary value are brought into relief in the following exchange: Knox says, "Remember, the more they got, the less they're worth," to which Vale answers, "Then this guy must be the most worthless guy in America."

The guy whose worth (if not guy-ness) is in question enters. Introductions follow. Unlike the feminized Knox, who knew Vicki Vale as a fashion photographer but not as a war correspondent, Wayne is familiar with her work in Corto Maltese and compliments her on her "good eye." But on hearing her desire to investigate the Batman story, Wayne says, "A little light after the war in Corto Maltese, isn't it?" Of course, Wayne wants to throw Vale off the bat trail, but his comment also has the effect of aligning Batman with what also compares "lightly" to the carnage in Corto Maltese, that is, Vale's frivolous fashion photography, which Joker will later explicitly call "crap." The matters of photography and representation resurface here, for after Wayne departs, Knox, complaining to Vale about the oddities of the very rich, points to an immense mirror and says, "Maybe it should be Bruce Vain." His comment reminds us of Jack Napier's harsh vanity before the mirror in Alicia's apartment, but as the camera takes us behind Wayne's two-way mirror and we see Wayne's massive videographic surveillance technology, we discover that his problem is perhaps less narcissism than paranoia.

Commenting on this scene in an article about *Batman* and cultural memory, Jim Collins has compared the ways Batman and the Joker "actively play with images" (p. 167).

> Like the Joker, Batman is shown watching television a number of times in the film and like his adversary, he appears to be surrounded by images that he controls for his own purposes. Just as the Joker appears to be practically engulfed

> by the images he cuts up, the first shots of Batman in the Batcave show him before a bank of video monitors, surrounded on all sides by the images of his guests that his hidden cameras have been recording, and which he *calls up* rather than *cuts up* in order to bring back a reality that he has somehow missed. Where the Joker's manipulation of images is a process of deformation, Batman engages in a process of retrieval, drawing from that reservoir of images which constitutes "the past." This tension between abduction and retrieval epitomizes the conflicting strategies at work in this film, a text which alternately hijacks and "accesses" the traditional Batman topoi. (P. 168)

Caring less about the film's accessing of such topoi than Collins does, I would suggest different significations for the tension between cutting up and calling up images. I am especially interested in the tension Collins notes between controlling/retrieving images and being "engulfed" in an imagistic "reservoir," particularly as those last words relate to the scene of Batman and Napier's confrontation in the Axis Chemical Plant.

Not surprisingly, the Axis sequence begins, after an establishing shot, with the camera focussed on a succession of mass-produced photographic images: "wanted" posters of Jack Napier, which the treacherous and corrupt Lt. Eckhardt (William Hootkins) is distributing to his men. "Shoot to kill," he says, "Know what I mean?"—the question posed perhaps less to the cops than to *Batman* viewers growing sensitive to the film's foregrounding of the "homicidal" propensities of the cinematic apparatus itself. Inside Axis, the dynamics of the fort/da emerge again: Batman lassoes one of Napier's men, pulls him over a railing, and leaves him helplessly hanging. The camera lingers on Batman's cowled face as he himself lingers on this scene, staring as if fascinated by the image of the dangling man. This image is replicated shortly thereafter as Batman holds on to a suspended Jack Napier, only to let him finally drop into an engulfing vat of chemical waste, a "letting fall" that further underscores the anal dynamics of *Batman* and of the *fort/da* itself.

Through the ensuing process of cloacal transformation, "Joker" is born. Actually, the figure of the Joker emerges gradually in a series of scenes that read like a parody of the Lacanian narrative of subjective development leading from the real to the imaginary to the symbolic. Napier's body is expelled from the Axis Chemical Plant through a sewage drain, and we first see him again as a body-in-fragments, a disfigured hand reaching up in agony out of this "oceanic" stream of dissolution. We next witness what might be called his "mirror stage" in the shabby plastic surgeon's office. Beholding his newly and permanently rictalized face for the first time, he smashes the mirror and breaks out into peals of laughter. In the third scene, he steps into Carl Grissom's office (out of the same elevator that we last saw producing Alicia's commodity-laden, image-is-everything body), reaccommodates himself to the Name-of-the-Father by articulating his new identity ("Jack's dead, my friend—you can call me Joker"), and proceeds to empty a revolver into Grissom's body.

In this murderous scene (though in *Batman* all photographically framed "scenes" are potentially murderous), Joker both upholds and destroys what Bersani (1987) calls the "sacrosanct value of selfhood" (p. 222): he kills to protect the seriousness of his statement of identity even as he reveals—and revels in the fact—that that statement is a joke.[10] He simultaneously consolidates and disperses an identity that both must be and cannot be taken seriously and begins to signify both the murderousness of stable identity as well as its abject destabilization. Joker thus represents an attack on and of identity, an assault on and of representation, and this attack underscores the ironic duplicity of representation itself, the dependence of subjective identity on objectifying representational images that simultaneously guarantee and threaten the very coherence of ego boundaries.

Commenting on the way *Batman* "radically complicates the Joker's cultural position," Barry W. Sarchett (1996) writes that the Joker

> simultaneously signifies heterogeneous cultural spaces, thus becoming not a figure *different from* an assumed norm, but a figure of difference/figuration itself, the Joker in the deck—that which assumes multiple and even contradictory positions, a mask or trace without positive identity. (P. 75)

Sarchett connects Joker as a differential figure of figuration to the question of the West's longstanding distrust of images or "aversion to spectacularity" (p. 80). He cites Patrick Bratlinger (1983), who writes that spectacular aversion

> echo[es] Platonic doubts about physical appearances and about all the arts as third-hand reflections of the ideal." Thus the visual has come to be associated with the artificial and superficial: "Because the invisible surrounds and in some sense transcends the visible, the reduction of experience to visual imagery . . . will seem to liquidate essence (260-1). (P. 80)

Sarchett continues:

> In *Batman*, the Joker's antics offer a sustained commentary on popular culture, the media, and spectacularity. . . . With his rictal face, the Joker . . . provides an occasion for considering the vagaries of the visual image. The Joker, in effect, occasions a critique of the spectacularity of the mass media. Due to his beauty-product tampering, the glamour of Gotham City's newscasters is demystified as pure "image": without their makeup, they are haggard and ordinary. However, . . . the Joker does not seek to replace the "merely" superficial with any sort of "natural" or precommodified image. Instead, with all of Gotham's beauty products poisoned, he offers his own "new and improved Joker products," which transform consumers into visual replicas of himself. The Joker, as maker and unmaker of art(ifice) and as consummate capitalist, demonstrates that visual codes—here, beauty codes—are contingently perceived and valued. Under capitalism, indeed, all value floats. (Pp. 80-81)

Sarchett's comments are instructive here but evidence a slight confusion: the "new and improved Joker products" are not offered instead of the poisoned commodities but are the poisoned commodities themselves. Thus, no consumer survives being transformed into a visual replica of the Joker, a fact that underscores the film's anxieties about the destructive "nature" of visual replication itself. Joker figures figuration, represents representation, as toxic assault. The liquidation of essence, of positive identity, that is represented by Joker's permanently rictalized/rectalized face—a facial embodiment of the Bataillean solar anus[11]—enacts not just the liquidities of capitalism, in which all values float, but a mass(ive) cultural *Durchfall* into which masculine "essence," by virtue of its very dependence on abjectly "feminizing" representation, must take a heavy plunge.

And yet, Joker's figural ambiguity should be recalled here: he not only embodies the threat that mechanical reproduction as a "feminizing" process poses to the dominant fiction of unimpaired masculinity; he also enacts, as we shall see, a masculinist aggression against the feminine image on which that fiction depends. This ambiguity expresses the crucial carnal irony of the dominant fiction, but it also thematicizes what I have already called the film's inevitably masochistic iconoclasm: *Batman* is a film that simultaneously revels in and mourns its own status as image, *as film*, foregrounding its own anxieties about its pulpy comic origins and about its uneasy status between seriously "high" or masculinist cinematic artiness and laughably "low" or feminized, kitschy mass commerce. Engulfing itself in the liquefying flux of imagistic violence from which it seems to want extrication, enacting while exposing the displacements and projections it warns against, questioning the numerous boundaries on which it nonetheless insists, *Batman* itself unavoidably becomes the commodified toxic event it fears.

These points are supported by the sequences leading up to and through Joker's chemical warfare on Gotham, photographic sequences that work both to liquefy the distinction between chemicals and photography (an already liquefied distinction in one sense anyway, since photographs depend on chemical immersion to develop) and to relate the chemistry (or alchemy) of photographic representation to femininity, waste, and death. After incinerating a criminal rival with a hand buzzer (the charred remains are positioned against the background of large mural of a nude woman), Joker instructs his goon Bob (Tracey Walter) to follow Knox, to find out what he knows about Batman, and to take his camera. But just as Bob is following and shooting the feminized Knox (Joker will later refer to him as a "loss"), so Vale is trailing and taking photographs of Bruce Wayne. During this surveillance, Danny Elfman's score faintly alludes to Bernard Hermann's music for Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (it will do so more conspicuously later in the bell-tower sequence), and this allusion suggests an interesting gender inversion. In *Vertigo*, Scotty (James Stewart) follows Madeline (Kim Novak) through the coiling streets of San Francisco in an attempt to penetrate and explain her "mystery." Here, it is

the woman who for similar reasons follows the man and "catches" him revisiting the scene of his greatest trauma and vulnerability. (Even Wayne's laying of roses at the site of his parents' murder mimes Madeline's petal-dropping performance at the Presidio just before she jumps into the bay in a faked suicide attempt.) Gender inversion is further suggested when Bob's photographic surveillance of Knox, which already mirrors Vale's of Wayne, seeps over to Vale herself: Knox and Wayne are linked to Vale, and hence, again, "feminized," by virtue of being subjected to photographic representation.

The representational aura of this sequence is underscored when Joker's goons start to appear on the scene "disguised" as street mimes. The irony is that even though they are doing what mimes do, performing exactly what and as mimes perform, they are not "really" mimes. They are *miming mimes*, and the destructive power of mimeticism, its propensity to liquidate essence, is literalized at the moment when these killer simulacra pull out their machine guns and commence an indiscriminate slaughter, a shooting that occurs just after Joker has liquidated another rival, this time with a writing quill, itself an archaic implement of representation.

The relations among representation, slaughter, photo-toxicity, gender instability, and the Joker's analized laughter begin to emerge more explicitly in the immediately following sequences, as do the film's more disturbing racial politics. Just after punching Harvey Dent's televised face with the mechanical boxing glove, Joker announces, "This town needs an enema!" Shortly thereafter, we see Vale examining her black-and-white photographs of Wayne: "Mister Wayne," she murmurs in puzzlement, as if his "mystery" in some way complicated his status as a "Mister." The camera cuts to a close shot of a table strewn with black-and-white photos of ludicrously grinning but obviously dead men along with a manila envelope stamped "CIA: DDOD Nerve Gas—Discontinued 1977." In other words, these men have not only been photographed but gassed, eliminated, and the shot works to imply a connection between gaseous elimination and the harm that photography can do to men.

Zooming out and panning left, the camera reveals the Joker cutting up photos with scissors, engulfed now not in a vat of chemical waste but in a sea of photographic fragments of the CIA mass murder. When Bob reports with his photos of Knox and Vale (curiously, the Knox photo seems posed), Joker is captivated by Vale and takes his scissors to her. "So hard to stay inside the lines," he laughs, indicating that he is in fact mutilating her image. Here, Joker's duplicity is figured succinctly: he not only represents the feminizing and abjecting "mutilation" to which representation submits masculinity but submits femininity to aggressive mutilation as well. He figures a bewildering threat both to and of the femininity that Batman must correspondingly both protect and protect himself against. As we shall see, what this means for Batman is that he must protect Vale as an image, as an object that he can safely manipulate in the armored balletics of his own *fort/da*, while protecting

himself from her ability to make images, to turn *him* into a photograph. In any case, this scene ends with an overhead shot of Joker waltzing in his heap of broken images. We then cut to the Axis Chemical Plant, where Joker is overseeing the export of his cannistered chemical weapons of mass-cultural destruction. Underlining the anally explosive fury of his aggressivity, he hysterically bellows "Ship 'em all! We're gonna take 'em out a whole new door!" Having once been the site of his corrosive immersion in waste, Axis is now Joker's own projective arsenal—with the emphasis on the arse.[12]

Batman's thematization of its anxieties about the toxic, liquifying, feminizing potential of specular mimeticism comes to a head in the Fluggenheim Museum scene and the chase/fight sequence that follows it. As Sarchett (1996) points out, the museum scene "occurs just at the narrative center of the film and otherwise suggests its centrality for those interested in cultural hierarchies because it is an overt scene of cultural transgression" (p. 74). While Sarchett persuasively explores the high versus popular, Mozart versus Prince aspects of this transgressive scene, as well as its racial politics, I will focus on the gendered matters of Joker's "homicidal" art.[13] In a prelude to the museum sequence, we see Joker sitting before a mirror in Alicia's apartment, calmly applying the toxic makeup that has already claimed a number of fashion victims. When Alicia appears, ominously masked, in the same mirror, the identification between her and Joker as manufactured images—an identification that was first suggested in Grissom's apartment—is reemphasized, as is the idea that masculinity is, no less than femininity, a masquerade. Joker, however, highlights the real power asymmetry of this masquerade by ironically assuming the position of father and producer: "Daddy's going to make some art," he tells Alicia.[14]

Inside the Fluggenheim, having gassed all the patrons but the gas-masked Vale, Joker and his goons "improve" the paintings with infantile flingings and smearings that are so exuberantly fecal that the word "party" in Prince's boom-boxed "Party Man" starts to sound like "potty."[15] But Joker is not merely desecrating high-cultural monuments: rather, he is revealing the long-standing cultural anxiety—indeed, as Bratlinger's (1983) comments above remind us, an anxiety as old as Plato—that art, particularly painting, by virtue of being representation, by virtue of being something made seen, is already a liquification of essence, a desecration, rather than a preservation, of some (supposedly) invisible transcendent truth. As Lacan (1978) puts it,

> The authenticity of what emerges in painting is diminished in us human beings by the fact that we have to get our colours where they're to be found, that is to say, in the shit. . . . The creator will never participate in anything other than the creation of small dirty deposit, a succession of small dirty deposits juxtaposed. (P. 117)

Joker's laughter destroys transcendence, as Bataille puts it, or at least destroys the idea that art can provide or secure authenticity or essence. Moreover, if the terms *essence* and *transcendence* have functioned historically in the reproduction of the dominant fiction of unimpaired masculinity, then we can read Joker's claim that he is the "first fully functioning homicidal artist" as a comment less about *his* art than about the "homicidal," masculinity-impairing "nature" of art itself. When Joker displays the disfigured Alicia and says "now *like me* she's a living work of art," the words I've stressed indicate this demasculinizing effect of art, its propensity to figure an identification with the feminine. At the same time, Joker clearly upholds and literalizes the masculinist power of art to contain the feminine through objectifying representational violence: "Alicia here has been made over in line with my new philosophy." Again, Joker illuminates the carnal irony of the dominant fiction of unimpaired masculinity: to sustain itself, that fiction, which depends on representation, must displace the inevitable impairments of representation—its propensity to objectify and abject, to turn its subjects into cultural waste—onto the feminine.

As the Fluggenheim sequence suggests, that abject propensity, while magnified in modern, mass-reproductive modes of representation such as photography and cinema, is already inscribed in high-cultural painting as well (correspondingly, any distinction between art-cinema and commercial cinema is also undercut). Thus, the sequence raises some interesting questions about artistic evaluation as well as about symbolic or exchange value. Joker foregrounds the former in by now familiar terms—that is, terms that underscore the film's understanding of the threat of film itself to masculinity—when he examines Vale's photography portfolio: her fashion shots, exclusively of women (some of whom are black), are all "crap," but her male-corpse-strewn Corto Maltese material is "good work": "I don't know if it's art, but I like it!" Sarchett (1996) comments that this judgment makes Joker's "cultural standards even more ambiguous" (p. 76), although I would say that it helps underline the film's examination of the ambiguity of cultural standards as such, not just Joker's. That is, if Joker embodies the "collapse" or *Durchfall* of cultural standards, then his embodiment works to reveal the vulnerability of standards themselves to such collapse.

This vulnerability is highlighted when the ambiguous matter of money is again brought to the surface. Joker refers to the Gilbert Stuart portrait of Washington as "the one-dollar bill" and later tells Vale that he wants his own face on that piece of currency. Sarchett (1996) remarks that Joker, in "clichéd philistine fashion," here "conflate[s] aesthetic value with commodity capital" while "simultaneously foregrounding his own (high) cultural illiteracy" (p. 76). Ross (1990), in a somewhat strained reading, refers to Joker's monetary desire as "A straight trade . . . that plays upon the very worst of white

fears: the Joker's ambiguously coloured face for that of the slave-owner George Washington" (p. 31). Although not completely off the mark, both Sarchett and Ross miss the way Joker's desire to substitute his solar anus of a face for that of Washington threatens to return monetary value, the restricted economy of the national treasury itself, to the ancient interests and general economy of the infantile playpen. After all, money is, again, a form of representation—after the collapse of the gold standard, exclusively so—and as such it is especially susceptible to abject psychosymbolic conversion. Joker later underlines this susceptibility when he announces that he will "dump" a million dollars into the streets of Gotham—a "dumping" that is followed by another lethal fumigation, tendered this time by giant parade balloons (one of which takes the form of a mewling infant).

In one sense, Batman's numerous monetary debasements can be read as the film's negotiation of its anxieties about its own art/commodity status: though in ways recognizably an art film, it nonetheless "flooded" the streets and malls of 1989 America not only with its own projected image but with "Tee shirts, posters, keychains, jewelry, buttons, books, watches, magazines, trading cards, audiotaped books, videogames, records, cups, and numerous other items" (Meehan 1991, 47). As a result, the film made a "pile" for Time-Warner. Just as the diamond the old woman throws into the ocean at the end of James Cameron's Titanic (1997) can be read as a metaphor for that film's historically unprecedented $200 million budget, so might Joker's "dump" be read as a metaphor for the anxious fort/da of Batman's own expenditures and returns.

There is, however, another sense in which Joker's dump is significant, and that has to do with the way the film's anxieties about abjection also articulate fears about HIV/AIDS. Two sequences are important here. At the end of the scene in the plastic surgeon's office, we see Joker leaving that dungeon by walking up a staircase, laughing hysterically, his body moving diagonally from the left side of the screen up to the right. We then cut to the interior of Wayne Manor and a shot of Wayne and Vale ascending a staircase, tipsy from champagne, their bodies moving diagonally from right up to left. The mirroring effect of this cut is amplified in the soundtrack by the way Joker's laughter seeps over into the scene of the couple's ascent. But since that laughter is itself the product of corrosive chemical "contamination," and since Wayne and Vale are in fact on their way to have sex, the seepage of Joker's laughter into that sexual prelude seems to allude to the danger of contamination posed by unprotected intercourse. The prophylactic nature of Wayne's latex-ish bat suit becomes more conspicuous here.

The second sequence is rather more pointed and homophobic. After Joker has lured Gothamites into the streets with the promise of "dumping" a million dollars on them, and has gassed them instead, Vale encounters one of the gas victims, who, still clutching the dirty money, plasters himself across the windshield of her car. I will risk saying that this man seems to me to be coded

as gay and that Vale's response to his suffering—which is not to try to help him but to shriek in horror—seems significant in the light of that coding: the man is not just poisoned by Joker but is now himself the carrier of contamination. Knox has already condemned "Gotham's greed"—Gothamites, like "sodomites" in homophobic fantasies, give in to their desires in the streets—and although Batman comes along to save everyone, the film does not seem particularly concerned with the victims' status as human beings; rather, it implies that they more or less deserve the contamination that Joker dumps on them.

I have suggested that Joker, in representing representation, figures as a threat both to and of femininity. Similarly, Vicki Vale, in her position as both photographed and photographer, represents the potential both to stabilize masculinity and to abject it. Thus, Batman's stance toward Vale is mixed: he must protect both her body from the Joker and his own body from her gaze. This duplicity is enacted in the chase/fight sequence following the Fluggenheim scene. Trapped in an alley by Joker's goons, Batman uses his line to hoist Vale to safety atop a building then drops back into the alley to do battle. Momentarily laid low, Batman lies supine in the alley while the goons examine his body armor. Realizing they cannot "check his wallet" to discover his identity, they begin to lift off his cowl. "He's human, after all," says one, his voice suddenly avuncular.

At this moment of Batman's most conspicuous vulnerability and impairment, Vale attempts to take pictures from the top of the building. The goons turn on her with particular vehemence. "Shoot her!" Bob cries, and in this exchange, in which Vale shoots and the goons shoot back, it's as if the goons themselves had suddenly become Batman's agents, the aggressive protectors of his identificatory soft spot. The close juxtaposition of the lines "he's human" and "shoot her," punctuated only by Vale's flash, works to gender as feminine both the photographic and the ballistic targets. The soft, human vulnerability beneath the hypermasculinized body armor is exposed as "feminine," and protected from Vale's penetrating, abjecting gaze, at the same time that her body is threatened with a more serious, retaliatory penetration. Thus, the sequence enacts the dominant fiction's guiding representational logic: exposure of male vulnerability is answered with a violent and amplified displacement of that very vulnerability onto the feminine. Batman reinscribes this displacement when, after chasing the goons away, he greets Vale with a hostile remark about her weight, a reminder of her embodied subjection to the gravity that he effectively transcends. He then whisks Vale away to the Batcave for a ravishment the main point of which is to relieve her of her "damaging" film.

Batman's view of the nature of representational damage—abjecting, feminizing, deadly—is insisted on one more time in the following scene in Vale's apartment. The fashionably clad Wayne has appeared there to tell Vale who he really is, and his difficulties in announcing his identity underscore his

vulnerability yet again: Armanied but unarmored, he cannot bring himself to lay bare or represent his identity to Vale. The potential price of such exposure is suggested when Joker unexpectedly appears. After shooting Wayne—seemingly transforming him from fashionable "crap" to Corto Maltese-ish corpse (although, as we discover, he has shielded himself)— Joker makes a thematically conspicuous exit. As he dances out of Vale's apartment in slow motion, Elfman's score turns heavy and lugubrious, a musical rendition of a *Durchfall*. Once in the hallway, Joker mimics flatulent self-propulsion, as if he were shitting on while escaping the scene of his crime—or perhaps, as if any representational "scene" were in itself abjectly homicidal. And on the wall behind him, the background for this flatulent dance is—unsurprisingly—a Titianesque painting of a supine nude woman, a figure whose posture replicates that of the supposedly wasted Wayne.

By the end of the film, however, it is the Joker who has become thoroughly representational, a walking compilation of wind-up, chattering fake teeth; phony appendages; and guns that no longer shoot but only produce flags that say "Bang!" (suggesting not that cinematic violence is "merely" representational but that representation itself is violence). Whereas Batman is vulnerable on the inside but invulnerable, because armored, on the out, Joker seems soft on the outside but indestructible, because artificial, in his interior. Even after he has taken his final fatal plunge, and lies leering up at the law from the cracked pavement, his signature laughter persists as the "soulless" mechanical wheeze of a toy laugh box. Batman, on the other hand, has saved himself and Vale from the fall, and both now hang safely suspended above the mess of the Joker's demise.

Soon we have Harvey Dent telling us that Batman has made the streets of Gotham safe again and will return whenever we need him. And how, Knox asks, will he know? Commissioner Gordon, in one of Batman's supremely self-reflexive moments, responds by revealing what is, in effect, a giant projector and cries, "He gave us a signal!" Several ironies are at work here: not only is the projection machine no less mechanical than Joker's laugh box, but the image it projects is already, by the time of the film's distribution, a mass-produced commodity saturating the market as aggressively as any of Joker's chemical products. Moreover, as Silverman (1992) reminds us, projection itself is always only "a tenuous barrier . . . since what has been cast violently away will continue to threaten from without" (p. 47).

As if to stress again the nature of the threat, the camera takes us back into a cloacal alley—now presumably sanitized for our protection—for one last look at Vale's face, then pans up and out of the city for the final shot of Batman, standing erect at the top of a skyscraper, gazing now not down at antipatriarchal crime but up in reverence at the projection of the very bat insignia with which the film began, this one now "purely" light and shadow, cast loose from its earlier, more material engulfment: a representational image that supposedly signifies Batman's salvation from, and transcendence of, representation

itself—as well as his ability to save us from its evil clutches. But if we know what the film has so repeatedly told us we are looking at, and understand all of the mechanisms of projection that the film has both undercut and reinscribed, then, despite the triumphant swellings of Elfman's score, we might still hear in the background the traces of a subversive laughter that works to destroy the transcendence of any signal that any Batman might give.

In this article, I have argued that *Batman* discloses numerous traces of a specifically masculinist anxiety about the relation between the male body and the cinematic apparatus. It could be counterargued that, given men's position of power in patriarchy, the camera, despite its capacity to turn men's bodies into mass-produced images, cannot really objectify, abject, or disempower them at all. If this is the case, if patriarchy does firmly secure men in positions of immunity from the cinematic threat, then male filmmakers like Tim Burton should be informed that they have nothing to worry about. Of course, in one sense, Burton's film simply obeys the protocols of narrative convention concerning conflict and resolution, and his audiences were obviously thrilled to witness once again the reassuring spectacle of bourgeois patriarchal order threatened and restored. But the very need for such reiterative reassurance signifies the insecurity, and the instability, at the heart of the order itself. *Batman* is an enormously protective projection, to be sure, but it is a projection that, on close examination, reveals an anxious awareness of the tenuousness of the very barriers it erects. The fact that those barriers are tenuous, and that the patriarchal order they protect is constituitively unstable, is itself a signal of the possibility of change.

NOTES

1. The phrase "technology of abjection" belongs to Diana Fuss (1992) and will be elaborated further on in the article.

2. In "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," Freud (1953-74) writes "it is a universal conviction among children, who long retain the cloaca theory, that babies are born from the bowel like a piece of faeces: defaecation is the model of birth" (vol. 22, p. 100).

3. In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Silverman (1992) uses the term *historical trauma* to describe a significant disruption in what she calls "the dominant fiction," that is, the "ideological belief [through which] a society's 'reality' is constituted and sustained, and [through which] a subject lays claim to a normative identity" (p. 15).

4. See West's (1993) introduction to his *Race Matters*.

5. Readers of Klaus Theweleit's (1987) *Male Fantasies* who are sensitive to what Tony Bennett (1991) calls "the fascistic element in Batman's advocacy of vigilanticism" (p. vii) will note the recurrence of the word *flood* here and its relevance to Theweleit's analysis of the construction of the armored egos of the fascist male warrior: the Freikorps men consistently figure the dark, feminine, Jewish current of communism as the "flood" against which they must steel themselves.

6. Compare Barry Sanders (1995) in *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History*:

Philosopical documents on laughter, religious statements and mandates forbidding laughter—all these provide instructions on how and when and how hard to laugh. They

designate the proper attitude one should take toward laughter, because laughter is our last "sense" to capitulate to authority. No other bodily function requires such attention and close supervision. We may ask, "Is the baby potty trained?" but no one would dare wonder, "Does the baby have its laughter under control?" And yet, no other bodily function demands such controls, as if laughter dogged us as a vestige of some earlier, incontinent time—a more primitive period when we laughed and defecated and took our pleasure at will. Neatly tucked away, safely hidden from view, laughter threatens to blow our adult, civilized cover at every moment. (P. 25)

Note also certain similarities: the sphincterish quality of a camera's shutter (which complicates the image of the camera as the mediator of a penetrating gaze, since the camera in effect has to be penetrated by light to work); the fact that the muscles that control the opening and shutting of the eye are called sphincters; the pun, no doubt made many times before in psychoanalytically inflected film theory, on the reel of the fort/da, the cinematic reel, and real. On a not completely unrelated matter, let's note before leaving the scene in Alicia's apartment that it articulates the only conspicuously—and conspicuously disposable—Oedipal component of *Batman*'s narrative. Alicia is, in fact, the squeeze of aging crime boss Carl Grissom (Jack Palance), and her affair with somewhat younger Jack is supposedly secret. When Jack says that Grissom will hand Harvey Dent his lungs, Alicia tells him that if Grissom finds out about them, he will hand Jack "something else," thus reminding him of the father's standard phantasized punishment for desiring the mother's body, castration. Later Jack, as Joker, transgressively fulfills the Oedipal paradigm, not by identifying with Grissom but by killing him in the first of many gruesome burlesques.

7. For the connection, within the masculinist imaginary, between mass culture and femininity, see Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" in *After the Great Divide* (1986).

8. Abjection is, of course, a major element in the psychosocial structure of racist phantasy: recall here that far-right white supremacist groups like Christian Identity refer to blacks and Jews as "mud-people."

9. To my knowledge, the reading of *Batman* most sensitive to its racial politics is Ross's (1990). But Ross misses a few points. For example, considering Frank Miller's *Dark Knight*, Ross writes,

> Most relevant to the film which it influenced . . . was the racially-specific way in which *Dark Knight* treats the question of vigilanteism. The book presents a world of urban crime in which all the street gangs are extremist whites, identifiably right-wing and libertarian. The result, in terms of black representation, is invisibility. *As in the Warner film*, Miller's deviants, delinquents and psychopaths are exclusively white, while their depiction draws freely upon stereotypes about criminal and deviant behaviour that are usually applied to black and other minority subcultures. (Pp. 33-34, my emphasis)

Apparently, Ross is so busy establishing black invisibility in Batman that he fails to notice that the most extended fight sequence in the Warner film, the one in which Batman gets his ass most seriously kicked, involves a conspicuously black adversary who, in one of the film's visually darkest sequences (in the *Vertigo*-ish bell tower), wears sunglasses. In any case, I am confused by Ross's argument here, for he seems to be asserting that the racial politics of Batman would have somehow been improved if more of the deviants, delinquents, and psychopaths had been black.

10. In "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Leo Bersani (1987) posits sexuality as self-shattering and the "self-shattering into the sexual as a kind of nonanecodotal self-debasement . . . in which, so to speak, the self is exuberantly discarded" (pp. 217-18).

11. For Bataille's (1985) extrapolations on the solar anus, see *Visions of Excess*.

12. I read the line "ship 'em out a whole new door" as expressing anal fury because of its resonance with the threat involving tearing someone "a whole new asshole."

13. Sarchett (1996) writes,

The Joker is the seditious, nihilistic destroyer of beauty, order, and art, replacing the spiritual, European Mozart with the sensual, ethnic Prince. According to the zero-sum economy of High Art acolytes, the bad necessarily drives out the good, and so the Joker—purveyor of the popular—logically destroys the sacred Rembrandts, Degases, and other masterpieces. Just as street-culture has invaded high culture, so too is Gotham threatened by the various punks, thieves, and murderers who have made the streets unsafe for the law-abiding (white) bourgeoisie. (P. 74)

14. Like the word *stuff* earlier, the word *make* starts to take on a certain resonance here, from making art to "making mookie," to the you-made-me-I-made-you exchange in Batman and Joker's final confrontation. Conspicuously, Joker tells Batman, "You made me when you dropped me into that vat of chemicals." Note that Batman does not contest Joker's charge that he intentionally dropped him rather than just letting him slip.

15. In one sense, the Fluggenheim seems appropriately set up for such shenanigans, for unlike any museum I have ever visited, in this one the restaurant is conspicuously placed inside the gallery. Thus are the sites of artistic reception and food consumption mixed, and one does not have to follow the analogy too far to arrive at the other end of the alimentary canal and the "mixture" of artistic production and defecation.

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