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Risk addiction: reading heteromasculinity and orgasm in Basic Instinct 2

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2015-08-20
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University of the Witwatersrand

Wits School of Arts

MA Dissertation

TITLE:

Risk Addiction: Reading Heteromasculinity and Orgasm in *Basic Instinct 2*

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For the Degree of Master of Arts in Dramatic Art by Dissertation

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Benita de Robillard, for her guidance and insights during the process of writing this dissertation. I would also like to say thanks to friends and family for at least trying to understand my irrational decision to suspend my career to pursue postgraduate studies.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in Dramatic Art by Dissertation to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university.

_____

Dumisani Zungu

On this the….day of June 2015

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to analyse the construction of heteromasculinity in the erotic thriller *Basic Instinct 2: Risk Addiction* (Caton-Jones, 2006). In the film, Catherine Tramell, a wealthy author who evaded murder charges in the past, is again under suspicion of murder. She manages to seduce Dr. Michael Glass, the psychiatrist assigned to assess her mental state. He knows that Tramell is dangerous but he is unable to resist her sexual allure. In the end, Glass suffers a breakdown and ends up in a mental institution. Glass' knowing pursuit of the dangerous Tramell will be the main area of investigation in this dissertation because it has a bearing on the film's construction of heteromasculinity.

My objective is to investigate the film's construction of heteromasculinity through its representation of the male protagonist's sadomasochistic relationship with the *femme fatale,* Catherine Tramell. According to Jeffrey Weeks (2011: 164), at its most basic, sadomasochism is a composite term that refers to a sexual practice in which one person inflicts pain and humiliation on another in the pursuit of sexual pleasure (sadism), and the willing submission to this treatment by that person (masochism). The practice was initially regarded as a perversion but it has now acquired the status of a legitimate sexual practice "focused on the eroticization of power relations" (Weeks, 2011: 164). Nikki Sullivan (2003: 154) further explains that sadomasochism has the potential to queer subjectivity because, while it relies on stereotypes of subjectivity, participants do not necessarily "express an essential identity" in sadomasochistic scenarios, which works to suggest that subjectivities may not be as fixed as discourses that produce them suggest.[1] Using these ideas, in addition to others to be detailed below, I will examine how the film uses the conventions of the erotic thriller genre to question the definitions of femininity and masculinity as unitary subjectivities locked in an unequal power relationship that favours masculinity. I will focus mainly on heteromasculinity owing to the fact that I want to unravel what the film's procedures suggest about current conceptions of heteromasculinity.

[1] I use the term queer to refer both to practices and critical approaches which question and denaturalize normative subject positions such as heterosexual masculinity and femininity; homosexual subjectivities may also be queered if they are conceived of as fixed and immutable entities (Sullivan, 2003).

According to Linda Williams (2005: 187), in many erotic thrillers the male character is presented as both a victim of the *femme fatale* and his heterosexuality. The male protagonist's desire for the dangerous woman blinds him to all the signs of danger that the films clearly signal. This is the case in *Basic Instinct 2 (BI2).* It is this process of 'knowing blindness' to the *femme fatale* and its implications for heteromasculine subjectivity that will be the central object of study. According to Nicola Abel-Hirsch (2006: 101), disavowal or misrepresentation of a situation is a perversion that can be utilised to mask an unwanted fact of reality in order to enable the individual to engage in behaviours which the disavowed knowledge would have otherwise warned against. In the case of *BI2*, Michael Glass disavows the danger that Catherine Trammel poses. Furthermore, he engages in a sadomasochistic sexual relationship her. To ascertain the motivations for these behaviours as well as what they signify, I will analyse how *BI2* constructs a sadomasochistic sexual economy in which Catherine Tramell has knowledge to offer and Michael Glass gets involved with her to procure it. The emphasis in this project is on the film's invocation and staging of the orgasm within what Judith Butler calls a heterosexual gender matrix[2]. Following Robert Muchembled (2008: 99), I use the term orgasm to refer to sexual pleasure and the excitement, anxiety and freedom associated with seeking out sexual gratification within a socio-political environment in which not all sexual practices are allowed, and the pursuit of sexual pleasure can provoke social censure. In my judgment, the question which arises in *Basic Instinct 2* is: to what ends does Glass use his orgasm if it is not to reinforce normative ideas of heteromasculine subjectivity?

The discussion to follow analyses the dynamics of the relationship between Catherine Tramell and Michael Glass to shed light on how the film shapes and inscribes meanings about the nature of heteromasculine sexuality and subjectivity. This analysis will also involve a consideration of how Tramell may function as a mirror for Glass' unacknowledged

[2] Judith Butler (1990: 9) defines the 'heterosexual gender matrix' as a string of associations between sex, gender and sexuality, which presupposes a causal relationship in which gender follows naturally from biological sex and sexuality follows naturally from gender.

polymorphous sexuality.[3] Furthermore, the analysis will explore how the sadomasochistic relationship between Tramell and Glass could be seen to queer normative heteromasculinity. One of the ways the film appears to queer heteromasculinity is by foregrounding Catherine's orgasm and its links to risk, with Glass' actions functioning either to frustrate or fulfil her orgasm. I would contend that it is this apparent under privileging of the male orgasm which contains answers about how *Basic Instinct 2* first queers and then attempts to recuperate heteromasculinity, and to what end. This tension is evident in that it is not clear whether Dr. Glass is actually destroyed by Tramell at the end, and the film hints that he is enjoying his 'destruction'. Which is possible given his disavowal of Catherine's dark past.

While I am mindful of the limitations to extrapolating definitive conclusions about social structures from a single text, I have chosen to analyse *Basic Instinct 2* because I think that it suggests a shift to a more fluid or queer understanding of heteromasculinity. I will not treat the film as a paradigmatic example of the erotic thriller, but as a specific moment in its evolution. I would suggest the film's procedures are linked to a broader cultural context. That context includes men's magazines which propose that men need help to perform their chosen version of masculinity (Gauntlett, 2008) and films like *Rock n Rolla* (Ritchie, 2008), which suggest that some heterosexual men are open to gay sex under certain conditions. In *Rock n Rolla*, Handsome Bob (Tom Hardy), tells his heterosexual friend, One Two (Gerard Butler), that he has feelings for him. The film then suggests irreconcilable lines of action: that they had sex and that they did not engage in sexual activity. The last scene is a kind of flashback that shows the two men slow dancing in a tight embrace, which ensures that the spectator is left unsure as to whether or not they slept together.

At this point it is useful to contextualise the industrial and cultural environment in which *BI2* came about as it has a bearing on the film's generic make up and foregrounding of sexuality.

[3] The term polymorphous sexuality is derived from Freud's idea of polymorphous perversity, and denotes adult pursuit of plural pleasures, including those which may fall outside of the heterosexual definition of appropriate sex. Freud argued that before undergoing psychosexual development, children were polymorphously perverse in that the stimulation of any of the child's erogenous zones (mouth, anus, eyes) provided sufficient sexual pleasure to the child. The psychosexual development process facilitated the child's selection of a sexual aim. For Freud, the 'normal' sexual aim was penetrative genital intercourse (Derek Hook and Kate Cockcroft, 2001: 87).

BI2 is a product of a film industry for which, as Thomas Schatz (2009: 22) has shown, the global market is a significant contributor to financial success. As such, it relied on the globally recognisable trope and spectacle of the *femme fatale* to appeal to a global audience (Kate Stables, 1998: 166). The film emerged in a global consumer culture in which understandings of sex and sexuality have gradually converged as "images of different sexualities are rapidly diffused across the world" (Altman, 2000: 34). While people in different localities understand sexualities differently (Ibid), I would argue that the film references globally circulating ideas about heterosexuality because of the wide reach of Hollywood films, in which heterosexuality is the norm for the representation of sexual subjectivities and their relations. Numerous scholars have convincingly established the dynamic interconnections between erotic thrillers and cultural imaginaries of heterosexual subjectivity (Place, 1998; Williams, 2005; Finlay and Fenton, 2005). It is in the slipstream of that body of scholarly work that I will analyse how heterosexuality in general, and heteromasculinity in particular, are imagined in *BI2*.

Like most erotic thrillers, *Basic Instinct 2* makes the argument that the woman has the power to use sex to manipulate the man and, crucially, that the man is a victim of the woman's powers of seduction. The film therefore upsets normative filmic representations of subjectivity that represent the male as active and the woman as passive. This procedure is evident in films like *Disclosure* (Levinson, 1994) and *Body of Evidence* (Edel, 1993) in which the male lead is shown being seduced by the *femme fatale* and seemingly unable to resist her advances. However, that is a complex process, as I will demonstrate. In *BI2*, Tramell is different from the paradigmatic erotic thriller *femme fatale*, clearly evinced in the first *Basic Instinct* film, in that she has taken control of the sexual act and appears to want orgasms on her own terms, and because she no longer feigns interest in her male partner's needs. In the first film, Tramell's acceptance of Curran as a lover despite her ambivalence about whether she should kill him indicated that she entertained the idea of a somewhat ordinary heterosexual relationship with Nick Curran for as long as she wanted to be with him. However, in *BI2*, her interest seems to be solely on the orgasm and the power it brings. As I will show, Trammell's orgasm can be said to be empowering because throughout history women have been denied sexual agency. On the other

hand, Glass appears to want to experience "the flow between aggression and passivity, domination and submission which seems to be integral to the experience of sex but often polarizes around gender" (Noyes, 1997; 3, citing Coward 1989). For Glass to experience this pleasure, the film's diegesis becomes a licensed space where he can 'understandably' succumb to his desires because he is under the sexual spell of the *femme fatale*. The film uses the ideological myth of the woman as seducer and the man as powerless in the face of such feminine wiles to explain away his actions. I will explore the reasons behind Glass' actions and the implications of his behaviour for his masculine subjectivity.

Richard Dyer (1993: 265) has proposed that cinema codes the dominance of masculinity through the convention of men looking at women who either do not know that they are being looked at or simply do not look back because they are not supposed to. However, Catherine Tramell does look back. Therefore, I would suggest that by challenging the structure of the 'look' the film throws up questions about the power relations inherent in heterosexuality. The question that arises then is whether, by inverting the structure of the 'look', the film is suggesting that there are other permutations of heterosexual desire that can be taken up in which, for example, men can have desires which subvert the dominance of masculinity whilst still retaining the same hegemonic social position? Masculinity's dominance within heterosexuality works to support men's social power. Therefore, an important aspect of my analysis will be a consideration of how the notion of heteromasculinity as in charge and domineering is challenged and destabilised by Glass' involvement with Tramell.

My purpose is to explore whether *Basic Instinct 2's* procedures imply that Glass is a different kind of heterosexual male who can incorporate traditionally feminine and homosexual desires and practices when it suits him; or, if the film is suggesting that heterosexual sexuality itself includes desires and practices that have been discursively constructed as feminine, homosexual or perverted. I believe that this is an important idea to investigate because, as Butler (1990: 30) has argued, femininity and masculinity have been constructed as opposites which complement each other. Within the heterosexual matrix each gender has to be a unified entity in order for heterosexuality to remain stable (Ibid). I will argue that Glass' sadomasochistic relationship

with Tramell challenges his masculinity's integrity. Drawing on Michel Foucault's (1997) conceptualisation of sadomasochism as a "subversive form of self fashioning or self-(trans)formation through the use of pleasure" (Sullivan, 2009: 444), I will explore how Glass queers his own masculinity through sadomasochistic pleasure. Furthermore, the analysis will explore the extent to which the film's incorporation of sadomasochism queers normative ideas of heteromasculinity. This is necessary because, as Sullivan argues, the shattering of the subject through masochistic practices is not absolute because the "subject maintains a consistency of agency and intention that preserves [it] at the same time" (Ibid).

I am using *Basic Instinct 2* as a case study because it is part of the global film industries that have been identified by critics such as Williams (2005), Jeffords (1993), Nixon (1997) and Brown (2002) as sites for the discursive articulation of subjectivity and sexuality. Susan Jeffords claims that mainstream Hollywood films of the early 1990s presented audiences with a newly caring, loving and nurturing type of masculinity, as opposed to the hard and violent men of the 1980s as portrayed by Sylvester Stallone in the *Rambo* series, and Harrison Ford in *Indiana Jones*. According to Jeffords, the 1990s man was the "US gender culture's response to feminism, civil rights and a declining Cold Warrior validation" (1993: 197). Jeffords' analysis demonstrates that political movements had an impact which facilitated a change in masculine norms in the socio-political environment and that film was quick to take up the new norms and weave them into stock characters such as the action hero. The link between how heteromasculinity is imagined in the broader culture and how it is represented in films is further discussed by Williams (2005) in an analysis of the way in which heteromasculinity is represented in *Disclosure*. Williams argues that the character of Tom Sanders, played by Michael Douglas, represented an embattled heteromasculinity. Sanders' lack of authority is figured in an erotic dynamic where "even sexual success is seldom cast as the controlled desire of the male subject: they are chosen not free [...]" (2005: 194). Williams concludes that the weakness of *Disclosure's* hero stemmed from the knowledge that things had changed in the socio-political environment and heteromasculinity could not go back "to the searing authority of the flawless masculinity

embodied by Douglas' father's star image" [4] (Ibid). This being said, some feminists regarded *Disclosure* as misogynistic. In this regard, Sarah-Jane Finlay and Natalie Fenton, citing Yvonne Tasker (1998), charge that the film's "[M]isogyny is often hidden behind quasi-feminist rhetoric" (2005: 53). They argue that the film casts Meredith Johnson's (Demi Moore) ambition and sexual aggression as negative characteristics which she uses to gain the advantage over Tom Sanders. This, according to Finlay and Fenton, reduces Johnson to a power-hungry "sterotype of a female executive" who revels in frustrating her male colleagues (Ibid).

Sean Nixon (1997) also discusses the idea of the 'new man' that gained prominence in the 1990s. Describing print advertisements, Nixon says that in popular consumer magazines images of men were sexualised since they were presented as sex objects to be looked at (1997: 293). Nixon, however, assumes that heterosexual men would not be interested in viewing such images, and questions whether this 'visual erotica' was appropriate for heterosexual men to look at (Ibid.). His use of terms like 'beefcake' and 'narcissistic' suggests that the images contain gay or metrosexual visual codes, such as fastidiousness in terms of dress and grooming (Hill, 2006). The men in the adverts still possess traditional attributes of heteromasculinity such as strength and virility, but Nixon notes that what is most striking about them is the "festished and narcissistic display" of their bodies (1997: 293). He links this development to a changing consumer economy in which men were increasingly being targeted as a market for fashionable products such as "menswear, grooming products and toiletries, and consumer magazines" (1997: 294).

Moreover, Nixon argues that the lifestyle magazine was the first site where the images of the well-groomed and fashionable man appeared and were later elaborated. In this instance, the publishing industry was involved in shaping a new discourse on heteromasculinity that, like the Hollywood men described by Jeffords and Williams, had its roots in a broader social change, which in this case was economic. The link between economic participation and views of subjectivity is explained by David Gauntlett (2008) in an evaluation of Anthony Giddens' theories. Gauntlett (2008: 111) argues that in capitalist societies consumerism has a direct impact

[4] Williams is here referring to Kirk Douglas, a Hollywood leading man from the 1940's through to the early 1960s.

on how people construct their sense of identity. The various products available in the market and the lifestyles they denote hold out the promise of a common identity in which different people can have a stake through clothing or other possessions (Ibid). Mainstream magazines appeared to endorse the idea of the 'beautiful' male, which gave the images and magazines discussed by Nixon potency in shaping ideals of masculinity.

Images of masculinity continued to mutate, and Jeffrey Brown (2002) describes a further elaboration of them in an analysis of the film *Payback* (Hegeland, 1999). Brown claims that the film presents a "sadomasochistic trope that defines contemporary cinema's model of masculinity" (2002: 124). In this model the male character, played by Mel Gibson, submits to various forms of sadomasochistic violence and abuse that ironically function to enhance his masculinity because he proves in the end to have the strength and will to withstand excruciating pain (2002: 131). Brown points out that this new screen hero challenges the gendered binaries which have characterised weakness and vulnerability as feminine traits (2002: 129). Both *Payback* and *Basic Instinct 2* present different versions of masculinity, which suggests that it is constantly being made and remade.

The consensus among these scholars is that there are material ways in which the global media industry constructs notions of acceptable sexual subjectivity. As Nixon and Jeffords make clear, these subjectivities emerge at particular historical moments in response to discourses and practices in the broader socio-economic environment. It is against this intellectual background that I aim to analyse the particular construction of heteromasculinity in *Basic Instinct 2*.

"She just walked out, how Lacanian!" Dr. Milena Gardosh in *Basic Instinct 2*

Basic Instinct was not a talking point in the popular media only. It also spawned a considerable amount of debate among film scholars. To a lesser extent, *Basic Instinct 2* also created some debates in the press and among academics. The two films have been analysed using feminist film theory, psychoanalysis/spectatorship and narrative theories [5]. While each of these

[5] Narrative studies includes analyses of how the film narrative as a system of interrelated parts is designed to guide the spectator to interpret character's actions and other filmic events in the ways that the filmmakers intended

theoretical positions has been used as a primary critical lens to analyse the films, there has been some overlap as well as combination of the various critical lenses. To provide context, I will first rehearse the arguments of the various critics and then offer my assessment of them in relation to the central question my dissertation investigates.

Tuna Yilmaz (2006) and Williams (2006) have read *Basic Instinct 2* as a knowing and self-reflexive sequel which engages playfully with the academic debates that emerged around the first film, such as whether Tramell was a positive image for feminism, and if *Basic Instinct* was homophobic and misogynistic. On the other hand, Mark Fisher (2007) regards the sequel's engagement with those debates as unintelligent. Juan Senis Fernandez (2011) has used narrative theory to explore how *Basic Instinct 2* uses Catherine Trammel's privileged status as a writer to suggest alternative discourses on sexuality that create space to resist normative ideas of femininity. These writers' analyses suggest that they subscribe to the school of narrative theory which recognises that classic Hollywood narrative "for the most part, negates the female point of view and is predominantly based on male sexuality [...]" (Susan Hayward, 1996: 251). From a feminist film theory point of view, critics such as Tracy Beck-Briggs (1993), Finlay & Fenton (2005), Michael Kelly (1998) and Kate Stables (1998) have focused on *Basic Instinct's* portrayal of sexual subjectivities, with special emphasis on Tramell's bisexual practices as well as the relationships she engages in as a result. They suggest that her bisexual practices can be said to challenge normative ideas regarding heterosexual femininity.

Finlay and Fenton (2005) laud Tramell's bisexuality and her avid sexual appetite and suggest that it problematizes the binary understanding of sexuality within Hollywood cinema. Tramell's money, power, aggression and bold sexuality are what usually describe masculinity so there is an extent to which, Finlay and Fenton posit, she upsets heterosexual understandings of femininity. Stables (1998: 175) argues that Tramell's speech further serves to disturb gender norms as she confidently speaks of "fucking" and not "making love," which creates space for ideological contestation where spectators can imagine a different kind of heterosexual

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(Branigan, 1992). Narrative studies is also concerned with how the structured telling of the filmic story privileges certain points of view such as masculine subjectivity and capitalist values (Bhaskar, 2004).

femininity that does not defer to masculinity when it comes to issues of sex. On the other hand, Beck-Briggs (1993) slammed *Basic Instinct* for being misogynistic and homophobic in that the textual organisation of the relationships between the characters, she argued, favoured a heterosexual worldview. In my view, the critical perspectives just outlined in relation to *Basic Instinct* also could be applied to its sequel *Basic Instinct 2*.

My dissertation distinguishes itself from the existing scholarship on the *Basic Instinct* franchise by concentrating on how the representation of Tramell as sexually aggressive functions to elide some of the contradictions in Glass' performance of masculinity. What will be key to this aspect of the analysis will be an examination of how Glass' interest in sadomasochism, most clearly exemplified in his participation in asphyxiaphylia, may be an instance of a subject wanting to redefine the boundaries of his subjectivity. Hucker (2011) explains that in cutting off blood supply to the brain, asphyxiaphylia can result in accidental death[6]. Glass knows this but he nonetheless allows the notorious Tramell to asphyxiate him during sex. Glass' masochistic submission to Tramell is an important aspect of examination in this dissertation because his submission to her, I will argue, queers his masculinity. Abel-Hirsch (2006: 100) explains that masochistic suffering is a way to tolerate painful change in order to discover what is it is to be oneself. It is the nature of this change and what it may produce that I will examine in the coming chapters.

"Images and functions of heterosexual masculinity within mainstream cinema have been left undiscussed" (Neale, 1992: 277)

The influential film scholar, Steven Neale makes the claim cited in the epigraph above in his seminal essay, *Masculinity as Spectacle* (1992). Neale suggests that feminist film theory has focused on critically analysing the representation of women in film (1992: 277). "Only within the Gay Movement have there appeared specific discussions of the representation of men". But, Neale argues, those discussions focused on "stereotypes of gay men" and did nothing to question the normative status of heteromasculinity (Ibid). I would argue that it is

[6] http://www.forensicpsychiatry.ca/paraphilia/aea.htm

understandable that feminist anthologies like *Women in Film Noir* (E. Ann Kaplan, 1998) concentrate on how women are represented in *film noir*. The focus in that volume is on the politics of women's representation; not, for example, how these very representations might function to elide a range of alternative modalities of heteromasculine subjectivity. Hence, the idea for this research was inspired by the limited academic criticism and inquiry that directly considers the representation of heteromasculinity in erotic thrillers. As discussed above, Finlay and Fenton (2005), Stables (1998), Place (1998), Williams (2005) have discussed how erotic thrillers construct and subvert female heterosexuality but there is a lack of similar inquiries into the narrative construction of heteromasculinity in *film noir* or the erotic thriller more generally.

In the literature I have surveyed, Williams (2005) and Becca Cragin (2009) differ in that they provide detailed discussion of how heteromasculinity is depicted in the erotic thriller. However, both authors assume that the underlying structures of desire remain normative and unchanged even though the man is involved in what they identify as a sadomasochistic interaction. Cragin notes that Catherine Tramell is 'masculinised' but does not explore the implications of this textual procedure for the heterosexuality of the men who pursue her. My argument is that an in depth study of the delineation of heteromasculinity in *Basic Instinct 2* will reveal the detail of what may be elided by the film's presentation of a boldly sexual *fatale* who, it seems, ends up destroying her male counterpart.

'A Brutal Murder. A Brilliant Killer. A Cop Who Can't Resist the Danger.'[7]

Before providing a definition of the erotic thriller, I will first mention the broad characteristics of the thriller genre, of which it is part; this will serve to contextualise the genre's narrative structure. Hayward (1996: 187) defines the thriller as a film chiefly characterised by complex plots that are designed to engender fear and [or] suspense in the spectator. Various categories fall under the rubric of thriller: "film noir, gangster, science fiction, and horror films are in some respects thrillers" because suspense is integral to their plots (Hayward, 1996: 387). The erotic thriller, also called the neo-*noir,* grew out of classic *film noir*, which also featured narratives that

[7] This is the strapline on the *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992) DVD that was released in 2002.

took sexuality as a starting point (Williams, 2005: 28). Hillary Neroni (2005: 22) seems ambivalent about whether *film noir* "is a genre or just a style." However, she sidesteps that question to point out that *film noir* and the erotic thriller can be regarded as one filmic aesthetic, separated by time and socio-political circumstance. This is due to the fact that 'classic' *film noir* also featured tales of betrayal, seduction and murder[8]. Like *film noir*, the erotic thriller's central characters usually include a morally compromised man and a "scheming femme fatale" (Cragin, 2009: 2).

Williams (2005: 36) proposes that there are differences between the erotic thriller and neo-*noir*. In neo-*noir*, "sex might be a tributary traversed en route to criminality, crime's vehicle rather than its object," while the erotic thriller focuses on "[S]ex as crime or sex so foregrounded that it […] subordinates the role of crime to the minimal status of subplot or narrative pretext" (Ibid)[9]. Stables (1998: 167) takes the latter point further and argues that what sets the erotic thriller apart from its classic predecessor is the integration into the narrative of scenes that explicitly depict sex to the extent that these scenes often mark key points in the plot. She argues that the erotic thriller differs from *film noir* in several ways, most notably in its explicit depiction of sex acts, which its classic predecessor merely suggested through double entendres and the construction of the *femme fatale* as erotic spectacle. "Where the classic *femme fatale* was forced into the cultural margins due to her unsettling sexuality and ambition, the new *fatale* willingly lives on the edge, driven by lust for power, money and sex" (Ibid.)[10]. In addition, Slavoj Žižek (2000: 9) points out that a further trait which distinguishes the erotic thriller from early *film noir* is that its *femme fatale* is "not killed off at the end, only to survive as a spectral presence, she survives directly in the social reality of the film." For example, *Basic Instinct* ends with Tramell

[8] For example, in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), Lana Turner plays a woman who teams up with her lover to murder her husband.

[9] Several authors that I have cited use the terms neo-*noir* and erotic thriller interchangeably. But I will use the term erotic thriller because *Basic Instinct 2's* foregrounding of sex fits William's description of that genre, and throws into relief how it differs from neo-*noir*. Examples of neo-*noir* include *Double Jeopardy* (Beresford, 1999) and *The Specialist* (Llosa, 1994).

[10] See for instance *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *They Live by Night* (1948) and *Double Indemnity* (1944).

exonerated from all her crimes. In the last scene she is in bed with Nick Curran, and through the shot of the ice-pick under their bed the film suggests she has not decided whether or not to kill him. That shows that the film is not interested in punishing the *fatale*.

As with any genre, spectators bring certain expectations to the viewing of an erotic thriller: sex scenes are one of the important elements that spectators would expect to see. In that regard, Williams explains that the erotic thriller's combination of suspense, sex, violence and light sadomasochism is designed to thrill and sexually arouse the spectator (2005: 25). Hence, the erotic thriller combines and synthesises elements of the thriller and those of soft-core pornography, which presents scenes of simulated sex without showing genitalia during sexual intercourse (Williams, 2005: 39). Ronald Schwartz (2001: 7) makes a similar argument and points out that in the erotic thriller characters engage in sex "that leaves little to the imagination." Moreover, the sex is usually haunted by danger because it is often the case that the *femmes fatale* use "their sexuality" to attract and then betray "vulnerable men." Schwartz further says that the erotic thriller shows "sexuality as the true core of the motives for the protagonists to commit their crimes" (Ibid.). According to Williams, the erotic thriller's foregrounding of sex is partly due to the fact that the genre's emergence in the 1980s was, to an extent, fuelled by the rise of home video, which enabled audiences to watch sexually explicit films in private (2005: 7). The direct to video erotic thriller was designed to "provoke sexual response" and its mainstream counterpart built on this generic innovation (Ibid, 45).

With regard to the *noir* genre's social commentary, Place (1998: 48) claims that since the 1940's the genre has been involved in a discourse that partly resists hegemonic gender norms. That is, it appealed to popular culture by foregrounding the dominant gender ideology, whilst simultaneously subverting it (Ibid). Place (1998) proposes that *film noir* first privileges and then suppresses female power and sexuality, which shows that the genre's expression of repressed issues, such as unequal gender relations, is circumscribed. When viewed in this way, the erotic thriller's relationship to the heterosexual framework appears to have been characterised by tension from the beginning. Place further points out that while *film noir* is not progressive, it nonetheless offers an opportunity to re-imagine gender relations because it provides "one of the

few periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality" (1998: 47).

Having established the generic make up and discursive orientation of the erotic thriller with regard to heterosexuality, it is worthwhile to outline how *Basic Instinct* and its sequel have contributed to recent debates about heterosexuality. *Basic Instinct* is generally considered the definitive erotic thriller and as such the film has functioned as a reference point in discussions about contemporary sexuality in the media. *Basic Instinct 2* has, to a lesser extent, extended the conversations its precursor instigated. I now provide brief expositions of both films and how they were received. It is necessary to read the sequel through the first film because *BI2* presents a similar narrative and draws on the spectators' knowledge of the first film. And, as critics have pointed out, *BI2* engages with the debates that emerged around the first *Basic Instinct*.

Basic Instinct (Verhoeven, 1992) featured Michael Douglas and Sharon Stone in the lead roles. The plot follows detective Nick Curran, played by Douglas, as he investigates the murder of a retired rock music star, Johnny Boz, who was stabbed with an ice pick during sexual intercourse. The police learn that the deceased was in a relationship with wealthy heiress and author, Catherine Tramell, played by Stone. Tramell tells the police that she could not be bothered that her lover is dead because she did not care about him but was just 'fucking him'. Curran is drawn in by her brash and seductive manner and soon they are having sex, while Tramell's lesbian lover, Roxy, watches from the bathroom. Johnny Boz's murder took place exactly as described in one of Tramell's novels. However, the police cannot mount a case against her due to lack of evidence. *Basic Instinct* was one of the top successes of 1992, with box office earnings of over US $350 million dollars worldwide[11]. But it also caused a lot of controversy for its explicit sexual content, which reached a crescendo when Catherine Tramell uncrossed her legs and flashed her vagina. The film's success and the controversy surrounding it provide a framework for understanding its relationship to the cultural politics of heterosexuality.

[11] From the movie industry business website Box Office Mojo: http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=basicinstinct.htm

The sequel, *Basic Instinct 2*, followed much later in 2006. Sharon Stone reprised her role as Catherine Tramell, but Michael Douglas did not return for the sequel. Instead, the British actor, David Morrissey, co-stars as psychiatrist Dr. Michael Glass. The film opens with Catherine Tramell speeding through a dark London street at over 160 kilometres per hour. She uses the hand of her drunk, or drugged, male passenger to masturbate and, in the midst of an orgasm, drives off the road and into the Thames River. As the car sinks, she is unable to undo the buckle and save her companion so she swims away to safety. Was it an accident or murder? The London police think it suspicious, and again Catherine Tramell is under investigation. Michael Glass is called in to assess her mental state and it emerges that she suffers from 'risk addiction'. Trammel seduces Glass and their relationship eventually becomes sexual. As inexplicable murders are committed, Glass becomes more suspicious of Tramell. The murders again take place as described in her latest novel. In the end, Glass has a breakdown and is placed in a mental institution. The final scene features Tramell seemingly gloating that she orchestrated all of the events that led to Glass's downfall. But the scene is rendered ambiguous by Tramell's suggestion that Glass may in fact be the killer. After all this, Glass half smiles as Tramell saunters away. Though Glass initially opines that Tramell has risk addiction, his fascination with and submission to her, suggest that he enjoys her risk taking. That Glass assumes a masochistic position in relation to Tramell is crucial to a consideration of the shift in the way heteromasculinity is imagined in this film, as opposed to the first *Basic Instinct* in which Nick Curran believed he could "contain" Tramell's aggression (Cragin, 2009: 3). I aim to explore the nuances, and implications, of this shift through a close reading of *Basic Instinct 2*.

Before moving on to discuss the theoretical framework I will use, I want to introduce the supporting characters in *BI2*. I will concentrate on the characters to which I will refer in the course of the dissertation. As the protagonist, Michael Glass is connected to most of the supporting cast. Dr. Milena Gardosh (Charlotte Rampling) is his friend and colleague. From their conversations it is clear that she is something of a mentor to him. He discusses intimate details of Tramell's therapy sessions with her and it is in Milena's house that Glass shoots and kills Detective Washburn (David Thewlis). Washburn is in charge of investigating Tramell's

involvement in the car crash that claims Kevin Franks' (Stan Collymore) life. Within the film, Franks' death makes headlines because he is a famous football player. Glass' ex-wife, Denise (Indira Varma), is in a romantic relationship with one of his rivals, a magazine reporter called Adam Towers (Hugh Dancy). When Towers' is found dead in his bed, Tramell informs Glass that she was also in a sexual relationship with Towers. The film does not resolve the question of who killed Towers but it suggests that Tramell was responsible. Before he starts a sexual relationship with Tramell, Glass is involved in an ongoing sexual relationship with Michelle Broadwin, a psycho-pharmacologist he presumably met in the course of his work. In addition, there are several scenes with Glass in the coffee shop near his office. The unnamed waitress who usually serves him takes on greater significance when he has sex with her in the shop.

I will now introduce the theoretical apparatus to be deployed in the discussion to follow. In addition, I will develop the key concepts in each chapter across the dissertation. Broadly speaking, three poststructuralist oriented bodies of literature will be consulted in the pursuit of this study: film theory, cultural studies and critical studies of sexuality, including focused references to queer theory. The literature review has been organised under the key terms that I will use in the dissertation.

Film Theory

Basic Instinct 2 is part of a genre that has become a site for debates around cultural definitions of (hetero)sexuality and gender roles. It is therefore fitting to analyse the text using a body of film theory and criticism that is cognisant of the broad range of factors that come into play in the production of a film. According to Hayward (1996: 352), poststructuralist film theory synthesizes psychoanalysis, feminism and deconstruction with a view to analysing explicit and implicit discourses within and around films. That procedure facilitates the examination of films as products of an industry situated within a particular culture, which means the theory accounts for "modes of production, the impact of stars on choices and the socio-historical context of production" (1996: 352). Place (1998) and Stables (1998) have used poststructuralist feminist theory to analyse *film noir,* producing analyses which deduce that representations of the *femme fatale* in the 1940s and 1990s were informed by contemporary concerns with regard to

issues of female empowerment and sexuality as well as the inequities of the relationship between masculinity and femininity. I will deploy poststructuralist film theory to analyse the social concerns inherent *BI2* since it also stages what appears to be a tug of war between masculinity and femininity in twenty first century western culture[12].

Nonetheless, this body of theory and practice is not without some drawbacks. Saul Newman (2005: 2) suggests that some of the limitations of poststructuralist theory are that it situates the subject within the fields of "power" and "discourse," which constitute the subject but cannot be traced to a single point. As a result subjectivity becomes a diffuse formation that discourses produce (Ibid). Diedre Pribram further points out that the discursively constructed subject may appear to lack "agency" in terms of the subject's "self-willed thoughts and actions" (2004: 156). However, as Pribram goes on to argue, the subject as envisioned under poststructuralism is not without agency. In that regard, Pribram cites Judith Butler's contention that the idea of a discursively constructed subject does not preclude the possibility of the subject's appropriation of the very discourses that constitute him/her (Ibid). Against this background, I will propose that Michael Glass' actions suggest that he wants to challenge the meanings ascribed to heteromasculinity as a subject position that is produced through discourse.

Pertinent to this study is the strand of poststructuralist film criticism that Claire Johnston (1975) inaugurated in her analysis of a "female character who cross dressed as a male pirate" (Smelik, 2007: 495). This is because one of the key aspects I will concentrate on in this analysis is how subjects are able to appropriate ideas of gender and sexuality to challenge power imbalances; or, to question cultural ideas about heterosexual subjectivity and sexuality. Citing Johnston, Anneke Smelik argues that screen representations of women that trouble their relationship to femininity, such as the aforementioned female pirate in men's clothes, can work to question the

[12] Muchembled cites Freud to suggest that the sublimation of the "physical passions" enabled European countries to grow at a rapid rate since the Renaissance (2008: 3). Over time, Muchembled posits, the idea of "self-control" with regard to sexual desire informed the production of appropriate subjectivities, including ideas of how the ideal body should look (Ibid). Therefore, I use the term 'western' to denote ideas of subjectivity and social organization that began in the European context, later reaching America, and then circulated around the globe.

idea that femininity in women occurs naturally, which exposes femininity as an ideological construction or masquerade (Ibid.). In Mary Ann Doane's ([1991] 2003) elaboration on the idea of femininity as a masquerade, she disputes Freud's assertion that femininity is an enigma, and instead argues that "the question of the woman reflects only the man's own ontological doubts" about the stability and fixity of his subjectivity (2003 [1991] 61). Doane suggests that men project their doubts about subjective unity and coherence onto women, and cites the omitted parts of the poem Freud quoted in his lecture on femininity to illustrate that what the poet wanted to know was not the nature of femininity but, rather, masculinity since the original lines read: "Tell me, what signifies man? Whence does he come? Whither does he go? (Ibid.)[13]"

Doane proposes that the masquerade is associated with the *femme fatale* who destabilises the structure of the cinematic look through the control she exercises over her male counterpart, thereby using her sexual allure to subvert patriarchal law (2003 [1991]: 66). *Basic Instinct 2's femme fatale* dresses in fashionable clothes in order to fit the ideal of female beauty, which, as Cragin (2009: 3) points out, means "slim" and "white" in the western context. Hence, the idea of the masquerade will be useful in exploring what the film seeks to highlight or contest: namely how Catherine Tramell may function to reinforce normative ideas about heteromasculinity and femininity on one level, whilst simultaneously highlighting, through her 'excessive' and 'masculinised' femininity, questions about the passive/active structure of gendered power relations that are assumed to be natural to heterosexuality. In short, I will use this conceptual genealogy to reflect on what 'ontological doubts' about Michael Glass' masculinity Tramell reflects, excites and frustrates.

Femininity, Masculinity and Subjectivity

Pribram explains that psychoanalysis postulated subjectivity as a coherent experience of selfhood predicated on sexual difference (2004: 146). However, poststructuralist theories that came after Lacan questioned the universal "sameness" of the psychoanalytic subject in the light

[13] The poem is by Heinrich Heine, and is titled 'Question.' It is presented as a set of questions being asked by a young man whose "head is full of doubt" (Lazarus, 2010: 215).

of differences in cultural contexts around the world, which galvanized a reconceptualization of the concept of subjectivity in subsequent poststructuralist work (Ibid, 152). According to Pribram, then, "[P]oststructuralism […] posits a decentred, noncoherent, externally constructed rather than internally originating subject" (2004: 146). In the case of masculinity and femininity, Pribram says that "the discursive formation of heterosexuality" constructs heterosexual subjectivities through "institutions and technologies such as marriage, and discourses such as romance [and] love" (2004: 152). For Pribram subjectivity can be regarded as the effect of various discourses which intersect to articulate a subject (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Diana Saco (1992: 24) argues that the "discourse of gender" constitutes masculine and feminine subjects, and these subjectivities govern the ways individuals relate to themselves and others through implicit and explicit codes of what is permissible and impermissible. Judith Butler defines gender as a way of ascribing meaning to human bodies on the basis of sexual difference, which according to Butler, presupposes that biological sex causes gender (1990: 9). For Butler, sex itself is a gendered category, and gender constitutes "the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" (1992: 10).

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note that *Basic Instinct 2* operates within the two gender system mentioned above, which, as Marjorie Garber (2005: 54) explains, conflates "[biological] sex and gender." The effect of this is that "heterosexuality" becomes established as "the natural province […] of male and female" bodies to the exclusion of "bi-, homo-, and asexuality" and "control of intersexual bodies because they blur and bridge the great divide" (2005: 55 – 56). Garber explains that medical doctors control the bodies of intersex persons through surgical procedures that reclassify such individuals into either male or female so they can "'fit in' both physically and psychologically" (2005: 55). This, continues Garber, implies that there can "only be two sexes, that heterosexuality alone is normal […]" (Ibid). These 'corrective' surgeries, as Mary Bunch (2013) has shown, frequently assign the 'wrong' sex/gender to a person who may not identify as either male or female, but both. The arguments that Garber and Bunch put forward show that the two gender system by no means covers the full spectrum of possible sexual subjectivities. This suggests that subjects may fail to perform

their genders and sexualities in normative ways. This conception of sexual subjectivity will be useful in this study because it posits a culturally constructed subject for whom it is possible to appropriate the power being exerted through the discursive formation of heterosexuality. In the film, Michael Glass is able to push the boundaries of his heteromasculinity because it is an ideological construction that is maintained through discourse. I will now turn to a discussion of masculinity and femininity within the discursive context of heterosexuality.

According to Glover and Kaplan (2000: 1), femininity refers to a network of ideas about the nature of women. Nurturing, dependent and sensitive to the needs of others are some of the traits that supposedly define femininity. But Glover and Kaplan also note that while some women are aggressive and ambitious, aggression and ambition are said to be unfeminine because they describe masculinity within a system where masculinity and femininity are positioned as "complementary opposites" (2000: 93). The production of masculinity and femininity as different but complementary also applies to sexual characteristics ascribed to each gender. In this regard, Muchembled (2008: 80) notes that the historical production of femininity has been haunted by the fear of women's sexuality, which manifested in the myth that a prostitute lay "at the heart of every woman." Likewise, Place (1998: 47) mentions that a virgin/whore dichotomy has informed the cultural production of the meanings of femininity. Muchembled explains that the latter idea helped ballast the notion that a good woman was not interested in sex and thus aided in the policing of women's bodies and sexuality (2008: 80). Against that background, the *femme fatale* clearly falls into the 'bad' category of femininity because she is sexually aggressive and 'destroys' men. I will use this conceptual framework to examine how Catherine Tramell both re-inscribes and subverts ideas of femininity to question its validity.

With regard to masculinity, Darryl Hill (2006: 147) explains that western culture aligns masculinity with activity, aggression and dominance, but he concedes that not all heterosexual men subscribe to this idea of masculinity, or are able to conform to its precepts. Similarly, Robert Heasley (2005: 112) shows that some men perform their masculinity in ways that challenge the dominance of the masculine ideal that Hill (2006) outlines. Heasley goes on to say

that alternative or 'feminine' performances of heteromasculinity can lead to violent punishment by other men and society in general (2005: 112). This is due to the fact that aggression and violence have come to function as signifiers of masculinity (Ibid.). In this respect Neroni (2005: 42) argues that violence is "an activity that inevitably enhances a man's masculinity as much as it would conversely detract from a woman's femininity". Neroni cites films like *One False Move* (1992) and *The Godfather Part 2* (1974) to illustrate that filmic depictions of masculinity have evolved in line with changing ideals, but violence still figures as a key marker of the masculine ideal (Ibid). In highlighting aggression as a constitutive trait of masculinity and Glass' failure to fully align himself with that aspect of normative masculinity, my purpose will be to explore the nuances of how the film questions the cultural ideal of heteromasculinity.

I will use the term masculinity or heteromasculinity to refer to the gendered subject position as delineated above. In addition, I will deploy R.W. Connell's concept of transnational business masculinity to denote the specific type of masculinity that Michael Glass performs. This is due to the fact that he is lives and works in the City of London, which the film highlights through shots of the skyline in which global banks like HSBC and Barclays are clearly visible. According to Connell (2006 [2000]: 270), transnational masculinity is characterised by a narrow focus on individual needs, transactional relationships and an "increasingly libertarian sexuality." Connell explains that this form of masculinity is embodied and circulated by the international business man and the politicians with whom he comes into contact (Ibid.). Penny Griffin (2013: 14) builds on Connell's idea and further proposes that transnational business masculinity is a "contingent and negotiated association between masculinity and institutionalized power" (2013: 15). So where I use '(hetero)masculinity' it will be to refer to Glass' subjectivity without highlighting the institutional privilege that makes it transnational. I will refer to 'transnational business masculinity' to highlight the context specific institutional apparatus that informs Glass' behaviour. For example, his high income profession enables him to have a degree of social authority because he can pronounce on the mental well-being of other subjects. Moreover, his relative affluence affords him the latitude and privacy to engage in sadomasochistic activities, without incurring the kind of sanction described above.

Sexuality & Heterosexuality

According to Weeks (2011), the term sexuality refers to a person's erotic feelings, fantasies and desires as well as their concomitant sexual practices. Weeks (1995: 34) contends that while societies still think of sexuality as unchanging, it is not fixed because it is susceptible to the sway of environmental factors. Furthermore, Weeks argues that this means that sexuality functions as a "conductor" of shifts in "power relations" and "social mores" (Ibid). In that regard, Altman (2001: 38) explains that over the course of history "sexual mores and values have been in constant flux due to colonisation [and] trade […]." This is because changes in "social and political" order "alter ways of feeling, acting and understanding" (Moore, 2012: 2). For example, economic growth and the resultant affluence make it possible for societies to organise and understand sexuality differently (Altman, 2001: 43). So, far from being purely natural, "a large range of religious, medical, legal and social institutions" regulate the desires and practices that constitute sexuality (Altman, 2003: 2).

Many scholars have used the terms 'sex' and sexuality interchangeably. For example, Tamsin Wilton (2009: 508) says 'sex' refers to "all things erotic." Wilton further suggests that the term's description of sexual desires and practices is inseparable from its designation of biological sex because in a heteronormative society "to be 'properly' male or female is to experience and perform one's sexuality as gendered in specific and restricted ways" (Ibid). In this dissertation, I will not use 'sex' and 'sexuality' interchangeably nor will I use 'sex' and 'gender' as synonyms. I will restrict my usage of the term 'sex' to denote heterosexual intercourse, except in instances where I discuss the relation between biological sex and gender.

Of relevance to this study are the ways in which *Basic Instinct 2* uses the idea that sexuality is not fixed to explore contradictions around accepted ideas of femininity and masculinity. According to Weeks (1995: 12), sexuality has traditionally been understood as universally and automatically manifesting in a heterosexual performance where, as Kerwin Kaye (2007: 122) puts it, the man's orgasm is the ultimate goal. Similarly, Tamara Shefer and Don Foster (2009: 268) demonstrate that in heterosexual relationships men's sexuality is advantaged in many ways, with women unable or afraid to "assert their needs." My reading is that the film

questions this understanding of sexuality by presenting the audience with a man who, I will argue, seems to queer the normative idea of masculine sexuality. This is further underlined by Tramell's performance of sexuality, which is at odds with ideas of women as passive sexual participants.

According to Jonathan Ned Katz (1995: 159) the line between sexuality and heterosexuality is a fine one due to the fact that heterosexuality has been regarded as the natural manifestation of sexuality. Likewise, Diane Richardson (1996: 2) argues that heterosexuality "is institutionalised as a particular form of practice and relationships, of family structure, and identity." As such it forms the basis for subjectivity and social relations (Ibid, 3). This kind of privileging of heterosexual relationships and subjectivities is heteronormative in the sense that it implicates society in an effort to continue producing heterosexual subjectivities and relationships (Richardson, 1996: 2). Similarly, Calvin Thomas (2009: 21) defines heteronormativity as "the institution, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent […] but also privileged." Both Thomas and Richardson were writing in the Euro-American context. But I would say that their arguments also apply in the globally circulating ideas pertaining to heterosexual subjectivities, even though, as Altman (2001) has shown, performances of sexual subjectivities vary across cultural settings.

According to Katz (1995: 148 – 9), heterosexuality defines the roles of men and women within its field of practice, and it is predicated on an unequal power relationship between male and female. In this respect, Richardson (1996: 2) points out that "heterosexuality both privileges and disempowers women" because heterosexual women are "defined primarily in relation to desire for men and/or the social and economic privileges associated with being the partner of a man […]." I would argue that *Basic Instinct 2* critiques the heteronormative idea of a 'natural' power differential between men and women which favours masculinity. Furthermore, the film's inversion of the power relationship between Glass and Tramell challenges the idea that masculine and feminine sexualities are different and hence complementary by suggesting that Glass wants to be dominated by Tramell. This notwithstanding, I would argue that the film does so without positing a radical shift in the understanding of heterosexual sexuality because it

relies on the foundational idea of opposite sexes that are 'naturally' attracted to each other. In addition, it relies on the trope of uncontrollable heteromasculine sexual desire and the danger it can lead to.

Orgasm & Queer Theory

Muchembled's (2008: 99) concept of orgasm includes both sexual pleasure and the pursuit of that pleasure within a socio-political environment where sexuality is a policed space and not all sexual practices are allowed. Indeed, Connell and Dowsett (2007 [1992]: 188 – 9) have shown that sexual pleasure has historically been conceived of as an "unclean" primal urge that, nonetheless, could be properly expressed within a heterosexual relationship. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will draw on a key aspect of Muchembled's argument that the orgasm has, to a degree, shed its image as an 'unclean lust' in contemporary western culture due to the sexual revolution of the 1960's. That revolution was marked by the advent of the birth control pill and the subsequent legalisation of abortion in the Euro-American context. Consequently, for the first time, women could have sex without fear of getting pregnant; they could choose what result they wanted from sexual pleasure as they did not have to rely on "coitus interruptus" or their partner's willingness to wear a condom (2008: 35). According to Lynne Segal, the pill made it possible for young women in Britain to "flaunt their sexuality" because it was suddenly "divorced from reproduction, status, security" (1994: 8 – 9). But, Segal argues, "sexual liberation was most often arrogantly male" in the sense that the discourses around it reflected male fantasies. This is evidenced in that the underground press produced images that Segal describes as "standard porno fare" which objectified women (1994: 22). In this regard, Wilton notes, one of the political slogans of the 1960s was: "F*** the system; never f*** the same woman twice" (2009: 510). Nonetheless, Segal concedes that the "porno fare" appealed to women because it still evinced the "lifestyle and sexual freedom they wanted" (1994: 22). However, not all women were able to break with social prescripts and take advantage of the sexual revolution, and this ambivalence has persisted into the twenty-first century (Ibid). In this respect, Brooke Wagner (2009) argues that the female orgasm is still haunted by guilt and shame due to the historical production of women's orgasm as unnatural.

Over the years, feminists have made efforts to remove the stigma surrounding the female orgasm. To this end, Segal mentions that the women's liberation movement in the 1970s made strides to redefine women's sexuality "in a society at best ambivalent, and more often antagonistic, towards any such notion" (1994: 33). According to Segal, one of the ways the women's liberation movement encouraged women to take control of their sexuality was by encouraging them to masturbate so that they could gain "sexual autonomy" and feel more in "control of their own bodies" (1994: 43). Women were also encouraged to challenge their male partners if they did not do enough to enhance the woman's pleasure; or, to try and educate them if they lacked the skills required to give women pleasure (Ibid). I would argue that *BI2* feeds off the conception of orgasm outlined above in its representation of heterosexual practice. Through the main characters' actions, the film contests the precepts of feminine and masculine sexuality. The concept of orgasm highlights the political dimension of fulfilling sexual desires so it will be a useful tool with which to examine what tensions the film's procedures suggest exist within and between heterosexual subjectivities. I will use these ideas to explore how the orgasm functions to construct and inflect heterosexual subjectivity in *Basic Instinct 2*.

According to Thomas (2009: 29), queer theory provides a tool for questioning sexual subjectivities by challenging their seeming naturalness. In this respect, Weeks (2011: 145) says that queer theory is concerned with examining how heteronormative subjectivities become hegemonic. And so Thomas argues that queer is not so much an "identity than a critique of identity" (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Annamarie Jagose proposes that it is precisely queer's ambiguity which makes it attractive (1996: 96). Citing Doty (1993), Jagose goes on to explain that queer encapsulates a "wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including space for describing and expressing bisexual, transsexual and straight queerness" (1996: 97). For that reason, Jagose says that queer has implications for aspects of subjectivity other than sexuality because it was the poststructuralist conception of "identity as provisional and contingent" as well as a "growing awareness" that identity categories such as gay, straight and lesbian did not exhaust the full spectrum of possible human subjectivities that gave rise to queer theory and practice (1996: 77). Furthermore, Hendrietta L. Moore (2012: 4) clarifies that a queer approach to

thinking about subjectivity takes into account the many ways in which subjects fall short of normative models of masculine and feminine subjectivities; therefore, queer theory "understands sexual difference as sexual variety". According to Moore (2012: 5), the queer conception of sexuality as a source for varied possibilities "exploded the easy assumption" that male and female individuals follow a straight path to heteronormative masculine and feminine sexualities. Building on this understanding, I will be using the term 'queer' mainly as a verb to emphasise that my reading of *Basic Instinct 2* is that it presents practices that can be said to challenge normative ideals and performances of subjectivity. Bearing in mind that the film is not concerned with representing the lives of what Sullivan (2009: 438) describes as "definably queer subjects" such as lesbians or gays, I will use the term to argue that the characters' actions "challenge the familiar distinction between normal and pathological, […] masculine men and feminine women" (Jagose, 1996: 98; Citing Hanson, 1993).

According to Sullivan (2003: 160 – 1), sadomasochism can be considered a queer practice when it is thought of as a "simulation" of the power relations that structure heteronormative sexuality. Sullivan further says that the simulation of fundamental social relations of power can be subversive when the ultimate aim is to "parody" the subjectivities and the discourses that give those subject positions social force because, within a sadomasochistic scenario, "anybody can assume the role of privilege/power" regardless of whether they enjoy the same privilege in social reality (Ibid.). In this respect, Sullivan (2009: 442) proposes that sadomasochism can function to pit sexuality and pleasure against subjectivity in that "the performative character of such roles foregrounds how acts and gestures create the illusion of an innate core […]." However, sadomasochistic practices are simulations of power play and therefore have the double potential to re-inscribe or queer normative subjectivities (Ibid). These ideas will be instrumental in my analysis of how the sadomasochistic relationship between Tramell and Glass might queer heteromasculinity.

Methodology

Based on the numerous studies mentioned above, which have demonstrated that film is a site for the representation and amplification of discourses about heterosexual subjectivities, the

dissertation will take as a starting point that there are textual mechanisms through which *Basic Instinct 2*, codes and mediates masculinity and femininity. Consequently, I will consider how formal elements such as cinematography, *mise en scène*, sound and editing help the narrative to generate meanings about heterosexual subjectivity. In addition, I will use the literature delineated above, namely: film theory, sexuality studies as well as queer theory, to explain how the film's procedures make both heteronormative and queer interpretations possible, as well as how the film positions spectators in relation to narrative events. Therefore, the study will be limited to a textual investigation of what the film suggests about heterosexual subjectivities. In doing so, I will place particular emphasis on how Glass's performance of heteromasculinity, including sex scenes, can be said to support and/or queer heteromasculinity. The key sequences I will analyse are: the opening scene, during which Tramell uses her drugged passenger's hand to masturbate; her 'orgy' scene in Soho; Glass' sex scene with Michelle as well as the one with "the waitress." I will also discuss Tramell and Glass' sex scene and their use of asphyxiaphylia during sexual intercourse, as well as their final scene together in which Tramell visits Glass in the mental institution.

My dissertation takes the form of three chapters, followed by a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on a specific rhetorical node. As already indicated, the erotic thriller is notable for its repeated representation of the dangerous and boldly sexual woman known as the *femme fatale*. Therefore, the first chapter opens up the inquiry to be pursued with an examination of how Tramell's actions point to contemporary concerns around the 'proper' performance of heterosexual femininity and sexuality. I will draw on feminist film scholars like Janey Place (1998) and Kate Stables (1998) who have argued that the way in which the *femme fatale* is represented is a manifestation of social issues pertaining to power relations between women and men at any given time. I also discuss the intersection of race and representation in *BI2*. Building on Yvonne Tasker's (1993) idea that in action films the black helper's death usually gives the (white) main character another reason to fulfil his/her goal, I propose that Kevin Frank's sacrificial death for Catherine as the white heroine means that she embodies a double difference that has a bearing on her sadomasochistic duel with Glass. I come back to the issue of race and representation at

various points in the discussion because I believe it is one of the film's unacknowledged structuring forces.

While the erotic thriller may flirt with homosexuality, the central mode of sexuality that it represents is heterosexuality. This is in line with the heteronormative framework of Hollywood film in general. And in that vein, I will draw on Laura Mulvey's (1992 [1975]) thesis in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* to discuss how Tramell, as a *femme fatale*, works to simultaneously challenge and re-inscribe heterosexual structures of power through what at first glance appears to be a spectacle of 'transgressive' female sexuality. I go on to suggest that Tramell's behaviour performs the dual function of challenging the cinematic designation of femininity as passive, whilst providing a heterosexual lens through which to view and interpret the heteromasculine orgasm. I propose that *Basic Instinct 2* uses the *fatale's* sexuality and the discourse of heterosexuality to legitimate masculine behaviour and practices which could otherwise be construed as queer. I employ Žižek's (2000) concept of inherent transgression to show that the threat Tramell poses to Glass is only apparent because he needs the aggressive *fatale* in order to experience his masochism.

In chapter two, I turn to critical studies of masculinity as a gendered category to first analyse how *Basic Instinct 2* constructs normative heteromasculinity through Michael Glass, and then go on to discuss how the film simultaneously queers this conception of heteromasculinity. In erotic thrillers, the male lead is usually morally bankrupt, and sexual excess figures prominently in his interactions with the *femme fatale*. So the analysis draws on Linda Williams' (2005) scholarly work to examine how the cinema has historically represented heteromasculinity in the erotic thriller and *film noir*. I then evaluate how *Basic Instinct 2* represents heteromasculinity. Drawing on Steve Neale's (1992) *Masculinity as Spectacle*, I analyse how the muscular male body works to reinforce traditional notions of heteromasculine subjectivity. I combine that film scholarship with Connell (2007) and Hill's (2006) work on heteromasculinity to discuss how masculine professionalism and sexuality as represented in the film function at one level to reproduce normative ideas about masculinity. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how the signs of normative masculinity explored earlier can be said to contain implicit elements of subversion

which, I will propose, function to queer the picture of heteromasculinity they ostensibly construct.

In chapter three, I examine how *Basic Instinct 2* can be said to queer heteromasculinity by considering Glass' willing participation in sadomasochistic sex and his masochistic submission to Tramell. Nikki Sullivan (2003, 2009) and Calvin Thomas' (2009) work on queer theory and practice as well as sadomasochism informs my analysis of how *BI2* queers the idea that heteromasculinity is a univocal subjectivity. I point out how Glass' masochism is at odds with normative heteromasculinity. The analysis then looks at how the film attempts to recuperate Glass' masculinity after his sadomasochistic duel with Tramell, and shows that while it seems that Glass is destroyed, the film's conclusion is nonetheless conservative because it suggests that Glass knew what he was doing and that works to recuperate his masculinity through its transnational aspect.

In the conclusion, I propose that Tramell's aggression contests the cinematic and cultural definition of femininity as a weak and passive object, as can be seen in her appropriation of the 'male' gaze. Drawing on Jack Halberstam's *Gaga Feminism* (2012), I suggest that the Tramell character challenges the feminine ideal because the film emerged out of a socio-political context that has seen significant change in conceptions of subjectivity and the organisation of sexual and family life. I go on to propose that Glass' character indexes current ideas that heteromasculinity and sexuality are susceptible to change, and that this can be seen in Glass' participation in sadomasochistic activities which can destabilise his subjectivity. I further suggest that Glass' struggle can be linked to the fears of white transnational masculinity in the face of non-white masculinities from so-called emerging economies. To that end, I demonstrate how Tramell's double threat (sexual and racial) works to reaffirm the idea that white transnational masculinity is under threat. I draw on Penny Griffin's *Gendering Global Finance* (2013) and Wendy Somerson's *White Men on the Edge* (2004) to show how the film utilises discourses of transnational masculinity as well as the 'white-man-as-victim' narrative with a view to ensuring that white masculinity retains its hegemonic position in the west and in the global cultural imaginary that the film references.

Chapter 1

"Erotic thrillers are noirish stories of sexual intrigue incorporating some form of criminality or duplicity […]" (Williams, 2005: 1).

The erotic thriller has sparked much debate about female sexuality and the female subject's position in society. Women have a key role to play in these films because, for the most part, it is their bodies and their sexuality which is put on display, and under investigation (Williams, 2005: 1). Hence this chapter will explicate how Tramell's actions point to contemporary anxieties around the 'proper' performance of heterosexual femininity and sexuality. Key to the discussion will be an exploration of how the film reinforces mainstream cinema's construction of sexuality, which is usually "taken to refer to heterosexuality" (Hayward, 1996: 314). In that regard, I will argue that Tramell's theatrics have the double function of re-inscribing a heteronormative feminine sexuality, whilst providing a heterosexual lens through which to view and interpret the heteromasculine orgasm. As I will demonstrate, the film uses the *femme fatale* and the discourse of heterosexuality to legitimate behaviour and practices which, under certain conditions, could be construed as queer. I will use Žižek's concept of inherent transgression to show that the threat Tramell poses to Glass is not what it appears. I will now turn to a short definition of the concept of heterosexuality as it is crucial to an analysis of how the *fatale* operates in *Basic Instinct 2*.

Heterosexuality and the Erotic Thriller

According to Richardson (1996: 2), heterosexuality is "a particular form of practice and relationships" which assumes a "natural, fixed [and] universal" relation of sexual attraction between men and women. Furthermore, Richardson argues, heterosexuality's central position in globally circulating ideas about sexuality is undergirded by the presumption that it is the "bedrock of social relations without which, it is posited, society would no longer function nor exist" (Ibid.). Those ideas then find expression in various cultural representations. Hence, mainstream film reproduces heterosexual relationships as the norm. Jackson (1996: 30) further points out that the institution of heterosexuality "is founded upon a gender hierarchy" where

masculine privilege depends for its continuity on women's unremunerated "domestic labour" as well as the sexual favours that accompany it. Jackson clarifies that the woman's homemaking is more important "to a man's well-being and his ability to maintain his position as a man than the sexual servicing he receives" (1996: 30). This is important to a consideration of how Tramell functions as what Žižek terms the inherent transgression because it suggests that heterosexuality in part relies on the maintenance of appearances that may hide more nuanced relationships. Moreover, Jackson shows that heterosexuality functions to police women's bodies and prescribe how they act "through the discourses and forms of representation which define sex in phallocentric terms, which position men as sexual subjects and women as sexual objects" (1996: 31). Mulvey (1992) and Dyer (1992) have critically discussed the operation of these discourses in mainstream cinema, and the *femme fatale* is one filmic figure who has operated as a site for replaying and challenging the heterosexual assumptions that inform cinematic representations of subjectivity. The following sections will be concerned with an in depth examination of how *fatales* like Catherine Tramell have operated in mainstream narrative film.

"She is as old as Eve, and as current as today's movies […]" (Place, 1998: 47)

According to Place, the genealogy of the *femme fatale*, "the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction" can be traced back to Eve, the biblical character who '(in)famously' tempted her companion, Adam, and therefore brought about his fall from grace (1998: 47). Similarly, Fernandez (2011: 1) says that Lilith, who was banished from Paradise for refusing to be underneath her male partner during sex, is one of the contemporary *fatale's* ancestors. As I will demonstrate below, like Eve and Lilith, Tramell is defined by her sexuality and its impact on the men around her. In sum, her subjectivity is defined by her image as a 'siren'.

As an erotic thriller, *Basic Instinct 2* uses the trope of the sexually aggressive *femme fatale* to explore various social issues around femininity, masculinity and sexuality. This is due to the fact that throughout history, sexuality has functioned as "the means by which men and women are designated a place in society, and are kept in their place" (Williams, 2005: IX, citing Dyer,

1986). The *fatale* challenges the subordinate position assigned to women through that discourse. That idea is reflected in Place's (1998: 47) argument that the *fatale* of the 1940s reflected concerns about women that were specific to American society after World War II. At that time, women were encouraged to leave the labour force and go back to being housewives to make room for the men who had left the workplace to go and fight (Ibid). Similarly, Hayward suggests that *film noir* came out of a period of "repressed insecurity and paranoia" (1996: 116) with men struggling to adjust to a post war society in which "their role at work and in the political culture generally" was unclear to them (Ibid, 117). The fact that these issues manifested in a stylised way in *film noir* has to do with the operations of film as a form of artistic expression. In this respect, Place explains that "the dominant world view expressed in film noir is paranoid, claustrophobic, hopeless, doomed […] Nothing – especially woman – is […] dependable" (1998: 51). The *film noir mise en scene* evinces that dark outlook in the silhouettes and darkly lit rooms and alleys, which attest to the "inner turmoil and alienation so associated with film noir" (Hayward, 1996: 117). According to Frank Krutnik, film does not reflect society in a direct fashion but rather does so "in the manner of a funhouse mirror with its aberrations" (1991: 66). In this way, the 1940s film *noir* reflected concerns about masculinity and its relationship to femininity, which found inflected expression in the figure of the *femme fatale,* in addition to the other aspects of the narrative.

As stated above, the narratives in which *femmes fatales* like Catherine appear are structured by a heterosexual framework and take sexuality to mean heterosexuality. I would argue that this has prompted critics like Cragin (2009) and Yilmaz (2006) to interpret Tramell's sexuality from a heterosexual point of view, and assume that her actions only betray tensions and desires which are fundamentally heterosexual in nature. Their analyses suggest that her masculine traits only make the sex more exciting for her partners. This suggests a gap in their reasoning when one considers Butler's (1990: 31) contention that within heterosexuality, a masculine subject is supposed to desire his feminine opposite, whose gender characteristics are different from his. I will address the implications of Catherine Tramell's masculinisation in due course, for the

moment I want to outline the discourses and cinematic procedures which coalesce to construct her.

Stables proposes that the contemporary *fatale* resembles her classic predecessor in that she is also informed by current issues around feminine and masculine subjectivities and the relationship between the two (1998: 165). She locates the new *fatale* of the erotic thriller in a film industry which is driven by the imperative of maximum financial returns, which means that producers have had to resort to explicit "tales of sexual obsession and violent death […] [which] translate speedily and effectively across a spread of markets" (1998: 166). With regard to social issues pertaining to feminine subjectivity, Stables cites Pidduck (1995) to conclude that the *fatale* is an important figure for women in patriarchal society because she represents "embodied social, sexual and physical powers" in a culture where women have "limited social power," as evidenced by their vulnerability to violence and relative lack of economic power (1998: 179).

Jermyn (1996: 255) takes that point further when suggesting that the psychopathic *fatale* represents an exploration of the subjective distance between the *fatale* and "her positive inverse, thus problematizing female identity." This, according to Jermyn, can be seen in that the psychopathic *fatale* is usually contrasted with a figure of a 'wholesome' woman, usually a housewife. The *fatale's* bold sexuality and power struggle with the male character represents a different kind of femininity that the heteronormative character and spectator must reconcile with their own circumstances (Ibid). Jermyn also points out that the re-emergence of the *fatale* in cinema coincided with a broader media discourse about "conflicting roles for contemporary women" (1996: 252). Therefore, through her performance of femininity that is at odds with the gender hierarchy which Jackson (1996) says is integral to heterosexuality, the *fatale* "forces women to confront their unhappiness and domestication" in the sense that women in heterosexual relationships are still identified with the domestic sphere, regardless of their personal ambitions (Jermyn, 1996: 258). As Brabazon puts it: "only through the presence of anxious or contradictory binaries such as a woman active in the public domain […] can oppressive structures be revealed" (1999: 490). Following these critics, I will suggest that

Tramell surfaces similar issues about the contested definitions of femininity and their relationships to female subjects in contemporary society.

In addition to film industry requirements and cultural discourses around femininity, the *fatale* has a further dimension. Place posits that the dark streets, "shadows, mirrors and reflections" found in the *mise en scene* of film *noir* point to a darkness and lack of subjective unity in the male character, and that the *fatale* is a part of that darkness. "She is the psychological expression of [the man's] own internal fears of sexuality, and his need to control and repress it" (Place, 1998: 53). Hence, I would argue that the *fatale* should be read as part representation of issues concerning women and as a masculine projection which is recycled from the abovementioned series of patriarchal myths about the nature of woman. Both aspects are then amplified in the excess of the profit driven Hollywood product so that Tramell becomes a highly sexual and aggressive woman.

"White Devil: […] Blonde stars carry with them a physical signification of both virtue and demonism, sexuality and innocence," Williams (2005: 219).

The cinematic *femme fatale* is traditionally a white woman so her representation intersects with the issue of race as well[14]. Foster (2003) has shown how Hollywood film privileges whiteness and white performers, and Tramell comes from that line of cinematic representation. Foster (2003: 124) suggests that the *fatale* is part of the historical cinematic representation of "the bad white," a category that includes the *fatale* and the bad white mother of the melodrama. Proposing that the "bad white mother" and the *fatale* are somewhat similar figures, Foster explains that "fatales refuse to mother their men; instead, they seek to destroy them" (2003:

[14] Following Kalpana Sehadri-Crooks (2000) I use the term race to refer to "a system of categorization" which rests on different physical traits to organise "human difference in certain seemingly determined ways" (2000: 4). Seshadri-Crooks deploys a psychoanalytic lens to explain that race, as "a system of differences," is organised in relation to "Whiteness," which she terms a structuring signifier without a signified (2000: 20). In this structure "black" and "white" are merely signifiers which gain significance through their proximity to the master signifier, which results in a "hierarchical" relationship in favour of whiteness (Ibid).

124). In addition, the *fatale* is particularly problematic for the white patriarchal order because she infuses the body of the white woman with active sexuality, which is traditionally regarded as a masculine trait, and so *fatales* are portrayed as "monsters of evil" (2003: 124). I will next expand on how race intersects with representation in the film through a discussion of the opening scene, which includes a black character.

Basic Instinct 2 opens with Tramell and Kevin Franks, a 'black' man, driving in a car. Tramell uses Franks' hand to masturbate, and loses control of the car as she climaxes. The vehicle plunges into the river below. While Tramell survives the accident, Franks drowns. I will describe the scene in more detail later, for now I want to focus on the racial tropes that structure the scene. Foster (2003: 7) proposes that whiteness and heterosexuality have a similar function in that they both work to maintain "sexual and racial power." In this respect, she demonstrates that, in most Hollywood narrative cinema, the black supporting character works as "a necessary ingredient in the film's racial makeup to fully mark the whiteness" of the lead characters and "by extension, the white audience" (2003: 7). In a similar vein, Tasker (1993: 36) argues that in action films there is usually "a representational relation of power and subservience" between the white protagonist and the "black helper."[15] Tasker further points out that, in the action genre, it has become a convention for the black character to be "willing to sacrifice himself for the white hero" (Ibid). These tropes structure *BI2's* opening scene. I would argue that Kevin Franks' death serves to set up Tramell both as a sexually aggressive *femme fatale* and as a white lead character who plays the central role in the film. Thus, even though Tramell portrays a form of what Foster calls "bad whiteness", the film works to centralise whiteness within its narrative and in this way assumes that the spectator is also white. This is also evident in that there are no other black characters in the film, except for the odd 'extra' who appears in the background in some scenes. Therefore, Franks' death can also be read as a sort of sacrifice for the white heroine. I will come back to the intersection of race and representation across the arch of the chapter and the dissertation as a whole.

[15] The action film is characterized by high speed chases involving people in motor vehicles; airplanes and helicopters have also been used in such sequences. These films also feature physical fights as well as gun fire.

"Always a supra-real projection of 'woman', the fatale begins to border on caricature […]"(Stables, 1998: 190).

I will begin this section by outlining Žižek's (2000) theory of the inherent transgression because it elucidates the unclear linkage between the *femme fatale's* aggressive sexuality and heteromasculine sexuality and subjectivity. According to Žižek (2005: 4), at its most basic level, the inherent transgression describes the two tiered structure of meaning which governs the interpretation of narrative events by spectators. This is because an essential feature of Hollywood films is that they usually generate "two very clear, although mutually exclusive meanings" (2000: 4). The first level contains what is usually referred to as common sense, which is produced by power through discourse, and the second level is a more daring, obscene support of the first (Ibid). The obscene support is generated by the same power which generates the 'proper' first level of meaning, but the spectator is "absolved from guilty impulses by the official story line" (2000: 5). Žižek explains that this is because cultural law is more concerned with maintaining appearances and "leaves you free to exercise your dirty imagination insofar as it does not encroach on the public domain" (2005: 6). For example, a first level reading of *Basic Instinct 2* would view Glass as a victim of Tramell's manipulation, whereas the obscene support, or second level of meaning, would surmise that perhaps he needs her in order to experience sadomasochistic pleasure. But the spectator would not be burdened with the guilt of having entertained the second level of meaning because the narrative sets up Glass as a victim and in that way appears to foreclose other readings.

The more complex meaning of the inherent transgression pertains to how a narrative element like a character can function as the inherent transgression. According to Žižek (2000: 10), the *fatale* works as the inherent transgression because she is "a fantasmatic support of patriarchal domination, the figure of the enemy engendered by the system itself." Žižek further contends that "the patriarchal erotic discourse creates the *femme fatale* as the inherent threat against which the male identity should assert itself" (Ibid.). It is crucial to note here that male characters in the *noir* genre seem to enjoy their tug-of-war with the *fatale*, so their relationship with this figure is not just about destroying a false threat to bolster "male identity." I will explore the significance

of that in the course of the discussion to follow. Žižek (2005: 12) further argues that the contemporary *fatale* as the inherent transgression operates differently from the classic *fatale* because the neo-*fatale* blatantly uses sex and untrammelled violence against the male, revealing herself as an underlying fantasy. But, Žižek argues, in the end the neo-*fatale* is reduced to the inherent transgression because her enigma persists and therefore she does not succeed in destroying herself as a fantasmatic support to masculine domination (Ibid). This means that, as with Eve and Lilith, the patriarchal narrative produces and is then 'forced' to somehow neutralise the threat of the *femme fatale*, a procedure which, among other things, works to police women's behaviour in general. In that regard, Margaret Marshment has argued that film depicts women "in ways that define what it means to be a woman in [this] society" (1996: 126). I will return to the idea of inherent transgression in the current section as well as across the arc of this chapter.

The film opens with a white oval spot flashing rhythmically in and out of the dark screen. The white shape grows in size and, as the picture fades up, the figure merges with a broken white barrier line to suggest that this is what the spectator has been looking at all along. The film then cuts to a black Spyker C8 Laviolette speeding along an underground road. Catherine Tramell is driving, while Kevin Franks, who is semi-conscious, is in the passenger's seat. After a short conversation during which he asks Tramell if he is the one driving, Tramell takes his one hand, licks the middle finger and, presumably, inserts it into her vagina. She then pleasures herself with it while driving at over 160 kilometres per hour. As she reaches orgasm, she loses control of the vehicle and it flies off the road, landing in the river Thames.

Following Finlay and Fenton's (2005: 65) reading of the first *Basic Instinct* film, I want to suggest that, in the sequel, Tramell's sexuality also "increases the range of sexualities expressed in the film," going from "sexual adventuress" to dominatrix[16]. Tramell's role as dominatrix is most

[16] In sadomasochistic relationships a dominatrix or Mistress is a woman who plays the role of 'master' in relation to her submissive or slave. She is the dominant party who inflicts all types of sadistic actions on her submissive. Bergner (2009) and Sullivan (2003) demonstrate that some practitioners of sadomasochism take up these roles at certain times or at organised events, while other masters and slaves live out their daily lives in their respective roles.

explicitly revealed later in the film when she asphyxiates Michael Glass with a dog collar during sex. Her aggressive seduction of him leading up to their sex scene clearly indicates that she likes to dominate. However, I will discuss the implications of Tramell's aggression in the sections to follow. Tramell's sexual aggression, I would argue, challenges the notion of heterosexual femininity as passive and subservient in sexual relations, and in general. In this respect, the opening scene illustrates how Catherine's orgasm works against the norm of "male dominant, female submissive binary of normative heterosexuality" (Finlay & Fenton 2005: 54). In the opening sequence, this is evidenced in the two medium shots which show Tramell in the mode of 'sexual adventuress'. In the first mid-shot, she licks Kevin Franks' middle finger, while the second mid-shot shows her putting it between her legs, thereby prompting the spectator to infer that she has inserted it into her vagina. Therefore, I would suggest, Tramell's actions provide room for spectators to imagine a kind of heterosexual feminine sexuality that has agency and does not defer to masculine needs. As mentioned above, the scene has a racial dimension, which intersects with the enactment of feminine sexual agency, here figured as white, which constructs Tramell as the "bad white woman". The film, nonetheless, privileges and centralises her by sacrificing the black supporting character.

Moreover, I would contend that the opening scene works to set up Tramell as the inherent transgression in that it begins to paint a picture of "the exploitative and sexually insatiable woman who simultaneously dominates us and enjoys her suffering […]" (Žižek, 2000: 10). However, I would say there is a doubling of Tramell's character in that Michelle Broadwin is the one who bears the brunt of Glass' sexual aggression. Williams (2005) has pointed out that the hero's displacement of sexual aggression is a commonplace procedure in the erotic thriller. For example, Michael Douglas' character in *Basic Instinct* has "compensatory" violent sex with Beth Garner instead of Catherine Tramell. That Tramell works as the inherent transgression within the text becomes evident when the film goes back to the trope of Tramell's sexual aggression in the scene following the car crash. In that scene the police question her about the accident. She is clearly not shaken by Franks' death, and it would appear her only regret is that

she may not experience the same kind of pleasure again. As she puts it: "I'm traumatised. Who knows if I'll ever come again?" The policemen who question her appear taken aback by her nonchalance but their curiosity about the fact that a man died because they were 'having sex' while driving at high speed suggests they are both threatened and excited by her actions. This positions Tramell as the exciting but errant woman who must be reined in by the authorities. Thus the opening scene sets her up as the threat, albeit it one that is paradoxically alluring. As I proposed above, Tramell should be read as part feminine representation and part projection of masculine fantasies and fears. And this early scene begins to foreground those two aspects in their complex relation to one another.

According to Stables, one of the functions of the *femme fatale* is to challenge the unequal relation between men and women in society and thus surface tensions around men's fear of what the changing status of women means for male domination in a society where male privilege is under threat due to "industrial, social and cultural changes" (1998: 166). Yvonne Tasker elaborates:

> [T]here have been dramatic changes in American society in terms of patterns of work and employment for men and women. These patterns are familiar in other western economies, with the rapid expansion of new technologies, part-time female employment and a movement away from the notion of the 'male' breadwinner or a job for life. The development of a female professional middle class […] is also a feature of this economic transformation" (Tasker, 1998: 134).

I want to suggest that the threat that Tramell apparently poses to Glass' heteromasculinity is informed by the issues Tasker outlines, which are expressed in Tramell's aggressive sexuality. Willis (1997: 60) attests to this when she points out that "masculine anxiety" is foregrounded in films "where women's power […] is consistently accompanied by diminution of masculine force or competence." In *BI2*, male anxiety over women's power is evidenced in the fact that sex with Tramell usually proves fatal or otherwise devastating for her male partners: Kevin Franks drowns after her orgasm, and Michael Glass ends up in a mental institution after his complicated dalliance with Catherine. In that regard, both Stables (1998) and Williams (2005)

have argued that the fact that the *fatale's* victim is seldom without professional or personal problems shows that the *femme fatale* should be regarded as more of a symptom than a cause of the man's problems.

The idea of the *fatale* as symptom becomes apparent when one considers that Glass was caught up in his own crisis of masculinity before Tramell entered his life. His problems are manifest in his professional and personal failures. The film hints at Glass' professional shortcomings early in the narrative when Adam Towers questions Glass about a former patient of his who murdered his girlfriend. Glass merely dismisses Towers and it is clear he does not wish to revisit the issue of that patient. It later transpires that he suspected what his patient might do but failed to take measures to prevent it from happening. Secondly, his wife has left him and it is unclear why. In this way, the narrative implicates Glass in failing to manage both these spheres of his life. And instead of confronting and resolving these issues he gets entangled with Tramell and she comes to embody the threat to his heteromasculinity. Hence, I would contend that Glass' personal problems suggest that the threat Tramell poses to him can be said to be a projection of his lack of control. It also points to a general concern with regard to transnational heteromasculine privilege in an era where, as Tasker (1998) shows, the economic system no longer guarantees white heteromasculine privilege and, by implication, white men's dominance over women and other groups in western culture in general.

This also has implications for race as an axis of difference. Tasker (1993: 36) suggests that after the black sidekick's death, the white hero has to somehow avenge his friend's death. Towards the end of the opening scene, Tramell appears to serenely float to the surface as Franks drowns in the sinking car. Franks' final moments, as the film cuts from the medium close-up of him looking at Tramell to the medium long shot of Tramell swimming to the surface of the water, suggests that he realises that his death means she will live, since her inability to undo his seatbelt and save him meant that she had to make the choice to save herself. Hence, I would contend that by eliminating Franks and his racial difference early in the narrative, the film proceeds to displace the threat of the non-white other onto Catherine who, while embodying a

double difference, then gets into a complicated sadomasochistic duel with Glass. So the threat she poses to Glass also references the threat of the racial other in the western context.

The question of Tramell's allure to her victims cannot be explained only in terms of the wider social threat to western patriarchy that the *fatale* embodies. Fisher (2009: 76) suggests as much when he claims that the leg-crossing scene in *Basic Instinct* posed a crucial question concerning the nature of desire and pleasure at work in the film: [...] "was this a female fantasy of a woman subduing men with her sexuality and her confidence, or was it a male fantasy of abasement before a dominatrix?" I would argue that it is more the latter, not only due to the fact that she functions as the inherent transgression, but also because her re-emergence, as Stables (1998) and Tasker (1998) have proposed, coincides with a collapse of rules around the performance of gendered subjectivity. The *fatale* is "a historical construct whose ingredients vary according to the time and climate of her creation" (Stables, 1998: 165, citing Stott, 1992). Those ingredients include male paranoia "provoked by the postmodern collapse of traditional rules governing sexual difference […] as more women (and men for that matter) take on both masculine and feminine roles" (Stables, 1998: 167, citing Jones, 1991). The *fatale,* then, becomes a site where discourses of feminine subjectivity intersect with heteromasculine anxieties about subjective coherence. This complexity contributes to her enigma.

I would argue that Tramell's subjectivity remains elusive because she is partly fanstasmatic, "a supra-real projection of woman" as Place (1998) describes the *fatale*. The *fatale's* often opaque motivations have led Cragin (2009: 5) to claim that for all Catherine's sexual charge, the spectator does not actually get a clear idea of her subjectivity in terms of what motivates her and drives her to kill. Similarly, Fisher makes the point that Tramell is a vacuous, self-constructed presence, and that "she wasn't using her sexuality as a means to an end, she was just using it" (2007: 76). I would, however, as I have argued above, point out that she is not entirely a self-constructed presence. This is a possibility that Fisher acknowledges when he questions whether "it is Tramell's thoughts which are 'omnipotent' or is she herself" a figure that Glass has imagined (2007: 76). Tramell's undecidable subjectivity, as Stables (1998) has shown, means that she becomes an inscrutable character whose sexuality is revealed as the

truth of her nature, thereby rendering her a 'blank screen' onto which her male counterparts can project their sadomasochistic fantasies. Tramell, of course, seems to be aware that she is something of a male fantasy, and she uses that to her own ends. The next section discusses how she appropriates the power of the 'male' gaze to empower herself.

"What an Anguish Never to Speak One's Mind. What a Drag to Embody Desire all the Time […]"[17]

In this section I will discuss how Catherine Tramell functions to challenge and ultimately re-inscribe the heterosexual framework which structures the Hollywood erotic thriller. She does this by breaking the established structure of cinematic looking relations in the manner in which she pursues her orgasm. According to Mulvey (1992 [1975]: 24), popular cinema has organised "the erotic according to the language of the dominant patriarchal order" where the woman is the passive object of the gaze and the man takes the part of the active 'looker'. This point is reiterated by Dyer (1993: 265) when he demonstrates that the dominance of masculinity in cinema is set up through the convention of men looking at women who do not look back.

Before continuing with the discussion, I want to point out that Mulvey's thesis that identification and desire are separate processes and that the gaze is essentially 'male' has been criticised by many film scholars. For instance, Steve Neale (1992) has convincingly argued that male spectators can also desire the male character with whom they identify. I also use the term 'spectator' to refer to a male subject because *Basic Instinct 2* is about a man who is seemingly led astray by an attractive *femme fatale*. Moreover, Catherine Tramell is presented as a dangerous and alluring mystery that Michael Glass should unravel, so *BI2* assumes the spectator to be male. But, because I am suggesting that the film ultimately queers heteromasculinity, I will not adhere to the discredited idea that identification and desire cannot occur simultaneously.

[17] The quote is from Patricia Mellencamp (1995: 26). It is taken from a passage in which she criticizes the overly sexual character of the *femme fatale*, and suggests it works to make "profit for the lingerie, cosmetic, fashion and weight-loss industries," which are owned by men (Ibid.).

Rather, I use Mulvey's ideas to analyse how the film subverts the heteronormative gender structure in which an active male subject pursues a passive feminine object.

Since this section is concerned with how Tramell's orgasm challenges traditional relations of looking in cinema, I will briefly outline how historical events have shaped the feminine orgasm. Firstly, it is important to briefly reiterate how I will be using the term orgasm in this chapter and the dissertation as a whole. Following, Muchembled (2008: 99), I use the term orgasm to refer to not only sexual pleasure but also to the pursuit of that pleasure, a process which includes anxiety and exhilaration given that it takes place within a socio-political context in which the discourse of gender defines and delimits what is appropriate sexual behaviour by masculine or feminine subjects. With reference to the female orgasm, Muchembled (2008: 32) further explains that the dramatic shift in western sexual mores that took place in the 1960's, coupled with the invention of the contraceptive pill, introduced a somewhat risk free orgasm for women, which meant that for the first time in history women could have sex for pleasure without fearing that they could become pregnant. Muchembled also proposes that one of the results of the sexual revolution is that women can now demand sexual pleasure (Ibid).

I will use the scene from *Basic Instinct 2* in which Tramell confronts Dr. Glass about his sexual desire for her to illustrate how Catherine breaks the conventional cinematic gaze structure. The scene in question turns out to be Catherine's last therapy session with Glass, and it takes place after the mysterious death of Adam Towers – a popular magazine journalist who was writing a story about Glass. A low-angle wide shot establishes the scene as taking place in the famous 'Gherkin' building in London, which has been established as the location of Glass' office. The film cuts to a mid-close-up of Glass waiting in his office. According to the clock on the wall, it is twelve o' clock, suggesting that the patient he was supposed to see at twelve is probably late. He goes out to look for his next appointment, and a long shot from his point of view shows Tramell nonchalantly standing and smoking in the waiting area. An unsmiling Glass simply looks at her, and she stares back at him, seemingly unconcerned. Glass turns around and heads back to his office and she bends down to put out her cigarette.

Back in Glass' office, a series of mid shots tracks their conversation as Catherine muses that Detective Washburn must think she killed Towers because she was in a sexual relationship with him. She stands up and walks over to the coat stand and retrieves cigarettes from her trench coat. A long shot from Glass' point of view shows her lighting the cigarette, prompting Glass angrily to instruct her to extinguish it or leave. At this point he is still seated in his arm chair. She drops the cigarette on the floor and squashes it with the ball of her high heeled foot. She then pulls a chair to the centre of the room, and provocatively pulls up her skirt as she straddles the chair with her legs spread dramatically. Glass says nothing as she asks him to replay in his mind how he imagines 'fucking her'. After her speech, Tramell announces she is ending therapy and leaves abruptly.

As mentioned above, cinematic relations of looking have positioned the feminine as object and the masculine as subject of the look; this structure is repeated in the "active/passive heterosexual division of labour" within the narrative where the male character has agency and moves story events forward and the woman is present as object (Mulvey, 1992 [1975]: 27). The regime of heterosexuality makes this possible because, as Weeks (1995: 36) argues, sex has been instrumental in the social effort to define and delimit the place and role of the individual in society. Muchembled (2008: 80) suggests that one of the ways that has been achieved is through the sexual double standard, a discourse that bestows on men alone the right to sexual pleasure within and outside of marriage. In practice, the sexual double standard coerces women into repressing their own sexuality by making a virtue of the chaste woman, who is a discursive construction presumed to not have sexual desire. In this way, regulating sexuality works to support political agendas and social positions such as the historical dominance of masculinity over femininity. It is this framework which "establishes clearly gendered rules and expectations around sexuality" (Altman, 2001: 4) that informs the structuring of looking relations in Hollywood cinema.

But like her cinematic precursors, Tramell challenges that framework, which is why her orgasm is politically significant. Her behaviour in the scene outlined above goes a long way towards troubling the model Mulvey describes, without rejecting its reliance on the assumption of the

fundamental heterosexuality of the screen couple and the spectator. I would argue that proof of this can be seen in that Tramell's dramatically spread legs in the scene described above could be considered a reversal of her so-called 'beaver' shot when she flashed her genitals in the first *Basic Instinct.* This is because in this scene Tramell positions the chair back-to-front so that her arms rest on the top of the backrest, which also conceals her crotch. Tramell knows, or assumes, that Glass has been looking at her, and she uses his attraction to her to force him to give in to his desires and have sex with her. According to Stables (1998: 177), the kind of sexual language that Tramell uses constitutes an aggressive sexual act because in asserting that she knows that he fantasizes about her and suggesting that she fantasizes about him while masturbating; she effectively performs the latter act in front of him and invites him to take part, at least in his imagination. Similarly, her speech as well as the shot of her with her legs spread apart is designed to excite the spectators' imaginations so that they also imagine the sexual activity she describes. And, as she talks about being 'fucked' the spectator is invited to imagine what is hidden behind the backrest of the chair.

I would contend that by confronting Glass with the content of what she believes to be his desires, Tramell appears to be a woman who knows that she is structurally positioned as the passive object in narratives that are usually driven by male characters. More importantly, she uses the language of sexuality, which has not historically been associated with femininity. According to Gagnon and Parker, throughout history, sexuality has been considered a basic drive, much stronger in men than in women (1995: 4). Moreover, Connell and Gary Dowsett's (2007 [1992]: 188) research into the history of sexuality echoes the latter view, adding that sex has historically been regarded as "the unclean motion of the generative parts," a shameful desire which men had to combat and subdue. Tramell's use of sexual language, therefore, has the effect of taking the power of the gaze away from Glass by showing that she has agency while at the same time playing the part of the objectified woman in that she is the object of 'his' fantasies in the first line of her speech when she states: "When you think about fucking me [...]" In this way she uses the traditional position of femininity to 'look' back at the cinematic discourses that have positioned the woman as object.

The narrative lends credence to Tramell's claims that Glass wants her in the way it frames their exchange through camera shots and editing. Furthermore, Glass seems both discomfited and excited by her speech, which suggests that he is enjoying momentarily being rendered the object of the gaze. Cinematographically, the film suggests an intimate connection between the two characters in that the speech starts with Tramell framed in a mid-shot, and by the time she asks him if he wants to "beat me up" or "come in my mouth," the camera has moved in to alternating close-ups of both characters. The framing of Glass and Tramell in close-up shots during the speech indicates that they are sharing something deeply personal with each other because, as van Nierop suggests, the close-up draws the spectator's attention to a significant "moment in the lives of the characters" as well as "intimacy between two characters" (1998: 40). This kind of framing also suggests a sadomasochistic relationship between the two characters because Glass allows Tramell to dominate him by surfacing issues he would rather not discuss in a therapy session.

In addition, Glass does not suggest his desire for Tramell by looking at her while she demurely pretends not to notice. Rather, she articulates 'his' desires for him, which would invert Mulvey's model except that the film has already set up Glass as a desiring male and Tramell as a desirable *femme fatale* so the effect on Glass and the spectator is that of pleasurable subjection in anticipation of sexual pleasure. The scene begins by suggesting sexual desire on Glass' part in two ways. Firstly, the low-angle wide-shot of the Gherkin building where he works is phallic in the way its glistening structure pierces the sky. Secondly, even though he seems upset that Catherine has kept him waiting he does not scold her when he finds her standing, hand on hip, languidly smoking a cigarette in the waiting area. He accepts her subtle play for power. To reiterate, the long-shot of Tramell in the waiting area is taken from Glass' point of view. It reveals her seductive pose and invites the spectator to join Glass in admiring Tramell. As a result, I would argue that Tramell's aggression just makes her all the more desirable, and in effect re-inscribes the heterosexual framework of Hollywood narrative, even though it would appear she is breaking the structure of the look. This implies that Tramell's apparent challenging of traditional relations of looking in cinema consistently works to undercut itself.

Hence, her performance of femininity can be said to be a masquerade. According to Doane (2003 [1991]: 66), the masquerade is an excessive display of femininity which draws attention to the fact that femininity is a cultural construction, and therefore challenges the discourse which structures it. Catherine's masquerade, then, contests the positioning of femininity as passive and without desire. However, as I have already established, the questioning is not straight-forward because Catherine also plays to the male gaze. Doane considers the question of why the woman deploys the masquerade in her subversive acts, and suggests that the she uses it to "compensate for [the] theft of masculinity" (2003 [1991]: 66) for she must not be discovered to possess it. While Doane's argument is valid, I want to suggest that as far as the *femme fatale* is concerned there are two further reasons why she would deploy the masquerade to get her way. Firstly, I would contend that it is because *Basic Instinct 2* was aimed at the mainstream audience so the film confines itself to the heterosexual matrix in the way it conceives of and depicts gender and sexual relations. Secondly, the masquerade works to conceal contradictions which might arise if the heterosexual script is ignored completely. William Simon and John H. Gagnon (2007 [1984]: 31) use the term sexual scripts to denote the formulation and entrenchment of sexed behaviour in societies. They go on to say that institutional arrangements such as heterosexuality can be viewed as "signs and symbols through which the requirements and the practice of specific roles are given" (Ibid). So, as the woman, Tramell has to position herself as the object of 'fucking' in the speech discussed above. But her sleight of hand belies the fact that she is aggressively seducing Glass and, crucially, that he is enjoying it. That dialectic is what makes her the inherent transgression for Glass and the spectator in that both can enjoy being subjugated by her because she is a woman. The film, then, explains away Glass' actions as a man's natural reaction to an attractive woman – and not as a natural part of heteromasculinity. So it seems that the contradictions, so well glossed over and elided by the masquerade, emanate from masculinity and not femininity

Chapter 2

From Double Indemnity *to* Basic Instinct 2*: "How Could I Have Known that Murder can Sometimes Smell like Honeysuckle," Walter Neff*

In this chapter, I will first analyse how *Basic Instinct 2* constructs normative heteromasculinity through the Michael Glass character before arguing that the film simultaneously queers this conception of heteromasculinity. I start with a definition of masculinity, followed by a brief discussion of how heteromasculinity has historically been represented in the erotic thriller and *film noir* before it. The second section discusses how Glass' whiteness comes to stand in for a universal kind of subjectivity. I proceed to argue that the film's representation of a white male as a 'victim' is in fact a reactionary strategy that seeks to secure white privilege. In the third section I discuss the particular representation of heteromasculinity in *BI2*. I analyse aspects such as the muscular male body, masculine professionalism and sexuality in terms of how they reinforce traditional notions of heteromasculine subjectivity. The last section considers how the signs of traditional masculinity explored in the third section can be said to contain implicit elements of subversion which function to queer the picture of traditional masculinity they ostensibly construct.

Following Sullivan (2003: 129), I will use the term 'queer' to refer to how Glass' actions in the film problematize the meanings ascribed to heteromasculinity through performances that are not in line with the patriarchal model. The patriarchal ideal aligns heteromasculinity with power, agency and the propensity to dominate in relationships. In a similar vein to Sullivan, Thomas (2009: 17) proposes that to queer is a process that involves "strategies of de-naturalisation" and a refusal to consolidate or stabilise subjectivity. Weeks (2011: 146) suggests that society stabilises subjectivity through the constant reinforcement of the gender binary "by constantly reaffirming its naturalness and inevitability […] [which] is experienced not only in representations but by being embodied in individual subjects and in the values and structures of heteronormative culture […]." I will argue that, in *Basic Instinct 2,* Michael Glass implicitly de-naturalises heteromasculinity's claims to an essence which is characterised by power, agency and the desire to dominate. In so doing, I will suggest that the film goes a long way towards

challenging the idea of heteromasculinity as a stable aspect of the masculine/feminine "binary […] so fundamental to Western culture" (Ibid.).

The Cinematic Inscription of Masculinity in the Erotic Thriller

In this section I will first define masculinity, within the framework of the discourse of gender which constitutes it. I will then summarise how heteromasculinity has historically been represented in the erotic thriller, with specific reference to the gender and sexuality claims that the genre makes on behalf of heteromasculinity.

According to Saco (1992: 24), masculinity is a specific subject position "made possible by the discourse of gender." Furthermore, Saco conceives of genders as "symbolic categories for ascribing subjectivities onto human bodies," and in this formulation masculinity is seen as a set of signs whose interrelations produce the impression of a stable subjectivity (1992: 25). Butler (1990: 9) extends the kind of criticism provided by Saco, further questioning the notion of subjectivity as natural when she proposes that if the concept of gender refers to the cultural meanings ascribed to the sexed body, whether it is male or female, it means that biological sex cannot be said to create a certain gender. While questioning the notion of gendered subjectivity as "coherent" and "unified" over time, Butler invokes Michel Foucault's argument that the binary understanding of sex is shot through with power and therefore a site of regulation because the grammar or relational structure of sex "imposes an artificial binary relation between the sexes, as well as an artificial internal coherence within each term of that binary." (1990: 26). Therefore, Butler continues, the "artificial binary" works to suppress "the subversive multiplicity of [a] sexuality that disrupts the heterosexual, reproductive and medicojuridical hegemonies" (1990: 26). Having shown that the binary structure of masculinity and femininity is a discursive construction, Butler concludes that gender is performative in the sense that it is constituted through the performance of the various "gestures" and utterances said to be indicative of masculinity or femininity. For Butler, then, it is through the appearance of immanence that genders maintain the illusion of permanence in male and female bodies (1990: 185).

Hence, according to Butler, gender can be said to designate a unified and coherent experience of sex, gender and desire only when biological sex is regarded as giving rise to gender and desire. In this formulation, a male body becomes masculine and desires a female body, which exhibits feminine traits. And, crucially, the internal coherence of each of the genders "requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality" (1990: 30 – 31) in which desire is presumed to emanate from gender and gender reflects desire. Butler's conception or interrogation of gender will form the overarching framework for the discussion of heteromasculinity here because this chapter is concerned with how the film deploys masculinity within a heterosexual matrix in a way that I would say both reinforces and, as I will later argue, implicitly queers the internal coherence of heteromasculinity.

In keeping with Butler's argument that genders within the heterosexual matrix are constituted according to exclusionary processes that preclude the existence of subjectivities which do not fit the criteria for either masculinity or femininity, Hill (2006: 147) traces definitions of masculinity and concludes that heteromasculinity is generally defined as an outright rejection of 'feminine' attributes such as submissiveness, being dependent, compliant or effeminate in any way. The conception of masculinity as part of a gender binary is further outlined by Dyer (1993: 35), who suggests that masculinity is undergirded by notions of male sexuality as an uncontrollable urge which propels men towards women. As a result, heteromasculinity has been represented in the media as sexually importunate and domineering (Ibid). However, Hill also illustrates that such normative frameworks for understanding heteromasculinity can be disputed when one considers that some women are active, rather than passive, during sex, and "sometimes heterosexuality is about women's power and men's resistance to that power." Furthermore, there are heterosexual men who enjoy sex with women whose power exceeds theirs (2006: 147).

This being said, ideas about dominance and power are still some of the most salient cultural markers of heteromasculinity in the globally circulating discourses of masculinity. According to Heasley (2005: 110), men who fail to reproduce that ideal face harsh sanction. In that regard, Heasely demonstrates that some heterosexual men want to perform their masculinities in ways that run counter to the image of force, strength and authority as represented through "sports,

historical figures, economic and political leaders" (Ibid). But, Heasley argues, performing masculinity in ways that fall outside of the "idealized image of the hetero-masculine" inevitably invites sanction and retribution from other men and society in general (2005: 112). Thus, as a gendered subject position, masculinity occupies a privileged and dominant social position which, as Glover and Kaplan (2000: XXIV) suggest, is based on a "repression of similarities" between men and women that the discourse of gender positions as natural differences. These definitions will inform my analysis of Michael Glass' masculinity in *Basic Instinct 2* in terms of how the character functions to re-inscribe heteromasculinity and how the representation of Glass' masculinity can be said to queer the very notions of heteromasculinity which provide its legitimizing framework.

I would contend that erotic thrillers are very much concerned with the problems, threats and internal dissonances that plague (white) heteromasculinity in its cultural figuration as a unified totality. And, following Butler (1990) and Saco (1992), I would argue that masculinity is not unified and stable because it is premised on a repression of similarities between the sexes. In a discussion of *Basic Instinct*, Celestino (1997: 8) examines the issue of which masculine tensions are at stake in the erotic thriller, and suggests that one of the reasons Nick Curran is unsettled by Tramell is that he is unsure of his own sexuality. In this respect, Celestino posits a homosexual dimension to the relationship between Nick and his friend and colleague, Gus. This is because Gus is Nick's only friend, and Gus becomes jealous of Tramell when he realises that Nick has become sexually and emotionally involved with her (Ibid.). Catherine and Roxy's lesbian romance is, according to Celestino, a mere projection by Nick because the only homosexual relationship which is explored in any depth in *Basic Instinct* is that between Nick and Gus. This shows that in erotic thrillers male sexuality itself is questioned and investigated, albeit in ways that make it seem as if it is beyond question.

One of the strategies that enable the covert questioning of male sexuality is that the masculinised *femme fatale* is always beautiful and, within a heterosexual framework, coded to

denote sexual desirability[18]. However, the indirect result of the manner in which the male character welcomes and engages with the sadomasochistic *femme fatale* is the surfacing of questions about heteromasculinity's apparent solidity. But, these latent questions are always displaced by the intense and energetic representations of heterosexual sex that characterise the erotic thriller (Celestino, 1997: 9). The genre invokes heterosexuality's putative self-evidence and the apparently "natural" force of heteromasculine desire to suggest that the male lead characters are somehow not responsible for their actions[19]. In that regard, Finlay and Fenton (2005: 62) note that while the leading male characters in *Disclosure* and *Body of Evidence* willingly enter into sexual liaisons with women who are under suspicion of murder or are known to be sexually aggressive, the films nonetheless imply that they are victims of their respective *femmes fatale*. In *Disclosure*, for instance, Tom Sanders (Michael Douglas) is apparently sexually harassed by his female boss, Meredith Johnson (Demi Moore), but it later transpires that they used to be romantically involved and that he knew about her sexual aggression but that he nevertheless 'ended up' alone with her in her office at night. And *Body of Evidence* suggests that Willem Defoe's character cheats on his wife with the *fatale*, played by Madonna, because his wife is too involved in her business and neglects him.

White Masculinity in the Erotic Thriller

In the previous chapter, I discussed how race in *Basic Instinct 2* operates in relation to the character of Catherine Tramell. In this regard, I proposed that the black character, Kevin Franks, works to foreground the leading characters' whiteness and that the film therefore privileges whiteness and assumes that the spectator is also white. So, since Michael Glass is a white male,

[18] She is masculinised in the sense that she is often violent, selfish, unemotional and sexually demanding, all of which are traits culturally coded as denoting normative heteromasculinity (Cragin, 2009: 3).

[19] I'm referring to erotic thrillers in which the narrative is driven by a *femme fatale*, as opposed to an *homme fatale*. In *homme fatale* driven erotic thrillers, the woman is usually the victim of a sexually aggressive man who is also often sadistic. *Sliver* (Noyce, 1993) and *Indecent Proposal* (Lyne, 1993) are some of the examples of that variation of the erotic thriller.

it is necessary to consider how ideas of white masculinity provide a key structuring dimension to what the film presents as a global and universal kind of masculinity.

Richard Dyer (1997) argues that ideas inherited from Christianity and imperialism still structure conceptions of whiteness in the contemporary world[20]. Jesus' trials and the miracles he was able to perform under difficult conditions filtered through to the imperial endeavour to found worldwide empires, tasks which seemed difficult but were embarked on because that is what whiteness had come to represent. According to Dyer (1997), representations of whiteness in the media have become entrenched to the extent that they are presented as universal categories rather than particular and raced, as is the case with representations of people who are not white. In the context of Hollywood cinema, Denzin (2002: 20) names "African, Hispanic, Native and Asian Americans" as the "non-whites" who have historically been cast in a variety of supporting roles such as the butt-of-the-joke, the extra or "recognizable villain[s]."

In addition to embodying a universal kind of masculinity, I would argue that, like Tramell, Glass also portrays the 'bad white' that Foster describes (2003). According to Foster, the male version of the 'bad white' is usually figured as an intelligent man who is somehow "involved in the realm of the body." In films he is usually figured as a doctor or a clever serial killer (2003: 128). Moreover, Foster contends, the 'bad white male' "is often associated with effeminacy." He therefore threatens "white heterocentric society" through non-normative performances of gender (2003: 126 – 7). Glass fits this type in that he is also a doctor whose interest in sadomasochism suggests that his investment in heteromasculinity is not without qualification. This is evident in that Glass takes a masochistic position in relation to Tramell and allows her to asphyxiate him during sex. As I will later argue, this is one of the ways in which the film queers Glass' masculinity.

[20] Imperialism, according to Muchembled (2008: 14), refers to mainly European countries' propensity in the centuries after the Middle Ages to grow their then industrializing economies by supporting business expansion into foreign countries, often at the expense of local peoples whose economies were mainly agrarian. This also meant that white European culture was exported to the rest of the world where it was presented as superior through discourses of 'modernity' and 'progress.'

Dyer's (1997) discussion implies that whiteness, and white masculinity in particular, is able, persevering, visionary, driven and competent in the face of adversity. Glass' performance of bad whiteness only becomes clearer upon closer inspection. His successful career and affluent lifestyle ultimately disintegrate; therefore his masculinity only appears to correspond with Dyer's description of white masculinity. My sense is that Dyer's ideas provide a framework for understanding the Glass character, especially in the light of Connell's (2006 [2000]: 270) formulation of "transnational business masculinity." I will mobilise Connell's concept because it explains how white masculinity is indexed in the film due to the fact that Glass is a white urban character who lives and works in London, a city which functions as an exchange centre for international capital. According to Connell, transnational business masculinity:

> appears to be marked by increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), [...] a declining sense of responsibility for others [...] [and an] increasingly libertarian sexuality, with a growing tendency to commodify relations with women (2006 [2000]: 270)

This ideal of masculinity circulates globally through the influential business institutions in which it is the norm (Ibid.). Building on Connell's work, Griffin (2013: 15) further characterises transnational business masculinity as a context specific and "negotiated association between masculinity and institutionalised power." It combines the business traits of competition and the ethos of survival-of-the-fittest, inflecting them through traditional masculinity (Ibid.). Many of these traits are discernible in the character of Dr. Glass in that he appears committed to furthering his career. For instance, when the court asks him to provide a forensic evaluation of Tramell, he quickly seizes the opportunity occasioned by the experience to start work on an academic paper about "Risk Addiction and the Omnipotent Killer." Moreover, as I will argue later, Glass' treatment of the women around him shows evidence of the libertarian sexuality mentioned by Connell: this is evinced by the fact that he has sex with Michelle Broadwin because he cannot yet bring himself to consummate his flirtation with Catherine, and he has sex with "the waitress" at the coffee house he frequents for the same reason. However, Glass'

performance of transnational masculinity is not without its contradictions, as his masochistic attachment to Tramell indicates. I will discuss this in depth in the coming sections.

I want to suggest that Glass' sadomasochism also works to reinforce his transnational heteromasculinity by positioning him as an ostensible victim. Somerson (2004: 216) proposes that the "victimised" white male as described by writers like Williams (2005) and Cragin (2009) reacts to feminist and racial equality politics by assuming and at the same time disavowing "the role of victim." According to Somerson "reflexive sadomasochism" or "voluntary victimization" enables "the white male subject" to divide "his subjectivity into a sadistic and masochistic half" so he can play the roles of both victim and aggressive male (2004: 216). Somerson describes this kind of sadomasochism as reflexive to highlight the fact that it is the white male subject who casts himself as "both aggressor and victim […] in a continual battle that is ultimately waged within himself." The battle takes place within the white male because reflexive sadomasochism is an "ultimately conservative" strategy in that it works to secure the centrality of white masculinity "in times of social, economic and thus psychic crises" (Ibid). I would argue that Michael Glass provides an instance of a white male engaging in reflexive sadomasochism in response to external threats. I will come back to this idea across the arc of the chapter.

Constructing Traditional Heteromasculinity in *Basic Instinct 2*

The cultural idea that masculinity should index authority and dominance is constructed in several ways in *Basic Instinct 2*. Michael Glass' physique, job and sexuality are the key aspects the film uses to both invoke and reconstruct ideas about the transnational heteromasculine subject. As I will detail below, Glass' body is displayed in several instances in the film, and this necessitates a discussion of how the muscular male body has been represented in cinema and the meanings that have come to be associated with those representations. According to Dyer (1992: 270), the naked male body is always shown in a state of action; if the man in the frame is not doing anything in particular, he tightens his muscles as if in anticipation of action (Ibid). Dyer further argues that muscularity is an important criterion in assessing the manliness of men's bodies: "[M]uscularity is the *sign* of power – [as] natural, achieved, phallic" (1992: 273).

The power denoted by the muscular male body is assumed to be natural because the potential to develop muscles in men is thought to be biologically determined (Ibid). Furthermore, muscularity is, paradoxically, presented as proof of the man's achievement of his beauty and power[21]. Dyer concludes that men's muscles may be regarded as phallic in the sense that they symbolise the patriarchal power of the phallus. In addition, Glover and Kaplan (2000: 59 - 60), point out that there is a historical tradition of subjecting the male body to rigorous exercise in order to reproduce and naturalise ideas of masculinity as disciplined, restrained and without emotional weakness, which has been cast as a sign of femininity. I would argue that *BI2* borrows from this history of representation and fashioning of the male body to set Glass apart from the other male characters and to position him as more masculine by virtue of his physical frame, which is relatively more imposing than those of the men around him, especially Adam Towers and Dr. Jacob Gerst who, in specific ways, challenge Glass' masculinity.

Taken together, these casting decisions coalesce to present a picture of traditional heteromasculinity. Glass is bigger and taller than Adam Towers and Jakob Gerst. The contrast in the casting of the men is significant because at different points both Towers and Gerst appear to be Glass' adversaries: Towers taunts Glass about his professional failures; and Gerst holds the key to an academic post that Glass wants badly. However, both 'adversaries' are feminised. Towers is of slight build and well groomed, and his delicate facial features and fashionable clothes appear to index metrosexual masculinity. According to Hill, metrosexuals are "mostly straight but definitely not narrow" and "have fewer macho pretensions, [and] more concern with style and prettiness" (2006: 146). The ambiguity in Towers' sexuality is underscored by the fact that he later dies of erotic asphyxiation. While the narrative does not resolve the question of who killed him, it suggests that Tramell was responsible. In this way the film further stresses

[21] Dyer contrasts the muscularity of the male with the female beauty queen, whose efforts are interpreted as something which has been done to her even though her beauty regime probably included waxes, exercise and dieting.

his femininity by suggesting that he could not fight to save himself when a woman asphyxiated him during sex.[22]

Glass' interaction with Towers seems to position Glass as the more physically imposing, and hence more powerful, of the two men. The two meet once in the course of the film. During that meeting, the contrast between their physiques sets up Glass as the bigger male who possesses the phallic power that the smaller Towers lacks. In the sequence, Towers arrives late at court on the day that Glass is set to deliver his forensic analysis of Tramell's mental state. A tracking mid-close-up shot shows him hurrying towards the court, but he finds he cannot get in because the proceedings have already begun. The shot reveals his groomed face and hair. A green scarf sets him apart from the black and grey attire of the other men milling around and, more importantly, Glass' similarly grey outfit.

Inside the court, Glass is composed and confident as he provides his testimony. Afterwards, as he walks out of the courtroom, Glass skilfully deflects journalists' questions about whether Tramell is guilty or innocent, which further constructs him as a man with a firm grip on his world. Towers joins him further down the passage, and a mid-close-up tracks both men as they walk out of the building, with the taller and bigger Glass looming in the foreground while Towers' already diminutive frame is situated further into the frame. Glass takes steady strides and Towers has to break into a trot to catch up with him as he walks down the stairs. The same 'catch up' moment is repeated outside as Glass walks to the side of the road to get a taxi. I would argue that his sequence positions Glass as the more able masculine figure because not only is he bigger and taller than Towers but the latter has to increase his pace to catch up with Glass who seems to just be walking. The two-shot of the men walking out of the building creates the impression that the muscular Glass is the more competent because he is foregrounded and as a result Towers appears smaller and in the middle ground. The spectator

[22] In the final sequence, the film suggests that Glass could have been responsible for Towers' death. In chapter three, I will discuss the significance of introducing such an ambiguous idea at the very end of the film.

is thus invited to identify with Glass because he appears to possess the dominant characteristics of heteromasculinity. It is also significant that Glass refuses to give Towers the information he wants, and in this way Glass dismisses Towers in a way that is somewhat similar to the manner in which he deflected journalists' questions outside the court, further positioning Glass as the dominant masculine figure.

Gerst is much older than Glass but like Towers he is also smaller than Glass. Given Glass' muscularity and the fact that he punches a man of his own size in a bar, the older and comparatively slighter Gerst poses no physical threat to him and is therefore positioned as less masculine. Gerst may have some power over Glass because the latter needs Gerst's recommendation for a job, but the film frames Glass' acknowledgement of Gerst's power as something which he has to do to get the position he wants. Glass and Milena Gardosh's conversation on the way to Gerst's house underscores the idea that Glass need only manipulate the intellectual but unmanly Gerst to get the job. Milena advises Glass to "be candid but not too candid". She also reminds him that the interview at the university is a mere formality, that the meeting with Gerst is the real interview. In this way Gerst is further reduced to an obstacle that Glass should work smart to overcome. To relate this to Connell's transnational business masculinity, Glass effectively pledges allegiance to Gerst for as long as he stands to benefit from their rather transactional relationship. Furthermore, Gerst's relationship with Catherine seems completely platonic, so virility, the film suggests, is another masculine trait he lacks. It does not even occur to Glass that Catherine and Gerst might be sexually involved. Therefore, it appears that the important male characters around Glass are weaker than him when one considers heteromasculinity as a subject position that is represented through the force, often merely implied, of the phallic male body.

Michael Glass' job as a psychiatrist is a key device the film uses to construct his character as competent and in charge of his immediate environment. According to Connell (2000: 265), the work a man does, and indeed whether he is employed, has a bearing on the type of masculinity he is able to mobilise for himself. Glass is, therefore, able to mobilise the social authority that comes with transnational heteromasculinity because he is a doctor and that gives him the

institutional power to pronounce on people's mental well-being. This is borne out by the fact that Glass is the one called upon to assess Catherine Tramell's mental faculties after she has been arrested as a suspect in Kevin Franks' death. In court he confidently testifies that Tramell suffers from 'risk addiction,' a condition which effectively means that she is a danger to herself and others. Based on Glass' testimony, Tramell is remanded in custody, but later released due to a legal technicality.

The shifting loyalties and egocentrism of transnational business masculinity that Connell (2000: 270) describes are evident in that Glass soon forgets about Tramell's risk addiction. Even though he suspects that Tramell is the killer, he sleeps with her and manages to steal from her house a bottle of what might be the dangerous drug that paralysed Kevin Franks and led to his drowning. He gives the bottle to Detective Washburn to have its contents analysed. When Washburn comes back with the news that the substance was indeed the infamous drug, Glass refuses to confirm that he got it from Catherine's house, much less write a sworn statement. At this point his loyalties shift from the state or Crown and back to himself and it appears he is no longer certain of the danger inherent in Tramell's addiction to risk. Tramell's guilt or innocence becomes irrelevant the moment he realises that she would not be able to have sadomasochistic sex with him if she was locked up in prison.

The film casts Glass' about turn as the strategic move of a man hedging his bets in an uncertain situation. This is the case because Glass changes his mind after Catherine's lawyer has warned him about Washburn's 'dark' past. Glass investigates and finds that none other than Adam Towers was writing a story about the 'dirtiest cop in London' when he was killed. Towers' colleague suggests that Washburn is the dirty cop and hints that the detective was somehow responsible for Towers' death. This kind of ambiguity in narrative events and character motivation is typical of erotic thrillers. But I would contend that *Basic Instinct 2* uses the device to excuse Glass' behaviour because it ultimately serves no other narrative purpose. As Fisher (2007: 82) puts it:

> *Basic Instinct 2* exacerbates and accelerates that tendency in the postmodern Thriller towards permanent narrative instability, in which for the purposes of 'twist' or 'double twist' endings, a character can continually be re-positioned […].

In his defence, Det. Washburn explicitly names Glass' sexual desire for Tramell as the reason why Glass appears to have switched loyalties. This is illustrated in the scene in which Washburn tries to convince Glass to falsely claim that Tramell has threatened to kill someone so that Washburn can arrest her. When Glass refuses, Washburn says: "If you have one moment when you're not dizzy with the smell of her pussy, ask yourself do you trust her?" But by this point the film has introduced a twist to reposition Washburn as a dirty cop and so Glass does not trust him.

The invocation of a 'natural' heterosexual desire further enables the film to harness the notion of masculinity as unemotional, selfish and driven by a desire for sex. These are culturally produced ideas which have come to be regarded as facts. These attitudes are characteristic of what Bowden and Mummery (2009) call a patriarchal sexual economy, a system in which heterosexual desire is assumed to be an innate, natural expression of sexuality. Crucially, Bowden and Mummery argue that the patriarchal sexual economy is premised "on a hierarchical relation between the sexes in which "male" counts more" (2009: 77). The asymmetry in this relation may result in male sexuality being privileged and male pleasure taking precedence over female pleasure (Ibid). I would argue that the patriarchal sexual economy provides an implicit frame of reference for Michael Glass' behaviour particularly with regard to two women in the film: Michelle Broadwin, the psycho-pharmacologist with whom he is in a sexual relationship, and the unnamed waitress at the coffee house where he is frequently seen working on his academic paper.

Glass and Michelle appear to be erotic partners only because throughout the course of the film they are not shown out on a date or doing anything that suggests they are more than that. Glass seems to be interested in her only as a sex partner. This is exemplified by a scene which takes place at a function hosted by one of his colleagues. After a sexually charged altercation with Tramell, he asks Michelle to go for a drink with him. The following scene is of the two of them

having sex in his bed. But there are two significant interruptions that suggest she is there merely to serve his sexual needs. First, while having sex with her, he stares at a photograph of Tramell, which conveniently looks back at him from the back cover of one of her novels on his bedside table. Then they are interrupted a second time when Denise, Glass' ex-wife, calls with the news that her boyfriend, Adam Towers, is dead. I want to focus here on what happens while Glass and Michelle are having sex because the scene presents Glass as a selfish and violent heterosexual man, which works to reinforce his transnational heteromasculinity.

The spectator is aware of what is in the book on the bedside table because Glass reads it in an earlier scene, and, presumably, the sight of it prompts him to re-enact a scene from the novel in which the hero yanks his girlfriend's hair during sex. Michelle screams when Glass pulls her hair but he carries on pulling as he thrusts into her. In this instance the film invokes the patriarchal right of access to women even if it is through the use of violence. The film establishes that when Glass pulls Michelle's hair this was clearly not scripted or consensual sadomasochistic play. In that moment he hurts and uses her body to enhance his own pleasure. Later, he shows no sign of remorse when Detective Washburn questions him about his whereabouts the night Adam Towers was killed: Glass says he came home with an acquaintance and was on his "knees fucking her when Denise called". In this way the film constructs for Glass a transnational heteromasculine sexual script which is characterised by a lack of emotional investment and a need for diversity when it comes to sex partners (Hill, 2006: 147). Washburn unwittingly condones Glass' characterisation of his treatment of Michelle as unproblematic when the Detective quips: "On your knees, ha? It sounds like your evening was better than mine."

It is significant that the waitress at the coffee house is never addressed by name in the film. After yet another altercation with Tramell, Glass has sex with her against the wall of one of the backrooms of the coffee shop and leaves immediately afterwards. The waitress is not shown again after that, which further constructs Glass as the type of cold heterosexual man who David Wyatt Seal and Anke A. Ehrhardt (2007 [2003]: 381) say views women as prey to be hunted and subdued through sexual intercourse. From this perspective Glass' behaviour fits the traditional

heterosexual men's sexual script that Hill describes as the "4F Club: find them, feel them, fuck them, and forget them" (2006: 147). This is precisely what happens to the "the waitress" in *Basic Instinct 2*.

The contrast between Glass' treatment of the two women and his submission to Tramell shows Somerson's notion of reflexive sadomasochism in operation in that he acts out his aggression on the waitress and Michelle's bodies, while apparently being unable to do the same to Tramell. She taunts him and he wants her all the more for it. Dany Nobus (2006: 68) characterises such masochistic longing in the following manner: "I the masochist do not demand that the woman love, desire or appreciate me; on the contrary I wish to be beaten and humiliated, neither desired nor loved by her." In this way Glass, who is a white male, positions himself as Tramell's victim. I would therefore argue that his actions implicate the white male spectator whose centrality is threatened in "the new global economy" where white masculinity needs to reinvent itself to maintain its hegemony (Somerson, 2004: 217). Victor Seidler (2006) makes a similar argument in a broader discussion of current issues relating to masculinity. Seidler (2006: 5) suggests that after the World Trade Centre bombings of 9/11, "masculinity needs to be refigured" because the West can no longer take for granted its hegemony in the "new global climate." Against that background, Glass' masochism resonates with the film's context of production.

The fact that Glass was looking at a picture of Tramell during intercourse with Michelle suggests that she was not the one he wanted to have sex with and the narrative interruption of their sex, its lack of orgasm, suggests that it was not significant to Glass. This becomes the focus of my analysis in the next section. The discussion takes place within a broader framework of how the signs of the normative heteromasculinity Glass performs could be said to simultaneously betray tensions in the cultural construction of a unified and internally stable heteromasculinity.

"This Time You Knew Exactly What I Was, And You Let It Happen […]," Tramell

In this section, I will examine how the picture of transnational heteromasculinity painted in the preceding section contains inherent tensions which ultimately queer it. Glover and Kaplan (2000: 60) have shown that the active mediation of ideals of masculinity has a long history, which reveals that masculinity requires considerable effort, compelling men to struggle against themselves and their bodies to attain to the dominant ideal. Similarly, Gauntlett (2008: 179) has analysed popular men's magazines and found that for men in contemporary society masculinity is something they have to work towards. It is always effectively an achievement, and there are many different modalities of heteromasculinity as evidenced by the different versions that emerge out of men's magazines such as *Men's Health* and *GQ* (2008: 171 - 173). For example, *GQ* projects a picture of upwardly mobile masculinity by inviting its reader to buy "his way to a sense of male specialness with expensive cars, […] grooming products, suits and property" (Ibid: 172). While the *Men's Health* reader is presumed to regard physical fitness as the starting point to sexual health and general success in life (2008: 170). In this way the magazines encourage the reader to take measures to embrace and reproduce the magazine's idea of masculinity.

I mentioned above that Glass had casual sex with each of the two women after an altercation with Tramell. So I would argue that Michelle and "the waitress" function as stand-ins for Tramell because they do not seem to be enough or be what he wanted. This can be seen in that after sex with the two women he wants Tramell even more. Tramell is on his mind during sex with Michelle, as evidenced by her book on his bedside table, and he calls her just after having sex with "the waitress." It would appear he is at first reluctant to sleep with Tramell because she is one of his patients. However, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, Tramell is a source of fascination and fear for Glass because she is masculinised, and her sexual aggression and lack of emotional investment in sexual relations queers the heterosexual scripts for courting and sexual relations in which women are positioned as passive (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2007 [2003]). According to Seal and Ehrhardt (2007 [2003]: 376), even though women in modern society may

initiate courtship and sexual intercourse, research indicates that men are "the initiators of sexual intercourse and women [...] the boundary setters." However, Hill (2006: 147) has found that heterosexual sex is not always driven by men because some men "eroticize powerful women" and enjoy sex with "women who have more power." And, in this respect, Richardson (1993: 161) suggests that the cultural idea that women are "gatekeepers" when it comes to sex works to maintain men's power over women through the insidious idea that women cause men's sexual desires.

This notwithstanding, the idea of a stronger male sex drive enjoys cultural currency. In that regard, Glass and Tramell's relationship does not adhere to the traditional heterosexual scripts that Seal and Ehrhardt discuss. Rather, it conforms to Hill's description in which men eroticize powerful women. I want to suggest here that Glass eroticizes Tramell and wants her because she presents an alternative to the traditional script offered by Michelle and "the waitress." Sullivan (2003: 128) suggests that recasting gender scripts can queer gendered subjectivity by questioning the ascription to bodies of meanings which work to define male and female figures in gendered terms and in this way regulate their relations. Moreover, Thomas (2009: 25) proposes that a queering project would involve "a strategic failure" to recognise the grids of intelligibility that seek to delimit a subject's desires. Hence, I would argue that Glass' attraction to the masculinised Tramell begins to queer the construction of heteromasculinity and the male subject as the 'active' pursuer of the 'passive' female subject by questioning the alignment of heteromasculinity with active power and dominance.

But I am not claiming that male masochism is an inherently queer practice. Daniel Bergner (2009) has shown that male masochism can work to support heteromasculinity. This is apparent in Bergner's discussion of a male submissive who imagined that his "service" to a dominatrix might help her "make more money and be happier" (2009: 55). In addition, one of that masochist's stated goals was to endure "16 bullwhips and never complain or cry" (Ibid). Therefore, while his submission was undergirded by the idea of heteromasculinity as physically and emotionally strong, his submission itself constituted a refusal to align his behaviour with normative masculine practices. While this may seem like a contradiction, my thesis is that, in

fact, both sadistic and masochistic impulses lie at the heart of heteromasculinity. This is because it is founded on a repression of aspects which are thought to be feminine and therefore connote weakness (Glover & Kaplan, 2000: 60). Heterosexuality depends on the constructed complementarities of femininity and masculinity in which "the man plays the active and dominant role and the female plays the passive and submissive role" (Hill, 2006: 147). In *BI2*, some of Glass' actions queer these ideas.

The 'passive/active' sexual division of labour is challenged by instances of masculine representation in which men are shown to want to experience passivity and submissiveness. As suggested above, this kind of internal division is an integral aspect of masculinity, as Glover and Kaplan (2000: 77) demonstrate. To that end, they examine the Carlylean ideal of masculinity and conclude that it was "compromised by a deep interior division between the need for mastery and control […] and fear of the potentially untameable flows of energy within."[23] Indeed, this kind of tension is evident in Michael Glass' contradictory attitude to Tramell. His ambivalence is exemplified in the scene towards the end of the film when, after she has confessed to killing Adam Towers and attacking Denise Glass, he attacks her and attempts to drown her in her Jacuzzi and then loses his nerve and lets her go.

I earlier proposed that *Basic Instinct 2* suggests a connection between Tramell and Glass by situating their figures in the centre of the frame, thereby making them share screen space, instead of placing each character on the left or right side of the screen. I therefore want to suggest that he fails to strangle her in the scene described above because he identifies with her risk addiction and in fact needs her to carry on dominating him. Glass' desire to be dominated makes sense when one considers sexuality through a Foucauldian lens. Foucault (1977: 44) postulates that the notion of sexuality is inherently perverted in the sense that multiple sexualities have been incorporated into the individual, while society pretends that different sexualities inhabit different bodies. According to Foucault, the increase in discourses of

[23] By Carlylean masculinity the authors are referring to the subjective divisions which were typical of the 19th century author Thomas Carlyle's heroes. John Morrow (1997) cites Carlyle's writing on the contemporary British politician, Sir Robert Peel, to demonstrate that while Carlyle was aware of Peel's strong liberal economic beliefs, Carlyle nonetheless wrote pamphlets that painted Peel as a hero whose "moral purpose" would enable him to overcome his liberal economic ideas and pursue interventionist policies (1997: 97).

sexuality, which were mostly institutional and spoke the language of prohibition, had less to do with eliminating what were deemed aberrant or unnatural sexualities. Rather, argues Foucault, those discourses represented a concerted effort to incorporate those sexualities into the human body and make them an abundant fact of reality. This strategy would enable power to control individual conceptions and experiences of sexuality (Ibid). Moreover, these sexualities were hierarchized and locked in an oppositional relationship that was mutually reinforcing, and this was a tactic that power used to maintain the hierarchy of the sexualities in relation to one another (1977: 45).

I would argue that Glass' sexual practices evince the tension that Foucault posited. This means that Glass does not have to resolve the tension brought about by his desire to be dominated by Catherine; he need only maintain the appearance of "straight" desire on his part. His struggle against his feelings for Tramell consists in replaying the tension between his heteronormative sexuality and his masochistic sexual desires. The two sexualities then reinforce each other, as Foucault describes. In this way, Tramell continues to function as the inherent transgression, enabling Glass to simultaneously avow and disavow his masochism. Therefore, in pursuing a sexual relationship with the aggressive and dominating Tramell, Glass queers his masculinity and thus problematizes the idea of heteromasculinity as a discrete category with a unitary and stable sexuality.

Cinema's inherently heterosexual structures of looking, as described by Mulvey and Dyer, are subverted when Glass welcomes Tramell's aggressive seduction. The question of why Glass would want to subvert his masculinity becomes clearer still when one considers Week's (1995: 36) argument that sexuality is not fixed but has been constructed as such to fix the places of individuals in culture. The latter is in line with Foucault's conception of multiple and hierarchized sexualities that are incorporated into the individual at a specific historical moment. In terms of historical specificity, Weeks (1995: 34) suggests that sexuality is subject to social influences, so Glass' heteromasculinity is subject to influences that arise out of his environment as well as his needs.

In that regard, Halberstam (2011: 16) has shown that while heterosexuality retains its dominant status as a normative institution and practice, it now has to share the stage with gay, lesbian and transsexual modalities. In addition, Hoy (2006) demonstrates that men who identify as heterosexual sometimes engage in sex with other men. Hence, I would argue that these social factors would have an influence in the construction of a character like Glass as well as how he thinks about his heterosexuality. Glass' changing conception of his sexuality can be explained by taking recourse to the idea of "the imaginary body" (Sullivan, 2003: 129). Drawing on Moira Gatens (1996), Sullivan (2003: 129) explains the idea of "the imaginary body" as "the psychical image of the body which […] (in)forms one's being-in-the-world; that is, one's motility, one's desire, one's sense of self and others." Sullivan goes on to explain that the imaginary body is discursively produced through language and society constructs its desires "through the privileging of various zones of the body (for example, the mouth, the anus, the genitals)." Moreover, the privileging of certain organs and parts of the body in "contemporary Western culture" has created dual images of male and female bodies, with the female constructed as penetrable, while the male body is coded as impenetrable (Sullivan, 2003: 129). The social influences that Halberstam and Hoy describe would have had an influence on the cultural imaginary on which the film draws a character like Glass and therefore impacted his conception of the heteromasculine imaginary body, leading to his piecemeal attempt to queer his heteromasculinity.

There are further implicit ways in which the film queers the notion that masculine desire is directed at women and requires traditional heterosexual intercourse where the man is dominant and the woman passive. Dyer (1993: 120) argues that cinema invokes the notion of male sexuality as goal oriented, with seduction and foreplay the means to the main event of penetrative heterosexual intercourse and orgasm. However, Michael Glass' sex scenes with Michelle and the waitress seem to lack the goal of orgasm, which renders the women insignificant, especially in light of Glass' attraction to and identification with Catherine Tramell. Therefore, Michelle and the waitress were never important; they just happened to be there. The picture becomes more complex when one considers that Glass was essentially hankering for

non-normative sexual activity while engaged in heteronormative intercourse with each of the two women. Implicit in his complex desires is a queering of heterosexual intercourse because it is in effect standing in for queer sex, which suggests that the boundaries of heteromasculine sexuality and desire may need to be redefined to accommodate some of the 'feminine' aspects it currently excludes. Whether Glass is willing to go as far as overtly queering his heteromasculinity is in doubt, and this will be the object of analysis in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Becoming Queer?

My reading of Michael Glass' behaviour is that he is attracted to Tramell because she indulges in a variety of polymorphous sexual pleasures. As a result there is a question mark hanging over Glass' sexuality with regard to whether it is limited in scope to heterosexual scripts and the subjectivities they support or if he wants to use sadomasochistic sex to queer his subjectivity. I am not arguing that sadomasochism is essentially queer, as I will detail below, my argument is that because participants in sadomasochism sometimes can choose to play the dominant or the submissive role, depending on how they feel, this denies subjectivity of the timeless unity and coherence ascribed to it (Sullivan, 2003: 154). Furthermore, not only can they reverse the roles but, in fact, as Bergner (2009) shows, a dominatrix simultaneously can be in a heteronormative relationship with a man who is not involved in sadomasochism and does not recognise her as a dominatrix. I would therefore say that the incongruity in such performances of subjectivity queers it by intrinsically denying it of any link to an essence. Hence, this chapter will explore how *Basic Instinct 2* queers heteromasculinity by considering Glass' willing participation in sadomasochistic sex and his masochistic submission to Tramell. I will then argue that the film attempts to recuperate Glass' masculinity after he has enjoyed the sexual transgressions involving Tramell.

I will use the term 'queer' to describe how the element of sadomasochism in Glass' sexual relationship with Tramell troubles its definition as heteronormative. I define sadomasochism in detail below; here I want to briefly elaborate on what I mean by heteronormativity. According to Richardson (1996: 2), heteronormativity refers to the institutions and discourses which work to support and normalise heterosexual relationships and sexual practices and to cast other modalities of sexual subjectivity as abnormal. These discourses include ideas that masculinity should dominate femininity in relationships; with women cast as the objects men should pursue to fulfil their desires (Ibid). Hence, to be heteronormative is to reproduce heterosexuality as a norm and, in that way, reproduce yourself as a heteronormative subject by aligning your

behaviour with cultural discourses that define either masculinity or femininity in narrow terms. Therefore, as Thomas (2009: 21) notes, certain kinds of sexual intercourse between men and women may not be heteronormative in cases where participants partake of pleasures that do not function to reproduce heterosexual subjects as distinct and internally coherent.

I want to suggest that Glass and Tramell's sadomasochistic sex queers Glass' transnational heteromasculinity by "ambiguating" (Thomas, 2009: 17) its discursive production as dominant and self-possessed. Furthermore, I would say that their sadomasochistic sex queers heteromasculine subjectivity because, while their sexual activity is "fixated on genital sex," it also "opens up a sort of polymorphous perversity" that makes it possible to "rethink pleasure and/or sexuality in terms of one's preference for certain acts, […] sensations […] [or] certain relations of age or power" (Sullivan, 2003: 156). This is evident in Glass' submission to Tramell in that his interest in her goes beyond a desire to have sexual intercourse. As I will demonstrate below, he is interested in a relation of power where he is the submissive party and Tramell the dominant party.

I am not suggesting that sadomasochism is inherently queer, rather, that "[I]n its fluidity and malleability it threatens the fiction of a coherent identity" and therefore queers it (Sullivan, 2003: 166). But, because Glass does not venture outside heterosexual sex, it is important to note that his attempt to queer his subjectivity is very much limited. Pat Califia, who at one time identified as lesbian, recounts fisting with gay men, and mentions meeting "straight men who would go down on other men or be fucked by them if their mistresses ordered them to do it. Since the acts took place under the authority of women, they thought of them as heterosexual behaviour" (2005: 23). Against that background, Glass' attempt to queer his heteromasculinity is more in line with Thomas' (2009: 19) admission that for himself as a heterosexual scholar involved in queer theory, the odds are "heavily against ever finally dislevelling the even plain of straight regimentation;" given his "undisownable place of privilege within it," he hopes "only to fail again, though this time perhaps to fail better." In other words, Glass is not aiming for total annihilation of his subjectivity. My sense is that he wants to experience the pleasure of being dominated by Tramell without losing his place of privilege in society.

Before embarking on an in depth discussion of how *Basic Instinct 2* tries to both queer and to recuperate heteromasculinity, it is necessary to discuss how sadomasochism has been approached by scholars in relation to how it might affect subjectivity. Noyes (1997) uses the terms masochism and sadomasochism interchangeably, and, while Silverman (1992) only discusses masochism, there is an implicit acknowledgement of the sadism that usually accompanies it so that her use of the term implies a certain inextricability of the two terms. Hence, where I use the term sadomasochism I will be implying a dynamic relationship of domination and submission between Tramell and Glass. And where I use the term masochism, it will be to describe behaviour that is designated as masochistic, that is, a willing submission to pain or humiliation for the purposes of sexual pleasure (Weeks, 2011: 164) as well as the subversion of subjectivity that this can lead to (Noyes, 1997: 30). The distinction is necessary because the Glass character behaves in ways that might be more suitably described as masochistic, whilst Tramell has more sadistic characteristics. Nevertheless, the two characters oscillate between the two positions when it suits them.

Silverman (1992: 187) argues that the masochist is constructed as a pervert who challenges the social order by exposing subjectivity as a political position founded on the repression of aspects of the individual that are not in line with his sex and gender. In this way, Silverman posits, "the male masochist magnifies the losses and divisions upon which cultural identity is based, refusing to be sutured or recompensed" (1992: 206). That is, he revels in the pain of yearning for the femininity he was forced to repudiate.

According to Sullivan (2003: 152 - 153), sadomasochism encompasses a vast range of practices, some of which are not overtly sexual; these may include, among others, "fantasies, various forms of restraint or bondage, domination and submission." Sullivan further argues that the evolution of inquiry on the concept of sadomasochism has followed two main lines of thought: one school of thought draws on the ideas of the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, and views sadomasochism as a potentially positive mode of queering subjectivity because its practices undercut naturalised ideologies and the "subjectivity[s] to which they give rise" (2003: 152). On the other hand, writers following in the footsteps of Freud and Von Krafft-

Ebing see sadomasochism as a psychopathology for which curative treatment should be sought, or corrective action taken (Ibid). The detractors of sadomasochism interpret its various practices as abusive, violent and coercive, (Sullivan, 2003: 153) while proponents view it as a consensual and passionate set of practices which can facilitate an exploration of the lived body beyond the limits of its discursive construction, and can lead to personal growth (McCosker, 2005: 32).

A major criticism of sadomasochism's potential to subvert subjectivity has been the charge that it reproduces unequal power relations that are apparent in heterosexual relations. I would concur with scholars who say that this reading does not bear scrutiny because in many instances the roles played by sadomasochistic practitioners are reversible and fluid (Sullivan, 2009: 442). Similarly, McCosker (2005: 32) explains that practitioners of sadomasochism view it as an alternative to normative sexuality and a transgression of the naturalised subjectivities it supports. Nevertheless, the reversibility of roles does not resolve the question of the power inequities in sadomasochism. Hence, drawing on Hopkins (1994), Sullivan proposes that as a way of resolving the tension created by the unclear function of power within sadomasochism, the latter should be "conceived as a simulation rather than a replication of heteropatriarchal values and relations" (2009: 442). The latter point is further discussed by Noyes (1997: 30) when he argues that masochism is a staged performance that gains meaning through its referential relationship to "aggressive" or "violent" actions in mainstream culture. This is because it takes actions such as culturally inscribed male aggression and female passivity, both of which are "socially sanctioned identities", and recodes them within the framework of a game to be enjoyed (Ibid.). In that game aggression does not necessarily issue from a male body and passivity may not be aligned with a female body. The ludic aspect of sadomasochism, as outlined by Noyes and Sullivan, points to a subversive impulse in sadomasochism. Sadomasochism is ludic in the sense that it is constructed as a game that plays out within "the bounds of the fantasy" (Noyes, 1997: 31). And is therefore "bereft of the political force to change oppressive political structures" (Mary Bunch, 2013: 40). But by locating subjectivities in the context of a power game, their presumed naturalness is put in question (Noyes, 1997: 32). It is the idea of sadomasochism as inherently critical of the presumably causal relation between sex,

gender and sexuality as constructed within the heterosexual matrix that, I will argue, works to queer Glass' sadomasochistic interaction with Tramell.

Brown (2002: 124) argues that contemporary film is characterised by a sadomasochistic trope which combines in male characters representational traits that cinema had previously designated as either feminine or masculine. This is done through the inclusion of both sadistic and masochistic qualities in the male characters (Ibid). Likewise, McCosker (2005: 31), citing Landridge and Butt (2004), illustrates that the turn of the 21st Century has been characterised by stories of dominance and submission, pointing to films such as *Blue Velvet* (Lynch, 1986) and *Wild at Heart* (Lynch, 1990) "as well as a wide range of television programming, advertising, music and literature" as some of the sites that have evinced society's sadomasochistic sensibilities. Through a close reading of *Crash* (Cronenberg, 1996), McCosker argues that the film's foregrounding of the role of bodily pain in heightening sexual experience, coupled with the vehement opposition levelled against it in the press, makes clear that spectators' cinematic experience of *Crash* can be described as masochistic because it invited them to enjoy the eroticised pain of the characters. Media opposition to *Crash* assumed that 'vulnerable' spectators would be prompted to explore the link between pain, death and sexual pleasure as depicted in the film and, according to McCosker, this suggests a tacit acknowledgement of a sadomasochistic sensibility in contemporary culture. This seems a valid claim when one takes into account that the films mentioned above, such as *Payback*, *Basic Instinct 2*, and *Crash* all make use of the trope of sadomasochism in their narratives. Furthermore, in an analysis of the suitability of the 'Young Adult' genre of literature for the young girls who comprise its target market, Love (2011) shows that Bella Swan's behaviour in Stephanie Meyer's popular book series *The Twilight Saga* can be interpreted as masochistic because she willingly goes through the excruciating pain of becoming a vampire to become worthy of her boyfriend. *The Twilight Saga* was adapted into a film series (Hardwicke, 2008; Weitz, 2009; Slade, 2010; Condon, 2011/12) and Love makes reference to the film adaptations as well.

In a similar vein, Hutchings (1993: 86) proposes that male characters and spectators alike take pleasure in horror film even though it is a punishing and subjecting experience because the

primary affect of horror is masochism. Hutchings argues that because male spectators and characters are positioned as agents in possession of forms of social and institutional power, moments of subjection and disempowerment cannot be said to merely reconfirm the notion of the male as endowed with a natural power – which he can bear to momentarily 'lose' under controlled conditions because it is supposedly an immanent quality. Rather, the masochistic scenario functions to elide the reality that the male character/spectator's hold on power "is structural and provisional rather than personal" (1993: 92). This is because male power is predicated on a man's assumption of a subject position under patriarchy. It "does not emerge from within his own unique being" (Ibid.). Against this background, in this chapter I will argue that Michael Glass attempts to refashion his heteromasculine subjectivity through sadomasochistic pleasure.

"All addiction is progressive," Michael Glass

I will now examine how Glass' sadomasochistic relationship with Tramell functions to queer ideas of heteromasculinity as dominant and in charge. I will argue that the film queers masculinity by appearing to subtly "denaturalise, to render unstable, heteronormative ideas about gender and gendered behaviour" (Sullivan, 2009: 436) especially as it applies to orgasm.

Hollywood narrative film is traditionally organised around a male character and as such it privileges male agency, which, in terms of character, refers to a character's ability to pursue a goal and fulfil it (Hayward, 1996: 249)[24]. Etherington-Wright & Doughty, citing Willemen (1981), take the latter point further and argue that all spectators take pleasure in watching the male character on screen because the spectator's experience rests on the pleasure of seeing a male character assert his agency in various ways – which may include fights, rides or business deals – "in or through cityscapes, or more abstractly history" (2011: 175). Furthermore, as the narrative develops, the male character moves through a process which starts with eroticization, as he is first introduced and the spectator is invited to identify with him; the second phase is

[24] Agency also operates at the level of the overall narrative, which has implications for questions of whose agency the narrative enacts; it may be the director's, the studio's or the film industry's (Hayward, 1996: 4).

destruction as a result of physical or emotional violence; and at the end he re-emerges and is restored after having gone through this process of testing and reaffirmation (Ibid). However, a narrative like *Basic Instinct 2*, which is driven by a female character, presents questions about masculine subjectivity because Glass' agency is circumscribed. He does not appear to assert his agency in the diegetic world and the process of destruction he undergoes is extensive, culminating in an ambiguous ending which does not restore his masculinity in the way Etherington-Wright & Doughty (2011) describe.

I will now discuss how Glass' relationship with Tramell challenges masculine agency, thereby beginning to queer his transnational heteromasculinity. I will do this through a detailed reference to his first consultation with her. Before I describe the scene, I want to suggest that a key characteristic of Glass' queering of transnational heteromasculinity is the fact that he is a willing participant and, as will be apparent in the scene description and the discussion that will follow, it is because of a series of decisions he makes that he ends up losing his medical license and has a breakdown. Glass, therefore, fits Silverman's (1992: 185) characterisation of a masochist: he submits to a woman and thus subverts the hierarchy of gender which posits the masculine subject as superior in society and dominant in sexual relations. I will elaborate on this point in due course.

The scene that marks the beginning of Glass' submission to Tramell takes place within the first half-hour of the film. It is Tramell's first therapy session. Tramell reclines on a leather chaise lounge, wearing a tight black dress and black stilettoes. Glass sits in a chair and listens to her talk. It is one of the few scenes in the film in which chiaroscuro lighting, a key trait of *film noir*, is overtly deployed[25]. Half of Catherine's face is in shadow, suggesting a dark and devious side, while the other half is lit. Both sides of Glass' face are also engulfed in shadow with only the front part exposed to light. I would say that the film uses the device to suggest to the spectator that perhaps he does not know his own dark side. What is important in this scene is that Glass surreptitiously looks at Tramell's naked thighs and legs while she is talking about the sex she

[25] Chiaroscuro refers to a high contrast between dark and light areas within an image, and is used in mysterious, dangerous or somber scenes; it also suggests ambiguity in a character (Bordwell & Thompson, 2006: 130).

used to have with Nick Curran when she lived in San Francisco. She glances back at Glass during her speech and sees that he is looking at her legs. Tramell then tells him about the sex she had with a man the previous night:

> I fucked this guy last night. I fucked him for hours. I mean…we did everything to each other…the full screaming "Master's and Johnson's" greatest hits of sex. But you know a week from now, I probably won't remember him.

What is important about the scene described above is that it lays the foundation for Glass' progressive engagement with Tramell in sadomasochistic orgasm. Her speech links violence, risk taking, death and pleasure. And she makes it clear that she enjoys risky and violent sexual behaviour. In so doing, she bestows on herself a form of masculinity because these attributes have been discursively produced as denoting masculinity. This becomes apparent when she says "I fucked this guy last night". By positioning herself as the "I" who did the 'fucking', I would argue that she indicates that she has the agency to do that within the sexual economy she describes. This agency is supposedly a masculine prerogative. Her assumption of the 'active' role functions to indicate to Glass that he need not initiate sex with her because she is capable of doing that herself.

Her anecdote about visiting car crash sites with her former lover Nick Curran, and then proceeding to have sex with him in his car, makes it clear that she enjoyed those experiences and did not take part in them to please Nick. While Tramell says all of this, Glass, who is beginning to break out in a sweat, steals a look at Tramell's legs. It is important to note that she catches him looking and does not say anything, and he also realises this. When he looks at Tramell it does not seem like he might act on his feelings. It is therefore a look without agency, which indicates two things: that he is excited by what she is saying, but is not likely to initiate risky sexual acts with her. And it is in this early scene in the film that Glass begins to cede his agency and deviate from the script of heteromasculinity in cinema. He thus assumes a masochistic position and implicates the spectator in a masochistic "experience of subjection, of having things done to you" (Hutchings, 1993: 86).

As the narrative progresses Glass takes more and more steps into Tramell's universe of danger and polymorphous pleasure. For example, when Adam Towers is killed as a result of what appears to have been erotic asphyxiation, Glass finds what looks like Tramell's cigarette lighter next to Towers' bed[26]. The camera lingers on his face in a mid-close up as he realises that the lighter could implicate Tramell in Towers' death. Instead of leaving it there for the police to find, he decides to throw it in the rubbish bin. He sees Tramell for a therapy session shortly afterwards and does not react with concern and/or alarm when she tells him that she was with Towers the night he died, that he was "the Master's and Johnsons' guy" she mentioned previously. What seems to surprise Glass in this scene is merely that Catherine was in a sexual relationship with Towers, not that she might have killed him, even if by accident, during sex. It turns out to be their last session as Tramell decides to terminate therapy in a move that seems designed to make Glass want her even more. He subsequently calls her under the pretext of wanting to put things right but she does not answer his calls, leaving him to squirm. This also shows how he submits to Tramell's domination.

I mentioned in the last chapter that heterosexuality relies on a presumed internal coherence of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990: 26) and that it is defined in terms of what it is not, namely through the exclusion of characteristics like submissiveness which are ascribed to femininity (Hill, 2006: 147). Glass' submission to Tramell in the two instances mentioned above begins to queer the heteromasculine ideal. Glass' actions are significant because, as Silverman (1992: 16) proposes, the affirmation of "classic masculinity" is crucial to the preservation of the dominant discursive framework because it constitutes the "governing reality." Within this framework the masculine subject is a central figure that is a site and a product of the reproduction of hegemonic power, as can be seen in the alignment of the phallus with the penis (Ibid).

Following Sullivan (2009: 444), I want to suggest that Glass engages the aggressive and potentially murderous Tramell in a sadomasochistic duel with a view to using orgasm to queer the boundaries of his transnational heteromasculinity. He knows that Tramell might have had a

[26] The lighter is established as Tramell's in a previous scene.

hand in Adam Towers' death but his desire for her becomes even stronger after she confirms that she was with Towers the night he died. He sees that Towers died of erotic asphyxiation and he makes himself available to Tramell. The narrative suggests that he is maintaining a professional distance from his seductive patient, but I would propose that upon closer inspection it becomes clear that a masochistic desire to be dominated by Tramell drives him. And, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, Glass' engagement with Tramell is incremental and some of his actions later in the film take him closer to destruction. I will next describe a sequence of three scenes and then offer an analysis of how they can be said to be examples of Glass definitively queering his masculinity. In the descriptions to follow, I will also mention how the conventions of the erotic thriller shape the spectator's reading of the sequences.

It is during the night of the near fatal attack on Denise, Glass' former wife, that he takes the final step into Tramell's world of risky, sadomasochistic sex. That night Glass meets Denise at a bar to question her about certain things she told Towers about a notorious patient he treated in the past. They argue and she leaves to meet a friend at another bar down the street. Glass follows her and, in a scene reminiscent of Nick Curran's entry into the trendy bar in Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct*, Glass enters the chic bar and scans the crowd. He finally spots Denise, and this is where the scene gets interesting because she is talking to a blonde woman who looks like Catherine Tramell, but there is ambiguity here in that the unknown woman is facing away from the camera and the film quickly cuts away from the two women, so the spectator cannot positively identify her as Tramell[27]. But Glass is able to identify the woman as Tramell, as it later transpires when he arrives at her apartment.

Glass moves towards the two women as they make their way to the toilet. As he walks down the back passage that leads to the toilet, the intra-diegetic sound fades up and the song playing in the club suddenly gets louder and then fades down, suggesting that somebody has opened a door leading to the dance floor and either entered the back area or gone back into the main club area. Glass enters the toilet and checks the stalls in search of Denise. He eventually finds her

[27] Ambiguity is one of the key characteristics of the *noir* thriller (Hayward, 1996: 4), and this scene marks the point at which the narrative of *Basic Instinct 2* becomes overtly ambiguous.

lying on the floor in one of the stalls with her throat cut – her blonde friend/Catherine nowhere to be seen. Denise is then taken to hospital where she slips into a coma.

It is important to note here that one of the shots of Glass in the toilet is a mirror reflection of his figure. In the mirror shot doors and other objects distort as if in a dream or hallucination. According to Hayward (1996: 4), mirrors suggest duplicity and narcissism in a character and contribute to ambiguity in the context of *film noir*. The spectator is not implicated in the ambiguity because the mirror shot is not taken from Glass' point of view. Hayward (1996: 367) suggests that the point of view shot is one of the filmic mechanisms that facilitate identification by "positioning the spectator alongside a character's subjectivity." Hence, the mirror shot serves to signal to the spectator that something might be amiss. But, as Wilson (1986: 4) argues, any "narrative must present enough material to enable the audience to make inferences" and since the film does not provide sufficient clues to implicate Glass in the attack, the mirror shot alone is not enough to enable the spectator to infer that Glass may be the assailant. Moreover, Wilson's reading of the early *noir* thriller *You Only Live Once* (Lang, 1937) suggests that it is a strategy of *film noir* to present a narrative that makes possible both "a standard reading and another inference" (1986: 22). I will explore significance of casting aspersions on Glass at this point in the film in the last section of this chapter, which considers whether and how the film attempts to recuperate Glass' transnational heteromasculinity.

Following his gruesome discovery of Denise in the toilet, in the next scene Glass is sitting in Washburn's office, staring into space, clearly devastated. The camera tracks 180 degrees around him in the customary tracking shot around a subject who is at his wits' end because of events that are beyond his control (Van Nierop, 1998: 42). However, there is an important twist: the track starts at the back of his head and ends just at it reaches the front of his face. Traditionally this kind of tracking shot, if it is not a 360 degree movement, starts at one side of the face and ends at the other. The fact that it covers only a side of Glass' body further suggests ambiguity in terms of his role in Denise's attack. As with the previous scene in the club, the spectator is not given enough information to suspect that Glass attacked Denise. The inclusion of a woman who looks like Tramell in the scene preceding the attack on Denise is a much stronger clue which

implies that Tramell attacked Denise. So the tracking shot does not function as an indictment because Glass looks devastated enough and there is sombre music supporting the gloomy mood.

The police think Glass may have tried to kill Denise because she had evidence that could implicate him in Adam Towers' death. But Tramell arrives at the station, wearing the same coat as the mystery woman who was talking to Denise in the bar just before she was attacked. Glass sees her talking to Det. Washburn. And it is at this point, I would argue, that Glass takes the final leap into Tramell's world of deadly risk. He saw Tramell talking to Denise before somebody slit her throat. But he decides to go to Tramell, ostensibly to ask her why she was meeting with Denise earlier and why she lied to the police for him. These questions, as the film makes clear, are really a pretext because the point of his visit to Tramell's apartment is to have sex with her, potentially deadly sex. According to Williams (2005: 33), the erotic thriller typically suggests similarities between characters on opposite sides of the law. The *fatale* is usually the transgressor, and her dupe, typically a detective, is supposed to represent the law. And since sex is the instrument the erotic thriller uses to negotiate relations of power and, crucially here, to represent lapses in masculine subjectivity, it is usually the case in these films that "the moment of highest erotic charge is also the moment of most extreme moral culpability" (Williams, 2005: 33). Glass knows that Tramell was with Denise before somebody attacked her but it would appear the erotic charge eclipses any moral considerations he should entertain.

A medium close up reveals anticipation and sexual excitement in Tramell's face as she stands in front of her lift, waiting for Glass to arrive. While Glass does not attempt to initiate any kind of sexual activity, his resigned demeanour and the fact that he stares expectantly at Tramell as she seductively lights a cigarette and suggests that the fact that she might be the killer turns him on, indicates he wants to have sex with her. She says: "Some guys are into blondes and some guys are into killers. Isn't that what turns you on, why you're here?" He does not answer verbally, but he acquiesces by kissing her.

The film then cuts to a shot of the two characters having sex in Tramell's bedroom. She is initially on top, straddling him as she rocks up and down. They then change positions and Glass lands on top of her in the missionary position. All the action is framed in a medium long shot so that both their bodies are visible and the sex seems as realistic as possible, which, as Williams (2005: 25) proposes, is a narrative device designed to excite feelings of sexual arousal in the spectator. While Glass is thrusting on top of Tramell, a close up shot shows her one hand reaching for something under the bed in a manner that recalls how she would reach for the ice-pick in the first *Basic Instinct*. In a flash, she secures a dog collar around his neck and asphyxiates him; this action is framed in a medium close up. He seems surprised when she slips the collar around his neck but he does not struggle and, after a moment, carries on thrusting. He lets it happen; not knowing what the result might be.

I now turn to a discussion of how Glass' actions in the scenes discussed above might be said to queer his transnational masculinity. Califia (2005: 24) mentions that in sadomasochism there is a negotiation of roles so that "nobody is automatically on the top or the bottom." After securing the collar around Glass' neck, Tramell asks him if he trusts her. A quick negotiation takes place and Glass reaffirms his consent to be the 'bottom' or submissive in their sadomasochistic exchange. Moreover, Noyes (1997: 202) argues that accepted "practice in sadomasochist circles is to understand consent as a controlled surrender of control" and the use of code words "ensures that the fantasy can be interrupted at any time." Where "stop codes" have not been established beforehand, the masochist is then at the mercy of his partner (Ibid). Glass and Tramell do not negotiate any stop codes. He decides to trust her even though he is not sure of the result, which is consistent with a sadomasochistic scene without stop codes because, as Noyes (1997: 202) puts it, masochists in those situations regard their tormentors as a "patient" would a "doctor." The roles between Glass and Tramell are then reversed and Tramell becomes the 'doctor' who guides Glass towards a queer state of being. I elaborate on this point in the following paragraph.

Just as Williams (2005) suggests that the erotic thriller draws parallels between those who are meant to uphold the law and those who transgress it, Willis (1997: 64) proposes that in *noir*

thrillers "dramas of identification and doubling" are played out through sadomasochistic scenes "where the reversibility of the gaze structure constitutes the central threat to the gendered subject's integrity." Catherine's assumption of the role of active looker would threaten Glass' heteromasculinity if it was not his goal to queer it. Hence, I would argue, Glass takes part in sadomasochism as a "subversive form of self-fashioning, or self-(trans)formation through the use of pleasure" (Sullivan, 2009: 444). This is because the moment Tramell asphyxiates him he momentarily relinquishes the power and authority which inform conceptions of transnational heteromasculinity. This is a pleasurable moment for him because, as Silverman (1992: 199) argues, the masochist revels in the drama of the annihilation of subjectivity and for him pleasure is present in the pain of destruction and "the psychic destabilisation to which it leads." I remind the reader that, according to Sullivan, such instances of subjective destruction are not absolute (Ibid). It is the pleasure present in the pain of subjective destruction that the masochist seeks to experience. In that regard, Abel-Hirsch (2006: 99) argues that the pain of such perversion can be used to endure change and allow it to take place within the subject. To recapitulate briefly, I use the term perversion to refer to behaviour, such as male masochism, that culture casts as "abnormal," "deviant," or "pathological" in that it upsets accepted representations of subjectivity, sexuality or power relations (Nobus, 2006: 3). Hence, I would argue that the change Glass seeks through his 'perversion' is to experience a sexuality which is not restricted and delimited by the dictates of heteromasculine subjectivity. Stated differently, Glass wants to experience both the "domination and submission" that Noyes (1997: 3) suggests are central to sexual practice but have tended to be viewed as polar opposites due to their cultural ascription to the two genders.

I would also suggest that by having Tramell asphyxiate Glass during sex, *BI2* wreaks "havoc with cinema's established scopic conventions by dramatically exteriorizing the visual supports of all subjectivity, image and gaze" (Silverman, 1992: 216). That is, the convention of a male gaze which surveys the female body from a vantage point and fulfils its agency by finally subduing the woman through sexual intercourse is subverted when Glass cedes his agency during the scene described above. In this way the film denaturalises the significance of the

masculine body as a potent site of sexuality and a dominant party in heterosexual intercourse. For these reasons I would argue that the film queers their sexual intercourse by showing Glass' renunciation of control. Furthermore, I would contend that Glass' actions enable the spectator to read their sexual intercourse "as a case of the vagina enfolding the penis" (Sullivan, 2003: 130) instead of an active man penetrating a passive woman. This is apparent in that Glass is on top of Tramell during intercourse, and his muscular physique pins her to the bed. However, Tramell, with Glass' tacit consent, takes charge of the sexual act and they thus unmask the phallic male body as a mere support of masculine subjectivity. Mulvey's masculine gaze, in which the male spectator identified with the male protagonist as the latter fixed the woman within the narrative with his gaze, is turned onto its bearer. With the gaze turned onto Glass, he loses his omnipotence and the spectator is invited to contemplate heteromasculinity's limits.

The fact that after securing the collar around Glass' neck, Catherine asks him if he trusts her is further evidence of his submission to her. He indicates that he trusts her by continuing to thrust. But at this point he is clearly not in control – the penis is stripped of its mythical power and reduced to function. Holland et al. (1996: 146) propose that heteronormative sex is defined in terms of masculine agency where heterosexual intercourse involves "penetration" and "starts with his arousal and ends with his climax." Conversely, Glass' sex with Tramell is not heteronormative, rather, it is queer because it "involves a transgression of the boundaries between" masculinity and femininity and thus destabilises either gender's claim to a timeless essence (Sullivan, 2003: 130). The queerness of the scene is further evidenced in that it shows that Glass is more interested in a sadomasochistic relation of power as opposed to heteronormative intercourse. Even though Glass' lack of control was clear from the beginning, the fact that his life is now in Tramell's hands makes it even more obvious. He is not in charge of his orgasm and he does not mind.

Consequently, Glass' struggle betrays a fundamental flaw in the cultural configuration of the genders and how sexualities are imagined. This seems the case when one considers Weeks (2003: 42) argument that human beings constantly change the meaning of gender and modify behaviour to suit political and moral factors, whilst society insists that sex is a natural and

unchanging human trait. Through his masochism, Glass performs the tension inherent in a sexuality that is changeable but which is socially understood as being immutable. According to Krutnik (1991: 102), this tension manifests in a masochism that is a key fantasy of masculinity because it is an attempt to repudiate the centrality of masculinity and the discourse of "sexual difference." Silverman (1992: 187) echoes the latter point when she says that the pervert attempts to free himself from the constrictions of the laws of the paternal universe. Therefore, Glass' submission subverts not only the laws that govern subjectivity but the very discursive regime that underwrites the privilege of transnational heteromasculinity.

"Perhaps I'm acting out your unconscious impulses." Catherine Tramell

As suggested in the opening paragraph of this chapter, *Basic Instinct 2* presents Tramell as both sexually aggressive and adventurous. But the narrative positions Glass as somebody who, perhaps unwittingly, gets drawn into Tramell's spider web. However, as she says, she could be acting out his unconscious desires. So in this section I will analyse ways in which Tramell can be said to mirror Glass' unspoken desires, given his knowing blindness and disavowal not only of her past but also her possible involvement in recent murders.

According to Abel-Hirsch (2006: 101), disavowal or misrepresentation of a particular situation can be used to obscure an uncomfortable fact of reality. When the "recognition of reality is experienced as a threat […] [it] is avoided by a simultaneous acknowledgement and disavowal of reality" (2006: 102). I want to suggest that Glass' disavowal of Tramell's criminal past fits Abel-Hirsch's idea of disavowal, and that Glass is therefore able to both ignore Tramell's past and go as far as to remove evidence from a crime scene to protect her because he needs her to play her part in their deadly sadomasochistic game. Glass' disavowal of Catherine's dark side is a consequence of his desire for sadomasochistic sex, which, according to Noyes (1997: 206), can provide a subject, in this case Glass, with a technology to collapse the boundaries of masculinity as a sanctioned subjectivity. As argued in the previous section, Glass allows himself to be asphyxiated by Tramell in an attempt to redefine the boundaries of his masculinity, particularly its alignment with a controlling agency. His masochism, then, is "an erotic attachment to the breakdown of identity" which has at its core the unmasking of the superficiality of subjective

coherence "in the name of bodily pleasure" (Noyes, 1997: 39). Glass pursues his masochistic orgasm throughout the film. With reference to the sequence which ends with Glass witnessing Tramell taking part in group sex, I hope to show how Glass can be said to take vicarious pleasure in the sexual behaviour in which Tramell participates, which highlights the dimension of fantasy to the process of queering his subjectivity.

The sequence comes after Tramell and Glass have had sex. Tramell no longer speaks to Glass because he took from her house a bottle of what may or may not have been a dangerous party drug that led to Kevin Franks' death in the opening sequence. It is dusk and Catherine leaves Dr. Gerst's house and walks down the road. Glass watches her from behind a tree across the road. He follows her and the film cuts to a scene of Tramell walking down a Soho street, past sex shops, porn cinemas and sex workers. Glass is still following her, and from his point of view we see Tramell exposing her crotch to a male sex worker who refuses the transaction by shaking his head. Then Tramell takes out some bills and offers them to the man. Suddenly, he grabs her and pushes her into one of the brothels. Glass is alarmed and music designed to heighten the feeling of suspense soars as Glass runs to rescue Tramell. There is no sign of her when he bursts into the building. He opens random doors to see if she has been taken into one of the rooms, but he does not find her. He runs up a staircase which leads him onto the roof top. He appears to be at a loss until he hears people moaning in ways that suggest sexual pleasure. The source of the noise seems to be a domed glass roof. He goes over to see and appears transfixed by the sight of several couples having sex in the same room. Tramell is also present and is being fucked by the sex worker she picked up. Simultaneously shocked and excited, Glass looks on, and Tramell finally sees him watching, stares him in the eye and smirks. The film then cuts to a visibly shaken Glass relating what he has just seen to his colleague Milena Gardosh.

As with his sex with Tramell, Glass does not ask Tramell if he can watch her taking part in group sex, he simply follows her and ends up witnessing the group sex. I would argue that having been asphyxiated by Tramell, Glass wants more sex that does not reproduce heteromasculinity and instead queers it by challenging its presumed dominance, fixity and coherence (Thomas, 2009: 23). The group sex that Glass sees provides him with a taste of the

kind of queer sex he would have to pursue in order to break free from "the plain of straight regimentation," Thomas describes (2009: 19). In this respect, the orgiastic scene presents an especially queer picture in that there do not seem to be clear roles of masculine penetrator and feminine penetrated as was the case when he had sex with Tramell. The structural relation of active male and passive female in sexual intercourse is a notion that Foucault (1985: 46 - 47) has traced back to ancient Greece and shown that it was [and still is] a characteristic of sexual practice that works to support heteromasculine subjectivity. In the group sex scene there are men on top of women, as is the case with Catherine and her partner. But there are also women on top of men, and some of the bodies are in the dark, which could mean that same sex erotic partners may have been present. And as somebody acting out Glass's unconscious desires, Tramell partly partakes of the sexual excess on his behalf. It is worth considering in some detail the significance of Glass' implication in Tramell's sexual activities, given that Tramell is, after all, a woman.

Waugh (2001) provides a model for thinking about the complex structure of the vicarious pleasure a man can derive from watching a woman having sex with another man. With reference to the porn film *While the Cat's Away* (circa 1950 – 55), Waugh considers the pleasure involved when a man watches another man having sex with a woman:

> the wife in *While the Cat's Away* entertains her lover in the wood-panelled family abode, but cleverly pushes him into the closet when her husband comes home unexpectedly – horny, as it turns out. The lover ends up watching the married couple have sex from the closet vantage point, and two emphatic shots, including the final image of the film, show him standing masturbating through the half-open door. […] What is the object of this wanker's voyeuristic pleasure…and the object of the director's / spectator's? And do they know? (2001: 283).

The question posed by Waugh in the above quotation is relevant to a consideration of the pleasure Glass gets from watching Tramell having sex with the sex worker, Dicky Pepp. Both Glass and the anonymous lover in *While the Cat's Away* are treated to a full view of a naked man engaged in vigorous thrusting on top of a woman. In the case of the group sex scene in *BI2*, the

question of the object of Glass' voyeuristic pleasure arises: does he in that moment enjoy watching the man doing the thrusting or does he take pleasure in seeing Catherine being penetrated or wish himself to be in both Dicky and Catherine's positions? Waugh does not provide an explicit answer to that question. Rather, he suggests that the structure of desire is complex and in fact includes homoeroticism. In this particular scene, I would say that homoeroticism is prompted by what Williams (2008: 146) has called anal eroticism whereby the possibility of and desire for anal sex is suggested through a shot that shows a man's buttocks during sex, either for the benefit of another male character in the film or for the spectator[28]. According to Hirsch, Wardlow and Phinney (2012: 99) homoeroticism refers to feelings of erotic attraction between members of the same sex. It is different from homosexuality in that it also manifests in the sexual practices of men who do not identify as gay, as is the case with the Mexican *hombres normales* or normal men (Ibid.). Hirsch explains that the *hombres normales* she encountered in her research "were married, and yet their long-term relationships with feminine-appearing men were well enough known about" (2012: 99). These men were able to maintain their 'normal' status through "an aggressive style of walking and low-pitched speaking voice," which made it clear they did not prefer "penetrative anal intercourse" (Ibid.).

In light of Glass' pursuit of sadomasochistic sex, I would argue that his identification oscillated between Tramell and Dicky Pepp. This is because a double identification positions him as both active and passive and therefore negates established conventions of the masculine as active. And since Tramell is in this scene partly standing in for Glass, her bisexual practices further implicate him in homoerotic desire and in this way queer his heteromasculinity. Moreover, Noyes argues that when the male character in *A Woman in Flames* (van Ackeren, 1982 – 3) meets the unflinching gaze of his dominatrix girlfriend while she is administering a beating to a client, the man's gaze is neutralised by the woman's active look. In that moment the man recognises a confusing mixture of masochistic and sadistic impulses at the core of his sexuality. Therefore,

[28] Williams refers to anal eroticism in the context of a discussion of gay pornography. But since *Basic Instinct 2* borrows visual motifs evident in porn and is concerned with queering subjectivity, it seems appropriate that the film would reference homosexual sex.

the fact that Tramell looks him in the eye effectively neutralises his gaze and any claims to a single identification.

There is a further dimension to my claim that Glass identifies with Tramell being penetrated. In her analysis of male masochism in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Fassbinder, 1980), Silverman (1992: 243) says that women in the film are made to circulate between men with repressed homoerotic desires, thus reducing the women to carriers of men's unacknowledged homosexuality. Following Silverman, I want to suggest that Tramell functions in a similar way, albeit not merely as a carrier of Glass's unacknowledged homoerotic desires but as a double for his orgasm in general. That Tramell functions as a carrier for Glass' unacknowledged polymorphous desires is evident in that she has had sex with his ex-wife and her lover Adam Towers with whom Glass had an on-going rivalry. I have argued in the previous chapter that Towers is feminized in relation to Glass, through the subtle coding of the former as metrosexual. Tramell, then, provides the homoerotic connection between the two men. I will explore the significance of this homoerotic link in the next section.

In terms of how Tramell works as a double for Glass' orgasm in a broader sense, I have proposed that she takes part in sexual activities which seem to fascinate him and his attraction to her suggests that he wants to experience the same queer pleasures. In a similar vein to Silverman, Willis (1997: 85) posits that Al Pacino's character in *Cruising* (Friedkin, 1980) can be said to be involved in "over-identifications […] with both the victims and the killer(s)," which is possible because "the investigation implicates his own sexuality." *Cruising's* Steve Burns (Pacino) is a straight police officer who goes undercover in New York's S&M gay scene with a view to finding a serial killer responsible for killing gay men. Burns' physical appearance is similar to the victims' so his task is to 'attract' the serial killer and then apprehend him. During the course of the narrative, Burns befriends a gay man and they get so close that the man's lover attacks him out of jealousy. In addition, the film ends with Burns' girlfriend discovering among his belongings clothes that the spectator identifies as the outfit worn by the serial killer. So it is not clear to what extent Burns was involved in the gay scene while working undercover. As is the case with *Cruising's* main character, *BI2* suggests that Glass identifies with Tramell as well

as her lovers/victims. Glass' double identification with Tramell and Dicky Pepp in the orgiastic scene is one instance that illustrates this process. His reaction to Tramell's possible involvement in Adam Tower's death is additional proof of his double identification: he condones her part in Tower's death in that he has sex with Tramell knowing what happened to the last man with whom she had sex.

After witnessing the group sex and seeing Dicky's naked body engaged in sex, the hint of homoerotic desire would have had a disturbing impact on him as the heterosexual man he is required to be, and his frazzled state after witnessing the scene suggests that he was but deeply affected by it. When he talks to Milena Gardosh about what he saw, he seems so shaken that she pours him a Scotch. Therefore, I would contend that the scene produced in Glass what Sullivan (2009) would call a queer affect. According to Sullivan, a subject can experience queer affect when he/she is confronted with activity, such as the orgiastic scene, where "heteronormative ideas about gender" and sexuality are shown to be inadequate to describe the breadth of, in Glass' case, sexuality and sexual practice (2009: 436). This notwithstanding, Glass does not walk away from Tramell because his object is to suffer the pain of psychic destabilisation that he knows Tramell can offer. As Williams says of the Marlon Brando character in *Last Tango in Paris* (Bertollucci, 1972), Glass "insists that the dissolution of personal identity in the face of death is necessary to any real eroticism and to any authentic being" (2008: 118). This raises a further question: namely, how Glass' masochistic orgasm impacts his transnational heteromasculinity since masculinity occupies a central position in patriarchal culture?

Scholars have put forward many theses attempting to explain how heteromasculinity maintains its dominant position. For example, Robert Hanke (1992) argues that masculine power and privilege in capitalist patriarchy is secured through a dual means which includes coercion of the dominated and a counter process of challenge and resistance to masculinism by the dominated groups. He defines hegemonic masculinity as the form of masculinity that assumes dominance in a society and comes to be seen as the obvious way of being a man, "thus securing the dominance of some men (and the subordination of women) within the sex/gender system"

(1992: 190). Hence hegemonic masculinity is always involved in a process of co-opting and containing oppositional gender ideologies in order to maintain its dominance (Ibid). Furthermore, citing Connell (1987), Hanke suggests that a gender hierarchy among men becomes necessary for patriarchy to justify the subordination of women. "This hierarchy has three elements: hegemonic masculinity, conservative masculinity and subordinated masculinities" (Hanke, 1992: 190).

Hanke explains that conservative masculinity appears to be progressive but in fact performs the function of co-opting oppositional gender ideologies and thus discourages further criticism of the core qualities of hegemonic masculinity; subordinated masculinities, on the other hand, are those – like gay masculinity – that are excluded from definitions and representations of masculinity, and when they are included they operate as "negative symbols of masculine identity" (1992: 195). However, Jude Elund (2013) has shown that hegemonic or heteronormative masculinity has evolved into maintaining its dominance by enticing gay men to privilege a homonormative model that functions to support hegemonic masculinity at the expense of a modality of gay masculinity that foregrounds homosexual desire and the pleasure of homosexual sex.

In that respect, other scholars have shown that homonormative masculinity can work to buttress heteronormativity. Jasbir Puar (2006: 70), for instance, describes the homonormative subject in the post 9/11 US context as "butch, masculine […] [and] white." According to Puar, homonormative subjects' perpetuation of heteronormative values facilitates their co-option through the "management and absorption of homonormative bodies" (2006: 72) so that the butch and patriotic white gay male becomes a positive sign in the discourses around difference. This means that "negative markers of homosexuality," such as effeminacy, are then used to mark the US enemy in the form of the terrorist as a sexual and racial other (2006: 71). But not all homosexual subjects are included in the positive representations of homonormative subjects. Mafalda Stasi and Adrienne Evans (2013: 573) attest to this when they note that "homonormative contexts are often exclusionary […] with regards to women and ethnic and racial minorities."

Glass' masculinity appears hegemonic due to the fact that he is white, heterosexual and is involved in a high income profession. But he can contest the hegemonic modality of masculinity because, as Lloyd (2005: 20) argues, subjects are constituted "across" and situated "within reinforcing and conflictual axes" of discourse and the survival of any subject position is not guaranteed because it "results from certain political contingencies, not from metaphysical certainty." As I have argued above, heteromasculinity as a gendered subject position is constructed through exclusionary practices, and the femininity and homosexuality against which it defines itself also work, to use Puar's terminology, as the "shadow" that haunts heteromasculinity's stability (2006: 70). Glass' chance encounter with Tramell would be the kind of contingency Lloyd posits. Tramell's performance of femininity that transgresses the boundaries of sexual difference makes it easier for Glass to embark on a process of queering his subjectivity. Therefore, as argued in the previous chapters, the film succeeds in presenting Glass' masochism as the result of a powerful attraction to Tramell. However, Glass' transnational masculinity is not successfully restored at the end of the film, and this will be dealt with in the next section.

Recuperating Masculinity?

The last sequence of *Basic Instinct 2* provides insights into how the film attempts to recuperate Glass' transnational masculinity after his masochistic relationship with Tramell. The sequence takes place after Glass has been destroyed, having lost his license to practice as a psychoanalyst and shot and killed Detective Washburn. Tramell visits him in the psychiatric institute where he is being treated after his breakdown. He appears to be heavily sedated. The sequence is framed as a new ending to Catherine's book. She claims she changed the book's ending after Glass shot and killed Washburn. According to Tramell, Glass effectively implicated himself in all the other crimes by shooting Washburn. I remind the reader that Tramell has been using Glass as a model for the main character in her book. So, when Glass kills Washburn, Tramell says that provided her with enough material to change the ending to her book.

Tramell brings with her a copy of the book, titled *The Analyst*, and gives Glass a summary of the plot. Her abridged narration is accompanied by relevant visuals of Glass: strangling Towers;

killing Dicky Pepp; and attacking Denise. The film suggests that this sequence is Tramell's imaginative projection through the use of a sepia colour tone and further manipulation of the image so that it looks fuzzy, which runs counter to the rules of continuity editing in which the picture quality and "overall lighting tonality remain[s] constant" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2006: 135). The handling of the graphic qualities of the image attests to the strangeness of the sequence which the film stages as a fiction which may be fact. Tramell hints that the new ending is not entirely a work of fiction so the sequence also works to suggest that Glass could have in fact committed the crimes.

The sequence, then, lies somewhere between fact and fiction because Tramell does not make clear how it should be interpreted[29]. Bordwell and Thompson (2006: 135) argue that in narrative cinema causation and spatial and temporal contiguity work to clarify how characters have arrived at a certain point in the narrative. As Wilson (1986: 4) further explains, narrative events unfold by suggesting causal connections and in this way "film guides us to a way of seeing its fictional constituents." Hence, Tramell's fictional scene is not in line with narrative cinema's conventions in terms of causality and clear relations to space and time. This is due to the fact that it suggests that the film's narration has been unreliable and so the spectator has had an incorrect grasp of narrative events up to the film's last scene. Up until the last scene in the psychiatric institute, *Basic Instinct 2* leads the spectator to infer that Tramell is the murderer. Therefore, the suggestion in the last scene that Glass could have perpetrated the crimes flouts realist narrative conventions. Following Grisham, Denson and Leyda (2013: 1) I would characterize the sequence as post-continuity because it seems to be designed to produce an effect instead of adding to overall narrative continuity. I would suggest that the effect it was meant to create was to render the narrative ambiguous, as a continuation of the trope of ambiguity that was foregrounded in the scene preceding Glass' discovery of Denise with her throat slit. It also suggests a split in Glass' subjectivity, as I will detail in the concluding chapter.

[29] With respect to this, Fisher (2007: 81) quips: "at the end of *Basic Instinct 2*, […] it is clear that even Tramell doesn't know what has happened."

I would argue that the sequence tries to recuperate Glass' transnational masculinity in several ways. First it emphasises the role of the *femme fatale* as destroyer. In that regard, Schwartz (2001: 5) has shown that the *fatale* in the erotic thriller is portrayed as a siren who uses her "wits and sexuality" to seduce the man into doing something he will regret. Second, it destroys the homoerotic links in the form of Adam Towers and Dicky Pepp by suggesting that Glass killed them both. Thirdly, in killing Denise, Glass seeks to re-establish a link with the aggression and violence which traditionally define heteromasculinity. I will now consider these three aspects, each in turn, and then discuss whether the film succeeds in what I read as its attempt to recuperate Glass' transnational heteromasculinity.

In the scene preceding the final sequence, the film emphasises that Tramell, as the *femme fatale,* is responsible for destroying Glass. He blames her for all his actions. In his words: "This is what you wanted, isn't it? To fuck me up!" Later, as the police pin him to the ground and arrest him for shooting Washburn, there is a mid-long shot of Catherine holding Milena Gardosh and watching the final moments of Glass' self-destruction, which the narrative suggests is Tramell's fault as the evil seductress whose feminine wiles bring men to destruction (Place, 1998). Thus the film sets the scene for the elisions to be enacted in the last sequence. If this is Catherine's punishment for not behaving in an appropriately feminine way that Jefferys (1996) says shows deference to masculinity, it is a light punishment compared to those meted out to Tramell's cinematic predecessors. For example, towards the end of *Double Indemnity*, Walter Neff shoots and kills the film's *femme fatale*, Phyllis Dietrichson.

In Tramell's 'fictional' version of how Glass went about committing the murders, she starts by suggesting that Glass first killed Adam Towers. This is in line with Hanke's (1992: 194) argument that hegemonic masculinity maintains its dominance through "exclusion" or "symbolic annihilation" of subordinated masculinities. So, in the short scene in Tramell's narrative which shows Glass strangling Towers for stealing his wife Denise, I would argue that the film has Glass symbolically annihilate the homoerotic feelings which Towers awakened in him through his performance of metrosexual masculinity. Silverman (1992: 240) also notes the tendency of heterosexual male characters to be violent towards the object of homoerotic desire,

who in fact returns rather than represses this desire. It is therefore significant that the narrative concludes by suggesting that Glass killed Towers. However, this suggestion is presented as a fiction so it would appear that the film is not seriously concerned with severing the homoerotic link and its threats to Glass' heterosexuality. As I will detail in the next chapter, this might have something to do with the current construction of heteromasculinity as a subject position which, under certain conditions, may accommodate homoeroticism as long as it does not threaten the subject's understanding of himself as 'normal.'

There is further evidence that Glass' killing of Towers amounts to a symbolic annihilation in that the sexual activity which preceded Towers' death is elided in Tramell's narration of the murder. Towers died of erotic asphyxiation during sex, as the pictures of sadomasochistic activities in his apartment and the collar around his neck suggest, not of straight forward strangulation. According to the logic of asphyxia, as Hucker (2011) has explained, Glass should have had some kind of sex with Towers prior to the murder and asphyxiated him during sex.

The abovementioned elision is repeated in the scene in which Glass is seen/imagined killing Dicky Pepp. Tramell's narrative suggests that jealousy prompted Glass to strangle Dicky Pepp after he saw him have sex with Tramell. But this scene is even more revealing because the police found Dicky with his trousers pulled down and he had clearly been engaged in some sort of sexual activity as there was semen on and around him. So if Glass killed Dicky, it is logical to assume that he asphyxiated him during sex or immediately afterwards. Therefore, the attempt to recuperate Glass' heteromasculinity fails to achieve its objective because it raises more questions than it answers. As discussed earlier, Etherington-Wright and Doughty (2011: 175) argue that in mainstream narrative films masculinity is eventually restored after having been subjected to various forms of sometimes extreme testing. It would appear that the last two phases they posit, namely re-emergence and re-generation (Ibid.), are not present in *Basic Instinct 2* because at the end Glass is sitting in a psychiatric hospital, unable to talk or walk. In fact the attempt to restore heteromasculinity to a model of dominance and assertiveness is so feeble that it appears that there was no real desire to do so.

Nevertheless, what is happening in the scene is more complex still in that while Glass' heteromasculinity is not restored, the film does not foreclose the regeneration of his masculinity through its transnational aspect. To reiterate, transnational business masculinity, as Griffin (2013: 14) describes it, is associated with the international business man whose focus is very much on success and image. As a result, it is characterised by "libertarian sexuality" and "conditional loyalties," which suggests that men who subscribe to this modality of masculinity usually have some kind of agenda driving their relationships (Ibid.). Furthermore, Griffin explains that transnational masculinity differs from traditional heteromasculinity in that transnational business masculinity results from the fusing of heteromasculinity with the "institutionalized power" and the worldly attitude of the global corporation (2013: 15). This seems logical given that business executives are required to have some kind of plan during their business travels. Hence, having proposed that Glass performs transnational masculinity, I would say that the film's ending suggests that he had a plan all along. The fact that Glass smiles when Tramell suggests he is the killer and, later, half smiles as Tramell walks away implies that he knows what game he has been involved in. Indeed, as Thomas (2009: 444) says, while sadomasochistic practices "can function to shatter identity and dissolve the subject" the procedure is by no means exhaustive because "[T]he subject maintains a consistency of agency and intention that preserves a centred authoritarian subject at the same time."

In addition, Noyes (1997: 210) argues that the sadomasochistic game must be kept "within the economy of desire" so that what takes place within it does not have "political effects." Moreover, says Noyes, "when the force of the banished order breaks into the masochist fantasy, the frame collapses" (Ibid.). So, I would contend that by shooting Washburn, Glass breaks the frame of the sadomasochistic fantasy and his actions begin to have social repercussions as is evidenced by his institutionalisation. But the film's reluctance to punish him for killing Detective Washburn suggests that it condones his part in the game he played with Tramell. Furthermore, his smiles and Tramell's suggestion that his breakdown may not be authentic work to suggest that perhaps he is not a victim: as Tramell says: "Getting away with it…that was genius!" It is also noteworthy that for his 'punishment' Glass has to spend time in an

institution whose architecture recalls the style of sprawling old manor houses. This suggests a kind of retreat to old English norms of masculinity, shaped as they were by imperialism. In fact, there is a literary precedent for the narrative salvaging of lapsed white masculinity through its transnational aspect. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (DH Lawrence, 1920), Sir Chatterley is similarly recuperated from his impotence through that narrative's foregrounding of his industriousness and business acumen. Proof of this can be seen in the emphasis the novel places on his successful business schemes, which he pursues even as his wife asks him to divorce her so she can marry her (virile) lover. My point here is that the film wants to suggest that while Glass' transnational masculinity may have taken a knock from the *femme fatale*, it is by no means completely destroyed. I will explore the implications of this in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The aims of this research project have been to analyse the construction of heteromasculinity in *Basic Instinct 2*, which, as I have proposed, the film figures as transnational masculinity. The male protagonist in erotic thrillers is usually portrayed as blind to the danger the *femme fatale* poses, and attracted to her at the same time. The main object of the dissertation was to examine this process of 'knowing blindness' to a *femme fatale* and its implications for heteromasculine subjectivity. In order to arrive at the nature of and motivation for these behaviours, I have analysed how *BI2* constructs a particular economy of desire in which Catherine Tramell has sexual knowledge to offer and Michael Glass pursues her to obtain it. The emphasis in this project has been on the film's invocation and staging of the orgasm within a heterosexual gender matrix. The question which arises in *BI2* is: to what end does Michael Glass use his orgasm if it is not to reinforce normative conceptions of transnational heteromasculine subjectivity and sexuality?

Over the preceding chapters, the research has demonstrated how the film shapes and inscribes meanings about the nature of heteromasculinity and heteromasculine sexuality through an analysis of the dynamics of the relationship between the *femme fatale* and the male lead. To this end, I have argued that while Tramell is coded as an erotic spectacle and an object of the male gaze, the 'masculinity' that the *femme fatale* has possessed through the *noir* genre's history makes it possible for Tramell to perform a femininity that includes traits such as economic power and sexual aggression, which have been described as markers of masculinity. That discussion involved a consideration of how Tramell functions as a double for Glass' repressed desires. In that regard, I proposed that the relationship between Tramell and Glass can be read as queering heteromasculinity in that some of the sexual activities in which Tramell takes part as Glass' double betray unacknowledged polymorphous desires on Glass' part. I have also shown that *Basic Instinct 2* affirms Glass' transnational heteromasculinity through his characterisation as a professional heterosexual man who is able to defend himself in altercations with other men and, crucially, demonstrates that he is sexually attracted to women and proves it by having sex with them.

Moreover, I have characterised Tramell's relationship with Michael Glass as sadomasochistic since it involves a dynamic of dominance and submission in which Glass plays the role of submissive. In this way Glass knowingly cedes the power and privilege ascribed to transnational masculinity in the globally circulating cultural imaginary the film references. This means, as Noyes (1997: 206) suggests about masochists in general, that Glass' sadomasochistic play enables him to challenge the presumed fixity of subjectivity by pursuing the weakness and subjection which falls outside definitions of normative heteromasculinity, thereby queering heteromasculine subjectivity. I then proposed that, while Hollywood film generally recuperates such lapses of masculinity, *BI2* is ultimately ambivalent about recuperating Glass' heteromasculinity. This tension is evident in that it is not clear whether Glass is actually destroyed by Tramell at the end, and the film intimates that he is enjoying his 'destruction'. I posited that the ambiguous ending can be linked to the film's attempt to recuperate Glass' heteromasculinity by reaffirming its transnational aspect. The current chapter offers insights into why the film portrays aggressive femininity and masochistic masculinity and why its narrative contains ambiguities and contradictions.

In the first section, I argue that Tramell's aggression contests the cinematic and cultural definition of femininity as weak and passive, as can be seen in her appropriation of the gaze. Drawing on Halberstam (2012), I suggest that her character emerges out of a socio-political context that has seen significant change in conceptions of subjectivity and the organisation of sexual and family life. Moreover, Building on Tasker's (1993) idea that the black helper's death usually gives the main character another reason to fulfil his/her goal, I reiterate that Kevin Frank's sacrificial death for Catherine as the white heroine means that she embodies a double difference that has a bearing on her sadomasochistic duel with Glass. I go on to propose that Tramell's double threat works to buttress the idea that white transnational masculinity is under threat.

In the second section, I suggest that Glass' character indexes current ideas that masculinity and sexuality are not fixed, and that this can be seen in Glass' participation in sadomasochistic activities with a view to queering his subjectivity. I further argue that *Basic Instinct 2* suggests a

division within heteromasculine subjectivity through ambiguities and inconsistencies in character and plot. I cite the final sequence in which Catherine suggests that Glass could have perpetrated the murders that took place in the course of the plot as an example of how the film disperses subjectivity through space and time, thereby indexing the idea of divided subjectivity.

In the final section, I conclude that Glass' struggle can be linked to the fears of white transnational masculinity in the face of non-white masculinities from so-called emerging economies. Following Griffin (2013) and Somerson (2004), I posit that with far eastern countries becoming more important in the international order, the centrality of white transnational masculinity is threatened. Therefore, *Basic Instinct 2,* I will argue, is conservative in its aims because it wants to secure the centrality of the white male by casting him as a victim of forces beyond his control. At a subjective level, Glass' actions ultimately queer his masculinity, but I would contend that this process also works to restore white transnational masculinity to its central position within the film and in the global cultural imaginary that the film references.

"Everything she does is designed to confuse or confound you." Michael Glass

In chapter one, I proposed that Catherine Tramell appears to be a discursive construction designed to unsettle cultural codings femininity. Judith Butler disputes the idea that biological sex causes gender, and argues that the genders are effects of "institutional heterosexuality" which produces them as separate and coherent categories (1990: 31). Scholars such as Glover and Kaplan (2000) and Hill (2006) have advanced arguments along similar lines. On these grounds, this dissertation has approached the concepts of subjectivity and sexuality as "constructed by the cultural forces of multiple, overlapping and sometimes competing discourses" (Pribram, 2004: 152). Tramell, as a *femme fatale,* exemplifies the idea that subjectivity is constituted by discourses which are sometimes at odds with each other in that she is a feminine figure whose wealth and career as a novelist gives her 'masculine' traits such as economic power and the resultant sexual agency. Here I want to suggest that the characterisation of Tramell in *Basic Instinct 2* points to several current tensions among the discourses that intersect to constitute feminine subjectivity and sexuality in the western context as well as in countries where western ideas of gendered subjectivity have gained purchase.

Following Halberstam (2012), I would contend that Tramell's masculinisation represents changes in the way people in western(ised) society think about ideas of gender and sexuality. As Halberstam puts it:

> [I]n the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, we have seen a massive decline in the […] dominance of monogamous marriage and a huge rise in divorce and diverse households. In the United States, we have also witnessed a new and startling visibility of transgender communities and individuals as well as new levels of acceptance for normative gays and lesbians (2012: 16).

As Halberstam points out, people's understandings and experiences of "sex and gender" have been impacted by significant social change[30]. I would argue that these shifts have found expression in the characterisation of Tramell. In this respect, Pribram notes that representational media such as film reflect "and [are] a site for cultural struggles over meaning formation" (2004: 154). As I have wanted to show in the preceding chapters, *Basic Instinct 2* is involved in this broad cultural conversation. Hence, by including 'masculine' traits in Catherine Tramell, the film challenges discourses and cinematic conventions that define femininity as passive, weak and dependent. This is an ongoing struggle because, as Glover and Kaplan (2000: 93) point out, there is lack of agreement, even contradictions, in how femininity is understood, with weakness, dependence, transgression and aggression being some of the terms invoked to describe femininity. However, they also note that coldness, aggression and ambition are frequently used to designate behaviour that is culturally marked as unfeminine and hence masculine – or, pathologically feminine (Ibid).

[30] It is important to note that Michael Warner has cautioned that the kind of gay and lesbian visibility that Halberstam refers to "is awarded as a bribe for disavowing the indignity of sex and the double indignity of a politics around sex" (1999: 66). In this regard, Warner goes on to say that "queers who have sex in public toilets […] [and] the boys who flaunt it as pansies" are relegated to the shadows in order to secure acceptance for their normative counterparts (Ibid). That is why Halberstam is careful to make clear that it is "normative gays and lesbians" who have gained significant acceptance in mainstream culture (Ibid).

The ambivalence in Tramell's characterisation is crucial to a proper assessment of how she operates. To that end, I have demonstrated that *BI2,* even though it operates within the limitations of a heteronormative framework, challenges the notion of the woman as the object of the male gaze in that Tramell usurps the power of the gaze by anticipating Glass' desire and then using it against him for her own gain. The scene in which she confronts Glass about his sexual attraction to her is one example of how she can be said to take back the woman's power to look in cinema. Knowing that he cannot detail his sexual fantasies about her, Catherine asks him: "When you think about fucking me, how do you picture it Doctor?" Glass just looks at her as it would be inappropriate for him to acknowledge these fantasies to a patient in the context of a therapy session. As I have shown, Tramell's reason for seducing Glass so aggressively is to get him to give in to his desire and have sex with her. Dyer (1993) and Mulvey (1992 [1975]) have convincingly argued that Hollywood film draws on patriarchal social ideals to position the woman as object both narratively and in the way the camera frames her. Therefore, in challenging that model, *BI2* shows that the dominant ideal of heterosexual femininity in cinema and, by implication in culture more generally, is a discursive construct which can take on new characteristics. However, the film works to contain the subversive potential of its antagonists' non-normative performances of gender and sexuality. I will return to this point in due course. For now I want to concentrate on the implications of the film's construction of Tramell as a subversive feminine subject.

In a discussion about media representations of women in general, Marshment (1996: 128) notes that cinematic images of femininity represent patriarchal definitions of what it means to be a woman, and not necessarily women's embodied experience. Likewise, Mellencamp (1995) argues that representations of women fall short of women's lived experience. I have argued that Tramell should be regarded as part representation of feminine subjects and, simultaneously, a masculine projection. Hence, I would say that, as far as she represents issues of import to femininity, Tramell's combination of feminine and masculine traits critiques that tradition of representation by pointing to the "multiple ways in which men and women exceed and fall short of definitions that sustain gender categories" (Halberstam, 2012: 27). The film shows the

limitations of a binary understanding of gender by representing Tramell as at once the feminine spectacle that connotes to-be-looked-at-ness, as per the conventions of Hollywood cinema, and the aggressive, 'masculinised' top in her sadomasochistic relationship with Glass. This dialectic is evidenced in that Tramell wears various accoutrements of femininity, such as fashionable clothes, jewellery and make-up, to code herself as the object of the gaze, while working to undermine it by manipulating Glass.

Nevertheless, as I have intimated above, a qualification is necessary here given the ambiguities that are inherent in *Basic Instinct 2* as an erotic thriller: the film walks a fine line between questioning the cinematic designation of women as objects of the male gaze and reproducing that unequal relationship. This is because the film relies on the recognizable erotic thriller tropes such as the alluring and dangerous woman and the man with a seemingly uncontrollable sexual desire to ground and propel its narrative. The latter can be attributed to the film's status as a mainstream genre film which came out of an industry that privileges heterosexuality as a normative framework for the performance of gender and sexuality. This, however, does not nullify the film's feminist politics. As Marshment (1993: 133) contends, "the effectiveness of appropriating masculinity for women should not be underestimated" because mainstream film reaches a wide audience. Marshment proceeds to argue that the ubiquity of Hollywood products means that a greater number of women can appropriate "sexist" films like *Basic Instinct* "by reading against the grain" and interpreting Tramell as a positive figure of female empowerment (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, the film's procedure of containment is further demonstrated in the fact that Glass believes Tramell suffers from risk addiction and a God-like omnipotence. Glass' diagnosis is significant for the way it works as a normalising discourse that is in the end conservative. Following Lisa Downing (2013), I want to suggest that the characterisation of Tramell as a "genius criminal, […] sex beast [and] violent woman" (2013: 31) works to separate and "maintain" her as an exceptional monster who is not representative of a mode of femininity that exists in society. This then circumscribes her non-normative performance of femininity through what Downing has called a discourse of exceptionality. Neroni (2005: 76) puts forward a similar

view with regard to how the *fatale* functions, suggesting that the violent woman in film represents a "failure" of normative constructions of femininity so they are represented as somehow inexplicable.

To return to the discussion of *Basic Instinct 2's* context of production, a cultural environment where the dominance of the institution of heterosexuality is being contested, and persons who identify as transgender, gay and lesbian are gaining acceptance, I would argue, provides fertile ground for the emergence of a film like *BI2,* which challenges the presumed univocity and fixity of heterosexual subjectivities. Sedgwick (2005) provides further evidence for the claim that sexuality and the way people think about it is constantly shifting, making the discourses on sexuality amenable to change when writing: "[S]ome people, homo-, hetero-, and bisexual experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not" (2005: 82). Sedgwick's claim suggests that new conceptions of sexuality and subjectivity can take root because people's experience of their sexuality at a particular moment can differ "from another period of the same person's life." In the film, this kind of change in a person's experience of sexuality can be seen in Glass' sudden sadomasochistic attachment to Tramell, which the narrative suggests is not something he had done before, even though he may have fantasized about it. Moreover, the film hints at Tramell's bisexuality but does not foreground it as in the first *Basic Instinct*, which could mean that in the second film she is more focused on sex with men. The film, then, can be said to reference similar shifts in cultural understandings of sexuality, and heterosexuality in particular.

I would contend that a further effect of Tramell's actions is to question the power relations which structure the heterosexual orgasm. The film's opening sequence in which Tramell masturbates using the hand of a man who is apparently incapacitated provides a good example of this. In the scene, Tramell pleasures herself without regard for her partner's pleasure, who in this case drowns when she orgasms and drives off the road and her car plummets into the river below. As Jeffrey's (1996: 76) argues, within the structure of heterosexuality, "feminine behaviour shows deference" because the domination of masculinity over femininity is legitimated and produced within the "political system of heterosexuality." Therefore, Kevin

Frank's inability to actively participate in the sexual activity, and indeed drive the process, suggests that women need not take part in sex to please men. In that way the film seems to question "the hierarchical relationship between males and females as a male privilege in sexuality where what matters most is male activity and pleasure" (Bowden and Mummery, 2009: 77).

Tramell's actions are significant because, as Brabazon (1999: 495) notes, for women "sex remains a regulated discursive site" and is "linked to punishment or duty." Similarly, Wagner (2009) describes the female orgasm as a process fraught with anxiety for women. She details her visit to a swingers event where she felt uncomfortable taking part in activities like bathing naked with strangers because, she realised, she had been taught from an early age that women should not show interest in sex or that as a woman she had no sexuality to speak of (2009: 296). Her misgivings were in stark contrast to her husband's attitude in that he enjoyed the sexual atmosphere and felt free to express his sexual fantasies to her – as long as they were heterosexual – because he had not been subject to the same admonitions and prescriptions around sexual pleasure (2009: 305). Therefore, I would say that by foregrounding Tramell's sexual pleasure at the expense of a man's life, the film challenges the role assigned to women within the heteropatriarchal sexual economy in which it is presumed that the "male counts more" (Bowden & Mummery 2009: 75) and that men are therefore deserving of the privileges and power that come with the higher status. By pushing the limits of what is thought to be acceptable sexual behaviour for a woman, Tramell exposes femininity as a construction which both excludes and denies feminine sexuality.

The opening scene, and the rest of the film, is complicated by the racial discourse that Frank's blackness foregrounds. Former footballer, Stan Collymore, played the character of Kevin Franks. Prior to acting in *Basic Instinct 2*, Collymore had received a lot of media attention after the press revealed he had been involved in a "dogging" incident – a practice whereby people drive to secluded areas at night and take turns watching each other having sex in cars. The scene in the film reverses Collymore's active role in the real life incident, further 'stealing' masculine privilege.

In addition to those gender politics, I earlier suggested that Franks' character serves the conventional purpose of marking the whiteness of the main characters and that his death can be read as a sacrifice for the white heroine. I further proposed that in addition to marking Glass and Tramell's whiteness, Franks' sacrificial death works to conceal the threat his racial difference poses to Glass' white heteromasculinity. In a discussion of *Fatal Attraction* and *Basic Instinct*, Willis (1997: 82) argues that the "excess" that characterises thrillers which are concerned with issues of "sexual difference […] suggests that what is presented as localized anxiety must be multiply determined." I proposed above that Tramell functions as a blank screen for the male characters to project their fantasies onto, and in displacing the racial threat onto her, in addition to the threat she poses as a woman, the film adds a further dimension to her character. Her masturbating in the car and buying sex from a sex worker are actions usually performed by male characters, and the fact that she does those things sets up a confrontation with masculinity in that she effectively claims the privileges usually reserved for men. For example, in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Scorcese, 2013), Leonardo Dicaprio's character receives a blow job from a woman while driving in his Ferrari. And, in *Parenthood* (Howard, 1989), the Steve Martin character receives surprise oral sex from his wife while he is driving. Hence, Tramell's aggression against Glass makes her threat a broader one against white heteromasculinity, whilst Glass' submission to her suggests that he is a victim of Tramell's double threat. The generic rules of the erotic thriller enable the film to explain away Glass and Tramell's relationship: as Schwartz (2001: 5) points out, the erotic thriller usually pits "an easily dominated male" against "a dazzlingly attractive woman" who is cleverer and ahead of him every step of the way. I will discuss the implications of Glass' actions further on, for now the point I want to make is that Tramell's masculinization is multiply determined in that it is also embodies the threat of non-white world masculinities that white masculinity is having to deal with as the balance of power in the world political/economic order shifts to accommodate the increasingly important emerging economies, such as China, Brazil, India and the whole of Africa. This, however, does not nullify the importance of Glass' masochism in terms of what it suggests about current understandings of heteromasculinity.

Risk Addiction and the Omnipotent Killer

After meeting Tramell, Glass begins writing an academic paper titled 'Risk Addiction and the Omnipotent Killer'. In a subsequent conversation with his colleague Milena Gardosh, he suggests that Tramell provided the inspiration for it. Glass' knowing pursuit of the dangerous Tramell, however, makes clear that he is also addicted to risk. As I have argued earlier, in the erotic thriller a masochistic fantasy lies at the heart of the male characters' weakness. This is evidenced by the fact that the *fatale* is not only dangerous but often fatal. In this way, Tramell works as the inherent transgression in that she supports both the narrative's official explanation that it is her sexual attractiveness that draws the men to her, and functions to screen the queerness of the men's desires by legitimizing them through the myth of the siren and the uncontrollable desire she excites in men. The fact that Glass went to have sex with Tramell knowing that she was the last person he saw with Denise before she was attacked shows that he was drawn to Tramell because "sadomasochism is the prime sexual practice for the *femme fatale*, neatly combining sex and death in one package," (Stables, 1998: 173). But the apparent heterosexuality of the characters elides their queer desires in that the object of Glass' desire was nonetheless a woman. In this respect, Aaron (2004: 188) shows that popular film relies on "disavowing techniques to implicate yet contain" the prospect of desires that fall outside the heterosexual framework. In this way, I would say the film comments on the queerness of heterosexual characters that the erotic thriller consistently disavows. This also implicates the spectator who is invited to identify with the characters.

Basic Instinct 2 casts Tramell as the mysterious woman who might even be unknowable but, as Doane argues, the question of "enigmatic" femininity "reflects only the man's own ontological doubts" (2003 [1991]: 64 – 65). In that regard, I have proposed that Tramell functions as a stand in for Glass when she has sex with the sex worker Dicky Pepp because Glass identifies with both Dicky and Catherine, in their respective roles as penetrator and penetrated, while he watches them having sex. Tramell's sexual activities, then, partly reflect Glass' fantasies of a polymorphous sexuality, which Tramell enacts with abandon. But, Glass also finds a way to explore his fantasies without going too far outside heterosexual definitions of sexuality. As I

have argued, when Glass allows Tramell to asphyxiate him during sex, he cedes masculine privilege and in that way upsets the heteropatriarchal "distribution of power among gendered subjects" (Noyes 1997: 203). This amounts to an uncoupling of gendered subjectivity from the biological body and a fragmentation of his subjectivity which he does not experience as loss. Rather, in pushing the boundaries of his heteromasculinity he gets to experience the sense of powerlessness that is at odds with definitions of heteromasculinity. Therefore, his masochism is merely a way for him to navigate the discourses that define and delimit heteromasculinity.

Following Noyes' (1997: 200) characterisation of the masochist, I have proposed that Glass uses masochism as a way to explore a mode of sexuality in which he is not in control so that he can deliberately fall short of the definitions of his gender. Noyes argues that the masochist "must fantasize subjectivity as a floating field in which both cultural codings of identity and political technologies of the body can be temporarily suspended" (1997: 209). This makes possible the wilful "fragmentation of identity, without the feeling of loss or struggle" which, Noyes argues, is in line with postmodern ideas of subjectivity "whose fragmentary nature is not subjectivity's breakdown but subjectivity's persistence" (1997: 211). Noyes argues that subjectivity persists due to the fact that postmodern masochism does not seek to contain the fragmentary nature of subjectivity through "synthesizing formations" or grand narratives but rather celebrates its fragmentation, thereby parodying the presumed smooth functioning of normative subjectivity (1997: 200). In other words, masochism today acknowledges subjectivity's fragmentation without attempting to suture it. That the film does not attempt to suture Glass' masculinity is evident in that at the end of the film he is in a mental institution, and not clearly recuperated. In this way the film posits a fragmented experience of subjectivity in contemporary society. This being said, I would propose that there is a more complex process at work at the end of *Basic Instinct 2*, but I will discuss the implications of the film's ending in due course. For now I want to discuss how other films produced at around the same time point to contemporary conceptions of heteromasculine subjectivity and sexuality as changeable.

The trope of subjective fluidity is evident in various contemporary films. *Rock n Rolla* (Ritchie, 2008) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (Ritchie, 2012) are some of the films that evince the

trope of subjective fluidity. The two films have generic connections to *Basic Instinct 2* in that *Rock n Rolla* is a crime thriller, which is complete with a *femme fatale* of its own, while *Sherlock Holmes 2* is an action thriller. There are several scenes in which *Rock n Rolla* suggests that heteromasculine sexuality is fluid. In one scene, One-Two (Gerard Butler) talks to Mumbles (Idris Elba) about his uneasiness regarding the fact that their friend Handsome Bob is gay. During the conversation, One-Two reveals that he spent some time with Bob the previous night. When Mumbles presses him to provide more detail, One-Two insists nothing sexual happened between Bob and himself. Mumbles responds by flatly telling One-Two that it is fine if he "took care" of Bob because "that's what friends are for." The film treats this moment as a joke, but it is left open ended, which suggests that it does not reject the idea of homosexual sex involving straight men. Similarly, in *Sherlock Holmes 2*, there is a scene in which Sherlock (Robert Downey Jr) disguises himself as a woman and ends up lying underneath his friend and partner Dr. Watkins (Jude Law) in what would otherwise be interpreted as a missionary position, which the film nonetheless frames as a necessary manoeuvre in a high action sequence, thereby disavowing its homoerotic undertones.

In both films heterosexual male characters subtly reference gay sex without categorically stating that they are merely joking. In this way, *Sherlock Holmes, Rock n Rolla* and queer heteromasculinity by not maintaining a strict homo/hetero divide in their discourses on sexuality to ensure that straight characters, and spectators, are not implicated in homosexual desire. With respect to the construction of homosexual desire as occurring in certain kinds of people, Foucault (1978: 43) argues that the nineteenth century saw the start of the discursive production of the homosexual as the locus of 'unnatural' sexuality. And, building on Foucault's ideas, Katz contends that the homosexual male has functioned as the bearer of same sex desire so that the heterosexual male can be said to be without it (1995: 104). Moreover, Katz notes that a more complex masculine sexuality was explicitly acknowledged in "James M Cain's novel *Serenade* […]" in which the hero admitted "that there is always somewhere a homosexual who can wear down the resistance of the normal man by knowing which buttons to press" (1995: 101). I would say that there is a similar acknowledgement of the complex nature of sexuality for

the male subject who identifies as heterosexual in the films cited above. It is important to note that James M Cain's novels provided the source material for many *films noir* of the 1940s (Krutnik, 1991: 136) of which *BI2* is a contemporary elaboration. Krutnik (1991: 102) says *noir* heroes attempt to "expel the phallus as signifier of patriarchal authority," so it is fitting that there is a precedent in the *film noir* source material for the queering masculinity.

Basic Instinct 2 references fragmented masculine subjectivity through the ambiguous ending in which the film suggests for the first time that Glass could have committed the murders that occur in the film. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit argue that "film encourages us to believe in both the existence and the primordial importance of individuality" because cinema fulfils our expectation of watching characters who are represented as consistent across space and time (2004: 8). This is because narrative film presents events in such a way that the spectator can reasonably ascribe motives to the character's "actions" throughout the narrative (Wilson, 1986: 45) thereby affirming the idea of a consistent and unitary subjectivity. According to Bersani and Dutoit, to "defeat" this expectation, the "film-maker must somehow traumatise our perception" (2004: 8) by dispersing the subject in space and time. *Basic Instinct 2's* ambiguous ending retrospectively enacts this dispersal of subjectivity in space and time. This can be seen in the series of short scenes that Tramell frames as a new ending to her book: her narration suggests that Glass was the one who murdered Adam Towers and Dicky Pepp, and attempted to kill Denise Glass. However, this information comes to light after Tramell has confessed to Glass that she committed the murders.

While "narration is ultimately a way of making knowledge intermittent" with a view to "controlling time and regulating access to a fluctuating field of information," in narrative film the ultimate aim is to resolve the enigma (Branigan, 1992: 69). So the film's visualisation of events which may not have taken place means that the spectator cannot make reasonable inferences about reasons for Glass' behaviour. This would then indicate that Glass has not been consistent through space and time, if he committed the murders. In this way, *BI2* posits a divided subjectivity. Bersani and Dutoit claim that film represents divided subjectivity in the form of "parallel modes or lines of being, [or] alternative unfoldings of events that do not

'communicate' with one another but inaccurately replicate one another" (2004: 5). In the film, the "alternative unfoldings" that point to "parallel modes of being" are evident in that, on one hand the film's narrative maintains that Glass did not kill anyone. But at the end, this is countered by the suggestion, complete with visual proof, that perhaps he did it in another mode of being or parallel narrative. This can be seen in Tramell's narration of the events in her book, which she claims were inspired by Glass' actions. The visuals show Glass attacking Adam Towers, Dicky Pepp and Denise Glass.

As argued in the previous chapter, two of the murder victims were men who were killed during or after sex, which, if Glass were the murderer, would mean that he engaged in sex with other men in his alternate mode of being. In this way, like *Rock n Rolla* and *Sherlock Holmes 2*, *Basic Instinct 2* suggests a different kind of heterosexual subject who can take part in homosexual sex as long as it is a circumscribed, temporary or occasional activity. That there are men who identify as heterosexual while secretly having sex with other men is an established fact. As with the Mexican *hombre normales* described by Hirsch et al. (2012), Hoy (2006) describes the "down low or DL" a phenomenon initially characterised as a black "subculture" in which black men engaged in sexual intercourse with other men while still "self-identifying" as heterosexual. Hoy (2006) points out that the DL is not exclusive to black men or any other racial group; its characterisation as a black phenomenon was due to the fact that it was introduced as such to a global audience on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2004.

"But then again that could all be a fiction," Catherine Tramell

As Place (1998: 48) has argued, *film noir* latches onto whatever social issues are bubbling underneath the surface. I have suggested that *Basic Instinct 2* feeds off the anxieties of white transnational masculinity which have been brought about by changes in the world order as Asian, South American and African economies grow in size and importance. As a result, white transnational masculinity not only has to deal with the threat of femininity but has to recognise other masculinities as equal, which fuels the questioning of its place and role in the world (Somerson, 2004). Griffin (2013) discusses the idea that global masculinities compete against each other with specific reference to the masculinised culture of global finance. To that end,

Griffin (2013: 13) points out that global economics is "a masculinized space" which is characterised by "tropes of invasion, occupation and colonization" to the extent that business men from stronger economies characterise the faltering economies as feminine, and their stronger economies as masculine. According to Griffin the gendered nature of international economics manifested "during the Asian financial crisis" of the early 2000s when "Western capital" attempted to "(re)feminize Asia by discrediting the region's claim to muscular, alternative capitalism […] [and] by buying out Asian capital at bankrupt prices." In this respect, Willis (1997: 31) suggests that "white masculinity is constructed against femininity, black masculinity and male homosexuality."

I want to suggest that in *Basic Instinct 2*, voluntary victimisation or reflexive sadomasochism is the primary procedure that the film uses to re-centre Glass' masculinity after his sadomasochistic duel with Tramell, who embodies both racial and sexual difference. I remind the reader that, according to Somerson, voluntary victimization enables the while male subject to play the roles of both "aggressor and victim," which enables him to "claim both victimization and prove his aggressive masculinity" (2004: 216). Somerson further contends that reflexive sadomasochism works to "consolidate and preserve white masculinity in times of social, economic and thus psychic crises" (Ibid.). I would argue that this is what *Basic Instinct 2* ultimately does with regard to Michael Glass. *BI2's* ambiguous ending proves this in that Glass is presented as both the victim of the *femme fatale* and, possibly, a clever criminal. Tramell's comment that Glass' "getting away with it" was "genius" implies that the apparent victim might in fact be the mastermind, which, as I have argued, works to recuperate his masculinity by way of its transnational aspect. This is because white transnational masculinity would be threatened by the shifting balance of power as Asian, African and South American economies grow in size and importance.

Furthermore, as demonstrated above, sadomasochism has been a recurring trope in film. But sadomasochistic scenarios in the time period *Basic Instinct 2* was produced featured in films with mostly male casts, such as *300* (Snyder, 2006), its sequel *300: Rise of an Empire* (Murro, 2014) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Scorcese, 2013). Where the sadomasochism has involved women,

they have usually been peripheral figures who are not involved in the core sadomasochistic play. Where women are involved in sadomasochistic activity they are masculinised. In the case of *Rise of an Empire*, the warrior *femme fatale,* Artemisia (Eva Green), is masculinised to the extent that her heterosexual sex with the hero, Themistocles (Sullivan Stapleton), has homoerotic undertones. This can be seen in that they lead armies on opposite sides in a war and they have sex as part of a negotiation for a ceasefire. On the other hand, *Wolf's* lead character, Jordan Belfort (Leonardo Dicaprio), has all the traits of a *femme fatale*: he is a charismatic, boldly sexual individual who brings destruction to everyone around him, including his closest friend. Moreover, while *Wolf's* hero is married, the film privileges his homoerotic friendship with his friend, Donnie Azoff (Jonah Hill).

Therefore, I would argue that these films show that the cycle of thriller films in the past decade has explored struggles primarily between and within masculinities, hence its elaborate displacement onto the battlefield in *300*, and Wall Street in *Wolf*. Furthermore, *Basic Instinct 2's* queering of masculinity implicates it and the other films in its cycle in a broader process of heteromasculine introspection. The fact that Catherine Tramell was very much anachronistic, re-emerging as she did fourteen years after the first *Basic Instinct* and outside a similar erotic thriller cycle, explains her almost parodic portrayal: she was in a way competing with 'male' *femmes fatale* like Jordan Belfort, so she had to be as masculine as possible to be relevant to the ways in which film figured heteromasculine anxieties at the time.

This being said, the recent success of the neo-*noir* psycho-thriller *Gone Girl* (Fincher, 2014) might signal the beginning of a new cycle of *noir* thrillers which feature the traditional *femme fatale* in the central role[31]. I mention this film because it explicitly references *Basic Instinct* in the way Amy Dunn (Rosamund Pike) reaches for a razor under her pillow and then slits her sex

[31] *Gone Girl* is about Amy and Nick Dunne (Ben Affleck), a middle class New York couple who are forced to leave the big city for Nick's home town in the Mid-West when Nick's mother is diagnosed with terminal cancer. The news comes just after he has lost his job in the aftermath of the 2007 recession. Amy uses what is left of her trust fund to purchase a bar for her husband to run. Their relationship begins to suffer as Nick settles back into his old community and Amy resents him for it. They drift apart and Nick cheats on Amy, which pushes her over the edge: she begins planning to commit suicide and make it look like her husband killed her.

partner's throat during sexual intercourse. Furthermore, Rosamund Pike mentioned in an interview published in *Variety* that she watched Sharon Stone's performance in *Basic Instinct* several times in preparation for her role in *Gone Girl*.[32] *Gone Girl* as well as similar films which might follow it could extend the kinds of feminist politics I have identified in *BI2*. However, since *Gone Girl* explores how heterosexual couples have been affected financially and emotionally by the recession that began in 2007, the full breadth of its issues is yet to be investigated, and falls outside the scope of this analysis.

While *Basic Instinct 2* continues the identity politics of its predecessor, my reading of it is that it leans towards queering white transnational heteromasculinity while working to maintain its centrality in the global cultural imaginary. The voluntary victimisation of the white male works to re-centre white transnational masculinity in the current global political order. This is an important exercise due to white masculinity's historical centrality in the international socio-political order.

Nevertheless, my analysis of *BI2* and the conclusions I have drawn from the study owe their current form to the theoretical framework I have used in the exercise. Films contain many possible meanings, which can be teased out by deploying a variety of theoretical approaches. For example, applying a narrative studies theoretical framework to this study would have yielded an appropriately different reading.

Furthermore, the poststructuralist framework used in this dissertation could also be employed to examine the role of sadomasochism in constructing heteromasculinity in *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015) and its forthcoming sequels. *Fifty Shades'* hero, Christian Grey, plays the role of Master in his sadomasochistic activities with his girlfriend, Anastasia Steele. So it would appear he does not practice sadomasochism with a view to destabilizing his heteromasculine subjectivity. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyse the role of masochism in the early construction and current performance of Grey's masculinity since, by his own admission, a woman he nicknames Mrs Robinson introduced him to sadomasochism by seducing him and

[32] http://variety.com/2014/film/news/rosamund-pike-gone-girl-2-1201316673/

making him her slave when he was a teenager. In this regard, Catano (2003: 7) suggests that masochism in young men is an important aspect in the shaping of their masculinity. This masochism may play out in relationships with fathers or other figures of authority. For Catano, young men's masochism is a sort of rite of passage that they go through before attaining to 'mature' masculinity, which comes with the privilege to play the role of 'Master' in relation to others. Catano's discussion makes clear that this need not necessarily take place in an avowed sadomasochistic exchange. Such an analysis might explain how Grey's early masochism shaped him as a young man as well as how it informs his adult performance of heteromasculinity.

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Fatal Attraction (1987, Lyne)

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Gone Girl (Fincher, 2014)

Kindergarten Cop (Reitman, 1990)

One False Move (1992, Franklin)

Out of the Past (Tourneur, 1947)

Payback (1999, Hegeland)

Parenthood (Howard, 1989)

Rock n Rolla (Ritchie, 2008)

Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows (Ritchie, 2012)

Terminator 2: Judgment Day (Cameron, 1991)

The Godfather Part 2 (1974, Ford-Coppola)

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