

Quinn Miller

The Bob Cummings Show's "Artists at 'Work'"

Gender Transitive Programming and Counterpublicity

"There are three kinds of people—men, women, and actors."

Broadcasting the media industries' normative allegiances in all the predictable ways, television culture's self-representations in the latter half of the 1950s prioritized concerns about the set's role in family relations (for example, its potential disruption of the newly consecrated ideal of mutual sexual satisfaction in marriage). As if oblivious to such parochial concerns, a blissful sitcom called *The Bob Cummings Show* seized on the small screen to showcase backstage filmmaking instead of domestic medium specificity and to pursue erotic pleasure through a "state of single blessedness" rather than in conventional coupling.² During its original airing between 1955 and 1959 and in syndication as *Love That Bob*, *The Bob Cummings Show* depicted the exploits and pranks of bachelor Bob Collins, a celebrity photographer of Hollywood stars, and his network of mostly unmarried friends. In light of publicity conventions, an advertising dynamic in which Bob's studio assistant, Schultz (Ann B. Davis) was figured as an internal critic in some promotional images and was entirely absent from others indicates this series' departures from more familiar programs of the era. In fact, despite their formal limitations, print illustrations of *The Bob Cummings Show* often represented the show's aesthetic and erotic interest in the politics of media

production by reproducing *The Bob Cummings Show's* own use of double entendre and triangulated character relationships. In one picture, Schultz looks at Bob, who holds a developing photograph of a fashion model. The caption "Negative Reaction" is a double double entendre. Playing on the process of printing photographs, the phrase invokes the meeting of emulsion and light to reference the



PLAYING the comic role of Bob Collins, a freelance photographer, Cummings runs through a ploy with blonde Jo Lomax; however, Schultz (Ann B. Davis) is an integral part of the Cummings skit.

The "ubiquitous" Schultz under the lights of the Bob Collins photography studio: aligned with boss Bob and out of step with the models pictured, Schultz is visually and narratively central to this 1956 *Pictorial TV* image, but missing from seemingly identical versions of the ad featured elsewhere.



In this illustration representing an important but intangible dynamic of *The Bob Cummings Show*, photographers Schultz and Bob Collins produce a euphemistic “negative reaction.”

series’ frank discussions of sexual chemistry and its themes of inverted perspectives. “Negative Reaction” also refers to Bob and Schultz’s anti-normative relationship. The characters don’t lack sexual chemistry; they relate to one another in a mode incompatible with the naturalized gender dynamics that condition traditional romantic rapport. In the insular context of the Bob Collins “cheesecake” factory, the “negative reaction” between Schultz and her boss is not one of simple repulsion, but rather a specialized process akin to photography. Bob and Schultz turn to the visual language of the photographic negative so as to imagine its transformation in representation: their relationship, and the show as a whole, eroticizes gender transitivity—queer culture’s tendency to resignify dominant forms of gender differentiation in opposition to sexual normativity.

The tensions between this series and the discursive system in the postwar U.S. are so thorough that the program represents a counterpublic: a social formation “understood to be not merely a subset of the public but constituted through a

conflictual relation to the dominant public.”³ In general, publicity for *The Bob Cummings Show* addressed an intertextual industry audience in Southern California, New York City, and elsewhere at the same time as it promoted the fictionalized Bob Collins Studio to viewers beyond the confines of show business. The *Los Angeles Times* and *Mirror and Daily News* published photographs of character actors Nancy Kulp and Rose Marie in anticipation of their appearances on upcoming episodes, and TV magazines profiled Davis, who received four Emmy nominations for her portrayal of Collins’ assistant Schultz. Network depictions of *The Bob Cummings Show*, in contrast, often adapted the popular formulas industry advertisers used to negotiate the television set as a conduit to “another woman” suggestive of infidelity.⁴ In representing the fashion models in the program as its primary attraction, the series sidestepped dominant industry strategies intent on tempering “blue humor,” but continued to address its target audience with the spectacle of “available” women.⁵ Adopting this paradigm of engrossed husbands as one of its advertising strategies rendered *The Bob Cummings Show* threatening to family tranquility by virtue of its apparent heteronormativity, but in a manner in tension with most married viewers’ domestic maneuvers. While some of its publicity hyped Collins’ sexual prowess with promiscuous women according to “the structural relations of female competition for male attention” that Lynn Spigel has argued ordered gendered roles in the postwar home, this series and many of its print paratexts overturned audience expectations for aggressive “wolf”



Emblematic of *The Bob Cummings Show*’s “zany crew,” Nancy Kulp’s “Bird Watcher” character Pamela Livingstone was used to promote the series in this 1958 *Los Angeles Times* publicity spot.

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behavior with narrative flourishes reminiscent of screwball film and replaced heterosexist paradigms of adultery with representations of mutual non-monogamy.⁶ Schultzy's "negative reaction" to Bob and his pin-up prototype, for example, does not represent dissatisfaction with her boss's choice of models over marriage (a response critics commonly attributed to the character). In fact, in the insular context established by the series' textual field Schultzy is as likely to confirm her devotion to her boss, voice a critical opinion of Collins, or bypass Bob in her relationship with the woman pictured.

Although *The Bob Cummings Show* could have consistently showcased its quasi-familial cast to court fans of domesticoms or promoted its parade of international fashion models entirely according to an androcentric "window on women" paradigm, its press relations often bypassed these more conventional, gender differentiated, and gender reifying marketing strategies with publicity that adopted the program's own use of sexual innuendo, mobile gender signifiers, and cheeky photography



TV FAMILY—Bob Cummings, star of his Sunday night program at 9:30 over WCNY Channel 7, is surrounded by his TV family which includes Rosemary DeCamp, Duane Hickman and Anne B. Davis.

This 1956 promotional image published in *The New York Times* portrays *The Bob Cummings Show* ensemble as a "TV Family."



In the final scene of this 1958 episode of *The Bob Cummings Show*, Chuck (disguised as Schultzy's alter ego Pierre) cruises the streets of L.A. in Uncle Bob's car as Schultzy and his mother Margaret negotiate his share of the group's spending money.

metaphors. Even campaigns that sought to downplay the sexual content of a simplified series text signaled *The Bob Cummings Show's* queer scene of production and anti-heteronormative forms of discourse. Public relations suggesting that Bob, Schultzy, Bob's sister Margaret (Rosemary DeCamp), and his nephew Chuck (Dwayne Hickman) composed a family akin to the casts of other half-hour comedies incorporated a number of the show's rebellious features, but needed to consecrate the union of this queer collective in order to do so. Not quite nuclear, the intimate ensemble traversed Bob's Beverly Hills home, which he shared with Margaret and Chuck, and his Hollywood studio, presided over by Schultzy, in their matchmaking schemes, publicity stunts, and commercial production. The cast was most recognizably familial in that Bob financially supported Schultzy and his relatives, regularly trickling money through Margaret to Chuck in excess of his allowance, and to Schultzy on top of her paycheck. NBC took a publicity photo of these four characters and Chuck's Hollywood High School girlfriend in the style of a family portrait, but the series was not commonly promoted as an alternative family situation. Indeed, even the most domestic of *The Bob Cummings Show's* high jinks failed to affirm the Cold War era rhetoric of family "togetherness." In an emblematic episode called "Bob Plays Margaret's Game," Margaret and Chuck blackmail Bob with the help of Schultzy's male

persona Pierre, who Bob knows only as “the most expensive gigolo in Hollywood.”⁷ After hijacking Bob’s car and divvying their loot, Margaret and Schultz split with Chuck for separate nights out on the town. The final sequence of the episode highlights the opportunities Hollywood presents them and the queer affiliations possible in this particular social milieu by parading boulevard lights unfurling in its filmed background.

As its Los Angeles location and the “Negative Reaction” illustration indicates, *The Bob Cummings Show* was characterized by comic self-reflexivity around the category of “cheesecake,” a solid helping of equally eroticized “beefcake” (the tongue-in-cheek period terms for mass-produced sex objects), and a collection of recipes for mixing in moving images the two usually still and otherwise exclusive iconographies, which the series consistently denaturalized in its backstage setting. While it was technically sound and narratively standardized, the sitcom fell happily short of the moral standards expected of television programming. A 1956 *Variety* reviewer wrote that *The Bob Cummings Show’s* “combination of corn, slapstick and sex,” succeeded only because “everybody acts as though [Cummings is] improvising on a camp picnic.”⁸ Bob shared his blanket and basket with Schultz, a fellow expert in evaluating “curves,” and Pamela Livingstone (Nancy Kulp), an obsessive “bird watcher” who repeatedly pronounced herself cheesecake for Collins’ consumption without any; both sported enormous appetites for Bob.⁹ Pamela, Schultz, and Margaret co-existed with a significantly mixed crowd of women, including reporters, secretaries, waitresses, gossip columnists, aspiring actresses, foreign models, up-and-coming personalities, and full-fledged stars. The series’ high kissing quota and shocking innuendo (expect racy condom references, for example), are hardly as surprising as the series’ varied cast of women characters and their unusual relationships to the unmarried and effeminate main character. Even the seemingly most conventional aspects of *The Bob Cummings Show* disrupt the heteronormative process Lynne Joyrich has called “tele-containment,” in which the television industry promotes sexuality as a product (in the conceptual form of sexual identity or the accoutrements of gender conformity) while “retaining its simultaneous anxiety around sexuality

as practice.”¹⁰ This medium-specific, identity-based system was especially effective when it intersected with postwar America’s “elaborate courtship etiquette,” which Elaine Tyler May argues was a “method of containing sex,” and the virulent Cold War era transmedia containment discourses, which were motored by their demonization of homosexuality and homophobic Othering of social dissenters and ethnic and racialized minorities.¹¹

Although television programming was restrictive and conservative overall, episodic comedy series and variety shows routinely aligned cultural producers like Bob and Schultz and Bob and Pamela in quasi-romantic gender queer pairs. *The Bob Cummings Show* was the most successful forerunner of a sitcom cycle featuring unmarried comic characters that denaturalized gender difference, aestheticized gender transgressions, euphemistically embellished a generalized notion of eccentricity, invested in anti-social types, and parodied normative sexual scripts. On this series alone, regulars Schultz and Pamela, recurring characters played by Rose Marie and Marjorie Bennett, and the rest of Bob’s cross-gender coded suitors are entirely unaware of or deliberately flout a textual and social system expecting them to “snare” men “passively...with bait rather than a net.”¹² While some might dismiss these characters as a marker of superficiality in the most frivolous of genres, I would argue that these characters enacted an important “negative reaction” to otherwise uncontested structuring relationships. In depicting commercial artists confronting the institutional and ideological constraints of the culture industries, this comedy programming eroticized the uncompromising presentation of gendered characteristics discouraged in the dominant ideology of everyday life and media production. In fact, a loose field of Cold War era industrial artists camping on the mutual construction of entertainment industry hierarchies and normative gender roles produced anti-heteronormative gender dynamics between men and women as well as specifically homo-erotics.¹³ In response, network broadcasts and national print media unwittingly established a queer interpretive context for this work.¹⁴ As a result, the counterpublicity of culture industry products such as *The Bob Cummings Show* condition the possibilities

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for contemporary transgender aesthetics and queer political formation as much as do medical paradigms, neo-liberal identity discourses, or a specific 1990s cultural “moment.”¹⁵

In order to negotiate *The Bob Cummings Show*'s relationship to the gender roles and “togetherness” rhetoric that inspired suburban domesticity and was the dominant metaphor of postwar consumption during the era, journalists reporting on Bob Cummings' film and television projects focused on the actor's marriage and family life in addition to his sophisticated taste and the “boyish” sex appeal he retained from his “lighthearted” film roles in the 1930s and 1940s (though he was 47 years old when the series began). Leading up to its debut on CBS in January 1955, *Bob Cummings Show* publicity began to center on the star's unique capacity to portray a bachelor. Writers commonly asserted a contradiction between Cummings' personal life and the characters he played, marveling at his ability to invoke the reputation of a playboy even though he was not himself single. In a CBS commercial directed to “homemakers,” for example, a woman comments knowingly to her peers: “Perhaps it has also struck you as ironic that one of the most happily married husbands in America should star...in the role of a highly eligible but dyed in the wool bachelor...Who is this paradox?” By asserting Cummings/Collins as strange combination of wedded bliss and single blessedness, CBS assured conservative audiences that they could safely let Bob Collins into their living rooms even if his duplicity and the show's “parade of pulchritude” raised their suspicions. “Ironic or not,” the monologue continues, “*The Bob Cummings Show* is high on my list of ‘never to be missed’ programs.” In the context of Cold War containment, publicity about Cummings' marriage and his capacity to appear unmarried invested in the star's “paradoxical” relationship to sex and marriage as it invoked codes for homosexuality. In keeping with the ambivalence of postwar constructions of cultural difference, homosexuals were understood to be both anti-American and “distinctively American,” simultaneously dangerous and “attractive.”¹⁶ As a naturally flamboyant bachelor but a happily married family man—as well as the ideal husband and father but a polyamorous pleasure-seeking sophisticate—Cummings and

his Collins doppelganger glamorized the cultural markers and double-crossing narratives that more commonly depicted lesbians and gay men as pathological, criminal, and undesirable.

Spigel explains that in the American suburbs of the cold war era,

television's blurring of private and public space became a powerful tool in the hands of housewives who could use the technology to invert the sexist hierarchies at the heart of the separation of spheres. In this topsy-turvy world, women policed men's access to the public sphere and confined them to the home through the clever manipulation of television technology.¹⁷

In sharp contrast to the reversed spousal hierarchies and sexual surveillance of domestic family life, *The Bob Cummings Show* represented its own world with its own gender inversions and “topsy-turvy” potential. While this program is embedded in the broader processes at work in the television industry's reconstitution of social hierarchies for mid-century U.S. consumer culture, it in many ways set itself up against popular discourses invested in these hierarchies. In this way, *The Bob Cummings Show* indicates the extent to which counterpublic formations permeated the media industries during the early Cold War era despite its homophobia and the industry's relentless assimilation of subculturally marked comedy for a national market. Michael Warner articulates the relationship between these artistic formations and the postwar culture in which they worked when he describes the relationship between a counterpublic's “ethical-political imagination” and the impoverished vision of the public that dominates it. He writes,

Dominant publics are by definition those that can take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy. Counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely.¹⁸



GILDING THE LILY—Before he photographs naturally lovely Jeanne Crain, Paul Hesse, famed color photographer, applies final make-up in his own cosmetic room.

Pictured here with actress Jeanne Crain, this 1946 *New York Times* article depicts Hollywood photographer Paul Hesse “applying final make-up in his own cosmetic room” and describes his exclusive backstage insight into film stars like Lana Turner and Veronica Lake.

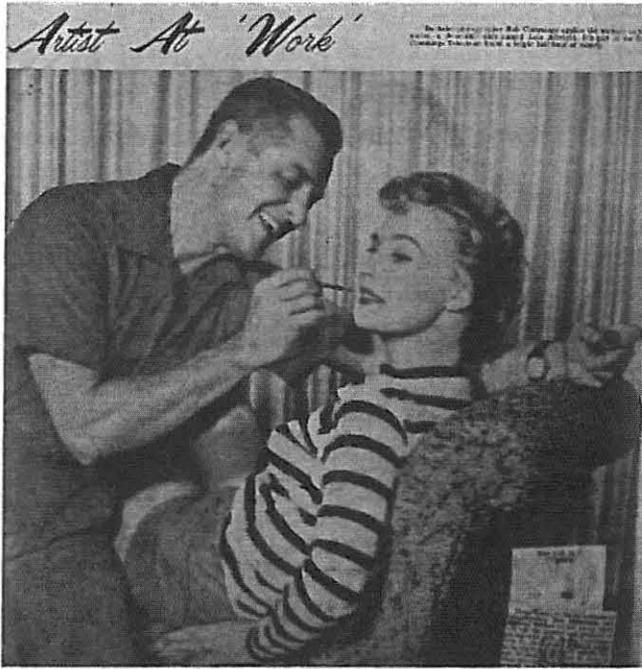
Shamelessly preoccupied with inseparable questions of sex and fashion, *The Bob Cummings Show* represents a “negative reaction” to the gender system in which it was produced and in many ways persists.

Topsy-Turvy Turnabouts: Publicizing Gender Transitive Erotics

In writing about *The Bob Cummings Show* in 1989, thirty years after its original broadcast, television historian David Marc retrospectively reinforces the dominant “cheesecake” paradigm even as he circulates once more the signifiers that

contributed initially to the series’ counterpublic discourse. Contrasting contemporary gay codes to the presumed heteronormativity of the past, Marc notes that the Collins character, “in dress and gesture...strikes the contemporary viewer as a gay sunbelt computer programmer. But Bob—sporting a perfect tan through his short-sleeve open-neck leisure shirt—was the premier ladies’ man.”¹⁹ As Ron Gregg argues about press relations in the pre-Production Code film industry, “It is not just retrospectively that highlighting such tastes seems a deliberate cue.”²⁰ In fact, Hollywood publicists—regardless of their sexual practices or sexual self-identification—were “not only familiar with, but participated in the highly developed gay subculture in Los Angeles and with the gay world beyond southern California.”²¹ The Bob Collins’ character’s sense of style was in many ways continuous with the celebrity image of Bob Cummings’, who won “best dressed” and “best groomed” awards, and whose own Beverly Hills home, furnished with a “sophisticated blend of contemporary and Oriental décor,” sported either pink or coral couches.²² Writing about the insider mode of address used to promote MGM actor William Haines in the 1930s, Gregg demonstrates that the media industries cued wardrobes and home décor to attract privy viewers to particular stars, glamorizing their facility with homosexual codes. For instance, *Photoplay* reported that Haines’ home had “lace pillow slips in a bedroom that would make Clara Bow’s look like a fireman’s.”²³ Although television executives are perhaps less likely to have encouraged the systematic promotion of such queer comparisons, especially as popular interest in lesbian and gay life was itself less publicized during the “security risk” discrimination of the blacklist era, local circuits of performance, service, and sex work like the earlier social constellation Gregg details undoubtedly remained integral to daily life and cultural production in Hollywood, a network consistently signaled by gossip and fashion reports feminizing men in relation to female masculinity. The continuity of queer commercial art across the transition to television is evident in *The Bob Cummings Show*’s provocative conflation of the fictional character Bob Collins and actual commercial artists like Hesse and his apprentice Wallace Seawell, portrait artists commissioned

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(top left) Publicity for *The Bob Cummings Show* recalls celebrity Paul Hesse: Bob Collins touches up actress Lola Albright's lipstick in this color photo accompanying a 1956 *Miami Sunday News* article titled "Artist at Work."

(bottom left) Hesse was a well-known commercial artist, featured here with Joan Fontaine in the first installment of a three-part color profile from the *New York Journal-American Saturday Home Magazine*.

by Hollywood studios. Known as glamorous "photographers to the stars" from the height of the studio era through the series' broadcast, they produced television indirectly as rich local intertexts and behind-the-scenes starmakers.

This commercial scene is one social formation in "a history of moments to which the gender separatist models [of sexual difference] just won't answer."²⁴ Yet gender transitivity, the universalizing

counterpart to primary gender differentiation that produces femininity and masculinity as mobile across dichotomous categories of male and female in queer subjects, can flirt dangerously with the "heterosexualizing presumption" of the inversion model of homosexuality.²⁵ Canadian television scholar Paul Attalah, for example, in an otherwise excellent article on the sitcom form, writes that Nancy Kulp's *Beverly Hillbillies* character "combines within herself a pronounced feminine desire with all the traits of masculinity, right down to her manner of dress and comportment."²⁶ Continuous with Kulp's Livingstone character on *The Bob Cummings Show*, her Hathaway character disrupted the naturalized causal connections ascribed to an individual's sexed body, gender identity, and sexual orientation during the *Beverly Hillbillies*' nine season run from 1962 to 1971. Attalah's analysis appreciates one aspect of the character's conceptual displacements, but maintains erotic object choice as the ground for a comic misalignment between the body and soul, entities that, even in such a hyperbolic fictional character, remain in his mind naturally sexed. That is, Attalah identifies Hathaway as heterosexual through the same mechanism that figures homosexuality as a congenital inversion of natural opposite-sex drives. He understands her as "for all intents and purposes...a man who just happens to be a woman," yet claims that Jane's erotic desire for men normatively matches her gender—her biological sex, which in Attalah's argument trumps masculine presentation as the ground for gender recognition.²⁷ He attributes an essentially feminine quality to Jane Hathaway's erotic desires, seeing sexual attraction to men—no matter how inter- and extratextually non-normative they are—as evidence of a "pronounced feminine desire." In a queer interpretive context, Kulp's character can be seen to assert an erotics of difference within an otherwise conventional opposite-sex object choice through her cross-sex presentation, her ongoing pursuit of simple, beefy Jethro Clampett, and her extraordinarily complementary official union with fellow ornithologist Professor P. Caspar Biddle, played by Wally Cox.²⁸

Eve Sedgwick critiques the inversion trope on two counts: it aligns lesbians and gay men with heterosexuals of their own gender rather than each other based on an essential gender difference and



Camp photography: a 1959 advertisement from the *Los Angeles Mirror and Daily News* mimics *The Bob Cummings Show's* sensibility, self-reflexively announcing the series' fifth season with "this bit of turnabout play."

minoritizes the sexual difference of homosexuality by positioning "same-sex" invested individuals between genders. According to Sedgwick, the invert figure is emblematic of a minoritizing impulse in that its liminality instigates the disciplinary processes of "gendering sex."²⁹ But denaturalized inversions have transitive potential. When gender transitivity is universalized in queer difference that is not primarily either "same-" or "opposite-sex," the gender transitive movement of inversion becomes itself a sexual act antagonistic to the homo/hetero distinction and other gender-naturalizing ways of relating identification and desire. The comic repertoires of many mid-century U.S. artists displaced the "invert" explanation of homosexuality by queering gender—by disrupting

this otherwise "transparent and unexaminable part of the 'common sense' of twentieth-century sexual tropology."³⁰ In the context of *The Bob Cummings Show*, for example, Schultzzy and Pamela's erotic choice attests to their queer difference instead of acting as its alibi or antidote. In an intuitive sense, this kind of TV comedy is gender "transitive" in that its characters produce gender as a perpetual "transition," passing their unexplained and changeable leanings on to one another while agitating static and unresponsive gendered forms.

As publicity for *The Bob Cummings Show* adopted the series' own use of camera equipment and photography related props, it often figured the program's interference within dominant models for understanding gender and sex. For example, a newspaper advertisement published in *The Los Angeles Mirror and Daily News* at the start of what would be the series' final season showed two women inspecting a photographed portrait of Bob Collins. The caption identifies the scene as a "bit of turnabout play."³¹ Although a turnabout can indicate a simple reversal (these models appraise Bob, but usually Bob plays Pygmalion), here "turnabout" suggests a more fundamental if incomplete transformation, or a comprehensive undoing of the expected (Have the models taken over the studio? Is "beefcake" suddenly as acceptable as "cheesecake"?). What exactly is turned-about in the photograph's flip-flop of Bob and his models is unclear. In the consistency of figures across gender role rearrangement, the affected concern of Darrow and Lloyd, and the caption's suggestion of whimsical inconsistency, it represents a "shift or reversal of...tendency" rather than a definitive reversal.³² Although a "tendency's" defining feature is ostensibly the inherent quality of its "leaning, bias...[or] bent," the unsettling aspect of this form of predilection is its impulsive transitivity; consider how the euphemistic and noncommittal form of the otherwise immediately reifying category of homosexuality (as in "tendencies toward...") indicates with a knowing insider's nod the perversity of unspecified but forbidden attractions and sex acts. As the title of Sedgwick's collection of essays, *Tendencies*, and its Ken Brown cover art promises, the tendency is itself the perversion—that continuing contagion of queer conversion.³³ Print representations can quell the movement

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of gender transitive filmed programming, but at the same time cannot help but contribute to the ethereal force of a queer lesbian and gay history accumulating across media forms.

Every Man Should Be a Wolf: Schultzzy and Pamela Help Bob

In Cummings' star persona, as in his fictional characters' relationships and their representations in print, an externalized and intersubjective trope of gender inversion—not of gender inversion as homosexuality, but of gender inversion as gender inversion: as topsy-turvy turnabout play—signals the incoherence between gender transitive and gender separatist models apart from the naturalizing formulations of “same-” or “opposite-sex” attraction. As articles highlighting Cummings' unusual preference for series television over feature film contracts (“Bob Cummings' Method is Effective but Odd”) gave way to reports representing the unfamiliar form of character Bob Collins' interest in women (“Bob May Be For Girls But Girls Not For Him”) and the suspicious relationship between the actor and his character (“Cummings Plays Wolf Too Well”), publications searching for an angle stated that Bob was a bachelor despite being married, or a playboy because he had a wife.³⁴ In fact, a column attributed to Mary Cummings was titled “I Married a Bachelor.” The caption read, “Although Robert Cummings has been married for ten years and is the father of four children, his lovely wife Mary proves that the man's still a bachelor.”³⁵ Others quoted Cummings' lewd proclamations that playboys actually make the best husbands. While journalists occasionally reported that Mary Cummings was present on *The Bob Cummings Show* set, they usually either omitted the fact that Mary was Bob's business manager and president of their production company, or described her professional involvement in order to raise “paradoxical” questions about their extratextual partnership that paralleled the ambiguous role of publicity in the Collins character's fictional dating. (In discovering new talent around town, for example, Mary was scandalously recruiting women to dally with her own husband.) The potentially disreputable situation of the couple's “private” life only contributed to the “irony” that Cummings was,

as *Look* magazine reported, considered by some “a self-made man and the creation of his wife, Mary” by others.³⁶

As this quick survey indicates, magazine profiles to a certain extent supported the conceptual dynamics of Cummings' sitcom role and star persona. While publicity discourses were able to accommodate the contradictions of the Cummings/Collins figure, whether as a married bachelor or a playboy husband, the same publicity discourses rarely indicated differences between television women in print beyond typing them “plain” or “pulchritudinous,” much less represented their various ambivalences around coupling and marriage. In fact, it proved difficult for critics writing on the show to present any two of *The Bob Cummings Show*'s trajectories of seduction simultaneously to their readers. In a CBS public relations account of Bob's “pursuit of pulchritude” and Schultzzy's pursuit of Bob, for example, writers attempted to explain Bob and Schultzzy's respective socio-sexual ambitions efficiently, standardizing their respective drives in order to clarify the premise of the series within the narrative economy of the press release. Bob's life, the ad explains, is “complicated by the fact that, while, on the one hand, he plays pursuer of this parade of pulchritude, he is on the other hand the pursued—the quarry of his plain but adoring assistant.”³⁷ As the provocative captioning of *Bob Cummings Show* stills in secondary texts like “Negative Reaction” suggests, the briefer that writers needed to be, the more poetic their descriptive prose about the series became. In this case, they establish a parallel between Schultzzy and Bob's desires in order to articulate clearly (if not entirely accurately) the characters' basic relationship to one another in just a few sentences. Without the strategic “paradoxical” constructions of a simultaneous desire for sex and single blessedness in women as in the figure of Bob, publications consistently failed to acknowledge a potential disparity between “marital mindedness” and “man-hunting.” The fact that these mechanical clichés are the only traces of a rich archive of queer comedy programming in newspaper reviews and magazine articles suggests cultural custodians reluctant or unable to conceive of relationships between men and women in which women were not structurally disadvantaged.



HARD AT WORK . . . Work? . . . Bob Cummings, the redoubtable, romantic commercial photographer, poses a model, Rusty Beamont aided by Schultzzy (Ann B. Davis) his faithful assistant. Scene is from Bob's ABC-TV show *Love That Bob*.

Partners in irony: a photograph accompanying a 1960 *TV Pictorial* article on the *Bob Cummings Show* depicts a hidden animosity in Schultzzy toward Bob, but describes her as his "faithful assistant." Hardly formidable and ambiguously at "work," the "redoubtable" Bob Collins is, in fact, a "romantic."

Nevertheless, this television repertoire denaturalized gender difference and made queer codes mobile in its construction across media platforms. As the defining features of camp texts were reproduced for publicity, character relationships signified according to counterpublic forms. The "Negative Reaction" ad is representative of this discourse in that it eroticizes Bob and Schultzzy's similarity, conveying information about the characters through *The Bob Cummings Show's* formal strategies as it selectively encodes or incompletely translates the series text. Specifically, writers invest Schultzzy with a traditionally masculine romantic agility by likening the character to Bob, while Collins'/Cummings' playboy qualities are decidedly feminine, and differently so in different textual venues. Although the CBS commercial describes a "Bob" that actively pursues women and is passive "quarry" of only a single, anomalous female pursuer, the series itself



CUMMINGS, SCHULTZZY (RIGHT) & MODEL
He found the right socket!

This 1956 image from *Time Magazine* suggests that Bob Collins found the right socket with the model pictured, but not with his assistant Schultzzy whose presence is a blur of rage behind the oblivious couple.

and other secondary texts represent Bob as an object pursued by many women. As a result, the tentative ad copy contrasts Schultzzy to a passive "parade of pulchritude," as a broader series context compares her to both positions simultaneously. In this formulation, Schultzzy traverses gendered signifiers that differentiate Bob and the models, signifiers that have already passed between the two figures (each is an active seducer and object of desire in relation to the other), or will be when triangulated with her (models often encourage Schultzzy to pursue Collins, and if Bob and a model are not involved, Schultzzy mediates their ambivalent professional relationship and potential courtship). This interplay between the program and its publicity produces a counterpublic context for Schultzzy, Bob, and the pinups' "negative reaction."

In its internal press relations within the media industries and in supposedly more impartial cultural criticism and popular reporting, Bob Collins was

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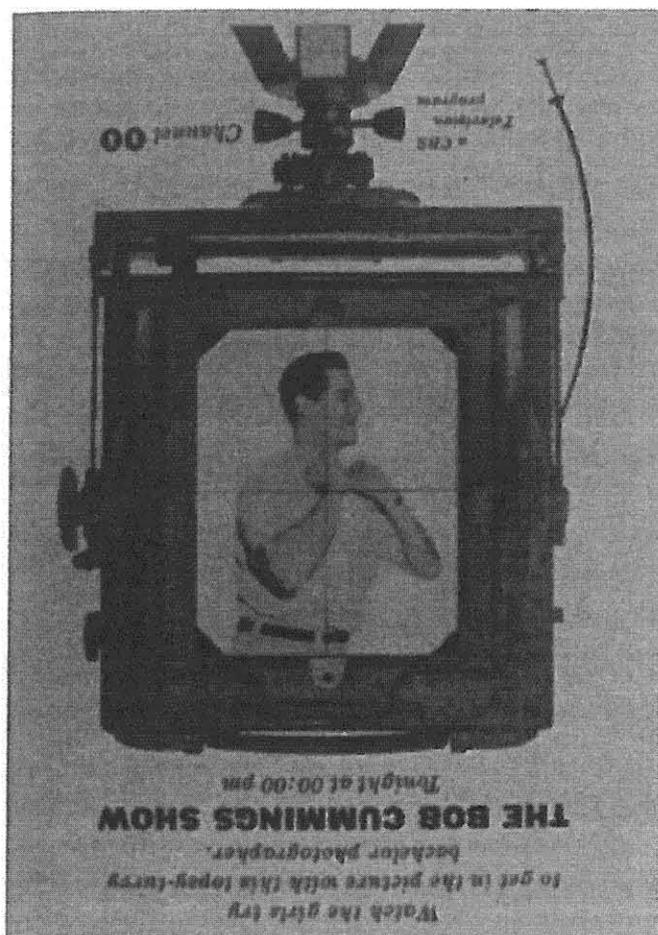
positioned as an object pursued and criticized, adored and attacked. As *TV Star Annual* wrote, "Never, in the history of television, have so many women—all beautiful—pursued one man with such vigor and determination. ... They hound him, surround him, vamp him, all but catch him."³⁸ Thus the press release compares Schultzzy's seduction tactics to Bob's at the same time as Bob's tactics eschew the sexist forms of pursuit the naturalizing language of "the hunt" suggests, both in print texts like this magazine profile and many *Bob Cummings Show* episodes. It is in her futile attempts to seduce Bob that the Schultzzy character departs from an inversion model of homosexuality that would masculinize her according to dominant codes of gender difference. Displacing the privileged relationship between women and femininity and men and masculinity, the series text models Schultzzy's pursuit on effeminate Bob's wordplay and passivity, at the same time as her desire mimics the models' "vigorous hounding" of him.³⁹ In this way, the potential connection between each characters' gender and sexual object choice conflicts with the heteronormative matrix that demands their alignment in heterosexuality (masculine Bob should actively pursue passive women; feminine Schultzzy should make herself bait for prowling Bob) or their inversion in homosexuality (where a femme Bob would necessarily desire men or masculine women; a wolfish Pamela would pursue women as a man "trapped" in a female body). Even CBS's straightforward gender reversals of the active-passive courtship dichotomy indicate the insular "topsy-turvy" movements of a less conservative text. Their description of Bob as Schultzzy's quarry produces queer gender through dominant codes for gender deviance (hunting as a masculine activity; a secretary's "plain" hair and wardrobe), but at the same time sets the character within a counterpublic system of signification by displacing the gendered ground produced by the homo/hetero distinction of sexual object choice. In fact, while the word "quarry" identifies Bob as Schultzzy's marital and/or sexual prey, it also represents him as her rival; the noun denotes an "object of pursuit" that is "an intended victim"—an object open to "intellectual or verbal challenge or attack."⁴⁰ Bob and Schultzzy's affinities and friction are chaste compared to Bob and Pamela's conflation and erotic antagonism, yet



"Unaccountably glum" without explanation: publicity for *The Bob Cummings Show* such as this 1956 photograph in the *New York City World Telegram-Sun* routinely pointed out that Bob Collins was surrounded by women, but remained unmarried.

even Schultzzy's supposedly romantic pursuit of her boss comically suppresses homoerotic challenger elements that dismantle the sexual machinery constitutive of hierarchized gender difference.⁴¹

Even press depictions of *The Bob Cummings Show's* narrative architecture that accord with broader social discourses suspended heteronormativity by foregrounding homosocial desire apart from the traffic in women structuring ties between men. Publicity images and TV critics' unelaborated shorthand identified Schultzzy as a "jealous secretary" though she was rarely begrudging of the women who dated Bob. (She was also employed in the position of photographer's assistant, not "secretary.") Schultzzy was in fact friendly and familiar with the women the jealousy model positions as her competition. One odd advertising trope within this framework of feminine backstabbing depicts Schultzzy's violent aggression toward Bob, rather than the photogenic subjects she supposedly longs to replace. In fact, the sexist culture of rivalry this phrase invokes was decidedly uncharacteristic of *The Bob Cummings Show* situation, but the images the motif generates are indicative nonetheless of the queer affinities it produces among women characters in relation to



CBS encourages viewers to participate in the “topsy-turvy” antics of “bachelor photographer” Bob by physically rotating this *Bob Cummings Show* advertisement.

Collins. In the disjuncture between their still image and captions, these ads invoke the show’s calling card prank narrative in which women conspire with one another against Bob rather than fight with one another for him, as they would within the gendered paradigm Spigel’s work outlines.

In the episode “Bob Helps Anna Maria,” for example, Schultzzy helps the “Italian Shirley Temple” Anna Maria Alberghetti masquerade as a vamp in order to convince Bob she can play against type.⁴² When Bob discovers their scheme, he joins the show, intimidating Anna Maria with an impersonation of a predatory “wolf.” With Schultzzy looking on, she and Anna Maria turn the tables on Bob once more; Anna Maria chases him away by dramatically accepting his advances, forcing Collins to interrupt his role in the charade. In the end, Bob is chagrined to find the producers of a new *Carmen* film and real-life gossip columnist Sheila Graham in his office, congratulating him for discovering a

cunning side to the formerly innocent singer—a role Schultzzy and Anna Maria created together by commandeering his studio and ventriloquizing his authority. As this episode and others demonstrate, although the hostility and violence of the “jealousy” publicity trope is foreign to *The Bob Cummings Show*’s diegetic understanding of Schultzzy (and is as likely to indicate a blinding misogyny on the part of newspaper men as a “man-hating” dyke directing a photo shoot), its use in some illustrated advertisements represented one of the program’s most consistently anti-sexist homoerotic narrative devices. Imaginatively embellishing the series’ established character relationships, the industrial authors replace Schultzzy’s unrecognized crush on her boss with an unforeseen attempt to take his life. Wielding camera equipment behind Bob’s back, this darkly comic hyperbole reproduces Schultzzy’s romantic ambivalence and queer difference within the formal constraints of print publicity. Unlike the “turnabout play” advertisement, these images ask what would happen if Bob were put out of—instead of in—the picture.

Publicity that centered on Bob, such as CBS’s paradox-themed pitch to homemakers, often hinted at an ironic “problem” he had with women but left it unexplained. Even fairly simple advertisements from early in the life of the series reproduced its self-reflexive devices about sexual representation. A similar ad included in the press packet promoting the series’ in its last season is far more versatile than any of the third-person prose commercials it includes in suggesting that Bob is himself “cheesecake” for a pack of hungry wolves. The brief text captures the sensibility of the show through its euphemistic description of characters in active pursuit of Bob Collins, an assortment that can include suitors with “pulchritude,” or “plain” and predatory figures like Schultzzy, Pamela, and other similarly typed one-off characters. Productive ambiguities are generated around many of the terms in the ad’s simple command (i.e. “Watch... *The Bob Cummings Show*”), which tends progressively toward a rapturous state of coded “explicitness” in the racy phrase “girls...get...with.” In a transitive formulation that mirrors the show’s founding conceit, it instructs viewers to “Watch the girls” as they gaze at Bob, who is identified as a “topsy-turvy bachelor photographer.” Shown

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fixing his shirt collar and smiling in a pose that suggests the pleasures of fashion and the self-fashioning for which Cummings was known, the tactile object plays the dark hues of his hair and accessories off of the grey tones of the camera technology, encouraging consumers to rotate the paper in order to see Bob upright.⁴³ The “topsy-turvy” moniker refers to its own style rather than the inversion model of homosexuality or dominant reversals of husband and wife roles. While prose journalism often appropriated *The Bob Cummings Show* to reiterate the heteronormative status quo, it also universalized queer gender transitivity against the emerging gender separatist identity discourses through which homo/heterosexuality and the heteronormative recognition of men, women, masculinity, and femininity are reproduced. Pairing vivid illustrations with punch line style euphemisms, *Bob Cummings Show* publicity assisted the series’ text in the production of anti-heteronormative erotics. Compelled to generate metaphoric “twists” and “turns” to advertise its farcical plots and disregard for conventional gender roles, anonymous editors and corporate authors reproduced the possibility of counterpublic discourses in the sitcom’s print paratexts, despite their inability to represent in detail the series’ skepticism of heteronormativity.

While Margaret and Bob encourage Schultzzy to “snare” a husband by cooking a stellar meal and settling for a “meathead,” the series makes this “solution” seem as unappealing as it is unlikely. In fact, while Bob, Schultzzy, and Margaret (happily widowed) often played matchmaker in one

another’s many dates, they shared an irreverence toward marriage. In one episode, the Bob Collins Studio gives a “confirmed bachelor” running for office a better chance at election by snapping a “family portrait” of the candidate with Margaret and a bag of oranges dressed as a baby. Before Schultzzy and Bob “perform the ceremony” in the darkroom, they ask, “Do you take this woman and child to be your lawfully superimposed family?”⁴⁴ The relationship between Schultzzy and her boss shared a similar montage quality. In fact, in the episode “Schultzzy’s Dream World,” Schultzzy doctors photographs of herself and Bob as a couple in an attempt to convince her prying roommate and a gaggle of girls at her apartment complex that Bob is her boyfriend.⁴⁵ While Schultzzy has up to this point, we learn, regaled them with topsy-turvy stories about Bob’s hopeless pursuit of her, Schultzzy’s method of distraction now fails to deflect their insinuating judgments about her disinterest in dating men besides Bob. Always in the mood for a performance, Bob happily comes to Schultzzy’s aid when their suspicions persist; they masquerade through the building on their “date,” dazzling the petty onlookers and convincing those who would judge their relationship’s authenticity of its legitimacy.

The utility of Bob’s image for Schultzzy is also evident in “Bob and Schultzzy Reunite.”⁴⁶ In this episode, the ensemble stages a performance in which Bob plays a retired but still ruthless boxing champ in order to scare off a roughneck intent on terrorizing Schultzzy’s fabricated boyfriend and



Sporting a bathing suit in the episode “Bob Goes to the Moon,” Pamela, playing her “wolf” role, surprises Bob in his studio.



“Tell me Mr. Collins, do you want to live?”: Against the backdrop of the Hollywood Hills, Pamela attempts to seduce Bob in his office.

taking her for himself. As in these more literal enactments, Bob helps Schultzy on an ongoing symbolic level. By existing as the object of her mostly imagined pursuit, he allows her to avoid unwanted suitors as well as peer surveillance. Consumed with fantasies about Bob, she is absolved of the social compulsion to marry a normal man. It is only facetiously, in fact, that Schultzy performs the "pulchritude" of Bob's models as she pursues her boss. Her apparent attempts to "snare" Bob are performed behind his back as send ups of culture industry clichés. That is, she performs her devotion to Bob not in serious attempts to present herself to him with the standard "bait," but in office banter with women when the boss is absent. Schultzy entertains Bob's girlfriends by vamping performances of femininity for men.

Bob, as a matter of fact, does conceive of Schultzy as a woman, even as he repeatedly tries to make her over as one. In addition to donning a gorilla suit often for photo shoots, Schultzy poses as a variety of gender queer characters. In one episode, she stars as an effeminate French artist chasing a femme model. In another, she plays a passing woman for a *Real Confessions* tabloid story called "How I Fooled the Spanish Government Posing as a Girl by Señor Pancho Mendez." When Bob explains this last assignment to her, he backhandedly complements her "very versatile face." She jokes back about the limits of her modeling range. Despite her skill at lampooning feminine glamour, she says she lacks only the ability to impersonate conventional femininity; she is a flexible studio extra in that she "can be anything but a girl." After proclaiming women "simple, like a typewriter," though, Collins recognizes his assistant's technical inclusion in this category, and apologizes confidently. "Sorry Schultzy," he says, "I just don't think of you as a female."⁴⁷ Yet again, the series stages a "turnabout" that ensures Schultzy will remain Bob's "boyfriend."

Schultzy's denaturalizing turnabouts and the character's tension with conventional femininity are also enacted through wisecracking discussions of the sexual politics of gender difference. In an emblematic exchange in the episode "Bob and the Bachelor Apartment," Bob and Schultzy together trivialize "the female mind" in contrast to the superior intellect of "fellas" such as themselves.⁴⁸ This scene frames the characters side-by-side in a

two-shot that emphasizes their similarity within the professional setting of the office. Over the course of their conversation, Schultzy nudges her "buddy" Bob and chuckles along knowingly as he trumpets the qualities of "guys like us." As is characteristic of the series on the whole, Schultzy undercuts the sexism of this conversation as she attempts to seduce him from the position of a male friend. All too aware of the uncertain yet often painfully direct relationship asserted between sexual object choice and gender identity, Schultzy laments about Bob, "I don't think he knows I'm a girl... To the boss I'm just a friend. A boyfriend!"⁴⁹ By suggesting that Collins' identification of Schultzy as a colleague is so thorough that he cannot recognize her obvious advances, the comment lampoons the essential connection between gender identity and sexual object choice fundamental to the homo/heterosexual matrix.

Pamela is the most emblematic of Cummings' many "boyfriends." Their relationship went unexplained, as did their theatrical antagonism and the uncanny affinities through which Pamela camped the characteristics of Cummings' own star persona. In episodes like "Choose Miss Coffee Break" and "Bob in Orbit," Kulp's Livingstone exaggerated everything from Bob's fussy refinement, precision in speech, and attempts at seduction to his ringing endorsements of wheatgrass and carrot juice.⁵⁰ While such characteristics are common in the non-comic "spinster" type described by Patricia White in *unInvited* and the "third wheel" television specialists Judith Roof details in *All About Thelma and Eve*, they are also genealogically connected to the exceedingly educated, cultured, articulate, and sophisticated popular culture codes that figure male homosexuality mostly, but not exclusively, in men.⁵¹ In fact, Livingstone was defined by her effeminacy and characterized by signifiers of queer masculinity, like many so-called old maids.⁵² As a matter of fact, the character is reminiscent of celebrity photographer Paul Hesse—if of anyone—in his cameo in "The Hesse Story," a precursor episode to *The Bob Cummings Show* in Cummings' first series, *My Hero*.⁵³

"Let Paul Hesse date who he wants!"

In the context of compulsory marriage, monogamy, and gender differentiation, depicting leading man

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Bob Collins as Davis and Kulp's sexual quarry must have been an exciting intrusion into the status quo on the part of cultural producers dissatisfied with conventional gender roles and the sexual scripts they enacted. As Matthew Tinkcom writes, the "chance given to queer men and women *to labor as queers*" is a fundamental component of the "liberatory possibilities" available in Hollywood, where mainstream cultural life "marks the insistence of the camp intellectual on inserting himself into the matrices of cultural production in their most powerful venues."⁵⁴ Amidst McCarthy-era lavender scare rhetoric, the first stages of lesbian and gay assimilation, self-sustaining social scenes, and expanding counterpublic print networks, Los Angeles also offered a setting where queer men and women mixed, often in the context of Hollywood production cultures, and at times in partnerships directly instigated by production companies and publicity firms. Although *The Bob Cummings Show* was advertised in many ways, it was not promoted as an adaptation. Nevertheless, the program imagined a relationship between its fictional character Bob Collins and Paul Hesse, a close friend of The Cummings. Hesse was figured as a competitor to Collins in several episodes, while a few critics noted that the show was more or less based on his work at the Paul Hesse Studio on the Sunset Strip, reportedly "a gathering place for advertising and motion picture notables."⁵⁵

One reference to local celebrity and nationally known Hesse by his interlocutor asserts a "topsy-turvy" arrangement of commercial photography and sexual object choice, in a "turnabout" that renders effeminacy sexually perverse in that it appeals to a range of women with a variety of dating motivations. "Advice to the Lovelorn" represents Hesse as simultaneously homosexual and All-American in comparison to the inverted "paradox" of Bob Collins' sexually deviant "opposite-sex" drive. When Collins' skeptical friends wonder how he could have a hard day at work while photographing fifteen beautiful models, Bob predictably defends himself by appealing to the economic logic of market forces. Accused of being unprofessional, Collins attempts to explain: "Now, wait a minute! I happen to be a commercial photographer. I have to take pictures of things that sell products." Bob makes his announcement as he finishes dressing.

He slips intuitively into a sport coat after easily and elegantly buttoning the textured white shirt he wears, which features a tight collar and slightly tapered short sleeves. The scene draws attention to the fine clothing suited to the Collins character by the fashion lines that sponsored the series.⁵⁶

A "camp picnic" of fey beefcake, the sequence asserts the legitimacy of his glamorous appearance—he is preparing to leave for a business meeting, otherwise known as a date—through its art direction and set design suggesting the office setting's class and exclusivity, but this visual support for Collins' attire and good intentions is quickly undercut. Schultz contradicts Bob's claim that his choice of subject is justified because images of women are the most marketable. "According to Paul Hesse, who is one of the greatest," she replies, "children and dogs sell the most products." Poised to retort, Bob accidentally comments on an erotic component of this comparison instead of the market strategy in question, playing directly into the hands of Margaret and Schultz, who want him to confess that he enjoys his work. Instead of insisting he shoots models over more wholesome fare because he profits financially, Bob turns defensive. In his frustration, he asserts exactly the opposite of what his pride would have him—he rendezvous with his models. Flustered, Collins acts as if a photographer's subject is invariably also his sexual object choice. "Let that Paul Hesse date who he wants," he says in a huff, "I go out with girls!" This joke uses the series' ongoing camp conflation of work and sex to produce an erotic multiplicity generally considered incompatible with television programming. By referencing the commercial artist, known for his Norman Rockwell-style illustrations as well as his magic touch with stars like Carmen Miranda, the episode asserts an ambiguous artistic/erotic difference between Hesse and Collins in a universalizing satire of postwar era "homosexual panic."⁵⁷

A Camp Picnic?

In a recent interview about her sitcom career, Ann B. Davis, who often reminisced about being discovered at a cabaret on "the wrong end of Sunset Boulevard," recalled executive producer George Burns' attention to preserving the dignity of *The*

Bob Cummings Show's more vulnerable gender transgressing actors and characters.⁵⁸ In budgeting the episode "Bob Rescues Mrs. Neemeyer," Burns instructed the wardrobe department to treat accomplished actor Marjorie Bennett to clothes of her own choice at the Beverly Hills boutique where they would buy the "oversized" bathing suit she would wear for one of her two potentially humiliating appearances as a "Bob-chaser." Davis also remembers Burns intervening in a scene because he found Bob's rejection of Pamela too harsh and insulting. As it was rewritten, Pamela is the one to snub Bob. In an attempt to scare Pamela off, Bob kisses her. Unruffled, Pamela pauses to evaluate Bob's performance, and requests another kiss. After he obliges, she says, "No thanks," and walks away. Comedian Burns, who Alexander Doty has shown figures prominently in the "biographical erotics" around gay-coded, gender queer Jack Benny, did not author the industrially produced text of *The Bob Cummings Show*, but his awareness of the everyday effects of heterosexism and his attempts to ameliorate the hostility of the normative representational field in which characters like Pamela, Mrs. Neemeyer, and Schultzy would be received suggests that a scene of production prizing and protecting queer difference across gender set the stage for *The Bob Cummings Show*.⁵⁹ Like Kulp's character, Cummings was himself consistently candid about his avowed eccentricities, displaying a zeal for vegetarianism early in his career, he writes, that "surely exceeded my common sense as well as the sage advice of the publicity experts."⁶⁰ He observed at a later date, speaking of astrology, "people make fun of almost anything you delve into...they make fun of anything they don't understand. Now I make a hobby of trying things that people make fun of."⁶¹

Labeled inconsequential and juvenile even by the *Variety* reviewer who said it would "bomb bigger than Bikini" if it took itself seriously, *The Bob Cummings Show* depicted an easily, triumphantly gender-deviant, sex-obsessed production culture as a desirable alternative to a traditional domestic family situation it conflicted with. (Collins sent "the homey heart stuff... to the photographer down the street.") Asked to advertise such a program, the show's public relations contributed to a weekly "camp picnic" that, in the words of Tinkcom, had a

"subtle capacity to allow its practitioners to inform the world of their ability to produce themselves as different."⁶² In publicizing queer difference in several venues, such as in the broadcast, press relations, and print media depictions of a "negative reaction" between Bob and Schultzy, a Cold War era cultural field that has been considered resolutely heteronormative sustained tensions between a queer sitcom text and the terms through which dominant discourse proscribed anti-normative relationships between women and men. Sold to audiences as an ensemble of seducers, *The Bob Cummings Show* characters cut across the gender differentiating formation of gay and lesbian identity and dominant discourses of homosexual typing, producing television programming in conflict with the consolidation of heteronormativity in postwar American media. The series' "negative reaction" to normative values with which it would not mix developed an archive of images that index a queer scene exceeding any single media platform, historical actor, or minoritizing model of sexual and gender difference.⁶³

Bob Collins's homoerotic exchanges with Schultzy and his objectification at the hands of Pamela Livingstone and his femme models produced queer gender erotics through a contingent network of commercial intertexts across a field of heteronormative cultural forms. Print publicity represented *The Bob Cummings Show's* counterpublic scene, sometimes in keeping with the episodic programming, and at other times in diverging from this archive. Both forms tended to produce a universalizing and gender transitive model of erotic multiplicity in conflict with the minoritizing and gender differentiating models constitutive of heteronormativity.⁶⁴ At a time when U.S. popular culture was beginning to reproduce and naturalize femininity and masculinity by asserting "ethnic" conceptions of fundamentally gender differentiated and newly visible homosexual identities, television comedy generated queer representations that cannot be classified as either gay or lesbian. Their generalizations of sexual deviance are not dictated by object choice; they do not reify an interpretive field biased toward dominant "opposite-sex" erotics by naturalizing gender difference. Instead, these industrial cultures reproduced queer difference in relation to heteronormative institutions with

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which their counterpublic producers were in perpetual conflict.

Quinn Miller is a Ph.D. student in Screen Cultures at Northwestern University and Yale University's Sarah Pettit Fellow in LGBT Studies for 2008-2009. Miller's work looks at queer formations and transgender aesthetics across the culture industry and the underground, with an emphasis on the institutions and art of television production. Miller has reviewed books for *Framework* and *Jump Cut* and has published the essay "Masculinity and Male Intimacy in Nineties Sitcoms: Seinfeld and the Ironic Dismissal," in *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming* ed. James Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2007).

Notes

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1 This aphorism pokes fun at actors within the behind-the-scenes ranks of Hollywood, which can reorder the hierarchy of trades that positions actors as celebrities (instead of writers, directors, producers, or crew) and dictates industry salaries. As reported by Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1950), 254. See also Danae Clark's citation in *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 26.

2 Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 120. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 105.

3 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 118.

4 Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 120.

5 Television programming's sexualized images forced a wife to compete with "eye candy" for her husband's attention, but allowed her to feel "in control of his sexuality," as actual infidelity was supposedly less likely the longer he remained in the living room easy chair. He was also depicted as less likely to help her with chores, and thus capable of instigating new marital battles. *Ibid.*, 147, 122.

6 *Ibid.*, 30.

7 December 23, 1958.

8 A "gay gathering," in the subcultural and the mainstream sense of the code, both operative at the time. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 16-17. William Esty in *Variety*, October 10, 1956.

9 Schultz and Pamela were both played by actors who would become best known for these types of roles. In most parts Nancy Kulp played, she signified several hyperbolic cultural differences simultaneously. These could include an obsessive hobby of bird watching; an overeducated background; extreme efficiency; an emphatic insistence on rules; excellence in positions of authority; a severe and precise manner of gesture, speech, and comportment; a capacity for dry and inaccessible sexual innuendo amidst an appearance of "prim and properness"; complete obliviousness to social mores; and the aggressive pursuit of oblivious, shy, or unresponsive men. From her one-off role as the department store floor manager Dolly in *A Date With the Angels* ("The Christmas Show," December 13, 1957) to her appearance as a real estate salesman in an unsold pilot *Shakespeare Loves Rembrandt* (NBC; June 12, 1974), Kulp enacted queer gender in a manner such that—as Patricia White writes of Agnes Moorehead's Endora character—"gay audiences don't need to appropriate her." Typecast much in the fashion of Jack Benny, Kulp was effectively denied dramatic roles, Kulp was cast in at least two failed domestic comedy pilots (one in which she played the mostly dramatic role of wife to Bill Bendix's lead character, a buffoon husband), but these shows were not picked up, and Kulp came to specialize in cameo roles. She went on to play a better-known version of the Pamela Livingstone character, Miss Jane Hathaway, in *Cummings Show* writer Paul Henning's *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS, 1962-71). Davis is best known as "Alice Nelson" on *The Brady Bunch* (ABC, 1969-74). Patricia White, *unInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 140. For a different discussion of women as camp subjects, see Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

10 Lynn Joyrich, "Epistemology of the Console," *Critical Inquiry* 27 (2001): 453.

11 May, *Homeward Bound*, 105.

12 *Ibid.*, 88.

13 Kulp, Davis, DeCamp, and Cummings can be counted among a loose collective of television comedians working in the traditions of vaudeville, Broadway, radio, cabaret, ball culture, Yiddish drag, female impersonation, and musical-romance-comedy film, including Eve Arden, Lucile Ball, Jack Benny, Milton Berle, Mary Grace Canfield, Eddie Cantor, Imogene Coca, Wally Cox, Richard Deacon, Jimmy Durante, Fred Gwyne, Jonathan Harris, Bob Hope, Tab Hunter, Sheila James, Georgie Jessel, Allyn

Joslyn, Don Knotts, Ernie Kovacs, Liberace, Jack Lemmon, Mary Livingston, Paul Lynde, Groucho Marx, David Niven, Donald O'Connor, Tony Randall, Martha Raye, Rosemarie, Dinah Shore, and Alan Young.

14 If it seems "ironic," as CBS's homemaker might say, to find queer television produced in the "criminal intimacies" of ostensibly heterosexual sitcom conceits and press coverage that includes the ridiculing comments of hostile commercial writers, it must be in part due to the persistent refusal of dominant discourses to recognize and value queer gender or to encourage anti-homophobic dynamics between men and women (Warner and Lauren Berlant, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 199). This remains the case despite the complicating force of transgender cultural production, the anti-normative trace of heterosexual transsexuals, the accumulation of a gender transitive archive of texts taken up by queers across gender difference, the fact of queer labor within the media industries, and the abundance of commercially produced and corporately authored queer representations.

15 This argument is inspired by Patricia White's and other works of critical "retrospectatorship," which chart discursive shifts from marginalized genres, texts, and spectator positions to identities, communities, and niche markets. Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney & Lacey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

16 Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), 167.

17 Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 122.

18 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 122.

19 David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 79.

20 Ronald Gregg. "Gay Culture, Studio Publicity and the Management of Star Discourse: The Homosexualization of William Haines in Pre-Code Hollywood." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 20 (2003): 90.

21 *Ibid.*, 87, 89.

22 "Pop vs. Playboy," 38. The Robert Cummings Papers, Brigham Young University Arts and Communications Archive, MSS 2129.

23 Harry Lang, "A Melancholy Wisecracker," *Photoplay* May 1931, 58. Qtd. in Gregg, 89.

24 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xiii.

25 *Ibid.*, 97.

26 Paul Attallah, "The Unworthy Discourse: Situation Comedy in Television" in Joanne Morreale, ed. *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 113.

27 *Ibid.*, 113.

28 Cox, the biker partner of Marlon Brando, was the famously mild *Mr. Peepers* and other sissy halves of sitcom partnerships. For example, he played Lincoln Goodheart, Sally Rogers' (Rose Marie) date on *The Dick Van Dyke Show's* "The Making of a Councilman," January 26, 1966; CBS.

29 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 171.

30 *Ibid.*, 56. This painfully literal system retains currency in contemporary gender regulation through "straight-acting" and transphobic formations within LGBT culture.

31 January 24, 1959.

32 *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed., s.v. "Turnabout."

33 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, xii. For a critique of this book, and queer "expansion" through gender transitivity on the whole, see Jay Prosser, "Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 257-280.

34 After establishing his career on Broadway and in film during the depression years, Cummings became an early spokesperson for the television industry, representing the move to the independent production of telefilm in Hollywood from live broadcasting on the east coast. After touring with the Ziegfeld Follies and working as Milton Berle's straight man on the vaudeville circuit, Cummings signed with Paramount Pictures when they requested to screen test Berle. After moving to Universal, he left under the auspices of a lawsuit with his wife, former actor Mary Cummings nee Elliot serving as his manager. With the gradual relocation of production facilities to Southern California from New York City throughout the 1950s, an investment in the television industry appealed to artist-investors like The Cummings, who had been under contract to major film studios for much of their Hollywood careers. At times self-financing their TV productions with capital from entrepreneurial side projects, they became involved with the medium early and rose to prominence over the course of the fifties with the episodic series *My Hero* and *The Bob Cummings Show*, both of which went into syndication just as daytime stripping emerged as a repurposing strategy. Neither *The New Bob Cummings Show* nor *My Living Doll*, Cummings' early-1960s series, was renewed for a second season.

35 Mary Cummings, "I Married a Bachelor," *TV Stage*, October 1955, 16-17; BYU.

36 George Ellis, "Bob Cummings: The Life and Times of a Perennial Juvenile," *Look*, October 14, 1958, 111. Robert Cummings clipping file; Billy Rose Theater Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

37 *The Bob Cummings Show*. CBS Television Network Advertising Program. [n.d.]; Cummings Papers, Box 8; BYU.

38 "The Private Life of a Ladies' Man," *TV Star Annual*, Number 3, 72-5; BYU.

39 On the latter see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

40 *Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. "Quarry."

41 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) and Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

42 October 7, 1958.

43 The sincerity that characterized Cummings' public relations in the 1950s was asserted against a confessional narrative of his

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past deceptions; early in his career, Cummings twice used assumed personalities to secure acting roles, the first scam reportedly involving a forged British passport that saw him cast on Broadway during an Anglophile phase of Depression era American theater that left his colleagues out in the cold.

44 "Bob Digs Rock 'n' Roll" May 27, 1958.

45 April 15, 1955.

46 September 23, 1958.

47 "Advice to the Lovelorn" April 24, 1955.

48 "Bob and the Bachelor Apartment" March 20, 1955.

49 "Schultz's Dream World" May 15, 1955.

50 August 14, 1955; November 18, 1958.

51 Judith Roof, *All About Thelma and Eve: Sidekicks and Third Wheels* (Champaign; University of Illinois Press, 2002). This suggests an historical and generic dimension to the textual system Lee Edelman describes incarnated in queer male characters' threat to the neo-liberal logic of "reproductive futurism" in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). The tropes of anti-sociality in episodic television comedy in the 1950s are often gender specific, but some characters differ from dominant modes of femininity through male codes of homosexuality. In fact, they are often identified as men, particularly by hostile male authority figures, on the one hand, and sympathetic male friends who treat them as equals on the other. These "types" are thus effectively contextualized as effeminate at the same time as their female masculinity aligns them also with historical codes that are particular to constructions of lesbianism or exclusive to female sexual deviancy. These accumulated characteristics can amount to political demystification about material, institutional, and social inequality when they are incarnated in specific characters, particularly in screwball and self-reflexive styles of comedy where frank appraisals of heteronormativity are allowed, if devalued by genre hierarchies, narrative closure, and contextualization within the culture industry of femininity. The signifiers of homosexuality in the Cold War era are essentially an accumulation of particularly anti-social or senseless behaviors—codes that in sitcoms take on valences of defiance at the same time as they invite ridicule.

52 If this argument seems obscure, envision Livingstone's tastes and attitudes in concert with those of the 1960s sitcom eccentrics portrayed by Ray Walston—Uncle Martin in *My Favorite Martian*—and Agnes Moorhead—as Endora on *Bewitched*.

53 "The Hesse Story" 1952 (NBC). Kulp also resembles the Russian émigré actor Mischa Auer—one of the most brilliantly gender queer actors of the era—in physique, comportment, and expression. Auer played the emoting waif Carlo, the piano playing and window lingering "protégé" of "zany" high society mother Angelica (Alice Brady) in *My Man Godfrey* (1936). In the August 21, 1952 episode of the game show *I've Got a Secret*, host Garry Moore referred to Auer's lithe body as a "brawny, gorgeous thing" (CBS).

54 Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 32.

55 *The Motion Picture and Television Photo Archive*, s.v. "Paul Hesse: 1896-1973," http://www.mptv.net/main/main_elements/hessebio.html.

56 The program's wardrobe was initially provided by John R. Vogelsang of Beverly Hills, and later by the Puritan brand, which launched a Bob Cummings casual clothing line.

57 See also Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) on the queer gender and universalized homosexuality of literature, lesbian pulp novels, and physique magazines. On the comic sections of homophile journals such as *ONE* magazine, see Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

58 Academy of Television Arts and Sciences online collection.

59 These erotics occur in the textual relationship between the Jack and Rochester characters, and the textual and extratextual relationship between Benny and his comedian wife Mary Livingstone and her character Mary from *The Jack Benny Program*. Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 73.

60 Bob Cummings with Elaine St. Johns, *Stay Young and Vital* (New York: ARCO, 1961), 21.

61 Robert Cummings clipping file; NYPL.

62 Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, 23.

63 We need not recognize this or any particular constellation of counterpublic commercial producers or their actual ties to one another, but the odds are that they existed and still do. Queer cultural fields "with a different language ideology, a different social imaginary," are, have been, and, as Warner writes, "can in fact be understood as projects for transformation among strangers." Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 124, 122.

64 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).