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THE QUENTIN KIND:
VISUAL NARRATIVE AND
THE NAKED CIVIL SERVANT

MARK ARMSTRONG

PhD

2012

The Quentin Kind: Visual Narrative
and *The Naked Civil Servant*

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Abstract

This thesis offers a close reading of Quentin Crisp's auto/biographical representations, most particularly *The Naked Civil Servant*. Published in 1968, Crisp's autobiography was dramatized for Thames Television in 1975, a film that would prove seminal in the history of British broadcasting and something of a 'quantum leap' in the medium's representation of gay lives. As an interpretative study, it offers a scope of visual and narrative analyses that assess Crisp's cultural figure – his being both an 'icon' in gay history and someone against which gay men's normative sense of masculinity could be measured. According to particular thematic concerns that allow for the correspondent reading of the visual and the literary auto/biographical text, this thesis considers the reception of that image and the binary meanings of *fashioning* it embodies. It explores not the detailed materiality of Crisp's figure but its effects – the life that his fashioning determined and the fashioning of that life in textual discourse and media rhetoric. Observing Crisp as a performer of the auto/biographical, the following themes are addressed: the biopic, its tropes and 'the body too much'; desire, otherness and the 'great dark man'; the circumscribed life of the art school model; the 'exile' of a Chelsea bedsit; and the drag of a queer dotage.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Name: Mark Armstrong

Signature:

Date: 31 January 2012

Introduction: 'Someone like Quentin'

I find it hard to take a prolonged look back and not attempt to excuse results by rearranging causes. Though intelligence is powerless to modify character, it is a dab hand at finding euphemisms for its weaknesses. D. H. Lawrence said that it was not living life that mattered but watching it being lived. I would say that it was not watching life that mattered but explaining what you saw (Crisp, 1977a, p.215).

In exploring Quentin Crisp's queerness and its fashioning, its representations and self-representations, this thesis stands at an intersection of several academic discourses, including auto/biographical theory, gay studies, queer theory, and the inter-disciplines of visual culture. Each of these offers a lens through which particular visual narratives of Crisp's life can be examined. In synthesis, these establish a methodology that allows for the liberal reading of the machinations behind this visually reconstructed life, and thus a consideration of the meanings which it acquired, drawing on Crisp's life as a text in which the body at its centre reveals discreet conflicts of ideology – a body at once political/apolitical, and culturally representative/liminal. In proposing Crisp's public figure to have been defined by visual narratives, it is the 1975 biopic of his autobiography, *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968), which stands as primary text here. While there is narrative evident also in the media representations of Crisp that were the consequence of that film, and which are critical to this thesis, those original writings held their own persuasive sense of the visual. Recent studies such as Maria Tamboukou's *Nomadic Narratives, Visual Forces: Gwen John's Letters and Paintings* (2010), and *In the Fold Between Power and Desire: Women Artist's Narratives* (2010), and Tzu Yu Allison Lin's *Narrative and Visual Arts in Virginia Woolf's London Writings: The Aesthetics of Words and Arts* (2011), employ approaches to visual narrative that allow their authors to look at the lives of their subject's as all-encompassed by politics of 'being'. Indeed, what is revealed in these histories is the complexity of unravelling representation from self-representation, and of the questions that have to be asked to understand what such lives mean, circumscribed as they were by gender, sexuality, period and societal position. Such a reading of Crisp's life adds to the body of literature on the historicization of twentieth century gay lives, and develops an understanding of how, from their

abbreviated, and seemingly heterogeneous, visual, media, and literary representations, more nuanced meanings can be recovered.

Crisp's autobiography (figure 1) held vivid dramatic potential, considering the difficulties through which he had lived. In the wake of the film's success, with John Hurt persuasive in the role (figure 2), and the public celebration that Crisp himself experienced – unexpected for someone so relatively obscure and now in their sixties – he would produce a further volume of autobiography, *How to Become a Virgin* (1981). In this he reflected upon the belated celebrity he had found and the means through which he had achieved such cultural visibility. He was attentive particularly to the received image of queerness that he had come to personify. He suggests that if the 'housewives' prototypical of Britain's social mores at that time were asked what they expected a gay man to look like, the response would be 'someone like Quentin' (Crisp, 1981, p.83). Indeed, in Crisp's image, in the 1970s, the public found a byword for queerness – the very name Quentin became the embodiment of an effeminate nature, and indeed a schoolyard taunt.¹

Elizabeth Wilson considers the material expression of queerness to have been significant among 'the great struggles of the twentieth century', a resistance of the heteronormative that engendered a critical shift in 'the definition of what it means to be a man or a woman', and she summons the explicit language that queer more recently has at once recovered and veiled in its synonymy of gender and sexual dissidence; 'we may look back and say that it has been the gay century ... in which the figures of the dyke and faggot have come out to challenge the inevitability of heterosexuality' (Wilson, 1994, p.176). Crisp's figure was principal amongst visual representations of queerness in 1970s Britain, and the essentialism with which his life was re-presented to a mass audience would seem a radical re-claiming of sexual otherness in a medium that had long been cautious of the 'homosexual question'. Indeed, scriptwriter Philip Mackie's adaptation of Crisp's writings was rejected several times at the BBC; but while the film would be five years in the making, there was great faith placed in the story at Thames Television. It would prove seminal in the history of British broadcasting – and a 'quantum leap' in the representation of gay lives (Howes, 1993, p.534). Crisp's figure would however antagonise elements of the newly mobilised gay 'community'. In his celebrity, he was portrayed as martyr as much

as icon, and would anticipate this in his writings, describing how his fashioning had become 'a Carnaby Street hair-shirt' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.216-217).

While such a referent of place may have been very much of that moment – the late-1960s in which *The Naked Civil Servant* was published – the allusion to which it was bound was not. Crisp's narrative of the fashioned self was defined by both the freedoms and the intolerances of London as he had experienced them, from the late-1920s, but that illusory cloth, with the intimations of martyrdom it wove, was even more anachronistic amidst the emerging topography of gay masculinity.² That Crisp's autobiography was written just before the 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting adult men in Britain, a decade after the Wolfenden Committee's report had advised such legislation, and would be published just months afterwards, is resonant in his own allusion to the advocates of such reform, summoned at the close of his writings as he reflects on why the effeminate queerness he had fashioned should have elicited the violent censure it did – and its apparent political inefficacy now, in the late-1960s;

What happened? What went wrong? This is the question that, from a throat parched by brick dust, I ask the rescue party as they lean for a moment's rest on their Reform Bills and their Acts of Parliament. When they see me tottering toward them they find it difficult not to recoil. I am the survivor they hoped they would not find—something too broken to be restored to active life but not quite ready for decent burial. My lips still move (Crisp, 1977a, p.215).

Crisp received the opinion from *Gay News* that his autobiography should have been published posthumously as 'a literary way of saying, 'Drop dead'' (Crisp, 1981, p.84). *Gay News* was a symbol of the newly emancipated gay culture, and of its increasingly commercial as much as political nature – a landscape in which Crisp's figure, for some, was quite obsolete. The extraordinary past that was the consequence of his being so visibly queer revealed for a mass audience a representative of an apparently vanishing sexual terrain; in many ways its most trophy survivor, Crisp was equally a figure of the nascent panorama of sexual and gender permissibility that so defined the 1960s and 70s. The objective of this thesis is to position Crisp's figure within these debates, and in the historicization of gender and sexual dissidence, and to consider the interstices between

representation and self-representation. The following literature review should give rationale to its interdisciplinary methodology.

Literature Review

There are particular bodies of knowledge that have shaped the thinking behind this thesis, and while thematic focus here demands incursions into seemingly disparate disciplines, certain discourses and texts continue to define the ways in which Crisp's life is looked at – and to frame it as a life worth looking at. The body of literature that this research demands is expansive, but the texts given evaluation here are those through which the methodology and historical contextualisation has been determined, and amongst which this thesis is positioned.

Crisp has been subject for several biographers, including Tim Fountain (2002) and Nigel Kelly (2011), who provide somewhat 'cut and paste' retellings of Crisp's life, with little contextualisation of what it in fact meant. *The Stately Homo: A Celebration of the Life of Quentin Crisp* (Bailey, 2000) gave various commemorations after his death in 1999. Andrew Barrow's *Quentin and Philip: A Memoir* (2002a), a double portrait of Crisp and his acquaintance Philip O'Connor, is perhaps the more revealing of these texts, with its intimate dissection of Crisp's life before and after *The Naked Civil Servant*.³ In those histories that sought to 'reclaim' gay lives and experience, published whilst Crisp was still alive, he figures as someone whose material expression of queerness was almost singular; in projects such as the excavation of 'hidden histories', for example Alkarim Jivani's *It's Not Unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century* (1997), and Hugh David's *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995* (1997), Crisp's insistence on visibility is recognised as a remarkable assertion of the body politic, long before that term was conceived and given currency in discourses on gender and sexual identities. Such histories however, given their nature, are not able to evaluate with any depth the position from which Crisp spoke of his experiences.

Gay autobiographical writing has been subject to increased academic interest in the past decade or so, and in *Gay Lives: Homosexual Autobiography from John Addington Symonds to Paul Monette* (1999), Paul Robinson includes

Crisp amongst his subjects, with an essay that constitutes one of the few serious academic treatments of Crisp and the life he made textual.⁴ Amongst the criteria that Robinson would employ in selecting his subjects was that they should be artists and intellectuals, as the autobiographical writings of these promise a far more 'rich subjectivity' (Robinson, 1999, x). In the acute differences evident amongst his subjects and the narratives they offer, Robinson observes the epistemological dilemma of 'gay autobiography', and, by implication, 'gay life' (1999, xii). But the 'very act of writing a gay autobiography', Robinson suggests, 'implies a degree of identification with one's fellow homosexuals' – that at some level any act of autobiography has to be seen as a political act (1999, xvii).

Like Robinson before him, Bertram J. Cohler's *Writing Desire: Sixty Years of Gay Autobiography* (2007), looks at texts (though all American) in which the differences of generational experience are clear, with authors born between the 1930s and 1980s. Recent edited collections such as *Queer Lives: Men's Autobiographies from Nineteenth-century France* (Peniston and Erber, 2007), and *Gay American Autobiography: Writings from Whitman to Sedaris* (Bergman, 2009), offer extracts of what might have otherwise become forgotten lives. As Bergman suggests in his introduction, gay autobiographies 'have had a difficult time finding acceptance with heterosexual readers' (Bergman, 2007, xvi), a valid observation still, but even more so when *The Naked Civil Servant* was published, and critical in contextualising the shift in Crisp's narrative from the page to the screen. While his autobiography would make the 'bestseller list' in 1968 (Barrow, 2002a, p.308),⁵ he remained a marginal cultural figure. With the broadcast of its film adaptation, Crisp found a celebrity that no literary success could have determined.

As a seminal voice in auto/biography studies, Paul John Eakin's work has helped enlarge one of the most critical concerns of this thesis – the subjectivity and autonomy evident in what a life is made to 'look' like. In *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (2008), Eakin surveys the processes through which the autobiographical subject fashions narratives of self and identity. Eakin considers how culture and its institutions 'teach the individual what lives look like, while it is the individual who chooses [or does not choose ...] to live a particular kind of life and become the person predicated by that life' (Eakin, 2008, p.147). In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting*

Life Narratives (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explore the formation of autobiographical subjectivity through memory, experience and self-identity. What they, and likewise Eakin, term the 'autobiographical act' – in respect of how the subject 'does' or indeed performs the narrativisation of their life – is an apposite term when looking at Crisp's life.⁶ In her *New Critical Idiom* guide to autobiography (2001), Linda Anderson observes how the life narrative can articulate, through one subject's experiences, those that become 'representative of a particular marginalized group ... a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition' (Anderson, 2001, p.104). That such assumed representativity can be problematic was a fact that Crisp himself acknowledged in discourse around his particular image of queerness, and is a cornerstone issue of this thesis.

Where Eakin considers the tropes of self-fashioning that are so often a trait of life narratives (Eakin, 2008, p.85), Crisp's allusion in the opening of *The Naked Civil Servant* to an existentialist consciousness – his suggestion that 'Perhaps Jean-Paul Sartre would be kind enough to say that I exercised the last vestiges of my free will by swimming with the tide – but faster' (Crisp, 1977a, p.7) – is redolent with Sartre's claim that 'One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way' (Sartre, 1988, p.39). Crisp's writings and the further acts of autobiography in which he engaged were highly practised, with a strong sense of the performative – his frequent use of 'normal' and 'real' to portray the heterosexual masses that his fashioning was meant to enlighten perhaps the most provocative illustration of this. Where concepts of performativity were made central to the development of queer theory, in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), Judith Butler suggested that performativity 'describes [the] relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power' (Butler, 1993, p.241). In reading Crisp as performative subject, there is revealed a militant confrontation with a culture and society censorious of his manifest queerness – something that was veiled, for many of his critics, beneath his arch literary style and the affectations of his media discourse. In his study of camp as literary genre, proposed to be as evident in memoir as it is in fiction, *Camp in Literature* (2006), Gary McMahon ascribes the academic neglect of Crisp's autobiography to his being so highly performative;

'another camp writer who hangs his prose on style rather than plot' (2006, pp.163-164). Joseph Bristow's study of effeminacy and its literary tropes, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (1995), looks at the 'taint' of effeminacy that is evident in its very disavowal in homoerotic literature, including the autobiographical, from the late-nineteenth through the twentieth century, with Crisp alluded to as a figure, for some writers, against which a normative sense of masculinity could be measured.

In Weeks' and Porter's *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* (1998), the collection of short autobiographical accounts of gay men's experiences in that period, Crisp is said by one contributor not to have been courageous but 'ridiculous' and 'pigheaded' (Weeks and Porter, 1998, p.45), while another, in many ways a contemporary of Crisp's in London, describes him as the 'bravest man in the world', but that even he would cross the road should he see him; 'he was persecuted by us as much as he was persecuted by everybody else' (Weeks and Porter, 1998, p.176). Such first-person narratives, as framed by the lawful and social illegitimacy of their experiences, aid an understanding of the provocation amongst 'one's own' in giving material expression to sexual otherness. In his seminal text on gay men's fashioning of sexual and social identity, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel': Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (2000), Shaun Cole considers those material practices against social and cultural attitudes towards same-sex desire, particularly in Britain. In Cole's text, Crisp stands again as a figure against which other gay men were able to determine their talents for acceptably masculine appearances.

The very fiction of 'Quentin Crisp' – his real name being Denis Pratt, 'before I dyed it' (Crisp, 1977a, p.16) – would enter the popular consciousness as a figure both reformist and regressive, in a conception of self conclusively demarcated by the act of fashioning, a term employed here as having meaning beyond the material practices of identity formation, or indeed the 'becoming' nature of identity. Even the most cursory survey of 'fashioning' in recent academic discourse – of the body and of the self through narrative representation – reveals the breadth of its meanings. Though with a more concentrated emphasis than Cole's, looking specifically at the 1920s, Laura Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Subculture* (2001) offers a further model for this thesis, in giving nuanced contextualisation to the lives of

those women who gave public image to such sexual difference, particularly the writer Radclyffe Hall. Beyond the body fashioned in expression of sexual and gender otherness, Judd Stitzel's *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (2005), for example, offers a very close lens to the fashioning of the collective social body, while Cynthia G. Kuhn's *Self-Fashioning in Margaret Atwood's Fiction: Dress, Culture, and Identity* (2005) considers the body and subjectivity that is fashioned in narrative. In such analyses, the materiality of selfhood is contextualised as a social and political body. Alistair O'Neill's *London – After a Fashion* (2007), maps the fashioned body against the city through the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though cited for example when looking at Crisp's career as an art school model, O'Neill provides a template for the liberal visual analysis of how lives are fashioned not simply in, but *by*, a particular place and time, and, of course, in revolt.

Twentieth-century gay lives have been represented almost exclusively as urban lives, and in *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis 1918-1957* (2005), Matt Houlbrook traces the reflexive relationship between gay men and the city. Not only are the decades of Houlbrook's survey those of Crisp's formative experiences, from the late-1920s, but he offers a geography that was determined by such factors as class as much as sexual otherness, and it is perhaps the most significant secondary text in this thesis, particularly given the precarious class position that Crisp himself occupied. Also focused on the city and gay men's appropriations of its social and sexual spaces, Richard Hornsey's *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (2010) considers the strategies for surviving the increased surveillance and policing of the 1950s, for finding a sense of place and belonging in the midst of such intensified persecution.

This thesis aims to employ the duality of 'queer', acknowledging its political re-appropriation and critical theorisation over the past twenty years, but also the historical contextualisation that queer lives like Crisp's demand. As an example of contemporaneous literature on the subject, in *Queer People: The Truth about Homosexuals in Britain* (1963), Douglas Plummer gave a plea for legal and social emancipation, with an assertion of his own normative sense of masculinity; 'I am a homosexual, a so-called 'queer' or 'pansy' ... If you met me you would not know I was homosexual. Nine out of ten of us are indistinguishable

from our fellows, in appearance, dress, or general behaviour. We are certainly not all effeminate ‘pansies’ in appearance’ (Plummer, 1963, p.15). Offering his own etymological enquiry into ‘queer’, Plummer attests to the shifts in meanings it had already undergone, explaining the resonance it had in the 1950s and 60s; ‘I want the book to be read by people who will understand what “queer” means, but might fight shy of the word homosexual ... Today, many people in Britain know the word as meaning homosexual, and nothing else’ (1963, pp.9-10). In *The Culture of Queers* (2002) Richard Dyer suggests that queer theory, in the 1990s, sought to reclaim that language ‘not so much to cleanse it of its negative associations as to challenge the assumption that these associations are in fact negative’ (Dyer, 2002, p.6). But Houlbrook considers the methodological dilemma of employing ‘queer’ today in the sense of Plummer’s use – and Crisp’s. For Houlbrook, it ‘cannot easily be mapped onto contemporary categories of queerness’, signifying as it once did a sense of difference from what was regarded as ‘normal’ sexuality – and a difference which could, though not always, be manifest in behaviours and appearance (Houlbrook, 2005, pp.6-7). It is amongst these debates that Crisp’s figure of effeminate queerness has to be positioned – debates that allow an equivalent consideration of the material expression of sexual otherness and the narrative representations, literary and visual, that they predicate.

Chapter subjects

While it was Crisp’s fashioning that made him ‘eligible’ as autobiographical subject, his writings are lacking in any nuance of material detail as to this principal aspect of his life – they place a rich and precise accent upon effect rather than cause. This thesis considers not just the material constructedness of identity, but the effect of image and its fashioning upon other aspects of the subject’s life. In the opening of his autobiography, Crisp writes of the effeminacy he fashioned as a ‘uniform’ that determined the worlds in which he lived; ‘the rest of my life solidified round me like a plaster cast ... my friends were anyone who could put up with the disgrace; my occupation, any job from which I was not given the sack; my playground, any café or restaurant from which I was not barred or any street corner from which the police did not move me on’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.7).

Where other autobiographical subjects might reminisce the selves they once were in explicitly material terms – recalling the what and the where of image and identity – such focus would seem purposefully absent from Crisp’s writings.⁷ In light of the societal censure and violence it would elicit, the precise facts of his fashioning would indeed seem inconsequential. In *The Penguin Book of Twentieth-Century Fashion Writing* (Watt, 2000) Crisp is one of the most quoted of authors – as often as Cecil Beaton and Diana Vreeland. But where they might reminisce in fetishistic and glamorous detail, Crisp is quoted on the social and sexual mores that fashion engendered in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. The image of Beaton particularly, as drawn in his much fêted diaries – a figure more aesthete than queerly effeminate – offers valuable contrast with that of Crisp, revealing particularly their very different social worlds.⁸

The first volume of Beaton’s diaries commences on the day he goes up to Cambridge, in 1922, at the age of eighteen; ‘For no known reason I was wearing an evening jacket, red shoes, black and white trousers, and a huge cravat. I cannot think what impression I made on old asthmatic Mrs Perry arriving for lunch with my mother; she caught sight of me before there was an opportunity to change’ (Beaton, 1961, p.3). Once at Cambridge, Beaton writes of his visibility there; ‘I hate the way people stare at me. I can’t think why they do it. I’m not fantastically dressed or odd looking. Yet it’s a fact: they *do* stare’ (Beaton, 1961, p.12). The entry is footnoted; ‘Since I was possibly wearing fur gauntlet gloves, a cloth of gold tie, scarlet jersey and flowing ‘Oxford Bags’, perhaps it is reasonable to suppose that I was noticeable’ (Beaton, 1961, p.12). While Crisp’s life was defined by his fashioning to a far greater degree than was Beaton’s, he would offer no such detail, and in the sexual militancy of which his fashioning was articulate would welcome the stares of strangers. Crisp’s writings are rich with visual impression, but in a much different manner from those of most autobiographers or diarists, but the biopic of his life would translate these into a persuasive image of queerness for a mass audience quite unfamiliar with so candid a portrait of sexual otherness, its expression and its histories.

What Ruth Holliday terms ‘the politics of visibility’ (Holliday, 2001, p.217), in an essay on the fashioning of queer identities that stresses their plurality, and what Houlbrook terms the ‘readability’ of the effeminate body (Houlbrook, 2007, p.159), define Crisp’s auto/biographical image. He offers a written past that might

lack material detail, but was evidently more radical than his present, as dictated by his emergence as a public figure in a more 'permissive' time. But just as gay men could measure the 'success' of their masculinity against his effeminacy, other autobiographers – whose lives were in some way touched by Crisp's – have gauged their endeavours in fashioning 'difference' against his figure, as when Emma Tennant reminisces her attempts to 'look like' a writer in the early-1960s; 'I put on a beret and stare anxiously at my reflection ... but [it] sits awkwardly on my black-dyed hair and when I walk down the King's Road I receive as many inimical or puzzled looks – or so I imagine – as the odd person of Chelsea, Quentin Crisp ... My changed appearance doesn't of course lead to attacks on my person' (Tennant, 1999, p.153). In her discussion of the uses of autobiography for the fashion historian, as category in the 'period witness' of fashion, Lou Taylor considers how 'exaggeration, political bias, romanticism and invention are just as possible to find here as elsewhere and no historian would accept these texts at face value, or without additional evidence' (Taylor, 2002, p.99).

Certainly for Robinson Crisp is 'the classic unreliable narrator', always in contravention of Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' (Robinson, 1999, p.149). Robinson reads Crisp's prose as 'a linguistic extension of the self-dramatizing style of his life, a queenly prose to match his queenly person ... the verbal counterpart of his hennaed hair and lacquered fingernails, wittily savaging the repressive convictions of his countrymen' (Robinson, 1999, p.150). Indeed the voice that autobiography afforded Crisp could be understood as a vindication of sorts, but it is not in any overstatement of his fashioning or the exaggerations of the body he writes that this thesis is concerned, but rather in the consequences of that image. While these might hold as much hyperbole, the prose which frames them does not distract from the extraordinary experiences that his fashioning determined. The societal censure that Crisp would feel, the sense of being always beneath its gaze, invites inquiry, through the individual analyses of this thesis, beyond the materiality of identity.

In his study of the genre, Bingham suggests that *all* biopic subjects possess 'difference' (Bingham, 2010, p.321). What reads in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* as Crisp's purposeful fashioning of difference he acknowledges himself as a materiality over which he had autonomy; the consequent prejudices

he faced, and particularly the 'effemiphobia' he experienced amongst his 'own kind', reveals not just Crisp's history but the histories of gendered and sexual behaviours through much of the twentieth century. This thesis is an interpretative study focused upon a range of visual and narrative analyses which consider, according to particular thematic concerns that allow for the correspondent reading of the visual and the literary auto/biographical text, the reception of Crisp's image and the binary meanings of the *fashioning* that it involved. It explores not the detailed materiality of Crisp's figure but its effects – the life that his fashioning determined and the fashioning of that life in textual discourse and media rhetoric.

The first chapter of this thesis provides further foundation to the textual and visual methodology that is employed throughout. In looking at the biopic, it addresses what a life 'looks like' according to the tropes of the genre, and how an audience's empathic identification – or not – with Crisp's past was determined by this most performative of auto/biographical texts. It considers how lives are to be abbreviated on the screen, and looks particularly at how queer childhood is to be represented. In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, Crisp's is afforded only a matter of seconds, but it would reveal for audiences his essentialist identification with effeminacy at a very young age. From this the themes that are most notable in the life that Crisp made auto/biographical are addressed. In chapter two, the spectral figure of the 'great dark man' that Crisp writes of as the masculine other to his effeminacy is a figure afforded particularly convincing image in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, and parallel is drawn between the archetypes of masculinity he observed in the gay culture of his dotage with the desires articulate in his own fashioning. This chapter is thus able to trace shifts in the paradigms of queer desire and intimacy to which gay men were seen to subscribe through the twentieth century. Chapter three considers Crisp's insistence that it was his fashioning that determined his career as an art school model, the most liminal of artistic vocations; being something of a bohemian 'cameo', it is from his experiences as a model that the epithetical title of his autobiography comes. Such analysis allows an understanding of how bodies are fashioned as 'artistic', and is revealing of attitudes within the world of art and art education in London, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, towards gender and sexual dissidence. Crisp's career as a model began during the

Second World War, and has to be positioned against the normative 'heroic' masculinity that held such cultural inscription at that time. Chapter four considers the Chelsea room in which Crisp lived for forty years, and later that on Manhattan's Lower East Side; subject to much media curiosity in its negation of 'good' domesticity, Crisp would claim, and convincingly for many a journalist, that his single room was a place of exile, denying the rich social life portrayed in *The Naked Civil Servant*. Crisp's domestic life was very much inscribed upon his public figure, the apparent abjection of which would elicit fascination and horror. His single life in a single room, however, reveals something of the political implications of homemaking for gay men through the twentieth century. In chapter five, looking at his dotage, acknowledging how Crisp would only once 'do' drag, finding little satisfaction in any attempt to convince of himself as wholly woman, there are moments of female impersonation that seam the corporeality of his agedness with the affect of drag – his role as Elizabeth in Sally Potter's *Orlando* principal amongst these. To suitably frame these representations, it is necessary to consider how 'deathliness' and its appearances have been theorised across the inter-disciplines of visual culture.

Each of these chapters seeks to explore something very different, and each reveals something discrete in the relationship between sexual otherness and gender performativity. They are however very much related in defining what Crisp's life 'looked like', and each addresses Crisp's conception of himself as 'effeminate'. It is necessary that effeminacy is given some depth of reflection here – to frame within the discourses of its politics, through the twentieth century, Crisp's own understanding of its material expression. This discussion is necessary as it gives critical contextualisation to this most defining aspect of Crisp's identity and its fashioning, a contextualisation that frames each of the chapters and their debates within this thesis.

Effeminacy and its politics

Exhibitionism is like a drug. Hooked in adolescence, I was now taking doses so massive that they would have killed a novice. Blind with mascara and dumb with lipstick, I paraded the dim streets of Pimlico with my overcoat wrapped around me as though it were a tailless ermine cape ... Sometimes I wore a fringe so deep that it completely obscured

the way ahead. This hardly mattered. There were always others to look where I was going. (Crisp, 1977a, p.49).

The queerness that Crisp wore, in late-1920s London, evokes here a martyrdom fashioned through the literal bondage of effeminacy, no longer the subtlety of a tentative political act – the apparent symbolisation of what he would describe as his ‘sexual type’ – but a confrontational claim to visibility. Yet he reveals too the passivity in which he was literally swathed in order to survive the enmity that his image would provoke. Soon after the publication of his autobiography, Crisp was the subject of a thirty-minute *World in Action* documentary, directed by Denis Mitchell (figures 3 and 4), first broadcast in 1970.⁹ Reviewing the film, one journalist regarded Mitchell’s portrait of Crisp as ‘sad, sometimes tragic ... a compulsive and fascinating insight into a true outsider’ (Knight, 1970). In that film, Crisp claims to be ‘a minority within a minority’, and is insistent that as an effeminate homosexual he spoke only for himself. In his early life, queer meant effeminacy – it was indeed embodied by its material practices and behaviours. However, while Crisp might have resisted any affiliation with political intent, in the spectacle that he fashioned, and demanding the visibility he did, as Robinson suggests, he ‘raised the matter of effeminacy to the level of ideology ... he became, in effect, a sexual politician’ (Robinson, 1999, p.160).

Cole observes how the fashioning of effeminacy was often ‘the first step many men took in the process of making sense of their apparent sexual and gender difference and reconstructing their image of themselves’, but suggests that it was for many a provisional measure, appropriating later a more acceptably masculine image (Cole, 2000, p.34). In *Mother Clap’s Molly House* (2007), Rictor Norton suggests that most principally effeminacy in dress and behaviours is employed as ‘a form of self-advertisement’ (Norton, 2007, p.104). But Crisp’s experiences would attest to K Jod Taywaditep’s claim, in an essay on the anti-effeminacy sensibilities that became increasingly pronounced in late-twentieth century gay culture, that ‘some of the most visible attacks against effeminacy are expressed by those who are most likely to be stigmatized: other gay men’ (Taywaditep, 2001, p.7). Such rejection of effeminacy would become more visible ‘in tandem with the massive adoption of hyper-masculinity by the post-liberation gay culture since the early-1970s’ (Taywaditep, 2001, p.22).

In *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (1994), Alan Sinfield considers the indictment of effeminacy to be founded in misogyny, recognising how particular 'manners and behaviours are stigmatised by associating them with 'the feminine' – which is perceived as weak, ineffectual and unsuited for the world of affairs' (Sinfield, 1994, p.26). In her study of cross-dressing, Marjorie Garber suggests that what is most striking about Crisp's autobiography 'is the way in which it points to a polarization about dress and demeanor *within* the gay male society of which he was a part', revealing an 'incipient transvestophobia' (Garber, 1992, p.138). Garber thus defines the terms of effeminacy that apply to such fashioning as Crisp's, placing an accent upon 'the condition of being *turned into* a "woman"' and the 'stigmatized and fantasized *agent*' she becomes; 'In expressing condemnation of various types of men, it is always *women* who are scapegoated' (Garber, 1992, p.139). Where Crisp reflects on the persecution he experienced amongst his own kind, the effeminacy in which he invested his own sense of 'woman' is not given to be singular, but his belief that it should be afforded visibility is;

I was beginning to meet a greater number and a greater variety of homosexuals and having to face the fact that, almost without exception, they did not like me. Those who camped in private and watched their step in public felt that my not doing either was an indirectly expressed criticism of both these activities. They were right ... Even those who did not feel that I was secretly judging them were angry with me for presenting to the world, by whose good opinion they set great store, a brand image of homosexuality that was outrageously effeminate. This was resented chiefly by those who were effeminate but did not think of themselves as outrageous. Their objection was part of a much more widespread hostility to my putting forward any propaganda about the subject at all (Crisp, 1977a, pp.84-85).

Observing the political motivations of professional disavowals of effeminacy, Crisp writes of the medical interest in sexual otherness in the decade or so preceding the publication of his autobiography, recalling a meeting he had himself with a psychologist;

He told me that he was preparing (yet another) survey of homosexuals ... Twenty years earlier I would have thought this such a noble undertaking. Now I tried not to sigh. As I rose to leave him, [he] said in a faintly irritable tone, 'I think it's a pity you dress the way you do but still

...’ ... We seemed to be reading once again that paragraph which used to occur in all books about sexual abnormality and which began, ‘There is no need to waste time considering that small group of men who dress and act in an effeminate manner ...’ (Crisp, 1977a, pp.197-198).

In looking at the 1960s and its queer iconography, Patricia Juliana Smith considers someone like the playwright Joe Orton to have been ‘the embodiment of a new gay icon in the 1960s, a nascent mode of youthful, “masculine” queer sensibility and discourse’, and an ideal that ‘would soon eclipse an older, ‘effeminate’ model’ (Smith, 1999, xviii).¹⁰ Cole argues however that anxieties would emerge at this time for a ‘heterosexual society [that] did not like the fact that it was hard to identify gay men. As long as [they] kept to their swishy, effeminate and therefore non-sexually threatening stereotypes they could be tolerated, if not actually accepted. [British] society could find a place for an amusing unthreatening pseudo-woman’ (Cole, 2000, p.100). Crisp understood the situation somewhat differently; he would write in his second volume of autobiography of how the ‘present fashion among gay men for normalizing their clothes and their mannerisms is a relief to the rest of the world’, because socially ‘it makes dealing with them less embarrassing.’ However, in some concurrence with Cole, and with allusion to his own image of effeminacy, he suggests that ‘deep down, this subdued public image makes heterosexuals uneasy. If gay men look like everyone else, they may be anywhere – everywhere. How much safer to be able to see one coming from a mile away ... This, of course, is what I told the whole world as far back as 1931’ (Crisp, 1981, p.83).

In the essentialism that Robinson ascribes to Crisp’s effeminacy, suggesting as he does that it was ‘natural’ (Robinson, 1999, p.157), there is redolence of what Crisp writes as his inability to conform to any of the demands of masculinity that he observed in his youth. He recalls an ‘awakening’ of sorts, in his early adult life, whilst waiting for the commuter train from London on which his solicitor father was travelling; ‘a stream of men in dark suits and bowler hats went by us. I thought, “I’ll never be able to get into step with them.” I felt as I had in childhood when two other children turned a skipping-rope and urged me to run under it and start jumping. I couldn’t do it’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.39). The very figure of convention that Crisp conjures as other to his effeminate nature at that time is examined in Fred Miller Robinson’s study of modernity and masculine conformity,

The Man in the Bowler Hat (1993). Robinson defines a masculinity and figure of establishment that we see in fact queered in the film of Crisp's autobiography – the 'man from the ministry' that Crisp writes of, and whom can be grouped amongst the uniform masculinities addressed in this thesis in relation to Crisp's imagining of the 'great dark man', that ultimately intangible figure of his erotic desires but embodiment of a sexual otherness to his effeminacy.

In Mitchell's documentary Crisp would claim 'what I'm so bad at is being a man.' Where Aileen Ribeiro explores fashion and gender in the 1920s and 30s, discussing particularly the formation in 1929 of the Men's Dress Reform Party, she suggests that the principal difficulty the movement faced 'was how to overcome the 'moral' associations of men's conventional clothing without being accused of effeminacy' (Ribeiro, 1986, p.157). Contemporary media was concerned with the fact that 'some young men were showing unhealthy signs of effeminacy in their appearance' (Ribeiro, 1986, p.157) – but what actually constituted effeminacy was rarely specified. Crisp reflects on how heterosexual men would at this time attempt to reconcile an interest in appearances with the culturally imposed strictures of gendered behaviours – that is, without the charge of effeminacy and its intimations of queerness;

The men of the 'twenties searched themselves for vestiges of effeminacy as though for lice. They did not worry about their characters but about their hair and their clothes. Their predicament was that they must never be caught worrying about either. I once heard a slightly dandified friend of my brother say, "People are always accusing me of taking care of my appearance" (Crisp, 1977a, p.27).

Houlbrook considers how cosmetics were appropriated by gay men at this time to articulate their sense of gendered otherness, suggesting that those practices coded as effeminate reveal the processes through which they 'drew upon the gender culture in which they were socialized to make their bodies publicly intelligible within it' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.144). That cosmetics were fundamental in many queer men's formation of identity would reflect 'a pervasive assumption that homosexual desire was contingent upon an essentially womanlike character' (Houlbrook, 2007, p.148). The use of make-up by men became an external signifier of their sexual desires,¹¹ and was entrenched in recent shifts in the patterns of production and consumption of cosmetics; 'Within the vibrant beauty

culture of interwar Britain, cosmetic commodities were cheap, accessible, and an essential attribute of fashionable femininity that working-class men might readily appropriate' (Houlbrook, 2007, p.148).¹² The 1920s saw the rise of the beauty industry, alongside the increased economic means of young working women and the influence of cinema and its attendant media and ideals of 'glamour' and femininity, and effeminate gay men found themselves drawn into a parallel 'engagement with consumer goods and styles ... Powder puffs, lipstick, eye shadow – these were literally the embodiments of what men understood as their essential nature: their femininity' (Houlbrook, 2007, p.157).¹³ In an essay that takes Susan Sontag's 'Notes on 'Camp'' (1966) as its methodological model, Bronski (1994) explores the concept of the female gay 'idol' for generations of gay men. Reflecting on Crisp's film criticism for *Christopher Street* magazine, Adam Mars-Jones speaks of his 'study of the mechanisms of screen stardom [being] more than just a pastime; this is where [Crisp] learned the lessons in self-transformation he applied so rigorously' (Mars-Jones quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.195).¹⁴ Crisp would speak often of the 'orchidaceous' woman, embodied particularly for him in Greta Garbo.¹⁵

Just as Bingham suggests that the biopic subject often belongs in a social class of their own (Bingham, 2010, p.337), the precarious class position that Crisp occupied was, it would seem, directly wrought by his effeminacy. Crisp writes of the working-class Dilly Boy prostitutes of his acquaintance in the late-1920s and how they forgave him his middle-class background and 'unfair advantages because I was in the same sexual boat as they' (Crisp, 1977a, p.28). Robinson observes, across the British autobiographical writings that he looks at, 'the intense class-consciousness of British society', and suggests that Crisp 'is perfectly conscious that he himself is really middle class and a bohemian only by courtesy' (Robinson, 1999, xviii). Indeed Crisp embodied certain class connotations, in speech particularly, and intellectual sensibilities that made him quintessentially 'English' – evident most obviously in the song written as tribute to Crisp, *An Englishman in New York*, by Sting, the title also of Richard Laxton's 2009 film that was considered the 'sequel' to *The Naked Civil Servant* (figure 5). While parallels are often drawn between Oscar Wilde and Crisp, the effeminacy they fashioned was quite distinct. But Dyer suggests that Crisp, along with the likes of Noel Coward, 'carried the Wildean flame' through the twentieth century –

that they 'moulded queer personalities through refinement of accent and condescension of attitude'; 'Not for nothing did Crisp, a pauper most of his life, still play on the snob resonances of queerness by calling himself one of the 'stately homos of England' (Dyer, 2002, p.6). That epithet however, which Crisp certainly embraced, came not from his own hand, but from the screenplay of *The Naked Civil Servant*.

Mackie's screenplay of *The Naked Civil Servant* was rejected several times at the BBC, so incendiary it seemed was the subject of Crisp's life. There is some redolence here in Bingham's claim that where the subjects of so many biopics refuse to change, they are represented rather as 'a force that brings change' (Bingham, 2010, p.163). In *How to Become a Virgin*, Crisp would write of television being 'a redemptive medium', and that while the film of his life 'did indeed cause certain people to despise me even more deeply than before ... in the eyes of others I gradually started to become sanctified' (Crisp, 1981, p.8). Where Smith and Watson question how valid it is to read the autobiographical narrative as historical document, they consider the subject's 'making' of history, the subjectivity of its very performance demanding reading practices 'that engage the narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical or chronological trajectory of the text' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p.13). The film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, so sincere to the original text, was a radical project in history making. Crisp's very particular 'voice' – that of his writings, epigrammatic and self-deprecatory, confrontational in its articulation of sexual otherness, effeminate – was very much present. It was now afforded an audience that his autobiography would never have reached. Crisp was himself very much aware of what this shift in audience meant; 'my life story was unfurled before the eyes of people who until that moment had never given a serious thought to the subject of homosexuality' (Crisp, 1981, p.79).

In terms of how autobiographical scholarship has long been concerned with the confessional, Crisp's writings are remarkable in their sub-textual rendering of the body as a material site of confession. Crisp writes in the opening of *The Naked Civil Servant* of how he 'became not merely a self-confessed homosexual but a self-evident one. That is to say I put my case not only before people who knew me but also before strangers. This was not difficult to do. I wore make-up at a time when even on women eye-shadow was sinful' (Crisp, 1977a,

p.7). The correlation of sin and femininity, and therefore effeminacy, was one that Crisp often made, 'there is no sin like being a woman' one of his habitual lines. Jeremy Tambling, in looking at the performative nature of confession, suggests that 'autobiography is the name of confession that needs not speak its name, because it is of the essence of confession that the subject should be thought to be giving it spontaneously' (1990, p.106).¹⁶ In their role of confessant, the author is 'accused and appealing to have his discourse validated by the reader who has been interpellated into the textual unconscious of the confession' (Tambling, 1990, p.105). *The Naked Civil Servant* does not however offer a narrative steered toward revelation, and thus the realisation of a self until then hidden. In *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (2007), Sally Munt explores the Foucauldian relation between the confessional and the rituals of Christian faith 'as endemic to Western practices of sexuality', and suggests that the confession 'is also structurally associated with testimony and witness, processes which evangelise experience as transcendently meaningful. What is clear from this conjunction is the way feelings become performative: they materialise and metamorphose into states of being and legitimation' (Munt, 2007, p.187).¹⁷ It was not a secret life that Crisp revealed in his writings, but a life lived as confessional, his effeminate fashioning testament to a sexual dissidence that he sought to legitimise. Yet the testimony by which the confessional is defined is afforded very precise illustration in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, in a scene that offers perhaps the most vivid image of Hurt in the role (figure 6). Following Crisp's wrongful arrest for prostitution,¹⁸ during the Second World War, having sat through the evidence given against him in court, narration is given as to the sense of militancy he now felt in those circumstances; 'Of my own accord I threw off the burden of homosexuality by transforming it into a cause. I decided to make the problem clear by making it evident. I must now do something publicly to fight for that cause.' Crisp takes the witness box; 'Well, I can't possibly play my big scene with my back to the audience.' As he addresses the judge, he gives a précis of the very tenets of his fashioning and its consequences;

Sir, look at me. I wear lipstick. I wear rouge. I wear mascara on my eyelashes. I dye my hair. I wear flamboyant clothes far more outré than those I'm wearing now. I am a self-evident, self-professed effeminate homosexual for all the world to see. How could I hope to solicit anybody

in broad daylight in a crowded London street looking as I do? What would I expect but a curse and a blow? No, my appearance sets me apart from the rest of humanity. It is not easy for me to make human contacts. With strangers it is almost impossible. I learnt many years ago the golden rule of my life. In public places I do not speak to anyone unless they speak to me, I do not look at anyone unless they demand that I look at them. It is the only way I know of getting safely to my destination (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).

When asked for his plea, the ever-shifting cadence of Hurt's speech makes affective for a mass audience this ultimate of confessions; 'Perhaps my very existence is a form of importuning. Otherwise I am not guilty as charged.' But narration reveals Crisp's sense of performance – of how the conventions of the witness box and the confessional are to be practised; 'Well, I flatter myself that London has not seen a performance like that since Sybil Thorndike's Saint Joan' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).

It is the very vibrancy of Crisp/Hurt in that scene – most particularly the brilliant red of his hair against the sobriety of the court and the uniform of black in which he and his 'audience' are all dressed – that makes it perhaps the film's most lucid illustration of his claim to visibility, and particularly for a television audience, as Crisp himself identified, quite unfamiliar with such expression of sexual otherness. In terms of gay lives finding representation in the medium, the film remained for some time 'an isolated example' (Arthurs, 2004, p.117). Though its effects were, according to one journalist, 'cataclysmic', the film did not result in any 'deluge of gay-themed programmes', and it was only *Queer as Folk*, in 1999, that was thought to offer any similarly 'challenging, rounded' representation of gay lives (Smith, 2006). Russell T. Davies, the writer of *Queer as Folk*, describes the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* as a 'massively political piece; it's not written or made as a political piece, but its existence is political' (Davies quoted in *Verity Lambert: Drama Queen*, 2008).

In the celebrity that ensued for Crisp, and particularly with the success of his one-man theatre show, *An Evening With ...*, the ultimate redemption was his migration to America. After being presented with its flag on his first visit to New York, in the late-1970s, Crisp had worn it on his journey back to London, 'as though it were my college scarf. Perhaps this was an act of treason' (Crisp, 1981, p.155). At seventy-two, having lived in the same Chelsea room for forty

years, Crisp would leave London for Manhattan. In a monologue he gave for the Channel 4 series *Opinions*, in 1990, he opens with what had become his standard line on America; 'I have always been American in my heart ever since I saw the movies ... the moment I actually saw New York ... I wanted it.' Having realised his dream of America, Crisp took every opportunity to disparage England, a line from his second volume of autobiography given much reiteration; 'The English hated me for being effeminate and, in a country where women are still to some extent despised, this attitude has not altered' (Crisp, 1981, p.80). The same indictment of effeminacy that Sinfield observes – an indictment of femininity – this was in Crisp's rhetoric a peculiarly English prejudice. But his figure was not without censure in America, particularly given the rise of the new 'gay conservatism' in the 1980s and 1990s, which Robinson traces in *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and its Critics* (2005).¹⁹ Indeed, in Jonathan Nossiter's documentary on Crisp, *Resident Alien* (1991), Hunter Madsen, who co-authored with Marshall Kirk *After the Ball* (1989), censured Crisp's image again as politically ineffectual;

Quentin his whole life has represented maladjustment and a retreat in the face of oppression ... He tends to make himself almost deliberately a laughing stock. I think he knows this ... he's marginalised himself ... It's very easy to avoid attack by becoming the court jester and he's become the court jester of the straight world (*Resident Alien*, 1991).

Such censure would not however keep Crisp from contrasting the apparent liberalism of America with the intolerance of England. Robinson suggests that Crisp practiced identity politics 'before they had been invented' (Robinson, 1999, p.161). The image of queerness that Crisp fashioned in his early life, a time of immense societal and cultural intolerance, was narrativised across the literary, visual and popular cultures of the late-1960s and beyond. Made the subject of media discourse in the manner it was, Crisp's life did indeed appear quite singular. It is critical to examine firstly in this thesis the biopic and the life it gave Crisp. Few gay lives have been subject to the biopic 'treatment' – and few biopics 'made for television' have had the impact of *The Naked Civil Servant*.

CHAPTER I

Becoming Quentin: The biopic

When these people came to me and said we should like to make a film of your life, I said yes do, films are fantasies, films are magical illusions, you can make my life a fantasy as I have tried but failed to make it. But then they said we want the film to be *real*, you know *real life*. So I said *any* film, even the *worst*, is at least better than real life. Then they said, though of course we should have to have an actor to play you. I said I have spent sixty-six years on this earth painfully attempting to play the part of Quentin Crisp. I have not succeeded. Yes of course you must have an actor to play me. He will do it far better than I have done. And then they said, we shall want to show you when you were young, and I said, if I might suggest one image for your film ... (Quentin Crisp's introduction to *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).

This chapter examines the tropes of the biopic in relation to the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, and considers how it was the principal means through which Crisp became a public figure. It locates the body that 'became' Quentin Crisp in the culture of mid-1970s Britain, and considers how the 'real' and the 'performed' body were subject to equal political contestation. The biopic as film genre has been subject to scant academic attention, and the 'made-for-tv' biopic stands on even more precarious critical ground than its cinematic counterpart.²⁰ The central claim of Custen's (1992) seminal study of the Hollywood biopic and its construction of public history underlines the often purposeful misrepresentation and 'glamorization' of the historical figure, and how, as a genre, the biopic has been unable to reconcile cinematic and narrative conventions with the untidy factuality of the lives it explores. Bingham's more recent study (2010) of the contemporary biopic as a genre which contests notions of legitimacy in representing public lives surveys just how such projects validate the life narrative as 'significant' or accomplished.²¹ It is through the films produced during Hollywood's studio era that Custen assesses the 'claim to fame' fundamental to the life narrative becoming the biopic narrative, and observes in that exchange how 'a code for the biopic is an exercise in reconstructing a shifting public notion of fame' (Custen, 1992, p.7). The notion of the meritorious figure is embodied particularly in the 'Great Man' biopic, in which the individual can be characterised, and their life dramatised, to become *more* than simply the protagonist 'who has

done something noteworthy in the public world' (Bingham, 2010, p.213). As autobiographical subject, Crisp would seem narrowly 'suitable'; as biopic subject his life offered relatively little material in terms of accomplishment and reputation. But *The Naked Civil Servant* could be said to conform in some way to the 'Great Man' model of the biopic, in that its subject is most often 'posed as a visionary with a pure, one of a kind talent or idea who must overcome opposition to his idea or even just to himself' (Bingham, 2010, p.7). Central to the narrative of *The Naked Civil Servant* is indeed the sense of Crisp's embodiment of an 'idea' – of tolerance, of autonomy, if only for such sexual otherness as his – and of the opposition that this idea, as lent material expression in his self, met with. While a 'visionary' without any definite 'talent', the life that Crisp fashioned, in every sense of the word, was accomplished, if most particularly in his capacity for telling the story of that life as significant in its difference, something evident as much in the film's narrative as in his writings.

In his second volume of autobiography, *How to Become a Virgin*, focused as it is upon his passage towards celebrity and how the film of his life came about, he writes how, 'after a lifetime of condemnation for my sexual deviation, that very fact was to be used to present me to the world as being of interest for human reasons that transcended my sin' (Crisp, 1981, p.72). Crisp had written at the last of *The Naked Civil Servant* of the relative 'fame' he had then known, of being 'at least notorious' for some while (Crisp, 1977a, p.216). Indeed some renown was achieved in the spectacle and confrontation of Crisp's fashioning, his being 'one of the peculiar sights of London' (Bailey, 2000, p.8), but it was the biopic that lent him a 'public' image. The unknown subject becoming the biopic subject, and enjoying a consequent celebrity, was something of a role reversal. But as Custen observes, addressing the shift in medium from cinema to television which the genre was subject to from the 1950s, he observes the biopic subject as far more often 'ordinary' in the latter, figures who, prior to the television biopic of their life, made for whatever reason, 'were not public figures' (Custen, 1992, pp.221-222).²²

In looking at the 'translation' of lives, from the written to the visual text, Rosenstone underlines their intertextuality; 'To begin to understand the biographical film – its shape and structure, the way it handles data, the way it creates the world in which its subjects think and acts – one must attempt to see

the form within the larger issues of biography' (Rosenstone, 2007, p.12).²³ Crisp was engaged as technical advisor whilst *The Naked Civil Servant* was filmed (Crisp, 1981, p.72), and the fact that he would introduce the story of his own life (figure 7), speaking of the fantasy and illusion that he hoped would be made of his past, is evidence of just how atypical the film was. In his introduction, Crisp insists on his own life as performance, as 'un-real' as film itself. The director Jack Gold felt some predicament as to whether or not Crisp should introduce the film, but decided it was necessary that audiences should see something of the 'real thing'; 'first because it would give it authenticity and secondly because John's performance on the screen without any touchstone by which it could be compared may have caused people to think, "This is crazy. No one behaves like this"' (Nathan, 1986, p.17). In his second volume of autobiography Crisp would recite the story of a police officer who insisted that the film could not have been based on 'real life', because Crisp would 'have been arrested on the first day' that he publicly revealed the effeminacy of his fashioning (Crisp, 1981, p.49). Custen defines the biopic strictly as that which employs the subject's real name; when used in the biographical film, it suggests 'an openness to historical scrutiny and an attempt to present the film as the official story of a life' (Custen, 1992, p.8). As well as Crisp himself introducing the film, his name is indeed given in the titles. He does not however in his introduction claim to be Quentin Crisp, but rather that he has 'tried to play the part of Quentin Crisp.' And indeed it was a 'part'; the name was itself a fiction, not in fact the subject's 'real name'. The name Denis Pratt is mentioned in his autobiography, but not however in the biopic of his life. The 'autofact' that Crisp had fashioned is taken as given. The subject remains from childhood *Quentin Crisp*, that moment of 'becoming' – that step into the performative subjectivity that would define his public figure – quite inconsequential.

Crisp speaks in that introduction of his life as performance, indeed of his failure in the role, giving scope to explore Bingham's suggestion that the biopic occupies 'a liminal space between fiction and actuality' (Bingham, 2010, p.7). As autobiographical subject, Crisp had himself woven many exaggerations, if not fictions, into his life-narrative, as Robinson acknowledges in claiming him to be the 'classic unreliable narrator' (Robinson, 1999, p.149), but the film was able to convey the essence of what he stood for and what he experienced. It was with

some reluctance however that Crisp came to accept that the film was about himself; he describes how, when viewing it at a later date, 'I thought I would try and see it, not as something about my life, but as entertainment. I had to abandon that idea because it was about my life' (Nathan, 1986, p.19). Eakin observes that in the 'real' name of the autobiographical subject – that is, of the text's protagonist, narrator, and author – 'the 'I'-figure so named remains no less a creature of fiction' (Eakin, 1999, p.3). Unlike other film genres, the biopic, as Custen observes, is most often prefaced 'by written or spoken declarations that assert the realities of their narratives' (Custen, 1992, p.8). But in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* Crisp himself not only featured, but the voice of his writings was present, particularly in its narration, and often verbatim. Where Bingham observes the tropes of the 'classical' biopic, he considers how the voiceover is rarely employed beyond a film's opening scene (Bingham, 2010, p.4). It was employed throughout *The Naked Civil Servant* however, with Hurt as Crisp expressing an inner life and responsiveness to the world that so persecuted him in precise translation of the epigrams of Crisp's writings.²⁴

It is not redundant to consider the discrepancies between Crisp's writings and the biopic they became, but of more value is the exploration of what a life is made to *look* like for a mass television audience. Verity Lambert, who was Executive Producer of the film, would observe that it was necessary for Mackie's script to 'keep the sense of a person and at the same time make something dramatic' (Hurt, Gold and Lambert, 2005). The film's economic tableau format does follow something of Crisp's writings. Indeed Lambert considered it to reflect 'Quentin's life and manner ... of economy and wit' (Lambert, 2005).²⁵ Bingham suggests the preferability of 'dramatize' to 'fictionalize' in considering the lives that the biopic portrays (Bingham, 2010, p.379), and certainly the biopic is a genre that, whether as Hollywood cinema or television play, like any history-making, offers some mediation (Custen, 1992, pp.9-12). Custen enquires into the particular circumstances, ideological and material, which shape such constructions of history, and claims this to be of more significance than the question of 'truth' in the biopic; 'The pattern of these lives, the narratives and other devices used to construct these lives as parts of an institutional machinery of making film narrative, are of greater interest than the distortion of a single film, book, or folk tale' (Custen, 1992, p.11). *The Naked Civil Servant* would offer

audiences an insight into the performative sensibilities of Crisp's own narrative world. He would himself describe being 'stunned that a movie could be made from a story with no plot, no love interest, no rescue and with nothing with which the audience could identify', but supposed the film's essential theme to be 'what it is like to be one among the many' (Nathan, 1986, p.19). Indeed, *The Naked Civil Servant* belongs to the biopic type that is premised on conflict with a system rather than any individual, with social structure and cultural climate (Bingham, 2010, p.367).

Custen identifies in his study the problem of 'stating conclusions about what the patterns of the corpus of biopics mean', when it is not possible to recover precisely 'the level at which these ideas were received by viewers of different eras' (Custen, 1992, p.26). Certainly the biopic's critical reception, the discourse of its contemporary critics, is revealing, as is the public correspondence which the film would elicit. Just days before the film's broadcast, the *Times* published the article 'Quentin Crisp and his world', by Lord Wolfenden. Though there is some condemnatory tone to Wolfenden's measure of Crisp's effeminacy and the visibility of his sexuality, the film is said to be both 'a serious and responsible contribution to the discussion of a real problem of our society, and ... a vivid presentation of one man's life' (Wolfenden, 1975). The reason given for Crisp being the subject of the film is simply his experiences as 'an effeminate homosexual'. Wolfenden refers to his own involvement in the passing of the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, and suggests that it is according to the historical specificity of Crisp's experiences, between the 1920s and 1970s, that the film should be viewed (Wolfenden, 1975). Thames Television received few complaints,²⁶ and the letters page of the *TV Times* featured an interesting selection of what had been 'a very heavy mail' following the film's broadcast. A representative of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality had found the film 'upsetting', because 'It told only of one aspect of homosexuality that existed 30 to 40 years ago and was an incomplete picture ... a programme that portrays all gay men to be like [Crisp] does a serious disservice to the gay cause' (*TV Times*, 1976). The film's message of individualism was lost also to a psychiatrist; 'By reinforcing a conventional stereotype that all homosexuals are flamboyantly effeminate and doomed to empty lives of lovelessness, you have to some extent made the work of myself and my colleagues that much more difficult' (*TV Times*,

1976). But between these two letters was example of the more typical sympathy that the portrayal of Crisp's life would elicit. Signed from 'the unsupported mother of two sons', despite what might seem today the naïve Freudian implications, the letter is fascinating in its negation of the other correspondence. She writes of her sons, 'Having seen the film of Quentin Crisp, I hope they turn out half as sensitive, articulate and loving' (*TV Times*, 1976). The failure of those other correspondents to identify Crisp's fashioning as articulate of something greater than the fact of his sexuality, that he was as he often said, 'a minority within a minority', was a tension that would continue to define his position within gay culture and its discourses. The narrow and didactic political vantage from which those other, more invested, correspondents would write received admonitory response from the film's producer Barry Hanson; 'Crisp separates himself from other homosexuals repeatedly in the film, as a self-confessed effeminate homosexual. His marked characteristics as a human being are his honesty, courage, charity and sense of humour – surely qualities found at the basis of all organisations furthering understanding and tolerance' (*TV Times*, 1976).

The film was not without its 'scandal' though. Some weeks before broadcast, *The Sun* newspaper ran the headline 'A shocker from Soho'. Describing *The Naked Civil Servant* as the story 'of a self-confessed homosexual', it was said to be 'one of the strangest plays' made for ITV (Forwood, 1975a). Hurt is quoted on the reluctance of many actors at the time to undertake such a role, while the journalist cites the explicitness of the 'several sexual encounters with other men' that the film portrays (Forwood, 1975a). On the day of broadcast, the same journalist returned to the story, with a photograph of actor and subject together, writing that 'one of the most controversial plays ever to be shown on ITV goes out tonight – with a row still rumbling around it' (Forwood, 1975b). The disagreement to which the journalist refers was to do with the Independent Broadcasting Authority's insistence that Thames Television should remove one particular sentence of the narration, and its accompanying intertitle, from the film; Crisp's line, whilst lying in the bath, that 'sexual intercourse is a poor substitute for masturbation'. The line would be replaced with 'Wasn't it fun in the bath tonight?', and it is noted that director Jack Gold had threatened to have his name removed from the credits if the change was made; 'They have substituted a snigger for a laugh' (Gold quoted in Forwood, 1975b).

While Thames Television were said to have supported Gold's protest, they believed it preferable that audiences should see the play with that cut than not at all, and the journalist would conclude the article in an affirmative tone, writing that there 'has never been a television play which has treated the subject of homosexuality with such compassion and humour' (Forwood, 1975b). The *Guardian* would report of the 'scene' between the IBA and Thames at the film's preview, at which Crisp was present; the journalist writes that after a representative of Thames addressed the audience and revealed the change that had been demanded, such hilarity ensued that 'you'd have been better off trying to follow Benny Hill' (Fiddick, 1975).²⁷

Where the biopic subject can most often be defined as someone 'making their mark on the world' (Bingham, 2010, p.322), at the time of *The Naked Civil Servant's* broadcast, Crisp's only mark was as 'survivor'.²⁸ The closing scenes in which he is seen to confront the threats of a gang of youths with the line, 'You cannot touch me now, I am one of the stately homos of England' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975), are resonant, though discreetly, with the 'vindication ending' that would become a convention of the biopic (Bingham, 2010, p.155). Where the genre's audiences are said to 'expect results', to see 'artworks painted, songs written, battles won, scientific breakthroughs made – in short, accomplishments that justify the film's production' (Bingham, 2010, p.46), there was no such material realization in the biopic of Crisp's life. His having endured and survived the life that he had would seem accomplishment enough. The biopic, Bingham suggests, has conventionally dramatized 'the validation of figures by majority culture', and asserted, 'by the very fact of their having been made, the 'deserving' virtues of their subjects' (Bingham, 2010, p.149). The virtues which the 'unsupported mother of two sons' saw so plainly in Crisp, and which Hanson hoped audiences would find in themselves, were those which made Crisp a deserving and 'worthy' subject, the sexual behaviours that his fashioning had symbolised in the face of such violent societal censure now becoming more permissible for the majority culture. But where Crisp could not himself see in his life a narrative suitable for filmic adaptation, Clive James would write in the *Observer's* television column that the script held 'faultless tonal judgment and made a nail-biting story-line out of ordinary chronological progression' (James, 1975). If the film was indeed felt by audiences to be 'nail-biting', one would have

to ask what eventuality it was that they anticipated. Crisp had himself already introduced the film – bestowed ‘survivor’ status before the narrative even begins.

When the film was to be broadcast for the third time on British television, in 1977, it could still elicit much media attention. But the *Observer* suggested the film to remain ‘ambiguous’ in the politics of its appeal; ‘Made by as heterosexual a production team as you’d find anywhere in television, its real effect is to appeal to everyone’s liberalism while leaving non-gay people free to despise *every other gay* in the safety of Crisp’s particularity’ (Gilbert, 1977). Gilbert quotes the IBA’s Director General, Sir Brian Young, who believed the film ‘must have made many realize that underneath the bizarre interior was a man of compassion, a man who through his vulnerabilities had sympathies which we more fortunate folk do not always show.’ But such conviction in the film’s emotive capacities – a faith and empathy evidenced across so much of the British media – incites Gilbert to attack the ‘straight’ audience he assumes it would most appeal to. Suggesting that ‘there is an ideal viewing unit right in the centre of every TV executive’s vision,’ he writes that a figure such as Crisp therefore ‘makes it to the average family living room,’ while more ‘ordinary, unflamboyant gays who aren’t seen as flapping a desperate or a camp (and therefore excruciatingly funny) wrist’ will not (Gilbert, 1977).

But there is an awareness of the plurality of gay lives evident in the film, if only by way of the discrimination that Crisp experiences amongst his own ‘kind’. Crisp was a ‘minority within a minority’ that any attentive audience would surely understand. Crisp himself wrote an article for *TV Times* just before the 1977 broadcast, reflecting on the celebrity he had achieved in the intervening years. He observed how the accomplishments of the film had been ‘grafted by the great British public on to my character,’ to whom he would have to explain ‘that no credit for the quality of the play is due to me – that I am merely the raw material from which works of art are made’ (Crisp, 1977b). In the same year, writing on the representation of gay subjects in film, Thomas Waugh would cite *The Naked Civil Servant* as ‘a model, encouraging in many respects, of the best that we can expect from the establishment media’ (Waugh, 1977, p.11).²⁹ Crisp’s life story is said to serve ‘as much as an exemplary history of resistance to societal oppression over the years as it does as a personal memoir’ (Waugh, 1977, p.11). While Waugh cites the concerns expressed by such publications as *Body Politic*

and *Gay Left*, as to 'the ultimate effect the Crisp image would have in confirming existing stereotypes', he suggests that 'any potential damaging effect is fully offset by the film's defiant embrace of the 'queen' stereotype and its success in fleshing out that stereotype dramatically and historically' (Waugh, 1977, p.11). The 'mainstream' audience that Gilbert censures is critiqued less assertively by Waugh. He commends both Gold and Hurt for having 'realized a popular dramatic work in which an 'effeminate' man, the traditional outcast of the more respectable elements of the gay community as well as of the outside world, should enlist such a strong identification from a general audience' (Waugh, 1977, p.11).

What Waugh observes as *The Naked Civil Servant's* 'tough-headed' sensibility is said to be achieved through it having retained 'the personal specificity of Crisp's story and exploiting the sharp sense of self-awareness that apparently marked the original memoirs' (Waugh, 1977, p.12). Though an acquaintance with Crisp's writings and the subjectivity which the film takes from them would quite certainly impact upon any reviewer's response to the film, Waugh observes in the film's script, in its first-person voice-over and 'pointedly ironic intertitles', a sense of 'analytic counterpoint above the story itself.' He lends example here in citing Crisp's self-awareness, of the 'self-destructive, exhibitionist urges' that were the cause of his struggle, 'as much as any more conventional heroic impulse' (Waugh, 1977, p.12). While Waugh observes the same 'internalized oppression' that would long concern Crisp's detractors (Waugh, 1977, p.13), he reads in that narrative something of the picaresque, suggesting that his 'ultimate survival' and 'triumph' offers 'a happy ending that ... resounds with inspiration, integrity, and realism' (Waugh, 1977, p.12). In his review of the film, Clive James would describe Crisp, quite plainly, as 'a kind of hero' (James, 1975).³⁰

Glenn Man writes of the biopic and the life that 'quickness on the screen' (Man, 2000, x). When Hurt asked Crisp for his opinion of the film, his reply was that it was 'better than real life because it's so much shorter' (Hurt quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.161). In lending Crisp's 'previous' life image, and being subject as it was to a mass audience, the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* is read as a primary text throughout this thesis; whatever the biopic's fictions, it affords glimpses of that life that self-representation inevitably lacks. But there are

aspects of that portrayal – and of Hurt’s performance in the role – that demand particular attention here. Foremost amongst these is the image that Crisp suggested of his childhood.

A childhood drag

To most children I suppose there is a difference in degree between their imaginary and their real lives – the one being more fluid, freer and more beautiful than the other. To me fantasy and reality were not merely different; they were opposed. In the one I was a woman, exotic, disdainful; in the other I was a boy. The chasm between the two states of being never narrowed (Crisp, 1977a, p.16).

Following Crisp’s introduction to the film, the titles of *The Naked Civil Servant* are accompanied by the image of a boy (figures 8 and 9), no more than five or six years old, before a full-length mirror and dancing slowly on his toes. Wearing a feather headdress and swathed in fringed shawls and long beaded necklaces, the boy holds the ends of one shawl as he sways and pirouettes to the soundtrack. This principal visual image we have of Crisp’s childhood and its effeminacy certainly conjures the fantasy of femininity that he describes in his writings, and though lasting only seconds before fading to the figure of Crisp as a young adult, it would summarize a childhood of extraordinarily difficult socialisation and the material realisation of a formative queer identification.³¹

An entire childhood is not only condensed in that lone image of Crisp as a boy, but direct relation is made between its fantasy of woman and the adult in the subsequent scene (figure 10), who stands once more before the mirror image of his effeminacy, chastised by his father for his vanity; to the question, ‘Do you intend to spend your entire life admiring yourself?’, the adult Crisp answers, ‘If I possibly can.’ Bingham considers the employment of the ‘mirror shot’ in the biopic and its reflection of subjectivity (Bingham, 2010, p.48); the mirror reflection of the subject’s self-fashioning is said to be resonant of Lacan’s ‘misrecognition of a misrecognition’, of the subject who ‘sees what they want to see in mirrors’ (Bingham, 2010, pp.319-320). While the Lacanian implications of the mirror and of the narcissistic gaze – of Crisp as both child and adult – are germane to some measure here, what is more critical is how the abridgment of Crisp’s childhood persuades an audience that it was as decisive upon his later fashioning as he

insists in his writings. Indeed in the opening words of his autobiography Crisp himself makes such a précis; 'From the dawn of my history I was so disfigured by the characteristics of a certain kind of homosexual person that, when I grew up, I realised that I could not ignore my predicament' (Crisp, 1977a, p.7).

In the media interest that the film elicited, before and after its broadcast in December 1975, one journalist would write how the 'young Crisp had started dressing up in girls' clothes as a child and he kept right on' (Amory, 1975, p.81). In his article, Wolfenden had considered how the exhibitionism of Crisp's childhood determined his adult life; 'From his earliest boyhood, Quentin Crisp's nature had in it strong strains of fantasy ... As he grew up and realised his personal sexual composition, he refused to accept the world around him, as he found that it refused to accept him' (Wolfenden, 1975). The relation that is made between Crisp's childhood and his adult self is redolent with the Foucauldian understanding that, from the nineteenth-century, the homosexual became 'a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood' (Foucault, 1998, p.43).

In their work on gendered otherness in children, Bruhm and Hurley advocate the 'spacious' appropriation of 'queer', recognising both 'its more traditional sense, to indicate a deviation from the 'normal' [and] its association with specifically sexual alterity' (Bruhm and Hurley, 2004, x). While it would be precarious to suggest that any play with transvestism in childhood is a course towards gayness in adulthood, Robinson suggests that in Crisp's childhood 'the central pillar of his adult psychology, his inner femininity, was firmly established' (Robinson, 1999, p.155), and asks whether he was homosexual as a child. Though a problematic question, Robinson is certain that the answer is affirmative, 'but with neither the enthusiasm nor the pleasure he derived from his games of female make-believe. From the start, gender identity preceded sexual preference, and it never abandoned its pride of place' (Robinson, 1999, p.155). But in his autobiography Crisp does muse over the queer desires of which he was in some way aware as a small child. Writing that even 'in childhood I was mad about men in uniform' (Crisp, 1977a, p.13), he reminisces about the soldiers that were billeted in private houses during the First World War; 'To most people they represented a domestic inconvenience bravely borne but to me they were emotionally disturbing' (Crisp, 1977a, p.13). Barrow writes that it was with a particular incident sometime during the war that Crisp was given "an inkling of

my terrible fate” (Barrow, 2002, p.34). Being no more than nine years old, as the road outside the family home in Sutton was being dug up, Barrow writes that the young Denis became ‘so transfixed by these working-class men and stared at them so hard, that one of them protested, “Look at him – he’s all eyes! Clear off” with such violence that his companion was moved to say, “For heaven’s sake, Bill. He’s only a kid!”’ (Barrow, 2002, p.34).

The ‘inkling’ that Crisp recollects is less to do with the desire in the unknowing gaze of the queer child, and rather the realisation of the violence that it could elicit. In his introduction to *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood*, Matthew Rottnek asks ‘What does homosexual childhood look like?’ (Rottnek, 1999, p.2). The biopic gives some imago of what a life looked like – or might have – and the filmic image of any childhood, however fleeting, needs to foreshadow something of the life ahead. Bruhm and Hurley observe the anxieties often felt when queerness is manifest in children, with parents concerned ‘more about how the child turns out than about how the child exists as child’ (Bruhm and Hurley, 2004, xiv). Such transvestite play as Crisp’s challenged any received ‘ascension’ to heterosexuality (Bruhm and Hurley, 2004, xiv), and opened up a future of queer possibilities. Crisp’s childhood was of continual media interest throughout his celebrity, and writing in the *Daily Mail* one journalist would describe him as a ‘young boy who waltzed around the house dressed in his mother’s clothes admiring soldiers for all the wrong reasons’ (Lee-Potter, 1981). That such relation is made between transvestite play and erotic desire, however latent, concedes to the understanding of identifiably queer children – even if that identification is retrospective – as altogether ‘wrong’, their behaviours most often rationalized as a ‘series of mistakes or misplaced desires’ (Bruhm and Hurley, 2004, xiv). Although Crisp had introduced the film, and the image was of his suggestion – of what his own childhood looked like in recollection – it might be asked whether or not an audience would have otherwise known that the young child portrayed was in any way transvestite, or could he in fact have ‘passed’?³² There is the further question as to whether the film represents Crisp seeing himself for the first time, that image one of revelation and realisation for the small boy himself; for the image stands alone, without any indication as to where such play belongs within the panorama of the subject’s childhood.

Rottnek considers how gender-unconventional adult lives can be lived successfully and contentedly, but the trials that are inevitably experienced along the way often begin in childhood; he suggests that 'adults have the capacity and opportunity to articulate and work through these conflicts; children most often do not' (Rottnek, 1999, p.3). The scene of Crisp's childhood is returned to halfway through the film, fading from and then back again to a shot of the adult Crisp, at about thirty (figure 11); he is once again at his mirror, dressed in a kimono, his face bruised and cut, flinching beneath his red-painted fingernails as he traces the violence wrought in a particularly savage gang attack, the most graphic of his writings. Certainly Crisp's observation that Hurt revealed him 'as the helpless victim of a misguided dream' is conveyed here, but this is not a sentimental portrait of Crisp as victim. Rather, it is an effective technical means of suggesting that what might be read as a wilful articulation of gender nonconformity, with Crisp always mindful of the societal censure it could be subject to, was an expression of gender conflict which he had learnt to articulate in childhood. Most importantly, that image of his childhood, and the spectre of it that returns, has to suggest that effeminacy had never in fact been a struggle for Crisp.

With its remembrance of gender as performative in that most innocent sense, its consequences outside of the strident social demarcation of masculine and feminine, the image of Crisp's childhood reveals something of the 'girlyboy' that Ken Corbett explores. With 'a feeling for artifice, beauty, and style', the girlyboy is said to explore the body in an expression of queer aestheticism;

Girlyboys dress. They dress up. They accessorise. They delight in gender's masquerade. They do not simply throw clothes on; they put clothes together in an act of presentation. They love themselves as beautiful. They want others to love them as beautiful as well. But such narcissistic delight is policed as feminine. Girlyboys begin to equate such narcissistic delight with the shame of losing hold over their proper gender. In turn, they learn to defend against such narcissistic yearning through envy and repression (Corbett, 1999, p.130).

While there was as Crisp identifies a 'chasm' in his childhood between the real and the imaginary, the 'narcissistic delight' he himself found in transvestite play, according to his writings, was not so 'policed' or censured that any such sense of shame should result – indeed the return to the image of his childhood in the wake

of that violence only underlines such psychic negation. Where Patrick Higgins attributes early-twentieth century psychoanalytical theory with creating 'most of the modern mythology that surrounds homosexuality', he observes how, where Freudian thought reproved parental influences upon a child's sexual development, 'most of the burden [was placed] on the shoulders of Mother' (Higgins, 1993, p.129). As Julia Grant suggests, in looking at the emergence of the 'sissy' around the turn of the twentieth century, 'the concept that maternal overprotection could lead to sexual inversion was widespread' at this time (Grant, 2004, p.840). Robinson observes Crisp's account of his childhood as 'a parody of the stock Freudian narrative about the genesis of homosexuality' (Robinson, 1999, p.154), and certainly Crisp would concede that his own mother exercised a direct influence upon his effeminacy. Recalling his childhood dressing-up, and not as a solitary activity but in the company of girls of a similar age, he writes of her apparent indulgence; 'I cannot say whether my mother led me into this life-long exotic swoon because it was secretly her own ideal or whether, finding me already there, she sustained me in it as a way of keeping me quiet. Undoubtedly she allowed me to feel that it was a taste we shared' (Crisp, 1977a, p.15). Where Grant considers how mothers 'were not only to be blamed for the production of sissy and homosexual boys', but were believed to be complicit in their expression of effeminacy and seeming sexual otherness, being 'secretly pleased that their sons shared their affections and affinities', she suggests that the mother who was seen as devoted in the nineteenth century 'was recast as a pathological pariah' in the early-twentieth century (Grant, 2004, p.841).

In his semi-autobiographical short story, 'My Mother's Clothes: The School of Beauty and Shame,' Richard McCann writes sensuously of the materiality of childhood transvestism, describing 'the secrets of my mother's dresser: her satin nightgowns and padded brassieres ... galaxies of cocktail rings and cultured pearls ... shrines to deeper intentions, private grottoes of yearning' (McCann, 1994, p.546). It is the same mirror that the film of Crisp's autobiography offers – reflective of queerness in realisation, of a young boy seeking material likeness of his effeminate psyche – that McCann's narrative employs. The protagonist recalls how he saw himself transformed, 'in my mother's triple-mirrored vanity, its endless repetitions.' In redolence of the chasm that Crisp writes, he finds a self that has 'doubled', at once an image and the small boy that studies it;

I saw myself as beautiful, and guilty: the lipstick made my mouth seem the ripest rose, or a wound; the small rose on the back slip opened like my mother's heart disclosed ... The mirror was a silvery stream: on the far side, in a clearing, stood the woman who was icily immune from the boy's terror and contempt; on the close side, in the bedroom, stood the boy who feared and yet longed after her inviolability (McCann, 1994, p.551).

Such evocative description is largely absent from Crisp's autobiography, as is the secrecy in which McCann's protagonist cross-dresses and the sense of guilt that the mirror reflects back, but the apparent acquiescence of Crisp's mother is at once absent and present in that filmic image of him as a child; while it would suggest Crisp's childhood transvestism to have been enacted in private, his writings reveal otherwise, and the image of his suggestion embodies the 'indulgences' of his mother. Examining the culture of Edwardian childhood, Thompson considers how there was a 'significant minority of children whose upbringing ... seemed less restrictive than was normal, at least at first impression', coming from upper- and middle-class families, 'whose abundance of resources made it as easy to smother a child with the apparent kindness of professional diagnoses as to drill it in the traditional manner' (Thompson, 1992, p.47). Crisp writes of the strained relationship he had with his father in much detail, a relationship that he would reflect upon still in the last of his interviews, and of his relative closeness to his mother; 'my parents and I constructed between us the classic triangle for all the world as if we had read the right books on psychology' (Crisp, 1977a, p.12). But apart from his mother's solicitation of her own doctor, who suggested that all Crisp needed 'was a lesson in life' (Crisp, 1977a, p.26), his parents did not seek such counsel for the 'difference' they observed in him. The giving of that 'diagnosis' is portrayed in the film soon after that abridgment of his childhood, with the consequent 'lesson' being Crisp's discovery of masturbation – a scene subject to censorship by the Independent Broadcasting Authority, as discussed previously.³³ It has been in the domain of psychoanalytical thought however, as Grant suggests above, that mothers have been most maligned; pathologised as being 'over-protective, indulgent, seductive, overanxious, or unhappily married', Corbett suggests that there has been little consideration of the possibility 'that a mother's and son's subjectivities may afford greater closeness and empathy' (Corbett, 1999, p.129). Crisp

suggests that he and his mother felt a common identification with an 'exotic' expression of femininity, and the image of his childhood with which the biopic begins its tracing of his effeminacy and its fashioning is redolent with early-twentieth century understandings of the 'sissy' as the product of 'smother-love' (Grant, 2004, p.839). Stood in polarisation to 'real boys', in the nineteenth-century 'sissies were castigated by their peers, but twentieth-century sissies bore a clinical as well as a social stigma' (Grant, 2004, p.829).

Amongst brothers who 'aspired to be splendid icons of manliness such as firemen or ships' captains' (Crisp, 1981, pp.7-8), Crisp would speak of his expression of effeminacy in childhood marking him as an object of 'ridicule'. In the early years of the twentieth century, young boys, 'once thought to be exempt from the demands of masculinity', came to be regarded 'as men in the making, placing their behaviours, characteristics, and temperaments under a microscope for manifestations of gender deviations' (Grant, 2004, p.830). Grant suggests that while 'effeminate or unmanly boys were not artefacts of the twentieth century, the meaning attached to them shifted in conjunction with the politics of masculinity and transformations in child rearing, gender socialisation, and the new sciences of human development' (Grant, 2004, p.829), and considers particularly how cross-gender play came under scrutiny;

The tradition of boys dressing up in women's clothing in theatrical performances in the nineteenth century had a corollary in the play activities of little boys, many of whom enjoyed dressing up in women's clothes and elicited the admiration of relatives and friends in so doing. As the twentieth century progressed, however, the appearance of little boys came to symbolise their feminisation under the auspices of controlling and smothering women (Grant, 2004, p.840).

Crisp relates in his autobiography his appearance as a small child in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and how the private transgressiveness of cross-dressing was made truly public under parental concession: 'It is an instance of my mother's spasmodic indulgence of me that I was allowed to appear in public wearing a wreath of roses and a green tulle dress in a show that was in no other way transvestite' (Crisp, 1977a, p.11). Where the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* portrays Crisp's mother as somewhat anxious as to her son's 'difference', this is only expressed as he reaches young adulthood; a woman who emotes

dramatically at the hostile manner of his father, her presence is however fleeting, and the familial conflict that Bingham observes as a convention of the biopic is otherwise absent, and thus the sense of Crisp's isolation amplified. What Crisp in his writings suggests to be his mother's influence upon his effeminacy in childhood is very discreetly assimilated in those opening scenes. Such prudence could well have been the consequence of 'smother-love' theories having been widely disputed. However, even at the time of the film's broadcast, there was an evident predisposition towards such causality in the media. Writing for the *Guardian*, Fred Milson discussed the 'Church's dilemma about homosexuals,' asking whether they were 'born like that or does life make them such?' Milson quotes from the film – Crisp's insistence that 'Male and female created He, me' – and suggests that 'not all of them have an inborn constitutional condition', with some homosexuality 'induced by doting, dominating mothers; some is fixation at the adolescent stage of development; some is narcissism – falling in love with the mirror image of yourself' (Milson, 1976).

Corbett considers how homosexual boyhood 'as a conceptual category does not exist', and how culturally marginalised such childhoods are. When given representation, they are 'disordered' and 'nonconforming', and evidence behaviours 'from which it is hoped they will break free' (Corbett, 1999, p.108). In the 'spirit of parodically reclaiming oppressive signifiers,' Corbett suggests, of terms such as 'sissy', there is a defiant invocation of 'its linkage with pathology, indictment, and scorn.' Such terms however carry 'the implication of weakness, unbecoming delicacy, and enervation, devoid of the possibilities born of resistance, agency, and action' (Corbett, 1999, p.109). But the childhood effeminacy of Crisp's autobiography does suggest strategies of resistance and agency, and certainly the employment of its image in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, abbreviated as it is, seems intent on such inference. But a felt absence are the intervening years, particularly of Crisp's experiences at boarding school, where the expression of such effeminacy was inhibited, his 'dressing-up' necessarily grown out of, and the cruelties of which would provide him with 'a dress rehearsal for the treatment that I was to receive in the streets of London in a few years' time' (Crisp, 1977a, p.22).³⁴

Sinfield discusses the public school system of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain, suggesting that it was 'the main site where manliness

was supposed to be established,' an institution that kept 'men masculine – away from the excessive influence of women' (Sinfield, 1994, p.64). Parents had come to believe that 'the capacity to endure physical and psychological hardship with a stiff upper lip was the best thing one could bestow upon a boy-child', and the separation of boys 'from the women who were generally dominant in their childhood, and subjecting of them to systematic brutalisation, were not the incidental price of "a good education"; *they were the point*' (Sinfield, 1994, pp.64-65). But the paradox to the 'man-to-man loyalty' and 'insensitivity' that it was hoped a public school career would instil in boys, preparing them for the 'prevailing pattern of cross-sex relations' – being an institution 'supposed to protect men from effeminacy' – was that it allowed same-sex practices to flourish (Sinfield, 1994, pp.64-65). While Crisp writes of effeminate boys being 'among those who indulge least in sex acts with other boys at school' (Crisp, 1977a, p.20), the relative conformity it demanded of Crisp may well have looked at odds within the visual narrative of effeminacy that the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* traces. That lone image of his childhood affords more immediate passage into the effeminacy of his adulthood.

In her essay 'How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay', Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes the disavowal of the effeminate boy in gay culture, and proposes their figure to become at once 'the haunting abject of gay thought itself', and 'the open secret of many politicized adult gay men' (Sedgwick, 1993, p.72). Similarly, Corbett suggests that many gay men *can* recall childhood experiences of cross-gendered identifications, but keep their 'femme ghosts in their closets' (Corbett, 1999, p.112). There is evident pleasure felt by Crisp as he introduces that image of his suggestion, and the abridged portrayal of his childhood, an image of innocence and joy, is central to the affirmation of Crisp's particular queerness that is at the heart of the film's text. But the essentialism of Crisp's effeminacy that those first scenes register, the bridge that is built between his childhood play and his adult sexuality, engenders a negation of the very act that came to define modern gay subjectivity, that is the discursive claiming of identity that was requisite in the politicization of those gay men to which both Sedgwick and Corbett allude. In her treatise of the coming out narrative, Saxey suggests that lasting assumptions around the heterosexuality of children results in the certainty that every queer subject has a coming out story to tell. Observing such narratives

to trace most typically the subject's 'isolated and confused' youth (Saxey, 2008, pp.1-2), there is certainly some resonance with Crisp's experiences and the narrative of *The Naked Civil Servant*. But neither in his autobiography or its film translation is there any account of Crisp having 'come-out'. It would seem that the effeminacy that Crisp had fashioned since childhood meant the negation of any such spoken declaration.

The (not) coming-out narrative

The word 'homosexual' was never used. I was a sissy, or a pansy or a fairy. And I was, *always*. People say, "When did you come out?" – well I was never *in*. I was waltzing around the house in clothes I'd found in the attic belonging to my mother or grandmother, saying "Today I'm a beautiful princess ...". What my parents thought, I cannot *imagine* (Crisp quoted in Walsh, 1996).

There are few gay lives that have received the biopic 'treatment', and, whether biographical or fictional, the 'coming-out' theme is still defining of filmic narratives with a gay protagonist. Just as Margaretta Jolly observes the coming-out narrative to be the 'most distinctive form of les-bi-gay life writing', with its invocation of the auto/biographical tradition 'of revelation and conversion' (Jolly, 2001a, p.476), it can be said that audiences have come to expect that declaration as a necessary convention in the filmic portrayal of gay lives. While Crisp does often have to make a claim of queerness in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* – for instance, he has to confirm that he is homosexual before the military medical board, and in court when charged with solicitation – it is never offered as revelation or disclosure. The absence of that admission demands questions around the emancipation that its apologists insist the act of coming-out engenders, for both the individual and the collective – that is, the gay 'community'. With the material realisation of Crisp's effeminacy that the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* traces, the discursive act of coming out is made redundant. Although it can be said that his queerness is declared instantly in the film – in Crisp's own prologue, and in that summation of his childhood and all it would project – no name is initially attached to his 'difference'. It is a given fact of the film which remains unspoken until the first and only scene in which we see him working as a prostitute, pursued by a stranger along Piccadilly; 'the great

thing about following an obvious homosexual is that you can't possibly be wrong' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).

It can be argued that the act of coming out had no real frame of reference for Crisp and his generation, but it was the very fact that Crisp was so 'obvious' that most troubled the critics of his early celebrity – those who felt his figure to be disadvantageous to the newly politically mobilised gay culture. Cohler suggests the narratives of 'making a gay identity' to be hinged upon that epiphanic moment most often 'phrased in terms of the decision to disclose or 'come out' to self and others' (Cohler, 2007, p.223). In interviews with Crisp, journalists would often remark that he had never made such a disclosure; 'Crisp never came out of the closet – he was never in it' (Cook, 1995) is an assertion concurrent with the broad cultural permeation of those terms. While in the narratives of Crisp's history the closet is never an option, there is such a moment of identity realisation as Cohler suggests. While his effeminacy and its fashioning, being the essential subject of his autobiography, is declared upon the first page, its earliest material realisation is not reminisced until much later, and is offered quite austerely as 'I began to wear make-up' (Crisp, 1977a, p.34). That moment is portrayed in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* as Crisp's first experiment with lipstick in the company of those Dilly Boys who befriended him in the late-1920s, an epiphanic act of materiality rather than discourse (figure 12).

Sinfield asks the question, 'in gay liberation, who was liberated?', suggesting that it was not 'the kind of gay man whose effeminacy was tantamount to transgender, for he was always visible' (Sinfield, 2000, p.157). The specific example that Sinfield cites is Crisp, quoting from *The Naked Civil Servant* on the imperative of effeminacy for men like him, stressing the apparent fact that he 'was never not-out' (Sinfield, 2000, p.157). While Dean Durber suggests that every gay person has 'a coming out story to tell' (Durber, 2007, p.243), in the advent of gay liberationist politics, for Sinfield it was only those 'who could pass who gained the option of coming out' (Sinfield, 2000, p.153). In looking at attitudes towards effeminacy in America in the late-1970s, Seymour Kleinberg compares the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* with the more conventional 'coming-out' narrative that was emerging at that time, centred upon those who had for some time 'passed' convincingly. He suggests an essentialism to Crisp's effeminacy that could not be negated; 'Effeminate men like Crisp who have the

courage to defy society are eccentric; butch men are heroic ... What could sissies like Crisp do even if they didn't flaunt it?' (Kleinberg, 1982, p.203). In her enquiry into 'the passing of *passing* as a politically viable response to oppression', Carole-Anne Tyler proposes a sequence of binaries as its very terms; 'visibility/invisibility, speech/silence, difference/sameness ... coming out/mimicry' (Tyler, 1997, p.227). Where mimicry of the heteronormative is opposed to Crisp's wilful fashioning of queer signification, its volubility gives negation of the speech act. If the act of coming out can reconstitute 'one's past as mimicry' (Tyler, 1997, p.228), in the film Crisp has no such past; never 'not-out', never 'in', his life is presented, from childhood, as *a/ways* queer.

In considering how the autobiographical becomes lived narrativisation, Eakin explores the relation between those who 'perform self-narrations' and those who 'receive and judge those performances', concerned particularly with how the regulation of identity narrative can become the regulation of identity (Eakin, 2008, p.43). Amongst the opposition to the identity that Crisp fashioned, now become autobiographical and the subject of mass media representation, a particular incident would reflect for him the demands of the new collective gay political consciousness and the imperative of its claims to liberationist discourse. Writing in his second volume of autobiography on the early performances of his one-man show in London theatres, Crisp would recollect an encounter in which he was asked to 'come out' to his audience; 'I was unable to suppress my amusement. "How could that possibly be necessary?" I asked. "What do you think brings people here except that I am the subject of *The Naked Civil Servant?*"' (Crisp, 1981, pp.120-121). The collective political gains that were hoped to result from the individual discursive act of coming-out³⁵ was a principle in opposition with Crisp's much-expressed refusal of solidarity on the grounds of common sexuality. This was manifest most often as a line of defence in a culture that had, and would continue further in his celebrity, to resent his effeminacy. In Mitchell's 1970 documentary, he made that often repeated claim, 'You must understand with everything I say that I am speaking first of all for myself and then for a group. I am a minority within a minority. I'm an effeminate homosexual.' While Saxey considers the coming out narrative to articulate a collective voice, to 'speak for all gay men or lesbians when they speak for one' (Saxey, 2008, p.7),

Crisp had repudiated such a possibility before his life ever became the life of the biopic, and thus public, with a greater demand to conform to such political norms.

Durber considers the late-1960s countercultural claim of the personal being political in relation to the gay liberationist politics of the period and an agenda of public affirmation reasoned as 'a major step towards removing discrimination' (2007, p.243). He observes Foucault's understanding of the imperative character of modernity's sexual discourses in discussing the soon established homogeneity of the coming-out story; whatever their specifics, Durber suggests, 'the overall structure of these narratives remains the same.' Although imposing 'a culture of confession of our sexualised habits' (Durber, 2007, p.244), such didacticism was excused in liberationist discourse. In the account of lesbian and gay auto/biography in *The Encyclopaedia of Life Writing*, the circumscription of its modern narratives is immediately identified; 'The distinctive social stigmatization experienced by those who desire others of their own sex has led to a characteristic genre of life writing: the 'coming out' story. Its essential plot is self-acceptance through public declaration of one's sexuality.' Correlation is made specific between the relative proliferation of such narratives and the 'unprecedented rise in visibility and cultural organization' of lesbian and gay identities from the late-1960s (Jolly, 2001b, p.547). That *The Naked Civil Servant* provides the lone citation in the account – indeed its opening is quoted at some length to expound it as 'one of the most explicit ... most perverse, reclaimings of the terms of sexual pathologization' (Jolly, 2001b, p.547) – would suggest Crisp's autobiography to be definitive of the genre. The further treatise of 'the play and performance amid [such] humorous self-hatred' as Crisp's, and his rather vanguard portrait of the self as 'constructed, malleable, or even parodic', suggests that he provided something of a model for later gay life-narratives (Jolly, 2001b, p.549). While he might have negated any need for the discursive act of coming-out, it is not contentious to regard Crisp's as a coming out narrative – though perhaps there is greater likeness with the 'coming-of-age' memoir, where distinction can be made between the two – but whatever the later incidence of such performative tendencies within the canon of gay and lesbian autobiography, it is certainly questionable that it was Crisp who provided such a model.³⁶

In exploring the coming-out narrative as the 'staple of lesbian and gay culture building', McNaron considers how they represent resistance and fortitude

in a culture which has afforded 'no acceptable mirrors or images with which to fashion ourselves', providing representations in which 'people unsure of their sexual identity may recognise themselves' (McNaron, 1995, pp.173-174). It is the same pursuit of likeness and affirmation that Saxey considers; coming out narratives are said to offer valid portraits of gay lives 'as opposed to the distorting mirrors offered by heteronormative society' (Saxey, 2008, p.35). *The Naked Civil Servant* did not trace any passage towards what McNaron terms the 'crucial naming of the self to the self' (McNaron, 1995, p.174), and the reflection that the film of his autobiography would offer, as Crisp was himself very much aware, was not entirely welcomed. In so persuasive a medium as television, it was troubling that that narrative would take as read the negation of Crisp having to come out discursively – to have to claim in speech his sexual otherness – and he would write in his second volume of autobiography of 'the rift' between himself and 'the great body of homosexuality' being the consequence of that translation;

While my identity remained in the form of written words, the Gay Movement (as distinct from gay people) accepted and to some extent welcomed it. The fact that a book in part about my sex life had been published at all was considered to be a tiny triumph for the cause even if my image did lack the aggression requisite for an era when protest was developing into a fad and the voice of minorities was becoming everywhere so shrill. As very slowly I moved from the written to the spoken word – as I ceased to be an idea and became an icon – certain attributes of my nature, which before could only have been inferred, became obvious (Crisp, 1981, p.84).

Crisp was aware of how his effeminacy, now so 'obvious' and given so great an audience, was deemed by some to be quite literally making a 'show' of gay sexuality in a time when visibility, for his detractors, meant an acceptably masculinised image. Consequent to that image of masculinity, and its lack of obviousness, was the very *necessity* of coming-out. What Crisp considered his 'easily digested image, camp, ineffectual, slightly silly, and, worst of all, almost indifferent to sex' (Crisp, 1981, p.84) – the image that the film of his autobiography, he believed, established in the public consciousness – was the representation of queerness that he supposed to be so objectionable to the developing gay 'community'. In redolence of the notion that children most often abandon cross-gender behaviours, where Cole traces the fashioning of

effeminacy by gay men he considers how it has historically afforded them 'a first step into the gay world', but one often negated when the subject realised its 'alternatives' of stable – though still queered – norms of masculinity (Cole, 2000, p.31). The fashioning of the body could be critical to the subject's coming-out, for some the most lucid marker of this rite of passage and self-realisation.³⁷ But in both his autobiography and its adaptation, the gender transgressive fashioning of Crisp's early adult life and the queerness it symbolised is presented as being of some preordination, and, considering that it is typically family that most gay men and women have the greatest difficulty in coming out 'to', assimilated it would seem within family life with relative ease; while his first articulation of cosmeticised effeminacy might have been tentative, no attendant disclosure or revelation was given in speech. In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* his father simply informs Crisp, lightly cosmeticised at the breakfast table, that he resembles a 'male whore' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975), an observation with some precision at that time. Where Plummer considers the consequences of making a disclosure of one's sexuality before the emancipation of the later twentieth century, he observes the forms of 'dramatic social exclusion' that were the organising structures of what came to be the closet (Plummer, 1995, p.27). But never being 'in', Crisp could not articulate any understanding of the closet that the modern gay subject had to experience before they could 'come out'.

Eakin considers those subjects who 'fashion an I-character in an autobiography [to] give a degree of permanence and narrative solidity – or 'body,' we might say – to otherwise evanescent states of identity feeling' (Eakin, 2008, p.77). But the auto/biographical tradition 'of revelation and conversion' that Jolly suggests defines the coming-out story reveals a body that embraces its evanescence as symptom of 'becoming'. The permanence of the 'out' body that Crisp fashioned and made auto/biographical, in keen correspondence with Eakin's thesis, was at variance with the transitive body that the coming-out narrative so conventionally traces. Where Jolly observes its narrative revision of the 'forced confession', she considers how it afforded expression of the political and historical 'moment' of early gay emancipation (Jolly, 2001a, p.476). That Crisp's emancipation was not integrant of such a collective moment, at once contemporaneous and constitutive of wider societal change, would trouble the voices of this 'different' generation. Saxey considers the disavowal of causality

often evident in the coming out narrative to be representative of 'a new political attitude, one that regards the search for the causes of same-sex desire as a feature of oppression' (Saxey, 2008, p.39). At the last of his autobiography Crisp writes of having learned, but never mastered, 'the modern manner'; 'I know that on no account must I point a moral or trace a pattern through my past ... Yet I find it hard to take a prolonged look back and not attempt to excuse results by rearranging causes' (Crisp, 1977a, p.215). While Crisp would in his autobiography, rather indifferently, suggest there to be some causality to his sexuality, particularly in regards to his parents' attitudes towards him, there is an essentialism to the self that he writes that has some correspondence with the narratives of Saxey's analysis – but of course an essentialism expressed in effeminacy.

In her essay 'Anxieties of Identity: Coming Out and Coming Undone', Julia Creet considers those sexualities 'formulated as identities rather than strictly as behaviour' (Creet, 1995, p.182). She considers how they are predicated upon the act of coming out, and the exigencies beyond that 'single utterance', and suggests that as 'new situations demanding the revelation of identity are encountered constantly ... the repetitive act of coming out ... (re)creates and maintains identity, not just discloses it' (Creet, 1995, p.182). Just as Robinson suggests 'transcending self-hatred' to be a common theme across coming out narratives (Robinson, 1999, xvii), Tyler considers how the act itself allows the subject to declare and display 'a positive difference from a presumptive norm which has also served as the measure of superiority' (Tyler, 1997, p.228). In the lexicon of gay liberationist discourse, 'pride', expressed in the individual and the collective, would become fundamental, and the effeminacy that Crisp fashioned, for many, was articulate of a quite opposite identification. Though Crisp would reckon with the very concept, Hurt describes being particularly nervous as to how he could project the 'pride' that Crisp's figure embodied, 'the steel in the man that had sustained him through years of humiliation and insult and which was hidden under all the mascara and feminine flounces' (Nathan, 1986, p.15). But as Robinson suggests, to believe that the lives of early gay autobiographers such as Crisp, lived and written before the coming out narrative became *the* 'formula' of gay life writing, were premised upon 'nothing but self-hatred' is at once 'unhistorical and inaccurate' (Robinson, 1999, p.394). But Crisp could give an

impression of self-loathing that would incite much anxiety. Indeed, he writes, 'I regarded all heterosexuals, however low, as superior to any homosexual, however noble' (Crisp, 1977a, p.68). But where these are the last words of an early chapter in his autobiography, in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* the claim is given some further reasoning, however arch; 'It's infinitely luckier. It's always better to be a member of the majority.' It was an inevitability that Crisp's effeminacy, given the societal censure and hostility it had knowingly provoked, would be read as a badge of self-oppression. Indeed, the confrontational nature of his fashioning, it could be said, did mean his having to accept the 'superiority' of his persecutors. But Crisp's fashioning did afford him the same constancy of identity to which Creet alludes. The sustaining of its effeminacy rendered mute any discursive act of disclosure, and before coming out had itself come out, Crisp had fashioned it as material expression. But for his critics, this was not, in the 1970s, an effectual strategy of identity politics, and certainly the indifference to sex he believed audiences to perceive in the image of *The Naked Civil Servant* was implicated here.

Where Saxey discusses the coming out narrative as generally 'somewhat squeamish about effeminacy' (Saxey, 2008, p.48),³⁸ she might have considered the broader cultural figure of someone like Crisp and how his image became for many the index against which they were able to measure the 'success' of their own masculinity. But *The Naked Civil Servant* is given a lone mention in her study, and only to gauge how it narrowly pre-dates the genres 'modern' narratives. Saxey considers specifically how Crisp's autobiography relates sexual encounters in moderation when compared to subsequent gay life narratives (Saxey, 2008, p.40). Certainly Crisp would often observe the vociferousness of sex across late-twentieth century culture, but in its portrayal of his early adult life, at the time of broadcast the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* was for some viewers relatively explicit in its portrayal of same-sex intimacy, as that journalist from *The Sun* and their 'shocker from Soho' story evidences. Crisp might have spoken of sex with a suggestion of displeasure, in both the film's narration and further media, yet here in fact was a rather candid portrayal of his erotic life. But Saxey considers it a persistent dilemma that first-person narratives with sexual content are read as confessionals, with the protagonist seeking judgement of the erotic life they narrate (Saxey, 2008, p.6). Crisp's speaking of being asexual in his later

life however, alongside the relative sexual reserve of his writings, did encourage an image of him as 'sexless', and certainly in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* sex elicits a certain apathy in him – the erotic life it portrays is not one of awakening or realisation, of 'finding' one's sexual self, a course that the more 'modern' texts of Saxey's survey would narrativise.

At the time of the film's broadcast, one journalist would describe how Crisp's 'confrontations with the world were a kind of tragic parody of normal confrontations' (Lennon, 1975). Crisp's struggle was, it could be said, of his own fashioning, of his over-emphatic rejection of the closet, distinct in some ways, but not entirely, from those for whom the act of coming-out would be necessary. The coming-out narrative so often has a 'happy ending', the resolution that it is hoped that assertion will provide, but Saxey considers how such a convention can risk 'drawing attention away from continuing cultural homophobia' (Saxey, 2008, p.6). Where Crisp's autobiography closes with so pronounced a melancholic tone – 'I stumble towards my grave confused and hurt and hungry ...' – reflecting as he does on a lifetime of societal subjugation, the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* would portray him, in its closing scenes, as survivor, as 'stately homo', in something of a happy ending. There would be metaphor here for the *real* Crisp though; from that closing scene, he would attain what can legitimately be defined as 'overnight fame', Hurt's characterisation affording him a public life, past and present – indeed it allowed for a 'coming out' of sorts.

Between actor and subject

Mr Hurt does not do an impersonation of me, but he's taken on the quality that anyone has who's been stared at a lot. You develop a kind of distance, you never look at anyone, because you guess that they are looking at you (Crisp quoted in Amory, 1975).

There is much validity to the lyrical claim that 'John Hurt *is* Quentin Crisp'. It was indeed Hurt's portrayal that lent image to Crisp's 'previous' life, his life before the biopic, those years of societal defiance and struggle that gave his story its substance. The claim that Hurt's career 'can be divided into two parts – before and after playing Quentin Crisp in *The Naked Civil Servant*' (Slide, 1996, p.117), underlines how critical the role would prove for the actor, and behind the humour

of Crisp's repeated claim that Hurt was his 'representative on earth' there is some accuracy. Where Bingham explores Comolli's thesis of the 'body too much' (Comolli, 1978), in which the actor 'becomes the only version of the person that we have as we watch the film', he considers how the body of both actor and subject 'compete for the spectator's belief' (Bingham, 2010, p.17).³⁹ But apart from a few black and white photographs and several portraits from his career as an art school model, there is little visual trace to be made of the image that Crisp had fashioned in his youth, and although he might have introduced his own biopic – though his appearance in the film was, as he would himself say, at 'half-mast', with both his dress and make-up relatively muted – Crisp was then of such minor public renown that Hurt's characterisation and performance had little to be measured against. The image of his youth and middle-age, those years that Crisp had not lived in the public eye and of which his autobiography is concerned, are only known visually by means of Hurt's portrayal.

As Anthony Slide suggests, 'great trouble was spent in making up Hurt to look exactly like Quentin Crisp despite nobody's knowing at that time what was his appearance' (Slide, 1996, p.118). Crisp had himself been 'amazed that they took such enormous trouble to make Mr Hurt look like me. I know that if you make a film about Napoleon the actor must look like him ... when you are making a film about somebody absolutely unknown like me, what does it matter?' (Nathan, 1986, p.18). But Hurt spoke of not having entirely understood the role until he was in costume and fully made-up, that the character he sought in Crisp was revealed to him only through the material construction of that effeminate queerness. Whilst make-up was applied, Hurt 'suddenly realised exactly why women wear it. It does extraordinary things for you. Simply by using lipstick the mouth is delineated in a most extraordinary way and obviously the eyes are enhanced by mascara' (Nathan, 1986, p.16). Hurt's performance certainly received much acclaim, garlanded with accolades, including a BAFTA Best Actor award. The role would prove so defining for him that David Nathan opens his biography of the actor with a lone paragraph surveying his lineage, before devoting the rest of the chapter to *The Naked Civil Servant* and Hurt's performance in the role.

The question of the 'body too much' had indeed been of concern to Hurt, and Nathan traces the progress of the film from Mackie's first identifying Hurt as

the 'perfect' Crisp, and the concern they shared as to the consequence of actor and subject meeting before filming began. Hurt had also been concerned as to Crisp's introduction to the film, believing audiences might have identified too great a distinction between subject and actor. When Crisp was told by Mackie that he had 'never seen anyone so willing' as Hurt to play a role, he replied that 'if you were to show anyone in the entertainment business a book in which almost every paragraph begins with the word 'I' he will be anxious to play the lead in it' (Crisp, 1981, p.74). After finally meeting with Crisp, Hurt had told Gold that 'it was impossible to do an impersonation' of him, and he would have 'to create his own character from the script' (Nathan, 1986, p.17). Hurt attests to Bingham's thesis that the biopic allows the drawing of 'a character out of an actual subject' (Bingham, 2010, p.382), but the stylisation that Crisp's earlier self and life narrative were subject to would create the most enduring image of him in the public consciousness.

Bingham considers the biopic to be 'a form of celebrity culture' (Bingham, 2010, p.377), and there is particular illustration of this in the media attention that both actor and subject received prior to the broadcast of *The Naked Civil Servant*. Sometimes interviewed together, each was able to reflect on their experiences of becoming and being Quentin Crisp. As the film was made for television it would elicit the interest of much mainstream media, publications such as *TV Times*, aimed at an 'average' readership, for whom the homosexual 'question' was not entirely familiar territory. When *TV Times* profiled actor and subject together, the week before the film was broadcast, Hurt was described as a 'promising young film star' (Lanning, 1975), but the extraordinary success and reception of *The Naked Civil Servant*, and the lasting impression it would make on both Hurt's career and on Crisp's life, could not have been foreseen. Crisp would express in the interview his wonder at being 'portrayed in my own lifetime', said to be the 'ultimate' achievement for an exhibitionist like himself. There was propaganda, it might be said, in Hurt's rhetoric as to Crisp's relevance to the gay 'cause', with an evident awareness of the criticism that his figure could elicit. He describes Crisp as 'an intelligent spokesman for homosexuality without drifting into all the affectations of Gay Lib' (Hurt quoted in Lanning, 1975). But the journalist cites Crisp's claim of heterosexuality's 'superiority', an attitude that is said to have surprised Hurt, who quotes Crisp as having said, during filming, 'I don't know how

you can do this – you must find it so degrading to play’ (Hurt quoted in Lanning, 1975).

In a comparable feature in the *Sunday Times Magazine*, the journalist would quote from Crisp’s writings as though from Crisp himself, while he and Hurt reflected on the course of the biopic and its making. Crisp would comment on Hurt’s performance in the scene in which he is turned away from a private member’s gay club in the 1930s; ‘you see him gather himself together and walk absolutely on a desert island from the door to the bar ... this is absolutely right. Mr Hurt is quite dauntless’ (Crisp quoted in Amory, 1975). Bingham suggests that while the actor might assume ‘as much as [they] can the stance and demeanour’ of the biopic subject, it is essential that the actor should emphasise their ‘separateness’ (Bingham, 2010, p.17). That the biopic subject should observe in the performance of their life so close a reading of their psychology, as when Crisp suggests that Hurt had assumed ‘the quality that anyone has who’s been stared at a lot’, portraying convincingly the detachment and apparent diffidence that it determined, he evidences some willingness to see his life as others might see it. The still image of Hurt in the role that accompanies the *Sunday Times Magazine* article is testament to the spectacular visual possibilities that Crisp’s autobiography held. That photograph, by Terence Donovan, shows Hurt as Crisp vainglorious still in his ‘red period’, dressed in the most vivid of pink shirts, swathed in his signature scarf, with scarlet-painted nails and hands bejewelled in what Crisp would describe as his ‘Edith Sitwell rings’. It is a distinct vision from the ‘real’ Crisp shown as he was in his thirties, in a portrait by Angus McBean from 1940 (figure 13), a sombre profile of immaculately groomed features, glistening lips and heavy eyelashes, framed by a great spectacle of hair, its flaming colour hidden in its black and white tonality. For readers advised of Crisp as ‘an effeminate homosexual who defiantly wore make-up in the streets during the late Twenties when, even on a woman, eye-shadow was sinful’ (Amory, 1975), the image of the actor is more convincing than that of the subject. The original appears in comparison as something of a study of the effete ‘sad young man’, an image of romanticised melancholy.⁴⁰

Bingham suggests there to be, in the post-classical Hollywood biopic, three basic types of performance, the ‘fully embodied impersonation, stylized suggestion, and the star performance’ (Bingham, 2010, p.159). For Gold, Hurt

had 'created this character in which Quentin is recognisable though it is not an impersonation' (Gold quoted in Nathan, 1986, p.17). But there is an element of each of Bingham's categories observable in Hurt's portrayal of Crisp. The very question of what a life 'looks like', or should be made to look like, has to be an emotive one when confronted by the subject whose past it is that is being reinvented, in a medium that has to visually dramatise what only they can truthfully know. But when on location in his role as technical advisor, Crisp was asked 'if it was like it was'; unable to 'see whether it was like my life or not', he replied, 'it is what Thames Television wants' (Crisp quoted in Nathan, 1986, p.18). Crisp 'had no view of what the film would be like. I had been shown the scenario but I had no idea of what it would look like' (Crisp quoted in Nathan, 1986, p.19). Hurt suggests that the principal concern for all actors should be in 'correctly realising the image in your mind' (Hurt quoted in Nathan, 1986, p.19).

It is important to consider also the *voice* that Hurt achieved. In resonance of what Robinson describes as 'a queenly prose to match his queenly person' (Robinson, 1999, p.150), Hurt tells Amory that Crisp's 'is such a particular voice ... a very mannered, very definitely queenly voice, but at the same time it has a kind of logical intelligence, he knows *what* he is going to say, *when* he is going to say it and *how* he is going to say it' (Hurt quoted in Amory, 1975). Hurt's judgement of Crisp's voice, the dramatic promise of its 'mannered ... queenly' intellect (Hurt quoted in Amory, 1975), and the analogy it finds in his similarly mannered literary voice, reaches beyond the performative surface of the text that binds subject and actor. But Crisp would identify for Nathan what he felt was a glaring discrepancy in translation; 'If there's a weakness – and it isn't anything to do with Mr Hurt – it is the moment when I tell someone to sod off. Not only have I never uttered the word, but nobody in their right senses would say anything like that in a situation so fraught with danger' (Crisp quoted in Nathan, 1986, p.20). But with some objectivity Crisp recognised himself as a characterisation in the film; 'the character is slightly more defiant than I ever was. It does answer back to some extent. For of course I was a total victim. I never answered anybody back and I never defied anybody. I think my domain is a bit more dreary, so I think it was a good idea that a spark of defiance was injected, even if it was a bit misguided' (Crisp quoted in Nathan, 1986, p.20). Bingham gives a précis of the biopic's essential objective, being a genre that 'narrates, exhibits, and celebrates

the life of a subject in order to demonstrate, investigate or question his or her importance in the world; to illuminate the fine points of a personality' (Bingham, 2010, p.10). It was the sensitivity of Hurt's performance in *The Naked Civil Servant* that was celebrated, indeed the nuanced portrayal of Crisp's 'fine points'; 'Every gesture of vanity, humility, candour and generosity was accurately judged and perfectly co-ordinated' (Clayton, 1975).

Actor and subject would enjoy a 'strangely symbiotic relationship – Hurt had made Crisp famous, Crisp had made Hurt famous' (Hattenstone, 2009). In Jonathan Nossiter's 1991 documentary *Resident Alien*, there is a meeting that reveals something of the nature of their acquaintance.⁴¹ Crisp is filmed in his Lower East Side room, watching *The Naked Civil Servant* on a television set placed precariously upon his bed. As he speaks of the initial suggestion that his memoir should be translated to film, his introduction and the opening titles play. With a smile, he watches his own brief performance, before we see that Hurt is in the room with him. When Crisp says that 'of course you must have an actor to play me, he will do it far better than I have done', actor and subject exchange glances. The two talk of the impact that the film had on their lives and what it means still to them. When Hurt says that he is 'constantly accused of always playing either eccentrics or outsiders or outsiders trying to get in' (*Resident Alien*, 1991), Crisp tells him that he always plays victims. Hurt suggests that in some of his performances he may well have portrayed 'people that are victimised', but that he would not describe Crisp as a victim. When Crisp says that 'I *claim* to be a victim,' Hurt asks him to elaborate. Crisp says plainly that he is 'at the mercy of the world' (*Resident Alien*, 1991). As actor and subject watch the most violent scene of the film, Hurt recalls a letter from the playwright Robert Bolt.⁴² He quotes, 'When I got over the shock of the first few minutes ... I realised that it was a show about the tenderness of the individual as opposed to the cruelty of the crowd.' But there is only cosiness in Crisp's response; 'that's nice.' He praises once again Hurt's performance, acknowledging the sensitivity he brought to the role and that evocation of what it meant to have lived as Quentin Crisp; 'I think it was fine that it was played, especially that it was played by you, because that did produce that feeling of being at the mercy of the world, being the one in the presence of the many' (*Resident Alien*, 1991). Hurt reads from Crisp's memoir its closing words; 'We think we write definitively of those parts of our nature that are

dead and therefore beyond change ... I stumble toward my grave confused and hurt and hungry ...' (Crisp, 1977a, p.217). Crisp reads the same passage, those final words slow and precise, before closing the book and looking directly at the camera.

As the two are filmed walking across Manhattan together, Hurt tells Crisp that, 'as it changed your life in many ways, it certainly changed mine ... it was a complete turning point in my career.' Crisp says that he 'never expected to have the life I have now' (*Resident Alien*, 1991). In staged black and white photography, somewhat surrealist in style, there follows a sequence of scenes in which the two stand at opposite sides of an apparent mirror, each addressing the reflection of the other. To Crisp's, 'I try to become more like myself everyday', Hurt responds, 'I learned from the film to become more like him than himself' (*Resident Alien*, 1991).⁴³

The film of *The Naked Civil Servant* 'probably did more to make life tolerable for British homosexuals than any other single television production up to that time' (Slide, 1996, p.118). Hurt would receive, over the years, 'countless scripts for a sequel' (Teeman, 2009), but it was more than thirty years later that he returned to the role, in *An Englishman in New York*; 'He'd spent so many years with Crisp in one way or another, it would have been perverse to let somebody else play him ... for so many people, John Hurt *is* Quentin Crisp' (Hattenstone, 2009). Hurt believed the role to be 'written in his body', and would reflect on how 'decisions about the performance back then turned out to be right for now ... the body doesn't forget these things' (Hurt quoted in Dickson, 2009). If Crisp became, as is often suggested, a 'gay icon', then so too did the heterosexual Hurt. He would reflect on that first film and the political agenda in which he himself was invested, but also on what he described as Crisp's 'argument with the activists'; 'Nobody could have been sure that it was really going to do what we hoped it would do. But it did infinitely more, right across society. It had an extraordinary effect. I'm still stopped today by people whose lives were changed by it' (Hurt quoted in Scott, 2009). Hurt lent persuasive image to the auto/biographical subject that Crisp might have otherwise remained, and in a remarkable case of the 'body too much', would find himself implicated in the same politics of sexual identity that Crisp had been engaged, speaking from the same vantage of being the 'one among the many', and partaking with some

authority in the discourses of what Crisp's life had meant. The next chapter, exploring as it does many of the film's representations of Crisp's erotic life, which Hurt had so persuasively portrayed, considers the desired masculine ideal that Crisp would define as other to his figure of effeminacy.

CHAPTER II

'There is no great dark man': Fashioning the masculine other

This chapter proposes Crisp's fashioning of effeminacy to have embodied his desires of a masculine, heteronormative ideal, an expression of eroticism that reveals the changing structures of the intimate sexual and romantic lives of queer men through the twentieth century. The year before Crisp's death, in 1999, the American magazine *Out*, in their 'Time for Love' edition, ran amongst their cover features 'Quentin Crisp Chooses a Life Without Love'. Crisp's contribution, 'The Great Dark Man', was a short piece in his usual mannered prose, in which he offers the provenance of that very line; 'When I was young, I read a poem written by an actor that contained the line 'Where are you now, my great dark man?' The sentence caught my imagination, and I never forgot it' (Crisp, 1998). Indeed, Crisp had long claimed the line as his own, and had not elsewhere attributed it as such. The 'great dark man' was an enduring figure in his rhetoric, the spectral embodiment of the disillusionment of his own romantic ambitions and the very impossibility of the model of queer desire in which his fashioning had been invested. The single page feature, closing with the words 'Love is a mistake', included as it is amongst a breadth of affirmative literary and visual representations of more 'modern' queer intimacies, is cited here as example of the tension that Crisp's apparent 'life without love' engendered in the gay culture of his celebrity (Crisp, 1998). Indeed, in that correspondence received by *TV Times* following the broadcast of *The Naked Civil Servant*, there was already ascribed to Crisp a regrettable life of 'lovelessness'. *Out's* inclusion of Crisp's writing was a provocative gesture; his understanding of the romantic lives of gay men and their potential for lasting union, as determined largely by his own experiences in the 1920s and 30s, was now, at the end of the twentieth century, incendiarily out of touch.⁴⁴ In his autobiography Crisp would write of the very 'conundrum' of the 'great dark man', but it was the sentiment of the following address, given in dramatic close-up in the film of his life, which was most provocative;

I dream of a great dark man, a real man, enormously strong, enormously virile, whose love I shall win. I know that my dream is doomed to disappointment. If I succeed, I fail. If I win the love of a man, he cannot be a real man, and the more feminine I make myself to attract a real man the less will a real man be attracted by me. The dream is only a dream. There is no great dark man (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).⁴⁵

That the 'great dark man' was cited as both the objective and the impediment of Crisp's fashioning would appear to be the central antagonism in a letter to *Gay News* after the film's first broadcast, their correspondent concerned that Crisp had 'set the 'gay' world back twenty years' (*Gay News*, 1976a). Remaining anonymous because of having 'no desire, unlike Quentin, for publicity and self-importance', in his censure of Crisp's effeminate fashioning the writer traces, beneath a lens of normative desire and intimacy, what is conceived to be a queerness more valid than Crisp's at that time in its very ordinariness and domesticity;

I am not and see no point in trying to ape a female. There are a great deal like me. Our local has a good number of 'affairs' and, although in the 'Camp' life it would be boring, our lovers chat about food, clothes and the men about cars ... just as normal couples do, even to noticing a nice young thing just as Dad would fancy a young bit of skirt. I put this in to show how normal we really are (*Gay News*, 1976a).⁴⁶

The parameters of queer desire and intimacy propounded here are founded in fact upon the differently gendered behaviours of which Crisp was so familiar and articulate. Indeed the division of 'lovers' and men is more resonant of the binary that Crisp would express as his pursuit of the 'great dark man' than it is of any masculine likeness that the writer had evidently meant to trace. The difference it would seem is that the dividing lines of such intimacy are not materially articulate – they are not fashioned in difference, no pursuit of otherness is *observable*. Where Wilson suggests that Crisp fashioned his effeminacy with the intent of attracting a 'real man' (Wilson, 1994, p.169), Sinfield observes 'the effeminate model of queerness [as] precisely self-defeating', and alludes to the 'failure' with which Crisp was confronted in his pursuit of the 'great dark man', the inevitable consequence of what is termed 'the cross-sex gender grid' (Sinfield, 1994, p.139). Where Bronski suggests that 'the requisite pre-Stonewall icon of gay male desire was the straight man', he cites Crisp's 'conundrum', understanding the

'great dark man' not as 'an unsupportable dream', but rather as 'a cruel hoax' (Bronski, 2004, p.61). Insisting that Crisp was wrong however, he claims that gay men in the late-twentieth century 'have *become* [their] own Great Dark Man, [their] own obscure and not-so-obscure objects of desire' (Bronski, 2004 p.62). But where Cole addresses the material practices of asserting queer sexual availability in the early twentieth century, he observes the appropriation of the feminine that 'allowed for sexual interactions between men, as one of the pair was very much a pseudo-woman' (Cole, 2000, p.6). Where an effeminacy such as Crisp's would intimate availability, Cole suggests that it did not necessarily symbolise for the other partner any real 'object of desire' (Cole, 2000, p.20).

In *The Naked Civil Servant* there are many guises – or at least contenders for the title – of Crisp's 'great dark man', from the 1920s Soho 'rough' to the American GI in London during the Second World War. Crisp's fashioning articulated this desired other at once as absence, according to the lack that the queer body signified in the sexually authoritarian culture of his early life, and as surrogate, himself a 'pseudo-woman' in search of a 'pseudo-man', of a figure, however fleeting, of normative masculinity for whom Crisp could occupy the permissive spaces of the feminised that he observed most women could not. The pseudo-gendered binary that Crisp writes of – the 'ghetto' he describes of heteronormative mimicry of his early life – and his fashioning of what he describes as the 'orchidaceous woman' according to its strictures, reveal the 'great dark man' as a material but transient presence, an ultimately illusory object of a desire evidenced in his fashioning. Each embodiment belonged to a continuum of reciprocal desire, certainly, but the inevitable passing of which was central to Crisp's reflections on intimacy and romance.

Writing soon after *The Naked Civil Servant's* broadcast, Robert Trow, in *The Body Politic*, made relation between Crisp's fashioning and his 'inability to find a stable relationship', and the implications of this for a heterosexual audience, suggesting that his 'exhibitionism and flamboyant appearance will be seen as the perverse defiance of an unstable mind ... [which] tacitly reasserts the superiority of heterosexual life' (Trow, 1976, cited in Waugh, 1977, p.18). Soon after the film's broadcast in America, Waugh made relation between Crisp's 'own internalized oppression' and his 'persistent fantasy' of the 'great dark man' (Waugh, 1977, p.18). In their disquiet over the injurious image of Crisp's

fashioning, specifically the impossibility of lasting intimacy that it symbolised, such sentiment finds common ground with *Gay News's* correspondent above. So incensed by the seemingly obsolete model of gendered difference and desire that the film would translate, that writer would demand further, 'Quentin, keep it to yourself. No need to write books about it, have it on the box. Who wants to know?' (*Gay News*, 1976a). If Crisp was being asked to keep quiet about his dream of the 'great dark man', such censure received little regard in his celebrity, that spectre of desire ever-present in his rhetoric.

In 1991 Crisp was filmed in his Lower East Side room for the Channel Four television series *Opinions*. With the title *The Death of Love*, the programme opens with a brief narration of his biography, focused on the earlier consequences of his 'uncompromising effeminacy', followed by a monologue in which Crisp speaks of his dotage in New York as 'resident alien', seeking exile from the former oppressiveness of England.⁴⁷ He begins with the line, 'In my heart I have always wanted to belong, I never wanted to be separate' (*Opinions*, 1991), before tracing a theme that was the principal regret of *The Naked Civil Servant* – his witness to the parallel ruin of 'the divine woman' and the 'great dark man', a binary he would much exaggerate and uphold in certain defence of his particular gender dissidence. Speaking of the 'Dilly Boy' prostitutes and femme young things with whom he had in the late-1920s 'sat habitually in cafes on Old Compton Street', practising a shared exhibitionist appropriation of femininity, Crisp describes how they had 'wished they were women, they felt exiled from womanhood' (*Opinions*, 1991). Houlbrook has addressed the Dilly Boy's fashioning, and 'feminine' behaviours, to explore the organisation and experiences of queer desire in early twentieth century London, developing an interpretive framework that cites the 'wall straight and impassable' that Crisp writes of, that divide between the 'roughs' and the 'bitches', as example of those sexual practices 'in which difference and 'normality' were embodied in the distinction between 'queans' and 'men'" (Houlbrook, 2005, p.141). The fashioning of material and therefore sexual difference through which Crisp articulated his desire of its 'other', of the normative 'great dark man', is the pivotal reminiscence of that monologue, allowing a most explicit reference to the narrative that wrought his star; '*The Naked Civil Servant* says somewhere that we wanted love and when we didn't find it we just put on more eye-black, and if someone had

suggested that ... we should try to be more lovable, we would not have adopted a method so extreme' (*Opinions*, 1991).

What Crisp alludes to as a misjudged expression of femininity is described in his autobiography as his and his acquaintances' clutching 'with both hands at the myth of the great dark man', a spectre borne 'by the desire to bolster up, with a number of contrasts, that dream of [ourselves] which [was our] one increasing purpose to maintain' (Crisp, 1977a, p.63). This 'dream' is revealed in his monologue as entirely obsolete in the hyper-masculine gay culture of the late-twentieth century, its myth of masculinity realised wholly independent of the binary that Crisp and 'his kind' had mistakenly fashioned themselves to belong. The apparent shift however in the organisation of queer desires and their material expression are said to be far more subject to the vagaries of the fashionable; 'homosexual men now want only to meet other men. In the gay world there are no excruciatingly camp young men anymore, being feminine has gone out' (*Opinions*, 1991). It would seem to Crisp that the painted fingernails and hennaed hair he had worn in the 1920s were no less affectations of a propagandistic image than the machismo that gay culture was now so preoccupied with;

If you go to the clubs on Bleecker Street you only know you haven't stumbled by mistake into the canteen of a building site because the patrons are all so clean. They are all wearing tractor boots, pre-ruined jeans, gingham shirts. Or they were, its passe now ... They arrive with their crash helmets under their arms and they've come by bus. It involves us both in a pretence. Manhattan is a stage and this is play-acting. It would be as though I were to go home and take off my Edith Sitwell rings and say 'I'm home now ... there is no need for me to be effeminate' (*Opinions*, 1991).⁴⁸

Crisp was observing here a manifestation of the 'clone' model of masculinity, a presence in gay urban life for some decades now. In his essay on 1970s gay culture in New York, 'Where Have All the Sissies Gone? The New Masculinity of Gay Men', Kleinberg would suggest 'the macho gesture' to be most prominent 'where women are entirely absent' (Kleinberg, 1982, p.197).⁴⁹ The figure of uniform masculinity whom Crisp censures as embodying the downfall of the intimacy in which he had once believed is symbol of a gender and sexual parity at absolute variance with the pseudo-gendered intent of his own fashioning;

'There are any number of people who wear the uniform of the brave and the cruel ... [but] they don't feel that there is a relationship of the pursuer and the pursued, the satyr and the nymph' (*Opinions*, 1991). But such admonishment was itself performative – he famously conceded in his autobiography, and the claim was restated to dramatic effect time and again in its film translation, that there is 'no great dark man' (Crisp, 1977a, p.146), that the romance of his youthful imagination was indeed 'a conundrum incapable of resolution' (Crisp, 1977a, p.62). Crisp's 'conundrum' is often quoted in discussions of the changing nature of gay men's self-representation since the 1960s and its erotic implications. Tim Edwards, for example, commences *Erotics and Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism* with that very quote from *The Naked Civil Servant*, and the claim that, when Crisp wrote of that impasse in his desire, 'gay liberation had yet to begin' (Edwards, 1994, p.2). While this is often a fact of some oversight on the part of his detractors, what Crisp observes as a fashionable hyper-masculinity, more detachable and more drag than the femininity he had long fashioned, was a reactionary image not only against gay men's perceived essential effeminacy – that which Crisp had indeed come to exemplify in the popular consciousness – but was, as Wilson suggests, 'a caricature of masculinity', providing a uniform 'recognisable to other gay men' while heterosexual society would, at least in its initial appropriations, 'miss its significance' (Wilson, 2003a, p.202).

For Crisp however, the very 'accoutrements of machismo' (*Opinions*, 1991) that those Bleecker Street clones would appropriate, do not allow them to 'pass' as the icons of masculinity upon which they are fashioned, their very posture of masculinity being much too manicured. But where Kleinberg considers there to be a 'pseudo-masculinity' about the image being widely appropriated within gay culture from the 1970s, in which 'the most oppressive images of sexual violence and dominance are adopted unhesitatingly', he suggests that the 'offence is not aesthetic; it is entirely political. The homosexuals who adopt images of masculinity, conveying their desire for power and their belief in its beauty, are in fact eroticising the very values of straight society that have tyrannised their own lives' (Kleinberg, 1982, p.195). And the question of 'the macho gesture' has not ceased to be debated in the popular gay media. In a 2007 'Opinion' column for *Attitude* magazine, the journalist Paul Tierney

addressed a 'disturbing trend amongst gay men.' While the very language of 'trend' would suggest recent shifts rather than historical continuity, Tierney writes that the 'new' physical 'symmetry' is 'as unimaginative and depressing as the whole clone movement of the 1970s' (Tierney, 2007, p.26). Where the image of the clone is cited as an insidious 'fetishising of a look that was supposed to evoke universal masculinity,' the 'return' to the 'clone mentality' is attributed to gay men wanting to 'blend into the background, be as inconspicuous as possible', narcissists 'who only fall into bed with their own stunt doubles ... an identikit partner ... ultimately a super-idealised version of himself' (Tierney, 2007, p.26). Where Tierney reads the objective of the fashioned body here as the erotic pursuit of sameness, the narcissism he underlines reflects Bronski's claim that gay men have 'become their own' great dark man.⁵⁰

Peter Hennen, in *Faeries, Bears and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine*, writes of the pronounced rejection of effeminacy, of how the 'rapidity of this transformation in communities of gay men is thrown into high relief when one considers that as recently as 1968, Quentin Crisp presumed to speak for all homosexual men when he wrote of his doomed search for 'the great dark man' of his sexual and romantic fantasies' (Hennen, 2008, p.10). Though Hennen might overlook Crisp's insistence that he only ever spoke for himself, of being 'a minority within a minority', as a myth that Crisp would preserve as a certain validation of his own fashioning, the conception of the 'great dark man' frames enquiry around the models of sexual intimacy in which his effeminacy was permissible. The erotic licence that Crisp's appearance afforded was most articulate in the film of his autobiography, the various contenders for the role of the 'great dark man' lending example to the biopic's facility to memorialize 'moments that are fleeting' – and many of the relationships which the film portrays are indeed momentary – and which enter 'the mythic consciousness' of the audience (Man, 2000, x). While the pursuit of the 'great dark man' was a leitmotif of Crisp's autobiography which was subject inevitably to an overstatement, his realisation in its film translation meant for audiences a material representation of that 'otherness' and its reciprocal desire – indeed the representation of these 'other' queers, uniformly masculine and conformedly heterosexual in appearance and self-identification, was really quite radical.

What informed Crisp's often-expressed sentiment that he had 'never wanted to be separate', to be 'a minority within a minority', was not simply the fact that the spectacle he fashioned was amplified by the conscientious masculinity of those 'other queers', as witnessed in both his youth and his dotage, but their failure to live up to the normative intimacy that *their* fashioning articulated. This was a regret that spanned seventy years of witness to strictures and behaviours that he posits as subjectively as often as socially and culturally imposed. Neither the image of those Bleecker Street clones nor its challenge to his effeminacy should have been revelatory, being in fact resonant of an exclusionary masculinity apparent within the queer culture of 1920s and 30s London. Crisp writes that in the clandestine clubs of the time it was feared by the management that his 'arrival and departure might draw the unwelcome attention of officials. This I understood but it was with pained bewilderment that I came to see that even among the clientele my arrival caused a hush, clamorous with resentment' (Crisp, 1977a, p.84). In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, that sense of resentment is captured as he arrives at such a club (figure 14); as he weaves through the male couples dancing, uniform in their tailoring, himself the 'orchidaceous' figure that he writes of as the model of his effeminate fashioning, one patron whispers to another in an accent of queer camp, 'you don't want to be seen with her dear, she's a dead giveaway' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Told by the club's proprietor that he is 'spoiling it for the others' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975) and asked to leave, the film portrays an opposition of normative masculinity as groomed for the closet, however out of necessity. This was a defence that sixty years later those 'clones' in their 'pre-ruined jeans [and] gingham shirts' could not depend upon, their fashioning an unnecessary act of what Crisp identifies as the 'process of re-ghettoisation' (*Opinions*, 1991). That very milieu was portrayed in Laxton's *An Englishman in New York* (figure 15). Visiting a gay club in Manhattan, to 'see the American male in all his finery', Crisp is an intruder upon the sexually charged environment of leather-men and construction workers, with a narration that seeks out the foundations of their desire; 'they operate on the principle that in order to find their great dark man they must first look like him ... since clones are exclusively attracted to other clones, it is impossible to rope one in without first becoming one ... but which of these is the original, the archetype, and how many of them are merely

pretenders?’ (*An Englishman in New York*, 2009). In parallel with that scene from *The Naked Civil Servant*, Crisp’s effeminacy is conspicuous. Approached by one of the club’s patrons, he is shunned on the same grounds; ‘you’re not exactly playing ball here, so why don’t you finish up and go some place else?’ (*An Englishman in New York*, 2009).

Crisp could speak with some authority on ‘archetypes’ of masculinity, given his intimate relationships with what – in contrast to recent figurations in gay culture – were the ‘real thing’. Where the biopic reveals most critically what a life *looked* like, whatever the fictions that inevitably surface, Crisp’s erotic and romantic life was determined by contrary registers of gendered behaviours and the material articulation of desire for otherness. In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* there is precise validation of Wilson’s claim that Crisp fashioned his effeminacy with the intent of attracting a ‘real man’, given the reflection of his effeminacy in the uniform of the sailors and soldiers he would meet, in the very difference of the ‘rough’ he encountered in London’s West End, in the shadowy figure he would meet as a Dilly Boy prostitute – in the masculinity they each wore.

The punter and the rough: Crisp the Dilly Boy

To the boys this profession never seemed shameful. It was their daytime occupations for which they felt they needed to apologize. In some instances, these were lower class or humdrum or, worst of all, unfeminine. At least whoring was never that (Crisp, 1977a, pp.30-31).

Piccadilly was the centre of London’s queer commercial sociability in the first half of the twentieth century, affording as Houlbrook (2005) suggests a spatial organisation of dissident sexuality in which male prostitution was clearly inscribed, with queer desire as commercial transaction most clearly embodied in the effeminate Dilly Boy. In his autobiography, and its film translation, the awakening of Crisp’s adult sexuality is articulated as his first acquaintance with this figure in the late-1920s (figure 16). Welcomed into their nocturnal sub-culture, the discovery was for Crisp the certifying of his own queerness. In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* the questions he receives on their first meeting – of whether he is ‘on the game’, of whether he is ‘so’ – conflate prostitution with

effeminate queerness, each perceived as possibility in Crisp, a binary expressed in their fashioning and expressive of their desires. The first acknowledgement which Crisp's father had made of his queerness whilst he lived still in the family home – 'you look like a male whore' (Crisp, 1977a, p.40) – reveals an apparent identification of the Dilly Boy type, and how the effeminacy which Crisp was already fashioning was fraught with connotations of the solicitous.

Subject as their figure was to some media discourse, Houlbrook suggests that in the early decades of the twentieth century, in the public imagination, 'the flamboyant Dilly Boy was an arrestingly familiar figure, the embodiment of sexual difference' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.140), and explores the organised spaces that they occupied;

It was in the district surrounding Piccadilly that Londoners encountered 'painted boys' most often – either directly or through the pages of popular newspapers. Certainly, queans did not confine their social lives to the Dilly, and the neighbourhood attracted many more discreet men. But the Dilly Boys provided *the* dominant image of sexual difference, and the world they forged at London's glittering heart highlights the social and cultural organization of queer urban life. The Dilly's alluring reputation as a site of sexual and social opportunity for flamboyantly camp men was clearly well established by the late nineteenth century. By the 1920s, men were reproducing accumulated traditions of public sociability; they went up west because that was where they could find other men like them ... The colourful mingling of urban types, races, styles, classes, and fashions that constituted this cosmopolitan milieu provided the context in which the quean could, in certain circumstances, openly display the physical signs of character. Here they stood out far less than in the suburbs (Houlbrook, 2005, pp.153-154).

Crisp's father was right in associating his increasingly effeminate fashioning with a 'commercial' sexuality, the geographically specific contexts of which were formative in the erotic life – and romantic life – that he would later reminisce. Addressing the historical experiences and contexts of queer prostitution, Jeffrey Weeks considers 'the self-concepts it led to, the 'way of life' it projected' (Weeks, 1982, p.115). However opportunistic Crisp's prostitution,⁵¹ the sociability it engendered – that collective expression of *outré* fashioning he would recollect still in his *Opinions* monologue – afforded the certainty of being, at least momentarily, 'feminine', and more importantly *desired*. Just as writings on male prostitution in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were concurrent with

concepts of the homosexual as a specifiable figure, with certain 'needs, passions, and lusts' (Weeks, 1982, p.113), so Crisp in his autobiography would suggest prostitution as a quest for a love of sorts; 'What better proof of love can there be than money?' (Crisp, 1977a, p.31). In his study of polari, Paul Baker observes its use by the queer prostitutes of London's West End in 1930s London, with allusion to the experiences of Crisp and his acquaintances, and in paraphrasing Crisp, suggests that in a time 'of guilt and oppression', they were 'prostitutes by vocation', such an exchange absolving them 'from the charge of enjoying sex for its own sake' (Baker, 2002, p.33).⁵²

If the men whom Crisp met during his short time as a prostitute were the earliest contenders to claim the title of the 'great dark man' he sought, it is their very material intangibility that most distinguishes them from the roughs, sailors and GIs that would figure so greatly in his subsequent erotic life, and whom were lent such persuasive image in the film of his autobiography. Some conjecture as to that invisibility, of the material differences and discretion of this 'pursuer' of Crisp's, only foregrounds the Dilly Boy's otherness and the fashioning of their queer 'availability'. Where Houlbrook suggests that the Dilly Boy 'carefully mirrored those bodily practices conceptualized as womanlike' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.148), Sinfield observes in his discussion of the effeminate male prostitute at this time that 'likely clients' would not desire such effeminacy (Sinfield, 1994, p.46). But the extremes of female impersonation which Crisp would reminisce as the marker of sexual availability were knowingly imprecise; the particular femininity he describes as the 'set of stylizations' recognisable as 'camp', the 'appalling' approximation of feminine manners amongst his set, held a purpose which was 'self-explanatory' at the time, the 'mannequin walk' and pose of the Dilly Boys he first met incomprehensible only to the most 'innocent' of passers-by (Crisp, 1977a, p.26). For Weeks, in the historical survey of prostitution, whether queer or not, it is easier to determine 'the motivations and fantasies of the clients than to delineate the experiences and beliefs of those who prostituted themselves' (Weeks, 1982, p.123). Crisp would suggest otherwise, his experiences of prostitution reminisced always as his earliest pursuit for the validation of his femininity, any 'punter' rendered quite indistinguishable in the shadows of his own fashioning.

When Crisp is asked in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* by his art school acquaintance, 'what do you really give these men?', his answer articulates something of his apparently impassive attitude towards romance and the cold truth of the Dilly punter's surrogacy; 'I am an effeminate homosexual ... I want to be found desirable by a great dark man. But what proof have I that I am desired? No great dark man is going to ... say 'Quentin, I adore you. Your eyes are like stars and your lips are like roses.' A ten shilling note is proof, a proof I understand' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). As Florence Tamagne observes, in her history of queer interwar Europe, prostitution increased in many cities at this time due to the economic depression and high levels of unemployment (Tamagne, 2006, p.47).⁵³ While it would be precarious to overstress this point in relation to Crisp's experiences, it does offer a legitimate historical contextualisation,⁵⁴ but has to be framed by the fact that, for Crisp and his kind, their entering the world of prostitution was a relatively easy step. Where Cole makes relation between the fashioning of effeminacy in the early twentieth century and the suggestion not only of sexual availability but of solicitation of which it was so typically thought to be manifest (Cole, 2000, p.20), Crisp writes of the Dilly Boy's equation of fashioning with both erotic and monetary quest – when banished from 'combing each other's hair and trying on each other's lipsticks' in Old Compton Street's Black Cat café, he and his acquaintances would search the district for 'love or money or both' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.28-29).⁵⁵ Just as Crisp would question, when reflecting on his wrongful arrest for solicitation during the Second World War, whether his 'very existence is a form of importuning' (Crisp, 1977a, p.170), Weeks considers, if the intent of transgressive sexualities is to be gauged through their materiality, 'what constitutes an act of prostitution?' (Weeks, 1982, p.115). In speaking of the 'courtship' of prostitution, Crisp reveals only its violence; this 'consisted of walking along the street with a man who had my elbow in a merciless grip until we came to a dark doorway. Then he said, 'This'll do.' These are the only words of tenderness that were ever uttered to me' (Crisp, 1977a, p.32). Such a scene is translated in the film of his autobiography, in that lone portrayal of his prostitution (figure 17); Crisp pursued along Piccadilly, because of his being so 'obvious', by a stranger conspicuously heterosexual – and particularly against the glaring otherness of Crisp's effeminacy.

Lawful regulation would significantly determine the practices of male prostitution at this time. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, homosexual men were to be equated, as a class, with female prostitutes, with all major enactments concerning male homosexuality being 'drawn from Acts designed to control female prostitution' (Weeks, 1982, p.118).⁵⁶ Despite the repute of London's Piccadilly and its painted Boys, and the media attention they were subject to, the spaces of male prostitution remained liminal, and Crisp would have been witness to 'the professional disadvantage of being obliged to avoid the [relatively] open publicity of solicitation available to female prostitutes' (Weeks, 1982, p.118). The police warning that Crisp receives in the film of his autobiography, as to the kind of men who go with 'pansies' like himself, indeed inscribes the Dilly Boy prostitute as female surrogate – their 'punters' said to be 'suffering from venereal disease', and 'ashamed to give it to a woman.' Such lawful censure was in some way well-founded if, as Weeks suggests, effeminacy was a marker of availability rather than a mode of behaviour and appearance to which their pursuer was attracted. Weeks notes that while discretion was 'the hallmark' of queer prostitution, in London's Piccadilly Circus 'the more 'obvious' or blatant young prostitutes might gather', effeminate young men often in women's clothing and cosmetics whose image was quite contrary to that of 'trade' (Weeks, 1982, pp.127-128).⁵⁷ There was perceived in the male prostitute a 'predisposition towards corruption and sexual degeneracy' (Weeks, 1982, p.124). But where there was a common understanding of 'trade' being subject to the seductions of the more privileged classes, criminal intent was thought to be evidenced more particularly in traits of effeminacy (Weeks, 1982, p.124). Cole writes that 'solicitation for sex between men, whether money is involved or not ... has implications for the dress choices of men' (Cole, 2000, p.20), and the effeminacy that Crisp wore as a Dilly Boy, that made solicitation a possibility, would also draw the attentions of the 'rough'.

The 'impossible object' that Joseph Bristow relates as a predicament evident particularly in much late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century homoerotic writing, 'the bit of rough whose homophobia characterizes his status as a 'real' man' (Bristow, 1995, p.176), finds particular resonance in the behaviours of those men whose manifest permutations of hostility and 'mating plumage' Crisp writes almost affectionately about in *The Naked Civil Servant*.

There was for Crisp a very distinct masculinity about the figure he defined as the 'rough', depicted in the film of his autobiography as the desirable terror of those Soho cafes that allowed him and his kind an important nocturnal but public space in the 1920s and 30s (figure 18).

For Crisp the working-class 'roughs' had no parallel in the more liberal culture that he observed in his dotage, and he writes of how they 'pandered' to the femininity that he and his acquaintances fashioned; 'either permanently because it was some self-congratulatory idea they had of themselves, or temporarily whenever they were with us. They consciously tried to embody the myth of the great dark man' (Crisp, 1977a, p.62). The interest that Crisp and his acquaintances would elicit however was fraught with evident loathing as much as desire. Within the spaces that Crisp occupied, such as the Black Cat café, the effeminate quean, as Houlbrook suggests, 'constituted a disparaged other against which a [normative] masculine persona was articulated' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.149). Crisp writes that 'whenever pansies were in bloom' the roughs 'couldn't resist doing a little window shopping', but the attentions given 'had to be put in the form of an infliction';

Such gestures as running their fingers through our hair were accompanied by insults about what a bloody awful mop it was. If they wished to make any more definitely sexual advances, these must be ruthlessly stripped of any quality of indulgence ... I was never able to decide how much of the inordinate interest taken in me by the Clerkenwell boys was due to sexual curiosity and how much was what it seemed – hatred (Crisp, 1977a, p.64).

Houlbrook considers how, within the culture that Crisp writes of, 'sex or intimacy, as much as verbal abuse or assault, confirmed understandings of the male body as a site of interiority' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.178). In his study of how insult – given culturally and socially – has shaped gay subjectivities, Didier Eribon considers how 'the inscription of the sexual order as a matrix of inferiorization happens in those bodies and minds that contravene the norms' (Eribon, 2004, xxi). At an individual level, such processes are observable in Crisp's relationship with the 'rough', echoing as he does Eribon's thesis of gender roles finding definition in violent distinction; 'The scorn, the hatred, of those who prefer to think of themselves as masculine or virile for those they deem "effeminate" has been one of the major dividing lines in the self-representations of gay men' (Eribon, 2004,

p.2). Where Crisp was fashioned in otherness to the 'rough', they were able to assert a normative masculinity, and those erotic attentions, as Houlbrook suggests, were evidence of an ambiguous boundary 'between intimacy and brutality'; the 'prescriptive demands of masculine comportment' that the rough observed meant the adoption of a role 'that reproduced a *difference* from their sexual partners, articulating a toughness that asserted their physical and moral superiority' (Houlbrook, 2005, pp.178-179). In their alliance of 'pseudo-women in search of pseudo-men', Crisp suggests the 'exaggerated and over-simplified distinction that separated men from women in the outer world ran like a wall straight and impassable between the 'roughs' and the 'bitches'' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.61-62). Though Crisp had an 'intense' romantic interest in the 'roughs', he was never able to understand fully their attitudes towards him and his kind, and speaks of the performativity with which they both invested their behaviours;

This may partly have been because I feared and desired and sentimentalised them. It may also not have been their intention that I should understand them. If I was busy trying to seem mysterious and aloof to them, we must not rule out the possibility that they were reciprocally engaged (Crisp, 1977a, p.61).

Where Stockton suggests that in his fashioning Crisp 'courted the visible production of a bruise', that violence the consequence of his 'cruising the streets as an open effeminate queer,' she claims a tension between its political and its erotic intent, between the 'cause' of queer emancipation with which Crisp so strongly identified and the 'effeminate dream' of the 'great dark man' (Stockton, 2000, p.227). But that mark of violence is said to evidence the 'systematic failure' of their censure – to be 'the badge of *their* defeat' (Stockton, 2000, p.227). In the film of Crisp's autobiography the roughs first appear at the Black Cat café, with the greeting 'Hello, girls', and with Crisp addressed as 'darling' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Dressed in what was then a working-class tailoring and cloth-cap, they are as uniformly heterosexual as the Dilly Boys are 'pseudo-women'. Crisp agrees to declarations of how 'pretty' he is, with fingers entwined in his hair in affectations of seduction. Despite the rising threat of violence, he does not whisper the devotion that the rough asks of him, but moves close to express the possibility that his attentiveness suggests; 'Why don't you sod off back to Hoxton

before they find out you're queer' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Crisp would inform Hurt however that he would never have spoken such a line, particularly in such a situation. The film's most graphic depiction of the violence that Crisp experienced, as he is pulled from a taxi in which he sought retreat from a group of men in that same uniform of normative working-class masculinity, is accompanied with the line 'we want you', blurring discreetly those polarised attentions of which Crisp writes (figure 19).

Houlbrook cites Crisp's experiences in allusion to the 'everyday public languages within which workingmen inscribed the queer and their encounters with him' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.179). In their elicitation of the roughs' sexual attentions however, these languages were consented to by those of Crisp's circle. To understand the desires of the Dilly Boys, Crisp writes, 'it is only necessary to guess what they themselves were – young, frail, beautiful and refined' – with a predilection 'for huge, violent, coarse brutes.' Crisp suggests that if 'the roughs did not possess by nature' any such characteristics, 'they could be put on at a moment's notice as mating plumage' (Crisp, 1977a, p.63). But just as he and his kind faced the dilemma of a 'real' man being entirely unattainable, the roughs faced a parallel problem in the availability of the sexually confident woman they saw characterized in the popular culture of the time;

The exotic had for them a great lure based on its rarity. The idea of the orchidaceous woman was everywhere. Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich leaned down from the screen and shamelessly poured sequins over the heads of the one-and-ninepennies, but from the real lives of working-class men this element was totally lacking. The girls available to them were just like home. Parents in those days still had some say in what their daughters wore. Only prostitutes at that social level wore vermilion hair, gold eyelids and green fingernails. The girl next door had to make a necessity of virtue (Crisp, 1977a, pp.63-64).

Crisp writes of 'the divine woman', being 'first Brigitte Helm, later Greta Garbo and finally Marlene Dietrich'; 'I thought about her a great deal, wore her clothes, said her sphinx-like lines and ruled her kingdom ... a woman who was both beautiful and unattainable' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.202-203). The cinematic glamour that Crisp, however exaggeratedly, ascribes as a model of femininity which he sought to impersonate, does have some legitimacy in determining the reciprocative relationship between the Dilly Boy and the rough. Kleinberg

suggests that while such an effeminacy 'did express self-denigration' it was 'a complex criticism'; 'the women whom these men imitated were themselves extraordinary; androgynous idols like Garbo or Dietrich symbolised an ambiguous and amoral sexuality ... in their campy behaviour, gay men revealed an empathic observation of women' (Kleinberg, 1982, p.199). Crisp assents to a circumstantial model of same-sex desire in suggesting that when the 'girl next door' was not socially able to adopt the image of femininity that the Dilly Boy could, their embodiment of the 'divine woman' tendered a solution of the roughs' own 'conundrum'.⁵⁸ The cosmetic markers of such femininity, Houlbrook suggests, 'were easily intelligible within working-class conceptions of manliness, sexuality, and character' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.159), and Crisp would touch upon that visibility, and the psychic understandings of gender it could elicit, in conversation with Philip Mackie as he worked on the screenplay of *The Naked Civil Servant*; 'They chatted you up exactly as they chatted to girls ... they told the boys how beautiful they were ... They were eaten up with curiosity. No girl was ever as exotic as we were ... We saw in them someone who saw in us what we were' (quoted in Barrow, 2002, p.64).

'The one's who go away': The Portsmouth sailor

Crisp devotes an entire chapter of *The Naked Civil Servant* to a journey he made to Portsmouth in the 1930s; the city, like many harbour cities, being then something of a Mecca for gay men.⁵⁹ As Tamagne suggests, the increased repression of London in the period, particularly in terms of police surveillance, encouraged many gay men to seek the relative sexual liberalism of coastal towns and cities like Portsmouth, Brighton and Dover. Many near contemporaries of Crisp's, though queers of a different social class, such as J.R. Ackerley, Raymond Mortimer and Eddy Sackville-West, would visit Portsmouth regularly in the 1920s and 30s, in erotic pursuits that were increasingly precarious in the capital (Tamagne, 2006, p.48).⁶⁰ Crisp begins that chapter with a light-hearted explication of the homoerotic appeal of the sailors' uniform, and with a nod to popular culture positions the figure of the sailor in a spectrum of desire, queer and straight. It is such representation of the sailor in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, and the repute of their apparently fluid sexuality, that frames

Crisp's own desire of that uniformed body and the particular pleasures he found in their company whilst visiting Portsmouth;

Like Florrie Forde, I and most of the homosexuals whom I knew best wanted 'something in a uniform'. Any national dress or occupational outfit may be sexually stimulating and there are as many kinks as there are kinds of costume. Uniforms appeal to devotees of the fearless man of action. They also pander to the Cophetua complex so prevalent among homosexuals. When any of my friends mentioned that he had met a 'divine' sailor he never meant an officer (Crisp, 1977a, p.96).⁶¹

While Robinson suggests that Crisp can lay claim to the phrase 'Cophetua complex', to suggest 'the common English addiction to sexual slumming' (Robinson, 1999, p.153), the night that he spent in Portsmouth was a significant occasion of romantic – rather than erotic – parity, an encounter so significant for Crisp because, as is narrated in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, 'nothing sexual happened, nothing was going to happen. It was what I have always longed for and never elsewhere found – a flirtation, an evening's entertainment' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Certainly, Crisp's reminiscence of that trip is the most emotive of his writings, an occasion described by Robinson as 'anticlimactic [but] curiously moving' (Robinson, 1999, p.164). While he writes archly that a visit to Portsmouth would not now 'be worth the train fare', he suggests that, 'in the summer of 1937 the whole town was like a vast carnival with, as its main attraction, a continuous performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore*' (Crisp, 1977a, p.97).⁶² As Patrick Higgins suggests, Navy Week in Portsmouth, between the wars, was an annual event that 'occupied an important place in the homosexual calendar' (Higgins, 1996, p.63). Though Saxey accurately writes that Crisp's memoir lacks the sexual detail of more recent gay autobiography (Saxey, 2008, p.40), amongst the comedy of his recollection of Portsmouth, his observance of the sailor and their sexual behaviours is perhaps the most explicit of his writings, the apparent fluidity of their sexuality something of a challenge to the impossible paradigm of the great dark man. The Navy has had, more than the other armed services, 'an enduring reputation for same-sex liaisons' (Jivani, 1997, p.67).⁶³ In representations of the sailor from the earlier decades of the twentieth century, they remain 'a sexually ambiguous figure'; in the queer analyses of such imagery, 'sexual ambivalence turns out to be a common theme' (Lee, 2009, p.321), the

sailor perceived as 'hypersexual' (Donaldson, 1990, p.1174). In the desire that he expressed for the figure of the sailor Crisp was least alone, and certainly he understood this, expounding on an enculturated desire for the distinct masculinity they symbolised and the erotics of their uniform;

The fabulous generosity in their natures was an irresistible lure – especially when combined with the tightness of their uniforms, whose crowning aphrodisiac feature was the fly-flap of their trousers. More than one of my friends has swayed about in ecstasy describing the pleasures of undoing this quaint sartorial device (Crisp, 1977a, pp.96-97).

Elizabeth Lee reads the sailor in twentieth century visual culture as 'a homoerotic figure, sexualized by tight-fitting trousers, which emphasize his buttocks and groin' (Lee, 2009, p.322), while in her enquiry into the incidence of prostitution amongst sailors at the time of which Crisp writes, as with soldiers, mainly from the Guards Brigade, Tamagne considers how the uniforms of both 'exerted a fascination and an erotic attraction' for gay men, and cites Crisp's own experiences (Tamagne, 2006, p.48). The sailor's uniform, Tamagne writes, 'was particularly appreciated for the tight fit and especially for the horizontal fly' (Tamagne, 2006, p.48), and, in some resonance of the 'generosity' that Crisp writes of, while soldiers generally had limited leave time, sailors 'had many weekends' (Tamagne, 2006, p.48). In *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, James M. Saslow looks at the American artist Paul Cadmus's then highly-incendiary *The Fleet's In* (1934), and writes how, for a gay audience, Cadmus had 'pleasingly fleshed out an erotic ideal', with several generations worshipping 'the fit and footloose adventurer, horny and available with no strings attached, as the ultimate icon of gay male fantasy' (Saslow, 1999, p.238). Throughout the twentieth century, though very differently in its earlier decades, uniforms were subject to a pronounced eroticisation by gay men, as Cole suggests, and particularly those of soldiers and sailors; 'Men in uniform were often the unavailable (or sometimes not so unavailable) objects of men's sexual fantasy' (Cole, 2000, p.21). And for those who did not wish to wear drag, uniforms such as the sailors' would become a popular choice at London's Arts and Drag Balls (Cole, 2000, p.21). The sailor's uniform is described by one of Cole's interviewees as 'one of the gay things at the time', alluding to what would

become the archetypal image of the sailor in neat white uniform; 'sailor's rig at that time was quite sexy: white bell bottoms, tight-fitting here around the waist and hips ...' (Cole, 2000, pp.21-22). The homoerotic appeal of the sailor's uniform is described in further detail in a memoir of the 1920s that Higgins quotes;

Sailors had the advantage of having a genuinely erotic uniform ... very flattering, quite unlike the uniform of recent times. The neck of the tunic was cut in a very rough square, which gave the wearer a very masculine appeal. The faces were often bearded, which helped. The trousers must have been made to titillate ... tight around the waist and bottoms ... If the sailor wore no underwear then very little was left to the imagination (Higgins, 1993, p.197).

The model sailor's uniform described here originates in fact in late-nineteenth century women's fashion, and in its ambiguous gender coding is quite exceptional amongst forms of military dress (Sokolwske, 1983, pp.12-13, and Lee, 2009, p.321). In *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea*, Baker and Stanley examine the queer fetishisation of the sailors' uniform, and underline its capacity to anonymise the wearer; 'Put someone in a uniform and they are defined first by their occupation: differences between particular people are excised. Someone's uniform becomes the foremost signifier of [their] identity' (Baker and Stanley, 2003, p.13). The very uniform masculinity that the sailor embodied allowed for Crisp a desired other against which the effeminacy of his fashioning would be seen in strong relief; in his writings, their indulgence, the apparent 'generosity' and permissiveness of their natures, offers a mirror in which he could see himself as feminine. In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* the wonder that Crisp felt in his encounter with those sailors is most vividly represented (figure 20). It is remarkable that the occasion provides the film's penultimate scene, a meditation on the 'one night when I was totally happy', a solemn remembrance before Crisp makes that epithetical declaration of his old age, 'you cannot touch me now, I am one of the stately homos of England' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). The film provides only the most momentous abstract of the pleasures of that trip, but offers, as one close acquaintance would describe, a 'cherished image that keeps him wonderfully alive' (Anne Valery quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.54). Commenting thirty years after the film was made,

its director Jack Gold considered the scene to exemplify still 'romance at its height'; for Hurt, the sailors' indulgence of Crisp made that scene, a studio-filmed fantasy of twinkling electric stars and misted evocation of the Portsmouth waterfront, 'unforgettable' for audiences (Hurt, Gold and Lambert, 2005). The image of Hurt in the role, in the company of those sailors, was featured in *Gay News's* review of the film's broadcast (Bennett, 1976). The still shows Hurt with hands held in rapture at his suitors' adoration, the accompanying text acknowledging how Crisp was in 'Sheer Heaven ... the centre of attention!' (Bennett,1976).

The film's translation of the occasion, however visually fantastical, believably captures the innocence of that 'flirtation'. Crisp had realised, however momentarily, something absent in his encounters with the 'roughs'. The sailors that Crisp met that evening are portrayed in the film as genuinely captivated by his femininity, the 'fearless man of action' inciting in Crisp a relative temperament; their meeting was not inhibited by the foreboding that the 'roughs' could provoke, but was the genuine indulgence that Hurt suggests. Crisp holds the centre of the film's fantasy, a small figure of exoticism highlighted by the gathering of uniforms that he so desired, swarmed about him in attentiveness, the nuances of the femininity that Hurt carried so credibly never as luminous as they are amongst the brilliant white of the sailors' uniforms. Amidst the kindly expressed innuendo of the sailors, Crisp is asked 'which one of us do you fancy?', to which he is able to confidently assert the desire his fashioning articulated; 'I think you're all so incredibly attractive' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).

Baker and Stanley ask why seafarers are endowed as they are 'with an almost mythical aura of intense sexuality and masculinity' (Baker and Stanley, 2003, p.11).⁶⁴ Just as they suggest the answer is somehow ensconced in their routine of travel and return, so Crisp describes the 'sad, romantic quality that all sailors have – that otherness that comes because their calling makes them into distant objects of desire. They are the one's who go away' (Zeeland, 1995, back matter).⁶⁵ Lee writes of how visual representations maintain the credence that the sailor's 'extended journeys make him starved for sexual attention but also ill prepared to sustain a long-term relationship' (Lee, 2009, p.321). In some negation of Crisp's romantic image of the sailor, Jivani writes of the 'pseudo-woman' which many believed gay men to be, reflecting something of the attitudes

of the 'rough'; 'sailors coming back from shore leave sometimes boasted of having gone back with a gay man whom they disparaged as if the story had no implication for their own leanings' (Jivani, 1997, p.66).⁶⁶ In his biography of Samuel Steward – writer, celebrated tattoo artist, and 'sexual renegade' – Justin Spring discusses his subject's penchant for sailors, then 'well known as easy "trade"', describing how, being 'young, vital, socially unencumbered, and forced into celibacy during long months at sea', the sailor on shore leave would become 'an archetype of sexual availability' (Spring, 2010, p.82). Across British and American visual and popular cultures, early- to mid-twentieth century images of the sailor were invested with a homoeroticism that held some legitimacy, representations that allowed an enculturation of the sailors' sexual mores;

By World War II, the openness of sailors to any sort of sexual experience largely went without saying, and cultural references to it abounded – from the sly song lyrics of Cole Porter (what's Central Park/without a sailor?), to the scandalous homoerotic paintings of Paul Cadmus, to the intimate homoerotic watercolours of Charles Demuth. Plays, musicals, and ballets based on World War II experience would continue to establish the sailor as a figure of romantic and sexual longing in years to come, as evidenced by the tight-pantsed sailor in Tennessee William's drama *The Rose Tattoo*, as well as similarly attired young sailors in Jerome Robbins's ballet *Fancy Free*, and Comden and Green's musical *On the Town* (Spring, 2010, p.82).

In looking at artist's appropriations of the image, Lee writes of how 'the sailor in modern American culture represents a rich and multivalent theme', most often depicted in popular culture 'as a brawny working class hero' who enjoys 'the freedom of life at sea', and quotes W. H. Auden's quixotic observation of their sexual permissiveness; 'the sailor on shore is symbolically the innocent god from the sea who is not bound by the law of the land and can therefore do anything without guilt' (Lee, 2009, p.321). Crisp would write that the 'act of running away to sea was an abandonment of accepted convention and, after a sojourn in strange ports, they returned with their outlook and possibly their anus broadened' (Crisp, 1977a, p.96). Spring quotes Steward on the allure of the masculinity imbued in that uniform; 'Most uniforms make the bodies beneath them seem more exciting ... For me, and perhaps for a majority of others like me, the sailor's uniform top[s]

the list' (Steward quoted in Spring, 2010, p.82). It is said to represent 'a way of life that most of us can never know';

He fights for us who are left at home in the dull round of living ... The uniform surrounds him with the shimmering glitter of an illusion, and we are frozen into our positions of adoration and desire. The uniform is the psychic link – the gazing-glass through which we look into another world (Steward quoted in Spring, 2010, p.82).

Cole writes of an increasing understanding amongst gay men, more pronounced as gay reform advanced in mid-twentieth century Britain and America, that 'their wardrobes could reflect the types of men they wished to be and wished to 'have'' (Cole, 2000, p.21), that sense of 'symmetry' decidedly characteristic of contemporary gay culture, as Tierney suggests above.⁶⁷ In contemporary gay culture, the image of the sailor remains a constant paradigm of masculinity, ostensibly caricatured as much as it is fetishized, derivatives for example of the sailor that Tom of Finland conjured in his erotic art, or of Fassbinder's *Querelle* (1982), based on Genet's 1947 novel. As Donaldson observes, 'seamen and their images have assumed a role in the gay subculture out of all proportion' (Donaldson, 1990, p.1172); even a glance at titles of contemporary gay pornography, as Baker and Stanley suggest, reveal how the naval remains 'a prime site of erotic fantasy' (Baker and Stanley, 2003, p.9).⁶⁸ Indeed the 'pornification' of the uniformed body is redolent with Jennifer Craik's consideration of the ambivalent position that it continues to occupy in Western cultures; signifying 'order, conformity and discipline', the uniform is also 'a fetishized cultural artefact embodying ambiguous erotic impulses and moral rectitude' (Craik, 2005, p.3). Against the explicit sexualisation of the sailor in such iconography, in the charge of Crisp's being 'sexless', that image of him would seem validation. But whatever the lack of sexual intimacy in their acquaintance, the image of Crisp enjoying the attentions of those Portsmouth sailors attests to an encounter with the 'real thing', rather than the contrived fantasy of contemporary gay culture. It is also an image of gender difference rather than likeness. Though they were *real* sailors to Crisp's 'pseudo-woman', their 'flirtation' provided an experience through which Crisp could speak authoritatively of the decline he perceived of 'the pursuer and the pursued' scenario, of 'the satyr and

the nymph'. While the erotic pursuits of the sailor on shore leave are most often represented as passing pleasures, Crisp's recollection of that evening in Portsmouth reveals an enduring impression of a masculinity that he indeed 'never elsewhere found', that saw in him an essential femininity, their uniform imbued with a romanticisation quite distinct from any more recent representation of the sailor in gay culture. But it was not only in Portsmouth that Crisp would socialise with sailors. Being the busy port that it was, 'London attracted seamen from across the world', and being a major military centre it was for many years 'a magnet for all servicemen on leave'; this would allow for 'an amorphous bachelor culture' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.168). Houlbrook writes of the environs of the Union Jack Club, near Waterloo Station, and the commercial venues in which sailors, and other servicemen and working-men, would socialize with a liberal cross-section of London life; 'young women, prostitutes, queans, and middle-class queer men' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.168).⁶⁹ Many servicemen would venture into 'trade', a world that could lure 'men who were far from destitute', particularly guardsmen and sailors, who 'were a particularly striking metropolitan presence', their visibility derived of course from their uniforms (Houlbrook, 2005, p.177). Sailors on leave would often frequent queer commercial and public spaces in London's West End, Victoria and Waterloo. As a close acquaintance of Crisp's, George Melly would recall that whenever dressed in his uniform, while out and about in London together in the late-1940s, he would be subject to cries of 'Can't you get yourself a girl then, sailor?' (Melly quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.65).⁷⁰ Against that uniform, Crisp in his effeminacy did indeed appear the 'pseudo-woman' of which he writes.

The figure of the Portsmouth sailor would become for Crisp a lasting ideal of masculinity; tolerant, attentive, and generous in character. Through a metaphor that could not have been more prophetic – of the dissent in translation from the written to the visual image – Crisp writes that on his return journey to London he 'tried to recall what adventure, what romance I had expected this visit to offer me but, as though I had seen the movie after reading the book, reality had now obscured the dream.' He suggests that he 'had beheld a miracle that was the first, last and only time that I ever sat in a crowd of people whose attention I really desired without once feeling that I was in danger' (Crisp, 1977a, p.99). Robinson considers the 'elegiac tone' of that chapter, how the evening

became, 'in retrospect, his farewell to the possibility of a meaningful erotic life', an episode instilled with 'an almost Proustian melancholy' (Robinson, 1999, p.165). The lament that Crisp writes for the Portsmouth sailor suggests the gradual passing, in his psyche, of the great dark man;

For this reason all the quality of that evening, and all the evenings like it that never came, remained with me for many years until I no longer felt the need for this kind of relationship with this kind of person – until my desires had changed and my whole nature had coarsened in a way that on that night in Portsmouth I would have thought impossible (Crisp, 1977a, pp.99-100).

With his usual overstatement, Crisp writes of the modernisation that the sailors' uniform would be subject to, and the consequent decline of erotic interest it could elicit in gay men; 'With a vertical instead of horizontal opening to their trousers, sailors can walk their shoes to the uppers without a single stranger asking them for a light. They can linger even in Piccadilly without ever being offered a pint of beer' (Crisp, 1977a, p.97). However drolly he writes of that transformation, it is symbol of a changing sexual topography, of that shift, in gay culture, from the real towards the imaginary, and indeed the pornographic – a very real shift, as Houlbrook suggests, in the 'conceptual vocabulary' of queerness (Houlbrook, 2005, p.238). But before such changes were manifest, Crisp would regain far more than he had apparently lost in the image of the Portsmouth sailor. Where that acquaintance was only a 'flirtation', the American GI in wartime London embodied a masculinity and sexuality in which Crisp found the reflection he sought of his femininity, and a figure glamorous in his cultural difference. He writes that 'while the G.I.s were still around, I lived almost every moment that I spent out of doors in a state of exhilaration' (Crisp, 1977a, p.158).

'With love from Uncle Sam': The American GI

'Never in the history of sex was so much offered to so many by so few' (Crisp, 1977a, p.157).

In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, Crisp's paraphrasing of Churchill is offered as narration over scenes of him being 'picked up' by American GIs (figure 21), recently arrived in wartime Britain, and a figure once again of uniformed

masculinity against which the merits of his effeminacy could be measured. North American soldiers represented the largest group of foreign militia to be stationed in Britain during the Second World War, and the expression 'overpaid, overfed, over-sexed and over here', as coined by the comedian Tommy Trinder in allusion to their 'conquest' of British women, was soon enculturated. But, as Jivani suggests, the 'fascination that British gay men had for American soldiers was reciprocated' (Jivani, 1997, p.59), and the sexual license of wartime London that Crisp writes of is centred particularly upon the behaviours of the American GIs he himself encountered.⁷¹ As Barrow writes, their presence had 'awoken his sexual appetite' (Barrow, 2002, p.156), and in the film of his autobiography the intimacy they shared meant for Crisp a 'happy war'; 'In the blackout the whole of London was my playground, and when the Americans came, I discovered like many a good girl that sex could be fun' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Indeed, in *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (2011), Amy Helen Bell considers how the 'darkness and anonymity of blacked-out London not only enhanced sexual pleasure but allowed its previously marginalized expression to become more public' (Bell, 2011, p.152).⁷² In *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military During World War II* (2004), Paul Jackson suggests that 'many young homosexual soldiers', from North America and Canada, were 'overwhelmed by the sexual possibilities offered in wartime England' (Jackson, 2004, p.187), but the intimacies that Crisp enjoyed would leave an impression of sexual mores incomparable to anything else he had experienced, and the account of his relationships with the GIs evidences an attraction to the glamour of a homogenised 'American' masculinity as much as military masculinity. Juliet Gardiner's study of the American GI (1992) does not make explicit acknowledgment of their same-sex experiences whilst in Britain, but the reminiscence of their presence – of their being 'sex-mad', and with a 'Hollywood-style glamour' (Gardiner, 1992, p.108) – does find parallel in Crisp's narrative of the liberalism that their figure embodied.⁷³

The Naked Civil Servant can be positioned amongst early re-writings of civilian lives during the war, not only looking through the lens of romantic and erotic experience, but offering a queer vantage of what had been a seismic shift in sexual behaviours. In looking at how sexual relationships during the war have been written, Bell suggests Crisp to be a lone memoirist on the subject of same-

sex experiences. Bell draws comparisons between Crisp's experiences and those of John Lehmann and Harold Nicholson, each a part, in their different ways, of the bohemian and sexually permissive Bloomsbury circle. Nicholson's 'affairs with young men' were well-known, but his 'public Whitehall role in the war inhibited acknowledgment of his sexuality in his and others' writing' (Bell, 2011, p.151); 'In contrast to the club members of the Bloomsbury elite, Crisp's openness about his sexuality and his habit of cross-dressing already made him a social pariah. He not only had less to lose by his frankness, but the salaciousness of his writing would only increase the shock value of his memoir and his cultural status' (Bell, 2011, p.151). While the likes of Lehmann and Nicholson, as Bell suggests, 'had to be more discreet' (Bell, 2011, p.151), the film of Crisp's autobiography, given its mass audience, was perhaps a provocative revision of sexual life in wartime London. It would offer a model of desire that had been largely overlooked, of sexual expression borne of what was termed the 'live for today, tomorrow we die' mind-set (Gardiner, 1992, p.124). Though such reasoning might be too reductive in the reflection of such experiences as Crisp's, it is observed in Bell's thesis; 'Through a greater anonymity and the excitement and danger of air raids, the Blitz provided new social opportunities for carnal adventure. It also presented a symbol of the dangers of sexual license ... when death was near, morals tended to go out the window' (Bell, 2011, p.151). While the image of Crisp's intimacy with the GIs that the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* offered, on the blacked-out streets of London and in his bed, did not concur with established portrayals of wartime military masculinity,⁷⁴ in his writings he reveals an eroticisation of their figure that was not exclusively queer;

Mr Roosevelt began, with Olympian hands, to shower the American forces. This brand-new army of (no) occupation flowed through the streets of London like cream on strawberries ... Labelled "with love from Uncle Sam" and packaged in uniforms so tight that in them their owners could fight for nothing but their honour, these "bundles for Britain" leaned against the lamp posts of Shaftesbury Avenue or lolled on the steps of thin-lipped statues of dead English statesmen ... their bodies bulged through every straining khaki fibre toward our feverish hands (Crisp, 1977a, pp.156-157).

Their uniforms were indeed said to fit 'in all the right places' (Gardiner, 1992, p.108), and, as Jivani suggests, 'American soldiers, when compared to their

Limey counterparts, seemed incredibly glamorous' (Jivani, 1997, p.59). As Crisp alludes, the American GI expressed a sexuality that contrasted significantly with the mores of British men, and their uniform, particularly beneath the queer gaze, was an amplification of this. The implicit sexuality of Crisp's fashioning is again gendered in binary relation with their uniformed masculinity, and though their figure elicits evident fictions and exaggerations in Crisp, he does offer credible narratives of reciprocated desire as founded upon these material differences. London's gay world was then structured, as Jackson suggests, 'according to the demand for particular sexual traits', and the 'masculine bearing' of American and Canadian soldiers would mean much 'success in the bars', as one of Jackson's subjects reminisces; 'I wore a uniform and I was a sergeant or a sergeant-major. I looked stern and forbidding ... so I got picked up by all kinds ... [particularly] Brit civilians ... I felt all I had to do was just stand in the corner of a bar ... and sooner or later I'd be picked up' (Jackson, 2004, p.189). The 'feverish hands' of which Crisp writes, in correspondence with the sexual possibilities that 'overwhelmed' those young queer soldiers to whom Jackson alludes, indeed imbues the figure of the GI with a sexual objectification that the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* does not so explicitly portray – in abidance of his romantic paradigm of the 'pursuer and the pursued', and the gendered behaviours it would effect, it is always Crisp who is courted by the American GI. Indeed, as Barrow suggests, Crisp took 'unqualified pleasure in the attentions of [these] strangers and was more than happy to be pursued through the streets' (Barrow, 2002, p.156). In this the film does translate from his writings the rituals of seduction that Crisp evidently enjoyed;

These young men walked, not behind, but beside you, and at once began a conversation with some such words as "You and me's interested in the same things, I guess." If you wanted, like Madam Butterfly, "a little bit to tease them" and said "But I'm interested in the life of the spirit," they replied, "Me too." If they were rejected without equivocation, they accepted the fact good-naturedly. Even when it was obvious that they had mistaken me for a woman, they allowed themselves to be enlightened with no display of disgust (Crisp, 1977a, p.157).

The American GIs that Crisp met were, as Jivani notes, far 'more willing to be seen with him' (Jivani, 1997, p.60), and where the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*

portrays their mistaking him for a woman, their apparently fluid sexuality is affirmed in their pithy response to Crisp's assertion that he is not; 'frankly do I care?' Barrow quotes Crisp as having said that he represented for them 'some kind of sexual experience which might not be found elsewhere', and would draw a distinction between the American GIs and his other lovers, summoning particularly the image of the 'rough'; 'they were never out to degrade or defile or frighten you' (Barrow, 2002, p.156). Amongst the interviewees featured in Jivani's *It's Not Unusual*, relationships with North American and Canadian servicemen during the war were relatively common; one would find himself 'being introduced to a whole succession of them who would look him up when they came to England' (Jivani, 1997, p.58).⁷⁵ Jivani observes how the US Army had endeavoured to eliminate homosexuality from amongst its ranks, firstly through psychiatric testing at induction station interviews, hoping to detect queerness through any manifestation of effeminacy, in appearance or behaviour, and 'by repeating certain words from the homosexual vocabulary and watching for signs of recognition' (Jivani, 1997, p.58). More diagnostic tests would follow, each more specious than the last, but during enlistment for the war potential recruits were simply asked whether they had ever had homosexual feelings or experiences. Jivani cites a figure of 3,000-4,000 discharges on the grounds of sexual abnormality during the course of the war – though there were of course many more afterwards – and writes that for every GI 'caught and court-martialled there must have been several who weren't and Britain's gay population was immensely grateful for them' (Jivani, 1997, p.59). Crisp would characterise the sexual attitudes of the GIs he knew as peculiarly 'American', suggesting that they 'were more natural in their sexual behaviour than Englishmen ... American soldiers discussed their sex life and your sex life', and assents again to a circumstantial model of same-sex desire when he suggests that because many were 'away from their wives ... anything went' (Crisp quoted in Jivani, 1997, p.60).

Jackson cites the experiences of a Canadian serviceman, who would reflect on the commercial sociability of queer London and the permissiveness it engendered; 'In '42 I was stationed in London for six months and I suddenly found out that Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus were just hotbeds of gay bars. Just jampacked with them. Of course, I had all kinds of free evenings so I could wander in and out ...' (Jackson, 2004, p.187). But beyond that commercial world

of bars, clubs and cafes, Crisp would write that, as bombs fell, 'the city became like a paved double bed' (Crisp, 1977a, p.154), and indeed across Britain wartime conditions would facilitate 'illicit sexual encounters', with nightly blackouts in all cities and towns meaning 'that privacy was more readily improvised' (Jackson, 2004, p.187). Though the circumstantial model of sexuality could not wholly explain the 'availability' of American servicemen that Crisp experienced, if only because of the fact that women were in far from short supply, the incidence of same-sex desire amongst GIs during the war is reasoned with some persuasiveness by Jackson, who suggests that the anonymity afforded 'by the large number of available partners and the absence of regulating functions' meant that many servicemen, being abroad, 'could explore their previously repressed desires with impunity' (Jackson, 2004, p.187). But for many soldiers, as Jackson suggests, the masculine demeanour 'that made him desirable' for queer men was also 'deliberately fashioned to hide his homosexuality within the military', and some concession is made here to the model of desire upon which Crisp's effeminacy was apparently fashioned; 'To pursue the masculine was itself interpreted as non-masculine by those who accepted received standards of gendered behaviour' (Jackson, 2004, p.189). But where Crisp would reason that his attraction for the likes of the 'rough' was in being a 'pseudo-woman', he would suggest that his effeminacy – in its difference, in its very *strangeness*, rather than any surrogacy it could necessarily represent – was allure enough for the American GI; 'They simply couldn't believe what we were like because they hadn't all come from New York ... They would seize my hands in which the nails were more off the finger than on and they'd say, "Come here, Hank, look at his hands"' (Crisp quoted in Jivani, 1997, pp.59-60). While the visibility with which Crisp was able to 'tease them' – those material markers of his sexual difference – was subject to such an objectifying gaze, in his lyrical reminiscence Crisp would in turn exoticise the GIs;

Their voices were like warm milk, their skins as flawless as expensive India rubber, and their eyes as beautiful as glass. Above all it was the liberality of their natures that was so marvellous ... At the first gesture of acceptance from a stranger, words of love began to ooze from their lips, sexuality from their bodies, and pound notes from their pockets like juice from a peeled peach (Crisp, 1977a, p.157).⁷⁶

The body of American masculinity that Crisp took such pleasure in has some material resonance with its contemporary representations, embodied for example in the advertising campaigns of Abercrombie & Fitch, with photography by Bruce Weber.⁷⁷ But gay culture's hyper-masculine imago of the military figure with same-sex desires, particularly when they are so often pornographic, have meant the marginalization of such experiences as Crisp's, premised as they were upon differently gendered identifications. The quean of Crisp's fashioning is now an archaic figure in representing the erotic desires that military masculinities can elicit, while the historical image of fighting men has become subject to the machinations of modern gay culture, to be packaged as 'coffee-table' beauties. Evan B. Bachner's *At Ease: Navy Men of World War II* (2004), and *Men of World War II: Fighting Men at Ease* (2007) (figure 22),⁷⁸ for example, offer black and white images of American servicemen that would seem to observe the same aesthetic codes of contemporary homoerotic photography. While images of masculinity during the war tend to be dominated by those of combat and heroism, Bachner's collections offer a particularly intimate gaze at the men themselves, of 'when they were not fighting' (Bachner, 2007, p.5), capturing 'an innocent intimacy' said to only 'border' on homoeroticism (Macdonald, 2004, pp.34-35). While a gay audience may indeed 'key in on the homoeroticism of many of the images', for Bachner they most importantly reveal 'a camaraderie among males that is lost in today's society'; he describes how the images belong to 'a period before irony, before queer theory. It's not a sexual attraction; it's really about the relationship among the men' (Macdonald, 2004, pp.34-35), and offers a last get-out clause; 'we have no way of telling what was in the mind of photographer or subject' (Bachner, 2004, p.10) But to evoke the simple comradeship of that intimacy, Bachner quotes from John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1998);

Crowded into port cities, men on leave or those waiting to be shipped overseas shared beds in YMCAs and slept in each other's arms in parks or in the aisle of movie theatres that stayed open to house them. Living in close quarters, not knowing whether they would make it through the war, and depending on one another for survival, men of whatever sexual persuasion formed intense emotional attachments (D'Emilio, 1998, in Bachner, 2004, p.10).

Bachner acknowledges that the images in these collections are resonant with the codes of masculinity familiar in contemporary visual culture, in advertising and fashion media particularly (Bachner, 2004, p.10), and are imbued thus with a homoeroticism that he attempts still to repudiate. The film of *The Naked Civil Servant* translates the occasion that Crisp was 'brought' a GI by a friend, as their numbers diminished with the end of the war; 'I brought him for you. He's a bit small but they're getting difficult to find' (Crisp, 1977a, p.173). That scene could be said to symbolise the impending reversal of the sexual climate that Crisp had taken such pleasure in through the war, a reversal that would be particularly felt by gay men across Britain, and so often mourned by Crisp. The material difference of the American GI, seamed with their particular cultural difference, would constitute not only a gendered other against which Crisp's effeminacy could be seen in relief, but a figure quite distinct from that American model in 'pre-ruined jeans [and] gingham shirt' which he saw universally imitated in the later decades of the twentieth century, fashioned in an expression of desire for sameness. As Houlbrook suggests, when 'Allied servicemen came to London in their thousands and the risk of death created a unique sense of release', for many queer men the war became 'a kind of sexual utopia containing freedoms and possibilities absent both before and after' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.238).⁷⁹ Indeed, Houlbrook cites Crisp here, on how 'the horrors of peace were many' (Crisp, 1977a, p.173).⁸⁰ Although the police surveillance that Crisp was subject to, and consequently his systematic barring from the public houses of bohemian Fitzrovia, did begin following his wrongful arrest during the war, it was in the years after the war that the law became increasingly vigilant of queerness in London, as Houlbrook (2005) and Hornsey (2010) have explored.⁸¹

That the sexual world in which Crisp was immersed during the war is almost 'incomprehensible today', Houlbrook suggests, 'is a powerful testament to how profoundly masculine sexual practices have changed over the past century';

The guardsman or sailor no longer inhabits the queer urban landscape. Young workingmen no longer move between male and female partners. We no longer have the conceptual vocabulary to comprehend how men could participate in homosex or intimate same-sex relationships while seeing themselves – and being seen by others – as "normal" (Houlbrook, 2005, p.238).

Just as the gay culture of Crisp's dotage would so often attempt to dislocate itself from his image of effeminacy, believing it to be an unnecessary martyrdom and relinquishing of masculine privilege, so he in return addressed their masculinity as a greater pretence than his own fashioning and a vain romantic ideal, much too performative to suggest any resolution of the 'conundrum' of the great dark man. However transitory the relationships addressed here were, and however problematic his attitudes toward same-sex union, Crisp had experienced something of the 'real thing', as opposed to the hyper-masculine drag he now observed, caricatured as much as fetishised in the visual media of contemporary gay culture. The next chapter explores Crisp's career as an art school model, and how that vocation similarly reveals both the freedoms and circumscription that was determined by his queerness and its material expression.

CHAPTER III

A Specialised Subject: Quentin the model

If I have any talent at all, it is not for doing but for being. In the humblest way, this I was now given the opportunity to demonstrate ... I became a model (Crisp, 1977a, p.127).

This chapter considers Crisp's 'artistic' body and the professional opportunities it allowed for, particularly during the Second World War. The vocation of art school model was, for Crisp at that time, born of necessity. It would however prove to be a long-standing career that gave significant licence to the queerness he fashioned. In 2009 the National Portrait Gallery exhibited a collection of newly acquired life drawings posed by Crisp, lent the obvious title of *The Naked Civil Servant* (figure 23). This addition to the Gallery's collection of portraits of Crisp was an acquisition of work by Barbara Morris, who had been a student at the Slade School of Fine Art during the Second World War. An accompanying literature was considerate of how Crisp had 'made his homosexuality a cause and his effeminacy the means by which to proclaim it,' and the employment he thus sought is said to have been without compromise to 'his appearance or manner.' Attentive of the facts of his fashioning, they are made correlative with the ostentation of his modelling; 'With hennaed hair, nail varnish on both his finger and toe nails and a repertoire of dramatic poses, he made a memorable subject for students in the art colleges around London and the home counties' (National Portrait Gallery, 2009). Morris's drawings are early testament to the languorous vanity in Crisp's modelling, and belong to a body of disaggregate students' work for which he posed over forty years, a career that wrought the indelible epithet of his later celebrity. While there are in existence innumerable sketches and portraits of Crisp from his years as a model, in his celebrity he would sit, for example, for R.B. Kitaj, in 1978, in what was in every sense a 'naked' portrait (figure 24).⁸² It is only in the final pages of his autobiography that Crisp explains the meaning of that title, how 'the conditions in which anyone could be a famous model had vanished long ago', that those like himself 'still in the racket had dwindled into naked Civil Servants' (Crisp, 1977a, p.214).⁸³ While it was not Crisp's preferred title, it is unlikely that any other would have defined

him in the public imagination with such effect. He composed a soubriquet of martyrdom that embodied not only his most sustained career, but also the very transgressive fashioning that was its foremost determinant.

The essay by Elizabeth Hollander that accompanies Crisp's inclusion in the *Dictionary of Artists' Models* is particularly alert to how his fashioning 'determined his existence', revealing in effect how its exhibitionism and its consequences wrought 'the principle on which his modelling was based' (Hollander, 2001, p.132).⁸⁴ Tracing a history over three centuries of the changing fortunes of the life model, Martin Postle's essay 'Naked Civil Servants: The Professional Life Model in British Art and Society' (2006), employs that epithet as metaphor of the disparity between the life model and the artist's muse that Crisp had himself intended. Acknowledging the debt he owes Crisp, Postle considers how so few dedicated themselves to art school modelling as a full-time profession, and how Crisp was a most notable exception (Postle, 2006, p.22). Where Crisp would speak of modelling as the 'first job I had ever had in which I understood what I was doing' (Crisp, 1977a, p.130), in relation to the material realisation of his queerness its consideration promises answers to those questions of the 'artistic' body, its spectacle and containment, that his fashioning elicits.⁸⁵

In a short film on his career at the Camberwell School of Art, made in 1979, Crisp speaks of the certainty that his fashioning meant an artistic vocation; 'I'd got stuck with all these arty jobs. In the same way that it's true that artists adopt a flamboyant appearance, it's also true that people who look peculiar get stuck with the arts' (*Life Class with Quentin Crisp*, 1979).⁸⁶ While Crisp was by now a recognizable face in the British media, his appearance is still made explicitly correlative with that vocation. The film moves from the Chelsea bedsitting room in which he is interviewed, and the close-up details of that signature fashioning – the silk scarf, shirt tied at the waist, what he would describe as his 'architectural' hair, and 'Edith Sitwell' rings – to his work in the life room, as he talks of his exhibitionism and its relation to modelling; 'I don't think I ever had any worry, any anxiety, about being stared at. I knew what modelling was like from being a student, and I also knew what being stared at was like from merely being alive, and my movements in real-life are, to some extent, arranged' (*Life Class with Quentin Crisp*, 1979). What Crisp tenders as a considered

martyrdom is made relational between the fashioned body – and the violent consequences of its dissidence – and the corporeality of the dais; ‘People have said that I’m a masochist ... [they] can justifiably see an element of deliberate suffering in my entire life’ (*Life Class with Quentin Crisp*, 1979). As the film closes with Crisp dressing in his room, that formation of image seen in such detail perhaps redundant for any similar documentary subject, its spectacle is made consonant with the ‘arty’ circumscription of the martyrdom he suggests.

Crisp had received an art school education, and had published in the 1930s books relating to the world of commercial art and design in which he was, intermittently, also employed for many years.⁸⁷ Hollander considers how those formative experiences were critical to his success as a model, suggesting that ‘he had enough artistic training to appreciate the pedagogical aspect of posing, and enough cultivation to have informed and decided tastes’ (Hollander, 2001, pp.132-133). Certainly in his writings this erudition is evidenced, and he makes droll allusion in *The Naked Civil Servant* to the deference of art appeasing certain of those aggressors that his fashioning drew; ‘with a stranger’s hand at my throat or my crutch or both, another member of the gang would whisper, ‘But he’s an artist. I seen him in Chelsea [sic].’ Immediately the grip on my person would loosen ...’ (Crisp, 1977a, pp.59-60).⁸⁸ Hollander notes how amid the hostility Crisp faced, ‘he got and lost many jobs’ (Hollander, 2001, p.132), making association between the enmity of the street that his fashioning met and the circumscription of the liminal and always transitory vocations he found himself ‘stuck with’ in the arts. Indeed, until he began modelling, any art that Crisp practiced remained quite indeterminate, and it was certainly not a world without prejudice. What Crisp had hoped in his early life ‘to wrest from regular employment’, he writes, ‘was something with which to bargain with the heterosexual world for acceptance as a homosexual’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.73). When first he had sought work as a commercial artist, during his brief career as an engineer’s tracer, the principal of St Martin’s School of Art had refused his admission for evening classes in life drawing and illustration, ‘saying that it was a miracle that I had a job at all and that I had better not try to change it’ (Crisp, 1977, pp.56-57). Though he would find employment in the world of commercial art, he writes of being called into his employer’s office and the attempts that

ensued 'to coerce me into altering my appearance', an intolerance from which he would be quite free as a model;

Without looking at me and moving the papers on his desk from side to side, he would say, 'Fact of the matter is we don't particularly like employing people with plucked eyebrows and pointed fingernails.' For a week or two my eyebrows, which usually marched across my forehead in single file, were allowed to form fours and the style of my fingernails was changed from Gothic to Norman (1977a, p.73).

To conceive however of Crisp having sought in earnest, whether or not simply for the sake of his fashioning, to enter some faction of the world of art beyond its commercial employment, we might observe the particular keenness he felt in his early life for a movement soon canonised in its histories. Crisp's experiences of Surrealism arriving in London, which might seem at first simply anecdotal, are far from immaterial in considering the artistic body so inseparable from his fashioning.

Queerness and the *objet trouvé*

[When] surrealism came to London [the] movement appealed to me because the pictures executed under its banner were akin to the works to which my mother had directed my attention in childhood. Their especial quality was Victorianism now put into a perverse form. I was only sorry that this was not enhanced by giving the paintings such titles as 'The Blight of the World' or 'When did you last rape your father?' (Crisp, 1977a, p.122).

In his essay 'Patronage in the Age of Negation' (1947), a survey of contemporary art criticism and its relation to the taxonomies of art history, Crisp is much concerned with Surrealism, suggesting that art 'constantly receives some revitalizing impetus from the world that is not Art; from religion, from physics, from the camera ... and now from the psycho-analysis which has created Surrealism', and considers the 'psycho-analytical' to be one of the 'great phases of Art', comparable to the Christian or scientific (Crisp, 1947, p.128).⁸⁹ In *The Naked Civil Servant* Crisp makes his early aesthetic intent of becoming an *objet trouvé* correspondent with his attending the opening of the 1936 *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the Burlington Galleries. Finding himself 'an unwitting, though not

entirely unwilling, exhibit' (Crisp, 1977a, p.122), the body he writes is one of liminal presence. The stock accolade of Crisp's celebrity, of him having been since the 1930s 'one of London's works of art' – or one of its 'peculiar sights' (Bailey, 2008, p.8) – is never more precisely seamed with the very circumscription that steered the narrative of his autobiography, and that made his star so remarkable.

However trite such descriptions of Crisp might seem, they can be related to Foucault's discussion of the corporeal self as art, in which he summons a Sartresque model of the artistic body, and reflects back something of Crisp's conception of the self he fashioned;

Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something which is given to us, but through the moral notion of authenticity, he turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves – to be truly our true self ... the only acceptable practical consequence of what Sartre has said is to link his theoretical insight to the practice of creativity – and not of authenticity. From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p.362).

Crisp's remembrance of the 1936 exhibition explicates something of those boundaries of the liminal body that afforded such a notable epithet – the 'barriers' between art and the 'everyday' that Crisp hoped Surrealism might have vanquished, in its practices of objectification, being very much resonant of what Hollander describes as the 'cusps' of his art school modelling, of passivity and presence, of 'degradation and grandeur' (Hollander, 2001, p.132). The relation between the 'everyday' and the tenets of Surrealism is traced by Michael Sheringham to reveal how 'the movement always maintained a commitment to the transformation of daily life' (Sheringham, 2006, p.59). An infamous example of the Surrealist experimentation with the fashioned body that sought to collapse the barriers between the ordinary and the extraordinary is related by Crisp to the comparable exhibit that he fashioned himself at the 1936 show;

In and out of the different rooms glided a certain Mrs Legge wearing full evening dress and carrying in her hand an uncooked pork chop. With orange face and vermilion lips I weaved my way past her, clanking with amulets, but, as her face was entirely covered by a hood of roses, I could not see whether she registered fear that I might be a materialization of

the surreal world or annoyance that another voluntary worker had got his rota mixed with hers. For a moment one of the dearest wishes of surrealism was fulfilled. The barriers between art and life fell down (Crisp, 1977a, pp.122-123).

In *London – After a Fashion* (2007), surveying how the presentation of Surrealism was critical to its ‘expressive potential’, Alistair O’Neill considers how, following the opening at the Burlington Galleries, newspaper reports were quite ‘unconcerned with how the artworks unsettled the conscious assumptions of the everyday’, but were most fascinated by the artists themselves, particularly Sheila Legge, in the guise of the Surreal Phantom (O’Neill, 2007, pp.75-76). In Crisp’s ‘voluntary’ metaphor, redolent as it is of his autobiography’s appellative, there is intimation of the artistic body become ‘everyday’ – indeed pedestrian. But Crisp was confronted here with the very contrary registers of the artistic body – Legge’s ‘Phantom’ being indeed the ultimate objectification of what Lewis Kachur considers the Surrealist’s fetishization of the female body and sexuality (Kachur, 2003, p.78),⁹⁰ and his own being the bounded materialization of those who fashion the ‘peculiar’ only to be ‘stuck with the arts.’ In the materiality of their confrontation the relation to this faction of art that Crisp suggests he sought speaks in some way of his then estranged relation to society, indeed the very *dépaysement* in which the Surrealists were interested. Whatever its outré materiality and intent however, Legge’s image is read by Crisp as an affectation of certain impermanence in a space accommodating of it as performance. It presented for Crisp an assured essentialising of the feminine and embodiment of that which his fashioning most precisely challenged. Despite such divide however, it can be considered that they were each in their own ways, for their subjects, imaginaries of the feminine conceived for exhibition.

O’Neill suggests Claude Cahun’s photograph of Legge in Trafalgar Square, wearing the Phantom’s hood of roses, displaced from the Surrealist gallery space to the streets of London, to be posed ‘as if blinded by the notion of beauty’ (O’Neill, 2007, p.92). Crisp’s metaphors of his own cosmeticised bondage and its sensorial martyrdom – of being ‘blind with mascara and dumb with lipstick’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.49) – were prompted by a narcissism given everyday display upon those streets. Michael Warner’s thesis, in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), that it is only in being addressed that any specific public can be realised,

allows for an understanding of the very different worlds to which these displays of aesthetic bondage were delivered.⁹¹ Legge's address was one of performance, which sought an audience more than a public, while Crisp's, differently performative, was of his queer embodiment, seeking and inevitably encountering a quite contrary dimension of public in its everyday exhibition and repetition. In *Female Impersonation* (2003), drawing analogy between gender mimicry and performance art – expressly the 'playful' repetition of the feminine – Tyler considers how both 'subvert the commodification process' of the object;

The mimic as performance artist denaturalizes ideology by questioning the terms in which she is produced and circulated as commodity ... unmasking through a conscious masking (mimicry) the masquerade of (woman's) nature, what is supposed to precede cultural construction. She 'does' ideology in order to undo it (Tyler, 2003, p.23).

If the intent of Legge's performance and objectification was to reveal, behind that mask of roses, femininity as mime, the queer mimicry that Crisp made cosmetic and everyday was the negation of it necessitating the ordered space of the art gallery, or that of the art photograph. In writing of Surrealism as ephemeral spectacle, and expressly of Legge as its agent, Crisp reveals the transience of its study of feminine masquerade as wholly contrary to the constancy of his everyday fashioning. In Crisp's observation of Surrealism, and particularly of its being representative of the world of art from which he was apparently excluded, the 'undoing' of nature and ideology that he fashioned remains beyond its reach.⁹² While being 'stuck with the arts' is articulated as an inevitability of his fashioning, between the lines of Crisp's judgement of Surrealism, and implicitly of the broader realms of canonical art, its boundaries of the normative strike the inscription of the liminality behind the epithet of his artistic body.

Though the example of Surrealism cannot reveal any universal veracity of modernist art that might have been in his reach, psychic or actual, the further appraisal of its proponents' attitudes towards gender and sexual transgressiveness do summon some notable tensions of which Crisp might have been more attentive. Dawn Ades considers how 'other' sexualities rendered discussion amongst the Surrealists 'unstable', citing specifically Andre Breton's condemnation and 'violent reaction' towards the subject of male homosexuality

(Ades, 1992, p.197). Though Natalya Lusty, in *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (2007), lends some defence to this sentiment – of it being ‘the act’ that he so disapproved of (Lusty, 2007, p.111) – Ades considers further how such resistance amongst some male Surrealists was ‘combined with pleasure at the representation of sex between females, which evidently interferes less with the imaginative construction of a masculine sexual identity’ (Ades, 1992, pp.197-198). Lusty also discusses the Surrealist fashioning of the lesbian subject, relating this to the sociological interest in fashion at the time, specifically Flugel’s *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930), and its social reformist agenda, particularly the reform of anti-homosexual laws and men’s sartorial codes, (Lusty, 2007, pp.100-101). Further, the queer pseudonym and drag of Surrealist associate Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, Rrose Selavy, might suggest some greater openness to gender transgressiveness.⁹³ Just as Michel Remy offers keen defence of the autonomy that women artists were afforded within Surrealism (Remy, 1999, pp.338-340), Penelope Rosemont is quite unequivocal of both its feminist and queer sympathies, suggesting that their early ‘questioning and challenging of gender stereotypes went much deeper than even the most radical of their contemporaries’ (Rosemont, 1998, xlv), and that due to their ‘pronounced sexual openness’, Surrealist artists as a whole were for some time into the 1940s widely indicted of being homosexual (Rosemont, 1998, xlv). Saslow is equally absolute in his contrary estimation of Surrealism’s position on sexual otherness, that like other avant-garde modernist art movements, it ‘loved sex – except for gay sex’ (Saslow, 1999, p.225). George Melly however would write of his common acquaintance with Crisp and British members of the Surrealist group, and that he ‘made a considerable tactical error in assuming that all the Surrealists shared Breton’s mistrust of deviation’ (Melly, 2006, p.276).

O’Neill considers the parallel developments of Surrealist art and fashion to have been ‘bound by gendered distinctions’, evident particularly in the ‘fixed and static qualities’ of the male artists’ relative sartorial sobriety (O’Neill, 2007, pp.78-79).⁹⁴ The paradox of Surrealism’s relationship to the outré fashioned subject could be said to rest in its signifying preoccupation with the Freudian unconscious. Indeed, the fashioning of Crisp’s queerness as a very cognisant daring of its societal subjugation was quite at odds with this most critical of Surrealism’s influences. While the motifs of Legge’s Phantom were thought

redolent of female sexuality, these were symbols of an unconscious made intellectual,⁹⁵ quite removed from the 'everyday' unsettling of Crisp's queer embodiment. Though his writings on the subject could be read as typically 'arch', Crisp looked to the gallery as a mediating space, and to Surrealism's interest in the material intercession between 'art and life', and when he writes that he 'came out on the side of reality', rather than the world of art that Surrealism then represented for him, he makes a willing bid for the liminal artistic space that his fashioning seemingly determined;

I began to feel that art was not merely superfluous but actually insulting to life. Its implication was that the visible world was intolerable unless a bunch of amateurs at the creation business shoved it around. For this reason I never wanted to paint but hoped ... that I might become an *objet trouvé* in the world of art (Crisp, 1977a, p.123).⁹⁶

Body of war

However invested it might have been in the object as metaphor, particularly sexual, if Crisp's being 'found' was not to happen in the ordered spaces of Surrealism, it would come to pass in circumstances very much more 'everyday'. After his inevitable exemption from conscription in 1939, amidst the increased poverty which he immediately faced, Crisp was asked to sit for the artist Clifford Hall, an instance among several at this time of him indeed being 'found'; 'Without having ever met me, he telephoned me to ask if I would allow him to paint my portrait. When I asked if he would be willing to pay me he said with frankness, 'Only if it's absolutely necessary.' It was' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.121-122). Though Hall would paint several portraits of him,⁹⁷ Crisp does not offer adequate reason for their acquaintance being made like this, or any account of why he was supposed a suitable model by the artist.⁹⁸ The fact however that it was the 'only money' that Crisp earned at this time relates precisely to the difficulties of his finding work and the queerness that his exemption made even more socially reprehensible. It is in terms of the male body surviving the war by its very display – therefore the 'unpatriotic' body – that Crisp's assimilation of the queer and the artistic at this time is to be understood.

Crisp writes that when war was declared, 'I went out and bought two pounds of henna' (Crisp, 1977a, p.105). Discussing the gendered ideologies inherent in the constitution of nation during conflict and war, Mrinalini Sinha considers the 'contours' of patriotic masculinity that are produced in its rejection of the feminine or the feminized (Sinha, 2004, p.257). Certainly Crisp attests to the corporeality of nationhood becoming one markedly of masculinity during the Second World War, and the spectacle of his cosmeticised effeminacy being a challenge to its materialization. Indeed, in considering the 'contested signifiers' of cosmetics during the war, Gardiner quotes Crisp's declaration of stockpiling henna as example of their value (Gardiner, 2004, pp.496-498). While it might have been during the Second World War that, as Wilson suggests, in the constitution of femininity, cosmetics 'became truly democratic', particularly because of their short supply (Wilson, 2003a, p.112), the queerness that Crisp made material in their use would prove an overstatement at once of their conflicted in/consequence and their rarity, and, most significantly, of his exemption. Those 'contours' of patriotic masculinity so apparent in wartime Britain were precisely evidenced for Crisp in a particular confrontation with a police officer, who advised of his marked queerness that the public 'don't like that sort of thing.' Though Crisp would conceive that the public he so provoked 'could now add patriotism to their other less easily named reasons for hating me' (Crisp, 1977a, p.150), his unpatriotic response to the advent of war – that seeming concern only with the fashioning of his effeminacy – would paradoxically be put to its greatest employ at this time.

Crisp first made acquaintance with Angus McBean in circumstances not incomparable to his meeting Clifford Hall, the outcome of which would provide notable testament to that unpatriotic body. Though complete strangers in the wartime black-out, in 1939, Crisp was asked to sit for the photographer, and writes how 'Mr McBean longed to take photographs as fervently as I desired to be photographed' (Crisp, 1977a, p.152). The resulting portraits were typical of McBean's 'glamorous' style, prompting an acquaintance of Crisp's to observe 'I see you can go down to history as a famous beauty whatever you happen to look like' (Crisp, 1977a, p.153), and embody something of the 'painted boy' whom Houlbrook traces as a critical figure in the queer London of the 1920s and 30s (2005), and, as mentioned previously, the 'sad young man'. The golden eye-

shadow just evident in the luminosity about the eyes, beneath plucked and painted brows, and the architectural hair, subtly glossed lips and rouged cheeks, and the single costume ring that adorns his hands, may seem somewhat understated in McBean's study of this found beauty, but the photographs do provide rare document of Crisp's fashioning at this time. McBean was by now a photographer of some renown, particularly recognisable for his portraits of theatre actors, and incorporated – indeed popularised – many of the conventions of Surrealism. His biographer writes how in that darkness he saw 'a remarkable face'; Crisp was, according to McBean, 'one of the most beautiful people I have ever photographed. It was completely androgynous beauty, and under different circumstances it would have been difficult to know what sex he was' (McBean quoted in Woodhouse, 2006, p.167).⁹⁹ Linda Marchant considers McBean's work in the 1930s and 40s in relation to the photographic portraiture of celebrity that envisioned femininity as a singular ideal of 'glamour' and beauty, images that would elicit the 'worship and adulation' of a (female) public enduring considerable 'hardship, loss and uncertainty' (Marchant, 2007, p.97). Certainly if cosmeticised effeminacy in the inter-war years 'represented an imperial nation become dangerously effete' (Houlbrook, 2007, p.168), the anxieties it wrought during the war would inevitably, as Crisp attests, be more marked – and particularly if it could be read as imitative of the vision of femininity that Marchant traces.

Though their black-and-white tonality renders them somewhat restrained when contrasted with the image of Crisp's youth in the film of his autobiography, they would prove seminal to that later celebrity, being presented with the sample manuscript of *The Naked Civil Servant* to prospective publishers, and with the promise that the subject would 'provide the story that surrounds the image' (Barrow, 2002, p.244).¹⁰⁰ Certainly the 'flaunting' of his effeminacy during the war was pivotal to the narrative that would frame McBean's portraits of Crisp. In correspondence at Jonathan Cape, publisher of *The Naked Civil Servant*, between one of its directors and their associate, a certain tension between this visual veracity of Crisp's past and his own, seemingly more tolerable, written image was articulate; 'I daren't send you the photograph of the author as a young man, but ... it is quite stunning, alluring and beautiful in an only mildly sickening way' (Barrow, 2002, pp.244-245). If that trace of his queer fashioning was read as disquieting, however 'mildly', in the midst of the apparently liberalised mores of

late-1960s Britain, so often cited as critical to the publication of Crisp's autobiography (Smith, 1999, xxiii), its spectacle of 'alluring and beautiful' effeminacy must be read as a considerable daring of the instruction of 'remasculinisation' that Sonya O. Rose, in her essay 'Temperate Heroes: Concepts of Masculinity in Second World War Britain', considers so culturally ubiquitous through the privations of the time (Rose, 2004, p.177). While its provocation was certainly overstated when so posed, moving from the private photographic studio to the more public space intimated in the epithet of his autobiography would mean further amplification still.

While historians such as Houlbrook have quoted from *The Naked Civil Servant* in discussing the 'sexual utopia' that the Second World War wrought upon queer London (Houlbrook, 2005, p.238), it is critical to observe that Crisp spoke conflictingly of his wartime experiences. Though he would repeat in the interviews of his celebrity, perversely, of it having been 'a happy time', particularly because of his intimate relationships with American GIs, it was the time of his wrongful arrest and trial for soliciting, and of some of the most brutal assaults he would suffer (Crisp, 1977a, pp.150-151; 164-171). It was also during the war that Crisp began to model in the art schools of London and the home counties.¹⁰¹ cursory mention is made of these wartime – and immediate post-war – circumstances of his early modelling by journalist William Cook, writing on the experiences and reflections of students for whom Crisp had sat. While Cook writes that 'during the war, any able-bodied man under 40 was a novelty – let alone one with plucked eyebrows [and] exemption papers',¹⁰² those very contexts are of far greater consequence to the study of his modelling career and its relation to his fashioning than is acknowledged (Cook, 1992). In wartime Britain, as Rose suggests, "good citizenship' and masculinity were virtually the mirror images of one another' (Rose, 2004, p.177), and the queer body for which Crisp was exempt from its military efforts was a spectacle made especially transgressive in the exhibitionism of the life room.

Cook cites Crisp as saying that, on first moving to London in the early 1930s, 'I tried to find work where my appearance didn't matter. I missed the point entirely. I should have found work where my appearance was the entire point' (Crisp quoted in Cook, 1992). However 'naked' his modelling might have been, Crisp's fashioning was very much central to its opportunity during the war, in

some way its 'entire point', and its display of the narcissistic queerness that had led to his exemption did make him a particularly remarkable model, and much in demand. Following what Alison Light considers as the perceived 'feminizing' of concepts of nation after the First World War (Light, 1991, p.10), the attempts to 'remasculinise' its expression during the Second World War wrought a seemingly conflicted 'hegemonic masculinity ... constructed in opposition both to a hyper-masculine Nazi-like image, and to images of emasculated or effeminate men personified by old men and cowardly pacifists' (Rose, 2004, p.177). There was also apparent, as Crisp experienced, the conflation of the pacifist with the queer body; in seeking more 'conventional' employment he would claim his complete exemption and its grounds, but found himself 'always obliquely accused of being pacifist [and though] I protested that I was one of the few people who actually liked the war, I still didn't get taken on' (Crisp, 1977a, p.121).¹⁰³ Acknowledging that 'the requisites of manliness were evident everywhere and nowhere' in wartime Britain – "nowhere" in that there was rarely explicit and concentrated attention paid to the topic of masculinity as there was to femininity ... 'everywhere' because manhood, although not identified as such, was portrayed in a host of representations' (Rose, 2004, p.177) – is critical to understanding the discordant body that Crisp's exemption made so culpable but so 'available'. While this might have seemed an inexpedient time for such amplified exhibition of his queerness, modelling was for Crisp principal among his then limited opportunities.¹⁰⁴ While a member of the wartime staff of Goldsmiths Art College makes the obvious relation between Crisp's modelling and the queerness evident in his outré appearance, it is also made specific to his accomplishments as a model, and relative to the sartorial conventions of that hegemonic masculinity *and* of the art institution; he is described as being so 'terrific' a model 'because he was so astonishing to look at ... He had style. Men wore pretty dingy clothes in those days. Art students were a bit more daring because they were sort of bohemian, but unless they were homosexual they didn't go in for bright colours' (Cook, 1992).

The spectacle that such recollection suggests is one that negates those efforts to 'remasculinise' the expression of nation, the evasion of masculine duty intimated by that exempt body very much inscribed upon its display. The manner of Crisp's modelling that he would so often recite in interviews, of 'heroic poses'

that he recalled in the Camberwell film as something 'of a joke', can be read as very real provocation of the patriotic morality and war effort that the increasing representations of the athletic male physique embodied and endeavoured to make normative (Rose, 2004, pp.184-185). Indeed the 'camp quality' that Crisp suggests of his posturing – reminisced with hands and head in classical affectation, the theatre he made of his obligatory vocation (figure 25)¹⁰⁵ – reads not only as parody of the ideals of Renaissance masculinity that he so admired, and the figurativeness that he mourned the absence of in much twentieth century art, but of the then culturally pervasive ideal of heroic masculinity from which he had made himself exempt.

While Crisp considered modelling to be his naked 'martyrdom', the military heroism and frontline suffering that so dominated the work of artists who observed the war, and the 'crisis' in masculinity that Brian Foss, in *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain, 1939-1945* (2007), suggests it evidences, is sober counterpoint to the performance he made of his exemption. Just as the body of Crisp's naked display was consequence of his freedom from the duties of 'good' citizenship and its correlative masculinity, Foss considers those representations of male nudity that were expressive of the collective defence of nation;

Communal nudity within the armed services had long been exploited to build *esprit de corps* amongst men from different economic, social, religious and political backgrounds, welding them into cohesive fighting units. It could also, however, be a reminder of the petty, dehumanising tyrannies that existed within the military hierarchy (Foss, 2007, p.146).

While conveying the subjects' loss of dignity was the critical intent of representations of the naked, or semi-naked, male body, their testament to the humiliations of military life were meant also as metaphor of 'the more traumatic loss of bodily integrity through injury.' Foss makes association here with depictions of bombed and ruined architecture being proxy 'for the absent bodies of air raid victims', in the work of artists such as Graham Sutherland and Vivian Pitchforth (Foss, 2007, p.147). That Crisp's exemption led not to any such cost of dignity or comparable loss, but lent certain licence to the vaingloriousness of his fashioning, invited allusion to his own survival of the war through the lens of

architectural metaphor; 'I, who had once been a landmark more cheerful looking and more bomb-proof than St Paul's Cathedral ... had become a loathsome reminder of the unfairness of fate. I was still living while the young, the brave and the beautiful were dead' (Crisp, 1977a, p.173).

Foss suggests that while those artists of his survey would articulate 'the indignity associated with death, [they] replace terror with embarrassment and with the historically sanctioned aesthetic category of the male nude' (Foss, 2007, p.147). When read against the indignities and the horrors of war finding composite metaphor in that male body, the vanity of the 'deliberate suffering' which Crisp makes relational between his fashioning and his modelling is indeed brought to the surface of Barbara Morris's 'naked' drawings. Testament to that inexorable artistic vocation, they are also the material 'loathsome reminder' of that contrary body. While depictions of the male body as subject to 'others' inspecting, classificatory or supervisory visual interest' (Foss, 2007, pp.147-148),¹⁰⁶ especially by military recruiting officers, can be related to those of Crisp's experience in *The Naked Civil Servant* (Crisp, 1977a, pp.114-116), critical query is elicited of the contrary gaze they were subject to. Crisp's willingness to join the war effort and his effete, naked appearance before the recruiting medical board being no more than a comedic incident is particularly articulate in the film of his autobiography. For Foss, beyond the 'submergence of death' that informed its wartime representations, 'the nude male draws attention to his vulnerable ('feminised') status' (Foss, 2007, p.147). That Crisp should be exempt from any such gaze of authority, but so welcoming of that indeterminately gendered position and its potential judgements in the life room, invites questions that relate the gender dissidence he fashioned to the display he presented before the students he would often designate as his 'audience';

When a bomb was dropped on Goldsmiths' College and all the windows of the life room fell in, I remained motionless. When the students had risen from the floor and dusted themselves they congratulated me on my stoicism – my adherence to the Casabianca tradition (Crisp, 1949, p.51).¹⁰⁷

An audience with ...

Hollander understands Crisp's exhibitionism to reveal 'the peculiar tension between abject passivity and visual self-assertiveness that distinguishes modelling from other kinds of performance, and that keeps the model on the margins of both art and theatre' (Hollander, 2001, p.132).¹⁰⁸ With intimation of the spatial and material contingency behind Hollander's observation of modelling as borderline performance, Crisp would speak often of the students of the life room as his 'audience' (figure 26). To gainfully acknowledge modelling as performance, however liminal, demands certain reasoning with this very concept, in the hope of realising some register of that contingent relationship that evidences the trace signifiers of his fashioning as meaningful in 'working' the dais. As Marvin A. Carlson suggests, performance must always seek 'some audience that recognizes and validates it' as such (Carlson, 2004, p.5). In *Performative Realism: Interdisciplinary Studies in Art and Media* (2005), Gade and Jerslev similarly consider how an audience is requisite for the subject to *become* performative; 'becoming' a subject is always a relational matter that 'takes two or more' (Gade and Jerslev, 2005, p.8). In Crisp observing the students for whom he posed as audience, dissociate and anonymous, their being bound to study him as performer and his modelling as performance accords with the corporeal tension that Hollander suggests of the model, between the abject figure of passivity and its contrary but requisite material claim to presence and the gaze. Such binary clause relates Crisp's modelling to the 'solo' performance of his later celebrity, his resoluteness in the life room – instanced in his 'Casabianca' stoicism when under fire in wartime London – being intimative of the 'posture' of his one-man show and its further claim to singularity, and particularly his role in the popular imagination of 'survivor'. How this relationship relates to the figure he knowingly fashioned of an 'unsympathetic part played to a hostile audience' (Crisp, 1977a, p.45), the societal provocation so very critical to his consequent performance of the auto/biographical, is evidenced for Crisp in the surprisingly censorious attitudes of his art school 'audience'. Crisp writes that on first seeing 'the boys in their corduroy trousers and the girls in their Hungarian blouses, I had assumed that I would get on all right with them' (Crisp, 1977a, p.132). Though relatively less hostile in its articulation than that of the everyday

censure which his fashioning invited, despite such a 'bohemian' appearance and the liberal mores Crisp thought it should embody, an intolerance of the queerness that he fashioned was clearly felt by his 'audience' – the obligation of its gaze not always conceived in mutual silence.

Crisp writes that the 'mounting hostility' evident in the art schools of post-war London had led to increased 'insults about my appearance and my private life being hurled at me by students sitting on the window ledges to watch me arrive and depart' (Crisp, 1977a, p.206). That he was subject to their 'scornful comment' and 'opprobrious conjecture' as to the meanings of his fashioning (Crisp, 1986, pp.13-14) echoes the incidences which had long been ritual for Crisp, of strangers discussing his 'private life in public voices' (Crisp, 1977a, p.150). Transgressing the position of the other of art and its histories, Crisp's 'becoming' at once performance and 'art' itself – unravelling the model's dichotomy of being both subject and object – finds resonance in those processes of 'works of art ... overtly [staging] their relationship to the viewer as corporeal, invested, mutual, intersubjective' (Jones, 1999, p.38). That the audience sought inevitably 'takes as well as makes meaning' (Jones, 1999, p.38) from such performance, bid as it is to mutually 'invest', suggests that object which Crisp made of himself in the life room as ever more purposefully subject to the *potential* of censure. Discussing effeminacy and its theatre audiences, with reference to Crisp's one-man show, *An Audience with ...*, Michael R. Schiavi comments on the limitations of his 'performance range', suggesting that his 'professional effeminacy ... registered insistently', preventing any credible embodiment of anything other to his apparent 'nature' (Schiavi, 2006, p.131).¹⁰⁹ But while the theatre audience of Crisp's later celebrity was most often one of benevolence, the effeminacy so resolute in his modelling was an unsolicited performance.

Depicting Crisp's first assignment, he is revealed in the film of his autobiography upon the dais of a vast studio amongst the ruins of classical props, the elaborate poses he adopts in each successive shot accompanied with a change of the loincloth that ensured he was 'never quite naked' (figure 27) (Crisp, 1977a, p.128). However flamboyant each change might be, from russet to cerise – students would even reminisce sequins (Stevens, 2000) – none is ever as vivid as the henna of his hair or the crimson of his mouth, the overstatement of the cosmeticised colour he brings to the life room lending greater resonance to

the challenge that his excessive posing receives from the anxious art master, 'Do you think you could be more natural?' Jill Berk Jiminez suggests that because models are typically characterised 'by their readiness and ability to sacrifice personal identity for a greater artistic vision,' they can be considered 'the most quintessential "other" in art history' (Jiminez, 2001, vi). However few of its cosmetic traces remained, Crisp did not relinquish the principles of his fashioning, and considering the philistinism that litters his writings, however affected, he would certainly have never done so for another's 'artistic vision' – modelling was so suitable a vocation for Crisp as it was permissive of an inexorable exhibitionism.

The divide between performance and performativity that was diminished in Crisp's modelling is redolent in Sara R. Phillips observation that the model, despite their 'immobility', can conceive of their work and its processes of objectification as performance (Phillips, 2006, pp.14-15), and in Georg Eisler's reflection that posing *has* to be 'something indefinably more than just standing still' (Eisler, 1977, p.11). Anne Ring Petersen, in her essay 'Between image and stage: the theatricality and performativity of installation art', considers how 'performance' is 'usually applied to the carrying out of an artistic activity in front of an audience', whilst performativity 'is associated with the situational dimension of the viewer's reception of a work and the fact that this reception situation is an activity performed here and now' (Petersen, 2005, p.213). But the seeming lack, particularly of artistic skill, that defines the model's passivity and negates any such performance, still requires, as is evident in Crisp's rhetoric of his life as a model, the very performativity that Petersen identifies, of 'acquired, culturally determined behaviour' (Petersen, 2005, p.213). In his earliest published treatise on modelling, *The Declining Nude* (1949), Crisp recalls an acquaintance having commented that it was surely easier for him 'to pose than not' (Crisp, 1949, p.49), his fashioning and its societal provocation implicitly the pose of his self-definition, and the particular vanity thought critical to a model's success (Taylor, 2001, p.3) being already in evidence. It might have been observed however, that it was easier for Crisp to *perform* than not, and especially in view of the correspondence he suggests himself in that essay between the experiences of the model and the actor, and the performative extremes of 'anatomical perspective' he writes of in his own modelling (Crisp, 1949, pp.49-50).¹¹⁰ Crisp's being 'as Sistine as hell'

(Crisp, 1977a, p.131) in the life room, the excessive poses he adopted in camp reverence of Michelangelesque physicality, is resonant in Hollander's consideration of the life model as occupying a space defined to some degree by their 'bodily authority'; in their 'doing' *being*, the model is both the 'author and occupant' of that space (Hollander, 1991, p.134).¹¹¹ Such understanding of the model's spatial possession of the life room, intimative of what Carlson describes as the solo performer's 'management', elucidates not only the material relationship between modelling and performance, but suggests that body to be the object of strategies of narrativisation for its audience. Whatever the 'authority' his transgressive body gained in its performance, the inscription of Crisp's effeminacy, even at his most naked, revealed the very *reason* for his career in the life room, and perhaps his most defiant provocation of its censure. It is also in the 'bohemian' nature of modelling that Crisp observes the opportunity for performance. Where Wilson describes both the ideological and geographical spaces of bohemia in the twentieth century as 'a refuge, a way station, a stage' (Wilson, 2003b, p.73), the dais was indeed for Crisp the stage for a cameo role.

The bohemian cameo

The myth of famous, larger-than-life bohemians depended upon the cast of less known but equally flamboyant and eccentric characters surrounding them. These were often more unusual than the stars, sometimes so original that their lives became works of art in themselves. Without them, Bohemia could not have existed (Wilson, 2003b, p.72).

In *The Declining Nude*, Crisp defines modelling as very much a 'bohemian' occupation, available to those on society's margins, 'a job that requires no references, no training, no previous experience, no specific ability – not even a thought in your head' (Crisp, 1949, p.48). While he omits the artistic sensibilities which Hollander observes above as very much significant to Crisp's success, what Wilson discerns as the 'genius' of eccentricity and exhibitionism, of those bohemians who 'simply poured their creativity into that most ephemeral of arts ... of adornment, outrage, wit and conversation' (Wilson, 2003b, p.73), underlines the further absence of appearances. While Crisp's fashioning was resolutely

queer, it would find far greater tolerance in London bohemian circles than it did in its queer culture of the 1930s and 40s.¹¹²

Just as modelling was a principal opportunity of casual employment for those in bohemian London through the early decades of the twentieth century (Wilson, 2003b, p.73), so the life room offered Crisp a direct admission into its social life, with his introduction to Fitzrovia's Charlotte Street during the war by another model, an acquaintance made at St Martin's; 'If it had not been for this casual invitation, a whole world might for ever have remained closed to me ... once I had been introduced by an habitu  and found that my appearance was acceptable there, my whole social life changed' (Crisp, 1977a, p.137).¹¹³ In his autobiography Crisp writes of the public houses of Fitzrovia, particularly the Wheatsheaf, in which he would have socialised amongst many of the period's celebrated artists and writers, the likes of George Orwell, Dylan Thomas and Nina Hamnett.¹¹⁴ Afforded social freedoms elsewhere lacking, even in Chelsea,¹¹⁵ or Soho's Old Compton Street, Crisp's introduction to Charlotte Street would mark 'the discovery of a new self', and the construction of 'a public character'; 'I was moving among people to whom my homosexuality was of no consequence whatsoever. I began a whirlwind courtship of an entire district' (Crisp, 1977a, p.138).¹¹⁶ Alluding to its later literary representations, Crisp writes of the Fitzrovian players like himself who sought a character part for their extraordinariness; 'As though we had some foreknowledge that we were living literature, we all set to work to be cameos. We tried with significant gestures and memorable phrases to give good value for the welcome that I at any rate was so surprised to find that we received' (Crisp, 1977a, p.161). Crisp makes allusion here to the memoirs of Julian Maclaren-Ross, and to the fiction of Roland Camberton, although no mention is given to the cameo of Douglas Vanner in the latter's 1950 novel *Scamp* – a character based on Crisp.¹¹⁷ Camberton's portrait is suggestive of the acceptance he enjoyed amongst Fitzrovia's artistic community; 'He may be a man, he may be a woman ... He has a blue chin and long, waved ginger hair. His clothes are neither this nor that ... his smile is delicate, poised, and more than civilized. His wit glitters perfectly and artificially' (Camberton, 1950, pp.122-123).

Crisp was very much a recognisable player in Fitzrovia, from the war through to the essential decline of its bohemian ambience in the 1950s. But while

Wilson addresses the importance of the cameo role in bohemian life, he is a notable absence from her survey. There is some reasoning for this however in Crisp's star being so belated, no matter how greatly it would come to eclipse those who received considerable public celebration as that culture still prospered – artists, poets and writers whose work would fall to relative oblivion when compared to the celebrity that Crisp found in his dotage. Indeed, however deferred the enduring ambition of finding fame as a writer that Crisp pronounces in *The Naked Civil Servant*, he did not remain the 'failure' that was as much a cameo of bohemia as the artist's model – the ever ambitious but often unproductive writer, artist, actor, poet, playwright.¹¹⁸ But modelling was an important 'supporting role' in bohemian culture, its very ambiguities afforded some status there; as a profession resistant of easy definition, its 'romantic, bohemian overtones' distinguished it significantly from other 'transient' occupations (Hollander, 1986, p.26). Yet in some sense it was at odds with the 'layabout' culture of bohemia that Crisp writes of. It was a relatively secure occupation, and one which demanded, as Crisp would insist, punctuality and dependability. Where Rosemary Hill observes him not only as 'an outsider even among outsiders', but as someone who, in his moderations and morality, shunned the 'traditions' of bohemia, of its drunkenness and its unreliability (Hill, 2003, p.21), it is of note that Crisp was not always at home in bohemia, preferring as he did the discourse of its cafés to the rowdiness of its pubs; 'As at a party so in the Wheatsheaf, unless I arrived within an hour of opening time. I found the deadening effect of alcohol had begun to work on everyone present ... Conversation did not flow with the drink; it drowned in it' (Crisp, 1977a, p.160).¹¹⁹

Though Crisp would acknowledge his place in bohemia as somewhat precarious, his relative domestic stability in particular making him 'an object of suspicion' (Crisp, 1977a, p.192), the sociability which modelling provided him did mean a life wholly defined by 'artistic' identity, however liminal. Where his appearance had presented difficulties in finding more 'regular' work, modelling was mostly free from the discriminations of the 'straight' workplace. In collapsing the division of his professional and social worlds, bohemia was for Crisp a place – geographical, psychic and artistic – of tolerance and permissiveness. While not all models would claim themselves to be in any way bohemian, 'the intangible 'differentness'' (David, 1988, p.7) of those with whom Crisp socialised is

articulated in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* as *fashioned*. The 'rigid dress laws' of the female artist's model in the 1930s and through the war, of 'vermillion polo-neck sweater, curtain-ring earrings ... black beret balanced at the ultimate degree of obliquity' (Crisp, 1977a, p.86), the Hungarian blouses and sandals that he reminisces in Mitchell's documentary, were evident in the bohemian archetype that the film portrays. Indeed, the very acquaintance who offers Crisp the opportunity to model is presented as *la femme boheme* that he recollects.¹²⁰

Jiminez observes that many an artist's model has 'lived on the margins of society, a fact that contributed both to their allure and their vulnerability' (Jiminez, 2001, vi). Certainly Crisp's life was lived in many ways at the margins, a fact that in effect had led him into modelling, and the culture of bohemia in which he found such professional and social freedoms kept him there still. But while the appellative of his autobiography suggests anonymity and obscurity, Crisp did 'survive' bohemia to become 'the one among the many' (Crisp, 1977a, p.216). Indeed, just as the supposed transience of modelling was overcome by Crisp, his identification with bohemian sensibility is inseparable too from the life he lived at the margins as a consequence of his sexual and gender transgressiveness, the permissive nature of bohemia perhaps more determinedly bound to his dissidence than is any strictly queer identification.

Just as an embrace of failure and poverty has been characteristic of many bohemian lives, Wilson suggests such an attitude to symbolise 'a disregard for social niceties', and a perceptible 'superiority to the bourgeois rules of polite behaviour' (Wilson, 2003b, p.162), a stance which has some accord with the transgressiveness that Crisp fashioned – an inevitable consequence of that purposeful dissidence being the privations that are central to the narrative of his autobiography, an acceptance of his limited employability. Crisp would write of having endured a 'Soho poverty', stemmed 'from having the airs and graces of a genius and no talent' (Crisp, 1977a, p.49). While he alluded in that early essay to modelling as a vocation certainly most suitable for the 'talentless', the relative permissiveness of bohemia that Crisp enjoyed was some recompense for the low wages that were the lot of the art school model, that poverty indeed embraced not necessarily as a failing but as quite subsidiary to the gains of bohemian camaraderie. However, Crisp was not long a part of that world before his already precarious status was made even more so. Following his wrongful arrest and trial

for solicitation during the war, Crisp found himself routinely pursued by the police, who ensured that he was barred from Fitzrovia's public houses, including the Wheatsheaf, a surveillance and incursion that underlines the once inconceivable permeability of bohemia's otherness that its less outré, less *queer* figures, would not have been subject to; 'My friends protested hotly to the landlord. He coolly pointed out that he could not have a licence and me ... the police had accused him of running 'a funny kind of place' and, when he had said, 'How funny?' they had pointed to me' (Crisp, 1977a, p.172). Though he does not write of any return he made to the life of Charlotte Street, of how long he was obliged to keep away, by the early 1950s, he writes, 'the inhabitants of Fitzrovia had come a long way, all of it downhill'; he would observe the *vie de boheme* to be 'passing without hope or warning' (Crisp, 1977a, p.188). After a short absence from modelling in the decade, during which he found an array of commercial art jobs, Crisp would return to the dais, his 'odd appearance' and now his age being impediment to finding any other employment. Falling back 'into the oubliette of art', Crisp found himself 'propped up on some rickety Victorian chair ... silent and, I hope, apparently resigned – an ashy clinker from the long dead fires of Bohemia' (Crisp, 1977a, p.214).

Abstraction and the surviving nude

'I tried to invent these anatomical conundrums which would force the students to look at you, not merely turn their faces towards you, but actually look at you ... so that they would really have some view of the model' (Crisp, 1995, p.27).

In *The Declining Nude* Crisp would mourn the waning relevance of the life model within British art practice and education in the post-war period. Though so soon in his career, he would write that models were losing faith in the *vie de Boheme* that their vocation had once so keenly represented, that his essay might have been more suitably titled '*La Mort de Boheme*' (Crisp, 1949, pp.55-56). Crisp holds modernism responsible, specifically abstraction, for having 'pierced to the heart this small, uncomprehending group of people' (Crisp, 1949, p.55). Postle and Vaughan cite Crisp as having 'witnessed the last years of the great tradition and its decline in the post-war era', a time when the art school 'no longer

regarded the life class as central to [its] practice and progressive artists moved further and further away from pictorial representation' (Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.86). But despite the political credence of abstraction's embodiment of social, cultural and aesthetic conflict, and the might of its 'masculinist' tendencies,¹²¹ it could not render the life class entirely redundant.

While British art in the 1950s continued to expand upon the early-twentieth century language of abstraction, at the same time it was impelled to examine the wounds that the war had left, as Harrison explores in *Transition: The London Art Scene in the Fifties* (2002). The 'crisis' in figuration which artists across styles in the period explored, from geometric and painterly abstraction to pop art, meant aesthetic shifts were highly symbolic; for instance in the common predilection for effervescent colour – the luminescence that Harrison relates to 'flickering waves of incandescent and neon lighting' – a response was evidenced 'to wartime 'blackout' restrictions as well as to contemporary dullness' (Harrison, 2002, p.18). The decline of the figurative that Crisp writes however suggests the body wounded by the obligation of modernism's progressive tendencies, the political impetus and expressive potential of the non-figurative overthrowing the lone figure upon the dais. Though the avant-garde was strongly aligned with abstraction in post-war Britain, the life class did survive, for instance under William Coldstream at the Slade School of Art, where 'a more objective approach to the model was fostered' (Postle, 1996, p.761).¹²² While Crisp would write of how some teachers arriving at the life room would declare, "Stay just as you are. That's it for the day, everybody," others, while 'handling my body with the least possible carnality, would rearrange them in accordance with some secret theory of aesthetics' (Crisp, 1995, p.28). He comments that a Mr Rogers – Claude it is to be assumed, who taught at Camberwell in the 1940s and 50s – was particularly censorious of his style; 'He didn't approve of posing and wanted me to look like an ordinary mortal. I would not have found this easy in real life; when L.C.C. naked ... I was completely at a loss' (Crisp, 1995, p.28). Where Postle suggests modelling as a full-time profession, as it was for Crisp, to be quite remarkable, he observes how the demand for life models would soar in the immediate post-war period, as ex-servicemen took up grant-assisted places in many of the state-funded art schools. Alluding to the mounting primacy however of non-representational art that just as soon meant their decline, Postle employs Crisp's

epithet in allusion to the success it indeed represents (Postle, 2006, p.22). But Crisp reveals a greater precision to that epithet in his second volume of autobiography, suggesting that models 'are engaged by the term and their wages ultimately come from the Minister of Education' (Crisp, 1981, p.18). That Crisp would appropriate that most establishment of job titles as soubriquet, with its associations of municipal duty, was radical in its implication of having taken civic wages as a consequence of his fashioning.

In his study of the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts,¹²³ Geoff Hassell notes the immediate post-war period to have seen great influxes of ex-service students, who, 'with their grants, had decided to be teachers of art, commercial artists or follow some artistic career' (Hassell, 1995, p.18). As the government at the end of the war offered ex-servicemen relatively generous grants, schools like Camberwell found their student registration trebling (Hassell, 1995, p.18). But one student for whom Crisp sat at Camberwell would recall a less bohemian milieu than had perhaps been evident during the war. Demobbed from the armed services, he found the school 'crowded with ex-servicemen, trying to catch up on six lost years. It was a rather serious atmosphere. You couldn't call it bohemian ... There were plenty of homosexuals around, but they didn't flaunt it like [Crisp] did' (Cook, 1992). The epithet of Crisp's autobiography, and the militant gesture it engenders, that very dissidence he would 'flaunt', is lent greater exactitude when the political and civic investments in art education in the period are considered more fully. As Foss observes, the growing pre-occupation with Britain's post-war social reconstruction, the building of 'the people's peace', was evidenced in the Minister of Education R.A. Butler's Education Act of 1944. Like William Beveridge's 1942 Social Insurance and Allied Services report, Butler's was the consequence of the state's increased involvement in social services during the war, and both envisioned 'a more broadly democratic and compassionate Britain' (Foss, 2007, p.57). In his essay on the early committees that would become the National Society for Education in Art and Design, David Thistlewood suggests an extensive involvement with the debates that preceded and shaped the 1944 Education Act. A series of literature 'outlining an ideal future' for art education – *Art Education After the War*, *Art in General Education After the War*, and *The Curriculum and External Relations of the Art Schools* – would cite from a Board of Education *Memorandum* its objective of 'establishing a state of society where the

advantages and privileges, which have been enjoyed only by the few, shall be more widely shared by the men and youth of the nation as a whole' (Thistlewood, 2005, p.123).

Where Phillips observes the decline through the early twentieth century more generally of the official academies that had once been so critical in establishing life drawing as central to art education, in America and Europe, she relates the changing 'dominant artistic aesthetic', from naturalism to expressionism and abstraction, to the increased stress on 'the portrayal of the artist's emotional state over his fidelity to visual reality.' The greater significance of 'process, immediacy, and the unplanned' (Phillips, 2006, p.8), the very tenets of the abstraction that Crisp implicates as so wounding, that increasing concern at once with felt experience and the act of painting itself, meant the artist was free of both prescribed subject and object and afforded aesthetic possibilities that promised unbound expression – indeed, what Crisp had observed in his earlier essay, 'Patronage in the Age of Negation', as *the* 'subject of modern painting ... the Self' (Crisp, 1947, p.128). Postle observes how it was mid-century that the demise of the professional artist's model truly hastened, that with the increasing dominance of self-referential and non-representational art the model was pushed to 'a peripheral position', and 'the very existence of the life class within the academy had become threatened with extinction' (Postle, 1996, p.761). Where Postle suggests that the prevailing ethos by the 1940s, of the body as an object demanding like any other an analytical objectivity, 'cramped the style' of models like Crisp (Postle, 2006, p.18), the 'heroism' he had adopted during the war in seeming irreverence must have now seemed simply archaic; 'If being treated with indifference was now the daily lot of most models, it was obvious that open contempt would be shown to me. I was a natural target and my heroic postures on the throne now seemed more ludicrously outmoded than ever' (Crisp, 1977a, p.206).

After the leave he took from modelling in the 1950s, Crisp's return to posing is narrated as a return to a changed world; 'Only four years had gone by since I had last been a full-time model, but I was shocked to find how much worse the situation had become' (Crisp, 1977a, p.205). He would observe particularly the students' diminishing interest;

Although these young people took almost no notice whatsoever of what went on in the outer world, they did go to the galleries and in them they no longer saw any paintings of naked girls flopping about on piles of cushions. No nudes was good news. This change in aesthetic fashion meant that they could produce a large number of pictures with very little study. The sudden arrival of a model in the life room signified a temporary return to a pursuit that was old-fashioned, unprofitable and difficult (Crisp, 1977a, p.205).

Just as Crisp would write in the closing pages of *The Naked Civil Servant* of having to adopt a resigned attitude towards modelling, so in his second volume of autobiography he would open with the theme of students' apathy in the 1960s, and a quite incongruous change in the model's fortunes; 'the wages of art school models had risen so steeply that the difficulty they presented was no longer how to live on them, it had become how to deserve them. In trying to solve this problem, the students were little help ... they clearly wished I was not there' (Crisp, 1981, p.9). But in some way for Crisp, 'the decline in popularity of life drawing was a secret blessing,' for his physical stamina was in such decline that, 'even if enthusiasm for my efforts had been evinced, I could no longer have sustained wildly heroic poses' (Crisp, 1981, pp.9-10).¹²⁴ In his celebrity Crisp would be frequently 'name-checked' by those for whom he had once sat and were now themselves in the public eye – artists inevitably,¹²⁵ but also designers, musicians and actors – and it is a curious elision of those 'barriers between art and life' that Crisp writes of that John Hurt, whilst he was a student at Saint Martins, had been in a class for which he modelled. Indeed Stevens would write after Crisp's death that nostalgia and his belated celebrity 'have turned him into the Life Model of the 20th Century in the folklore of British life art'; 'Sometimes it seems that there is almost no-one in the London life art scene over fifty who has not either drawn Quentin Crisp or posed with him' (Stevens, 2000).

National portrait, national subject

With the intention of finding Crisp 'a place in our National History', in 1985 Marguerite Evans wrote to the National Portrait Gallery, tentatively offering a portrait of Crisp she had painted as a student during the war (figure 28), describing her subject 'as our finest model at the Willesden Art College under the

late Maurice de Sausmarez' (Evans, 13 June, 1985). Evans writes of how the portrait had been much exhibited in the previous year, and had accompanied Crisp on stage during his one-man show, describing the performance as that of 'an eloquent, amusing and humble public speaker much loved by his audiences' (Evans, 13 June, 1985). Evans's speculative hype of Crisp's relevance to the portrait collection of Britain's eminent historical and cultural figures gained even greater velocity following the Gallery's response; 'I appreciate the privilege of being asked to submit to the Trustees, feeling that [Crisp] is worthy of recognition now the public have obviously recognised and taken him to their hearts ...' (Evans, 2 July, 1985).

The way in which Crisp's recent public celebration is summarised by Evans stresses the fact of his portrait belonging to a realm of anonymity that the appellative of *The Naked Civil Servant* was to embody. That the portrait was a trace of a certain gender dissent that found agency in a certain vocation, and had become an empirical vestige of that past now implicated in compound structures of the auto/biographical, was not of explicit concern to Evans in her letters. Her interest however in how that trace held the potential for the 'establishment' initiation of the image of Crisp's once dissident fashioning would find Evans suggesting that 'the honour to model and painter must take priority before price' (Evans, 2 July, 1985). The matter of 'honour' being principal in its acquisition dominated subsequent correspondence, and during their negotiations Evans would hold Crisp's portrait under a veiled ransom, alluding to the life that Crisp had made for himself in New York in his dotage as one of exile;

Though I had been approached recently on its sale, by those near and helpful to [Crisp], I did feel that recognition in England should be a first priority. Perhaps I am wrong in being altruistic and patriotic. I have not tested the open market, but I am sure America, who has given Mr Crisp the fulfilment of happiness, and extended the hand of friendship, might well do so again (Evans, 2 July, 1985).

Such accent on Crisp's relevance for inclusion in the Gallery's collection prefigures Evans's most candid articulation of what she believed his cultural figure to represent in patriotist terms. She reveals here the full potency of her campaign;

I am sure the Trustees would not wish to trade on good will at cost to the British Artist, who being perspicacious, is aware, together with other curators of National Galleries, that the 1980s will show little to represent their age. Irrespective of one's own opinions in the matter, Society has changed under the guise of liberation and a ... language of 'gay' interpretation ...

Mr Quentin Crisp after considerable suffering has been liberated to prove his real identity ... Those who have listened to him in a full house have witnessed a standing ovation ...

This being the work of a British Artist, of a British Model under a British Art Teacher, will I trust be acquired by a British Public to give him the recognition he deserves in the autumn years of his life (Evans, 23 July, 1985).

Evans's abstraction of Crisp's life narrative and his figure of dissent and opprobrium, used to argue his induction into an institution of the very establishment his gendering had offended, was persuasive. The acquisition of her portrait was completed soon after her initial offer. Her correspondence continued, though it would seem that her views on Crisp's cultural figure were not shared by all at the Gallery. Evans wrote with questions of copyright, receiving the response that her portrait would be an unlikely subject for the machinations of their merchandising, as it was 'really of a specialised subject' (Yung, 6 August, 1985). Her recognition of Crisp as a public figure who represented a triumph of humility over oppression was not lost entirely on the Gallery however, which included the portrait in their exhibition *Faces for the Future: New Twentieth Century Acquisitions at the National Portrait Gallery*,¹²⁶ and Evans in her continuing tenacity suggested an accompanying performance by Crisp in the theatre of the neighbouring National Gallery (Evans, undated). Writing to Evans from New York, Crisp commented on the seeming irony of his acquisition, and celebrated her bravado;

Your news about the National Portrait Gallery fills me with amusement. The whole idea of my becoming a fragment of English history after the way I was treated there is a source of amazement to me. I congratulate you on the persistence – even on the daring that you have brought to this escapade (Crisp, 1 January, 1986).¹²⁷

Evans's 'escapade' to establish Crisp among the luminaries of British history was certainly with the 'fragment' that he suggests, a portrait painted in the subject's obscurity, what was intended as an ephemeral memento literal of the naked –

though in fact very much clothed in this instance – ‘civil’ service that Crisp practised. Evans’s portrait reveals an extraordinary androgyny in the mutedness of its palette, a somewhat languorous but noble profile composed of a remarkable tonal restraint; the fineness of Crisp’s eye make-up, the soft folds of his signature scarf that suggest the pale lustre of silk, the great ‘architecture’ of his hair, and the only trace of the colour that he became so famed for being the heavy vermilion impasto of his mouth that suggests the overstatement of his own cosmetic artistry.

Unlike those students whose censure was borne of a clear understanding of what his fashioning should represent, a reproach unexpected by Crisp, for Evans, in the early wartime years of his modelling, he had fashioned an image that resisted interpretation; ‘Though his appearance startled me at first encounter – the bronze-copper mop of hair, rouged cheek bones, painted finger nails and high heeled shoes – I was quite oblivious to the meaning behind all this’ (Evans quoted in Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.106). This sense of ambiguity would seem articulate in her portrait – its subtlety of detail, the ‘feminine’ nuances of Crisp’s fashioning, rendered in muted acknowledgement not of Evans being ‘oblivious’ to their meanings, but of her consenting to Crisp’s transcendence of normatively gendered sartorial and cosmetic behaviours in this most exhibitionist of vocations. Evans recalls how, even when Crisp had turned fully upon the dais, she was uncertain ‘if it was a man or a woman’ (Barrow, 2002, p.142).

Crisp’s fashioning of effeminacy triumphed in Evans’s imagination, but a somewhat aberrant testament to the intercession between artist and model is the deep slate-grey of his hair. Evans writes in a letter to the National Portrait Gallery how she had tried to establish with Crisp the date of the painting, which he had ‘mentally documented [through] a change in his colouring of hair.’ Evans recalls this as copper, but writes how this had ‘underwent a gradual change’ in 1948 – the year of Crisp’s fortieth birthday, which meant the precise onset of his ‘blue period’, the cosmetic acceptance made of his middle-age and a fact of his fashioning of which he was always resolute – but concludes that the painting was earlier (Evans, 2 July, 1985). Evans makes various references to *The Naked Civil Servant* and its account of Crisp’s time at Willesden for him to be able to verify these changes, complicit in her subject’s auto/biographical tendencies. She fails to explain however why she did not paint the fact of his hair as copper, as Crisp’s

writings insist it would have been while Evans was a student during the war, leaving embedded between the gender ambiguity she identifies and the abstract transcendence of the corporeal that defines the relationship of artist and subject an aesthetic conundrum that stresses Robinson's claim of Crisp being the 'classic unreliable narrator' (Robinson, 1999, p.149). That Crisp's 'life's work' might reveal as many fictions as it does truths only underlines how that vocation is implicated so irrevocably with his consequent performance of the auto/biographical, predicated as they both are on the freedoms and constraints, artistic and social, that his fashioning afforded him. Such contexts also frame the critical questions of the next chapter, which examines aspects of Crisp's domestic life, in particular his infamously squalid Chelsea bedsit. It was here that Crisp lived for forty years, insistent upon that room as the place of his societal exile.

CHAPTER IV

A Room in Chelsea: Quentin at Home

This chapter considers representations of Crisp's domestic life, particularly of his bedsitting room in Chelsea's Beaufort Street, where he lived for forty years. Representations of Crisp 'at home' reveal not only the performative tendencies of his media rhetoric and their persuasiveness, but also the politics of domesticity in the lives of gay men through the twentieth century. In his second volume of autobiography, Crisp would write of the media attention that followed the publication and film broadcast of *The Naked Civil Servant*, describing how most questions he received in interviews 'were very bland ... concerned [with] the oddities of my appearance and of my domestic routine' (Crisp, 1981, p.25). Crisp's infamously squalid room was first revealed to television audiences in Mitchell's 1970 documentary. With only the title of his name and without prologue, this would open with Crisp at his first floor window, dressed in the side-fastening women's trousers he had favoured since the Second World War, a ruffled blouse of multihued pastels, the very exemplar of what he would describe at the last of his autobiography as his 'Carnaby street hair-shirt', and with a blaze of mauve through his silver hair. An immediate divide is stressed between the world observed from that window and the exile of his room, its abjection an apparent consequence of that *outré* fashioning; 'This is the window from which on a clear day you can see normality' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970) sets the tenor of Crisp's discourse and his collusion in a portrayal of a gender and sexual transgressiveness fashioned and contained within the domestic. The very public life that had been so critical to the martyrdom and cause of his exhibitionism, the very narrative of *The Naked Civil Servant*, is swept aside in its overstatement.

Reviewing Mitchell's documentary for the *Guardian*, one journalist was indeed convinced by Crisp's performance. Describing him as 'a spirited, stagey Oscar Wilde-ish-witty, homosexual', they observed Crisp to have 'withdrawn from the world, abdicated action' (Banks-Smith, 1970). Writing that 'the elegance of his conversation' was equalled only 'by the horror of his company', they would make correlative the queerness of the materialities of his fashioning and his room;

It might be partly the way he looks, neither man nor woman. And partly the way he is neither alive nor dead but in some waiting room between the two. For 30 years, like Miss Havensham [*sic*] in drag, he has lived in a room he never dusts ... It was painful and salutary to see someone crucified [so] on the crossbeams of maleness and femaleness. The rest of the evening's television, good and bad, shrivelled beside the spectacle (Banks-Smith, 1970).

The Havisham metaphor is indeed redolent of the abject being, as Elizabeth Gross suggests in her essay 'The Body of Signification', both 'dead and alive' (Gross, 1990, p.90). But just as Kristeva considers the *jouissance* and *affect* of abjection, its 'victims' being 'its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones' (Kristeva, 1982, p.9), so Crisp's room has to be understood as manifest of how he willingly lived, not of how he was obliged to live, the real 'horror' of its abjection being performatively inscribed in Crisp's own rhetoric of home as exile.¹²⁸ The subsequent shots in Mitchell's documentary of the filth and neglect of Crisp's room (figure 29), in effect a series of still lives, of dusty surfaces and grimy everyday domestic items, are redolent of Bachelard's image of the 'disorderly' home, the communicability of which always holds 'great ontological significance' (Bachelard, 1994, xvii). That the image of Crisp's room would be so enculturated, a fact of his life indelibly inscribed upon his public figure, indeed finds compound resonance in Bachelard's thesis that the domestic image can 'appear to be a concentration of the entire psyche' (Bachelard, 1994, xviii).

In her discussion of how the inscriptive and the lived have represented the principal theoretical binary of the body in twentieth century thought, Grosz articulates that tension between 'the body as a surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed [and] the lived experience of the body, [its] internal or psychic inscription' (Grosz, 1995, p.33). Each body affords for Grosz 'the theoretical terms necessary to problematise the major binary categories', and she defines their limits as; 'inside/outside, subject/object, active/passive, fantasy/reality, and surface/depth' (Grosz, 1995, p.33). Located between a lived interiority and a socio-political exteriority, this body realises the former through that latter as inscription of its surface. If Crisp's body 'at home' is to be read as symptomatic of the inscription acquired on London's streets, of what he so soon

lapses in Mitchell's documentary to describe as the 'counter-protest' of violence to his protest of fashioned gender dissidence, his room reveals the intextuated site of each of those categories that Grosz cites in terms of a particular urban interior/ity. The enmity and affront that Crisp's fashioning invited was of a dimension relative to the city he provoked, the inside/outside binary being more expressly for Crisp that of London's streets/a room in Chelsea, the latter conceived in his writings as the 'dressing room' of his transgressiveness.

In the discourse that becomes narration to Mitchell's shots of his room and its abjection, Crisp delineates the worldly and the domestic in terms of otherness and expulsion, an abettance of the shifting emphasis between his marked queerness and the squalor of his room that suggests their inextricability; 'This room is ... a cell, and here I've remained for thirty years and whatever has gone by in the outer world has passed me by' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970). That his fashioning is said to be 'the great barrier between me and the outer world' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970), the impediment that keeps him in his room, elicits questions about how the socially transgressive body is to be read in contiguity with the domestic, with the body 'at home', and why journalists, like Banks-Smith, might so blindly consent to such a portrayal, indeed such a discernible performance.

Named more recently as 'the patron saint of squalor' (Brown, 2009), Crisp's domesticity was always highly quotable. In *Biting the Dust: the Joys of Housework* (1997), Horsfield cites Crisp's rejection of 'the rituals of domesticity', expressly what he had first articulated as 'a message of hope to offer to the housewives of England', and his infamous line that 'after the first four years the dirt won't get any worse' (Horsfield, 1997, p.13). In one of Crisp's obituaries, for the *Guardian*, the journalist would write that 'in his whole renegade life, no statement was more outrageous' (Horwell, 1999), but however overstated that claim, it was coincidental with a feminist agenda that confronted the cultural imperative of 'good' domesticity in women's lives. For Horsfield, the expression of 'such lordly dismissal of hygiene, of dust, of germs; to be able to sweep such concerns aside with a grand gesture is gloriously anarchic, a showy, antisocial, attention-catching posture to adopt' (Horsfield, 1997, p.13). But the very realism of Crisp 'at home' does invite questions of the relationship between the body and the *possibility* of abjection within the domestic and the real horror it elicits,

questions resonant with Mary Douglas's understanding of dirt as essentially disorder made subjective; 'There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder' (Douglas, 1984, p.2).¹²⁹

While the rooms and domestic lives of artists and writers have shifted from their reference in the margins of biographical studies to become a subject in their own right,¹³⁰ these rooms, their furnishings and objects, have most characteristically been explored in regards to the lives and careers of 'Great Men'.¹³¹ Where Penny Sparke addresses the relation between the body and the domestic interior, considering particularly the very concepts of fashionability that were so defining of modernity and their preoccupation for writers through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is indeed male writers such as Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin who are first summoned to observe how the parallel relationship between the fashioning of the modern self and of the modern interior was manifest and understood; 'In their capacity as material and spatial layers around the body dress and the interior both played a role in the process of interiority through which modern subjects developed a notion of "themselves"' (Sparke, 2008, p.74). Just as Bachelard proposed the image of domestic life as some distillation of the 'entire psyche', Sparke addresses the subject through the binary interior/interiority, and the 'blurring of the inner, mental activities of occupants and the material and spatial environments they occupy' (Sparke, 2008, p.74).¹³² It was the unexpectedness of Crisp's room that was evidently of most concern in the media attentions he received; if the materiality of his fashioning spoke of an inner life, that manifest sense of 'campaign' that was the very premise of his auto/biographical subjectivity, what could such discord between the materialities of his fashioned and domestic self mean?

Crisp would speak of home as his 'dressing-room', with redolence of the space in which, as Akiko Busch observes in *Geography of Home: Writings on Where We Live* (1999), 'composure' is sought, a room for 'putting yourself, as well as your attire, in order' (Busch, 1999, p.128). In writing of his earliest appropriations of cosmeticised queerness, just as he was venturing into the nocturnal spaces of Soho's cafés in the late-1920s, Crisp speaks of the demarcation between the family home in which he still lived and the abject necessity of his pursuit of the feminine; 'Once outside ... I hurried like a wrong hushed up to the nearest public lavatory and put on my war-paint. Then I

proceeded calmly wherever I was going. If I wasn't going anywhere, I tried to look as though I was' (Crisp, 1977a, p.34). In the obligation of his fashioning, the use of such a public place was of an especially transgressive intent. While Houlbrook discusses such 'a liminal social space' in early-twentieth century Britain in terms of its 'unique interplay between public and private [that] sustained complex opportunities for privacy and sexual encounter' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.49), Crisp not only chanced 'the ubiquitous danger of arrest' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.44) in his explicitly symbolising the received traits of homosexual gender dissent, but both transgressed this most masculine liminality with his appropriation of the feminine *and* rejected its sexual license.¹³³ The colloquialism of 'war-paint' was perhaps never more apposite – from that very conception of his gender transgressiveness, a face of militancy entirely public in its interdiction from the familial and the domestic, Crisp was to provoke the masculine cultures and spaces of the queer. Though his domestic independence remained a prospect of some years, with its realisation Crisp would reconcile the agency of his fashioning and his particular conception of 'home' – the notion of its concomitance as private 'dressing-room' for both the public performance and performativity of his gender dissidence and his rejection of 'respectable' domesticity.

Stephen Maddison opens his essay 'Small towns, boys and ivory towers: a naked academic' (2002) with a selection of quotes from popular culture on the subject of 'difference' and the 'small-town boy', including *The Naked Civil Servant*, and explores Crisp's reminiscence of the transience of 'home' during his early life in London. Maddison further considers how 'Queer subjectivity, performance, affectation, for Crisp and the subculture he aligned himself with, were ... about resistance of straightness, dullness, suburban mediocrity, masculinity ...' (Maddison, 2002, p.157). Maddison convincingly binds the 'mediocrity' of the provincial with its notions of gender conformity, uniting in its oppositional duality the domestic and the fashioned body as a site of resistance (Maddison, 2002, p.157). In her study of the phenomenology of queerness, Sara Ahmed considers the ways in which acts of repetition allow space to extend into bodies, and bodies into space, and the 'failed orientation' of the queer body in the spatiality of the heteronormative, suggesting that the spatiality that queerness locates for itself allows an intimacy with certain objects, specifically 'those that

would not be allowed 'near' by straight ways of orientating the body' (Ahmed, 2006, p.101). Just as Ahmed considers spaces and bodies to 'become straight as an effect of repetition', through those acts of the heteronormative which determine the "surface' of spaces [and] the contours of the body' (Ahmed, 2006, p.92), it is to be considered that queerness is determined as an orientation that becomes 'socially given by being repeated over time, as a repetition that is often hidden from view' (Ahmed, 2006, p.101).

While Crisp writes of leaving the family domicile to live with an acquaintance he had met at the Black Cat Café, with what represented the necessities of home, 'a red handkerchief full of cosmetics tied to a birch rod over my shoulder' (Crisp, 1977a, p.42), he later writes more profanely of the exhibitionism that defined his 'role' in 1930s Soho and its domestic diametric; only when he settled into a room of his own could Crisp admit 'that solitude was one of my essential needs ... [the] mistaken idea that to win people I must dazzle them ... made it essential for me to live alone. From time to time I had to stagger into my dressing-room' (Crisp, 1977a, p.90). It is telling that in the film of his autobiography, the items to be first packed and unpacked when he finally realises the independence of a room of his own are the accoutrements of the femininity he sought (figure 30), an apposite reading of this rite of passage in its conflation of the metaphorical and the cosmetic. As he places them on the dressing table of his new room, evocative of what he describes in his writings as 'the early Caledonian Market furnishings' that were typical of the bohemian transience of London's 1930s and 40s bedsit flats (Crisp, 1977a, p.112), he heralds that essential independence, furnishing his 'dressing-room' with what had once been the abject symbols of dispossession, and now a prophetic gesture of his contestation of received notions of domesticity.¹³⁴ As one particular acquaintance would later observe: 'He lived and lives in an amazingly squalid room somewhere off King's Road and in the quarter saw no reason to do more than slap cosmetics over the grime' (Melly, 2006, p.276). The very dust of Crisp's room was of the artifice with which he had made militant his queerness, and it finds extraordinary resonance in Ahmed's understanding of home as 'where one has expanded one's body ... home as *overflowing* and *flowing over*' (Ahmed, 2006, p.11).

In its definition as 'a place of reflections' (Busch, 1999, p.126), the dressing-room is to be understood as a place very much private. Where Busch

locates the dressing-room as the coincidence of 'metaphor and fact', a space in which a 'sense of self' and of 'self-possession' is composed, its 'landscape of narcissism, an interior space that is completely about dwelling on the self' (Busch, 1999, pp.127-128), invites query as to the containment which Crisp himself inscribed upon his room, as to why he would be so candid and so *public* in the matter of his domestic life, and some insight into the very practices that define that room. In *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (2000), Judy Attfield understands the dressing table as a site of femininity, 'for 'making up', part of the ritual associated with getting ready in private to go out in public', domestic symbol of the colloquialism of 'putting my face on' (Attfield, 2000, p.159). In Crisp's writings, and in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, such ritual is indeed rendered as the pursuit of artifice that Attfield suggests. However, as a reflection of the gender dissidence which he sought, such ritual is also seen undone, The 'victim of a misguided dream', the mirror of his dressing table returns the image of his childhood with which the film begins as Crisp traces with painted nails the violence wrought in opposition to his dissidence, his face bare of 'war-paint', adorned now in the abject horror of his injuries and the undoing of the transgressiveness he had indeed 'put on'. The remembrance of gender as performative in this most innocent sense, the consequences of the play of childhood being outside of the strident social demarcation of masculine and feminine, contained in the domestic and the familial, is a return to the interiority of Crisp's conception of the gender transgressive, and the image of its undoing testament to what he considers in Mitchell's documentary to be the inevitability of such violence – 'my way of going on as a protest and the beating-up as a counter-protest' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970).

In his writings on etiquette, on 'manners' and style, Crisp would often tender instruction on homemaking; it is telling however that in *Doing It with Style* (1981) the most concise chapter is that on 'Creating a Home'. He would suggest some relation here between the body and the domestic, home being 'something that you put around you, like your clothes, in order to tell people who you are', that it should be understood as 'your stage' (1981, pp.77-78). Where Barrow explains Crisp's Beaufort Street room indeed as 'living theatre', he alludes to Crisp's own arch, but more precise, 'curtain-raiser for the *Rocky Horror Show*' (Barrow quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.147). To recover such an image from popular

culture, one of 'horror' as droll as his room and the rhetoric he fashioned upon its own image, was apposite; Crisp's room would become, as one journalist would write, 'one of the most infamous single rooms in modern mythology' (Taylor, 1981, pp.46-47). In *Camp in Literature*, McMahon introduces his essay on Crisp with the observation that it was the media, in his dotage, that 'brought him out of his bedsit and into the outer world' (McMahon, 2006, p.163). Although the apparent exile of Crisp's room affords insubstantial rhetoric here as to the real wonder of his celebrity, worth pursuit is the claim that, in media such as Mitchell's documentary, Crisp 're-styled the drawing room demeanor of Wilde and Coward to the bedsit comportment of a self-effacing narcissist, simplifying drama to self-contained memoir ... the 'kitchen sink' context of the 'kitchen sink drama' (McMahon, 2006, p.178). Where the abject realism of Crisp's Chelsea room is seamed with the performativity with which he would invest his auto/biographical subjectivity, critical questions do elicit as to the lives of queer men in single rooms. The bedsit has become culturally redolent most particularly of post-war London, symbolic of societal change, of transition and liminality – in terms of domestic spatiality and homemaking, of generation and class – and in some way is analogous with the changes of post-war society at large. But Crisp's having lived in the same Chelsea room for forty years, a room which he made home in the early years of the war, would become central to the narrativising of a life in fact neither transitory nor transitional.

Single Lives, Single Rooms: The Bedsit

I like living in one room and have never known what people do with the room they are not in (Crisp, 1996, p.7).

Crisp's Chelsea room was a material fact of his life and celebrity that reveals much consonance with cultural representations of the bedsit as a curiously British phenomenon. The most selective survey of certain of these visual and literary evocations of the bedsit stresses its consequence in histories of urban modernity as home to lives at a societal and domestic 'threshold', its being employed as cultural short-hand to contain lives of pathos, lives which find in its mean spatiality conflicting experiences of autonomy and abjection. To consider Crisp's room in some relation with the lives the bedsit has seemingly contained, and how

it has become most synonymous with a certain time and place – post-war London¹³⁵ – and a certain interiority bound inextricably with culturally inscriptive platitudes of its interior, tells for instance of the analogous domestic lives of the ‘spinster’ and the ‘bachelor’, and even the parallels between the domestic and consequent sexual enfranchisement of the unmarried woman and that of the queer man in the twentieth century. While the bedsit has been differently gendered at certain moments, predominantly it has been conjectured as feminine, though this is not without valid cause; surveys in the 1950s and 60s for example, to which we shall return, do suggest the significantly disproportionate occupation of the bedsit by women, particularly in metropolitan London.¹³⁶

However trite the love story of Yvonne Mitchell’s 1959 novel *The Bedsitter*, of a political refugee and poet from Germany and a struggling actress, it captures something of the zeitgeist of social and political change, and individual exile and struggle, that the single room came to symbolise in post-war culture.¹³⁷ The bedsit is indeed redolent at this time with all manner of change between the social and the individual, and was employed then, and has been since, as their nucleus. The gains of bedsit independence for young women do reveal much in common with the domestic life it offered the metropolitan homosexual, and the way in which it could be with relative ease *queered* is articulate in many of its literary representations. While in the earlier part of the twentieth century, the most necessarily closeted man might have held freedoms different to any woman in urban society, for both the bedsit was a challenge to the responsibilities of marriage and family and accepted ideals of domesticity and homemaking. In *The Naked Civil Servant* Crisp indeed evidences the interconnection of such lives in finding home in London rooming houses and bedsits. Such experiences are to be seamed with the accepted image of the bedsit and the lives it has apparently contained.

Discussing the representations of home in the domestic novel of the inter-war period, and the ‘cult of domesticity’ with which these writings were concurrent, Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei propose the boarding-house and the bedsit, in the work of writers such as Jean Rhys, Laura Talbot and E.H. Young, to ‘shelter single women of faded gentility’ women’ (Briganti and Mezei, 2004, p.150). The rented room became symbolic in society and in literature of ‘the decline of the great houses of the upper classes [and] the decimation of the male

population by the war that affected the destiny of so many women' (Briganti and Mezei, 2004, p.150).¹³⁸ To identify this subsidiary, liminal domestic space with associative qualities of such enormous social change stresses the shifting domestic possibilities of the city in the period and the consequent increase in urban populations, changes which would accelerate again following the Second World War. The rented room of Crisp's art student friend is depicted in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* as the archetypal 'bohemian' bedsit of the 1920s and 30s; its 'abbreviation' of home, the independent purposes of rooms reduced into one, not a compromise in light of the independence she is afforded. Where Briganti and Mezei relate the bedsit as symbolic of the severance of familial ties, of the discovery of the city and the opportunity of paid work, we can acknowledge these very factors to have been equally decisive in queer lives and their urban migration. The bedsit remains however an 'ambivalent space potentially shadowed by loneliness, discomfort and poverty', and the domestic lives within the narratives they examine are underlined always with the question, 'how private is a bedsit with shared bathrooms and interfering landladies?' (Briganti and Mezei, 2006, p.11).¹³⁹ While the bedsit does impose a domesticity of contrary public and private dimensions, the juncture of these would not, according to his writings, impede upon Crisp's queer life. His domestic life reveals not only the liberal attitudes of his 'landlady', but underlines the importance of the 'right' room in the 'right' house for all queer men in the period, a significant distinction to be drawn in light of the constant threat of lawful intervention in the precarious lives of queer men, even at home.

In her essay on the work of novelist Dorothy Richardson,¹⁴⁰ Melinda Harvey considers the bedsit as symbol of the rejection of ideals of domesticity and homemaking. An 'embrace of dirt and disorder' by the protagonist of Richardson's *Pilgrimage* series of novels, her refusal 'to lift a finger' against its inscription upon that room, is read by Harvey as real defiance of middle-class 'respectable' domesticity (Harvey, 2008, pp.183-184). Crisp would suggest his own disregard of 'housekeeping', like his insistence on life in a single room, to be a rejection of the bourgeois ideals of his early family life, and such negation corresponds precisely with what would become the received image of the bedsit as dissolute other to the norms of 'good' domesticity, particularly that aligned with the post-war 'detergent age'.¹⁴¹

With the subdivision into low-rent accommodation of large houses that had become increasingly redundant, most specifically in economic terms, which accelerated in post-war Britain, the bedsit would become a phenomenon of liminal domesticity and cultural referent of a compromised independence. An inevitable consequence of the increasing presence of the bedsit was the publishing of advisory, 'how to' literature. In 1951 Jon Wynne-Tyson published *Accommodation Wanted: A Short Guide to the Bed-Sitter*, offering somewhat light-hearted counsel on the subject. Christopher Hilliard notes the monthly magazine *Bedsitter*, published between 1959 and 1964, to have featured 'short stories and poems set in seedy digs, practical articles about bedsit life ... and recipes that could be cooked on a single gas-burner' (Hilliard, 2006, p.58). The magazine's synthesis of the literary vision of life in a bedsit and guidance on valid domestic issues was aimed at both proprietors and tenants. In *The Bed-sitter Tribe* (1959), Armand Georgés would contend to document 'the art of living' within the confines of a single room (Georgés, 1959, vii). Georgés relates the apparent isolation of bedsitter experience with normatively gendered ideals of domestic duty, suggesting that most likely 'men suffer more than women' the weight of solitude, 'simply because after her day's work is done, a woman will occupy herself with various domestic chores – washing, ironing, mending ... which will at least keep her busy – while a man, unless he has a hobby, may be at a loose end' (Georgés, 1959, p.45).

Observing how 'most women seem to have the happy knack of keeping spick and span under the most difficult and cramped conditions' (Georgés, 1959, p.81) Georgés locates the domestic life of the bedsit for young women as the catalyst of normative 'homemaking'. What was most typically thought of as a space of transition for both men and women, towards ideals of marriage and family, provided for Crisp however, and men like him, a contented intransience – being forty years in his single Chelsea room was indeed a remarkable feat. Georgés considers the demands of the landlady – the proprietor is always gendered as such in his survey – and suggests the most resolute to be, 'No more than two visitors to be entertained at any one time'; 'Visitors to leave by 11 p.m. on Saturdays and by 10 p.m. on other days'; and 'No conversation at the front door with the door open' (Georgés, 1959, p.22). Crisp spoke in Mitchell's documentary of his landlady being 'the last saint left alive', and how he and his

fellow tenants would 'do exactly as we please' protest' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970), a fact very much apparent in the full social and erotic life he writes of as very much domesticated, of lovers, entertaining and parties – a queer life unhindered by any such regulation as Georgés portrays.

In her article 'Bedsit World', for the *Observer* in 1966, Ruth Inglis wrote of the half a million Britons who lived in bedsits, of 'grim' rooms and their lives of 'squalor'. She observes how, over the previous fifty years, bedsitter existence had proliferated in 'the most derelict Victorian structures, those establishments quaintly described by the Greater London Council Housing Committee as 'houses in their twilight'' (Inglis, 1966, p.24). The terrace houses of South Kensington and Earls Court are reported to be amongst the most dense of 'bedsitter belts', but remain 'shabby genteel', while north of Hyde Park, in Kentish Town, Paddington and Willesden, bedsitters are to be found 'in all their squalor' (Inglis, 1966, p.24). While it is young people who are said to pay especially 'heavily in physical and emotional terms for the gentle wish to assert their independence', (Inglis, 1966, p.27) this burden is again gendered; Inglis suggests that the 'once-willing' bedsitter occupant might become more disenchanting with their domestic life 'when the pattern seems to be setting and marriage possibilities are growing more remote each day.' One 'single, thirtyish bedsitter woman' is said to have confided that 'she didn't dare leave ... because she felt her best chances of marriage lay in underlining her impermanence there' (Inglis, 1966, p.27). This was an apparent consequence of life in a bedsit made familiar in contemporary popular culture. With Sheila Hancock in the role, the romantic and professional discontent of young single women was the essential premise of the BBC sitcom *The Bed-Sit Girl*, broadcast between 1965 and 1966. The bedsit became symbolic of the negation – typically unsuccessful – of normative patterns of relationships and marriage. Indeed it afforded both women and men a transitory space as well as a space of transition; in particular it alleviated something of previously dominant expectations of women to leave the parental home for the marital home. It engendered comparative possibilities for men, and by implication, afforded some challenge to assumed heterosexuality, and while Crisp's fashioning of manifest queerness would counter any such uncertainty, it became home to the 'suspect' bachelor, burdened with questions of the very *purpose* of single lives in single rooms.

Veronica Forrest-Thomson writes of the 'familiar world' of the bedsit in Philip Larkin's *Mr Bleaney*, from 1955, and considers the similarly recognizable image 'of the contemplative poet in front of reality', the 'I' that claims a 'poetic persona' to inhabit its material and psychic spaces only to render life in a bedsit all 'the more sordid' (Forrest-Thomson, 1978, p.58). While her observation of the condemnatory lens beneath which the bedsit is subject finds redolence in the scope of representations cited here, the 'one hired box' of Larkin's poem that Forrest-Thomson unravels is particularly resonant in the melancholy of Crisp's own likening, in that early documentary, of his room with the coffin, his awaiting, indeed *welcoming* death, in the exile of his bedsit; 'I've done and said all I can do and say. I've come to the end of my personality ... if I want anything, it is peace, quiet ... the opportunity to stay in my room ... I suppose what I want in a way is death' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970). The solemnity of his somewhat macabre performance here does afford slender dispensation for the likes of McMahon's claim that celebrity was Crisp's emancipation from his Chelsea room and its isolation. In lending materiality to the sentiment 'That how we live measures our own nature', employing the bedsit and the coffin as synonymical, Larkin stresses the seeming death drive of bedsit life. Consider further the scene with which Mike Leigh's play *Ecstasy* opens:

JEAN'S bed-sitting room in Kilburn. Bleak, Cramped. Kitchen within the room ... Furniture all drab, second-hand. Single bed, wardrobe ... small armchair, table (more cluttered than used) ... paperback books, newspapers, box of chocolates, empty bottles, candle in wine bottle, cigarette packets, matches, some dead flowers in a jug, odds and ends ... (Leigh, 1989, p.1).

Leigh in effect employs the same poetic convention, the ever-present spectre of death in the bedsit, those dead flowers too acute a symbol to pass unnoticed amongst its domestic abjection. Armand Georgés would return to the subject of the bedsit in 1967, with co-author Cyril Donson, with *Lonely-land and Bedsitter-land*. They rightly claim the bedsit as the consequence of Britain's increasingly congested towns and cities, being the home of 'gentlefolk' in the early twentieth century, but of a less easily distinguished tenant in more recent years.¹⁴² They present something of a quantitative study of the bedsit, citing the facts and figures of those lives it contains, though with little of their methodology

established. Consider for instance that the 'average young man' living in a bedsit is said to purchase annually 'two suits; 1 overcoat; 1 mackintosh; 7-8 shirts; 8 pairs of socks; 2 pairs of shoes; 5 ties' (Donson and Georgés, 1967, p.126). Their foremost concern however is the solitude of bedsit life, a seeming fact which their quantitative measures articulate as manifest in its very interior. They found that:

38% of bedsitters had one large glassed and framed picture hanging on their wall – favourite being sea-scapes, country scenes, animals or people; 20% had two or more smaller pictures ... chosen to help alleviate the loneliness of a single room or its smallness which gave a confined feeling; pictures helped to give an impression of company, or wide open spaces (Donson and Georgés, 1967, pp.129-130).¹⁴³

When the poet William Henry Davies wrote in *The Bed-sitting-room*, in 1911, 'Must I live here, with scripture on my walls ... Let me have pictures of a richer kind' (Davies, 2009, p.86), he spoke of the anonymous interiors of rooming houses and the transient lives they were temporarily home to. The solitude writ by that transitoriness is made manifest in the absence of received *meanings* of home, the absent possibility of 'homemaking' for those at its threshold. Donson and Georgés take earnestly the endeavours of their subjects to afford meditative diversion from the experiences of solitude in a bedsit; we might consider Crisp's own stance on this matter as making legitimate his claims of domestic asceticism being the simple manifestation of his fashioning's societal dissension and its psychic consequences – the cause indeed of a spartan forty years in his Chelsea room without any such sea-scape or country scene.

The 'panoramic' endeavours of Donson and Georgés to examine loneliness as a quantifiable incidence, not only for those living in bedsits, but more broadly as an implication of twentieth century urban life, brings to focus the 'types' of men most affected. 'Homosexuality' is addressed between 'Homeless Men' and 'Bachelors', with a plea for societal tolerance; queer men are said to 'live in a twilight world of their own where loneliness is inevitable', that isolation the consequence of an awareness 'that they cannot fit into a normal pattern of society because of a sense of guilt and bewilderment because they are different' (Donson and Georgés, 1967, p.69). The bedsit's apparent contest to normative domesticity is implicated in being principal amongst the limited opportunities of home to these 'twilight' lives and the isolation they have already to endure.

Indeed it became culturally symbolic of such otherness and its perceived dangers, particularly given the Law Society's post-war, pre-Wolfenden definition of the queer, which did have some societal ascendancy, however spectral his figure, as 'a potent challenge to normative domesticity: an attack on marriage, a barrier to demographic stability, and a threat to the nation's youth' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.110).

Across the various types of rented room which metropolitan London offered, Houlbrook observes that a 'complex and distinctive queer world took shape' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.111), determining an inevitable geographical phenomenon. Governed certainly by economic means and by implication social class, by the 1950s the furnished room was the home of queer men most often found, as Houlbrook suggests, in districts such as Notting Hill Gate and Earls Court – in many of the same areas which both Inglis and Donson and Georges write of as the most conspicuous of 'bedsitter belts'.¹⁴⁴ It is critical to underline that Crisp made his home in the more 'artistic' Chelsea, a greater determinant perhaps than any obligation of being queer 'in numbers'. In her history of The Gateways Club, Jill Gardiner writes however that 'Chelsea prided itself on welcoming those considered eccentric or outrageous by the society of their day; its Bohemian reputation drew them there in droves' (Gardiner, 2003, p.3). Following the war, those 'on the fringes of society took refuge there' (Gardiner, 2003, p.4), and Crisp is among the artists and actors whom Gardiner cites as conspicuous in the daily life of Chelsea, sometimes visiting the Gateways himself.¹⁴⁵

Hornsey considers how the 'reforming and redesigning [of] one's own domestic spaces was a central component within early postwar citizenship' (Hornsey, 2010, p.32), and in his discussion of the 1946 COID's *Britain Can Make It* exhibition, examines the bedsit conceived for a single man, specifically a 'sportsman and sports commentator at Broadcasting House'. That room and its interior would suggest a significant shift in representations of the bachelor, from the marginalised but benign, to a figure strictly outside 'the normative imperatives of postwar spatial citizenship [and] the inclusive metropolitan community' this would effect (Hornsey, 2010, p.79). Among the few model citizens conceived for the exhibition who lived outside of the procreative family unit, the bachelor's bedsit was one of the least popular of the exhibition's furnished rooms (Hornsey,

2010, pp.205-206). While the bedsit was frequently mined for comedic worth in the 1960s and 1970s, its humour was derived specifically from the abjection and pathos of the lone domestic life and its contestation of normative domesticity.¹⁴⁶ With its evocation of the solitude and boredom of the lives it contained, Tony Hancock's performance in the BBC's *The Bedsitter*, from 1961, has become a 'classic' of television comedy. Opening with an aerial shot of Earls Court before focusing on one of its porticoed stucco houses, it attests to what Inglis writes as an evident 'descent from grace ... the myriad bells on their front doors' (Inglis, 1966, p.24). In his study of British television in the 1950s and 1960s, and its purposeful social and cultural influence, Turnock addresses consumer culture and class conflict. Citing *The Bedsitter*, he explores the character of Hancock 'as a man on the edge ... of the middle class ... of suburbia ... of respectability' (Turnock, 2007, p.159). Indeed, the compound class implications which Turnock relates with Hancock's performance, that 'increasing overlap in material existence between the working classes and the lower middle classes in the 1950s' (Turnock, 2007, p.159), not only lends a precariousness to the (lower middle class) character's posturing of cultural sophistication but renders the bedsit as symbolic of the very complexities of post-war social and cultural change. The droll allusion that Crisp makes in Mitchell's documentary, following the director's observation of how dusty his room is, that 'unkind friends say that I have the dust sent in from Fortnum and Masons' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970), does suggest something of Crisp's own precarious class position as determined by his domestic life being in such conflict with the pretensions of his rhetoric and speech – his 'Crisperanto' – and his dandified figure. But the bedsit can more generally be read as being, at once, a social 'leveller' and a register of the liminal and material nature of class at this time. In being home to lives 'on the edge', it was opposed to the discourses of 'good' middle-class suburban domesticity which would itself provide something of a standard comedic narrative for British television in the 1970s. Considering the medium which wrought Crisp's celebrity, the 'horrors' of his room might be read in relation with such preoccupations in popular culture, and the heteronormative mores inhered in such paradigms of domesticity.

John Ellis, in *Visible Fictions* (1992), considers how broadcast television's portrayal of the family has been at some variance with the domestic lives of much

of its audience, specifically its dramatic preoccupation with heteronormative romance and its 'perpetual construction of standard families' (Ellis, 1992, p.136). To suggest how the situation comedy often plays 'on the discrepancies between this assumed norm and other forms of existence', Ellis cites the 1970s sitcom *Rising Damp*, in which the lives of 'variegated bedsit tenants' at once disrupt and articulate as absence – an absence of an ideal indeed sought after by its characters – the norm of 'wage-earning husband, housekeeping wife, two children' (Ellis, 1992, p.136). Such comedy is premised upon the failure and disappointments of single lives, and the bedsit is symbolic as both their consequence and their cause. While Harvey considers the bedsit since the late-nineteenth century to have been represented and understood as a 'spinster space' (Harvey, 2008, p.169),¹⁴⁷ a claim which has some redolence with the anxieties of the 'single, thirtyish bedsitter woman' whom Inglis cites, Houlbrook notes how the furnished room was home only temporarily for many men before marriage, but afforded many queer men somewhere more permanent (Houlbrook, 2005, p.115). The lives of single men in bedsits are implicated with the density of male sexuality at the time in Muriel Spark's 1960 novel *The Bachelors*.¹⁴⁸ When one character claims to be a 'confirmed bachelor', debate ensues as to his and his acquaintance's apprehensions over marriage. The assertion, 'They say all bachelors are queers' (Spark, 1994, p.383), evidences something of common sentiment as to the threat that the bachelor – 'confirmed' or otherwise – embodied for the 'institution' of marriage. Inglis however would observe bedsitter life as 'remarkably asexual', but still with gendered implications; the fact that there were then twice as many women in bedsitters as men is made correlative with many a 'landlady's restrictions on her young female tenants' (Inglis, 1966, p.30). Further, Inglis suggests that for 'a shy girl, the very act of inviting a male friend to visit her digs appears crude, the unavoidable presence of the bed a compromise' (Inglis, 1966, p.30). The film of Crisp's autobiography would mark effectively the indivisibility of his emancipated sexuality from his domestic life, their lack of isolation always evident in scenes that reveal the erotic possibilities his room afforded – his bed always in sight, and most often in use, no door to divide sitting room from bedroom from kitchen.

When, in 2008, the Virago Press reissued Katharine Whitehorn's *Cooking in a Bedsitter*, first published in 1961, the book was said by one journalist to be

the cause of her own 'nostalgia' for a bedsit in which she had in fact never lived. Here she conjures both the cultural evocations and the assumed realities of life, most particularly again for young women, in the post-war British bedsit;¹⁴⁹

I love a good, boxy bedsitter, be it in an almost-forgotten novel of the 1950s, or an almost-forgotten film of the 1960s. I drive past buildings that I know, or assume, to house bedsits, their stucco peeling like eczema, their window frames rattling like old bones, and I cannot help myself from picturing the scene within: a dubious pot on an equally dubious single ring, the female in charge of it half-heartedly stirring its contents at the same time as she files her nails, reads an old *Vogue*, or chats to some distant parent on the telephone (Cooke, 2008).

Such an image did in fact accompany Inglis's 1966 article,¹⁵⁰ in which Whitehorn's book is said to be 'beyond the scope' of the average bedsitter. The quixotic impression of the bedsit that Cooke offers though, its sense of pathos and dissoluteness, only underlines how, like any domestic space, it can never be so one-dimensional as is culturally conceived. Harold Pinter employed the bedsit in many of his early plays, with his first, *The Room*, from 1957, becoming a standard of the 'kitchen sink' drama (though Pinter occupied a contentious position amongst the 'angry young men' and 'kitchen-sink dramatists' of 1950s British theatre), an image of normative domesticity under threat, and evocative of the squalor and depression of the world of the bedsit at that time. Pinter's is a single room with a double bed, gas stove and sink, in which every routine and gradation of domestic life is to be acted out, 'where all elements of human habitation are contracted into one space' (Batty, 2001, p.13). The particular image of domesticity on which Pinter's play was premised was of Crisp's Chelsea room. But in the scene of their meeting at Beaufort Street in 1955, Pinter would observe Crisp's life in a single room as partnered, however temporarily – a scene of Crisp as 'caregiver', in which greater inflections of otherness were evident.¹⁵¹

The Room and the couple

Mark Batty observes Pinter's interest in 'the representative value of rooms', their capacities to shelter and protect 'self' from 'other' (2001, p.30). Such domestic setting was common not only in Pinter's early work, but critical to its common

theme, of intruders who threatened 'the security of room dwellers' (Diamond, 1985, p.17), of subjects seeking 'to define areas of territory, and the ability of an intruding figure to intercede' (Batty, 2001, p.12).¹⁵² If *The Room* was premised from its inception on parallel negotiations of agency – between its characters, between the worlds inside and out – what incursion might Pinter have imagined upon that scene of Crisp's domestic life?¹⁵³ Pinter himself reflected on the domestic insularity of the (female) character whom Crisp would 'become'; 'in her warm and comfortable room her security is complete ... of course, it isn't; an intruder comes to upset the balance ... points to the delusion on which she is basing her life' (Diamond, 1985, p.18). Just as that character has to accept their 'contingent status in a world she wants to believe is secure' (Diamond, 1985, p.21), Pinter observed in Crisp's room a pretended domesticity, premised as it was on a queer intimacy, whether sexual or not, that was lawfully precarious even at home.

If Crisp's room represented a rejection of the heteronormative, it was consequently a rejection of the closet to which Houlbrook alludes in considering how domesticity was increasingly defined to exclude the queer, how 'the privileges of privacy – the freedom from official surveillance – were nominally afforded only to those who conformed to bourgeois notions of family life' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.110). With the increasing hostility of the law towards queer behaviours in the post-war period, Pinter might have conceived of himself as the intruder, an imaginary of the very real watcher/watched relationship between the queer subject and the surveilling tactics of the police. The 'nested position' of Pinter's vulnerable subjects in *The Room* (Prentice, 2000, p.48) finds parallel with those dissident sexualities that were subject to lawful reprimand and the failure of the home to protect them. Where Houlbrook considers the relationship between the domestic spaces occupied by queer men and the received, as well as legal, definition of the 'Englishman's home as his castle', that is, a space of privacy and sanctity in which the command of the law that so defines public space is largely absent, such distinction becomes highly unstable (Houlbrook, 2005, p.110). Given that definition of the queer as a threat to domestic stability, Crisp was inevitably the subject of lawful attentions at home.

Crisp's first 'knock at the door' however came in the late-1930s, and in a particularly redolent sequence that compounds his erotic and domestic life, the

film of his autobiography obfuscates what Houlbrook considers to be the 'contradiction between the criminalisation of men's private sexual behaviour and the legal convention that evidence should be secured without impairing the privacy and confidence of domestic life' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.110). To appropriate Crisp's term, he is 'picked up' by a stranger as he waits to cross a busy London road, following a period of his intermittent celibacy, accompanied with the narration, 'It was at this time I'm sorry to say that sex re-entered my life' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Crisp's fatalist manner permits his chasteness to be displaced by a particular hazard of life 'outside', as articulated earlier in the film; 'the great thing about following an obvious homosexual is that you can't possibly be wrong' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). The scene of the consequent lovers in the nocturnal stillness of Crisp's bed is followed by that of the police visiting his room. Swathed in the attire of his 'dressing-room' and its requisite solitude, most 'at home', the spectre of the law, though 'plain-clothed', seems ever more unduly intrusive. This last private stance of his fashioning, that it had seemed could not invite the enmity that was his everyday encounter on London's streets, was violated in their presence, the apparent exile of home subject to unsought, uninvited, lawful intervention.

The police bring complaints from neighbours able to see through the window of his room. Crisp is reminded of those laws which Houlbrook traces as a public/private contravention and relates to the ways in which the 'ideological domains of residence, domesticity, and privacy were interwoven and contingent upon each other' within such conflicting legal strictures (Houlbrook, 2005, p.110). Crisp writes of the incident in the customary archness of his prose, revealing how the house in which he then boarded in Belgravia was 'at the bottom of a deep ravine formed by the five-storey houses of the rich. From the top back windows of these mansions, the last members of the dying race of domestic servants looked down – but not in mercy.' Having to close his curtains necessitated 'a climb on to my desk since even the bottoms of the windows were above my head. What could be seen of the room was the bed. On this there was usually somebody lying. Since there was only one chair in the room ... there was nowhere else for my friends to relax' (Crisp, 1977a, p.102). What Houlbrook considers the tactics that, 'in effect, rendered [gay men] and their residential arrangements invisible', were indeed those 'as simple as locking the door, closing curtains ... taking care

when entering or leaving ... all intended to construct an impermeable – if precarious – physical boundary between a furnished room and the outside world’ (Houlbrook, 2005, p.127). What Crisp reasons as a matter of domestic expediency is not to veil some particularly provocative constituent of his exhibitionism, but intimates rather how his fashioning already articulated ‘what goes on’ in the privacy of his room, a very public dissidence fashioned to articulate his private transgression of the law. When questioned in the film of his autobiography as to why he would not draw his curtains, Crisp drolly responds, ‘it never occurs to me that the neighbours would want to look in’ (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975).

Ian Smith notes the genesis of *The Room* to receive varied attributions by critics and scholars, that Pinter himself resisted ‘innumerable opportunities’ to clarify the matter, opportunities for ‘a classic and irresistible theatrical anecdote, combining celebrities, a bohemian setting, a chance event, Crisp’s unconventional sexual and domestic arrangements’ (Smith, 2005, p.28). While Crisp had written in *The Naked Civil Servant* of their meeting,¹⁵⁴ Pinter had indeed acknowledged that particular scene of Crisp’s domestic life as the play’s founding image, every detail observed seeming to find literal translation;

A slight, slender man, his hair blond and quiffed, his feet bare, was cooking ... A large man, wearing a cap, was sitting at a table reading a comic. [Crisp] smiled and waved ... The large man did not look up ... Crisp slapped the bacon and eggs onto a plate, took the plate to the table, placed it, poured tea into a cup, cut a hunk of bread, buttered it, all the while chatting away merrily to us. The large man started to eat, his comic propped up in front of him. His name was never disclosed ... [Crisp’s] monologue covered a considerable range of topics ... as he maintained a constant vigil at the table, cutting and buttering more bread, pouring more tea ... The man at the table never looked up or spoke (Pinter quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.84).¹⁵⁵

In his biography of Pinter, Michael Billington suggests that *The Room* ‘is nothing to do with Quentin Crisp and his chum’ (Billington, 2007, p.67), and it is in some way understandable that that scene of Crisp’s domestic life has eluded the critical query of commentators, considering the one revision that Pinter did make – such queerness being transposed for that of absolute heterosexuality demands an abstract theorisation of how and why its image might have evolved as it did.

Smith quotes the actor Barry Foster and his particular recollection of that meeting at Beaufort Street; 'there was this blue-rinsed, made-up guy with an apron on, cooking ... for this huge bloke, who said nothing. And he was rabbiting away; and it was Quentin Crisp. He was the woman. He is the woman in *The Room*' (Foster quoted in Smith, 2005, p.162). That Crisp 'is the woman' might invite questions as to Pinter's precipitative empathy for a queer politics, a 'latency' which indeed Richard Allen Cave has underlined (Cave, 2001, p.108). In his survey of Pinter's early work, Batty however is hesitant as to whether issues of gender are subordinate to or too densely entangled amongst its more purposeful concerns of displacement and threatened identity (Batty, 2001, p.30). But just as Diamond suggests the 'dizzying imbalance' of that image (Diamond, 1985, p.19), which we might articulate as marked equally in material and psychic difference, together a forceful gender demarcation, more gainful query here would dissect the meanings of home and domesticity implicit in that very inequity.

Describing Crisp as 'a flamboyant, henna-haired sexual outsider' (Billington, 2007, p.66),¹⁵⁶ the image of his fashioning is inextricable from what Billington observes in Pinter's capitalising of that 'arresting image', his study of 'the confrontation of an anxious recluse with the demands and pressures of the outside world' (Billington, 2007, p.67). While Billington might evade any discussion of the sexual and gendered implications of *The Room* in regards to that image, in suggesting the work to address 'the perils of withdrawal from the outside world and the emotional hazard of turning a room into a fortress' (Billington, 2007, p.69), there is redolence of the exile that Crisp would so often claim of his Chelsea room, of being the 'outsider', the 'recluse', always at home. But that scene is one of domestic *lives* – of contingent roles – however transient, and just as Michelene Wandor suggests, in *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-war British Drama* (1987), that the play's opening scene establishes 'the image of the nurturing mother' (Wandor, 1987, p.30),¹⁵⁷ and the 'room-womb' is often observed as a recurrent symbol of Pinter's early work, 'a measure of security in an insecure world' (Taylor, 1963, cited by Gale, 2001, p.92), we might consider their implication in Crisp's account of that meeting; 'I was feeding a starving outcast' (Crisp, 1977a, p.109). The portrayal of Crisp's earlier domestic life with 'Barn Door' in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* is much redolent of the relationship that Pinter observed at Beaufort Street (figure

31), of companionate domesticity, whatever its 'dizzying imbalance', and which Crisp writes of in some detail (Crisp, 1977a, pp.143-148). Just as Crisp would dangerously 'sentimentalize' the 'roughs' whose attentions he received in the 1920s and 1930s (Crisp, 1977a, p.61), so too in the film of his autobiography do we see this once-prospective 'great dark man' domesticated; 'I fed him because he was hungry and I housed him because he had nowhere to go ... He poor wee thing needed a kingdom. He had never known a world in which he had the upper hand. I gave him a kingdom' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). Crisp's single room often provided home to other 'outcasts', their lives together seemingly a mime of normative domesticity, but, as seems implicit in Pinter's observation, of liminal security.

Attentive as he was of their apparently compromised politicisation in the 1970s, in his second volume of autobiography Crisp stressed the dangers he envisaged in gay men 'forming an exile's view of reality' (Crisp, 1981, p.29), whilst observing in the very domestic other from which he had seemingly himself long been banished the waning of its hegemonic contentment;

Just because full-time homosexuals are on the outside of certain experiences – just because they stand with their cold noses pressed against the window pane gazing through it at the carpet-slipper set-up – they should not suppose that everything by the fireside is permanent, peaceful. The terrible truth is that people on the inside are trying to get out (Crisp, 1981, p.29).

The metaphors of bourgeois comfort appropriated to oppose the vantage of the queer 'outcast' with heteronormative domestic privilege are characteristic as ever of Crisp's rhetoric of 'home' and the conundrums it engenders, particularly when seamed with the image that his room had some years before provided for Pinter – of Crisp as partnered, as 'caregiver'. However 'bohemian' his Chelsea room, however opposed it was to middle-class norms of homemaking, the life Crisp made there was never quite as single as he would most often insist. Far from impervious to the domestic intimacy of the 'fireside' harmony he censures as entirely illusory, as Pinter's recollection reveals, it would conform particularly to its implicit normatively gendered roles.

The scene 'of absolute domesticity' which Pinter observed in Crisp's room precedes a study of insidious forces, the menace of an outside world that

conspires against the common need for home, for 'stability and assured personal identity' (Batty, 2001, p.13). This has certain parallel in the hyperbole Crisp writes, in that seemingly impermeable façade, in cohabitation being the preserve, however unstable, of heterosexuality. However, the questions they each elicit as to the domestic lives of queer men *together*, at the time of Pinter's observation, and some twenty years later, at the time of Crisp's – a momentous period of change for queer lives – demand some conjecture as to the normative models of domesticity they have both mimed and troubled, and the infractions, societal and lawful, they have had to counter. Indeed the scene which Pinter observed is redolent with a normativity that knowingly pretended its impermeability. It may well have been that precarious scene that the correspondent who censured Crisp for 'setting the gay world back twenty years' in *Gay News* in 1976 had in mind. Where Hugh David cites that letter without questioning its writer's incoherent claims of being 'normal', and the heteronormative roles in fact so easily ascribed to gay couples, he does observe that period as one of 'quietude, consolidation and even domesticity', how 'something approaching the Gay Suburban Dream was emerging' (David, 1997, p.241). While Hornsey does observe how the home in the 1950s was increasingly presented as the legitimate place of queer expression and behaviours, with the Wolfenden Committee, alongside other apologists for the homosexual citizen, endorsing 'dominant notions of companionate privacy' (Hornsey, 2010, p.202), it is through the 1970s, as David suggests, that there was increasingly evident in British society an 'easy, normal mundaneness about many a gay relationship, a cosy domesticity which frequently seemed to mimic a heterosexual marriage's' (David, 1997, pp.241-242). That letter to *Gay News* can be subject to a more candid reading that observes in the image of Crisp which Pinter had drawn upon the *impossibility* of domesticated gay partnership, a sensibility that Crisp embodied through his celebrity. The apparently normative gender roles of *The Room* and their instability underline how Crisp's mistaken faith in the 'great dark man', about which he was always so voluble, was at odds with the domesticity of coupled lives increasingly evident in the culture and society of the 1970s. That Pinter's couple remained childless is also to be implicated with changing ideas of what 'family' could mean for gay men – a matter much debated in media and politics through the 1980s, for example, with Susanne Bosche's provocative *Jenny Lives with Eric and*

Martin (1983). But where Bachelard's understanding of the domestic/psychic relation is always to be tempered with an acknowledgement of Crisp's performative tendencies as to the meanings of home, the implication that his room embodied antiquated ideas of what queerness *had been* – of the pretended and precarious intimacy that Pinter observed – finds much consonance with the pursuit that journalists made of the queer interior, seeking in Crisp's domestic life an effeteness to parallel the effeminacy of his fashioning, the gaze which his room was so often subject to returning a confounding absence.

'A great many little objects': an image of absence

In his introduction to the 1986 reissue of Michael Nelson's novel, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, from 1958, Philip Core considers how it is 'written entirely in the idiom of a vanished world, as if a Coward character or Waugh's Anthony Blanche had written a memoir in their own voice ... an extended slice-of-life overheard in a gay club when they were still 'by membership only' (Core, 1986, v). In suggesting that what might follow 'the orgies' of gay politicisation could be the return of such an idiom, 'not as a language of prisoners, but as a valuable dialect of modern English', Core considers that Crisp's celebration at the time 'suggests that there is a place for just the attitude and ambiance' that the novel depicts; 'Crisp, after all, wandered with painted toenails on the pavement outside the Rialto Hotel where Nelson's richer characters were disporting themselves inside' (Core, 1986, v). While he intimates the class connotations upon which Crisp's celebrity was in some way contingent – that style and seeming Wildean class pretension of his temperament and wit, acknowledged by Crisp himself in that earlier allusion to the provenance of the dust of his room, and in Banks-Smith's review – Core is precise in locating him as outside the rarefied society of wealth, privilege and private clubs which the novel represents, of characters who resembled 'those of a Sutherland/Freud/Keith Vaughan sort of painter and a Berard/Dior/Beaton sort of fashion personality' (Core, 1986, v). These could well have been the kind of queers Crisp had in mind when he wrote of the many who disapproved of his fashioning, using the public/private binary to articulate what can be read as a veiled class remonstrance; 'Those who camped in private and watched their step in public felt that my not doing either was an indirectly

expressed criticism of both these activities. They were right' (Crisp, 1977a, p.84). As the journalist Mark Amory would observe, in the *Sunday Times Magazine* feature with Crisp and Hurt, published just before the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* was first broadcast, while those more privileged 'could get away with wearing what they liked behind closed doors', Crisp belonged to an entirely other 'Chelsea set' to that of Nelson's novel, being 'always with the poor' (Amory, 1975, p.78). That this other 'belonging', predicated by the indeterminacy of Crisp's class position, should not have prohibited his transgressive fashioning leads Amory to make coincidental allusion to that interior of Nelson's novel;

A room in Chelsea, owned by a homosexual famed for his style, had suggested a drawing-room with a great many little objects so carefully arranged as to produce an atmosphere of elegance and precision. In fact his bed-sitter is small and shabby, crowded with unlovely furniture ... For his appearance I was prepared. Short but upright, his pale body was encased in a see-through shirt which seemed to have drapes rather than sleeves. His rouge had been applied lavishly, almost crudely, but his mauve and white hair soared upwards with all the quality his surroundings lacked (Amory, 1975 p.78).

Amory suggests a spectre of abandoned Havisham grandeur in his meeting with Crisp at home, observing an absence that betrays the spectacle and narcissism behind the image of someone so 'famed for his style' – indeed the very rudiment of his nascent celebrity at this moment – but more particularly, what is *imagined* to constitute the queer interior, the very objects with which indeed those other queers might have 'camped in private.' Where Susan Stewart considers what might threaten the enclosure of the domestic world, the 'island' that is home, its trespass and contamination being an 'erasure of materiality' (Stewart, 1993, p.68) that has some resonance in Pinter's domesticity, Daniel Miller suggests the ethnographic investigation of the material culture of home to be necessarily intrusive, an incursion justifiable by the empathetic need to understand the intimate relationships with 'things' that so define domestic lives (Miller, 2001, p.1). At home in his Chelsea room, Crisp would welcome the gaze of journalists intrigued by its very lack. Of invariable fascination throughout his celebrity was the binary asceticism of that room – his apparent withdrawal from the world that his fashioning offended and its negation of domestic comforts. When asked, 'If you were to create a Quentin Crisp room what would it look like?' (Keehnen,

2005), he spoke of a domestic life bare of the grammar of home, its aesthetic pleasures rendered entirely superfluous;

I would furnish it with only what is absolutely necessary - a bed, a chair, a stove, and a refrigerator. That is all that is in my room. There is nothing that is unnecessary, nothing that is a decoration. There are no pictures on the walls, no knickknacks balanced on things. I find that all a waste of time (Crisp quoted in Keehnen, 2005).

At the cusp of his celebrity, this was the very room in which Crisp had indeed been found, and in which he would steadfastly remain – even expatriated in his later move to New York. The absence of the ‘little objects’ of an effete-ness implicit in Crisp’s fashioning reveals a preconception perhaps in some way explicable, for his ‘fame’ was predicated indeed upon a life very much ‘styled’. Where Amory returns to Crisp’s fashioning to observe precisely the absence of his room, the ‘see-through shirt which seemed to have drapes’ (Amory, 1975 p.78) infers the deception of that body, of the aestheticism that Crisp seemingly fashioned. There is coded significance in the ‘little objects’ expected of Crisp’s room that finds some consonance with the ideological tendencies Stewart observes in the desire, most often nostalgic, to present cultural otherness in miniature form (Stewart, 1993, p.66). It might be said that Amory anticipates in Crisp’s room the diminutive upon which he is able to displace the triviality of his fashioning. Where Stewart’s miniature stands as metaphor for interiority, and the ‘gigantic’ for the abstract authority of worlds outside, of the state, of public life (Stewart, 1993, xii), such binary being inextricable from the public/private articulates something of the two worlds which Crisp spoke of from the vantage of his room.

The very language of what *should* have been in stead of the absence with which Amory is confronted finds redolence in Miller’s observation of the disorienting qualities of domestic lack. Miller contrasts the aestheticised absence of the minimalist interior with the rare and disturbing habitat that is ‘entirely devoid of any form of decoration’, for there should always be *something* decorative to speak of its habitation, ‘a little china ornament, a postcard from a trip somewhere, an image of a friend or relative.’ Suggesting there to be a ‘violence’ to such ‘emptiness’ (Miller, 2008, p.8), Miller observes a refusal of the private and the

domestic having to abide by normative social codes of materiality. The space void of objects has for Grosz 'no representable or perceivable features, and the spatiality of a space containing objects reflects the spatial characteristics of those objects, but not the space of their containment' (Grisz, 1995, p.92). While Crisp's room was far from bare of 'things', only those of a decorative nature, the interior that Amory anticipates is one of enculturated queer aestheticism. Alluding to the accumulative tendencies so often ascribed to gay men, in his article on the auction of Yves Saint Laurent's collections, for instance, the journalist Peter York employs the term 'Haut Euro Poofstastic' (York, 2009, p.45).¹⁵⁸ Observing the domestic interiors of those affluent European 'hyper-civilised art-literate gay collectors' of Saint Laurent's generation, York suggests home for these men to have been 'Baroque refuges against the world' (York, 2009, p.45). The several mentions made of representations of 'whopping great muscular men', 'classical' and 'lightly clothed' in sculpture and painting, finds resonance in Hornsey's discussion of the film *Victim* (1961), which he suggests employs a shot of Michelangelo's *David* as decorative signifier of a *repressed* queerness, closeted even at home (Hornsey, 2010, pp.230-231). The classical male nude is thus compounded as both restrained trace and unequivocal monument of queerness, an icon of ideal masculinity on the one hand to emulate and on the other to desire. Frequently to be seen in film and photograph, upon the mantel of Crisp's room was a postcard of David; whether or not as trace of the reverence in which he held such image as the muse of his own modelling, it remains a vestige of decorativeness free of the implications of sublimated desire which *should* furnish the queer interior.

The very *desire* inherited in Stewart's thesis is absent in Crisp's room – the absence of 'things', of 'knickknacks', that speak of the 'desire of part for whole', being suggestive of some absence in interiority (Stewart, 1993, xxi). What Amory observes is the absence of 'little things' which should have been some form of 'companionship' in Crisp's seeming domestic isolation. Where Stewart considers the memento's 'connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life', she underlines how it becomes 'emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self's capacity to generate worthiness' (Stewart, 1993, p.139). There is a sociality that the memento embodies which Crisp's room and the exile he would insist he sought there negates. Just as Miller considers how 'the arrays

of objects that fill its spaces' are a critical component of the material culture of home through which the subject is able to 'reflect back on it their agency and sometimes their impotence' (Miller, 2001, p.1), so Crisp in Mitchell's 1970 documentary, and evidently in his meeting with Amory and the many other journalists so intrigued by the lack of his room, reveals his absence of *need* for such valorisation – with Crisp's questioning of the cultural normativity of such need inscriptive of a very particular queer stance on the materiality of identity.

In a rare moment of dialogue between Crisp and Mitchell, he is asked whether he has a photograph of himself when he was younger. He searches the ephemera of his mantelpiece and offers to the camera a black and white snapshot (figure 32), describing how it was taken 'in the middle of Oxford Street [by] a street photographer ... [it] transpired he was a bit of a hooligan like ourselves' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970). An acute variance to the isolation he portrays, the consonance Crisp speaks of suggests the sociability that is imperative to the narrative of his writings, the 'hooligan' of London's West End being amongst the bohemian contingent of his autobiography. As further indiscretion in his performance of the domestic as containment, such lapse restates the urban agency that Crisp's fashioning demanded. To trace that fashioning of his past in this chance visual circumstance, some years before Hurt would trace it as biographical performance for a wider audience, Crisp explains how 'You can tell because the hair is dark that this was taken before I was forty, and my hair was red' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970). On the materiality of photographs, their meanings as domestic objects, Edwards and Hart consider how they are 'both images *and* physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience ... enmeshed with subjective, embodied and sensuous interactions' (Edwards and Hart, 2004, p.1). While that photograph exists as any other as a fragment of the temporal and the lived, it is more particularly a fragment of the fashioned, framed in Crisp's bejewelled hands as *aide memoire* of the spectacle he was forever prompted in interviews to describe. Retrieved from the interstices of his room, it affords only the smallest black and white abstraction of the past Crisp speaks and writes of, underlining the empirical absence of the apparently singular figure he fashioned in a time of societal intolerance, and the essentially spectral image of transgression upon which his celebrity was determined.¹⁵⁹

Edwards and Hart observe how it is 'not merely the image *qua* image that is the site of meaning,' but how 'its material and presentational forms and the uses to which they are put are central to the function of the photograph as a socially salient object ... these material forms exist in dialogue with the image itself to create the associative values placed on them' (Edwards and Hart, 2004, p.2). As well as the photograph that Crisp offers Mitchell being an auto/biographical trace – *that* signature of his past fashioning in *that* time and place – the particular context of its very materiality is resonant with questions of narrative that define the apparent rift between the precision and 'management' of Crisp's fashioned self and the seeming disorder of his domestic life. The photograph, it would seem, had never belonged to the broader visual narratives that so typically contain them as part of 'home' – the presentational forms of albums, of framed collections, of narratives of relations in both the familial and the spatial sense. Drawn from a mantel of seeming disparate ephemera, an assemblage of correspondence and postcards that would seem unchanged in other images of his room, its seemingly cavalier placement there accents the way photographs are subject to norms of domestication and conserved as objects, plagued as they are 'by the usual ills of paper objects', objects that 'invite packaging' in albums, to be 'framed and set on tables, tacked on walls' (Sontag, 1979, p.4). In Mitchell's documentary that photograph not only embodies Crisp's disregard of such domesticating practices, but holds greater implications of the subject's investment in any sense of 'future'. Where Edwards and Hart suggest the unframed photograph to be typically 'concerned with self-presentation in the present', the framed photograph and those assembled in albums suggest the future (Edwards and Hart, 2004, p.12); particularly when domesticated as object, photographs do articulate 'a desire for memory and the act of keeping a photograph is, like other souvenirs, an act of faith in the future' (Edwards, 1999, p.222).

Though the domestic photograph is most often understood as an anchoring in the past, where Pauline Garvey summons Giddens's definition of narrative and its implications for biography and selfhood, specifically the coherence of identity achievable only through its 'active and ongoing revision', to explore how, in homemaking, 'an individual engages in a continually revised presentational field ... an ongoing process of self-definition through which

continuous revision is a necessary factor' (Garvey, 2001, pp.55-56), the very absence of such 'revision' in Crisp's domestic life is as marked as that of the 'little objects' of home, of 'knickknacks' and framed photographs. While there is in Crisp's negation of Garvey's thesis much consonance between the 'stopped-clock' subjectivities of his fashioning and his domesticity, his Chelsea room more critically embodied a tension between a sense of permanence and the transitory, of which that photograph was articulate. Its materially 'unnarrativised' status might have intimated a lack of 'faith in the future', but as Crisp would insist, it was in his Chelsea room that he was intent on staying. With the opportunities of his celebrity however the resoluteness of his domestic sensibility would be tried. But as he made New York his home in his 'twilight years', after forty years in his Beaufort Street bedsit, it seemed that the inscription of its abjection could be moved between rooms, between cities.

Another city: a room in New York

Having announced his intentions of moving to New York, in 1979 Crisp gave an interview to the magazine *Mode Avantgarde* from his Chelsea room, entitled 'Mr. Crisp Changes Countries'. With the same interest as ever in his domestic life, he is asked as to why he would not 'want this place' any longer, responding, 'I want 'this place' in New York.' When questioned if this would involve recreating that room, he suggested that 'It will re-create itself when I get there. I shall never say I must have it looking like Beaufort Street but within four years it will look exactly like Beaufort Street' (Neal Wilson, 1979).¹⁶⁰ Crisp's New York room would gain the same media fascination as his London room, and would indeed appear in film and photograph a shrine to Beaufort Street. For Crisp, it seemed the meanings of home had been greater than the surface of abject neglect that so intrigued that early media – a depth of inscription that would translate in domestic spatiality an unforeseen consonance of the fashioned self. The resistance of 'good' domesticity that Crisp had long made his cause was as inexorable and *relocatable* as his fashioning, the dust of the Lower East Side in his dotage being spectral of that in wartime Chelsea, the same apparent 'stopped clock' of his fashioning.¹⁶¹

In 1981, as he was finally leaving for New York, *The Face* magazine also interviewed Crisp at home, abiding by the now conventional journalism which, at the outset, would survey the nuances of his fashioning against the asceticism of his room – Crisp ‘dandified’, his room ‘one of the most infamous single rooms in modern mythology’, his life before his celebrity assessed as that of someone ‘virtually cowering in a room in Chelsea’ (Taylor, 1981, pp.46-47). When Russell Harty interviewed Crisp for British television following his move, he described Crisp’s new home as ‘a dingy rooming house in unfashionable New York’ (*Harty Goes to New York*, 1985).¹⁶² As Crisp welcomes Harty into that room, his interviewer observes that ‘this is where you hang your fedora’ (*Harty Goes to New York*, 1985). But beyond the conflation of the fashioned upon the domestic, it would seem again that some prompt, despite the contrary evidence, was taken from the rhetoric that Crisp had long employed in being interviewed at home – of his room as a place of confinement. Harty’s insight into the single room’s manifold functions is seamed with such allusion; ‘having comfortably exchanged the genteel dust of London for the thick grime of New York ... Mr Crisp makes his little room an everywhere. It’s his bedroom, drawing room ... occasional salon, perpetual cell. From here he observes the delights and despairs of his newly adopted city’ (*Harty Goes to New York*, 1985). His interviewer would address the subject of Crisp’s fashioning in precise relation with the abjection of his room, the contradiction ‘between you, your person ... and the squalor that seems to surround you’ (*Harty Goes to New York*, 1985). Crisp would only overstress the rift between his fashioned and his domestic self, the neglect of the latter underlined as he accounts for the daily two hours it takes for him to ‘reconstruct’ himself, while the film closes in on the lotions and potions that furnish his room, grimy still lives of his effeminacy barely different from those that Denis Mitchell had captured more than a decade earlier in Chelsea.

The first scene of Crisp’s New York room in Nossiter’s 1991 documentary *Resident Alien* is of Crisp making-up at his mirror (figure 33), underlining a fascination with his aged figure being still so narcissistic, that scene an elision of the domestic and private, revealing the ‘reconstruction’ of the public, cosmeticised Quentin. And like Mitchell before him, Nossiter offers still lives of the abjection of Crisp’s room. Affording an acute observation of Crisp’s later domestic life, Tim Fountain’s one-man play also titled *Resident Alien*, first

performed in London in 1999 only days after his death, with Bette Bourne in the role (figure 34),¹⁶³ would seam the public and the private Crisp, the auto/biographical and the fictional, re-interpreting and collaging the aphoristic wit of his writings and media rhetoric. In reviewing Fountain's play, Alexander Games suggests this format to have given him 'licence to plunder from Crisp's thesaurus of epithets', while describing as equally 'famous' and instantly recognisable Crisp's New York room – 'cramped and cluttered ... inhumanely confined' – and the signature of his fashioning – 'spun-sugar hair ... make-up and the black velvet jacket' (Games, 1999). Describing the play as 'a portrait of the artist as a nonagenarian crank, living out his last days in his spectacularly shabby Lower East Side digs', the journalist David Barbour would consider how the scenic designer Neil Patel, for its New York run, 'resurrected' the squalor of Crisp's room; 'Between the stained, dirty walls of the setting, a dilapidated bed and easy chair were placed in a sea of clutter ... A grimy sink and mirror allowed space for personal hygiene ... Every item on the set looked filthy, worn out, or both' (Patel quoted in Barbour, 2001). Where Crisp's fashioning was central to the narrative of *Resident Alien* – he awaits a luncheon date and readies himself to get into his 'going out clothes' – it would employ its elements as fundamental to that scene of abject domesticity; 'a single bed with a huge mound of 'trademark' scarves piled neatly at the foot ... [an old] stove utterly coated in grease ... hooks with Quentin's shirt, hat, coat and trousers ... a chest of drawers covered with bottles of make-up and various other potions' (Fountain, 1999, p.17).

Amongst props enveloped in dust and grime, the room's shelves of cosmetics and cobwebbed mirror, those signature clothes – Crisp's 'going out' wear of black velvet jacket, black fedora, patterned silk scarf hung in an orderly row, trousers and lustrous cream satin shirt draped over an exhausted armchair – are the objects around which the play progresses. The private self of the domestic interior is articulated in the bodilessness of those clothes, the sense of material otherness they embody, the undone 'uniform' of his fashioning, accenting the vulnerability of the aged Crisp. With arms swathed in bloodied bandages, the amethyst cabouchon ring he wears is symbol of the resoluteness of his 'glamour' in the face of such bodily abjection. As Crisp begins to make-up, with powder compact in hand, finding the 'ideal spot' in his gloomy room, there is a silence shared with his audience. The small rituals of his effeminacy, private

and domestic, are not only relocated from London to New York, but afford space for reminiscence – as he makes-up he begins to reflect on his early life in London’s West End, and the hostility and violence of ‘England’, reflections of experience that endure still in the image of effeminacy that confronts him. Where the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* would trace Crisp’s life from youth to middle-age, so *An Englishman in New York* would chronicle Crisp’s last years. In the later film, the first sight of his New York home is a panning shot around that cramped room, an evocation not nearly as squalid as the real thing, before closing in on Crisp at his mirror, that reflection of him making-up an image of his domestic life returned to throughout the film – the resolve of his cosmetic self under the onslaught of sickness and aging.

While Patel held his set design for Fountain’s play to be of ‘the purest realism’, a room that one ‘could never invent’ (Patel quoted in Barbour, 2001), in terms of costume design Barbour notes the dressing of the actor Bette Bourne ‘in the rattiest bathrobe of the New York season’ (Barbour, 2001). Crisp would speak often of the solace he sought in his room, of being ‘wrapped in a filthy dressing gown and filthier day-dreams about myself’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.180), that abject dress an essential allowance of his ‘dressing room’. In Crisp’s New York room finding theatrical portrait, rather than his earlier Chelsea room, there is inevitably a greater sense of abjection given the ‘horrors’ of aging he experienced. The endeavour to recreate the material decay of Crisp himself is described by Barbour as ‘grisly’ (Barbour, 2001); he refers expressly to that moment when Crisp removes his robe to dress for his luncheon date, revealing the bandages and bloodstains of the painful epidermal condition that had beset him in middle age. In *An Englishman in New York*, where Crisp is compelled to seek assistance with personal care, the film fastens the image of his decaying body to the refuge of his room. The representation of such abjection marks the most private aspects of the domestic self as vulnerable to the horrified gaze.

Patel considers how until Crisp’s later years ‘his clothes were impeccable, but later it all began to fall apart. He started to look unkempt’ (Patel quoted in Barbour, 2001). Donson and Georgés addressed the requirements for those living in bedsits to be sartorially ‘spick and span’; when Crisp informs the audience in Fountain’s play that ‘I must put on my ‘going out’ clothes’, he recalls how, ‘when asked how I kept the dust off my black velvet suit ... I told them I

jump in the air when I put my trousers on.’ The accompanying stage direction - ‘He puts his trousers on without jumping in the air’ - is followed by the plain line that perhaps articulates the lucent performativity that Crisp had so early in his celebrity ascribed to his domestic life; ‘I lied’ (Fountain, 1999, p.26).

If the essence of domestic abjection is dirt, it can only through a long process be recognizable as such, as Mary Douglas suggests, and when all relationality and signs of origin have gone:

It is unpleasant to poke about in the refuse to try to recover anything, for this revives identity. So long as identity is absent, rubbish is not dangerous. It does not even create ambiguous perceptions since it clearly belongs in a defined place, a rubbish heap of one kind or another ... Dirt was created by the differentiating activity of mind, it was a by-product of the creation of order ... Formlessness is therefore an apt symbol of beginning and of growth at it is of decay (Douglas, 1984, pp.160-1).

It was perhaps the subversive lending of form that Crisp had realised of the filth and abjection of his room that the fashion designer Miguel Adrover paid homage to when he rescued the mattress of his Lower East Side room from the street on which it was discarded, following Crisp’s death in 1999. In this Adrover indeed revived something of Crisp’s identity, creating from it an extraordinary memento-mori (figure 35). From such urban waste, Adrover fashioned a coat laden with resonances of the public/private and domestic/fashioned subjectivities that had so defined Crisp’s cultural figure. The coat was included in The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *blog.mode: addressing fashion exhibition*, 2008, and curators Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton considered the revelation of the provenance of the striped cotton twill ticking to elicit either ‘macabre or poignant’ connotations; ‘with its forlorn history of wear and rusty stains ... transforming it into a tailored coat was less recycling than poetic reinvention ... invested with the resonance of a very public person’s intensely personal history’ (Koda and Bolton, 2008).¹⁶⁴

Reflection on dirt, Douglas suggests, can be understood as ‘reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death’ (Douglas, 1984, p.5). In *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness* (2003), Caroline Evans considers how the sense of melancholy inherent in such practice as Adrover’s ‘recalls the romantic cult of ruins’; where Adrover ‘imbued cloth with narrative and memory’, Evans’s suggestion that the

fictional tendencies 'that saturated the [same] cloth ... [with] a simulated mark or trace of the past' (Evans, 2003, pp.257-258) might be more explicitly linked with the fictions woven between Crisp's domestic and fashioned self.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps most importantly, Adrover's salvage and restructuring of that cloth underlines that Crisp's was not going to be the room of a 'great man' conserved. No matter that it might have been 'one of the most infamous single rooms in modern mythology', it embodied conflicts of transitoriness and permanence, and, despite such extraordinary inscription, in his rejection of bourgeois ideals of ownership and possession, the room was never his as such.¹⁶⁶ Such practices of re-contextualization were observed by Adrover himself in decidedly lyrical terms, as the partaking of 'someone's dream of freedom . . . [a] rescue from conventionalism, trying to bring some light to the memory of my once neighbour' (Adrover quoted in Koda and Bolton, 2008).¹⁶⁷ The conventionalism that both Crisp's fashioning and his domestic life had transgressed are to be read in Adrover's appropriation of the very ambiguity that is abjection – the imbued melancholy of death and loss, that fabric articulating at once the real complexities of 'presence and absence', to be navigated by those narratives fashioned and domestic that so defined Crisp's outré figure. The last chapter of this thesis further explores some of the 'last' images of Crisp, highly constructed representations in which he would 'do' drag – a play with femininity that he had long resisted – and which offer rich insights into his aged, indeed deathly, queerness.

CHAPTER V

Death Scenes: The drag of Crisp's dotage

Once, when I lived in Baron's Court, I travelled by Underground to Piccadilly Circus wearing a black silk dress and some kind of velvet cape. I went to the Regent Palace Hotel, had a drink and talked airily of this and that with my escort, who was, I think, in a dinner jacket. Then I returned home. The evening was a triumph, in that it was boring; nothing happened. Since then I have never worn drag (Crisp, 1977a, p.82).

This chapter proposes the images of drag which Crisp 'performed' in the last years of his life to offer some insight into attitudes towards the aged queer body. In the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*, the scene of Crisp's apparently isolated experience of drag offers an image of 1920s glamour, with him chic in the flapper style of the period (figure 36).¹⁶⁸ It would seem that the evening had indeed been uneventful, in contrast to the consequences of the effeminacy that Crisp wore as 'everyday'. It is in the film's subsequent scene that he insists 'I'm not a woman, I don't want to be a woman' (*The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975). In later life Crisp would teasingly say otherwise – that if there had been the choice of sex reassignment surgery he would have taken it, and opened a knitting shop somewhere provincial where 'no one would have known my guilty secret' (Crisp quoted in Barrow, 2002, p.63). But Crisp had never sought in his fashioning to truly 'pass' as a woman; as Horwell in her obituary would suggest, Crisp's definition of queer 'meant living as a dream of a woman, though without the aesthetic insult of travesty cross-dressing', claiming that his 'ankles look all wrong in a gown' (Horwell, 1999).¹⁶⁹ In the last decade of his life however Crisp ventured again into drag, though for quite different purposes. Principal amongst the career opportunities of his celebrity were many acting roles – though in films of wildly disparate merit¹⁷⁰ – and one of the most enduring images of Crisp is his performance as Elizabeth I in Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1993). Crisp's Elizabeth was much celebrated, and a role burdened inevitably with metaphors of power and public image, of agedness and death, of being 'queenly'. But there were other chances for Crisp to measure again the fit of drag. In Nossiter's *Resident Alien* documentary, Crisp was allowed to 'camp' as much as he could before a keen camera, and his imitation of a dying Greta Garbo can be described as little

else. Only a year before his death, aged ninety, his appearance in the pages of a fashion magazine would offer a confrontation with mortality that was highly provocative, given the medium – an image of gothic transvestism far more *outré* than anything of his own fashioning. These images reveal Crisp's capacity for performance in its truest sense, and are read here not only as instances of drag, but of confrontations with mortality in which play with femininity has a critical role.

Baudrillard would propose old age to become, in the cultures of modernity, 'a marginal and ultimately asocial slice of life ... a ghetto, a reprieve', marker of the subject's 'slide into death' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.163). With increased life expectancy, those who could 'win' over death would 'cease to be symbolically acknowledged', and would find themselves sentenced 'to a forever receding death' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.163). Crisp closes *The Naked Civil Servant* in reflection upon the abjection of his life and his survival into old age; 'I stumble towards my grave confused and hurt and hungry ...' (Crisp, 1977a, p.217). Barrow observes how the last years of Crisp's life 'would be spent apparently longing to die' (Barrow, 2002, p.465), something evidenced in almost every interview he gave, but that there was in fact 'nothing new about Quentin's affection for the grim reaper' (Barrow, 2002, p.518). Baudrillard's claim of death making its insignia upon the aged figure has much resonance with the image of Crisp in his dotage, as the instances explored here indeed attest, as does the sense of 'forever receding' mortality. But Crisp had spoken of his awaiting death from the earliest days of his celebrity; as cited above, in Mitchell's documentary, he would insist on having 'done and said all I can do and say. I have come to the end of my personality ... if I want anything it is peace ... what I want in a way is death' (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970). It would however be thirty years coming. Though Baudrillard suggests the aged to become culturally abject, Crisp was indomitable in his seeking visibility. While it could not be said in any case that his was a solitary image of aging in mass culture, it was however rather unique in a gay culture so resolutely characterized by youth. Crisp was not just any 'old queen', but the very eldest of queens.

In one of the last interviews he gave, for the *Independent*, Crisp reflected on 'what he felt was his imminent death'; indeed, he was said to have been 'looking forward' to it (Usborne, 1999). His death had of course been 'imminent' for a long time, but his passing would come only weeks after the interview. While

the journalist describes Crisp as ‘the great gay icon of the Western world’, they remark also on how he was ‘left cold by gay politics’ (Usborne, 1999). Crisp refers to having recently received a ‘hate letter’, ‘saying I was a lonely and embittered old queen who was interested in nothing that meant anything to anyone else’ (Crisp quoted in Usborne, 1999). Citing that same letter, with some humour, in the documentary *The Significant Death of Quentin Crisp* (2000),¹⁷¹ he would claim that there was some truth to it. Where it is suggested to be difficult to ‘imagine any strong image of ‘gay’ that’s not young’, that it is impossible to ‘brand a gay identity without invoking youthful pleasures’ (Ledger, 2009), Crisp remains principal among the few examples of queer aging that have been given cultural representation. Writing a decade after Crisp’s death, the journalist Brent Ledger asked ‘Who wants to end up like Quentin Crisp?’, citing the recently screened *An Englishman in New York* ‘for further tawdry evidence’ of Crisp’s apparently abject loneliness in old age (Ledger, 2009). But Crisp’s most provocative claim on death would be his backing, in 1997, that the discovery of the ‘gay gene’ should give parents the choice of abortion, suggesting ‘that the world would be a happier place without homosexuals’ (quoted in Barrow, 2002, p.468).

Crisp would write the foreword to the second edition of Raymond M. Berger’s seminal *Gay and Gray: The Older Homosexual Man*, in which the author hoped to ‘suggest that older gay men [were not] the lonely and self-tortured lot described by earlier writers’ (Berger, 1996, p.1).¹⁷² Though Crisp does not feature elsewhere in the study, he was himself indeed the embodiment of the ‘lonely old queen’, and in his contribution, to a text that was intent on celebrating being older and gay, he would write as ever of his ‘waiting for death’, which he felt was taking ‘a hell of a time arriving’ (Crisp in Berger, 1996, xii). Crisp’s contribution to Berger’s text is cited by Nancy J. Knauer in her discussion of ‘accelerated aging’ – specifically his observation that ‘the days of wine and roses’ are past when ‘one can no longer be described as a boy’ – and the ‘individual’s self-assessment of his relative age’ in light of the fact that gay men are said to age earlier than their heterosexual peers (Knauer, 2011, pp.68-70). Crisp would speak of having lived too long – ‘I’ve outlived my wardrobe. I’m ready for death. I just won’t die’ (*World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970) – in echoes of Baudrillard’s consideration of ‘equality’ in death; ‘life must be reduced to quantity (and death therefore to nothing) in order to adjust it to democracy and the law of equivalences’

(Baudrillard, 1993, p.163). Crisp had indeed proposed a 'Ministry of Death' in his autobiography, which would impose a time limit – he suggests sixty years – and 'deal with the chore of exterminating old people' (Crisp, 1977a, p.211). *The Times* in their obituary would note Crisp's 'ambition to be murdered, as in America this was testimony to a person's fame' (*The Times*, 1999), and certainly Crisp had a distinct lack of sentimentality in talking of his own forever impending death; 'I don't want anyone to stand in the pouring rain around a hole in the earth while someone says how wonderful I was. I'd like to be put in one of those glossy trash bags and put in a trash can' (Usborne, 1999). Such discourse, however arch, would only reinforce the sense of solitude and despair that for many his figure, elderly and queer, embodied.

There are particular complexities in lending mortality and death visual representation that serve to contextualise the 'scenes' to be explored here. On the very phenomenology of death, Chris Townsend speaks of its 'non-representability' (Townsend, 2008, p.129), while Elisabeth Bronfen, in her study of how death and femininity 'are culturally positioned as the two enigmas of Western discourse', considers how each is 'used to represent that which is inexpressible, inscrutable, unmanageable, horrible; that which cannot be faced directly but must be controlled by virtues of social laws and art' (Bronfen, 1992, p.255). Certainly, where 'the dying, dead and decaying body has formed a compelling focus of Western European visual cultures' (Hallam, Hockey and Howarth, 1999, p.20), the very cultural constructions of corporeality can be traced. Crisp had long 'performed' death, in discourse, and in the examples to be explored below, but in *An Englishman in New York*, dealing as it does with his last years, director Richard Laxton had to find visual and narrative means that would be particular to a subject like Crisp for representing that final and *real* death. In the film, Hurt is said to reveal Crisp as 'both of his time and a relic, an adored showman and loveless loner' (Hattenstone, 2009). But most particularly, he is said to portray convincingly 'the cruelties of old age for a man who had prided himself on his youthful beauty – the shoes that pinch so tight he can't walk, the arthritis and the thinning, shoulder-length hair wrapped pitifully round his head to give the impression that age has not withered him' (Hattenstone, 2009). The abject corporeality of Hurt's Crisp was quite distinct from that played in *The Naked Civil Servant*, invested with a discernible sense of decay, the body

in which effeminacy was borne as gesture of an essential sense of self was now being 'undone' – Crisp's fashioning could not conceal the horrors of old age and mortality (figure 37). But Laxton did not wish to show Crisp dying 'on some musty bed in Manchester', concerned as he was about 'that 'get on with it' sense about deathbed scenes.' Instead, wanting 'to leave Quentin on a note of celebration' (Laxton quoted by Teeman, 2009), Crisp's death would be 'offscreen', the facts of how and where given only as titles as the film closes.

The images explored here are portraits of the deathly as feminine. Benjamin Noys, in *Culture of Death* (2005), writes of how 'the dead female body, or the female body exposed to death, has often been an object of aesthetic fascination' (Noys, 2005, p.61), while Bronfen, exploring the concept of the speculated woman, considers the aesthetic modes of repetition through which her death is given representation (1992, pp.255-256). Where Bronfen suggests there to be 'delight' in observing the death of the other, the feminine, it could be said that Crisp delighted in playing the death of himself in the role of woman. In the images of female impersonation explored here, each constructed to afford Crisp some greater embodiment of 'real' femininity than his own fashioning, each observing conventions established across visual cultures of the deathly and the dying female subject, his own death becomes ever closer. These are indeed moments in which Crisp performs death as much as he performs woman. Where Bronfen unravels the ideology behind the lyricism of Poe's provocative and much-cited claim that 'the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world', she considers the very body that Poe conjures, and the equation made between beauty and death (Bronfen, 1992, pp.59-75). There is indeed beauty in each of the representations explored here; in the regalia and costume of Elizabeth, in the Hollywood soft-focus of Garbo, in the fetishistic glamour of the fashion photograph. Each offers an embodiment of impending death 'dressed up', each is an endeavour to make Crisp as beautiful, and thus more feminine, as he is deathly. For Bronfen, such is the cultural imperative towards normative beauty that Poe's claim finds some defence;

By allowing that the point or topic of Poe's poetics may in fact be the articulation of a culturally prevalent aporic attitude to death, to feminine beauty and to art, his decision to conflate these three terms is less contradictory than initially supposed. Rather it points to another, equally

conventional set of cultural norms. For if any discussion of death involves masking the inevitability of human decomposition, it does so by having recourse to beauty. We invest in images of wholeness, purity and the immaculate owing to our fear of dissolution and decay (Bronfen, 1992, p.62).

The cultural constructs of beauty are intent on disproving the idea of the body's disintegration and decay; where Crisp in these images becomes actress, Hollywood star, and fashion model, each is embodiment of such resistance, composed for the close gaze of the mass audience in expectation of beauty's 'perfection'. But these portraits of the elderly Crisp do articulate something of the decay about him – it is made quite apparent beneath the artifice of feminine beauty he wears, the cosmetic and the corporeal made to contend, the 'old man' beneath the make-up and lighting always present. Drag's usual parodic spectacle – its 'hyperbolization' of gender (Tyler, 2003, p.102) – has often been read as a hostile appropriation of the feminine that only accents the phallic; 'the femininity of the female impersonation is a put-on, not the real thing, signalling that the impersonator has what women lack: the phallus' (Tyler, 2003, p.94). But where Bronfen suggests the real tragedy in Poe's claim to be the implicit death of the potentially maternal body (Bronfen, 1992, p.72), when played out by the drag performer, the death of the beautiful woman can have no ascendancy over the 'real' body of femininity that it imitates; there is little to mourn of the imitative body, and to whatever degree it might 'pass' as woman, it holds something of the grotesque.

In Nossiter's *Resident Alien*, interspersed with footage of Crisp's appearance at a meeting of the New York Senior Action in a Gay Environment group is his appearance on the television show *Sally Jessy Raphael* – an indicator indeed of the nature of Crisp's celebrity in America in his dotage.¹⁷³ The show offers an insight into elderly gay and lesbian lives; a member of the audience describes the seventy-nine year old Crisp, heavily made-up and dressed in his signature style, as 'ridiculous' and 'hideous'. Such ascription receives much applause from the audience, and offers a distressing image contrary to the absolute tolerance he claimed to experience in America, Crisp become a grotesque figure not simply because of the materiality of his effeminacy, but because it was given such vivid expression still in his dotage.

Once conceived as festive symbol of 'life and renewal', in modernity, the grotesque body would become 'offensive to bourgeois sensibilities' (Hallam, Hockey and Howarth, 1999, p.27).¹⁷⁴ Particularly in his performance as Elizabeth, given the relatively wide audience it received, Crisp would have to reckon again with such ascription. In her study of old age, disability and cinematic representation, addressing the difficulties and creative limitations imposed upon actresses 'of a certain age', Sally Chivers considers how such visual markers as grey hair and wrinkles are understood by audiences to signify the 'decay, decline and imminent death of characters (and sometimes actors)' (Chivers, 2011, xix). But Crisp's aged figure was far more corporeally uncompromising than anything Hollywood could produce, as the constructed images explored here attest. Aside from their differences in medium, these are not discrete examples of Crisp in performance, and nor are their imagos of deathliness and the feminine. They each disclose their subject's sense of the performative; in the conventions of impersonation, of acting and posing that are observed to various degrees in each, they are as much studies in being Crisp, the old and decaying queen, waiting for death, as they are studies in characterisation and drag.

The true queen: Crisp's Elizabeth

Crisp was in his eighties when Sally Potter asked him to play the role of Elizabeth I in her adaptation of Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando* (figures 38 and 39). Suggesting him to be 'the true queen of England' (Potter quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.210), Potter's casting and direction would implicate both Crisp's figure and his performance in contingent questions of nation and legacy – political and individual – questions enmeshed with the distinct immanence of death in both performer and subject. When Elizabeth is first glimpsed in *Orlando*, as she journeys in reginal splendour upon a river barge, it was Potter's symbolic intention that it was Crisp who was serenaded, 'welcoming him back to England' (Potter quoted in Ehrenstein, 1993, p.6). In her essay on Crisp's performance as Elizabeth, the black river upon which the queen travels is said by Katharina Sykora to symbolise her Lethe or Styx, 'where the course of her life comes to an end' (Sykora, 2006, p.337). The symbolism with which Potter invests that passage elicits immediate questions of the embodiment, in Crisp's aged figure, of

a confrontation with mortality that the role would only accent. Potter, however, does not employ any conventions of the death bed scene, but rather has Elizabeth die 'quietly' off-camera. Sykora considers how Crisp, as Elizabeth, 'lives on as a cinematic effigy' (Sykora, 2006, p.341), and in that role Crisp is himself afforded the kind of celluloid longevity he had long esteemed in the Hollywood actresses of his youth. And indeed that death, however symbolically told – it parallels the 'discreetness' with which Crisp's is itself portrayed in *An Englishman in New York* – can be watched time and again, with the death of Elizabeth spectral in the immanence of Crisp's own, his aged figure embodying for Potter its very nearness.

Writing in his last volume of autobiography, *Resident Alien: The New York Diaries* (1996), of his experiences of filming and what it meant to return to Britain, Crisp commences the episode in his typically arch prose; 'To hell and back ... I set out timorously for England' (Crisp, 1996, p.121).¹⁷⁵ Discerning the symbolic worth of the serenade he receives in the film's opening scenes, 'telling the world that I was 'the fairest queen'' (Crisp, 1996, p.123),¹⁷⁶ Crisp is attentive of Potter's motives in casting him in the role. While it was little more than a cameo with which to open the film, as Elizabeth is in Woolf's original text, and with few lines, the image of him in the role has proved enduring. There is much of Crisp's public persona invested in that performance, a fact acknowledged when Tilda Swinton, in the title role, addresses the camera, describing the Queen as a 'very interesting person' (*Orlando*, 1992).¹⁷⁷ Although Crisp was himself dismissive, as ever, of the film's 'arthouse' sensibilities, its being 'unabashed festival material' (Crisp, 1996, p.122), that performance is cited frequently as one of his most significant achievements, highlighted in the briefest of biographies and in obituaries, and with the image of him in the role ostensibly representative of his dotage. While *Orlando* receives still much academic attention and is part of the canon of 1990s queer cinema, its concerns did extend significantly beyond questions of gender; Stella Bruzzi cites Swinton's claim that gender politics had become secondary to 'more pressing questions of mortality' (Bruzzi, 1997, p.193), questions which the film was able to explore acutely in the figuration of Crisp/Elizabeth.¹⁷⁸ Indeed the film's linear narrative begins in fact with an ending; 'the Queen's existence in both body and image' (Sykora, 2006, p.337).

Where Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman note the iconicity of Elizabeth that cinematic representations have determined, from Sarah Bernhardt and Bette Davis to Glenda Jackson and Cate Blanchett, Crisp is afforded only a bracketed mention '(And this is to say nothing of her portrayal by Quentin Crisp in the movie *Orlando*)' (Doran and Freeman, 2003, p.1). What Doran and Freeman by chance underline, in reflecting on Elizabeth's portrayal by 'actresses', is the critical question of transvestite performance that was principal in Potter's casting. The artist Claude Perreault, in 2009, had no such dilemma in including Crisp amongst his portraits of those same actresses in the role. In considering the medium in which Perreault produced the series – in collages made from gay male pornography, with certain intent to engender discord with the constant image of the 'Virgin Queen' – Crisp's figure is perhaps the most resonant with the work's queer sensibility.¹⁷⁹ Becoming 'cinematic', Crisp was himself lent another dimension of iconicity; but even sat alongside such a 'real' star as Bette Davis, his is perhaps the most corporeally demanding of Elizabeth's re-embodiments, with none of the glamour or relative youth – Crisp was in fact at the time considerably older than Elizabeth was when she died – of those actresses that Doran and Freeman cite or that Perreault re-imagined. The uncompromising stress – visual and symbolic – that *Orlando* places on Crisp's agedness compounds the very queerness of that performance. The image of Crisp as Elizabeth was a quite singular representation of the aging 'queen' in every sense; as Renee Pigeon suggests in her essay "No Man's Elizabeth': The Virgin Queen in Recent Films' (2001). In Potter's casting of Crisp there are many overlapping masks; 'Crisp, the elderly 'queen', plays the elderly Queen Elizabeth, male masquerading as female in his performance as age masqueraded as youth in Elizabeth's public iconography in the latter years of her reign' (Pigeon, 2001, p.12).

In surveying the cultural 'afterlife' that Elizabeth has enjoyed, Michael Dobson and Nicola Watson (2002) reveal the metaphorical nature of her twentieth century representations – particularly of her body as that of England's. Elizabeth remains a queen 'still engaged in a posthumous progress through the collective psyche of her country' (Dobson and Watson, 2002, p.2), but in positioning Crisp's performance amongst Elizabeth's many and varied afterlives, in narratives literary and cinematic, that the immanence of death is as marked in

actor as it is in subject implicates Crisp's queen, under Potter's casting and direction, as determinedly auto/biographical. Sykora's essay on Crisp's role in *Orlando* is the most extensive enquiry into that performance, concerned with the film's imago of Elizabeth 'as the perfect personification of a hybrid gender and an opaque historicity' (Sykora, 2006, p.327). Sykora is focused upon the meanings that were very much outside of the film but which figured in Potter's representation of the Elizabethan body, and critical in this is an analysis of the effeminacy that defined Crisp's cultural figure, particularly as represented in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant*. Becoming Potter's 'true queen of England', the 'old queen' that Crisp embodied transfigured the gendered body of this historical but still defining figure of nation and empire, the essential themes of Woolf's novel, as Dobson and Watson observe (Sykora, 2002, pp.225-227). Sykora makes much astute relation between Crisp's own history as an 'iridescently gendered figure' (Sykora, 2006, p.328) and the body of Elizabeth that the film conceives. Describing Crisp's Elizabeth as possessing a 'static attitude', 'minimalist' in her actions, those opening scenes are said to cast the entire film as a metamorphosis without predestination; 'Elizabeth I alias Quentin Crisp marks at once both a beginning and an end, stillness and motion, death and rebirth' (Sykora, 2006, p.328). The Queen's 'two bodies' that many writers have discussed in their analyses of *Orlando* are of different dualities; Pigeon considers the two bodies of the queen that Woolf evokes, of 'the body politic and the body natural', the one commanding and authoritative still, the other 'the failing body of an elderly woman' (Pigeon, 2001, p.11). Crisp's performance meant many further dualities; such is the indivisibility of the queen's two bodies in the film of *Orlando*, Barbara Hodgdon suggests, in echoes of Potter, that after Crisp's enforced American exile, 'because of his flagrant visibility as a trademark queen', he was released from his refugee state only to find himself 'at the heart of British culture as the true Queen of England' (Hodgdon, 1998, p.167). In playing Elizabeth, Crisp wore the auto/biographical with monarchical authority.¹⁸⁰

Where the film proclaims 'its vested (and vestimentary) interest in the imitative, performative contingencies of sex and gender over Orlando's figure', Hodgdon suggests, so Crisp in the role of Elizabeth demands a similarly 'double reading' (Hodgdon, 1998, p.166). What Hodgdon observes as Crisp's 'high cultural visibility as a self-advertising effeminate homosexual, the Queen of

Queens', is said to bring 'a particular resonance to his performance and to the cultural erotics of the figure he represents' (Hodgdon, 1998, p.166). Where Swinton as Orlando is 'never authenticated as a man', Crisp is said to have 'some claim' to the feminine/effeminate 'as a male social and erotic political style' (Hodgdon, 1998, p.166). But where the film is said to repeatedly gesture Orlando's constructedness, the relation between Crisp and Elizabeth is read by Hodgdon as 'seamless': 'not only does he look the way Queen Elizabeth *should* look in old age, but the resemblance between the two is so striking that one looks *at* her rather than *through* to the sexed body beneath the clothes' (Hodgdon, 1998, p.166). While Crisp's Elizabeth was not meant to convince, in some ways the body he performed was persuasive. He was routinely implicated by Potter herself as personification of a certain 'idea of royalty', possessed of a particular 'stillness' and 'sense of beingness' that suited the role (Potter quoted in Jays, 2008).¹⁸¹ More particularly, she would suggest Crisp to look 'extraordinarily similar to portraits of Queen Elizabeth at the end of her life' (Potter quoted in Jays, 2008). Crisp's performance has been read as 'believable' (Straayer, 1996, p.75) as 'tender, dignified, [an] effective performance without a hint of mockery' (Dobson and Watson, 2002, p.253), and there is certainly beneficence in his portrayal of Elizabeth, particularly if compared, for example, with Bette Davis in the role. Where Crisp's performance is said to reveal the Queen's 'utterly constructed cultural status', his Elizabeth appears as 'an alluring found object or a fetish' (Hodgdon, 1998, p.166), in resonance of the very constructedness of his own self.

The very impression of 'Britishness' in Crisp's performance was influential upon the varied critical assessments that the film received. Responses to the casting of Crisp as Elizabeth, as Brenda R. Silver notes, ranged from 'inspired' to 'creepy', with many American reviewers attributing 'the cross-casting, if not the entire film, to what they see as the disturbing British tradition of male transvestism' (Silver, 1999, p.327, n.46). But the suggestion that Crisp's performance was in some way disturbing may well reflect upon the very corporeality of his agedness. Ulrike Ottinger's *Freak Orlando* (1981), an avant-garde portrayal of Woolf's protagonist, is read alongside Potter's adaptation by Silver. Distinct from Potter's 'playful, gender-bending androgyny', Ottinger's film is described as 'an unrelenting display of physiological freaks' – Siamese twins, a

double-headed woman – and she cites Mary Russo’s claim that it is only in having Crisp play Elizabeth that Potter ‘approaches the grotesque bodily representations’ that Ottinger explores (Russo, 1994, p.96, cited in Silver, 1999, p.231). If Crisp’s Elizabeth was a portrayal of the grotesque, then it was Crisp’s person, both queer and aged, that provided its fabric.

Silver explores Susan Stewart’s understanding of the ‘freak’, not as the product of nature but of culture (Silver, 1999, p.231), and there is much redolence of the queen’s two bodies in such definition. Hodgdon observes in Crisp/Elizabeth ‘a figure incapable of reproduction’ (Hodgdon, 1998, p.167), and where traditional gender roles were projected upon the Queen’s aging physical body, there is resonance of the ‘lonely old queen’ – the isolated gay man without familial companionship or support – whom Crisp, for some, embodied. Sykora considers how ‘the Queen’s body came to represent her unconsumated and now impossible biological reproduction’, which alone ‘represented a threat to the ruling political body’ (Sykora, 2006, p.336), while Potter’s casting of Crisp is said by Dobson and Watson to not only literalize Elizabeth’s ‘rhetoric about having the body of a weak and feeble woman but the heart and stomach of a king’, but is faithful to the source-novel’s origins as a response to Lytton Strachey’s *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* (1928), in which the Queen is ‘represented as an honorary male homosexual’ (Dobson and Watson, 2002, text accompanying plate 10).¹⁸² The body of Crisp/Elizabeth in *Orlando* presents a binary provocation of the normative sexual duties of their separate, biologically gendered bodies, and the ‘honorary’ homosexuality bestowed upon Elizabeth, that finds such literal embodiment in Crisp, is articulate in Potter’s film in the Queen’s desire for the young Orlando. Though Crisp had never himself experienced such a configuration of the pederastic relationship, Maggie Humm suggests – rather problematically – that being the ‘queen’ he is, he ‘would undoubtedly admire a young beautiful boy’ such as Orlando (Humm, 1997, p.166).

Orlando recites for Crisp/Elizabeth *The Bower of Bliss*, from Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*; ‘Ah, see the virgin rose sweetly she does first peep forth bashful modesty.’ Crisp/Elizabeth interjects; ‘Is this a worthy topic from one so clearly in the bloom of youth to one who would desire it still?’ (*Orlando*, 1992). Crisp/Elizabeth recognises the passing of the apparent virtues that the poem

illustrates; but, as Pigeon observes, in Potter's selection of Spenser it is 'not the flattering figure of Gloriana' that is recalled, but instead 'the dangerous figure of Acrasia, whose lust saps and ultimately destroys her lovers'. But more importantly it is the 'carpe florem' motif, with its accent on mortality, that 'focuses attention on Elizabeth's advanced age' (Pigeon, 2001, pp.12-13). It is with the command 'Do not fade. Do not wither. Do not *grow old*' (*Orlando*, 1992) that Elizabeth confers Orlando's immortality, his 'magic agelessness' (Dobson and Watson, 2002, p.226). With aging cast as misfortune in both the body and discourse of Crisp/Elizabeth, Orlando is freed 'from the fate Elizabeth herself has not been able to escape' (Pigeon, 2001, p.13); indeed, having given that directive, the Queen turns her gaze from Orlando and confronts the immanence of her own death that it holds – it is the film's last image of Crisp/Elizabeth, before the intertitle of DEATH. That command is not taken from Woolf's text however; as Potter acknowledges, immortality was granted Orlando by Woolf 'unconditionally', but Potter found the film in need of 'this little moment to launch us onto the path of immortality' (Potter quoted in Indiana, 1993, p.90). With Crisp in the role, that directive finds much nuanced meaning, particularly in light of the attendant physical intimacy between the Queen and Orlando. Where Humm reflects on the eroticism of the scene, in which the Queen, at repose in her private chambers, receives Orlando to her bosom, she suggests it to highlight 'the possibility of forging and reforging sexual preferences' (Humm, 1997, p.166). But Crisp's 'undoubtable' desire for the young, beautiful Orlando is at some contrast with the fluidity of the historic Queen's, who 'might have favoured both sexes' (Humm, 1997, p.166). With the declaration 'this is my victory' (*Orlando*, 1992), Crisp/Elizabeth clutches Tilda Swinton's Orlando to her aging body, in illustration of the bisexuality that Humm suggests of the historic Queen.¹⁸³ But that intimacy points also to the queer possibility of Orlando's figuration of a young gay man, and the 'prey' that he becomes before the aging 'queen'.¹⁸⁴

Orlando's youth contrasts starkly with the agedness of Crisp/Elizabeth – indeed it is that corporeal difference which really marks the Queen as 'grotesque'. Catherine Fowler observes the frequent close-up shots of Orlando in the film's opening scenes to contrast 'his innocent, youthful face' with that of the aging Queen's, emphasising how he is 'very much at [her] mercy' (Fowler, 2009, p.73).

Potter sought to offer some symbolic recompense for the discrimination that Crisp had so long endured – indeed such embodiment of supremacy and rule certainly echoes his will towards ‘dominion over others’, his ‘lust for tyranny’, that he writes of at the last of his autobiography as the consequence of a lifetime lived ‘constantly at the mercy of others’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.216) – but the trace of sexual authority that reflects the received impression of older gay men as erotically desirous of youth has little auto/biographical resonance. Humm’s claim as to Crisp’s erotic desires, in old age, being so knowable is highly tenuous. There are more demanding concerns as to the generationally different embodiments of gay male sexuality that the figures of Crisp/Elizabeth and Orlando represent; transcending their historical roles, one is pre-‘liberation’, the other post-, in resonance of the political gulf into which Crisp’s public figure had emerged with *The Naked Civil Servant* – Swinton’s Orlando fashioned indeed in ‘masculine’ contrast to Crisp’s made-up ‘queen’.¹⁸⁵

There is however an emphasis in the directions of Potter’s script for this scene upon the ‘sensual’ actions of the Queen, and indeed David Grant Moss, in his essay ‘A Queen for Whose Time? Elizabeth I as Icon for the Twentieth Century’, considers Crisp’s Elizabeth to be ‘overtly sexual’ (Moss, 2006, p.804). Pigeon observes in the popular image of Elizabeth in her final years the anxiety she feels in aging, a woman ‘unwilling to acknowledge the passing of time, still hungry for the insincere flattery of her young courtiers’, suggesting that it is indeed ‘this vain elderly queen’ whom Crisp portrays in *Orlando* (Pigeon, 2001, p.11). But the intimacy between Elizabeth and Orlando is more restrained in Woolf’s text, the Queen’s body ‘caparisoned in all sorts of brocades and gems’, ‘so worn and old’ (Woolf, 1993, pp.8-10). Indeed Woolf’s Elizabeth is portrayed as a maternal figure, Orlando being ‘the son of her old age; the limb of her infirmity; the oak tree on which she leant her degradation’ (Woolf, 1993, p.10). Where Sykora considers the association of the Elizabethan body with death, she suggests there to be a mimetic relation made by Woolf, between the figure that so objectifies Orlando with her gaze, as Potter and Crisp translate, and the Queen’s funeral effigy in Westminster Abbey. Following the death of a monarch, the wax figure held a metonymical function, ensuring the stability of sovereignty and power (Sykora, 2006, p.332).¹⁸⁶ Potter knew that Crisp could bring a sense of ‘stillness’ to the role, and his performance does have some invocation of that

waxen figure – it is not only in his agedness that he embodies the sense of Elizabeth's impending death. Bronfen draws parallel between the wax cast of the cadaver and the death-bed scene, observing the correspondence in their spectacularisation of the feminine (Bronfen, 1992, p.99). While *Orlando* did not observe any conventions of the cinematic death scene, but found metaphor in the body with which Crisp played Elizabeth, he would find the opportunity elsewhere to play the 'ultimate' death-bed scene, in reverence of the ultimate 'divine woman'.

The death of Garbo

In Nossiter's *Resident Alien*, filmed whilst at a photographic exhibition of Hollywood's classical actresses, Crisp stands before the image of Greta Garbo in recital of her greatness; 'she was a star even to other stars ... she cultivated her remoteness, keeping her face so still that it became an icon on which everybody in the world could plant their dream' (*Resident Alien*, 1991). What follows is Crisp at the cinema, before the opening credits of Garbo's breakout film, *Gosta Berling's Saga* (1924). In his attempt to mimic the face he so revered, the subsequent scene of Crisp, filmed in black and white, alone in film-set opulence, a room magnificent with candlelit chandeliers, sets him before his own mirrored reflection (figure 40). With affectation of Garbo's Swedish accent, Crisp gives his somewhat imprecise reading of her death scene in *Camille* (1936); 'perhaps it is better that I live only in your heart where the world cannot see me. If no-one can see me, nothing can stain our love' (*Resident Alien*, 1991).¹⁸⁷ The melancholic tenor is sustained in his reading from *Romance* (1930), a film, like *Camille*, with a 'fallen woman' storyline, and in which Garbo had also died, though not quite so melodramatically; 'so that is what love is to someone. To me love is only a little warmth in all this cold, a little light in all this darkness, a moment to lie still and forget' (*Resident Alien*, 1991). That short performance fades to an equally intimate scene, Nossiter's editing contrasting that glamour – that pinning of Crisp's dreams upon Garbo's face – with the very pedestrian domestic routine of his 'lonely old queen'; of Crisp in his New York room, gloomy in the light of a bare bulb, a decrepit figure who groans as he prepares a meal of baked beans at a small, grimy stove. While he invests his imitation of Garbo and portrait of

Hollywood romance as much with camp gesture as he does solemnity, the immanence of death in Crisp's performance elicits questions as to the allure for the drag performer of the cinematic death scene – of which *Camille* has long been regarded exemplary – and the complexities of eroticism so enmeshed in that 'close-up' of femininity confronting death, however performative, and its queering of the gaze.

In *Camille*, Cukor would adapt Alexandre Dumas fils' 1848 novel *La Dame aux Camelias*, with Garbo in the role of courtesan Marguerite Gautier; though, as Linda Hutcheon suggests, in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), the film 'traded on its star's glamour to allow the love story to overtake any social argument' (Hutcheon, 2006, p.149). It is the close-up in which Marguerite is shown dying that Crisp imitates, but the scene is interpreted not with Crisp in the arms of a leading man – there is no-one to take on Robert Taylor's role as Armand – but rather, his recital of love finding atonement only in death is given to his own reflection. Crisp's performance however invites less conjecture as to the narcissistic gaze, and implicates more the ever-present spectre of the 'great dark man', where that figure – or rather his discernibly present absence – reflects back Crisp's 'lonely old queen', facing up to death's proximity alone, and his particular understanding of the contrivances of Hollywood heterosexual romance are critical here. Daniel Harris writes of *Camille* as a masterpiece of the choreographed kiss, with Garbo experiencing 'ominous bouts of consumptive hacking', falling frequently into Taylor's 'manly arms, collapsing into a boneless swoon ... while her lover hovers above her, revelling in her passivity' (Harris, 2001, pp.82-83). Alexander Doty however, in *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (1993), suggests *Camille* to contain 'moments where actors and the construction of the gaze work together to create queer spaces within an apparently straight narrative' (Doty, 1993, p.33). Where Marguerite and Armand are each, in their own ways, 'plagued by disease', desire is marked in *Camille* as 'tainted and unhealthy' (Doty, 1993, p.33). While the film is said to 'wring every bit of sympathy and eroticism from the story', the phallogocentric narrative would still demand 'that Marguerite's and Armand's forbidden passion end as a *Liebestod*' (Doty, 1993, p.33). The notion of romantic love being consummated only in death elicits Crisp's most melodramatic of poses, a romanticisation of the death of the whore, a figure of femininity he had once emulated; indeed he would write of his

'dream' in early life of becoming a 'cleaned-up odalisque' (Crisp, 1977a, p.53). But where those last words of Garbo's Marguerite are given in heteronormative exchange, they become a monologue in Crisp's performance, and the immorality and tainted desires of which he speaks – desires that he would suggest had tainted his own life – effect his dying alone.

Garbo was adept herself at drag, in films such as *Queen Christina* (1933), and in her seminal study Esther Newton would describe her as a figure of 'high camp' amongst the drag fraternity (Newton, 1979, p.108). In his essay 'Where Have All the Sissies Gone?', in which he had so precisely observed Crisp's embodiment of the effeminacy which so antagonised the 'new' gay masculinity of the 1970s, Kleinberg considers the idol that Garbo was for 'queens' like Crisp, and the 'ambiguous and amoral sexuality' that she embodied (Kleinberg, 1982, p.199). In *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (2002), Rosi Braidotti considers *Camille*, and the original text, to embody 'the excesses and the virtues' of a desire that is 'predicated on the ill and the decaying body of the 'femme fatale' whose sinfulness and delights turn into the living symbols of the *fleurs du mal* and the perverse *jouissance* they engender' (Braidotti, 2002, p.99). In his impersonation, indivisible from Crisp's rapture in Garbo's image is a sense of pleasure in his own decaying body. Doty claims a queer audience to find *Camille's* ending so emotive because of its 'shifting masochistic identification with both Marguerite's ecstatic death-in-love and the beginnings of Armand's necrophiliac erotic obsession' (Doty, 1993, p.34). In so empathic a gaze, Doty writes, 'not very empowering tears of romanticized self-pity were shed over what queers on- and offscreen supposed was the inevitably tragic fate of 'sick' and forbidden desires' (Doty, 1993, p.34).¹⁸⁸ If Crisp's recital of that scene was articulate of such identification, the reflection of his own approaching death was spectral with the sense of 'self-loathing' that troubled so many of his critics. To romanticise desire being unfulfilled – the deserved death of the whore and of the queer – was provocation again of the current political agenda.

Margaret Gibson, in her essay 'Death scenes: ethics of the face and cinematic deaths' (2001), considers the cinematic death scene as mediation of the immanence and alterity of death, in an analysis that places a particular stress on the close-up. Exploring how death is most marked on the face – made most visible there – she cites Lingis; 'To look upon faces is always to sense this death

that is latent, visible in the frail freshness of youth, the wrinkles of age' (Lingis, 1994, cited in Gibson, 2001, p.306). Crisp's performance was as much in remembrance of youth as it was in veneration of Garbo; he was in his eighties, imitating an actress of thirty-five – who was herself playing a woman of twenty-three. Where Gibson considers film as a technology that 'brings scenes of dying-towards-death into the sphere of visual representation', the death scene is outlined as that moment in which mortality is faced as 'an irreversible proximity' (Gibson, 2001, pp.306-307). The sense of death's proximity, the very measure of its closeness, is evidenced in each of the images explored here; but even behind the soft-focus of his Garbo impersonation, Crisp's agedness is apparent still, a greater embodiment of his own proximity to death than Garbo's ever could be in *Camille*. Where Patrick Fuery considers the filmic body and its spectacular nature, he writes how the close-up of luminous skin and its signification of feminine beauty – citing the example of Garbo in *Camille* – is 'a form of film spectacle which demands so much of the body that it is tortured', being 'too pale, too smooth, too readily demonstrative of pain' (Fuery, 2000, pp.83-84). That skin is at once resistant though, becoming 'more than human skin', and a lone sign of 'both the tortures of feminine beauty as well as a resistance to it' (Fuery, 2000, p.84). Crisp lent a sense of such 'torture', at least in camp gesture, to the spectacle of dying beauty that he imitated, observant of the dramatic conventions of suffering and longing that must precipitate the death scene of the classical Hollywood actress of his youth.

In his essay 'The Face of Garbo', Barthes would write that she belonged to a moment in cinema when the face in close-up could still thrust an audience 'into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced' (Barthes, 2000a, p.56). The 'mask' that was Garbo's face, with eyes like 'two faintly tremulous wounds', is said by Barthes to be 'almost sexually undefined, without however leaving one in doubt' (Barthes, 2000a, p.56). Crisp would write of aspiring to some essence of the 'divine' femininity that Garbo embodied. His impersonation however was again not to convince, but to venerate – and particularly her capacity for the melodramatic. There was some endeavour in Crisp's performance to translate what Barthes describes as Garbo's 'lyricism of Woman', a quality said to

transcend the material, to exceed the 'clarity of the flesh as essence' (Barthes, 2000a, p.57). In imitating that death scene, Crisp fastened a dream of romantic, 'feminine', and beautiful death upon the face of Garbo. The very temporality of death in cinematic representation – that is the very process of 'dying-towards-death' that Gibson considers – is most classically embodied in the close-up. With an understanding of the face as 'the privileged site of unique selfhood and self-expression ... where character is formed, performed, and where it fades and disappears', Gibson underlines how, in representing death, the face becomes itself the scene 'for the figuring of tragedy, loss and sometimes transcendence' (Gibson, 2001, p.307). In his biography of Garbo, Barry Paris considers *Camille* to contain 'what is perhaps the most memorable death on-screen' (Paris, 1995, p.334). While Garbo died in several of her films, Paris writes, 'only in *Camille* did she have the protracted death scene beloved of all actresses – executed in an aura of sublime and ravishing tranquility' (Paris, 1995, p.334). Where Townsend, Bronfen, and Hallam, Hockey and Howarth have each considered, above, the complexities of representing the phenomenology of death, Gibson looks at how cinema constructs 'the subjective process of dying, however impossible it is to imagine and experientially be in the place of the other, as something which can be acted out and visually represented', and suggests the death scene to be 'the fictional performance of the impossible *real* of death' (Gibson, 2001, p.316).

Parallel is often drawn between Garbo's ill health during the filming of *Camille* and her tubercular character, as indeed Paris does, and it is cited also as being critical to the accomplishment of that performance. In his biography of Garbo, Hugo Vickers writes that Cukor 'admired the understated way in which she conveyed her tuberculosis on the screen, not with great coughs and splutters, but a sudden loss of breath' (Vickers, 1994, p.53). But where the 'lyricism of Woman' was indeed present in that death scene, Garbo observed not the corporeality of pain and suffering in the ever-narrowing proximity of death, but the cinematic conventions of femininity and its preservation. It was not that Garbo made the death of Marguerite convincing – it was not for this that she was so applauded – but rather her capacity to maintain that 'divine' image of Hollywood femininity, even in dying. In performing the death of the beautiful woman, whatever the medium, there is always a spectral gaze – but the cinematic gaze is particularly intimate. As Gibson suggests, 'the face of women who face their

death, *the way of death* for women, and the bodies of dead women are compounded by the voyeurism of film itself' (Gibson, 2001, p.309). It was through Crisp's own voyeuristic gaze that he learnt how to imitate the glamorous pose of Garbo's death scene. Death has been 'practised through representation, scripted and rehearsed through performance' (Gibson, 2001, p.308), in cinema particularly, determining a vernacular that draws the imitative gaze – a lexicon of performativity to parallel that of rehearsed and rehearsable femininity, that is the 'canon' that petitions the drag reading. The two are indeed seamed in Garbo's performance, and Crisp's is not the only drag interpretation of that conjuncture that needs to be considered.

In considering Charles Ludlam's performance of *Camille*, in his 1973 Ridiculous Theatrical Company production, played with certain allusion to Garbo in the role, Kate Davy suggests that Ludlam 'conjured a credible representation of a woman despite clearly visible evidence to the contrary' (Davy, 1994, p.117). Such female impersonation, Davy suggests, negotiates 'a position somewhere between a Brechtian presentation of the character and an illusionistic portrayal', a position resonant with the Barthesian binary of mimicry/signification in which the feminine is offered as translation and not transgression (Davy, 1994, p.117). And with a male actor in the role of Armand Duval (Bill Vehr), the physical traits of masculinity which Ludlam did not conceal allowed the production to make manifest a queer desire. In his performance, Crisp found only his own narcissistic reflection, in which the closing proximity of death is faced alone.

In *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (2005), Kirsten Pullen considers how *La Dame aux Camelias* exemplified the fallen-woman narratives so popular in nineteenth century theatre and literature, in which the prostitute heroine would sacrifice herself for another's happiness – most typically a man's – and dies tragically. The many actresses who have played Marguerite, Pullen writes, 'have vied for the most convincing, erotic, and romantic death scene', with Marguerite's enduring 'story of sacrifice and sensuality' having become 'a pervasive popular-culture representation of the prostitute', a figure initially superficial and avaricious, but in whom 'true love brings out her best instincts and she dies rather than continue to pollute her family, friends, and lovers' (Pullen, 2005, p.11). Such narratives hold much melodramatic potential, and Crisp's observance of the speculated woman in such cinematic representations allowed

him to play something of the tragedian; playing the 'lonely old queen' before his own narcissistic reflection only accents the tenor of tragedy about Garbo's Marguerite that he imitates. Where Michael Moon looks at the practices of queer imitation and performance, he writes of Ludlam having first seen *Camille* as a 'life-altering' experience (Moon, 1998, p.167), and cites his reflections of 'becoming' the dying Marguerite himself; 'When the audience laughed at my pain, the play seemed more tragic to me than when they took it seriously' (Ludlam quoted in Moon, 1998, p.169). Moon suggests that in the long performance tradition of *Camille* the trope 'of the audience's mistaking tragedy for comedy or vice versa, or of the author or actor's wilfully combining or confusing the two, is a constant in Western theories of spectatorship, authorship, and performance' (Moon, 1998, p.169). But even in his camp gesturing, Crisp's imitation of the dying Garbo appears entirely sincere and earnest, and given the editing of Nossiter's documentary, specifically the scene of Crisp in his room that follows the fantasy of Garbo he plays out, there is little comedy to be observed, the melancholy of his imitation only amplified.

Vickers cites Cukor on the inference of eroticism in Garbo's performance; 'She didn't touch Armand, but she kissed him all over his face. That's how you create eroticism. It's the uncensored thought the actor flashes to the audience ... she could let them know she was thinking things, and thinking them uncensored' (Cukor quoted in Vickers, 1994, p.53). Paris writes that *Camille* would demonstrate how the restrictions of the Hays Code 'could be made to work to an intelligent performer's and director's advantage' (Paris, 1995, p.335), suggesting that the narrative and Garbo's performance functioned on two sexual levels; 'The obvious one was in the depiction of the demimonde (excused by virtue of the play's literary status); the second was Garbo's 'highly pitched emotional vibrato' that broke through her sophistication ... to provide an added erotic dimension' (Paris, 1995, p.335). While there is such an implication of eroticism in Crisp's imitation, in gesture and speech, it has to be asked how his performance, had it featured a leading man – if Crisp had played out that death scene in the embrace of Armand – could be read. Where there was a *very* queer intimacy between Crisp's Elizabeth and Orlando, who would have been suitable, in the mimicry of *Camille*'s eroticism, to play opposite his aged, dying Garbo? Paris considers the role of Marguerite as the 'ultimate challenge for all actresses' (Paris, 1995,

p.329), and writes that the usually highly self-critical Garbo was herself impressed by her performance of the death scene (Paris, 1995, p.334). He considers *Camille* to be Garbo's only 'classic', 'her most enduring gift to film, unequalled in the range it allowed her to express' (Paris, 1995, p.335). While the same could not be said of Crisp's interpretation, in his mirrored reflection as Garbo he watches himself dying, a pose as gothic as it is narcissistic, Crisp the performer indulging a sense of femininity that could be most fully realised in the melodramatic conventions of the Hollywood death-bed scene.

The model of death

The year before Crisp's death he posed for a fashion editorial in the British magazine *Scene*, with certain of his aphorisms accompanying Andrew Macpherson's black and white photography. While each of Macpherson's images accents the corporeality of Crisp's age, a double-page profile shot offers a particularly remarkable portrait of Crisp at his most glamorous and most deathlike, in make-up more gothic than he could have himself ever designed (figure 41). Where Baudrillard considers the erotics of death evident in the consumer cultures of modernity, with fashion perhaps its most pervasive medium, he writes of the cosmeticised mouth that 'no longer speaks, its beatified lips, half open, half closed' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.103). Styled with an artifice that has much resonance with Crisp's history of gender 'anarchism' – with the spun-sugar hair of his dotage in clear demarcation from the wild Pompadour artifice that billows behind, with eyes closed and lips parted beneath the heavy noir of his make-up, echoing at once the sensorial bondage of his own cosmeticised effeminacy and the mannered eroticism of the archetypal fashion pose – Macpherson's close-up of Crisp holds binary meaning. At once the immanence of death is lent glamour, and its proximity in real terms is made ever more resonant.

The 'irreversible proximity' of death that Gibson traces in the cinematic close-up (Gibson, 2001, pp.306-307) finds valid application here, but particularly in light of the media, though very different, in which that portrait is presented. Even in the contexts of fashion photography in the 1990s – summed up by Caroline Evans in her survey of fashion's recent preoccupation with decay, alienation and trauma, as a period in which the work of a certain avant-garde in

fashion design, photography and styling 'was pervaded by explicit references to death' (Evans, 2003, p.223) – that image is remarkable in featuring so aged a 'model'. 'Fashion' is in one sense immaterial here, yet has critical significance in another. It is debatable that Crisp would lend commercial endorsement to the Vivienne Westwood womenswear (and lone example of menswear) that he modelled – indeed his denouncement of the fashion magazine's didacticism is amongst those aphorisms cited; 'Style, of course, is not a question of fashion. Fashion is instead of style. When you don't know who you are, then you consult a glossy magazine' (Crisp quoted in Macpherson, 1998, p.52). But it is inquiry into the very media he censures that lends persuasive context to Crisp's embodiment of death and decay; whatever fashion photography's preoccupation with the macabre and the abject, the fashion magazine is a site in which youth has quite immutable ascendancy, and in such contexts Macpherson's portrait of Crisp seems decidedly daring.

The 1990s has proven to be a pivotal decade in the progression of fashion photography (Shinkle, 2008a, p.5), if only for giving direction towards 'realism' and the abject (Shinkle, 2008b, pp.214-5).¹⁸⁹ Where fashion imagery in recent years has freed itself from pursuing, and defining, ideals of beauty, it has become, Eugénie Shinkle suggests, 'a platform for the exploration of the grotesque and the disturbing' (Sinkle, 2008b, p.221).¹⁹⁰ Crisp's figuration of Elizabeth in *Orlando* was read as grotesque in reference to the corporeality of his agedness, and Sykora's suggestion that that imago held some intimation of the Elizabethan effigy finds some application in reading Macpherson's portrait. Evans points out a trend in fashion imagery in the 1990s in which the cosmeticised face was made to resemble the death mask (Evans, 2003, p.183), and certainly the image of Crisp here has such an effect.¹⁹¹

Exploring celebrity and the corpse – that is the pornographic fascination in contemporary culture with the dead celebrity body – Jacque Lynn Foltyn writes of contemporary fashion magazines and their 'eroticized tableaux of "cadavers" modelling clothing', in what she phrases as 'corpse chic' (Foltyn, 2008, p.165). But however fundamentally the fashion image and its referents might shift in redolence of the society and culture in which they are composed, the conventions of the fashion pose do in many ways remain a constant. Evans considers Benjamin's much-cited definition of fashion as 'woman', her embodiment of

deathliness, and the inflection of horror within that edifice of beauty; 'fashion was never anything but the parody of the gaily decked-out corpse, the provocation of death through the woman, and ... the bitter, whispered *tête-à-tête* with decay' (Benjamin cited in Evans, 2003, p.136). It is as much in movement as in stillness that the cinematic image portrays so evocatively 'dying towards death', but the very stasis of the fashion photograph elicits an intimate gaze under which decay becomes more nuanced – every line and crease of Crisp's fleshly decline is accented in the starkness of Macpherson's black and white photography. Crisp did indeed reject 'fashion' in its narrowest sense, and his pose, in a magazine that features upon its cover some of the most recognisable 'supermodels' of the time – Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Amber Valetta, each influential in defining the cultural mores of beauty at that time – lends quite literal figuration to Benjamin's thesis. Just as 'the posing body is always, necessarily, a situated body', made materially relative (Shinkle, 2008b, p.219), so Crisp's figure has to be read in relation to the 'real' model of fashion media and their embodiment of youth.

Suggesting fashion's turn to 'darkness' to reveal 'the melancholy death's head beneath the skin', Evans contrasts the trend towards the abject with the emphasis that the more moderate 'glossy' fashion media placed upon the healthy body, the body that could 'deny the pain of loss and ... hold death and decay at bay' (Evans, 2003, p.223). These would co-exist, 'like the paired figures of the living and the dead in the medieval Dance of Death – one celebratory, and life-affirming, the other inexorably signalling its opposite' (Evans, 2003, p.223), not only across different fashion media, but within the pages of a single magazine, and certainly the example of *Scene* illustrates this. But the possibility of 'loss' alludes to the very real threat of mortal disease at this time; in her analysis Evans alludes to Kristeva's suggestion that images of bodily decay and distress in the late-twentieth century were made in response to the HIV and Aids epidemic (Evans, 2003, p.236). But where the 'well' body – the muscular physique and the physically powerful that held decay at bay, prominent particularly in fashion advertising and the work of photographers such as Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts – can be read as refusal of the threat that disease posed, its 'other' was manifest of the realities of bodies in crisis. Crisp would reach old age at a time when disease and its devastation became defining of a generation's experiences of sexual

emancipation. Where *An Englishman in New York* makes central the issue of Crisp's response to Aids, as a 'fad', the threat of violence his remarks elicit is negated only because of his agedness; Crisp would insist that his sex life now existed only in the past, his aged figure thus saved from the crisis. In Macpherson's images of Crisp there is provocation of the collective body of a generation, his aged figure not only a 'survivor', but 'gaily decked-out' in accent upon this further gulf between them.¹⁹²

Being a practice that defines a world of appearances, invested in the illusory for both commercial and artistic sake, the matter of 'realism' in fashion photography elicits contrary questions. While the *Scene* editorial is studio shot and lit, it does in many ways correspond with the trend towards 'realism' in 1990s fashion photography, principally in its candid accent on corporeality – its realist ambitions marked in the flaws of its glamour, the 'imperfect' make-up that makes no attempt to veil Crisp's aging. Olivier Zahm considers the 'vampiric' nature of fashion photography (Zahm, 2007, p.266), that is its thematic and artistic appropriative tendencies, in which very little falls beneath its radar; where suggestions of death became pervasive in fashion photography in the decade, Macpherson's editorial is quite singular in that it seized upon the 'real' deathly body as opposed to the imagined or staged, and was soon enough a portrait of the deceased. With the simple title of 'Quentin', the editorial is indeed a 'portrait' of Crisp. Portraiture has long been a component of fashion photographic practice, as Shinkle observes (Shinkle, 2008a, p.2), and is often subject to appropriation quite apart from its original contexts, the faces it has 'made' finding 'iconic' status.¹⁹³ But where the 'star' fashion editorial is very much an arranged marriage, designed most primarily to enhance the subject's celebrity (Shinkle, 2008a, p.9), Macpherson's portrait of Crisp is articulate of a fascination in his agedness, with every fleshly detail captured. Evans considers how fashion's recent exploration of its 'dark side' is a purposeful reversal of its emphasis on bodily ideals. The conventions that fashion imagery has long observed are said to be 'only half the picture', with designers and photographers drawn more recently 'to the negated or neglected other side, be it cultural otherness or death'; where 'glamour masks decay', the latter is said to return 'as the repressed of the former' (Evans, 2003, p.227). Though recent fashion photography might well have glamourised death, read in such contexts the portrait of Crisp underlines a

binary between nature and violence; fashion photography has not typically offered the image of someone of such old age, for whom death is in close proximity – has become phenomenological confrontation – but rather its images of death and the dying subject have, as a rule, been of the ‘victim’, of violence in enactment or already past. Death in fashion photography is rarely so ‘natural’ a phenomenon, and the ‘dying-towards-death’ subject is seldom defensible.¹⁹⁴ While old age could be given as example of the cultural otherness that Evans alludes to, it is rarely evidenced in fashion imagery, however avant-garde.¹⁹⁵ Decay is the ‘corollary of youthful perfection’ (Evans, 2003, p.228), and being ‘gaily decked out’ as Crisp is only accents death’s proximity. Images of youth suggest the future, what lies beyond and ahead of the image; in Macpherson’s portrait of Crisp, it is quite impossible not to read the immanence of death in the body he displays, the proximity that the subject must *feel*.

Where Shinkle addresses the visceral dimension of reading the fashion photograph, she considers the affective responses elicited, those which are consequence of the experiential but remain present beneath the level of conscious awareness, and which structurally focused critical methodologies cannot but neglect (Shinkle, 2008b, p.215). Beyond the material contexts of the fashion image and the fictions it weaves, there are fundamental questions around the reading of the photograph and the aging subject that have to be recognised here. In his essay ‘Photography and Fetish’, Christian Metz employs a Barthesian methodology in considering how photography ‘is the mirror, more faithful than any actual mirror, in which we witness at every age, our own aging’ (Metz, 2003, p.140). Macpherson’s images however were not meant as ‘snapshots’ of Crisp, upon which he might himself reflect, as though it were any ‘domestic’ photograph, in temporal relativity, but were precisely choreographed portraits of his aged queerness. It is their particular stillness though that suggests the real immanence of death, and it is with inquiry into the consequence of immobility and silence upon photographic ‘authority’ that Metz analyses the relationship between photography and death. Suggesting that immobility and silence ‘are not only two objective aspects of death’, he considers how they ‘are also its main symbols, they *figure* it’ (Metz, 2003, p.140). Observing ‘real death’ as an everyday phenomenon, ‘as each day we draw nearer to our own death’, Metz considers how that moment in which the subject is photographed, ‘that moment when she

or he was', is forever lost; 'the person who *has been photographed* – not the total person, who is an effect of time – is dead' (Metz, 2003, p.140). Perhaps more than any other example of visual media however, in its ephemerality, the fashion photograph frames the subject fast in that moment, in its calculated pose. For Shinkle, the conventional fashion pose attempts 'to conceal or disavow the model's physical body', with the 'real' framed as other, as exterior, 'an unruly quality that representation can't quite come to terms with' (Shinkle, 2008b, p.216). While there is an imago of glamour in Macpherson's portrait of Crisp, his real body, unruly in its agedness, is very much present.

Shinkle relates to contemporary fashion photography the concept, also Barthesian, of 'making' oneself into an image, of 'becoming' an object before the camera, (Shinkle, 2008b, p.218).¹⁹⁶ The contexts of Crisp the model do find resonance here, and certainly he would know how to pose, indeed 'become', before the camera.¹⁹⁷ The essence of the fashion pose, Shinkle suggests, is its very difference 'from the gestural repertoire of real, situated bodies' (Shinkle, 2008b, p.219). While the fashion pose must signify 'fashion' more than anything else, such self-referentiality makes it difficult to read – in any conventional way – the body that it portrays (Shinkle, 2008b, p.219). Evans considers whether, in the 1990s, 'the imagery of death, decay and dereliction came to stand for mutability more than for mortality', tracing what was a vast landscape of change, of 'instability and uncertainty that had more to do with rapid technological and social transition than with death itself' (Evans, 2003, p.10). In Macpherson's portrait, Crisp's body is articulate not only of death's immanence, but of a much changed queer sensibility; he was, symbolically at least, the last of his 'kind'. Where the fashion image is said to have a 'structural affinity with the *memento mori*' (Evans, 2003, p.223), Macpherson's portrait is, if only symbolically, a 'last' image of Crisp, at once unexpected and predictable, invested with a radical queerness and a well-rehearsed sense of the auto/biographical.

CONCLUSION

The extraordinary body that Crisp fashioned is resonant in Eakin's exploration of narrative identity and its fashioning; where Eakin considers how narratives of the self are 'shaped by our lives in and as bodies' (Eakin, 2008, x), this thesis has been able to reflect on the very *voice* with which Crisp fashioned the body of his past – and how that same voice was present in the film adaptation of his autobiography, as well as the media discourse that allowed him to further dissect the image of his own construction. Where Eakin proposes there to be 'a link between literary and bodily narratives ... that self inheres in a narrative of some kind' (Eakin, 2008, xi-xii), questions elicit as to the body of the writer that Crisp has 'become' in the decade since his death, of the canon of gay auto/biography and the stature of *The Naked Civil Servant*. Crisp's inclusion in Robinson's survey (1999), alongside the likes of Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, Jean Genet, and Paul Monette, suggests something of its significance, and certainly *The Naked Civil Servant* has remained in print since the broadcast of its film adaptation, published most recently as part of Harper Perennial's 'Stranger than Fiction' series (2007). In Jeffrey Hartgraves's play *Carved in Stone* (2002), Crisp is featured amongst other literary figures from gay history – given an 'afterlife' alongside Oscar Wilde, Tennessee Williams, and Truman Capote. In 2010 however, when petitioned to give tribute to Crisp, at his former Beaufort Street home, the committee for English Heritage's 'blue plaque' scheme, that gives commemoration to distinguished writers, artists and other public figures and the places in which they lived and worked, suggested that it was still 'too soon to make an accurate assessment of his lasting importance' (Hastings, 2010). Though Crisp was afforded far greater cultural representation than any of the other writers mentioned here, following the film adaptation of his autobiography, he occupies a precarious historical position, his literary merit often overlooked in any mention of him in today's media, which describes him variously as a 'cult' figure and 'gay icon'.

In looking at the auto/biographical text that is translated from the page to the screen, whether for cinema or television – though there is of course important distinction to be made here – Smith and Watson ask whether 'the form shifts to an autobiographical hybrid or becomes a biopic' (Smith and

Watson, 2010, p.182). The film of *The Naked Civil Servant* has been explored in this thesis as an example of the biopic genre, but the 'hybrid' that Smith and Watson suggest is certainly germane in regards to that narrative, considering how closely Crisp's writings were observed. In making Crisp's 'voice' so apparent, Hurt's characterisation was afforded a cerebral poise that revealed, for an audience willing to see beneath the 'frills' of the effeminacy he fashioned, not only the political militancy with which it was worn, but that any suggestion of 'effeteness', as embodied in other 'camp' figures who were 'on the telly' in the 1970s – actor John Inman and gameshow host Larry Grayson, for instance – was questionable. The 1970s has been subject recently to many 'populist' histories, and just how representative Crisp's figure was of gay identity in the later part of the decade is evident in many of these. In Brian Viner's *Nice to See It, To See It, Nice: The 1970s in front of the telly* (2009), his first chapter is titled 'Me, My Dad, the Sundance Kid, Quentin Crisp, and Mother Made Five ...' Here Viner recalls how his parents' had allowed him to watch only the first half hour of the film, being 'pretty racy stuff for 1975' (Viner, 2009, p.9). In Alwyn W. Turner's *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (2008), Crisp is said to be an 'exception' amongst those gay men who were afforded cultural visibility through the decade; 'Here, for the first time, was a depiction of a gay man that made no concessions to orthodox sensibilities, that refused to countenance apology' (Turner, 2008, p.244).¹⁹⁸

Robinson contrasts Crisp's autobiography with J. R. Ackerley's *My Father and Myself*, published posthumously, but in the same year as *The Naked Civil Servant*, and which explores the same historical period – with both writers taking 'advantage of the more permissive atmosphere of the 1960s to tell their stories with considerable sexual candor' (Robinson, 1999, p.115). The two however inhabited very different worlds, Ackerley part of 'the intellectual and social milieu of Isherwood and Spender', and Crisp a bohemian, 'living on the margins of society' (Robinson, 1999, pp.15-16). What is most significant for Robinson's reading though is the disparity between the gender identities they embraced, with Ackerley being 'the quintessential invisible homosexual, self-consciously masculine, whose erotic interests were confined to other equally masculine, indeed preferably "normal" (i.e., heterosexual), men' (Robinson, 1999, p.117). It was however Crisp's life that became the subject of mass-

media representation, and in 1970s Britain it would lend perhaps the most convincing image to the public conception of gay sexuality.¹⁹⁹ While Crisp would insist that his was not a political body, but an expression of individualism, the sympathy with which the narratives of his life were mostly received invested his figure with political gain, however compromised it might have been for those within the gay 'cause'.

Though theatrical projects like Robert Pacitti's play *Civil* (2008) evoke the political impact of Crisp's figure in the 1970s, the narratives that gave him representation have rarely offered more than anecdote in academic studies of gay lives and histories. The vivid realisation of his defiant figure in the film of *The Naked Civil Servant* has however seen several queer academics, like Maddison (2002), cited earlier, give candid reminiscence of their own empathy with the text. The film's broadcast was for many young gay men the first open portrayal of a queer life they had seen. In his autobiographical essay 'One queen and his screen' (2009), Andy Medhurst writes of seeing the film as a teenager, happily 'home alone';

I sat about six inches from the screen with one finger on the 'off' button, drinking in every second as if my life depended on it ... Miraculously, the parental key wasn't turned in the lock until ten minutes after the film had ended ... *The Naked Civil Servant* did not 'turn me into' a homosexual (at 16, I had long been sure that I never had been or would be anything else), but its celebration of Quentin Crisp's unrepentant queenliness filled me with an elated, vertiginous sense of identification, belonging and defiant pride. His loneliness, lovelessness and the scorn and violence poured upon him were elements I either edited out or accepted as the price that lipsticked pioneers must pay. Although the film was set in the past, I had seen the future – and it minced (Medhurst, 2009, p.82).

But Crisp was not an entirely singular figure – he was not the only gay man in 1920s and 30s London to make manifest an essentialist identification with effeminacy. As one journalist would suggest after his death, 'Crisp was his own historian, and one part of his own story was that he lived through his protracted persecution alone. He simply did not. Many gay men were beaten up, killed even. And, like Crisp, many lived openly homosexual lives' (Parkes, 2000). Where Smith and Watson consider the self-reflexivity that is particular to

autobiographical subjectivity, they propose narrators to ‘become readers of their experiential histories, bringing discursive schema that are culturally available to them to bear on what has happened’ (Smith and Watson, 2010, pp.26-27). Crisp was aware of himself as being ‘horribly articulate’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.176), and being as egocentric as he was exhibitionist, he indeed had a gift for autobiography – for building narratives around the body he had fashioned. But relation has often been made between that body and what is understood to be Crisp’s ‘self-loathing’; for his critics, he wore his martyrdom as spectacle, one journalist suggesting that he would be remembered most for his ‘self-disdain’, particularly as it ‘shaped not just how he saw himself, but how he saw all homosexuals’ (Parkes, 2000).²⁰⁰

It has to be acknowledged that, in his rejection of a politically mobilised gay community and their ‘stridency’, Crisp not only ignored the very real experiences of homophobia that many gay people experience, and its institutionalisation, but that he tread even more precarious ground when his belief in the individual – his being entirely ‘a minority within a minority’, as opposed to any kind of figure-head – was appropriated in right-wing media discourse.²⁰¹ Amongst the incendiary claims that Crisp would often make, the most provocative would be his description of Aids, in the early days of the epidemic, as a ‘fad’. The defence that Crisp’s discourse was so often woven through with ‘double-bluffs’ could undo none of the offence caused, and Laxton’s *An Englishman in New York* would look closely at the consequences of that remark – the even greater gulf it would create between Crisp and a ‘cause’ now mobilised in the face of such devastation.

While Laxton’s film could never have had the cultural and political impact that *The Naked Civil Servant* did in 1975, given the very different worlds of their audiences, it is the most ambitious and significant project amongst the many in which Crisp has been given representation since his death in 1999, each of the various re-imaginings of his life revealing something of his ‘ambiguous’ legacy.²⁰² As Robinson suggests, Crisp is a gay icon ‘of sorts’ (1999, p.167). He was indeed included in the National Portrait Gallery’s *Gay Icons* exhibition, in 2009,²⁰³ but remembering him almost ten years after his death, in their ‘Heroes and Villains’ column, *Gay Times* described him as both an ‘inspiration’ and ‘a thorn in the side’ for gay people (Smith, 2008). Of all the

obituaries that followed Crisp's death, the most insightful was that by Veronica Horwell for the *Guardian*. Horwell writes how Crisp 'had been through and seen through love, sex, gender, fame, failure, poverty, 60 years of deep-pile dust carpeting bedsits, and John Hurt approximating his life in five wigs' (Horwell, 1999). It was a much-embroidered interpretation of Hurt's red and mauve wigs that the fashion designer John Galliano employed in styling models in the image of Crisp for his Spring/Summer 2009 menswear collection, with over-size hats by Stephen Jones (figure 42). Marking the centenary of Crisp's birth, in December 2008, The House of Homosexual Culture, a London based arts organisation which produces events celebrating gay culture and history, resident for some time at the Southbank Centre, held their 'Happy Crispmas' evening, with the winner of their 'Quentin lookalike' competition given a cover shoot for *QX Magazine* (figure 43) – a magazine which had only a few weeks earlier ran the article 'One of them. But one of us?', describing Crisp as 'a big problem for today's gay community' (Bridge, 2008).

In trying to reconstruct Crisp's image, these projects reconstruct something of Crisp's life – so invested was it in his fashioning. Where Smith and Watson consider the politics of remembering, they underline the 'struggles over who is authorized to remember and what they are authorized to remember, struggles over what is forgotten, both personally and collectively' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p.18); the politics of 'what is recollected and what is obscured' is said to be 'central to the cultural production of knowledge about the past' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p.19). When Crisp wrote at the last of *The Naked Civil Servant*, 'We think we write definitively of those parts of our nature that are dead and therefore beyond change, but that which writes is still changing – still in doubt' (Crisp, 1977a, p.217), he could not have foreseen the cultural impression he would make. The historical body that Crisp would write, a text provocative enough itself in 1968, would come to embody a fractious representativity in the visual culture of the 1970s and beyond. This thesis has offered close readings of aspects of Crisp's life and their narrative representations – of the body and the self that Crisp lived through narrative discourse. While the themes of this thesis have been highly selective, each has revealed something of the complexities of reading between those narratives,

and recovering from them some sense of what makes a life 'extraordinary' in its demand for visibility.

FIGURES

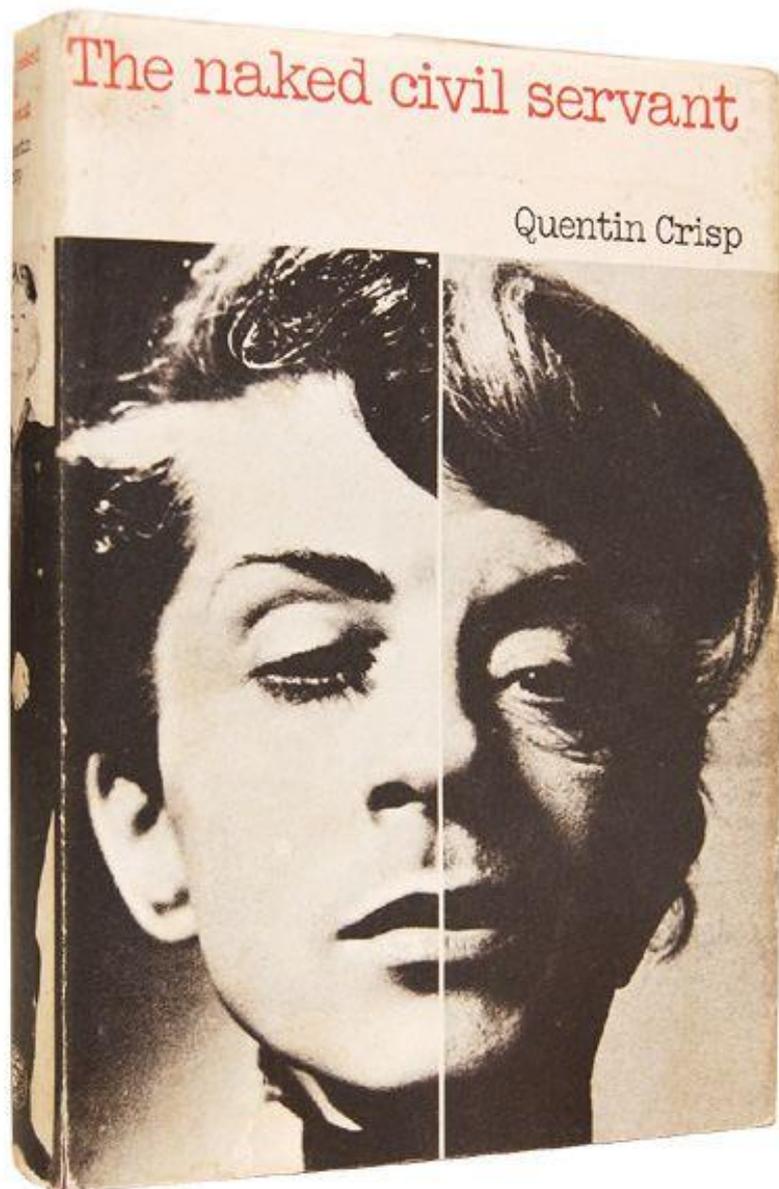


Figure 1: *The Naked Civil Servant*, first edition, 1968, published by Jonathan Cape, with cover photography by Angus McBean and Simon Dell (spine photography by Peter Hirst-Smith).



Figure 2: Quentin Crisp and John Hurt, publicity still from *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 3: *World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970.



Figure 4: *World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970.



Figure 5: The return of Crisp – John Hurt in Richard Laxton's *An Englishman in New York* (2009).



Figure 6: 'a self-evident, self-professed effeminate homosexual for all the world to see', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 7: Crisp introducing *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 8: A childhood abbreviated, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 9: *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 10: 'Do you intend to spend your entire life admiring yourself?'
The Naked Civil Servant, 1975.



Figure 11: 'the helpless victim of a misguided dream',
The Naked Civil Servant, 1975.



Figure 12: Becoming a Dilly Boy, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 13: Portrait of Crisp by Angus McBean, 1940.



Figure 14: 'you don't want to be seen with her dear, she's a dead giveaway', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 15: 'the American male in all his finery', *An Englishman in New York*, 2009.



Figure 16: The 1920s Dilly Boy, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 17: the courtship of prostitution, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 18: the 'rough', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 19: 'we want you', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 20: 'something in a uniform', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 21: 'Never in the history of sex was so much offered to so many by so few', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 22: Evan B. Bachner's model of World War II American masculinity.

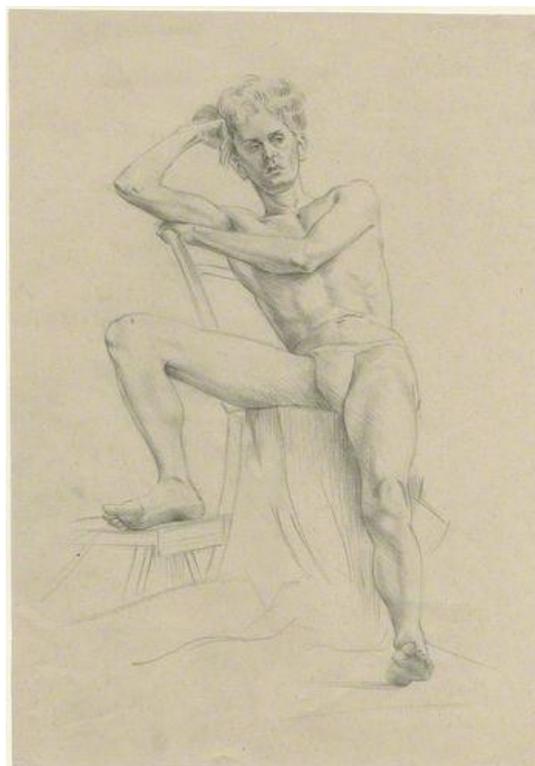


Figure 23: Crisp by Barbara Morris, c.1939, National Portrait Gallery.

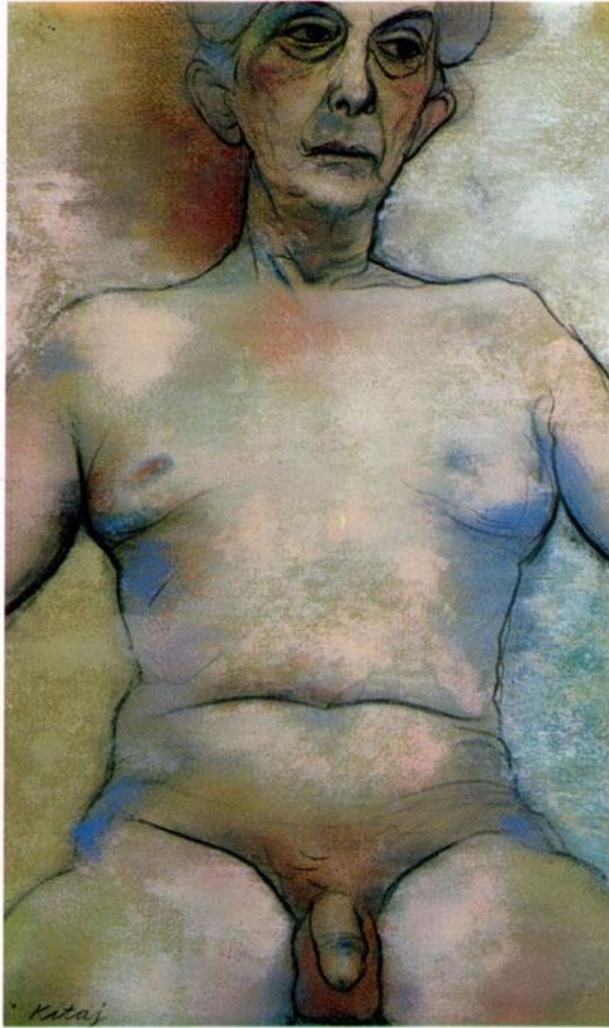


Figure 24: Crisp by R.B. Kitaj, 1978.



Figure 25: Crisp the model, *World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970.



Figure 26: Camberwell School of Art, *Life Class with Quentin Crisp*, 1979.



Figure 27: Crisp in crucifixion pose, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 28: Crisp by Marguerite Evans, c.1943.



Figure 29: Crisp's Beaufort Street room, *World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970.



Figure 30: Crisp's dressing room, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 31: 'Barn Door', *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1975.



Figure 32: Crisp in the 1930s, *World in Action: Quentin Crisp*, 1970.



Figure 33: at home in New York, *Resident Alien*, 1991.



Figure 34: Bette Bourne as Crisp, in Tim Fountain's *Resident Alien*, 1999.



Figure 35: Miguel Adrover's remembrance of Crisp, 2000.



Figure 36: 'I'm not a woman, I don't want to be a woman',
The Naked Civil Servant, 1975.



Figure 37: being undone by age, *An Englishman in New York*, 2009.



Figure 38: 'the true queen of England', Crisp as Elizabeth I, *Orlando*, 1992.



Figure 39: With Tilda Swinton in the title role, *Orlando*, 1992.



Figure 40: Crisp's Garbo death scene, *Resident Alien*, 1991.



Figure 41: Crisp by Andrew Macpherson, *Scene* magazine, 1998.



Figure 42: Crisp for the twenty-first century, John Galliano, Spring/Summer 2009.



Figure 43: 'Quentin lookalike', QX Magazine, 2008.

LIST OF REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Where 'Oscar', after the Wilde trials, would continue to intimate the 'unspeakable' through the earlier decades of the twentieth century (see Sinfield, 1994), 'Quentin' was of course less censorious. As well as Quentin, 'Jeremy' was also euphemism for homosexuality in the later years of the 1970s – after the politician Jeremy Thorpe (see Cole, 2000, p.25, n.12). In his autobiography Boy George writes how 'Quentin was a regular taunt at school ever since *The Naked Civil Servant* was shown on TV. I watched it open-mouthed. A man on TV with dyed hair openly admitting, 'I am an effeminate homosexual for all the world to see.' Mum and Dad were embarrassed, I was glued to the TV. It was the talk of the school for weeks. Everyone thought he was 'disgusting'. I thought he was brave and stylish' (George, 1995, p.52).

² Crisp was interviewed by Bernard Braden in 1968, following the publication of *The Naked Civil Servant*, as part of a series that looked at the lives and careers of some of the 'top people in London' at that time. Braden would describe Crisp's autobiography as 'salutary', but with a 'depressing' end. Crisp replied that 'it is the story of total failure, total humiliation ... it would be unwise to sort of perk up at the end and give it a happy ending.' The eleven minute interview was never broadcast but is now available through the British Film Institute archives.

³ Philip O'Connor was the author of *Memoirs of a Public Baby* and the person responsible for interviewing Crisp for the Third Programme (see Crisp, 1977a, pp.108-109) – an interview broadcast in February 1964 as the first of O'Connor's series of *London Characters*, and which led eventually to the contract for Crisp's autobiography with Jonathan Cape.

⁴ See also Brian Finney's discussion of Crisp in his essay 'Sexual Identity' in Philip Dodd (ed) *Modern Selves: Essays on Modern British and American Autobiography* London: Frank Cass, 1986.

⁵ Crisp writes that, 'with a hideous struggle, the hardback edition of *The Naked Civil Servant* sold out its edition of about three thousand, five hundred copies' (Crisp, 1981, p.21).

⁶ In considering the autobiographical medium beyond the literary, it is relevant to note also how Smith and Watson explore the autobiographical nature of contemporary visual artists' work.

⁷ Though aspects of the 'signature' of Crisp's fashioning are still of interest. For example, in the exhibition *Hats: An Anthology*, curated by Stephen Jones, Victoria and Albert Museum 24 February – 31 May 2009, Crisp's fedora was the only item of a specifically male subject to be featured (other than the top hat of Prince Albert that accompanied Victoria's bonnet). The *Homomuseum: Heroes and Moments* exhibition at Exit Art in New York, included Philip Ward's installation of a selection of Crisp's hats, a conceptual portrait of Crisp within an imaginary national museum, 21 May – 19 August 2005.

⁸ As part of the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2009, the series of films titled 'Self-Made Men: Gay Fashion on Film' would feature both Beaton and Crisp. The former was only represented by the BBC documentary *Cecil Beaton: The Beaton Image* from 1984, while Crisp was the subject of five separate films, including the premiere of *An Englishman in New York*.

⁹ Then broadcast in 1971 as one of the *Seven Men* series of Granada documentaries.

¹⁰ See also Coppa (1999).

¹¹ Though it was not the entire truth, Crisp would write that, 'from the moment I began to look really startling, men ceased to make propositions to me. They found it too risky or distasteful' (Crisp, 1977a, p.34).

¹² While such contexts are explored more fully in Chapter II, Houlbrook cites Crisp's experiences here; 'The power of cosmetics as evidence between the wars depended upon an increasingly pervasive assumption that male 'effeminacy' was a sign of transgressive sexual desires in this period – it was underpinned by a map of male sexual practices in which difference and 'normality' were embodied in the distinction between flamboyantly camp 'queans' and 'men', rather than in our modern categories of homo- and heterosexual. The distinction between 'queans' and 'men' had a deep resonance within working-class culture in particular, both as a mode of self-understanding and a way of interpreting other men's behaviour and character. In the 1920s, Quentin Crisp recalled, 'the same exaggerated and over-simplified distinction that separated men from women ... ran like a wall straight and impassable between ... roughs and ... bitches'. The language of 'queans' and 'bitches' evoked a commonplace equivalence between sexual difference and effeminacy; Crisp 'was over thirty before I heard

someone say... that he did not think of himself as masculine or feminine but simply as a person attracted to other people with male sexual organs' ... Sexual desires and practices were here understood as an inherent attribute of gender, embedded in an innate physiology or psychology. Set against an 'exaggerated' and rigid distinction between men and women, male and female bodies were assumed to be 'sexed' in particular ways. The desire for a woman was considered inherently masculine. The desire for a man was a priori womanlike. It was within this context that sexual difference and 'normality' were mapped onto the gendered opposition between quean and man. Men neither understood themselves, nor were labelled by others, through their choice of sexual partner' (Houlbrook, 2007, p.152).

¹³ Certainly cosmetics would seem more important than clothes for Crisp in the realisation of his effeminacy. He would describe himself in Mitchell's documentary as 'a one-man Oxfam' – with most clothes given to him from friends and acquaintances. In his celebrity, for example, he would favour for many years a jacket given by Lauren Hutton.

¹⁴ For Crisp's collected film criticism see *How to go to the Movies* (1990).

¹⁵ The class implications of cosmetics here, as Houlbrook suggests, wrought evident anxieties across the media most particularly because their use 'allowed working-class women to pretend to a glamour and beauty inappropriate to their station' (2007, p.159).

¹⁶ Tambling considers how confessional voices come from an 'ambivalent place, half-resonant of a radical politics of resistance, half of retreat' (Tambling, 1990, p.7). With much resonance of the vantage from which Crisp spoke, Tambling regards his subjects as marginal, their writings evidence of the choices they faced as to 'fight the relegation they have received, accept it, or subvert it: all texts will suggest inherently the presence of fissures within the dominant ideology emanating from the centre', but suggests that a text's 'confessional nature may be its display of such contradictions within the dominant discourse,' and believes that 'what is written from and in the margins is much more important than what goes on at the centre' (Tambling, 1990, p.7).

¹⁷ In her essay on the cross-dressing confessional, Kooistra suggests that the autobiographical gesture is 'an attempt at self-definition through representation', a textual act redolent with the material nature of identity; 'Language, like clothing, offers a way of representing – and representing – the self' (Kooistra, 1999, p.169). Kooistra suggests that in all autobiographical genres 'the truth-effect ... relies on the reader's belief in the coincidence between the writer's body and signature – between lived and represented life' (Kooistra, 1999, pp.167-168). Crisp's intent was never to convince of his femininity, and although such undemanding categorical assumptions are often applied in media discourse of his appearance, he did not cross-dress. Rather, he appropriated signifiers of both femininity and masculinity in representation of his psychic androgyny – it was 'preferable to be clearly identifiable as someone stranded between the sexes' (Crisp, 1984, p.15). Kooistra's observation that the reader finds truth only through the alignment of textual gender and the author's lived experiences is complicated by Crisp in *The Naked Civil Servant*; Crisp was successful in determining the textual re-presentation of his being 'stranded' through a narrative of the reactions his appearance provoked, suggesting that the 'truth' of his gender rested with his 'audience', lived and literary. Kooistra suggests that in women's confession made anonymously by men, and in the transvestite confession, 'the sign system signalling "female" appears to be supported by a socialised body of "feminine" knowledge and power.' This is undermined with the realisation that it has been the 'naked truth' of a different body (Kooistra, 1999, p.168).

¹⁸ See Crisp (1977a), pp.164-171.

¹⁹ Robinson suggests that effeminacy was amongst the expressions of gay sexuality that the gay-right sought to extinguish – evident particularly in the writings of Madsen and Kirk; along with 'sexual indulgence' and an alignment with left-wing politics, effeminacy was thought to inhibit 'the cause of gay freedom and equality' because it is 'so offensive to the straight majority' (Robinson, 2005, p.3).

CHAPTER I

²⁰ Though *The Naked Civil Servant* does not abide by the usual narrative or aesthetic conventions of the 'made-for-tv' genre, biopic or otherwise, 1970s or now, certain debates around that genre's reception, that have some relevance here, are addressed in Schulze (1994).

²¹ For a comprehensive bibliography of academic studies of the biopic, including the television docudrama, see Bell (2000).

²² In some redolence of the changing cultural and social climate that allowed for the making of Crisp's biopic, Anderson and Lupo suggest that, 'as our notions of fame, celebrity, and greatness have undergone diffusion, debate, and revision, the selection of who deserves – and ultimately receives – biographical treatment in theatrical film has expanded, as have ways of telling life stories. Genre history is always a story of evolution, mutation, and change, very rarely a tale of extinction. Popular genres accommodate themselves to changing times, new economic imperatives, and shifting cultural attitudes and discourses ... whose lives are considered interesting, provocative, worthwhile, profitable, or entertaining changes.' Anderson and Lupo, 2008, p.50).

²³ See also filmmaker Kathryn Millard's discussion of 'the canvas that biographies offer' (Miller, 1998, p.231).

²⁴ Bingham observes that the presence of *I* within a title 'connotes a sincere testimonial, a personal confession', some 'declaration of subjectivity' (Bingham, 2010, p.241); Crisp's preferred title for his autobiography had been *I Reign in Hell* – possessing perhaps an excess of subjectivity and certainly without the epithetical embodiment of *The Naked Civil Servant*.

²⁵ Further, Clive James would observe the film's 'economy of visual means', with Hurt in the role demanding every frame (James, 1975). But in *TV Times* Dave Lanning suggested the film was 'made with a distinct Ken Russell touch' (Lanning, 1975), while Peter Lennon in the *Sunday Times* praised Jack Gold's handling of 'this potentially disastrous subject', suggesting that 'one shudders at the thought of what Ken Russell would have done with it' (Lennon, 1975).

²⁶ According to the film's Executive Producer Verity Lambert, there were only three complaints amongst the very heavy mail that Thames received, 'from gay men who objected to our portrayal of an effeminate homosexual' (Lambert quoted in Smith, 2006). Howes writes that, according to an IBA survey, eighteen viewers out of a sample of 475 'switched off because of the content', while 85% said that the production was 'not shocking' (Howes, 1993, p.534).

²⁷ The film was subject to total censorship at the Prague International Television Festival in 1976. Describing *The Naked Civil Servant* as 'a controversial choice and one liable to offend the sensibilities of strait-laced Marxists', the film was not accepted, according to a *Financial Times* article, 'on the grounds it was "not in harmony with the main festival idea"'; 'The Quentin Crisp story had been entered under a section for programmes which should deal with "the problems of contemporary man, contribute to the strengthening of positive human values and which strive for social progress." A somewhat politicised statement perhaps, and Crisp's struggles with an unsympathetic world clearly do not count as "social progress"' (*Financial Times*, 1976).

²⁸ Reviewing Crisp's autobiography in 1968, one journalist indeed gave her article that title (see Conroy, 1968).

²⁹ Waugh's essay looks at *A Very Natural Thing* (d. Christopher Larkin, 1973) as principal example, and it is notable that whilst Larkin's film is subject to comparison with others of its ilk, *The Naked Civil Servant* is not.

³⁰ In his analysis of the 'hero' in the television biopic, Combs opens with an observation of 1970s popular culture, specifically the 'recurrent phenomenon of historical retrospection' – the tendency towards nostalgia that characterized much of the decade. Combs reckons with how the past was at this time 'presented, celebrated, and examined' in the narratives of the television biopic (Combs, 1980, p.9), and while the heroism of the past that he explores can be defined as that of the Great Man of action and leadership, of militaristic and political authority, the essential question that he explores, of *why* the hero should be of such popular interest at *that* time, reveals some parallels in asking what made Crisp's 'heroism' such a draw. Where Combs relates the conventions of the biopic, what became its essential 'formula', and the mass 'taste' for heroes, he proposes that such narratives and the lives they define reveal 'more about the present which consumes them than the mythical past they conjure up' (Combs, 1980, p.17). The success in mass culture that Combs attributes to the popular biopic, over the more 'serious historical treatments' of wartime subjects for instance (Combs, 1980, p.17), encourages questions around audiences at this time.

³¹ The cross-dressing child is represented in films such as *Ma Vie En Rose* (d. Alain Berliner, 1997) and *Torch Song Trilogy* (d. Paul Bogart, 1988), but in these examples much emphasis is placed upon the child's parents' confusion and distress, though an exception would be *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (d. Aureus Solito, 2005). There is limited focus on such anxiety in the film of the *The Naked Civil Servant* however; as in his writings, Crisp's parents

are portrayed as passive – essentially resigned to his queerness. On the cinematic representation of childhood, see Lebeau (2010) and MacDougall (2006).

³² Consider for instance Sinfield's discussion of the 'framework' that supports a queer identification in children, 'in terms of appropriate and inappropriate gender behaviour,' which 'has been there since before we were born – as a set of social expectations. By the time most girls and boys sense themselves as lesbian and gay, most of the conditions for that recognition are already there; the others slide into place as the individual strives to make sense of herself or himself' (Sinfield, 1994, p.126).

³³ In Crisp's writings it is the discovery of the Dilly Boy prostitutes. Foucault, in discussing nineteenth century mores, considers the wide acceptance that 'children had no sex, which was why they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closed one's eyes and stopped one's ears whenever they came to show evidence to the contrary, and why a general and studied silence was imposed. These are the characteristic features attributed to repression, which serve to distinguish it from the prohibitions maintained by penal law: repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know' (Foucault, 1998, p.4). But the historical shifts that Foucault traces have been read as too 'tidy' and generalised by Sinfield; 'Foucault finds history falling into epochs, characterised by distinct modes of thought; change occurs through a sequence of large-scale epistemological shifts. This makes his case vulnerable to almost any scrap of empirical evidence showing ideas occurring at the "wrong" time' (Sinfield, 1994, p.13). But what Foucault recognised in nineteenth century culture certainly lingered within that of the early twentieth century, according to Crisp's writings.

³⁴ Crisp published in *Vogue* an article on his experiences of school – of being parted from his mother, of such an education perceived as 'a weapon with which the middle class tried to arm its children', his only learning being his ability to 'bear injustice' (Crisp, 1979).

³⁵ Higgins considers how for the activists of gay liberation in 1970s and 1980s Britain, coming out 'was a critical rite of passage in which an individual became at last an honest soul. Coming out would, it was hoped, bring all sorts of benefits and especially achieve much greater tolerance of homosexual behaviour in society' (Higgins, 1996, p.221).

³⁶ The subject can still demand debate. The British magazine *Attitude*, citing its editorial standpoint 'that coming out is a given, a non-issue', covered the subject of its relevance in contemporary lesbian and gay experience, one journalist asking whether there was sometimes a 'case for the closet ... [to] leave some things unspoken', suggesting the act of orality of coming-out to be a confrontational militancy out of step with the lesser demands that gay lives encounter in the twenty-first century. An oppositional stance suggests that the visibility attendant to the act continues to make political gains, that the closet and its silences afford 'more power to those who would discriminate against us' (Millen and Teeman, 2009, p.72).

³⁷ Analogous in some measure with those of subcultural youth's, and their pursuit of what Breward considers the stylistic 'badges of belonging' (Breward, 2003, p.222). In relation to its gay and wider cultural permeations, alongside Crisp's refusal of the closet, Herman suggests, 'Even many of us for whom the closet never had much personal resonance still incorporate it as part of our vocabulary and common sense' (Herman, 2005, p.7). Herman offers a concise but considered survey of the literature on the subject, in relation to disciplines that include social sciences, geography, law, media, communication, and cultural studies.

³⁸ Saxey writes further of how 'An internal gendered difference (being sensitive and intellectual) is good; an observable gendered difference (being sissy) is less often celebrated. Camp men are most often valued as visible beacons who allow straight-acting boys to contact one another' (Saxey, 2008, p.48).

³⁹ See Comolli (1978).

⁴⁰ For theories of the 'sad young man', see Dyer (2002).

⁴¹ Hurt would describe Nossiter's film as 'exploitative ... I rather wish I hadn't done it' (Dickson, 2009).

⁴² Playwright of *A Man for All Seasons*; screenwriter on *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*.

⁴³ Nathan had asked Crisp whether he 'had grown a little like the character Hurt had played.' Crisp responded, 'I would almost certainly have done so if it had happened to me when I was younger' (Nathan, 1986, p.20).

CHAPTER II

⁴⁴ Though Crisp would provide the Afterword for John Gettings (1996) *Couples: A Photographic Documentary of Gay and Lesbian Relationships*. He writes that Gettings's work 'highlights the cozy, domestic aspects of homosexuality rather than some bizarre and frightening qualities that other works on the subject present' (Crisp, 1996).

⁴⁵ As example of the apparent pervasiveness of Crisp's claim of there being 'no great dark man', consider the 1979 dance record 'No GDM', by Gina X, a tribute to Crisp's impossible ideal. See Rimmer (2003, p.78).

⁴⁶ The letter has been cited in David (1997, p.241), and Higgins (1993, p.229).

⁴⁷ Almost a transcript of his *Opinions* monologue, Crisp published the article 'Love lies bleeding' at this time, in the *New Statesman* (Crisp, 1991).

⁴⁸ This had been expressed by Crisp ten years earlier in *How to Become a Virgin*, in which he wrote of a certain 'restaurant in New York in which there is not a woman to be seen'. Crisp describes how, in their 'tractor boots, pre-ruined jeans ...', these 'men *look* marvellous but, if we are speaking of personal liberty, they have taken a step forward only in that they have entered a more fashionable ghetto' (Crisp, 1981, p.87). Although Crisp had earlier offered a comic response to the accusation that those who fashioned their sexuality through the symbolisation of effeminacy were 'spoiling it for the rest', when he drew comparison with the declaration that those 'who coughed ruined for others all the fun of tuberculosis', he also writes that he 'was dumbfounded by this remark as 'it' was not a pitch but an illness' (Crisp, 1977a, p.85). In this allusion to 'illness' he expressed what was perhaps his most troubling judgement of same-sex desire for the 'new' gay culture.

⁴⁹ See also White (1984), and Martin (1984). Martin is particularly considerate of the pervasiveness of the American 'look' and its manifestation in the gay culture he observes in London.

⁵⁰ See also Burston (1999), and Dines (2007) for a response to Burston's re-imagining of Crisp's model.

⁵¹ Crisp writes of his own prostitution as being most often circumstantial, rather than purposefully solicitous; 'If anyone offered me money in exchange for sex I accepted it gladly ... Early in life I learned that I was not going to be able to afford to set a value on myself. In consequence I have never had the bother of taking offence but can decide afresh each time that anything is offered to me whether I want it or not. Apart from my need for small change, there was another reason for accepting money. It absolved me from the charge of enjoying sex for its own sake' (Crisp, 1977a, p.31).

⁵² See Crisp, 1977a, pp.30-31.

⁵³ Tamagne's discussion highlights the 'temporary' or 'amateur' prostitution of the 1920s and 30s, particularly among sailors and soldiers of the Guards brigade, to be classed most often amongst 'trade' (Tamagne, 2006, pp.47-49). Such figures, more purposefully masculine in behaviours and appearance, and their availability for "a walk in the park" for as little as half-a-crown, are discussed by Crisp (1977a, p.96). See also, on the decline of prostitution and the emergence of the 'amateur' female prostitute in the 1920s, McKibbin (2000).

⁵⁴ Crisp writes that, as he was still living in the parental home, 'where 2s.6d. a week was all the pocket money that I received', from one 'trick' he could earn 7s.6d. (Crisp, 1977a, p.31).

⁵⁵ Houlbrook notes how the populist weekly journal *John Bull* reported in 1926 that The Black Cat, opened by Italian immigrants earlier in the decade, was a site of 'undesirable immigrant sociability and prostitution.' Such sites of cosmopolitan London's nocturnal cultures were also tolerant of the unambiguous queer presence of Crisp and his kind, a space where 'queans, servicemen, and middle-class queers gathered alongside immigrants, underworld gangs, [female] prostitutes, and the metropolitan literati' (Houlbrook, 2005, pp.87-88).

⁵⁶ Weeks refers specifically to the Acts of 1885, 1898, and 1912, and notes how this 'juncture of the two concerns was maintained as late as the 1950s', when the Wolfenden Committee was established to investigate both (Weeks, 1982, p.118).

⁵⁷ What Weeks acknowledges as a doubly stigmatized identity, being queer and having to prostitute oneself, was, for Crisp and his kind, according to his writings, a means of asserting their erotic and romantic desires. The male prostitution of the period is more typically defined by 'rough trade', a figure that Weeks suggests was understood to be a 'real man', the Guards again an example, and part of what Weeks describes as the 'sexual colonialism' of the period (Weeks, 1982, p.121). The femme prostitute like Crisp and his kind were evidently resented for

their very material concession to the feminine – those guards did not relinquish their masculinity in prostitution, but exploited it.

⁵⁸ Circumstantial homosexuality, as Rosewarne suggests, is variously referred to as ‘contingent, incidental, temporary and situational homosexuality’, each describing ‘gay sex engaged in when circumstances dictate that same-sex partners are all that are available’ (Rosewarne, 2011, p.103).

⁵⁹ See also McKee (2002) for a concise account of the sexual lives of British sailors in harbour cities, 1900-1945.

⁶⁰ See also Robinson’s essay on J.R. Ackerley, as contemporary of Crisp’s, and his relationships with sailors (Robinson, 1999, pp.121-146).

⁶¹ For an examination of the sailor’s uniform and its inflections of rank and thus class in the period of which Crisp writes, see Colville (2003).

⁶² Crisp writes further; ‘This much I saw from the taxi window while I was being driven towards the hotel which the driver had chosen. ‘It’ll be best – for *you*,’ he said ... With a poker face I thanked the young man who carried my luggage upstairs for both pieces of information when he explained where the gentleman’s and a moment later where the ladies’ lavatories were’ (Crisp, 1977a, p.97).

⁶³ Further, the Royal Navy was thought to be the more tolerant of the armed forces, in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, when it came to intimacy between personnel, as Jivani suggests; ‘In some instances relationships which, it was tacitly accepted, might involve a sexual element were enshrined in the structure of the Navy’ (Jivani, 1997, p.65).

⁶⁴ From Baker and Stanley’s research evolved the exhibition *Hello Sailor! Gay Life on the Ocean Wave* at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, in 2006; since 2009 this has been a permanent display. For commentary on the exhibition see Meecham (2008).

⁶⁵ Donaldson echoes this sentiment, suggesting that seafaring, ‘with its characteristic appeal to escape from the constraints of land-based civilization, has been a major focus of male homosexual imagination’ (Donaldson, 1990, p.1175).

⁶⁶ See also Jivani, 1997, pp.62-67. Similarly, Donaldson attributes a working-class consciousness of masculine comportment to the sailor that resembles the model that Houlbrook traces – that it is not they who are queer, but their partner (Donaldson, 1990, p.1174).

⁶⁷ A concept for instance embodied in the character of Michael Tolliver in Armistead Maupin’s 1978 novel *Tales of the City*; ‘Cruising, he had long ago decided, was a lot like hitchhiking. It was best to dress like the people you wanted to pick you up’ (Maupin, 1989, p.85).

⁶⁸ As Ramakers observes, the sailor was also the most common of military figures in pre-World War II gay pornography (Ramakers, 2001, pp.158–59).

⁶⁹ For a further account of the Union Jack Club and the experiences of sailors’ that stayed there, see Houlbrook, 2005, pp.167-168.

⁷⁰ Melly’s experiences as a sailor were central to his autobiography *Rum, Bum and Concertina* (1977).

⁷¹ Woods positions Crisp’s experiences within a concise literary spectrum of twentieth century urban sexuality; ‘The miracle of the city of flesh is sheer quantity – the very same miracle that Marcel Proust witnessed in First World War Paris, Quentin Crisp in Second World War London, and John Rechy in peacetime Los Angeles’ (Woods, 1998, p.234).

⁷² See also Sinclair (1989), and Atkin (2008). Both cite Crisp’s experiences as a civilian in wartime London at length.

⁷³ For an account of the GI’s experiences in London, see Carpenter (1996). See also James Lord’s account of his experiences in Europe (2010).

⁷⁴ See for example Rose (1998).

⁷⁵ For a similar account of how such ‘introductions’ were made, see ‘A Dancer’s Life’ in Weeks and Porter (1998, pp.122-136).

⁷⁶ But Crisp would find with one GI a stability of sorts; ‘It was my nature to deploy my forces in breadth, so at first I was content to know many soldiers superficially, but after a while I decided to change my strategy to one of depth and concentrate on a single individual ... I learned to like my American but would never have put his interests before those of my lifelong friends and he would not have expected me to. I was always pleased to see him but would have left him with no more than a sigh for a steady income, a job in the movie industry, or a man who weighed twice as much. I could not have said that I loved him. When he ceased to call on me, I had no

idea whether he had gone to heaven or to New York – but, then, to me they were the same place' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.158-159).

⁷⁷ See McBride (2005), and Watson and Shaw (2011).

⁷⁸ Bachner is said to be an 'amateur' photographic historian, and longtime collector; the images in the volumes cited here came from the Still Pictures Branch of the National Archives and Records Administration. They were produced by the U.S. Naval Aviation Photographic Unit, under (then Captain) Edward J. Steichen, employed during the war to record the daily experiences of service personnel across the world, providing media images that would promote the American 'cause'. The Unit's photographers also included Wayne Miller, Horace Bristol, Victor Jorgensen and Barrett Gallagher.

⁷⁹ Where McBean's wartime portrait of Crisp is featured in James Gardiner's photographic essay, observation is made as to the servicemen 'lonely and far from home' who found that 'the darkness of the blackouts provided cover for all sorts of activities', with Crisp quoted on how London became 'like a paved double bed' (Gardiner, 1997, p.86).

⁸⁰ As one American serviceman whom Berube cites suggests, there were still after the war such opportunities as Crisp had enjoyed; 'The real revelation was when I went to London ... and saw the large number of servicemen of all nations and ranks cruising each other in Piccadilly and Leicester Square' (Berube, 2000, p.250).

⁸¹ See Crisp, 1977a, pp.172-173. As Houlbrook suggests, 'in figuring the queer as such a potent source of cultural danger' in the post-war years, particularly in the 1950s, 'the war underpinned those police operations within which men and their meeting places retreated from visibility' (Houlbrook, 2005, p.270).

CHAPTER III

⁸² Woods, discussing Kitaj's interest in the sense of parody and the fluidity of character that informs portraiture, comments on the artist's portrait of Crisp 'as a life model recognisable as himself' (Woods, 2000, p.171). See also Kitaj and Morphet (1994, p.218), and Livingstone, who writes of the 'sadness and introspection beneath the brittle and witty surface' evident in the portrait (Livingstone, 1999, p.33). Crisp would write 'I haven't been painted as much as I have been photographed ... when I was a model, of course, I was in any number of portrait classes. Less than life classes but any number of them, and I noticed that the paintings were all tame, compared to me. They all had been lessened in some way, but they were like me. But I have been painted by Mr Kitaj, or actually drawn in colored chalks by Mr Kitaj, and that painting was exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum. But that's the only famous painter who has endeavoured to paint me' (Crisp, forthcoming). See also Barrow, 2002, p.423.

⁸³ As Postle and Vaughan suggest, the status of an art school model was quite different from a professional artist's model, who 'viewed with disdain' the former (Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.52). Where Crisp distinguishes between private and art school modelling, he describes why he favoured the latter; 'I once posed for a sculptor who spent all day long asking me questions about my private life ... when the time came for me to receive 15s. we both felt a little foolish' (Crisp, 1949, p.55). That Crisp's pose should elicit such inquiry is not explained, but veiled in the deferential relationship between artist and model.

⁸⁴ The primary aim of the essays on each of the models featured is to present an overview of their career and contribution to particular works, 'and to illuminate the socio-historical circumstances of their lives and the modelling experience' (Jiminez, 2001, v). Crisp is among few male representatives, and one of only two British models, the other being Francis Bacon's lover George Dyer. Leigh Bowery is also included, his modelling for Lucian Freud of particular note. Hollander highlights the minutiae of Crisp's fashioning, alert to its relevance to his vocation, how he 'dressed in clothes that never, strictly speaking, qualified as drag: he always wore men's clothes, but adorned himself with heavy make-up, nail polish, jewellery, colourful scarves and hats.' While Crisp did not in fact always wear men's clothes, but never dressed to convince as a woman, Hollander is right to allude to Crisp's fashioning before listing the various occupations he'd had before the opportunity of modelling presented itself – it goes some way to explain, however implicitly, that this was why he belonged upon the dais. No other artist's model can demand to such an extent the explanation of their fashioning as the rationale behind their vocation; 'Crisp always maintained that his adopted look was less a challenge than an act of submission to an effeminacy from which he felt it was futile to distance himself.' Hollander does not clarify entirely why the gender dissent that Crisp fashioned found a particularly apt

vocation in modelling, but attributes it to the 'triumphant passivity' that his fashioning had demanded (Hollander, 2001, p.132).

⁸⁵ Crisp would allude in his essay *The Declining Nude* to the morality that the model challenged, having long been positioned somewhere between 'an actress and a prostitute' (Crisp, 1949, p.48). That equation is an issue touched upon in almost every text cited in this chapter. While the male artist's model has not historically been associated with notions of the immoral body as the female has however, Crisp evidently identified with the sense of 'sin' that modelling had long embodied. In their Introduction, Desmarais, Postle and Vaughan observe how historically 'the male model was revered by (male) artists as a paradigm of physical and moral well-being, [while] the female was treated as little better – or even worse – than a prostitute' (Desmarais *et al*, 2006, p.2). See also Phillips (2006).

⁸⁶ Broadcast on BBC2, 6th December 1980. Borzello notes how the television listings of the *Daily Mail* illustrated this programme with 'a drawing of a nude female model ... a tiny but typical example of the automatic transformation of modelling, even in the face of contrary evidence, into an exclusively female activity' (Borzello, 1982, pp.7-8).

⁸⁷ Crisp studied graphic art at High Wycombe College of Art, Regent Street Polytechnic, and Battersea Polytechnic, 1926-29. Published, for example, with A. F. Stuart, *Lettering for Brush and Pen* (1936), and *Colour in Display* (1938).

⁸⁸ Crisp writes further on this 'deference' to the artist and the kindness of strangers it might invite; 'Art, by which people who used the word always meant painting, was in those days sacred. It had not yet fallen into disrepute by becoming a game that any number could play. It was a profession by which a great deal of money could be made. It was still a divine madness which caused the possessed to grow their hair long and lead lives of unalleviated poverty. Once, when I fainted in an Express dairy, the manageress almost carried me downstairs to a part of the restaurant that was not used in the evenings. There she fed me with her own hand as though I were a pigeon—only rarer. 'You're an artist, I expect,' she murmured' (Crisp, 1977, pp.59-60).

⁸⁹ In his very last writings, Crisp spoke still of his interest in Surrealism; 'The only art movement I ever believed in was Surrealism and that was really, of course, a literary movement and about the hostility of inanimate objects. And that, I really believed in. It was the magic ... Chirico painted an endless mock classical landscape, either at dawn or at dusk, and the shadows of the buildings fell across the open spaces ... there was always the shadow of a man whom you couldn't see because he was behind the building, but his shadow was cast across the open space. And that represented a kind of terror which has no name ... frightening but also beautiful' (Crisp, forthcoming).

⁹⁰ Indeed, Legge's persona is frequently referred to as the 'Phantom of Sex Appeal'.

⁹¹ Warner's consideration of how 'the world to which one belongs ... will be determined at least in part by the way one addresses it' is of particular relevance here (Warner, 2002, p.129).

⁹² Tyler's consequent discussion of gender mimicry in relation to Joan Riviere's 1929 essay 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' is particularly relevant here (Tyler, 2003, pp.25-27), as is Lusty's analysis of Riviere's work (Lusty, 2007 pp.21-25).

⁹³ See Jones (1994a).

⁹⁴ Further, O'Neill discusses here John Banting, a marginal figure of Surrealism's British colony, as someone whose 'everyday practice of Surrealism through self-expression informed by dress' was deemed to have taken its liberation too far, and who O'Neill suggests was at some point rejected on these grounds from the 1936 exhibition (O'Neill, 2007, pp.78-79).

⁹⁵ O'Neill notes how the figures of Salvador Dali's *Three Young Surrealist Women Holding in Their Arms the Skins of an Orchestra* (1936) suggest Legge's costume to be 'the presentation of a painting come to life' (O'Neill, 2007, p.90).

⁹⁶ It is worth noting that the *Surrealist Objects and Poems* exhibition at the London Gallery, 1937, included work by Philip O'Connor (see Remy, 1999, p.112). Crisp would make his acting debut in the 1967 short film *Captain Busby*, based on O'Connor's 1937 poem. In his performance as a stationmaster, Crisp's dialogue begins, 'Madam, your carrot is in the drawer', which should suggest something of the tenor of the film. While the film speaks of the liminal 'arty' roles he would so often play, what is perhaps most remarkable is the necessity of a masculine drag to make Crisp look in any way 'surreal'.

⁹⁷ The whereabouts of these portraits is unknown (Barrow, 2002, p.134). Crisp writes in detail of Hall's appearance; 'The moment that he opened the door of his studio to me, I recognised him as one of the landmarks of the district. I had often witnessed him in King's Road wearing a

huge black hat and a stiff pointed beard ... He was the first real artist that I had ever met. I was delighted that he looked so perfectly the part' (Crisp, 1977a, p.121). For a persuasive discussion of modernist male artists' dress and its signifiers, see Jones (1994b).

⁹⁸ Crisp's standing in artistic circles however would seem always subject to questions of just what his liminality could embody; 'My friends—even those that lived in Chelsea—received the news that Mr Hall was painting me (and might do a picture of me in the nude) with amused contempt mixed here and there with a sickening archness. Some openly suggested that he had proposed this out of sexual curiosity.' He continues: 'Even in those days, long before Mary Quant and John Stevens turned the place into a vast boutique for the rich, Chelsea was evidently not, as advertised, the home of the broad-minded. It was merely lousy with people who lacked the nerve or the energy to give positive expression to moral judgment. Indeed, if a bohemian is someone without prejudices and without roots, then what there was of the *vie de boheme* seemed to reside in Mr Hall' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.121-122).

⁹⁹ Further, it is suggested that the portraits endow Crisp 'with the fabulous beauty of a Garbo or Joan Crawford; indeed there is one full-face image with lowered painted lids where he appeared a curious amalgam of the two' (Woodhouse, 2006, p.167). Crisp was included in the *Angus McBean: Portraits* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, 5th July-22nd October 2006.

¹⁰⁰ See also Woodhouse, 2006, p.312.

¹⁰¹ There is often inconsistency as to when Crisp began modelling, but the literature accompanying the National Portrait Gallery's exhibit of Barbara Morris's drawings is confident that it was 1939.

¹⁰² Describing his first appointment, a four-hour evening class, Crisp writes, 'I was eager but a little apprehensive lest I should faint as I had often seen models do ... I was asked to stand for the whole lesson ... I was glad of this. It made the evening a representative test of my endurance. When at ten o'clock I found myself still conscious, I knew that yet another way of earning a living had been presented to me ... Though being a model was such a great physical strain, there was a sense in which the work was easy to do. It required no aptitude, no education, no references and no previous experience. You had only to say 'I do' and you were stuck with it like marriage. It was also easy work to get. The war was on and I was almost the only roughly male person left with two arms and two legs' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.128-129).

¹⁰³ The contexts of the 'white feather campaigns' that men not in uniform were subject to as public marker of their perceived effeminacy and cowardice, while not discussed by Crisp, are relevant here. See Rose, 2004, pp.191-192.

¹⁰⁴ Though not perhaps relevant in Crisp's case, Postle and Vaughan suggest that the 'appeal of male modelling to homosexual men was perhaps greater at a time when homosexuality was illegal ... it became an opportunity for erotic display when other forms of gratification were risky' (Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.86).

¹⁰⁵ As in Mitchell's 1970 film also.

¹⁰⁶ Further, Foss considers how 'Ambiguous gender identity is ... central to the analysis of representations of naked soldiers. The WAAC [War Artists' Advisory Committee] acquired a dozen paintings and drawings of nude or semi-nude recruits or prisoners being scrutinised, appraised, evaluated and controlled by clothed men', the presence of whom 'transforms the exposed bodies of naked men into spectacle: a situation usually reserved for the female body' (Foss, 2007, pp.147-148). The homoerotic contexts that Foss also underlines here are redolent in the latent possibility of queerness amongst 'fighting men' which are very much the implication of the Bachner photographic collections discussed in Chapter II.

¹⁰⁷ Crisp maintained his pose 'without batting an eyelid' (Barrow, 2002, pp.142-143).

¹⁰⁸ What Crisp so often described as his 'crossword' intellect is revealed as a certain eccentricity in that passivity of his vocation. In anecdotes from students of how a crossword would be pinned to the wall of the life room for the duration of his pose, and its answers applied in his rest break, suggests the intellect that he designates while revealing at its most prosaic a tension between the passivity that was demanded of him and the active nature that Hollander considers Crisp to have represented upon the dais – Crisp disrupts the notion that time stands still for the artist's model, somewhat defiant of the passivity demanded of his role (see Barrow, 2002, pp.142-143).

¹⁰⁹ An interview with Crisp, on the subject of his one-man show, is featured in Capra's *Theater Voices: Conversations on the Stage* (2004, pp.84-88). Alterman profiles Crisp's theatre work in *Creating Your Own Monologue* (2005). Crisp is quoted by Alterman on the subject of 'getting the audience to like you', suggesting that it is best 'to get them to feel sorry for you', advising

that such a strategy was effectively employed by entertainers such as Judy Garland (Crisp in Alterman, 2005, pp.128-130).

¹¹⁰ For Hollander, models, like actors, have a 'special investment in their appearances', their 'ability to present them' being critical to the 'spectacle' they perform (Hollander, 1991, p.133). Taylor writes of the life room that the 'teacher directs, the model acts, and the artists sit and watch as audience' (Taylor, 2001, p.3).

¹¹¹ Commenting on a drawing of Crisp from 1946, by Gordon Richards (who first studied during the war at Camberwell and returned after serving in the Navy), Postle and Vaughan suggest that it 'shows Crisp in a less Michelangelesque mode' than he typically describes in *The Naked Civil Servant*; 'Although a life drawing, it appears to be principally a portrait study ... Richards seems to have been attracted most by his model's striking appearance.' Richards' own inscription and date on the drawing is followed by 'Quentin Crisp', suggesting less anonymity at least for this particular artist than Crisp generally suggested, and that 'striking appearance' is rendered as excessively visceral (Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.53).

¹¹² Cole observes the bohemian cultures of the early-twentieth century in relation to gay men's dress, particularly that of writers and artists and its class implications, suggesting that 'it was in the bohemian enclaves of major cities that homosexuality was accepted and even contributed to the 'alternative' images of those societies' (Cole, 2000, pp.18-19).

¹¹³ Barrow identifies Crisp's acquaintance as Peter Fisk, a bookseller and dancer as well as model (Barrow, 2002, pp.146-151).

¹¹⁴ For histories of London's Fitzrovia, focused particularly on the bohemian lives of its artists and writers, see Blakewell (1999). Crisp is mentioned in David (1988), in Pentelow and Rowe (2001), and in Willetts (2003). Maclaren-Ross's *Memoirs of the Forties* (1965), remains a 'classic' memoir of that scene, as Crisp alludes in his autobiography (Crisp, 1977a, p.161).

¹¹⁵ He writes, though it would seem not entirely truthfully: 'I could not have said that I was part of a 'Chelsea' life. I knew only one bearded artist and only one model. I never went to a bohemian party and I never got drunk' (Crisp, 1977a, p.93).

¹¹⁶ Crisp writes further of how 'In appearance these cafés were just like those from which I had been barred fifteen years before in Old Compton Street. In all other respects they were very different. Many homosexuals were present but there was no element of camp ... They even differed from their contemporary counterpart in Chelsea, which were clean to the point of primness and riddled with an artiness which I now saw to be but a feeble pretence of bohemianism ... Despite the variety of classes, sexes, nationalities and callings represented in the cafés of Charlotte Street, there prevailed an effortless acceptance of the other person's identity' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.138-139).

¹¹⁷ See Barrow, 2002, p.185.

¹¹⁸ Wilson suggests that the 'most radical approach to the possibility of failure' for the bohemian 'was to bypass completely the criteria by which success and failure were judged. One way of doing this was for the individual to unite life and art in his or her person ... the exploration of a paradox whereby art no longer imitated life, but, on the contrary, life became as unreal as a work of art' (Wilson, 2003b, p.76).

¹¹⁹ Crisp describes in *The Naked Civil Servant* how he was approached one evening in Fitzrovia by an American soldier who enquired whether he was a celebrity. Crisp 'led the culture seeker to Nina Hamnett, explaining that she had known Modigliani. She was leaning her laughing torso against the bar ...' Crisp describes how he 'started on a list of her claims to fame as though she were a public monument and I a tourists' guide. "Is he going to buy me a drink?" she said. This he promptly did but she remained obviously displeased with both of us. I found this hard to understand. All she was now being asked to do was make like a genius for a few minutes. It took a lot more coaxing from me and a lot more drink from the soldier to persuade her to do this' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.159-160). In Crisp's novel, *Love Made Easy*, the event is given a fictional facelift, the Marchesa being substituted for Nina Hamnett, who didn't even try 'to be worth her double whisky' when introduced to the American GI (1977c, pp.18-19). The novel had been written in the 1950s, but remained unpublished until 1977, at the ascent of Crisp's celebrity. It is obviously the alcohol-induced failure 'to make like a genius' that made the incident so remarkable for Crisp. When asked what she had done to deserve her celebrity, the Marchesa replied 'I drink', demonstrating the self-fulfilling addictive self-nihilism of the bohemia that Crisp knew, but which he would survive, being the 'cameo' he was.

¹²⁰ In Mitchell's film, Crisp discusses the current circumstances of the model's vocation, discerning the classes for which he most often posed not only as an audience for his

exhibitionism, but as a retracing of a certain youthful bohemia that he too had experienced; 'the main field of activity for a model nowadays is the housewives choice classes ... they draw you in memory of the time gone by ... people have got lonely, their children are grown up and they think of a way of filling in the time ... they think 'when was I happiest?' ... that was when they were at the school and they practically get out the Hungarian blouses they wore in 1926 and their sandals and their curtain ring earrings ... and that is when of course I'm more useful than another model because I pose in loving mummery, I pose for the time gone by, the poses are like this ... because it's easier for me to pose than not' (*World in Action*, 1970). As Postle and Vaughan note, by the 1910s and 20s, models 'tended to identify themselves at this time by a clear visual code' (Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.84). In his autobiography Crisp attests as to how female models dressed in subsequent decades, drawing on the language he used in describing the bohemian artist in his earlier essay. Describing a friend who had modelled long before he had even considered the vocation for himself, Crisp describes how she 'dressed in accordance with the rigid dress laws of the time. She wore a vermilion polo-neck sweater, curtain-ring earrings and a black beret balanced at the ultimate degree of obliquity' (Crisp, 1977a, p.86). Wilson considers how bohemian dress has been 'fraught with meaning'; 'It might express both the poverty and the artistry of the individual, suggesting a superior sensibility, it might be childish playacting, it might be symbolic, might be theatrical or deeply authentic ... the inner identity must express itself in an outward and visible style.' Through their statement of style, Wilson suggests that bohemians were 'doing only what everyone else was doing. To adhere to the rules of polite dress was to signal your commitment to the good manners of a gentleman; it therefore followed that to flout them was both to commit a real social transgression and to announce a different inner individual truth' (Wilson, 2003b, p.161).

¹²¹ Although in her study Brennan (2004) offers a survey wholly of the post-war American art world, more general questions around mid-century abstraction's heteronormative, masculinist tendencies find some resonance in her enquiries. Brennan explores the critical discourse that abstract art received in the period and the ways in which this enabled artist's work to be understood as 'metaphysical embodiments of masculine selfhood, as symbolic representations that at once challenged and reproduced prevalent cultural conceptions of masculine crisis and desire' (Brennan, 2004, p.10). The assertion of heteronormative masculinity which Brennan reads in the work of abstract expressionist artists in 1950s America, its 'conspicuously masculinist visual culture' (Brennan, 2004, p.80), are qualified by persistent anxieties of the artist as queer, a fact she addresses in relation to Kinsey's seminal research into human sexuality in the period, and lent example in Jackson Pollock and the public persona he maintained as avowal of his artistic practice as resolutely heterosexual (Brennan, 2004, p.81). Though Brennan addresses the very corporeality that underpinned the abstract painting of certain New York School artists in the 1950s, particularly Willem de Kooning, the idealised reading of their work to which artists like Pollock subscribed, as 'metaphorical masculine bodies' (Brennan, 2004, p.107), negates the absence that Crisp insists upon to reveal instead the presence of that which his fashioning, and inexorably his modelling, was very other to. It can be argued that the persona of the artist indeed became ever more critical to interpretation and the quest for meaning in mid-century abstraction, as it was increasingly presented as the work of 'masculine physical and psychic release' as much as it was 'an aestheticized, autonomous entity' (Brennan, 2004, p.112).

¹²² See also Yeomans (2005).

¹²³ Writing almost fifty years after his first essay on the subject, in his short contribution to Hassell's history of Camberwell, 'A Model's Eye View', which was a quite singular autobiographical account in the text, Crisp suggested that what were necessary in a model were 'two apparently contradictory attributes – abject humility because, while at work, he is really only a thing, and unshakeable self-assurance without which he could never survive the contempt in which he is held by the students' (Crisp, 1995, p.26).

¹²⁴ He had acknowledged this in *The Naked Civil Servant*; 'As I sank into old age I was more often given portrait sittings. This was not because my face had crumbled any less than my figure. It was in an even worse state of repair ... As my character coarsened, my features thickened ... certain Slade-type students can paint a tragic greatness into eyes that hang like an impending avalanche over the cheekbones. Nothing for which the life beautiful has a name can be read into a pot-belly ... Professionally it is considered a come-down to work in portrait classes, but at least head sittings were less exacting than other kinds. I did them with what

grace and gratitude I could. My lust for martyrdom had vanished long ago' (Crisp, 1977a, pp.213-214).

¹²⁵ The artist Peter Blake describes how 'the very first model I drew was Quentin Crisp, who ... had blue nails and lipstick and blue hair and was rather extraordinary' (Blake, cited in Wiggins, 2006, pp.139-40). There is a further anecdote from Blake that doesn't quite fit with the image that Crisp drew of his passivity: 'One day Quentin was leaving the art school and walking towards the station and a lorry pulled up and the driver said something like, 'You're a bloody fairy.' Quentin turned back and, quick as a flash, said: 'If I was a fairy, dear, I would wave my magic wand and turn you into a pile of s***' (Blake, cited in Nikkhah, 2010).

¹²⁶ *Faces for the Future: New Twentieth Century Acquisitions at the National Portrait Gallery* National Portrait Gallery, London, 11th July-5th October 1986.

¹²⁷ In his last writings Crisp would allude again to that institutionalisation of his image; 'There is a portrait of me in the National Portrait Gallery, which a woman painted when she was about seventeen and she made the authorities pay 400 pounds for it! And if it isn't a great painting, it's a great deal that she brought off. And, I don't mind, of course, that I should be there. More so, it's absurd that I should be there where Lord Byron and all those people who are part of English history are on display. But still, it will wear off in time. I shall be put in the basement, piled up on the floor against the wall with all the other paintings which came to nothing' (Crisp, forthcoming).

CHAPTER IV

¹²⁸ Though I would not suggest there is any application to Crisp's domestic life at all, Diogenes syndrome, or 'senile squalor' syndrome, is a disorder characterised by self-neglect as manifest in the abandonment of domestic mores – but also in social withdrawal. Also known as Plyushkin's syndrome, in allusion to Gogol's 1842 novel *Dead Souls*, after that character's compulsive hoarding.

¹²⁹ Douglas's claim provided the foundation for the recent exhibition *Dirt: the Filthy Reality of Everyday Life* at the Wellcome Collection, London, 24th March – 31st August 2011. See accompanying text: Smith et al (2011). As example of just how pervasive in the popular consciousness is Crisp's attitude towards domesticity still, reviewing the exhibition, one journalist indeed summoned his claim that 'after the first four years ...' Moore (2011). See also: Cohen and Johnson (2004), and Smith (2008). For a particular approach to gay identities and theories of cleanliness, see Andersson (2007).

¹³⁰ See for example Fuss (2004).

¹³¹ See Workman and Greer (2007). For a differently gendered example see Chi (1999).

¹³² Though some challenge could be made as to whether this can be defined as a binary relationship, as given in McCarthy (2005). See also Rice (2007). The Modern Interiors Research Centre 2010 Conference, *Interior Lives*, was concerned particularly with the historical insights that ethnographic and auto/biographical investigations into domestic lives can offer architectural and design historians.

¹³³ See also Gershenson and Penner (2009).

¹³⁴ As a rather apt though extraordinary example of the commercial art for which he was commissioned, Crisp's light-hearted line decorations were featured in the book *Life Lies Ahead: A Practical Guide to Home-making and the Development of Personality*, by Dr Eustace Chesser and Olive Hawks (1951). An influential psychiatrist and social reformer, Chesser is perhaps most renowned for his controversial 1941 book, *Love Without Fear: a Plain Guide to Sex Technique for Every Married Adult*, and was advocate of numerous sexually progressive causes, including the decriminalisation of homosexuality, with his opinion a considerable presence in the media of the 1940s through to the 1960s. Hawks is attributed as author of various novels on the title page of *Life Lies Ahead*. Though no mention is of course made, the first of these was written during the incarceration that followed her involvement in the British Union of Fascists, a figure who it was once thought could 'have become the most powerful woman in Britain had a Mosley Government come to power' (Wallder, quoted in Gottlieb, 2005, p.73).

¹³⁵ Though the surveys cited here do offer some focus on the provincial also; one of the contributors to *Between the Acts* remarks on a lover who occupied a bedsit in rural Wales and whom he could only visit when his landlady was away (Porter and Weeks, 1998, p.23). David Halliwell's 1965 play *Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs* was set in a

Huddersfield bedsit (its 1974 film adaptation, by coincidence, would feature John Hurt in the title role). With the bedsit again a site of the socially disconnected, the protagonist of Ian McHugh's 2008 play *How to Curse* is said to know 'little of the world beyond his Great Yarmouth bedsit', the domestic constraints of which provide the play with its moments of realism. See also, for more contemporary debates, Millington (2008).

¹³⁶ An early-twentieth century representation would be Harold Gilman's *Tea in the Bedsitter* (1916), a painting that at once reveals that room as a place of freedom while undermining its received solitariness. Here the artist articulates the shifting possibilities and pleasures of women's lives – or *some* women's lives – at that time, and offers an atypical, and indeed highly aestheticised, vision of the bedsit as home to independent women which allowed also for their sociality, something of an exemplar to suggest how the bedsit, like any domestic space, and like the lives they are home to, can never be as one-dimensional as is often culturally inscribed. Borzello writes that the room Gilman depicts 'is as much the subject of the painting as the women', offering 'the chance to observe a social development' in the lives of women, living 'with a freedom unknown to middle-class women a century earlier and even, we might assume, enjoying in friendship a substitute for family life' (Borzello, 2006, p.170). For discussions of Gilman's work, see also Upstone and Baker (2008), and Glinert (2007).

¹³⁷ It is evident even in its cover illustration by John Piper; while it is beyond the scope of this research to examine in any depth, there are issues around race in this period that can be addressed in relation to the bedsit and the liminal home it would afford immigrants arriving in London.

¹³⁸ Raphael Kadushin, writing of his first experiences of the city as a young gay man, alludes to the potent literary image of the London bedsit; 'My South Kensington bedsit was London's signature deathtrap, the one Jean Rhys could never escape, with the sprung mattress and dead space heater and cracked window that rattled in its oversized frame and added its own taunt' (Kadushin, 2008, p.62). Anna Snaith writes how 'Jean Rhys's representations of urban landscapes have long been identified as a key aspect of her modernism. Her portraits of the cafes, bedsits, hotels and streets of London and Paris make her an important writer of the geography of modernity, particularly in its feminist articulation' (Snaith, 2005, p.76).

¹³⁹ George Melly would offer this anecdote about his own boarding accommodation in London, the landlord of which was a close friend of Crisp's; 'Quentin, as we all know, lived in total squalor, but he liked to be clean himself, so he used to come and have baths at Meadmore's and he'd never lock the door. I'd go to the bathroom and there would be Quentin, in full naked glory, lying in the bath' (Melly quoted in Bailey, 2000, p.66).

¹⁴⁰ In *The Naked Civil Servant* Crisp speaks often of the cafés in which he dined and socialised, a necessary public extension to his room, though one unfathomably overlooked in the rhetoric that posits his room as his cell from which he was only released in his celebrity. In her essay on Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage series of novels, Harvey explores how the private space of the Bloomsbury bedsit of protagonist Miriam Henderson, and the public space of the London cafés she enjoys, are contingent interstitial spaces which afford 'heterogeneous freedoms.' For Harvey, Richardson employs the bedsit and the café to articulate her fundamental 'preoccupations with solitude and solicitude.' Applying Benjamin's thesis of places 'permeated by streams of communal life', the Bloomsbury bedsit of Richardson's writings reveals the paradox of an 'inviolable but inexhaustible porosity', a domesticity to which the choice of secondary sites of habitation, such as the café, is subject. Redolent with the feminist consciousness and experiences of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century modernity, the bedsit and the café are in Richardson's writings read as sites of public-privacy, both being 'exempt from the responsibilities and restrictions of domestic life' (Harvey, 2008, p.168). In relation to Crisp's experiences, Adrian Maddox considers how 'the espresso invasion of Soho' in the early 1950s created 'yearning spaces [that] became Britain's crucibles of change'. To the inventory he makes of the cultural shifts nurtured there – 'Colin Wilson's new existentialism ... John Deakin's raw photo street-reportage ... Colin McInnes' teenage rampages' – he appends their significance within 'the personal sexual penetralia broached by Christine Keeler and Quentin Crisp' (Maddox, 2003, p.35). The pairing of Keeler and Crisp is observant of figures who in the divergences of their *success' de scandale* would abet significant shifts in attitudes towards sexual morality in the 1960s and 70s.

¹⁴¹ On the role of consumerism and the obligations of homemaking in women's lives and the ideals of domesticity at the time see for example Partington (1995).

¹⁴² The figures that Donson and Georgés cite as to how many people are living in bedsits largely concur with Inglis's, though with a slightly increased figure when it comes to the ratio of men to women living in bedsits, 75% female, 25% male (Donson and Georgés, 1967, p.119).

¹⁴³ Wilson considers the bohemian experience of domesticity through the abject interior that was the *mise en scène* 'of revolt and identity' for poets and artists from Henry Murger to Nina Hamnett (Wilson, 2003b, p.159), and considers how such bohemian poverty later became picturesque convention, for instance, with the rediscovery of the posters of Toulouse-Lautrec's *fin de siècle* Paris, the very quintessence of Bohemia for 'post-war generations who pinned them to college, bed-sitting room and café walls' (Wilson, 2003b, p.224).

¹⁴⁴ In addressing the literary representations of the changing sexual mores of post-war Britain, Phillips considers how Rodney Garland's 1953 novel *The Heart in Exile* articulates shifting social and class relations. The way in which working-class men before the war had been regarded as 'a commodity that the homosexual upper-class man could 'harvest' from the London streets for sexual gratification' had been 'a conspiracy based on masculinity that excluded 'expensive' and 'fussy' women.' Phillips suggests the novel to trace how the now more affluent – 'better-paid, better-dressed' – working-class man could "afford" to have a relationship with a woman or pay 'for other amusements' ... motor cars, the cinema, clothes, a *bedsit* away from the oppressive and crowded family home' (Phillips, 2006, p.75). See also Houlbrook and Waters (2006).

¹⁴⁵ See also, for a concise contextualisation of the artistic milieu to which Crisp belonged in Chelsea, Decharne (2006, pp.31-33).

¹⁴⁶ In popular culture and entertainment the bedist has been employed with very disparate ideological intentions. Consider for example Spike Milligan's and John Antrobus's 1962 dystopian play *The Bed Sitting Room*, filmed by Richard Lester in 1969 – a surreal but anti-establishment study of nuclear holocaust.

¹⁴⁷ Harvey considers how the bedsit since the late nineteenth century has been represented and understood as a 'spinster space', and is cautious of Virginia Woolf's 'class-blind rubric of the "room of one's own"' which has deceived certain feminist critics to claim 'the bedsit as a utopian site of female creativity and freedom.' Harvey, the bedsit is as much the locus 'of economic hardship and social deprivation as ... a site of intellectual and sexual freedom.' The material realities of the bedsit which Harvey seeks, of a room 'small, shabby and expediently furnished ... the family home slashed to meanness', reveal a 'sleeping cubicle' divested of the 'separate supplementary spaces' of normative domestic necessity (Harvey, 2008, p.169). Suggesting Richardson's Miriam to fashion for herself 'a domicile that interpenetrates London's zones of public-privacy', those social spaces of pleasure and consumption now critical to women's experiences of the city (Harvey, 2008, p.174), the café is principal amongst these and the most potent symbol of Miriam's rejection of both ideals of domesticity and the class strictures of her background.

¹⁴⁸ The chapter title 'The Horrors of Peace Were Many', in David's *On Queer Street* (1997), acknowledges Crisp's account of post-war London in *The Naked Civil Servant*. David stresses the changing social and political face of Britain, and particularly London, in the period, and its influence on queer lives; 'a time of bluff and counter-bluff, of spies, duplicity and Reds under the bed ... the time of missing diplomats, McCarthyism, *The Third Man* ... squalid bedsits and fly-blown terraces in the early fiction of Muriel Spark and Angus Wilson' (David, 1997, p.158). That the evocation of the bedsit might be aligned with such a compound political state of affairs, which did have a real impact on many gay lives and the media portrayal and public perception of queerness at the time, summons the complexities of home and urban life and the very real threat of lawful intervention in the domestic lives of queer men. It is in this period in which the bedsit is really prevalent in reality and in cultural representation.

¹⁴⁹ First published as *Kitchen in a Corner*. It is not irrelevant here that Whitehorn would be something of a *cause célèbre* with her 1963 article 'Sluts', for the *Observer*. See also Hardyment's discussion of the bedsit and the influence of Whitehorn's book in post-war Britain (1995).

¹⁵⁰ Inglis makes association between 'one-roomed existence', the 'degree of withdrawal inherent in it', and mental well-being (Inglis, 1966, p.27). Her article is lead with a photograph of a bedsitter tenant, 'at ease by the communal phone,' by Jane Bown. The telephone is at once symbol of isolation and of sociality; an important fact of Crisp's social life was that he long had a private telephone in his room. Bown would photograph Crisp at home in Chelsea in 1978; the image would accompany his obituary in the *Observer*. Bown described Crisp's room as 'filthy ...

absolutely disgusting, though he was perfectly pleasant. It was good to get out quickly, nevertheless' (Bown quoted in McKie, 2009). Crisp was photographed at home by Edward Barber in 1977, and amongst the portraits produced one was selected for the cover of the first paperback edition of *The Naked Civil Servant*; this is now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery. Barber reflects on meeting Crisp at home in the essay 'Bedsitter Images' (2007).

¹⁵¹ Pinter also employed the 1950s London bedsit as place of reminiscence in *Old Times* (1971).

¹⁵² See *The Birthday Party* (1957); *A Slight Ache* (1958); *The Caretaker* (1959).

¹⁵³ Barrow recounts Crisp, whilst at a party at Pinter's London home in 1970, asking 'What do your plays mean?', his response: 'They are just what those people said on that day' (Barrow, 2002, pp.382-383).

¹⁵⁴ Crisp's recounts that meeting in *The Naked Civil Servant*; 'When I had lived in my room for some fifteen years, and I was feeding a starving outcast, we were called on by a small deputation of guests from a party going on elsewhere in the house. They brought glasses of sherry. As the rest of us sipped and chatted, one visitor sat silent. Through thick horn-rimmed spectacles he gave the scene a panoramic stare. His name was Mr Pinter. Later he confessed that this was the moment when he first felt that he might write a play' (Crisp, 1977a, p.109).

¹⁵⁵ The observation of Crisp's hair being blond is somewhat curious. Diamond cites a similar portrait of Pinter's: 'I saw two men in a small room. The smaller of the two, a little barefooted man, was carrying on a lively and rather literate conversation, and at the table next to him sat an enormous lorry driver. He had his cap on and never spoke a word. And all the while, as he talked, the little man was feeding the big man – cutting his bread, buttering it and so on. Well, this image would never leave me' (Pinter quoted in *Time*, 1961, cited in Diamond, 1985, p.19).

¹⁵⁶ Further, Crisp is described by Pinter as 'a little man with the most extraordinary colour hair, bare feet and extremely fluid clothes' (Pinter quoted in Billington, 2007, p.66).

¹⁵⁷ Diamond notes the more ambiguous readings of the character, of someone 'motherly' indeed, and sentimental, but also a woman domineering and 'castrating' (Diamond, 1985, p.20).

¹⁵⁸ See for example Camille and Rifkin (2001).

¹⁵⁹ The photograph becomes a rare autobiographical trace – there is little evidence available of the henna blaze that Crisp writes of and that was such a dramatic signature in the film of his autobiography, and which he became so famous for but was never seen, because of his celebrity being so postponed – well into the 'blue period' he entered on his fortieth birthday and the variant hues that evolved in his dotage.

¹⁶⁰ Barrow wrote an article on the present owner of the flat that incorporates what had been Crisp's Chelsea room following the conversion of the house in the 1980s, its current resident pictured at one of the same windows (Barrow, 2002b).

¹⁶¹ In his sumptuous documentary, *Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers*, photographer Robert Giard accompanies his subjects with excerpts of their writings. In one of the volume's introductory essays, Christopher Bram considers how Giard's visual narrative suggests 'a dense forest of American faces' (Bram in Giard, 1997, xxvii). The most customary maxim of Crisp's dotage, 'In my heart, I have always been American', intimates the honour he likely would have felt in such company. While he may not have been 'at home' in a collection that observed the cultivated 'beauty' of the domestic, photographed in his New York room he seems just that. The portrait and text – the passage from *The Naked Civil Servant* on that most brutal encounter that returned the likeness of his childhood in its film translation – engage as intimation of how that appellative, and the narrative of the militancy of his fashioning that it represented, permitted the journey to this room. Wrought of the same philosophy as his others in London, a bare shell for a 'dressing-room', it frames a portrait that accents the vanity, and its censure, he writes. At almost eighty Crisp's narcissism seems commendably youthful, and speaks of the fortitude that Giard intimates in his hope that, together, word and image would summon a most candid validation; 'We were here; we existed. This is how we were.' With the 'little objects' that intimate home already absent, only a spartan corner of his room is recognisable, an abstraction unmistakable for the numerous witnesses of photographers and journalists that he welcomed there, particularly those 'curious from England'. Crisp was never more 'homely'; his benign stare, hands clasped upon the aged 'architecture' of his hair, the dandy handkerchief in its customary flourish in his top pocket, and as always, the scarf and its signature of excess, overstated against the domestic signature of his asceticism. Giard intends

no commonality between his subjects in aesthetic, generational or topographical terms, no bond beyond their writings being articulate of their experiences of same-sex desire. The 'beauty' of his documentary is the plurality it traces of such desire and its expression. His chosen extract from *The Naked Civil Servant* is to be applauded for its particular articulacy of the transgressively fashioned self that is central to Crisp's prose. In her accompanying essay, Joan Nestle writes of Giard's subjects, 'with our words and our bodies, we chose revelation' (Nestle in Giard, 1997, xxv). For the most unfamiliar of readers, the portrait of Crisp hints at the past evoked in that passage; the nuances are there still, decades later, of his dissidence – the lips glossed, the eyes 'blackened', even in Giard's subtlety of tonal contrast there is trace of Crisp's more muted cosmeticised beauty, while the abject neutrality that frames him murmurs of the cell he had once so unconvincingly spoken.

¹⁶² Harty's interview with Crisp in New York opens with the narration that 'Here, in permanent residence is one of Britain's more unlikely ambassadors. Formerly, he held small court in London's fashionable Chelsea. Now, a dingy rooming house in unfashionable New York is home for Mr Quentin Crisp'. Crisp's life had not changed quite so much as Harty suggests – Crisp's Chelsea had not been quite so 'fashionable' if we believe his writings.

¹⁶³ The play is set in Crisp's room, 46 East 3rd Street, New York, in Autumn 1999, just weeks before his death. Opened at the Bush Theatre, London, 10th November 1999, directed by Mike Bradwell. The production referred to here is that performed at the New End Theatre, London, 28th January - 28th April 2009. The New York production discussed by Barbour is that at the New York Theatre Workshop, January 2001.

¹⁶⁴ The accompanying literature sets out the exhibition's objectives; 'As a living art form, fashion is open to multiple readings. A vibrant reflection of contemporary culture, fashion—especially in its most avant-garde expressions—affects us through its intense visual impact. *blog.mode: addressing fashion* is the first in a series of shows designed to promote critical and creative dialogues about fashion. The exhibition presents some forty costumes and accessories dating from the eighteenth century to the present—all recent Metropolitan Museum acquisitions—and invites visitors to share their reactions online or from a "blogbar" of computer terminals in the exhibition galleries.' *blog.mode: addressing fashion*, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 18th December 2007–13th April 2008. Full exhibit details: Miguel Adrover (American, born Spain, 1965). Coat and Skirt Ensemble with Vintage Fendi Scarf, fall/winter 2000–1. Coat: blue and white striped cotton twill mattress ticking; Skirt: beige and white striped cotton twill; Scarf: ivory silk with allover double interlocked "F" logo print, navy band trim, and burgundy tie-dyed pattern. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Miguel Adrover, 2005, (2005.44.1a-c).

¹⁶⁵ See also Blanchard (2000).

¹⁶⁶ Crisp's East Village room was reconstructed as an installation for the 2010 Mix 23 Queer Experimental Film Festival in New York, complete with personal effects and broadcast of Crisp in performance, featuring of course, among his recognizable aphorisms, 'after the first four years the dirt doesn't get any worse.'

¹⁶⁷ Adrover makes further consonance with the politics of 1990s New York – the city that Crisp had insisted was so different to London – and Crisp's search for tolerance. Adrover is acquiescent to the rhetoric of Crisp's insistence upon England's still systematic prejudice towards his queerness; 'At the time the homeless had no ticking, Giuliani kicked it out of the shelters. Like England kicked out Quentin Crisp for the way he was' (Adrover quoted in Koda and Bolton, 2008).

CHAPTER V

¹⁶⁸ Though the mode of transport is translated to bus, indeed Crisp receives little attention from the conductor who collects his and his companion's fare.

¹⁶⁹ Starck questions the legitimacy of the obituary and the biography of the subject they offer, specifically the failure often to discuss their sexuality and to recognise same-sex relationships and partners, with a focus on the British broadsheet press. In discussing obituary composition, Johnson suggests that there is a 'catholicity of selection and freedom of expression [in] an eminently readable union in the *Guardian's* [Horwell's] obituary of Quentin Crisp, whom it described as 'proud of being homosexual' (Starck, 2009, p.339).

¹⁷⁰ Crisp is often said to have been an actor, but his persona was most often present in his performances, though *Red Ribbons* (d. Neil Ira Needleman, 1994) is certainly counter to this

claim. Considering that Crisp was so renowned for ‘the elegance of his conversation’, when his elderly character talks of trying to overcome his erectile dysfunction, the great exclamation ‘I am hard’ is not the most becoming of lines. Crisp also played the title role in Needleman’s short film *Aunt Fannie* (1994). Further examples of the drag he performed in his dotage would include his playing Lady Bracknell in *New York* (see Barrow, 2002, pp.451-452), and the grandmother in the short film *American Mod* (d. Kolton Lee, 2002).

¹⁷¹ Directed by Nathan Evans with Tim Fountain for Channel 4, the documentary focuses on Crisp’s last days and visit to England, taking its title from Crisp’s wish that his death would be ‘significant’, in the sense that people would at least be aware that he had died, but not commemorative of the fact.

¹⁷² For more recent reflection on representations of gay men and aging see Goltz (2010).

¹⁷³ A fact evident in both British and American broadcasting, Howes suggests that gay men ‘are almost never seen or heard on TV/radio programmes by and about or for and about older people’ (Howes, 1993, p.569).

¹⁷⁴ Where the grotesque body came to be defined in opposition to the ‘classical body’, from the Renaissance onwards, it was understood in the West as ‘a body in process’; possessed indeed of carnivalesque qualities, the grotesque body was celebrated ‘as part of a festive cycle of life and renewal’. In such cultures ‘death was not feared but was embraced and transformed through the grotesque body and its symbolism’ (Hallam, Hockey and Howarth, 1999, p.27).

¹⁷⁵ Though lacking in any of Potter’s sumptuousness, the filming is reconstructed in *An Englishman in New York*. See also the diary that Crisp produced for *Marie Claire* (Crisp, 1992).

¹⁷⁶ There are further implications of generational difference here – Crisp is serenaded by the singer Jimmy Somerville, who would represent, in the 1980s particularly, a gay political consciousness given voice in popular culture that Crisp was apparently at odds with.

¹⁷⁷ Potter was said to have responded ‘to the way Crisp had made himself into his own icon, until it was impossible to slip a paper between mask and player’ (Jays, 2008). While this address to camera is perhaps more a nod to Crisp than Elizabeth, Humm suggests that it is ‘in the pornographic tradition an expressive, specularised relation to the spectator *qua* spectator’ (Humm, 1997, p.165).

¹⁷⁸ If *Orlando* is not intended to be a ‘gay film’, as Hodgdon suggests, it is Crisp’s performance – essentially as himself – that makes it relevant to gay audiences (Hodgdon, 1998, p.167).

¹⁷⁹ Claude Perreault, *Elizabeth*, Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, 9th January-14th February 2009. For discussion of recent appropriations of pornography in art, see Dennis (2009).

¹⁸⁰ Indeed Halberstam suggests the ‘essential masculinity of monarchy’ to be emphasised in Crisp’s portrayal of Elizabeth (Halberstam, 1998, p.213).

¹⁸¹ Crisp’s performance in *Orlando* coincided with his presenting, from New York, the first *Alternative Queen’s Message*, for Channel Four television in 1993, opening with a drolly executed monarchical wave from his horse drawn carriage as it passes through Central Park. Crisp suggests how ‘a reginal theme has permeated my year’, and speaks of his role as Elizabeth and how ‘the film connects the many moments of English history with what regrettably I believe is called gender-bending’; ‘Having worn reginal gowns I begin to understand why Queen Elizabeth I was not always in the best of moods ... continuing my honest masquerade I appear thus to address the entire British nation on Christmas day. I am of course in mufti. But departing from tradition I will not speak mainly of myself, Britain, or the strangely misnamed Commonwealth. Instead I will speak of America.’ Just as Potter had designed that welcome back to England for Crisp, so he in his address continues to denounce the country and its prejudices; ‘in England I never felt safe for a moment. Indeed it is my impression that everybody in the United States is your friend ... I left England’s lonely streets over ten years ago. Here, there are no nice people from Tunbridge Wells eager to chill what is left of my marrow with iceberg stares’ (Crisp in *The Alternative Queen’s Message*, 1993).

¹⁸² We might consider here also Sykora’s discussion of how with clothing Crisp defined his body as being between genders. She observes how, in Crisp’s writings, the assaults he endures are exercised as violation of his fashioning; ‘the violent and the visual destruction of his embodied image join forces, no longer differentiating between the physical body and its guise, masculinity and femininity’ (Sykora, 2006, p.335). Crisp’s effeminacy is underlined as ‘a life-long source of personal desire as well as social resistance’, and in his performance as Elizabeth, he ‘plays a masculine woman ... who also represented the visual embodiment of gender bending in another historical period’ (Sykora, 2006, pp.335-336). What Crisp and Elizabeth are said to have in common is the ability to transform their ‘vulnerability’, consequence of their multi-

layered bodies, into material strategies of power and resistance, and in which a sense of 'image' is determined (Sykora, 2006, p.336).

¹⁸³ Ouditt considers what can and can not be obscured by costume and performance in *Orlando* as being central to the gender/power relationship between the young Orlando and the aging Elizabeth – how a 'man acts the part of a woman ... who was known to play the part of a prince' (Ouditt, 1999, p.155).

¹⁸⁴ Consider how, before entering the Queen's private chambers, Swinton looks directly at the camera in apprehension; in such instances, Humm suggests, Orlando 'is both the fetishistic object of our gaze and actively governs the camera frame' (Humm, 1997, p.165).

¹⁸⁵ Silver considers the very 'self-consciousness' of Potter's *Orlando*, that is the 'suspension of disbelief' required of audiences, and the need to understand that Swinton in her performance is not meant to portray convincingly a man – and suggests such knowingness to be stressed particularly with Crisp as Elizabeth – but the masculinity she portrays in relation to Crisp's femininity is (Silver, 1999, p.227). Further, where Bruzzi alludes to the film in discussing the 'blurring of difference that characterises the androgyne', she observes the 'dangerous and destabilising' eroticism of those moments in which the boundaries between the body, clothes and gender of Orlando are most faint, 'when the image itself conveys doubt and uncertainty' (Bruzzi, 1997, xx).

¹⁸⁶ Dobson and Watson survey the representations of Elizabeth's death and the political conflicts they underline, with examples in art such as Robert Smirke's *Queen Elizabeth Appointing Her Successor* (1796) and Paul Delaroche's *The Death of Queen Elizabeth* (1827), revealing the very different bodies that the Queen acquired in death (Dobson and Watson, 2002, pp.12-31).

¹⁸⁷ Vieira quotes Garbo on how three different versions of that scene were filmed, alongside Cukor, who suggests that 'the screen is just too realistic for a long aria when someone's dying ... it seemed unreal for a dying woman to talk so much' (Vieira, 2005, p.227).

¹⁸⁸ Where Doty reflects upon his own emotive gaze, some sixty years since *Camille* was made, a gaze contemporaneous with Crisp's impersonation of Garbo in the role, he writes that this reaction to the film 'represents remnants of nostalgic, regressive self-pity', but such insight is inseparable from the regretful realisation that Garbo, Taylor, and Cukor were together 'pantomiming individual and cultural tragedies, depicting the impossibility of directly expressing the queer desire they all felt' (Doty, 1993, pp.34-35). For Doty, those last words of Marguerite's, the lines of Crisp's performance, 'allude to the pathos of the film's closeted ethos' (Doty, 1993, p.35). But Crisp had never been closeted, and could not have empathised with any such experience; rather, if he reminisced through his impersonation how it felt to imagine oneself in such a position of romantic esteem, it was an identification with an 'immoral' femininity seen in close-up, and his youth and the 'dream' of femininity that he attempted to realise.

¹⁸⁹ Though the 'straight-up' or reportage style was often as designed as any fashion image produced in a photographer's studio, Macpherson's portraits of Crisp make no concession for such an aesthetic either way, being very obviously studio shot and lit.

¹⁹⁰ See for example Kismaric and Respini (2004).

¹⁹¹ Foltyn considers how the cosmeticized face 'can appear more beautiful in death than in life', and is afforded a certain eroticism; 'In a world in which physical attractiveness is held in high esteem and viewed as a product to be sold in personal and professional forums, how we look in death is also increasingly important, and no more so than for publicly erotic people like James Brown, Anna Nicole Smith, and Princess Diana. Their looks were an extremely important aspect of each of their public lives ... and ... people were curious about how they looked dead' (Foltyn, 2008, p.165).

¹⁹² Indeed Garber suggests that Crisp's 'overt self-advertisement' became 'a cause of awkwardness and embarrassment'; 'In a culture that, struggling with all its energies against the AIDS virus and the massive bureaucratic indifference to this tragic epidemic, increasingly presents images of gay male health in T-shirt, tank-top, and close-cropped hair and beard, such flaming creatures of the past, with hennaed hair and painted fingernails, may seem anachronistic and even self-hating' (Garber, 1992, p.137).

¹⁹³ See Bright (2007). As example of how such images are syndicated, Macpherson's portrait of Crisp was again a double-page image accompanying the following articles: Hattenstone (1998) 'Miracle on 3rd street'; and Howes (1999) 'Quentin Crisp: Tales of the Sissy'.

¹⁹⁴ Baudrillard writes of the 'natural' death as the 'ideal or standard form of death [that] corresponds to the biological definition of death and the rational logical will. This death is

'normal' since it comes 'at life's proper term'. Its very concept issues from the possibility of pushing back the limits of life: living becomes a process of accumulation, and science and technology start to play a role in this quantitative strategy' (Baudrillard, 1993, p.162).

¹⁹⁵ Nor is there such an example given in Evan's very exhaustive survey.

¹⁹⁶ See particularly Barthes on 'He Who Is Photographed' (Barthes, 2000b, pp.10-15).

¹⁹⁷ In further resonance of Crisp's reflections on his years as an art school model, Shinkle considers the lesser anxiety that the professional model feels about posing, and the assurance of their knowledge that 'individuality is a marketable, rather than an essential, quality'; the professional model is said to know 'how to work on [their] skin from within, to avoid sacrificing the self by ensuring that it is never fully revealed to the camera' (Shinkle, 2008b, p.218).

¹⁹⁸ For an interesting consideration of how Crisp gained celebrity as punk was in ascendancy, see Bracewell, 2003, pp.301-305.

¹⁹⁹ Though *My Father and Myself* was the source of the 1979 television film *Secret Orchards* (D. Richard Loncraine), and Ackerley's only novel *We Think the World of You* (1960) was adapted in 1988 (D. Colin Gregg).

²⁰⁰ Following his death, for example, Peter Tatchell, activist and founder of the gay rights pressure group Outrage, was quoted in the *Guardian*; 'I have admiration at his coming out and demanding acceptance as a homosexual man which was trailblazing and courageous, but my regret is that he never felt able to use his public influence to support the campaign for gay and lesbian equality ... He was very much an old school stereotypical camp homosexual but there is no doubt about his courage in coming out and his bravery in flaunting his effeminacy' (Tatchell quoted in Baldwin, 1999). With the broadcast of *An Englishman in New York* in 2009, Tatchell would again question Crisp's political efficacy, suggesting that the film's portrait was 'sanitised', describing Crisp as 'a terrible role model', and that 'along with Larry Grayson and John Inman, he confirmed rather than challenged prejudices' in the 1970s (Tatchell quoted in Walker, 2009). Describing him as 'mysogynist' and a 'homophobe', Tatchell would further suggest that Crisp 'resented the fact that he was no longer unique – no longer the only visible queer in town. Hence his loathing of the gay liberation movement' (Tatchell, 2009).

²⁰¹ Terry Sanderson cites a 1994 article in *The Sunday Times* in which the journalist was concerned with how 'the present assumption of the gay lobby appears to be that all it has to do is to continue agitating in order to make further advances', and suggests that there is much validity in Crisp's claim that 'the more gay people now insist on their rights, the greater the distance becomes between the gay world and the straight world and that is a pity' (quoted in Sanderson, 1995, p.160). For the journalist, it 'is more than a pity, it is potentially a tragedy, and one that will make our society nastier and less tolerant than it was before' (quoted in Sanderson, 1995, p.160).²⁰¹ For Sanderson, such journalism engenders the belief 'that heterosexuals "cannot help" being homophobic and that gays had better know their place' (Sanderson, 1995, pp.160-161). Crisp was often prey to such misappropriation, and if there was a license to homophobia to be recovered from his rhetoric, it was evident certainly in his consent, at the time of the discovery of the 'gay gene', in 1997, that 'gay babies should be aborted'; accompanying an article in *The Times* in which he spoke of an unhappy life as consequence of his 'difference', his photograph would appear with the caption 'Quentin Crisp: Often wished he had never been born' (quoted in Barrow, 2002, p.468).

²⁰² Consider also Adrian Goycoolea's short film *Uncle Denis* (2009), which is revealing of the relationship that Crisp enjoyed with his family, with some remarkable home-video footage, and David Leddick's *Becoming Quentin* (2006), a documentary on the creation of his stage show *Quentin & I*.

²⁰³ *Gay Icons*, National Portrait Gallery, London, 2 July-18 October 2009.

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