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SEX, LIES, AND PHOTOGRAPHS:
LETTERS FROM GEORGE PLATT LYNES

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Copyright

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1997
Abstract

Sex, Lies, and Photographs:  
Letters from George Platt Lynes

William R. Thompson

In the fall of 1952, George Platt Lynes created one of his most memorable photographs: the image of two nude men--one black, one white--reclining in an intimate embrace. Lynes titled the print *Man in His Element*, but due to its overt homoeroticism and interracial content he could not show it in public. Instead, Lynes privately distributed the photograph and its variants through the mail and told the story of their creation in letters to a close friend. Lynes’s letters were an integral part of his artistic and voyeuristic activities. Through writing Lynes framed the ambivalent racial coding of *Man in His Element* and its variants, and in doing so, he asserted his authority as a white, socially privileged man. Lynes’s writings also functioned as a form of confessional discourse which enabled the photographer to document and speak the truth about his marginalized sexual identity and artistic production.
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William R. Thompson
Houston, Texas
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Introduction

On one occasion I pimped for [George Platt Lynes], sending him a particularly handsome young black whom I had met on the Twentieth Century Limited; he photographed Johnny L. over and over, and sent me one of the best: Johnny lying enfolded against a white boy’s body, Johnny’s face slumberous and composed, a dark Othello fitted against his male Desdemona. George entitled it “Man in His Element.” After his first meeting with Johnny, I got a simple response: “That boy is heaven. Thank you.”

Samuel M. Steward, 1981

On November 1, 1952, George Platt Lynes (1907-1955; fig. 1) produced one of the most visually striking and provocative photographs of his career: the image (fig. 2) of two nude men—one black, one white—lying together in repose. In this photograph, which Lynes allegedly titled Man in His Element, the models have been positioned on a paint-speckled tarp inside an austere, carefully illuminated studio; they appear to slumber in a contrived, post-coital embrace. The image’s elegantly balanced composition is characteristic of Lynes’s classical style, while its subject demonstrates his long-standing interest in two closely related cultural taboos—the representation of the male nude and the expression of homosexual desire. The suggestiveness of the image derives not only from the intimacy and implied sexual act between the two men, but also from their racial

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2 The image of Man in His Element reproduced in this thesis is not the original print Samuel Steward mentioned in the above passage. The photograph, like many of the illustrated images, was printed at the author’s request by the Kinsey Institute in 1995 from Lynes’s original negative. Since Lynes did not have control over the printing of these photographs and his darkroom methods could dramatically influence the appearance of his finished prints, I acknowledge that caution must be exercised in the analysis of these images, as with any posthuminously printed photographs.
3 At present, the photograph has never been reproduced as Man in His Element; Steward is the only person who has referred to it as such. Based on Steward’s published remarks, I have chosen to use this title for the image as well and will discuss its possible meaning and origin in Chapter III.
difference—the contrast of black skin next to white. Given the context of the early 1950s, the overt homoeroticism and interracial pairing depicted in *Man in His Element* would have presented a serious challenge to the era’s attitudes about sexual identity and racial interaction, thus making it difficult, if not dangerous, to display such a work in public. It is not surprising that Lynes chose to exhibit the image in a limited, private manner; as Lynes’s friend Samuel Steward reminisced, the photographer sent the print known as *Man in His Element* to him in the mail. Lynes in fact printed and privately distributed an unknown number of photographs from the negative and its variants, and he documented the story behind the series with considerable detail and candor in letters to a trusted friend living overseas. Ultimately, Lynes deposited the negatives for *Man in His Element* and many other images at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction in Bloomington, Indiana.\(^4\)

Despite its complexity and historical significance, *Man in His Element*, like much of Lynes’s work, has not been thoroughly scrutinized and remains poorly understood. Although it is a relatively well-known image today, its fame has derived primarily from its recent inclusion in books and exhibition catalogues. While such publications have brought the image to the attention of a much wider audience, at the same time, they have distorted the perception of the work and further distanced it from its historical context. The photograph’s original audience did not see it anonymously exhibited on a museum’s wall or reproduced on the glossy pages of an artist’s monograph. Instead, the image and

\(^4\)The Kinsey Institute does not release information concerning the names of donors to their collections or participants in their research projects. Researchers who utilize the Kinsey Institute’s collection must also comply with this policy. I was granted permission to discuss Lynes’s gifts to the institution, however, since Lynes gave his own work to the Kinsey Institute and his donations were already documented in published sources (see Steward, “George Platt Lynes,” 24).
others like it circulated privately among a small, exclusive network of gay men. Lynes and his friends developed, well outside of the traditional exhibition culture, their own strategies for displaying his homoerotic prints. Lynes’s photographs were kept and shown in private homes, they were pasted in scrapbooks to be displayed to interested viewers, and in the case of *Man in His Element*, they were sent to individuals through the mail. Focusing closely on this particular image and more broadly on related works from across Lynes’s oeuvre, this thesis will reconstruct and analyze the context in which these photographs were produced and shown. In addition, through the examination of extant negatives, prints, correspondence, and historical documentation, I will explore Lynes’s creation of *Man in His Element*, its relationship to his oeuvre and place in the art historical canon, and the social and political forces that prevented him from publicly exhibiting such works. Most importantly, I will address the photographer’s use of letter writing as a means of privately distributing and narrating the image and its variants through the mail.

Lynes’s images of the male nude tell only part of a much larger story--his voyeuristic activities with the camera were closely tied to sex and letter writing. Understanding the interdependency between these three facets of Lynes’s life provides an essential reference point from which to view *Man in His Element* and its variants and to interpret their problematic inscription of gender, race, and class. While the subject of racial difference is obviously a central theme of these images, their meaning was not so clear, and in fact could be seen as ambiguous and rather controversial. It is not obvious just by looking at the photographs if their interracial theme was intended to challenge racist perspectives or to perpetuate their visual manifestation. The ambivalent depiction of
race in this series may have encouraged Lynes to explain his role in its creation to those who received the prints. Letter writing enabled the photographer to do just that, and a great deal more.

The mail provided Lynes with an efficient and discreet method for distributing *Man in His Element* and other photographs that could not be exhibited in traditional public venues. Furthermore, writing letters about his prints and models allowed Lynes to fulfill his long-standing desire to be an author, and these texts played an important role in his voyeuristic experience, as well as that of his audience. When viewed in terms of theories of sexuality developed by Michel Foucault, Lynes’s letters function as a form of confessional discourse which provided the photographer with a means of documenting and speaking the truth about his marginalized sexual identity and the actions he orchestrated for the camera. The truth about Lynes’s sexuality, however, was entangled with his inclusion in the racial and social hegemony and his need to maintain his status over those excluded from it. While Lynes desired the men depicted in *Man in His Element*, at the same time, he did not look upon them as equals. Letter writing enabled Lynes to exercise control over his models and the viewers’ interpretation of the photographs he mailed, and in doing so, to construct and assert his privileged identity as a white, socially prominent man.

Although this study focuses primarily on one photographic series and a body of correspondence from late in Lynes’s life, the material richly illustrates Lynes’s social and cultural context and provides a framework for understanding his career as a whole. The criticism I direct toward Lynes, particularly with regard to his views and manipulation of
race, is based on my reading of the available source material and represents just one of many possible interpretations. Recognizing that the content of Lynes's photographs and letters is often personal in nature and controversial to some, I stress that I do not bring it to light in order to sensationalize it, but rather, to present it as an important body of work that merits careful study. It is my belief that *Man in His Element* and the circumstances surrounding its production and distribution, unique as they may be, provide valuable insight into Lynes's working methods in general, the role his photographs played in New York's gay sub-culture of the 1950s, and the intimate connections between gender, race, and class evident within such imagery.
Chapter I

Man in His Element

An Image Brought to Light

Although created more than four decades ago, it has only been in the last fifteen years that Man in His Element has become known to more than a few individuals. The photograph may have slipped into obscurity and been forgotten altogether had it not been included in several books and catalogues published in the 1980s. Man in His Element was first reproduced without its title in George Platt Lynes: Photographs, 1931-1955, the earliest monograph on Lynes published in 1981 by Jack Woody. While conducting research in the late 1970s, Woody met Samuel Steward, the acquaintance to whom Lynes originally mailed the print in 1952. Woody purchased from Steward a group of Lynes’s photographs, including Man in His Element, which he eventually reproduced in his book. Shortly thereafter, Man in His Element was reproduced in Peter Weiermair’s George Platt Lynes, a catalogue for an exhibition held at the Frankfurter Kunstverein in 1982. In 1989, Weiermair reprinted his text and included the image in the book George Platt Lynes, published in Berlin by Bruno Gmünder. Both publications labeled the image “John Leaphart and Buddy McCartney [sic],” but Lynes knew the two men as Johnny Leaphart

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7Peter Weiermair, George Platt Lynes (Frankfurter: Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1982), 63; and Peter Weiermair, George Platt Lynes (Berlin: Bruno Gmünder Verlag, 1989), 43.
and Buddy McCarthy. In 1986, Emmanuel Cooper included a reproduction of *Man in His Element* in the survey text *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*. Cooper perpetuated the misspelling of McCarthy’s name, but the text further increased awareness of Lynes’s image and its lasting aesthetic and historical value. Although *Man in His Element* has never been thoroughly discussed in the literature on Lynes, the attention it received from its inclusion in the aforementioned publications led the art historian James Crump to characterize, quite rightfully, the series to which the image belongs as “famous.” Two variant prints (fig. 3 and fig. 4) from this larger series were included in the exhibition *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute*. The exhibition, curated by Crump, opened in September 1993 at the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center at New York University. Both photographs were reproduced anonymously as “Male Nudes” in the accompanying catalogue. The series achieved even greater fame, at least for a few brief moments, when a cropped version of one of the variant prints (fig. 4) appeared in a review of the exhibition in the *New York Times*.

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8 Buddy McCarthy, the white model who appears in *Man in His Element*, was interviewed for this project in New York City on September 12, 1995. It is believed that Johnny Leaphart is deceased; letter from Bernard Perlin to the author, 20 August 1994.


10 Cooper titled the image *Two Men, John Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy* [sic].


12 Crump, *George Platt Lynes*, 44-5. The Kinsey Institute does not make public the names of subjects represented in its art collection and archives. Because of this policy, the nudes in the exhibition could not be identified. The Kinsey Institute also forbids researchers utilizing its collections from revealing information about the sexual interests, behavior, or orientation of its research subjects, donors, correspondents, or staff. In addition, the Kinsey Institute does not allow material in its possession from being used to identify or reveal personal information about the subjects in its photographic collections. The information presented in this thesis concerning the names of Lynes’s nude subjects and their alleged behavior was not obtained from materials in the possession of the Kinsey Institute; rather, it was derived from published sources, Lynes’s correspondence, analysis of the photographs, and interviews with the photographer’s friends and, in some cases, the models themselves. Where relevant, sources of
Times. As a result, Lynes’s image, originally intended to be seen by a handful of people in 1952, became public domain more than forty years later on the pages of one of the country’s most widely circulated newspapers.

Given the widespread distribution of Man in His Element and its variants in different media, not to mention the work’s overt homoeroticism and racially charged content, it is hardly surprising to find evidence of the series’ influence in the work of several contemporary gay artists, both black and white. Director Isaac Julien, for example, appropriated the composition of Man in His Element in a scene from Looking for Langston, 1989 (fig. 5), a film that explores the historical closeting of Langston Hughes and issues of identity in the lives of black gay men during the Harlem Renaissance. In one of the film’s most significant moments, Langston Hughes, played by actor Ben Ellison, exchanges a longing glance in a bar with another black man named Beauty, played by Matthew Baidoo. Beauty’s jealous white partner, a man played by John Wilson, returns a spiteful glare. Hughes’s character begins a daydream sequence which ends with himself and Beauty holding one another in bed in a post-coital embrace obviously derived from Lynes’s Man in His Element. In this scene, Julien, a black gay artist, critiques the voyeuristic pleasure Lynes presumably derived from the photograph’s

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interracial pairing and its function as a form of erotica for white gay men. Julien’s re-enactment of Lynes’s image using two black actors reclaims the image for a black gay audience. As Kobena Mercer demonstrated, however, the film “points to the way that intraracial relations among black men themselves also entail feelings of rivalry and envy.”

Julien’s criticism of Lynes’s imagery recalls the discourse generated in the 1980s in response to the controversial use of black models by the late photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Such criticism is equally relevant to Lynes’s photography since the similarities between his work and that of Mapplethorpe are more than coincidental, although the nature of the connection between the two artists has never been carefully explored or documented. In his essay “Mapplethorpe’s Vision,” Richard Marshall included a photograph (fig. 6) that Lynes took in 1952 of Johnny Leaphart with his arms folded and back to the camera. This image is remarkably similar to Mapplethorpe’s photograph Dan, 1980 (fig. 7), which was also reproduced in the same catalogue. Man in His Element and Mapplethorpe’s photograph Ken Moody and Robert Sherman, 1984 (fig. 8) also appear to be closely related in terms of subject matter. The formal resemblance between these two sets of images suggests that Mapplethorpe was not only aware of Lynes’s work, particularly his images of black men, but that he most likely borrowed from and responded to it. Given that Mapplethorpe created many of his most

18Marshall, et al., 93.
famous photographs of black men during the 1980s, the same time that Lynes’s imagery and *Man in His Element* were becoming more widely known, it is quite obvious that Mapplethorpe was aware of the precedent of Lynes’s work in this genre. Despite the fact that Lynes created *Man in His Element* and his other male nudes in relative obscurity, this particular work and many of his other images have become well-known today through reproduction and their significance to a new generation of artists such as Julien and Mapplethorpe.

**Archetypes**

As with many of Mapplethorpe’s models, the men featured in *Man in His Element*—Buddy McCarthy and Johnny Leaphart—were more than just casual acquaintances to Lynes; both were sexually involved with him. The nature and history of Lynes’s tryst with Leaphart and McCarthy will be explored in depth later in this thesis. Much can be learned about their relationship to Lynes and his camera, however, through visual analysis of selected images in which they appear. Such an examination also reveals that *Man in His Element* and its related imagery were influenced by a rich variety of visual sources, including Surrealism, commercial fashion photography, physical culture.

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20 According to Mapplethorpe’s biographer, the photographer was “well versed in the history of photography” and eventually developed a “stylized technique that was influenced by the glamour portraiture of Horst and George Platt Lynes,” Patricia Morrisroe, *Mapplethorpe: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1995), 178. Mapplethorpe is known to have owned at least one photograph by Lynes, a close-up of Ralph MacWilliams’s chest and hand from c. 1953. This print was included as lot 75 in the October 31, 1989 auction of the Robert Mapplethorpe Collection at Christie’s, New York. Although it is not known when Mapplethorpe acquired this print, he was no doubt aware of the books published about Lynes in the early 1980s. In 1985, Jack Woody, the publisher of the first book on Lynes in 1981, published separate monographs on Lynes and Mapplethorpe. See Jack Woody, *Ballet: George Platt Lynes* (Pasadena, CA: Twelvetrees Press, 1985), and Robert Mapplethorpe, *Certain People: A Book of Portraits* (Los Angeles: Twelvetrees Press, 1985).
magazines, and the classical traditions of ancient Greece. In addition, these images demonstrate that Lynes consistently explored issues of race and difference, and at times, he reflected and perpetuated white America’s racial stereotypes and outlooks.

Lynes’s photographs of the male nude have been discussed and thoroughly situated within the history of male homoerotic photography, a visual tradition ranging from the Pictorialist, classically-inspired nudes of Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden and F. Holland Day to the slick commercialism of contemporary photographers such as Mapplethorpe, Herb Ritts, and Bruce Weber.\(^{21}\) Although these photographers worked in different cultural contexts and styles, much of their work shares a common theme—the use of classical form and subjects. Throughout his oeuvre, Lynes also employed compositional strategies, props, and poses with strong classical references, and *Man in His Element* relates to this visual tradition in terms of its formal properties and iconography. The composition of the photograph, through its sense of balance and symmetry, epitomizes classical restraint and elegance. In addition, Lynes’s open depiction of same-sex affection recalls similar images produced centuries ago by the ancient Greeks, who not only venerated the male body but celebrated emotional and physical love, albeit of a very specific type, between males. In a well-known fresco (fig. 9) dating from the 5th century B.C. from a tomb in Paestum, Italy, two males recline together on a couch in an intimate pose not unlike that seen in *Man in His Element*. The ancient Greeks practiced a specific model of “homosexuality” in which it was acceptable for two males to engage in sex, provided the relationship consisted of a

dominant, adult male pursuing a passive adolescent. This behavioral model is represented in the Paestum wall painting; the older, bearded man is shown attempting to embrace his younger, unbearded companion. Despite its pederastic implications, this ancient practice was the most well-known and affirmative image of male homosexuality available to modern gay men such as Lynes. Robert Aldrich has demonstrated that references to classical civilization and desire for the Mediterranean male were central themes in Western homoerotic art and literature from the mid-eighteenth century through the 1950s. Furthermore, Greek homosexuality provided modern homosexual writers and artists with a means of representing and validating their own marginalized sexual identities.

While Lynes’s photograph evokes both the formal traditions of ancient Greece and its historical acceptance of a form of homosexuality, the image also makes use of long-established conventions of erotic representation, an appropriate visual model, given that the print was originally produced for the artist’s voyeuristic pleasure. In this respect, Man in His Element has much in common with Gustave Courbet’s The Sleepers, 1866 (fig. 10), a frank painting, likewise produced for a male audience, that shows two sleeping nude

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women entangled on a bed. Courbet exoticized the homoerotic image by contrasting his subjects' racial difference—one woman is blond and fair-skinned, while her companion is a brunette with a darker complexion. Such a pairing of light skin next to dark was not an uncommon feature of erotic representations of the female nude. Paintings of harem scenes showing sleeping or imprisoned women and different races mingling were highly popular in the nineteenth century. When viewed in this tradition, Man in His Element may be interpreted as a modern-day harem scene with a subversive gender twist—instead of depicting women, Lynes shows two men of different races slumbering before his camera. The custom of juxtaposing models with different racial features in order to titillate male viewers continues to this day, as evident in Sports Illustrated's annual swimsuit issue (fig. 11). The cover of the magazine, a photograph by Walter Iooss Jr., features two scantily clad, racially diverse models—Valeria Mazza and Tyra Banks—who strike a coquettish, homoerotic pose for the purpose of arousing heterosexual male consumers. As the critic bell hooks remarked, "within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture." Like Ioos, Lynes added spice to Man in His Element by commodifying a same-sex, interracial couple for the pleasure of a predominately white, male audience.

Interpreting the racial discourse inscribed in such imagery is no easy task, as F. Holland Day's well-known print Ebony and Ivory, 1897 (fig. 12) so readily illustrates.

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24 Courbet painted this work for Khalil Bey, an affluent Turkish diplomat who at one time had an extensive art collection. Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, Courbet Reconsidered (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 175-7. Diane Dillon first brought this comparison to my attention.
25 Ibid.
26 Sports Illustrated, 29 January 1996.
Day, a homosexual, was an important Pictorialist photographer who was active in Europe and America around the turn of the century. In the mid-1890s, Day began photographing black men, a subject he revisited on many occasions. In *Ebony and Ivory*, a black model strikes a pose adopted from a celebrated painting by Hippolyte Flandrin. The man is seated in profile on a leopard skin; a plaster Hellenistic statue of a dancing satyr stands next to him. As James Crump suggested, this complex image “signals the nexus of the Christian and Greek worlds with the world of ancient Africa. By juxtaposing the semi-nude body with a classical symbol, Day established the dualities of nature and culture, and black and white.”28 While Day was known to be open-minded and sympathetic to the plight of blacks at the turn of the century, his work nonetheless reveals a thoroughly Westernized view of Africa as a romanticized, exotic locale. In *Ebony and Ivory*, for example, Day’s black model rests on a leopard skin, an allusion to “the indigenous wildlife of eastern Africa, and the colonial white man’s recreational safari,”29 Furthermore, the title of the print refers to commercial products native to Africa as much as it does to its formal contrasts between light and dark.30 As Crump remarked, *Ebony and Ivory* and Day’s other images of blacks “show [his] complexity by neither implicating him in gratuitous stereotyping nor extricating him from the discourse of colonialism.”31 Lynes revealed remarkably similar interests and ambiguities, albeit with a more openly pronounced sexual edge, in an undated portrait (fig. 13) of a nude, seated black man whose crotch is hidden by a classical bust. The image perhaps was intended to read as a

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29 Ibid.
subversive pun based on the word "head." Beyond that, however, the meaning of this photograph and its bold exploration of race and culture is, like Day's *Ebony and Ivory*, complicated and problematic.

While it is not known if Lynes drew specifically from Day's photography, he was certainly well acquainted with the work of his friend Paul Cadmus, a painter who has explored the subject of male homosexuality throughout his career. On occasion, the subject of racial difference surfaced within Cadmus's sexually charged imagery as well. *The Bath*, 1951 (fig. 14), for example, depicts two men—presumably lovers—engaged in their daily grooming rituals. The man bathing in the tub is blond and light-skinned, while his companion standing in front of the sink is noticeably darker. This contrast between light and dark echoes that depicted in Courbet's *The Sleepers*, yet it also demonstrates that other artists within Lynes's circle were conscious of the issue of racial difference and its representation, even in its subtlest manifestations.

In addition to Cadmus's painting, Lynes may have been exposed to other sources open to depicting the convergence of male homosexuality and racial difference, such as the work of George Quaintance. Quaintance was a commercial artist whose homoerotic paintings were frequently reproduced and made available for purchase in post-war physical culture publications, the forerunner of today's gay press. While most of these publications were outwardly marketed to artists, fitness enthusiasts, and body builders, in reality, many of these books and magazines were published to provide gay men with a cheap, easily

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32 For a discussion of this painting, see Lincoln Kirstein, *Paul Cadmus* (New York: Chameleon Books, 1992), 83.
obtainable, and legal source of homoerotic imagery. Quaintance’s paintings were ideally suited for this purpose. The artist usually depicted semi-nude, muscular men together in sexually charged, intimate situations; for a touch of exoticism, he often contrasted his subjects’ racial differences, as so vividly demonstrated in Egyptian Wrestlers, 1952 (fig. 15), a scene showing two virtually nude, muscular men—one black, one white—locked in combat.  

Quaintance’s violent painting echoes the racial antagonism depicted in Théodore Géricault’s famous lithograph Boxers, 1818 (fig. 16) and countless other images in Western art showing blacks and whites in conflict. Given Egyptian Wrestlers publication in a mass-produced magazine relating to athletics, however, the image may relate more directly to the era’s sensationalized interracial boxing matches, such as the bout (fig. 17) on June 25, 1952 in New York between Joey Maxim and Sugar Ray Robinson. Robinson collapsed from the heat in Yankee stadium and lost the match after fourteen rounds. Although in Quaintance’s image it is not obvious which wrestler will win the match, there is no doubt as to which racial group is in charge of the overall situation: two armed guards with light skin watch over the wrestlers. Likewise, a light-skinned male ruler stands at the top of the temple’s staircase looking down on the contest, while two black servants kneel by his side holding fans. Quaintance’s black wrestler may be physically

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34Although this image is dated 1952—the same year that Lynes produced Man in His Element—the earliest reproduction of the image I was able to locate was in Physique Pictorial, Spring 1953.

35This work will be discussed later in this chapter.

strong and have his white opponent in a headlock, but the artist has clearly represented him as the Other—a member of a marginalized group defined by and ultimately subordinate to the ruling race or culture.\textsuperscript{37}

When compared to works such as Géricault’s \textit{Boxers}, Quaintance’s \textit{Egyptian Wrestlers}, and even photographs of the boxing match between Maxim and Robinson—all images depicting violent confrontations between blacks and whites—\textit{Man in His Element} stands apart for its tranquillity and tender intimacy. In contrast to the aforementioned images, in \textit{Man in His Element}, Leaphart and McCarthy pose inside a neutral studio setting devoid of any cultural references or signifiers. As a result, the viewer focuses even more intensely on the quiet, affectionate scene and the models’ racial difference. In many respects, it is a puzzling image. Without further information about the photograph and the men it depicts, Lynes’s racial coding may be interpreted in a number of different ways. Perhaps it was meant to serve as a tongue-in-cheek subversion of the antagonistic relationship between people of different races traditionally represented in art and the media. Has Lynes in some way privileged one model’s race over that of his companion, as Quaintance did in \textit{Egyptian Wrestlers}, or does \textit{Man in His Element} truly represent a scene of racial harmony and equity? There are no simple answers to these questions, but Lynes has inscribed visual clues and codes throughout his oeuvre concerning the inscription of race in this particular work.

A Visual Analysis

Man in His Element is part of a series numbered 375. Based on the sixteen surviving negatives housed at the Kinsey Institute from this group of images, Lynes began the session photographing McCarthy alone. In the five earliest extant negatives, McCarthy poses on the wrinkled, paint-speckled tarp, while Lynes highlights his physical strength and dexterity. In negative 16 (fig. 18), for example, McCarthy stands on the tarp with his back to the camera; the model’s stocky physique has been positioned against a neutral background. Lynes draws attention to McCarthy’s strong legs and the shadows created by the tensed muscles of his back and rear. McCarthy obviously was shaved before the photograph was taken, as stubble is visible on much of his body. In contrast to the more staid pose of negative 16, McCarthy performs a handstand in negative 22 (fig. 19). Lynes not only captured this impressive feat of strength and balance on film, but he added to its drama by strategically illuminating McCarthy’s taut muscles and veins. The pose is virtually identical to those (fig. 20) seen in the physical culture publications of the time. Lynes even mentioned that he deliberately photographed McCarthy

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38 Part of a series that originally consisted of at least forty-one images and was labeled 375, the Kinsey Institute houses sixteen 8 X 10 inch negatives from this series; they are numbered as follows: 1, 6, 16, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, and 41. Based upon this numbering system, most likely developed by Lynes or one of his studio assistants, there would appear to have been at least forty-one images in the series. At this time, it is not known if there are other extant negatives from this series, and if so, where they are located. Frederick R. Koch, a private collector, currently owns 6,360 8 x 10 inch negatives and 5,049 photographic prints from Lynes’s archive, including a number of images from series 375. Following his death in 1955, Lynes’s archive was left in the care of his close friend Bernard Perlin, who ultimately sold it through the Robert Miller Gallery to Mr. Koch in 1984-85. It was not possible for me to visit this archive or to obtain copy photographs of works in it, although Mr. Koch was kind enough to provide me with an inventory of his collection.

“musclemanwise” in this particular image, thus directly acknowledging his debt to the physical culture press.\footnote{Letter from George Platt Lynes to Bernard Perlin, 3 November 1952. The correspondence between Lynes and Perlin cited in this thesis is from the collection of Bernard Perlin, Ridgefield, Connecticut.}

Series 375 was not the first time that McCarthy appeared before Lynes’s camera. Lynes photographed him in and out of his studio on several occasions and not just in the role of a “muscleman.” On July 8, 1952, for example, Lynes photographed a noticeably hairier McCarthy in a series numbered 342.\footnote{The Kinsey Institute owns four negatives from series 342. They are numbered as follows: 1, 7, 10, and 14.} Lynes made use of a variety of unusual props in this series, demonstrating the pervasive influence of fashion photography on his work and his interest in the formal properties of Surrealism, a movement with which Lynes has been loosely associated since the early days of his career. Although in the 1930s he exhibited at the gallery of Julien Levy, a staunch advocate of modern photography and Surrealism in America, Lynes never fully adopted or internalized the Surrealist’s photographic theories, much less those of any other movement. Rather, Lynes utilized some of the Surrealist’s technical tricks and shared with them a love for unusual and subversive juxtapositions, as evident in series 342, and one might argue, in Man in His Element. In negative 10 (fig. 21) from series 342, Lynes photographed McCarthy in the nude standing behind a bedspring from a mattress. McCarthy grips the bedspring and peers at the viewer through the wiry lattice. The work appears to quote directly from Cecil Beaton’s photograph Nathalie Paley, 1936 (fig. 22). In this image, Beaton, a leading portrait photographer and colleague of Lynes,\footnote{Lynes was thoroughly acquainted with Beaton and familiar with his work. The two photographers even posed for one another on occasion; see fig. 1 and Weirmair, George Platt Lynes (1982), 18.} depicts Paley as a dark, mysterious
seductress poised before the abstract, patterned grid of a bedspring. Although Lynes utilized the same kind of prop in his photograph, he defiantly substituted McCarthy’s hairy, nude body for the fashionably dressed Paley. In doing so, Lynes reveals his willingness to appropriate the practices of commercial photography, but he also subverts them by symbolically replacing the alluring model in Beaton’s image—a symbol of the feminine ideal—with one that he finds more desirable.43

The use of bedsprings in the imagery of Lynes and Beaton may also relate to the work of the Surrealist photographer Jacques-André Boiffard. In Boiffard’s Untitled, c. 1930 (fig. 23), a circular wire contraption has been positioned in front of the face of a nude woman who represents a spider patiently watching her web for the next victim.44

Certainly, Beaton’s depiction of the vampy Nathalie Paley posing before a web-like form could be viewed in similar terms, as could the related image by Lynes. In Lynes’s rendition of this theme, however, it is a man who assumes the role of Boiffard’s femme fatale. McCarthy represents the hungry spider, the bedspring—a fragmented erotic symbol—has been transformed into a cold, sinister-looking trap, and the gay spectator becomes the hapless fly. Ironically, a few months after photographing McCarthy in series 342, Lynes remarked “in a fit of exuberance, Buddy threw me about a bit (adagio style),

43 It is no secret that by the late 1940s, Lynes had become extremely dissatisfied with his commercial fashion work, even though it had served as his main source of income. By the early 1950s, Lynes’s career as a fashion photographer was in serious decline, and in 1951, he was forced to declare bankruptcy. See Woody, George Platt Lynes, 11.

44 It is not known if Lynes knew of this particular work by Boiffard or had it in mind when he photographed McCarthy. Given the formal and conceptual similarities between Boiffard’s photograph and Lynes’s portrait of McCarthy, it seems possible. Lynes would have been familiar with Boiffard’s work through Julien Levy who owned work by Lynes and Boiffard and included them both in the exhibition Surrealisme held at Levy’s New York gallery in 1932. For more information about Boiffard and his photograph of the spider-woman, see Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism (Washington and New York: The Corcoran Gallery of Art and Abbeville Press, 1985), 74, 77.
despite my loud protests...and did something to my back. Probably nothing worse than a strained muscle, but it hurts like hell...and I creak and pother like a 90 year old."45

Perhaps Lynes viewed himself in this photograph as the middle-aged fly eyeing the young McCarthy's bed, a seductive, albeit dangerous web.46 Lynes's fondness for unusual juxtapositions and his subversive contempt for commercial fashion photography are likewise evident in another extant negative from series 342. In negative 7 (fig. 24), McCarthy poses in the nude beside an easel supporting a framed work of art, Pavel Tchelitchev's gouache The Golden Leaf, 1943 (fig. 25). Part of Lynes's personal art collection, The Golden Leaf was one of Tchelitchev's "Interior Landscapes," a series of works depicting fantastic interior views of the human body, based on technological advances that enabled scientists to see the body's interior with greater ease and accuracy than ever before.47 The work portrays the imaginary skeletal, circulatory, and nervous systems of a man's upper body seen from the rear. In contrast to the more clinical perspective of an x-ray, however, Tchelitchev's painting is alive with movement and light. In his photograph of McCarthy, Lynes wryly juxtaposes Tchelitchev's two-dimensional rendering of a human interior with the body of a living man, whose hair and skin offer a striking, surrealist contrast to Tchelitchev's imagined anatomy. Lynes's image also reveals a humorous twist when viewed in relation to another work by Cecil Beaton--a portrait of Mary Taylor (fig. 26) produced for Vogue in 1935.

45Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 1 October 1952.
46At the time this photograph was taken, Lynes, who was born on April 15, 1907 in East Orange, New Jersey, was forty-five years old, while McCarthy appears to be in his twenties. Lynes also referred to McCarthy as a "baby" and "boy" in his correspondence, suggesting he was particularly conscious of McCarthy's youth; letter from Lynes to Perlin, 25 August 1952.
47Lincoln Kirstein, Tchelitchev (Santa Fe: Twelvetrees Press, 1994), 92.
In this photograph, Beaton depicts the attractive model dressed in a glamorous evening gown and standing before a large painting by Tchelitchev. Beaton, Lynes, and many other fashion photographers often utilized works of art as interesting props for their models. Thus, by privately photographing the nude McCarthy in a style and pose that his audience would have associated with the very public world of advertising and high fashion, Lynes demonstrates his debt to such idealized commercial imagery while mocking it through his seditious reinterpretation of it.

In an unnumbered series taken on September 27, 1952, several months after series 342, Lynes again photographed McCarthy along with a work of art from his private collection. In this series, however, he traded the formality of the studio for the intimacy of his 84th Street apartment. The twelve extant 2 x 2 inch negatives (fig. 27) comprising this series reveal that Lynes photographed McCarthy using a portable camera; the lighting in these images is darker and less controlled than those produced in his studio, and as a result, the series appears uncharacteristically impromptu for Lynes. These images also clearly demonstrate Lynes's intimate relationship with McCarthy, who lies in various states of undress on the photographer's bed, most likely following a sexual encounter. Paul Cadmus's painting *Conversation Piece*, 1940 (fig. 28), a work Lynes commissioned from the artist, hangs on the wall above McCarthy's head. Like a family portrait, Cadmus's painting depicts Lynes relaxing beneath a large tree with Glenway Wescott, the well-known writer, and Munroe Wheeler, an editor at the Museum of Modern Art. At the time Cadmus painted the work, the three men were lovers involved in a complicated relationship and living arrangement; they shared the New Jersey weekend house known as
Stone-Blossom seen in the painting’s background. In Lynes’s twelve negatives, the scene depicted in Conversation Piece is echoed in the real space of the photographer’s bedroom. McCarthy relaxes on the bed, much like the three men who appear resting in the painting overhead. The images link Lynes’s past to his present; the nostalgic painting of Lynes and his former lovers at the home they shared is juxtaposed to the body of McCarthy, one of his current lovers, lounging inside Lynes’s apartment. Inscribed within both Cadmus’s painting and Lynes’s imagery is a strong sense of voyeurism that seems to have been typical among the men of this social circle. In Conversation Piece, for example, Wescott stares intently at Lynes, who lies before him wearing a pair of underwear. In Lynes’s twelve negatives, however, the photographer assumes the role of voyeur and directs his gaze on McCarthy’s body.

Lynes’s objectification of McCarthy in these twelve negatives is carried to a very different extreme in series 375. In the images comprising the latter, McCarthy not only plays the role of object, but his shaved body has been transformed into a type more closely resembling the white, smooth male bodies which so often appeared in the photographer’s bed and before his camera. Much of Lynes’s nude photography in fact features white men—usually young, handsome, and athletic—whose physiques embody the ideal male form (fig. 29) of classical Greece. The removal of McCarthy’s body hair not only transformed him into one of Lynes’s idealized classical subjects, it fetishized the whiteness

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48 For a discussion of Conversation Piece, see Kirstein, Paul Cadmus, 73. Although Kirstein describes the content of the painting, he does not mention that Wescott, Munroe, and Lynes were lovers. I am grateful to Bernard Perlin for providing insight into their relationship in a personal interview on October 1, 1993 in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Wheeler, Wescott, and Lynes were given Stone-Blossom in 1937 and used it together until 1943, when Lynes left Wheeler and Wescott; see Glenway Wescott, Continual Lessons: The Journals of Glenway Wescott, 1937-1955, ed. Robert Phelps with Jerry Rosco (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990), 107-10. For a photograph of Stone-Blossom, see fig. 58.
of his skin and returned his body to a hairless, pre-pubescent state, further emphasizing the difference in age between Lynes and McCarthy. In the Kinsey Institute’s remaining eleven negatives from series 375, Lynes juxtaposed McCarthy’s smooth, white body against Leaphart’s dark skin. Two prints illustrate the types of poses the two men adopted before Lynes’s camera. In the first of these photographs (fig. 3), McCarthy and Leaphart sit side-by-side on the tarp as their heads gently touch one another. In another image (fig. 4), the two men face one another; Leaphart’s back is to the camera while McCarthy, whose head is partially obscured behind Leaphart’s right shoulder, looks nervously into the lens.49

The most visually successful of the eleven extant negatives of McCarthy and Leaphart together is the image known as Man in His Element and three closely related variants. Together, these four negatives provide remarkable insight into Lynes’s photography session with the men and his working methods.50 In negative 26 (fig. 30), McCarthy rests on his back while Leaphart lies across him with his head on McCarthy’s abdomen and right hand over his genitals. Leaphart’s left arm lies bent across McCarthy’s chest and his hand rests on McCarthy’s pelvis. Leaphart’s genitals are partially visible in the right side of the image, while McCarthy’s face has been cropped above the chin. The next image in the sequence, negative 27 (fig. 31), reveals several subtle changes in terms of composition; Leaphart’s left hand now cradles McCarthy’s left buttock, and McCarthy’s left leg is partially raised. In negative 28 (fig. 2), the image Lynes titled Man in His Element, two more significant compositional changes are evident: McCarthy’s right hand is placed on Leaphart’s left shoulder and Lynes has moved his camera a few inches

49 As already mentioned, both of these prints were shown in the exhibition George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute.
50 These negatives are numbered as follows: 26, 27, 28, and 29.
to the left in order to crop McCarthy's head completely and reveal more of his raised thigh. Finally, in negative 29 (fig. 32) the composition remains the same as in the previous negative, but Leaphart has opened his eyes and stares into the camera's lens, returning the voyeuristic gaze of its operator. When these four images are viewed together in sequence, the experience of looking at them is almost filmic, suggesting parallels between Lynes's photographic record of the series and erotic cinema.

The subtle choreography evident within these four images necessitates a careful reading of the body language of Lynes's subjects. In negative 29 (fig. 32), for example, McCarthy reclines on his back, while Leaphart rests his head on McCarthy, who has placed his right hand on Leaphart. The position of McCarthy's hand is rather ambiguous—is it a gentle, reassuring touch, or is McCarthy holding Leaphart in a more patronizing way? Leaphart's stance as the one being held on another man's body mimics the way a small child might rest on a parent. Lynes's photograph is not altogether different from the intimate scene depicted in Mary Cassatt's drypoint *Quietude*, c. 1891 (fig. 33).51 In this print, a seated mother holds her naked infant who rests on the woman's chest and shoulder. The child looks directly at the viewer from the comfort and safety of the mother's embrace, just as McCarthy holds Leaphart, who stares directly into the camera's lens. While the pose of Leaphart and McCarthy has much in common with that seen in *Quietude*, Cassatt has represented the hierarchical relationship between parent and child by showing conventional differences in physical size and age. In contrast, Lynes asserts this hierarchy using racial difference—McCarthy's white body assumes the dominant role of a

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parent, while Leaphart's black body, despite its adult size, is cast in the submissive role of an infant or small child.\textsuperscript{52} This particular reading of the poses of McCarthy and Leaphart, however, does not necessarily apply to the other extant negatives and prints from series 375. As previously mentioned, one print (fig. 4) from the series shows Leaphart standing with his back to the camera and looming over McCarthy, who stares apprehensively into the camera.

As these images from series 375 suggest, it was not uncommon for Lynes to photograph groups of two or more men together and to experiment with their positions before his camera. The voyeuristic dynamic of such imagery was quite different from that inscribed within his photographs of individual men. In the latter, the subjectivity of the photograph's viewer determined whether or not the image of a nude man would be interpreted as homoerotic. Depending on the nature of the viewer's desires, such an image could evoke a number of different responses, from arousal to disgust. Yet in images combining two or more male nudes, Lynes could represent desire between his subjects directly. With such photographs, the gay male viewer not only sees and presumably longs for the bodies of Lynes's subjects, he also witnesses a scene that is unmistakably homoerotic in terms of content. Lynes could make such works explicitly homoerotic in one of several ways. Usually he photographed the bodies of his subjects together in physically close, intimate poses, as illustrated in a photograph, 1953 (fig. 34) of two nude men. The models are positioned side-by-side in a sexually charged embrace while lying face down on a paint-speckled tarp, perhaps the same one used in Man in His

\textsuperscript{52} Alison de Lima Greene has suggested that, in this context, Lynes's photograph may even be interpreted as a subversive play on the traditional iconography and sanctity of Madonna and Child imagery.
Element. The models' desire for one another is hardly ambivalent. When Lynes did not
place his models together in such close contact, he sometimes made use of suggestive
props that could signify a sexual link between them. In Lynes's photograph Jared French
and Paul Cadmus, c. 1938 (fig. 35), for example, the models are not in close physical
contact with one another, but their torn clothing and sleeping bodies imply that a
passionate sexual encounter has just taken place, much like that suggested in Cadmus's
closely related etching Two Boys on A Beach, #1, 1938 (fig. 36).\(^{53}\)

In general, Lynes's photographs, even at their most erotic, appear calculated and
staged; the figures are rigid and devoid of movement, while there is little sense of gesture
or impulse. As both voyeur and artist, Lynes preferred to have complete control over his
subjects; he arranged his models with great care before the camera and did not seek to
capture spontaneity in the way that photographers such as Richard Avedon did. In many
respects, Lynes was the opposite of journalistic photographers who captured action as it
happened before their lens, or at least made it appear that way. In this light, Alfred
Eisenstaedt's V-J Day at Times Square, New York City, 1945 (fig. 37), perhaps the most
well-known example of voyeurism in the history of photography, offers a useful
comparison to Lynes's work. In this famous photograph, Eisenstaedt caught on film a
seemingly impetuous moment of celebratory passion between a man and a woman. While
this lusty heterosexual union could take place on the streets of New York in front of
countless individuals, the homoerotic couplings Lynes arranged in front of his camera
could only happen within the privacy of his studio, away from prying or disapproving

\(^{53}\)For a discussion of this etching, see Philip Eliassoph, Paul Cadmus: Yesterday and Today (Oxford, OH:
eyes. The resulting images—Man in His Element included—are not authentically voyeuristic in the strictest sense, meaning they do not record a real sexual act (one would expect sex and voyeurism to occur simultaneously). Rather, Lynes’s work, through its careful staging, recreates an artificial sense of voyeurism, but not the real thing. In Man in His Element, for example, the models appear to embrace following sex, but in reality, as will be shown later in this thesis, the opposite was true—the sex between the two men took place away from the camera, with Lynes watching, after the photography session concluded.

Although Lynes’s imagery is rife with all forms of sexual tension, both real and implied, he rarely photographed explicit sexual behavior; instead he preferred, as in Man in His Element, to suggest its occurrence. On at least one occasion, however, Lynes did photograph sexual activity between two men. This series, numbered 409, was taken on January 26, 1953 and depicts Leaphart with another black model named Bill Blizzard. Many of these images (fig. 38) show the two men embracing in a variety of poses on a mattress in front of Lynes’s camera. More explicitly, in a number of the images comprising series 409, such as negative 12 (fig. 39), Leaphart and Blizzard engage in fellatio. It is not known to whom and even if Lynes privately circulated these prints of Leaphart and Blizzard. Steward mistakenly remarked that Lynes “never took forthright

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54 Twenty negatives from series 409, numbered 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, and 29, are part of the Kinsey Institute’s collection. The numbered negatives comprising series 409 seem to be out of sequence, since the actions represented in the negatives do not enfold in the same chronology suggested by their numbering. The order of this particular series must have been mixed-up before they were numbered, perhaps during or immediately after the development of the negatives. The numbered negatives in series 375, however, seem to follow an expected chronology. Lynes mentioned that he photographed Leaphart and Blizzard together, but not that they had sex, in a letter from Lynes to Perlin, 3 February 1953.
pictures of explicit sexual activity," so obviously Steward never saw these images or else he would not have made such a definitive statement. Perhaps on those rare occasions that he did photograph men having sex, as with Leaphart and Blizzard, Lynes kept the prints to himself. Regardless of who did or did not receive these works, their function as a form of erotica for Lynes, a white gay man, offers a very different voyeuristic experience from the image of Leaphart and McCarthy embracing in *Man in His Element*. In series 409, the white viewer witnesses the sexual act in progress but is denied the opportunity to identify with either of the two black subjects. In *Man in His Element*, however, Lynes directly represents desire between a white and a black man, albeit with no explicit sexual interaction. As previously shown, the carefully staged image only implies that a sexual union has taken place. Furthermore, the issue of Lynes’s representation of interracial desire becomes much more complicated upon examination of different examples of the photographer’s interracial groupings, particularly those that more clearly subordinate the Other to his white counterpart.

**Disparities in Black and White**

In another photograph depicting an interracial grouping, Lynes revealed more overt discrepancies in privilege and power between his black and white subjects. The photograph, a 1934 portrait (fig. 40) of Frederick Ashton and three black dancers, provides a useful framework for understanding *Man in His Element* and the representation of black men throughout Lynes’s oeuvre. On February 6, 1934, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut opened its newly constructed Avery Theater with the

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premiere of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, an opera written by Gertrude Stein with music composed by Virgil Thomson and sets designed by Florine Stettheimer. Frederick Ashton, in his first professional appearance in America, served as the opera’s choreographer. *Four Saints in Three Acts* was also the first opera in the country to feature an all-black cast.\(^5\) As a friend of both the Atheneum’s director A. Everett “Chick” Austin and of Stein, Lynes was given the opportunity to photograph the opera’s participants. In this image, Ashton appears elevated above three of the opera’s principal dancers, who are all nude and lie before him. Certainly the audience never would have been privy to such a risqué scene. The choreographer is fully dressed in a fashionable dark suit and looks down at the three performers; his right hand rests on the neck of one dancer, while his left hand holds the arm of another. The third dancer looks upward at Ashton while reclining with one arm supporting his back and the other lying across the leg of a fellow performer. The photograph not only possesses a strong element of sexual tension between the individual dancers and choreographer, but Lynes has positioned the white choreographer as the dominant figure in the group.

The composition of the photograph features a classic pyramidal structure with the dancers’ bodies comprising the base and Ashton’s face occupying the pinnacle. Ashton’s white skin appears more prominent against the shadowy background and dark skin of the performers. The choreographer’s stylish dark suit not only signifies that he is a successful and cultured man, but it blends his body into the shadows, thus de-emphasizing the physical nature of Ashton’s work and authority. Only his face and hands—\(^5\)See Eugene R. Gaddis, ed., *Avery Memorial, Wadsworth Atheneum: The First Modern Museum* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1984), 35-9.
choreographer’s primary tools—are clearly visible in the darkness. In contrast, the three dancers, despite the fact that they did not perform in the nude, lie naked at the bottom of Lynes’s hierarchical pyramid. Without their clothing, they have no direct link to civilization. Lynes also masterfully illuminated the dancers’ muscular bodies and drew attention to their need for physical strength, in contrast to the more intellectual requirements of the choreographer. Although the three dancers outnumber Ashton and appear physically stronger, they lie beneath him like subordinates at the foot of their master. The white choreographer occupies an elevated physical and cultural position in relation to the black performers, the result of Lynes’s carefully constructed image that privileges Ashton’s race and class. The photograph reflects and perpetuates a common historical pattern of Western imperialism—a white minority’s domination of the indigenous majority populating its colonies. The white viewer identifies with Ashton, who has been cast in the role of imperialist oppressor, while the three anonymous, black cast members—all nude—symbolize the disenfranchised majority living under his rule.

Lynes’s portrait of Ashton follows in the tradition in Western art of representing those of European descent as either superior to or in conflict with those who are perceived as racially different. Although exceptions to this tradition certainly exist, the art historical canon is full of works of art in which blacks are shown serving white subjects or are cast in confrontational roles against them. In John Trumbull’s portrait George Washington, 1780 (fig. 41), for example, Washington proudly stands in the center of the painting, while his horse and a black attendant wearing a turban pose behind him, reinforcing
Washington's exalted stature and importance.\textsuperscript{57} As previously demonstrated, Géricault's \textbf{Boxers}, 1818 (fig. 16) depicts a more violent model of behavior for European and African men.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, Géricault has placed the conflict within a setting that defines the African man as the Other, since the audience for the boxing match consists of white men. Even works of art which at first seem to promote racial equality and affection between blacks and whites, such as Charles Cordier's sculpture \textbf{Fraternité}, 1867 (fig. 42), reinforce the notion of white superiority. In Cordier's sculpture, a black and a white child embrace, a seemingly touching gesture probably inspired by the recent end of slavery in America and the tense colonial relationship between France and Algeria. But Cordier's black child is noticeably smaller than his white counterpart and broken shackles are still visible around his ankles--a symbol of the life of servitude from which he recently had been freed.\textsuperscript{59}

Just as Lynes's portrait of Frederick Ashton and the three black dancers reaffirms the hegemony's racial hierarchy, a number of his photographs of individual black men reveal a similar outlook. As bell hooks stated, "to make one's self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish forever one's mainstream positionality."\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, Lynes found ways to assert his authority as a white man over the black models he seduced and photographed. It has long been accepted that in traditional heterosexual pornography, that is erotic images of


\textsuperscript{60}hooks, 23.
women produced for a male consumer, the man who does the looking dominates the woman who is the subject of his gaze. Yet Lynes’s photographs of the male nude, in which both the viewer and the subject of the gaze are male, subvert the traditional gendered power structure found in heterosexual pornography. Writing about Mapplethorpe’s photographs of black men, which certainly bear comparison to the work of Lynes, Kobena Mercer suggested that the “(homo)sexual sameness” of such imagery “transfers erotic investment in the fantasy of mastery from gender to racial difference.”

Mercer argued that photographers such as Mapplethorpe reconstruct the hierarchical relationship between the white gay viewer and black male subject by fetishizing bodily signifiers of racial Otherness and depicting the body of the Other as feminine and passive.

One might argue that Lynes used such pictorial strategies in a photograph (fig. 43), 1938 of an unknown nude black man in order to subordinate him to the white male viewer. Standing before the camera with his hands held behind his back as if bound, Lynes’s model appears emasculated. The nudity and potentially bound hands of Lynes’s subject dramatically evoke the image of the naked savage, helpless before and subordinate to his white master. The photographer has cropped the image in a manner that reveals a dark mass of the man’s pubic hair but conceals his penis, thus giving his genitals a distinctly vaginal appearance. The hiding of his hands, legs, and phallus denies the subject those attributes traditionally associated with male virility and power. The image stands in

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62 Ibid., 311-8.
sharp contrast to Lynes’s representation of a powerful white male body seen in another undated photograph (fig. 44). While this figure appears strong and in control, the black man’s coquettish turn of his head and seductive glance make him seem feminine and passive. He has been relegated to a position traditionally assigned to the female body in Western art, an object of desire for an assumed male audience. In addition to feminizing his subject’s body, Lynes has emphasized the man’s racial Otherness; his wide, toothy smile links him to a common racist stereotype that has been a staple of American consumer culture throughout the twentieth century—the image of smiling black servants promoting packaged food to middle class shoppers. The grins on the faces of both Aunt Jemima (fig. 45) and Lynes’s unknown model reassured the white viewer-consumer that blacks were content and willing to serve.

Lynes’s 1938 photograph of this unknown black model is similar to another series, known as 373, that he took of Johnny Leaphart on October 23, 1952, a week before he photographed McCarthy and Leaphart together in series 375. In these images, Leaphart posed before the camera in much the same way as the anonymous figure in the 1938 print. In negative 6 (fig. 46), for example, Leaphart stands before the camera and stares into the lens with his arms folded. His genitals are cropped, thus feminizing his body. His thick lips and dark skin—the signifiers of his racial Otherness—have been accentuated and fetishized through Lynes’s careful manipulation of lighting. In negative 20 (fig. 6),
Leaphart's pose is rendered even more passive; he stands with his back to the camera and presents himself to the viewer as an object to be penetrated by his gaze and phallus.

"When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other," noted Hooks.

Lynes's image of Leaphart in negative 6 (fig. 46) bears uncanny formal and conceptual resemblance to an early example of instrumental photography, J. T. Zealy's daguerreotype Renty, 1850 (fig. 47). The Harvard University natural scientist Louis Agassiz commissioned Zealy's image as part of a series intended to demonstrate the physical differences and alleged inferiority of Africans to Europeans. Renty, a native of the African Congo who lived on the plantation of B. F. Taylor in Columbia, South Carolina, was one of the slaves chosen for the exercise. Agassiz wanted visual evidence to support his belief that blacks and whites did not share a common ancestor, a widely accepted theory at the time which helped justify white America's enslavement of Africans. Although separated by eighty-eight years and created for different purposes--one for science, the other in the name of art--the poses of Renty and Leaphart are eerily similar. Both men are stripped, displayed from the waist-up, and placed in front of a neutral background that divorces them from any cultural signifiers. Their isolation before the camera enabled Zealy and Lynes to focus attention almost exclusively on the physical characteristics of their respective models. The two photographers not only highlighted

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66 Hooks, 23.
their subjects' racial features, particularly the darkness of skin, hair, and eyes, but also the signs of their ages. Zealy’s daguerreotype recorded Renty’s scars and withered body, the result of a life of enslavement at the hands of his white masters. Lynes, in contrast, gently illuminated Leaphart’s smooth, youthful skin. Whereas Zealy’s daguerreotype was made to reassure white men that they were genetically superior to Africans, Lynes created this image of Leaphart to arouse himself and other gay white men and to encourage their furtive desire for the bodies of his black subjects. Yet with its striking similarities to Zealy’s disturbing daguerreotype, Lynes’s photograph of Leaphart also reveals how his desire for black men was connected to a need he felt, as a member of the racial hegemony, to express and assert his superiority over those who were racially different.

Racial Ambivalence

Lynes’s racial coding in such photographs may offer some perspective on the complicated spectacle of race presented in Man in His Element, but it does not necessarily provide the answer to it. Although it is possible to describe the content of this particular image and others like it as racist, a fixed interpretation of Man in His Element based on visual analysis alone is not possible. McCarthy’s shaved white body has been fragmented and fetishized as much, if not more so, than that of Leaphart. In addition, assuming Leaphart, like McCarthy, received complimentary copies of the prints from this series, would their voyeuristic dynamic have changed when viewed by a black male audience? To complicate further the reading of the image as an example of racial domination, both models appear to be willing participants in Lynes’s photographic exercise, and at the time, perhaps enjoyed it. Most importantly, the work visualizes the white oppressor’s desire for
the body of the Other, and it represents an intimate moment between members of two racial groups normally represented as unequal adversaries. As hooks explained:

whether or not desire for contact with the Other...can act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance, is an unrealized political possibility. Exploring how desire for the Other is expressed, manipulated, and transformed by encounters with difference and the different is a critical terrain that can indicate whether these potentially revolutionary longings are ever fulfilled. 68

The ambiguity of Man in His Element and Lynes’s other images depicting black men is not unlike that which Kobena Mercer found inscribed within Mapplethorpe’s photographs. Although Mercer presented convincing arguments for a racist reading of Mapplethorpe’s photographs of blacks, he also recognized their potential as anti-racist visual statements. Depending on one’s subjectivity, a viewer could interpret Mapplethorpe’s classically derived imagery as a means of elevating black men, individuals historically excluded from the classical canon, to the level of aesthetic ideals. Thus, Mapplethorpe’s photographs may be interpreted as a means of critiquing the racist, exclusionary practices of the classical tradition, despite their objectification and exploitation of the black male body. 69 Similarly, Man in His Element is open to a number of interpretive possibilities with regard to its racial content, depending of course on the viewer’s perspective. This racial ambivalence in fact seems to have been an integral feature of the photograph and its variants, and ultimately, one that influenced Lynes’s written narration of their creation. Given that Man in His Element and the other images

68hooks, 22.
from series 375 were such provocative photographs, and their audience may have interpreted their racially charged, yet ambivalent subject matter in different ways, it is possible that Lynes felt a need to influence the viewers’ perceptions of these works based on his own beliefs about race and class. Furthermore, since Lynes utilized the postal service to distribute prints from series 375, letter writing was the most natural and effective way for him to influence the audience’s encounter with his imagery. When Lynes’s photographs are viewed along with the letters that narrated them, as in the case of series 375, their racial coding becomes considerably less ambivalent. Before exploring this issue further, however, a look at the cultural, social, and political conditions of America in the early 1950s provides a useful context from which to view Lynes’s work and how he framed the racial coding of *Man in His Element* and its variants.
Chapter II
Man in His Element in the Context of 1952

Private Images/Public Spaces

When George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute opened in September 1993 at the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center of New York University, it was the most ambitious and scholarly presentation of Lynes’s imagery to date. James Crump’s well researched catalogue and the publicity generated in the gay and mainstream press from the exhibition probably did more to increase awareness of Lynes’s work than any past endeavors. The exhibition contained one hundred thirty-five photographs and featured a wide range of Lynes’s work, including commercial images for Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar, formal portraits, and dance photographs for the New York City Ballet. More than half of the photographs in the exhibition were male nudes, the subject that engaged Lynes throughout his career and was the most difficult for him to show in public.

It was fitting, albeit in an ironic sense, that these intimate photographs, secluded for years in the archives of the Kinsey Institute, finally received so much public attention and scrutiny. Buddy McCarthy admitted he was surprised to see the image (fig. 4) of himself and Johnny Leaphart anonymously reproduced in the exhibition review in the New York Times. McCarthy in fact claims to have destroyed the prints from this series that Lynes gave to him years ago because he feared that they might be discovered by his

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70 See Hagen. The two prints (fig. 3 and fig. 4) from series 375 exhibited at the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center of New York University in 1993 were on public view just a few blocks away from McCarthy’s current place of business, an antique store on Bleecker Street called Treasures & Trifles. According to McCarthy, when the photograph (fig. 4) from series 375 was reproduced in Charles Hagen’s review in the New York Times, a friend called to tell him his picture was in the paper. He was embarrassed, but with good humor, that the supposedly anonymous image found its way into the paper and he was recognized; Buddy McCarthy, Interview with the author, 12 September 1995, New York City.
family.\textsuperscript{71} McCarthy’s uncomfortable surprise at seeing the photograph from series 375 in a newspaper reinforces an important point stressed in Crump’s catalogue, but, as is often the case with museum presentations, was lost amidst the gallery’s elegant installation and its aestheticization of Lynes’s prints—the majority of his male nudes were produced for private consumption.\textsuperscript{72} At the time Lynes created these homoerotic images, they were not intended to be matted, framed, and installed in a museum setting, as we see them today. While Lynes clearly valued his photographs of the male nude and viewed them as a form of art, he could not easily show them to the public as such. Thus, during his lifetime, the photographer was never able to see an exhibition like Photographs from the Kinsey Institute, which so openly displayed a large number of his male nudes on the walls of a prestigious New York gallery.

\textbf{A Hint of Scandal}

In the last four decades, cultural attitudes about homosexuality, race, and the medium of photography have changed dramatically. While today an audience accustomed to seeing the male body commodified and objectified in everything from commercials for Calvin Klein to Mapplethorpe’s explicit sexual imagery would hardly think twice about Lynes’s photographs of the male body, in the early 1950s, such work would have been viewed very differently. Although there is little surviving evidence that demonstrates

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid. In another interview, McCarthy suggested he also was troubled by the photographs of series 375 “because some of them looked as though they [Leaphart and McCarthy] were making love.” McCarthy also remarked that the interracial coupling was disturbing to him, and that the man with whom he was living at the time also “was very displeased with the pictures.” See McCarthy, interview with David Leddick, 3 February 1995, Miami Beach, Florida. I am grateful to Mr. Leddick for sharing his notes from this interview with me.

\textsuperscript{72}Crump, \textit{George Platt Lynes}, 149.
Lynes's homoerotic imagery ever caused a scandal, one revealing incident suggests that it probably would have. In 1954, Lynes sent a group of publications, which included some of his photographs for the New York City Ballet, to the Kinsey Institute as a donation to its archive. In a letter sent to an employee of the Kinsey Institute, Lynes described the contents of the gift and commented about an incident that had occurred several years earlier involving the inclusion of one of his nude photographs in a ballet program:

three of the programs for The New York City Ballet Company contain much the same material. The one containing the nude of Nicholas Magallanes is by way of being an "item." It was withdrawn by the company management, though not until several thousand copies had been sold. On grounds of prudishness, a number of people complained—notably (so I was told) the dancer [X] who, as one-time wife of Balanchine, was in a position of influence. 73

The image (fig. 48) that allegedly caused the program to be withdrawn was a variant from the series (fig. 49) Lynes photographed on July 26, 1950 for the New York City Ballet's production of Orpheus. 74 The series featured two ballet dancers—Nicholas Magallanes and Francisco Moncion—posing very suggestively in the nude.

73 Letter from Lynes to Eleanor L. Roehr, 28 October 1954. The correspondence between Lynes and the Kinsey Institute cited in this thesis is from the collection of the Kinsey Institute and is used with its permission. For reasons of privacy the Kinsey Institute redacted the name of the dancer, referred to in this passage as X, from the copy of the letter they sent to me.

74 The New York City Ballet first performed Orpheus in 1948. At the time I was writing this text, the Kinsey Institute was not able to provide me with copies of the New York City Ballet programs Lynes mailed to them in 1954. Madeleine M. Nichols, Curator of the Dance Collection at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, located a program dated 1951 with a nude photograph of Nicholas Magallanes. Most likely, it is the same one mentioned in Lynes's letter. A variant of this program also exists; it is similar to the aforementioned program but it includes a photograph of Magallanes fully clothed instead of in the nude. Perhaps this program was printed following the controversy in order to replace the withdrawn version. According to Ms. Nichols, the Dance Collection has no record of the controversy which Lynes described; letter from Madeleine M. Nichols to the author, 16 February 1996. James Crump first brought this incident to light in Crump, George Platt Lynes, 142.
In the photograph reproduced in the ballet program, Magallanes stands in profile and holds a lyre, one of the set pieces designed for the production by Isamu Noguchi. Magallanes's body is bathed in soft light and cropped below the knees. Moncion's face is concealed, but he reaches upward in a phallic gesture and gently touches his dance partner on the elbow. Although the image does not show frontal nudity, it is a sexually charged work; Magallanes stands directly over Moncion, whose outstretched arm is so close to his dance partner that it seems to touch his genitals. Like Man in His Element, Lynes's Orpheus series also has an interracial component—Magallanes was white, while Moncion, a native of the Dominican Republic, was black. The dancers' racial differences were minimized, however, through Lynes's soft lighting and exposure. In addition, in the photograph that appears in the withdrawn ballet program, Lynes focused primarily on Magallanes, the white dancer. A close variant (fig. 50) of this photograph shows Moncion's face in shadow in the lower right corner of the image; the print is even more sexually charged than the version in the ballet program, as Moncion looks longingly at Magallanes. It appears that Lynes used airbrushing to conceal Moncion's face in the version published in the ballet program, perhaps hoping to minimize further the print's overt homoeroticism and interracial theme.

Although the legend of Orpheus is primarily a heterosexual love story concerning Orpheus's loss of and subsequent attempt to rescue his wife Eurydice from the underworld, Lynes's photographs of the production reconstruct the sometimes conveniently overlooked homoerotic component of the storyline. While Eurydice

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75 Lynes's Orpheus series is discussed in Ellenzweig, 98-104.
remains imprisoned in the underworld, Orpheus turns to the love of young boys instead of another woman so as to remain faithful, from the ancient Greek point of view, to his marital vows. The two male dancers shown in Lynes's Orpheus series of course performed the ballet wearing costumes, but Lynes chose to photograph them in the nude as they cavorted together in a variety of campy poses, a daring gesture for 1950, just as his portrait of Frederick Ashton posing with dancers from Four Saints in Three Acts would have been in 1934. When the New York City Ballet published a memorial compilation of Lynes's dance photographs in 1957, seven years after Lynes created the Orpheus series, the image (fig. 51) reproduced in the catalogue commemorating the Orpheus production possessed a more conventional heterosexual tone. In this photograph, the dancers are fully clothed as Eurydice clings to Orpheus. Only a subtle hint of Orpheus's homoerotic sub-plot is evident in the right side of the photograph, where a man's hand is seen holding Noguchi's phallic lyre toward the couple. The image is a far cry from the dramatic sensuality and overt homoeroticism seen in the nude photographs of Magallanes and Moncion.

It was ironic but not surprising that the ballet, a traditional haven for gay men, pulled the program featuring Lynes's homoerotic photograph of Orpheus. Perhaps the company's management did so because it did not want to draw attention to the presence of homosexuals in the organization at a time when the national political environment was conservative and increasingly homophobic. Regardless, the scandal involving Lynes's print from the Orpheus series, however minor, illustrates the kind of reception the

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76For a discussion of the Greek legend of Orpheus and its homoerotic components, see Ellenzweig, 59.
photographer's more explicit male nudes might have received if they had been shown in public, and the reason why he devised more private methods for exhibiting images such as Man in His Element.

Public Displays

Given the negative response to Lynes's Orpheus photograph, it is doubtful that Man in His Element or any of the other images from series 375 were ever exhibited publicly or seen by more than a select few after they were made. Jack Woody suggested that Lynes could not afford to exhibit his male nudes and risk causing a scandal that might drive away the clients for his fashion photographs,77 perhaps another factor that contributed to his distaste for commercial photography. Aside from the potential controversy that could have resulted from public display of an image that so frankly depicted the social taboos of homosexuality and interracial affection, Lynes had very few opportunities to display any of his photographs in commercial galleries or museums during the last decade of his life. Lynes's last documented public exhibition was a group show entitled Seventeen American Photographers held at the Los Angeles County Art Museum in 1948. Prior to that, his last major solo exhibition was in 1941 in New York at Pierre Matisse Gallery.78 The decline in Lynes's exhibition opportunities paralleled the personal and financial troubles that plagued the photographer from the early 1940s until his death from cancer in 1955. During this period, Lynes allegedly lost interest in commercial photography--the principal source of his income--and instead focused on photographing

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77 Woody, George Platt Lynes, 10.
78 For a selected exhibition chronology, see Weiermair, George Platt Lynes (1989), 120.
the male nude, a subject that was more personally satisfying to Lynes but financially unrewarding. 79

Since Lynes had so few opportunities to show photographs in the late 1940s and early 1950s, one must examine his exhibitions in the 1930s and early 1940s to understand more about the kind of imagery he was able to show to the public during his career. In the early 1930s, Lynes was well on his way to becoming a successful commercial photographer; it was also at this time that he seriously began to take photographs of the male nude. 80 Although Lynes's earliest public exhibitions focused primarily on his most marketable work--portraiture--on occasion he did show nudes, both male and female. In 1934, the exhibition Fifty Photographs by George Platt Lynes was shown in New York at Julien Levy Gallery. The exhibition checklist indicates that all of the works were portraits except for two nudes--one male and one female. 81 Although it is not known which two nudes Lynes exhibited at Levy's gallery, by displaying one female nude alongside that of a male among such a large number of portraits, the gallery could diffuse any speculation or suspicion about Lynes's interest in photographing the male body.

Such sexual ambiguity was even more evident in the large solo exhibition entitled Two Hundred Portraits by George Platt Lynes Plus an Assortment of Less Formal Pictures of People at Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1941. 82 Like his 1934 exhibition at Julien

79 For a discussion of Lynes's personal and financial troubles in the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Crump, George Platt Lynes, 143-6.
80 Crump, George Platt Lynes, 150.
81 A checklist of the installation and an essay by Glenway Wescott were included in the exhibition brochure; see Glenway Wescott, Fifty Photographs by George Platt Lynes (New York: Julien Levy Gallery, 1934).
82 The brochure accompanying this exhibition featured a checklist with the names of Lynes's portrait subjects and another essay by Glenway Wescott; see Glenway Wescott, Two Hundred Portraits by George Platt Lynes Plus an Assortment of Less Formal Pictures of People (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1941).
Levy Gallery, this installation was comprised mostly of portraits with a small selection of nudes. The nude images were not overtly homoerotic, and in fact, the content of many of these works was decidedly heterosexual. At the entrance to the exhibition (fig. 52), for example, a large photograph of a male dancer balancing his female partner in a precarious pose greeted visitors. Lynes’s depiction of the two nude dancers may have been viewed as daring and even somewhat erotic, but the image projected normality in that it depicted an attractive, healthy, strong, and outwardly heterosexual pair. One might argue that the pairing of a man and woman in this prominently displayed photograph set the tone for the entire exhibition. Inside the galleries (fig. 53), Lynes also displayed a chaste selection of nudes, again both male and female, as part of his “Assortment of Less Formal Pictures of People.” These prints were collaged to boards hanging on the walls in a manner that resembled pages from a scrapbook. The scattered look of this installation prevented the viewer’s attention from focusing exclusively on one particular image, and among the few male nudes, none seemed as overtly homoerotic as Man in His Element.83

In addition to showing at some of New York’s commercial galleries in the 1930s and early 1940s, Lynes also found representation in the city’s museums, although once again, not for his overtly homoerotic imagery. As many photographers discovered, it was difficult to have their work shown or acquired by a major museum at all, since at the time, photography was not considered as legitimate an art form as more traditional media such as painting and sculpture. Furthermore, only a few American museums even collected

83The Lynes Study Collection at the Museum of Modern Art contains a selection of images from the installation of Lynes’s exhibition at Pierre Matisse Gallery. These images were dated 1944 by the cataloguer, but in all likelihood they depict the 1941 exhibition. My thanks to Thomas Collins for his assistance in obtaining reproductions of these images.
photography in the 1930s and 1940s. The first institution to form a department of photography was the Museum of Modern Art, which was actively exhibiting and collecting photographs in the 1930s,\(^4\) the same time that Lynes's career was near its peak. As with his shows at Julien Levy and Pierre Matisse Galleries, Lynes exhibited some male nudes at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1932, he displayed the photographic mural *American Landscape*, 1932 (fig. 54) in the exhibition *Murals by American Painters and Photographers*, curated by Lincoln Kirstein and Julien Levy.\(^5\) Although the image included two male nudes and some classical references, a traditional coded signifier for homosexuality,\(^6\) Lynes’s use of double printing and abstraction effectively masked the work’s homoerotic subject matter and made it acceptable for public display.\(^7\)

In 1936, Lynes also exhibited one of his best known photographs, *The Sleepwalker*, 1935 (fig. 55), at the Museum of Modern Art in *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism*, curated by Alfred H. Baar, Jr. Lynes’s photograph was entry number 562 and was shown under the category “Artists Independent of the Dada and Surrealists Movements.”\(^8\) *The Sleepwalker* was printed from two negatives and then airbrushed; the legs of a standing male nude are shown from behind, while a rectangular platform, upon which rests a male nude sleeping in a fetal position, is balanced on the top of the legs.\(^9\)

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\(^6\)See Aldrich, 136-61.

\(^7\)For a discussion of this work, see Crump, *George Platt Lynes*, 140.

\(^8\)Alfred H. Baar, Jr., *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 234.

The title of the photograph describes the work's content with deadpan humor. Yet like *American Landscape*, *The Sleepwalker*’s Surrealistic touches and inclusion in an exhibition of “Fantastic Art” made the mildly homoerotic image seem less real, and thus, less threatening to the general public.

Although Lynes exhibited in these important exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, and he was well-connected socially to members of the museum’s hierarchy—many of whom were gay men—the only works by Lynes to be accessioned into the museum’s collection during his lifetime were two photographs—portraits of André Gide and Marc Chagall—which were included in the *20th Century Portraits* exhibition curated by Munroe Wheeler in 1942.⁹⁰ Uptown, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Lynes fared somewhat better in terms of the number of his photographs acquired by the institution, but as with the Museum of Modern Art, none of his homoerotic male nudes entered the Metropolitan’s collection during his lifetime. In 1941, the same year that Lynes had his large portrait exhibition at Pierre Matisse Gallery, the Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased twenty-eight of his photographs. Of these images, twenty-three were portraits, three were fashion studies, and the remaining two showed dance performances, one of which included some nudity. Another figure study came into the collection in 1941, but there is no record of the source; the photograph is one of Lynes’s early experiments with solarization.⁹¹

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⁹⁰Munroe Wheeler, *20th Century Portraits* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942), 139. As noted in Chapter I, Wheeler and Lynes were lovers. During a research visit to the Museum of Modern Art in September 1993, I examined the Department of Photography’s accessions records pertaining to Lynes’s work. While today the institution owns a sizable collection of Lynes’s photographs, including many male nudes, these materials did not come to the museum until after his death in 1955.

⁹¹Malcolm R. Daniel, Assistant Curator in the Department of Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, provided me with this information about the institution’s acquisition of Lynes’s work. Like the
Private Showings

It is not clear who prevented Lynes from showing his homoerotic male nudes in public--gallery dealers, curators, or perhaps the artist himself. It is evident, however, that Lynes was able to find a sympathetic audience for these images, albeit using somewhat unconventional methods and venues. In the early 1950s, for example, Lynes published male nudes in several issues of Der Kreis, an important early gay journal produced in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s. Circulating primarily among gay men in Europe and America, the publication provided Lynes with a way to reach a much larger and more appreciative audience than ever before. One issue (fig. 56) of the magazine in fact included a variant print (fig. 49) of Lynes’s controversial Orpheus series. Incidentally, after submitting photographs to Der Kreis using his real name for several years, Lynes adopted the amusing name “Roberto Rolf.” James Crump suggested that Lynes used this name because he “must have felt pressured by his submissions to Der Kreis, and the possible repercussions he would encounter in his professional career.”

While it may have been risky for Lynes to publish his male nudes in Der Kreis, it was safer for him to exhibit such work within the privacy of his home. Samuel Steward reminisced about a private viewing in Lynes’s New York apartment in 1951:

There were hundreds of pictures in a vague kind of order in the boxes and files--ballet, fashion, young men, nudes.

Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art currently houses a substantial collection of Lynes’s prints, including a number of male nudes, but the bulk of this collection was formed following the photographer’s death.

92Lynes is known to have published photographs in the July 1950, December 1950, February 1951, July 1952, and March 1954 issues of Der Kreis. The July 1950 issue of Der Kreis includes an article about Lynes in German. My thanks to Jensen Yow for loaning me his copies of these publications.
93Der Kreis, February 1951.
94Lynes submitted photographs to Der Kreis using the name “Roberto Rolf” in the July 1952 and March 1954 issues.
95Crump, George Platt Lynes, 153.
Naturally, I concentrated on the young male nudes. In 1951, the chance to see or own such things was small. There was no domestic production of pornography, literature was still clamped up, baskets were lip-licked over if you did happen to find a photograph that had not been airbrushed. We treasured such small snippets, those crumbs falling to feed our desire. If you wanted nudity, or explicit sex in either pictures or writing, you had to pay dearly for it—if you could find it. Things were looser than they had been in the 1920s, yes—but the grip of the puritan fist was still tight on the land—and Joe McCarthy was waiting in the wings.96

During this private showing, Lynes graciously allowed Steward to keep some photographs from his archive, and Steward rather greedily selected fifty prints and took them back home.97 Although Lynes’s homoerotic nudes were generally not shown in public, they were prized possessions among his circle of gay friends. Steward obviously cherished and took good care of them, as such artistic photographs of the male nude were difficult and dangerous to obtain:

When I got the images [from Lynes] back to Chicago, I hardly knew what to do with them. Such goodies were prime targets for rip-offs. I therefore lightly glued (Thank heavens, I used only white library paste!) each 8” x 10” photograph to a sheet of black paper interleaved between acetate and put the whole thing in a notebook. Even so, though it was under my watchful eye each time I showed it to friends, I lost one acetate slip cover—and, therefore, two photographs. ...[T]he male nudes themselves—hauntingly beautiful, revelatory from a psychosexual viewpoint—were considered great prizes, and legitimate articles for thieving back in those days. You stole whatever you could, whenever it was possible.”98

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96 Steward, "George Platt Lynes," 22.
97 ibid.
98 ibid.
Steward's scrapbook represents an important alternative exhibition method for Lynes's photographs of the male nude. The album proved to be ideal for both preserving the photographs and conveniently showing them to interested viewers. It is not known what became of the album that Steward mentioned, given that he sold some of his Lynes photographs to Jack Woody in the late 1970s, the album, or at least part of it, may have been broken up and its contents dispersed.

Lynes also kept scrapbooks of his own, not only to show his photographs, but to keep clippings and amusing pictures from the popular press. It would seem that many gay men at this time kept such albums as a means of collecting, preserving, and sharing ephemeral materials relating to gay culture. Buddy McCarthy, for example, still keeps the photographs Lynes gave him in the same three-ring binder (fig. 57) he used in the 1950s. Like Steward, McCarthy put the photographs back-to-back inside acetate sleeves so one could easily flip through the images like pages in a book. Although McCarthy apparently did not keep the prints Lynes gave him of series 375, his scrapbook contained a number of images showing himself, Lynes, and various other men, both clothed and nude.

One of the most ambitious of these scrapbook projects was that undertaken by the writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten, who, although married, was homosexual and an active participant in New York's gay sub-culture. Like Lynes, Van Vechten possessed a strong urge to document aspects of his personal experience and social context through visual and literary images. Van Vechten's private albums, now part of the Yale Collection

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99 It is not known what became of the album that Steward mentioned; given that he sold some of his Lynes photographs to Jack Woody in the late 1970s, the album, or at least part of it, may have been broken up and its contents dispersed.

100 The Kinsey Institute archive includes reproductions of pages from Lynes's scrapbooks, and Frederick R. Koch also owns several of the photographer's private albums. Lynes once mentioned showing his nude scrapbook to a friend of Glenway Wescott in a letter from Lynes to Perlman, 2 April 1952. Samuel Steward also discussed looking at one of Lynes's scrapbooks in Steward, "George Platt Lynes," 22.

101 McCarthy, interview with the author. During this interview, Mr. McCarthy was kind enough to show me his Lynes scrapbooks and allow me to photograph it.

102 McCarthy's scrapbook includes a number of photographs from series 342 (see fig. 21 and fig. 24) and portraits of Lynes, Bill Miller, and Alexander J. Yow, among others; all of these men were acquainted with one another.
of American Literature of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, were a monumental undertaking that comprise eighteen bound volumes. Each scrapbook contains pages full of pasted headlines, articles, pictures, erotica, and artwork with references to homosexuality, gender variance, camp, and other aspects of queer culture; much of this material derives from the popular press and dates from the 1930s through the 1950s, although Van Vechten probably assembled the scrapbooks in the mid-1950s.\textsuperscript{103} Jonathan Weinberg noted that a number of Van Vechten’s photographs of the male nude are contained in these albums as well, and they are “similar to if not as polished as the work of his contemporary George Platt Lynes.”\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, Lynes and Van Vechten had much in common; both were gay, interested in photography and literature, and active in artsy, highbrow social circles. It is not a coincidence that both Lynes and Van Vechten kept these scrapbooks containing their respective work. As Weinberg noted, “we can imagine Van Vechten and his friends at private parties laughing over the jokes of [his albums],”\textsuperscript{105} just as Lynes’s friends must have enjoyed looking at his private scrapbooks and homoerotic photographs during their gatherings.

The personal scrapbooks kept by Lynes, Steward, McCarthy, and other gay men in the 1950s offer an intriguing parallel to the private albums created by middle and upper-middle class European women during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{106} These small albums, usually made from bound pages of watercolors and sketches, depict the secluded domestic

\textsuperscript{103}For a discussion of the creation and contents of Van Vechten’s scrapbook, see Jonathan Weinberg, “‘Boy Crazy’: Carl Van Vechten’s Queer Collection,” \textit{The Yale Journal of Criticism} 7 (Fall 1994): 25-49.
\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{106}I am grateful to Daniel J. Sherman for pointing out the connections between these two different forms of the scrapbook.
world and experiences of women. Oftentimes, pages from these albums show women working within the home and engaged in traditionally feminine social activities and pastimes. Like the Lynes scrapbooks, these albums have not received the same popular and scholarly recognition as more traditional art forms and are accessible to researchers primarily through private channels. In her compelling study of these largely unknown works, Anne Higonnet demonstrated how these scrapbooks, although created and circulated within a private, domestic realm, participated fully in the construction and expression of particular values relating to women's gender roles. According to Higonnet, women's albums were "microcosmic versions of their [maker's] social networks" and "were destined for a secluded family life, within which they would be understood as memorials to emotional bonds and private histories."\textsuperscript{107} Subsequently, "no one album picture makes much sense by itself--its meaning only emerges in its relationship to other pictures in the same album, and from the situation of the album in the life-cycle of its maker and her family."\textsuperscript{108}

Although derived from very different sources, Higonnet's observations are equally relevant to the scrapbooks created by Lynes and his peers. The pages of McCarthy's photographic scrapbook (fig. 57), for example, document the faces and bodies comprising the private gay world of Lynes and his friends. The meaning of these photographs most likely would have been lost or skewed when they were seen individually, but when viewed and explained together in the format of a scrapbook, the images illustrate McCarthy's identity as a gay man and involvement with Lynes and his social network. More

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., 33.
importantly, the album and its contents participated in the construction and perpetuation of this clique’s particular social values, customs, and desires. Through their private circulation in such scrapbooks, Lynes’s photographs united their gay viewers and gave them a common, idealized voyeuristic experience.

The scrapbooks in which Lynes’s photographs were stored and displayed should also be viewed in relation to the limited edition picture books that a number of prosperous fine art photographers published in the 1940s and 1950s, such as Edward Weston’s famous monograph 50 Photographs by Edward Weston.\(^{109}\) Weston’s elegant book was published in 1947 in an edition of 1,500 copies. It contained, in addition to the fifty full-page reproductions of his prints, laudatory statements about the photographer from the book’s other contributors and remarks from Weston himself. While exhibitions of photography were still rare in most museums and cities at this time, such books could bring a photographer added prestige and sales, in addition to presenting his or her work to new and larger audiences. Naturally, such publications were expensive to produce, and thus, had to have strong financial backing and commercial marketability. Lynes expressed interest in publishing a book of his portrait work, but unfortunately, he was never able to see the project to completion.\(^{110}\) He did, however, discuss the idea with his friend Bernard Perlin:

[Monroe Wheeler] wants, as I’ve wanted and as many of my friends have wanted, me to publish a book of portraits. The hitch is obvious. Picture books are so expensive to produce and have to sell for so much that publishers are very (most boringly) cautious. The big expenses are, of course, the

\(^{109}\)Merle Armitage, Donald Bear, Robinson Jeffers, and Edward Weston, 50 Photographs by Edward Weston (New York: Duell Sloan & Pearce, 1947). Diane Dillon first suggested comparing the Lynes scrapbooks to contemporaneous fine art photography books.

\(^{110}\)Crump, George Platt Lynes, 142.
plates and the paper. Mon[roe]'s notion is that I collect the plates and then offer them to a publisher—maybe to one I know: Harold Guinzburg of Viking or Frank MacGregor of Harper—have them made a few at a time as I collect funds. He further proposes that I stand up my friends for a plate apiece. It'll be a fun game and I think will work. Obviously I can't pay for them all myself. I'll need about 150 of them @ about $17 each. You'll be, you are in fact being, asked to contribute one. Your mug'll be included, of course, but which? At the moment I fancy the profile with the endless naked leg.111

Near the end of his life, not long before he was diagnosed with cancer, Lynes also discussed with the publishers of Der Kreis the possibility of producing a book of his nudes called American Beauty. Citing personal reasons, Lynes abruptly canceled the project in early 1955, and he died within a year. His poor health and shaky financial circumstances undoubtedly played a role in his decision.112 While Weston's expensive picture book represented a way for photographers to display their work outside of the gallery system, the personal scrapbooks Lynes and his friends kept were important alternatives to such conventional publications. Societal disapproval of homosexuality prevented Lynes from seeking a mainstream publisher for a picture book containing his male nudes, and he could not raise the necessary funds to produce one about his portraiture. Lynes could, however, circumvent the obstacles he encountered in the publishing world by producing personal scrapbooks. These albums were, of course, simple and inexpensive to make, and Lynes could distribute his prints to friends so they could make ones for themselves. Kept and shown within this tight network of gay men, these scrapbooks offered Lynes the opportunity to show his work to an appreciative, and most importantly, private audience.

111Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 19 June 1952.
112Crump, George Platt Lynes, 153.
Lynes and Kinsey

The private manner in which Lynes’s images of the male nude were distributed and shown made it difficult for the photographer to earn money from them. In the early 1950s, Lynes’s need for cash and desire to find a sympathetic home for his male nudes influenced his decision to sell examples of his work to Dr. Alfred Kinsey, founder of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction in Bloomington, Indiana. Kinsey was well-known for the publication of his controversial studies of human sexuality and his tolerant view of homosexuality. Kinsey and Lynes first met in 1949 through Glenway Wescott, and the two men developed an important relationship. Lynes introduced Kinsey to other gay artists and writers who were willing to share their work with him and to participate in his research interviews. Kinsey took a liking to Lynes’s photography—particularly his male nudes—and began to purchase examples of it.113 According to the Kinsey Institute, Kinsey collected such material “as empirical evidence of the reality of the existence of human sexual behaviors and fantasies, particularly those that did not fit the beliefs of the conservative morality of America in the 1930s, forties, and fifties.”114 It is debatable, of course, whether or not Lynes’s photographs could serve as empirical evidence for Kinsey’s alleged purposes. As Melody D. Davis noted, “Lynes’s work does not represent data upon which we can deduce much of anything about sex, other than, at times, a certain cheeky campiness that signals itself as gay, a style more cultural than sexual. The incorporation of his highly stylized nudes into ‘proof’ of sexuality, or homosexuality, reveals more about the particularity of Kinsey’s thinking than

113Crump, George Platt Lynes, 145.
anything actually in the images." Regardless of its scientific legitimacy, Kinsey's obsessive collecting practices formed the heart of the Kinsey Institute's vast archive, and today, the institution houses approximately 75,000 photographic images relating to the study of human sexuality; included in this archive are approximately 600 prints and 1,200 negatives by Lynes. As already mentioned, the 8 x 10 inch negatives for *Man in His Element* and fifteen others from series 375 belong to the Kinsey Institute.

It seems unlikely that Kinsey actually purchased the negatives comprising series 375 from Lynes, although he did buy many other prints from the photographer. Because of Kinsey's financial support and interest, Lynes decided to donate a large number of negatives to the institution near the end of his life; most likely, the negatives from series 375 were a part of this gift. Lynes wrote to Kinsey:

> I want to make a new will--my old one is wonderfully out of date--and of course the question of what to do about my negatives comes up. The important portrait negatives probably will go to some or other university; I'll ask somebody else's advice about that. But what of the nudes? Who would want them? I don't want them buried in some archive. I do want prints to be available to anybody who may want them. They are not, as you know, "pornographic," and as many as not (or am I wrong about this?) are pure and plain enough to satisfy even the postal authorities. I would offer them to you, to your foundation, but I understand that material, once in, never again sees the light of day--at least so far as the general public is concerned. If I am mistaken about this, if you would like to have them, say the word. If not, then to whom might I offer them?

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115 Davis, 89.
117 Letter from Lynes to Alfred Kinsey, 2 April 1953.
For the next year, Lynes and Kinsey wrangled over the details of the Kinsey Institute's custody of the negatives.\textsuperscript{118} The two eventually reached an agreement, and Lynes informed Kinsey: "I propose to send you all my negatives of nudes, good and bad, on the grounds that some that are of no interest to me may be of interest to you."\textsuperscript{119} Lynes expressed two cartons of negatives to Kinsey on October 1, 1954.\textsuperscript{120}

Despite the Kinsey Institute's scientific mission and the reservations Lynes felt about leaving so much of his work in its archive,\textsuperscript{121} in many respects the institution was an ideal repository for the images. In 1948, Kinsey published his exhaustive study \textit{Sexual Behavior in the Human Male}, which was followed in 1953 by its companion publication \textit{Sexual Behavior in the Human Female}.\textsuperscript{122} Kinsey's research into male sexuality revealed some surprising information about the sexual practices of American men, including the extent of homosexual behavior in American society. According to Kinsey's surveys, thirty-seven percent of American males had had a "homosexual experience" leading to orgasm.\textsuperscript{123} Lynes, like other gay men at the time, was encouraged by Kinsey's openness

\textsuperscript{118}See, in particular, letters from Lynes to Kinsey, 9 February 1954 and 17 March 1954.
\textsuperscript{119}Letter from Lynes to Kinsey, 4 October 1954.
\textsuperscript{120}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121}Lynes was particularly concerned that Kinsey might consider his male nudes pornographic and categorize them as confidential material, thus preventing people other than the Kinsey Institute staff from ever seeing them. Lynes firmly expressed to Kinsey his desire that anyone who was interested in his photographs and negatives should have access to them; see letters from Lynes to Kinsey, 2 April 1953 and 17 March 1954.
and interest in the taboo subject of homosexuality. In a letter to his mother in 1949 Lynes remarked:

The big interest of the moment is Dr. Kinsey—in all our lives. He is on a new “kick” now and is interviewing and collecting data on artists....I had a three hour interview with him last Sunday...discussing artists, the erotic in art, and such like....He is quite wonderful and Bill [Bishop] is going to be busy for weeks making prints for him, for that famous collection of his. It's an extraordinary job he is doing.

Although Lynes and his gay friends were excited by the release of Kinsey's study and its objective, open-minded attempt to examine a topic that traditionally was not discussed, Kinsey's work also attracted the attention of anti-homosexual crusaders such as Senator Kenneth Wherry, a Republican from Nebraska. Wherry acknowledged in an interview in the New York Post in 1950 that he was aware of Kinsey's findings concerning the high prevalence of male homosexuality in American society. The Senator expressed disbelief that there could be so many homosexuals, but nonetheless admitted that he wanted to drive all of them out of government “regardless of the figures.”

Wherry's homophobia was characteristic of the 1950s. Kinsey's study and the attention it drew from the media may have suggested that homosexual activity was more common in American society than previously believed, but his findings also fueled fear and anxiety over the very existence of homosexuality.

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124 For a discussion of Kinsey's research and the issue of homosexuality in the 1950s, see Crump, George Platt Lynes, 149-50.
125 Letter from George Platt Lynes to Adelaide Lynes, 5 November 1949, cited in Crump, George Platt Lynes, 149, n. 8.
Beginning in 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy began a well-publicized campaign to rid the United States government of all homosexual employees on the grounds that such people were "moral perverts" and vulnerable to communist blackmailers. Although McCarthy's anti-homosexual tirades focused on rooting out subversives in the government, not the visual arts, according to Crump, "McCarthy's attacks on gays in the 1950s threatened gay male visual culture, in which Lynes was an active participant....[and] at the very least, Lynes must have recognized the political consequences of his prolific homoerotic image-making."  

127 Homosexuality was not the only target of moralists in the 1950s. During the post-war years, a number of groups, often backed by conservative religious organizations, were established to put an end to pornography and offensive content in paperback novels, films, magazines, and even comic books.  

128 Lynes was living in an era when virtually any form of behavior or expression deemed "lewd" by politicians or moralists could be vehemently targeted. In this context, Kinsey and his research center provided an ideal home for the negatives for Man in His Element and many of Lynes's male nudes.

Race and Segregation in 1950s America

While the overt homoeroticism of Man in His Element depicted a deviant form of sexual behavior in the eyes of mainstream America, the image's interracial content also challenged hegemonic beliefs about the relationship between blacks and whites. In the early 1950s, despite the gradual advancement of civil rights in the United States, the

\[127\] Crump, George Platt Lynes, 152-3.

country was in many ways rigidly segregated in terms of race. Blacks were usually
excluded from the homes, schools, and neighborhoods of white America, and many
experienced overt racism and the effects of segregation on a daily basis. Although the
structures of segregation were beginning to be disassembled as the civil rights movement
gathered momentum in the early 1950s,\textsuperscript{129} blacks and whites rarely interacted on an equal
level, and by and large, lived separate lives. It was not until 1954, for example, that the
Supreme Court ruled that segregated public schools were unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{130} Like
integrated education in the early 1950s, sexual interaction between people of different
races was taboo throughout much of the country--legislation was in effect in many states
that prevented blacks and whites from marrying.\textsuperscript{131} Even Kinsey’s progressive study,
which was remarkably comprehensive in terms of the demographic groups and types of
sexual behavior it included, was essentially conducted by and about white Americans.
Information about blacks and many other racial minorities was not included in the final
text. Kinsey frankly admitted the limitations of the study with regard to race:

we do not yet have enough histories of Negroes to warrant
their inclusion in the analyses that have been made in the
present volume. Any fair comparison of Negroes and
whites will have to be made for groups that are
homogeneous in regard to age, education, social level,
religious background, and still other factors.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{129}For an overview of civil rights advances in the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Kenneth Estell, ed., The
\textsuperscript{130}Estell, 732-4.
\textsuperscript{131}It was not until 1967 that the Supreme Court declared it was unconstitutional for states to ban
marriages between members of different races; at that time, interracial marriages were illegal in fifteen
1995), 302.
\textsuperscript{132}Kinsey, et al., Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 393.
Blacks in Gay New York

Like many Americans of his race and class, Lynes lived and worked in an almost exclusively white world. As a society photographer, the economics of Lynes's profession determined his clientele. Except for an occasional dancer or performer, blacks essentially did not appear in any of Lynes's commercial imagery. The fashion models Lynes photographed for Vogue and Harper's Bazaar were white, as were virtually all of the clients who paid Lynes to take their portraits. When blacks did appear in Lynes's photographs, they were usually his sexual partners—men such as Johnny Leaphart—who were willing to pose in the nude before the camera. Although both Lynes and Leaphart were gay and as such, outcasts in the eyes of mainstream society, as a white male, Lynes could still exercise power and control over Leaphart and other black men. In contrast to Lynes and his mostly white friends, black gay men were often from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, a factor that could create a hierarchical dynamic within any interracial relationships that developed. When Lynes first met Leaphart, for example, he was pleasantly surprised that the sex between them was free.\(^{133}\) Lynes expected that he would have to pay to make love to a black man, and thus, wield economic power over him. Lynes's fascination with black men such as Leaphart, which will be revealed in greater detail in Chapter III, violated cultural taboos against interracial sex of any form—gay or straight. To a certain degree, Lynes's desire for a black lover required him to surrender to the Other, but only within a framework that he, as a white man, could comfortably assert his authority.

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\(^{133}\)Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 7 November 1952.
The relationship between white and black gay men in the early 1950s was a complex one. New York actually had a long-standing tradition of tolerance and interaction between the white gay world of Lynes and the city's black neighborhoods. During the Harlem Renaissance, from roughly 1920 through 1935, Harlem developed a reputation for its tolerant atmosphere and wild nightlife, which centered around clubs, speakeasies, balls, and buffet flats. Carl Van Vechten, a white homosexual, romanticized the hedonistic nightlife and sexual freedom of Harlem in writings like his controversial novel *Nigger Heaven.* Because of its reputation for decadent fun and tolerance, Harlem rivaled Greenwich Village as a magnet for white gay men, who often traveled uptown for entertainment and sex. In Harlem, the tolerance for those of different races, social classes, and sexual identities meant that white gay men could mix freely, albeit somewhat uneasily, in the district's predominantly black clubs and speakeasies. Although the end of Prohibition and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 greatly curtailed Harlem's exciting night life, the black gay and lesbian community remained, and Harlem was still a destination for daring white gay men such as Lynes in the early 1950s.

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136 Lynes mentioned that he met Bill Blizzard, the black model who appears with Johnny Leaphart in series 409 (fig. 38 and fig. 39), at a drag ball in Harlem on Thanksgiving in 1952; letter from Lynes to Perlin, 19 February 1953. Lynes also was invited to a New Year's Eve party in December 1952 in Harlem with Johnny Leaphart; letter from Lynes to Perlin, 30 December 1952. Based on the description of his New Year's Eve activities in a letter written a few days later, Lynes did not make it to the party with Leaphart; letter from Lynes to Perlin, 2 January 1953.
In the context of 1952, *Man in His Element* and its variants represented a taboo sexual union between a white and a black man. Having orchestrated these scenes from behind the camera, Lynes fully implicated himself in the spectacle before his lens and revealed his sexual desire for the racial Other. Because of the era’s conservative social and political climate, these photographs, like so many of Lynes’s male nudes, could not be exhibited publicly on the walls of a gallery or museum. If Lynes wanted to show them, he had to utilize a system outside of the traditional exhibition culture. Furthermore, because of the controversial subject matter and racial ambivalence of series 375, the photographer may have felt it was necessary to explain the coding of race in these images and his role in creating them. Rather than leaving the interpretation of these works entirely up to chance and his viewers’ perspectives, Lynes took an active role in framing their racial content. Letter writing provided Lynes with the means to distribute privately images like *Man in His Element* and to reaffirm the hegemony’s racial beliefs.
Chapter III
Letters from George Platt Lynes

"Letter writing has advantages. I should write more."

George Platt Lynes to Gertrude Stein, 1929

In January 1939, George Platt Lynes mailed a photographic postcard (fig. 58) to his friend Otto Wittmann. The image on the postcard shows Lynes standing in front of a snow-covered Stone-Blossom, the New Jersey farm house he shared at this time with Munroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott. "Merry Christmas" is printed across the postcard along with Lynes's name. To the mailman, the image on the postcard would have appeared to be a typical holiday greeting, but to those familiar with Lynes's living arrangement with Wheeler and Wescott, the picture reveals a more subversive edge. In the handwritten note on the postcard's verso, Lynes informed Wittmann he was "Sending...today a copy of the mag. containing the mythology."

The magazine which Lynes sent to Wittmann was most likely a recent issue of U.S. Camera. In this magazine, Lynes had published a number of rather campy photographs of mythological subjects with accompanying text by Wescott.

Lynes's postcard to Wittmann, despite its ephemeral charm, is an important historical document that demonstrates how Lynes used the mail as a means of distributing

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137 Letter from Lynes to Gertrude Stein, 29 July 1929. The extant correspondence between Lynes and Stein is housed in the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
138 See Chapter I.
139 Postcard from Lynes to Otto Wittmann, stamped 16 January 1939, collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California.
140 See Glenway Wescott, "Illustrations of Mythology," U.S. Camera, January-February 1939. A number of Lynes's mythological photographs also have been reproduced in Woody, George Platt Lynes, 61-75.
photographic images in different formats to people he could not see in person.
Throughout his career, the mail proved to be a reliable, inexpensive, and for the most part, private way for Lynes to deliver his photographs. Being able to send a photograph in the form of a postcard or a reproduction in U.S. Camera provided Lynes with a unique and effective option for exhibiting his work.¹⁴¹ In many respects, Lynes’s use of the mail in this way foreshadowed the mail art movement that briefly flourished in and around New York during the early 1960s. As an artist utilizing a marginalized medium and exploring a taboo subject, the mail was one of Lynes’s best alternatives to the galleries and museums that he could not use to display his homoerotic photographs. Thomas McEvilley described the nature of mail art as follows:

[mail art] was the enemy of the gallery system; it decried all canons of taste and all attempts by would-be critics to establish themselves as arbiters of taste. Such independence was based on the unique stage on which mail art was seen as taking place: opening the mail was the exhibition, and the mail, of course, rejects nothing that is dropped in the mailbox. On the egalitarian metaphor of the postal system, the price of a stamp was the fee for exhibiting one’s work. The whole point was avoidance of selectively curated or juried exhibitions, and with them of taste, hierarchy, competition, fetishism, commodification, reification.¹⁴²

While the pretentious Lynes could never be accused of renouncing taste, much less hierarchy or fetishism, like the mail artists of the 1960s, he made use of the postal service

¹⁴¹Magazines like U.S. Camera were an important mainstream venue for Lynes’s work, and he was fairly successful in having his portraiture and other commercial photographs published in them. See, for example, Minicam, June 1941 and February 1943; U.S. Camera, November 1941; and Popular Photography, December 1939. Beginning in the mid-1930s and continuing through the late 1940s, Lynes’s work also appeared regularly in Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and Town and Country.
¹⁴²Thomas McEvilley, “'Mail Art Then and Now,' Franklin Furnace,” Artonum 23 (September 1984): 112.
to circumvent and subvert an exhibition system that prevented his work from being shown in public.

Although Lynes's mail art, if sent in the form of a postcard or mainstream magazine, could not openly show or mention erotic material, he could send more risqué photographs, such as *Man in His Element*, if he enclosed them within envelopes. The very nature of a photograph—an image that can be printed on paper inexpensively and in multiples—made it ideally suited for distribution through the mail. Lynes could easily make as many prints as he wanted from a specific negative and send them to interested people. A voracious letter writer who corresponded almost daily with a number of friends and colleagues, Lynes sometimes discussed the prints he mailed in his carefully crafted letters. In the case of *Man in His Element* and its variants, these texts played a crucial role in shaping the recipients' understanding of the images. Before examining the letters related to series 375, however, it is important to understand the significance of the written word to Lynes.

**Literary Desires**

Although best known for his contributions to photography, literature and letter writing played an integral role in Lynes's personal and professional life. James Crump suggested that Lynes's first ambition was to be a writer, and photography was a secondary interest he turned to when it became apparent that he could not forge a successful career in the literary arts. Always known as a well-read highbrow with a substantial library, Lynes first expressed literary ambitions during the early 1920s, while attending the

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Berkshire School in Sheffield, Massachusetts. Lynes was a mediocre student in most subjects, but he excelled in his literary appreciation classes and contributed poems and essays to the school's journal The Dome. The only evidence of his interest in photography at this time was his brief involvement with the school's Camera Club. Concerned that Lynes's spotty academic record was not strong enough for admission to Yale University, his parents sent him to Paris during the summer of 1925 with the condition that he study to prepare for college. While his parents hoped the experience would help him to mature and gain admission to Yale, as a budding writer, Lynes no doubt viewed the trip as a chance to live in Europe's literary and artistic capital and meet some of the city's avant-garde writers.\textsuperscript{144}

While in Paris, Lynes was introduced to the American expatriate writer Gertrude Stein, and subsequently, he was exposed to the influential circle of artists, writers, and intellectuals who gathered around her. After his return to the United States later that year, Lynes founded The As Stable Publications and published, with the help of friends, a series of pamphlets which he sold through subscription. Despite his youth and naïveté, Lynes was exceptionally ambitious in his publishing endeavors; in the one year that As Stable was active, he published original work by René Crevel, Ernest Hemingway, and Stein.\textsuperscript{145} Lynes's friendship with Stein—clearly more meaningful to him than to her—played a vital role in fostering his desire to pursue a literary career; it gave him credibility in the literary

\textsuperscript{144} Lynes's early days are documented in Russell Lynes, "The Daring Eye of George Platt Lynes," unpublished memoir, 1988. I am grateful to Mildred Lynes and the Wendy Weil Agency for granting me access to this memoir, and to Claire Needell who kindly photocopied the manuscript. Russell Lynes died before he could finish editing the text and see it to publication.

\textsuperscript{145} See Ernest Hemingway, \textit{Today is Friday} (Englewood, NJ: The As Stable Publications, 1926); René Crevel, \textit{1830} (Englewood, NJ: The As Stable Pamphlets, 1926); and Gertrude Stein, \textit{Descriptions of Literature} (Englewood, NJ: The As Stable Pamphlets, 1926).
community and helped him gain access to other writers and artists. Lynes frequently corresponded with Stein after leaving Paris, and continued to do so regularly until around 1934.\textsuperscript{146}

Lynes entered Yale as a freshman in the fall of 1926, but he found academia to be a stifling bore and left school by the end of the semester, much to the chagrin of his parents. During the semester, his dreams of publishing more pamphlets and a magazine edited by Stein never materialized. In 1927, Lynes began to study photography after receiving a view camera as a gift. That same year he opened the Park Place Book Shop in Englewood, New Jersey with the financial help of Edith Finch. It was at this bookstore that Lynes exhibited some of his early photographic portraits. Over the next few years, Lynes taught himself how to use the camera and became interested in pursuing photography as a career, perhaps having realized that he would not be content running a bookstore for the rest of his life. In 1932, following the death of his father, Lynes decided to become a professional photographer, and in the following year, he opened his first photography studio in New York on East 50th Street.\textsuperscript{147}

While working as a photographer, Lynes maintained close ties to the literary world. Over the course of his career, dozens of distinguished writers had their portraits taken in front of Lynes’s camera, and a list of his subjects reads like a who’s who of twentieth-century literature: W. H. Auden, Jean Cocteau, René Crevel, e. e. cummings, E. M. Forster, André Gide, Christopher Isherwood, Thomas Mann, Dorothy Parker, Katherine Ann Porter, Edith Sitwell, Glenway Wescott, and Tennessee Williams, among

\textsuperscript{146} For a discussion of Lynes’s relationship with Gertrude Stein, see Crump, \textit{George Platt Lynes}, 137-9, and R. Lynes, “The Daring Eye,” 33-49.

\textsuperscript{147} Woody, \textit{George Platt Lynes}, 117; see also Crump, \textit{George Platt Lynes}, 137-40.
others. Lynes was particularly close to several of these writers, including Cocteau, Crevel, Porter, and Wescott. Lynes’s accomplished portraits and distinguished clientele helped establish him as one of the leading portrait photographers of the 1930s and early 1940s.\textsuperscript{148} In particular, his portraits of authors and poets were a visual testament to Lynes’s connection to the literary world and the ease and frequency with which he moved among its luminaries. Lynes’s failed attempts to become a writer and publisher were perhaps tempered by his success as a photographer and the access it provided him to those in the literary arts.

**Letter Writing**

While Lynes may not have possessed the resolve to succeed as a writer and publisher of books, he certainly possessed a strong urge to write letters. The photographer left behind a vast body of correspondence to and from his friends and associates, many of whom were, like Lynes, gay and involved in the arts. Lynes’s letters were often works of art in their own right. Usually typed with great care and precision on personalized stationary (fig. 59), Lynes’s letters contained carefully chosen words, full of wit and at times bordering on the poetic, to keep his friends updated on the latest news, his personal activities, and a variety of interesting and sometimes tawdry gossip. Lynes’s younger brother Russell, an accomplished writer and editor, noted that “writing and receiving letters were bread and wine to [George] as long as he lived.”\textsuperscript{149} The religious connotations attached to this observation are a fitting description of the importance Lynes

\textsuperscript{148}For reproductions of some of Lynes’s portrait work, see George Platt Lynes, *Portrait: The Photographs of George Platt Lynes, 1927-1955* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms, 1994).

\textsuperscript{149}R. Lynes, “The Daring Eye,” 32.
attached to his correspondence. Letters to and from his friends were indeed sacraments that seemed to sustain and nourish him during his many personal and professional crises. Lynes approached the practice of writing letters with intense devotion, as this passage from a letter to his friend Bernard Perlin, addressed as “Dreamy dearie,” attests: “Brief bring-you-up-to-date-note—in answer to yours of this A.M.—though I wrote you yesterday. Tomorrow or Monday party news, if indeed there is any.” At times, Lynes’s constant need to write and receive gossipy letters seemed to overwhelm him and border on the compulsive, as demonstrated in the following passage from a letter he sent to Perlin:

> There was a time when I wrote to you and (sometimes) to my mother. Those days are gone forever, so far as I can tell. Now I’ve an almost-daily line to get off to Mac, ditto to Jimmy Hicks (Scott Douglas to you)...And this week, besides, I’ve managed to get letters off to Sam Steward, Carlos McClendon, and Edith Finch. And it’s only Tuesday. And I’ve got to get one off to Buddy. So, if you’ve been, if you feel neglected, bear with me. I’ll do the best I can.

It is possible that the energy Lynes devoted to writing letters even contributed to the financial problems he experienced during the last decade of his life. Like his photographs of the male nude, letter writing was also a time-consuming and financially unproductive venture.

Despite the demands it placed on his time, Lynes obviously enjoyed writing letters to friends and receiving responses. He derived great pleasure from his more intimate written exchanges with men such as Perlin and Steward, and he sometimes used language

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150 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 2 October 1952.
151 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 21 October 1952.
in these texts suggesting that the very act of writing was, for Lynes, similar to a sexual encounter. In a 1952 letter written to Perlin, addressed as “Cherished coz,” the photographer remarked:

I’ve neglected you. You’ve neglected me. I know why I’ve neglected you. I’ve simply not felt like writing. Letter-writing pre-supposes MOOD, and I haven’t had it. But I feel the mood coming over me again—it must be, arsebackwards as usual, for I should be writing to my mother and instead, for my pleasure, I’m having at you. But why have you neglected me? Because I’ve neglected you?\(^\text{152}\)

In this revealing passage, Lynes laments their mutual neglect of writing regularly to one another as one might regret a troubled romance. Lynes confesses that the reason for his neglect of Perlin was that recently he had not felt in the mood—his desire simply was not there. Yet now that Lynes’s letter writing mood was fully restored, he once again is writing, and for his pleasure he is “having at” Perlin, a colloquial expression with a strong hint of sexual innuendo. In this particular letter, Lynes also describes to Perlin several of his sexual encounters for the week as well as his re-reading of Balzac (another writer obsessed with sexual prowess), pending dinner dates, and miscellaneous gossip. He also creates a mood of anticipation when he informs Perlin that he will be meeting with Chuck Howard, a man with whom both Lynes and Perlin had been romantically involved, later in the week and would send him the “dirty details” in his next letter.\(^\text{153}\)

At the time of Lynes’s death in 1955, the painter Bernard Perlin was one of the photographer’s dearest friends. Lynes and Perlin were first introduced around 1940 by

\(^{152}\)Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 10 July 1952.

\(^{153}\)Ibid.
Paul Cadmus, but their friendship did not blossom until years later following some hurt feelings. In 1948, on the eve of Perlin’s departure for Rome, where he was beginning a fellowship at the American Academy, the artist hosted a going-away party for himself. Lynes attended the party, as did Perlin’s lover at the time, Chuck Howard. According to Perlin, Lynes “took one look at Chuck Howard and decided that’s for me.” Lynes proceeded to dump his boyfriend, a handsome young man with the curious name Randy Jack, and stole the willing Howard away from Perlin. After Perlin moved to Rome, Lynes, perhaps regretting his insensitive behavior, began to correspond with the artist. Over the course of the next six years, the two men wrote to one another almost constantly. The extant correspondence between Lynes and Perlin provides rich insight into their friendship, social milieu, and gay life in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their letters to one another were full of gossip and descriptions of their respective social and sexual pursuits.

According to Perlin, Lynes also frequently mailed small photographs of attractive men to him along with his letters. Perlin reciprocated by mailing sketches to Lynes in New York, which he used for his needlework projects. Despite the great distance between Rome and New York, the two men developed a remarkable, trusting friendship through the exchange of these intimate letters.155

Lynes certainly was conscious of the tawdry nature of his outgoing and incoming mail, and he expressed concern to Perlin that his letters might be read by the wrong people: “We write one another scandalous sorts of letters. Too scandalous? I hope you

154 Perlin, interview.
155 Ibid.
don’t leave mine lying about for the likes of Miss G, for example, to see.” In response to Lynes’s worried query, Perlin wrote:

Needless to say, I do not leave your letters around for Miss Gellhorn or anyone else to peep at—go ahead and be shameless—actually you know, I have all of your letters—a year’s worth by now, isn’t it?...But, although it’ll grieve me to do it, I’ll burn them all before I leave—on New Year’s Eve—or whenever. Or would it amuse you to see them—or appall you? You write wonderfully well, you know—quick, sharp—at the very mostest of you-ness—and no filling or padding or vague dawdling such as I am a slothful genius at doing.”

Lynes replied to Perlin as follows:

Not a confession, nothing I’ve held back; it just hadn’t occurred to me to tell you. By all means destroy my letters, now or when you leave or whenever. For I have carbons. Not from the beginning of our correspondence, but from early on, from the—that’s funny—I’ve a carbon of a letter dated the 16 Nov. 1951 and then there’s a lacuna, a jump to the 24 March 1952. From then on I have them all. And all my letters to others as well. It’s a thing I’ve done in the past, from time to time, by no means all the time; when I concluded I was in for a running-correspondence with you, I decided to do it again. Not (please God!) for posterity and the biographers, but as a way of keeping track of myself for fun and instruction. In some cases, as latterly in my all-too-delicacy all-too-difficult letters to Jimmy Hicks, it has been damned important for me to know what I’ve said. So, if you ever want to refer to same, etc.. I have all of yours, of course. Record, back and forth, of certain sorts of sexy behavior and other pleasant nonsense.

Although in this passage, Lynes vehemently denies that the reason why he has kept carbons of his letters is for “posterity and the biographers,” he nonetheless seems to be aware that someday his words might be the subject of research. In the months before his

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156 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 14 October 1952.
157 Letter from Perlin to Lynes, 28 October 1952.
158 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 3 November 1952.
death from cancer, Lynes is believed to have destroyed countless negatives and prints, mainly commercial images produced during his days as a fashion photographer, yet it seems that he chose to preserve much of his correspondence. The fact that he did not destroy this body of work suggests that he wanted to leave behind some evidence of his private literary pursuits, and that Lynes viewed the letters’ contents—despite being mostly about “pleasant nonsense” and other “scandalous” subjects—as significant and worthy of preservation.

Sex and Lies

Like his friendship with Perlin, Lynes’s relationship with Samuel Steward blossomed through the mail. Both men were gay, well-read, and most importantly, voyeurs. Lynes sent Steward photographs of beautiful men for his collection, and Steward sent Lynes titillating autobiographical narratives, most likely with some fictional embellishment. Steward described the nature of their correspondence as follows:

George discovered that I like to memorialize various experiences of mine in a sort of narrative form, and so I began to send him single-spaced one-page accounts of those brief encounters. “More, more!” he kept asking—and in return for them would give me small segments of photographs—a particularly beautiful sweep of thigh of some anonymous dancer, with perhaps the head cut away. Or a darkly brooding butch face with a crewcut, sometimes marked with tiny circles of ball-point pen around the blemishes, which he used as “notemaking” to remind himself that these should be removed. Perhaps it was a body taken

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159 Woody, George Platt Lynes, 115.
160 After Lynes’s death in 1955, much of the photographer’s correspondence—including the letters he received from friends and carbons of his outgoing letters—was left in the care of his brother Russell Lynes, who used this material when writing his unpublished memoir about George. In the case of the Perlin-Lynes correspondence, Russell Lynes made photocopies for himself of the letters and then gave them—originals and carbons alike—to Perlin; see letters from Russell Lynes to Perlin, 10 June 1991 and 11 June 1991.
straight on, or the curve of a satin undersuit covering a pair of buttocks.\textsuperscript{161}

In addition to providing Lynes with narratives of his sexual escapades, Steward also sent him his own photographs and artwork. In one particular letter addressed to Lynes, Steward seems to have typed one of his erotic narratives over a sketch (fig. 60) of two nude men; one of the figures performs fellatio on his partner.\textsuperscript{162} The drawing, which resembles the erotic ink sketches of Jean Cocteau, illustrates a scene described in the typed narrative. Although Steward’s illustrated letter was no doubt meant to entertain and titillate Lynes, sex was not the only topic the two men discussed in their correspondence. As Lynes received little attention in the mainstream art press other than some cursory vanity coverage,\textsuperscript{163} he was no doubt grateful for the feedback he received from men such as Steward, who not only appreciated seeing Lynes’s male nudes, but made intelligent, sympathetic comments about his work in general. In response to receiving Lynes’s latest yearbook for the New York City Ballet, Steward wrote:

> The ballet yearbook is a beauteous thing—you have come very close to surpassing yourself, I think. I love it. The large and complicated group spreads are really breathtaking. Most effective. I thought once there would never be anything more beautiful than last year’s one, but this has tied it, even gone beyond. It’s wonderfully imaginative in both conception and realization.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{161}Steward, “George Platt Lynes,” 22.
\textsuperscript{162}Letter from Samuel Steward to Lynes, 7 December 1952. Jack Woody and James Crump kindly provided me with photocopies of some of Steward’s letters to Lynes. Unfortunately, it was not possible to consult the original letters and it is difficult to determine if the drawing was done before Steward typed the letter or vice versa. Most likely, the letter was typed over the drawing.
\textsuperscript{163}The Art Index lists only one review of Lynes’s work from the period between 1931 and 1955: a one paragraph commentary on his 1941 exhibition at Pierre Matisse Gallery. See D. B., “Lynes Photos,” Art News 40 (15-30 November 1941): 27.
\textsuperscript{164}Letter from Steward to Lynes, 3 November 1952.
Mail Nudes and the Law

Lynes’s more risqué letters and the nude photographs he sometimes mailed were technically a violation of the law. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the United States Post Office, under pressure from Congress, cracked down on businesses and individuals sending nude photographs or any other form of erotic material through the mail. In 1948, Congress revised Title 18 of the United States Code known as “Crimes and Criminal Procedures.” Chapter 71, Section 1461 of this law addressed the issue of “mailing obscene or crime-inciting matter.” The law stated: “Every obscene, lewd, lascivious, or filthy book, pamphlet, picture, paper, letter, writing, print, or other publication of an indecent character...is declared to be non-mailable material and shall not be conveyed in the mails or delivered from any post office or by any letter carrier.” Violators of this law could be subject to imprisonment for up to five years, a $5,000 fine, or both.

In 1950, Congress passed another Act to reinforce the ban against sending “obscene articles” through the mail. Under Chapter 721, postmasters were empowered to stop individuals or businesses from obtaining money in exchange for “any obscene, lewd, lascivious, indecent, filthy, or vile article, matter, thing, device, or substance.” The law also gave the Postmaster General the authority to return such items to the sender stamped with the word “Unlawful,” and to forbid any postmaster from accepting a money order or postal note for such materials. Thus, Lynes risked criminal prosecution not only for sending erotic photographs in the mail, but for writing letters describing his sexual exploits.

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165 U.S. Code, Title 18, Chapter 71 was passed on June 25, 1948; see U. S. Statutes at Large, 62 (1948): 768.
166 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
and the content of his imagery. Although the law was not specific with regard to the kind of materials that would be considered "obscene, lewd, lascivious, or filthy"—that would have been determined by those responsible for arresting and prosecuting offenders—Lynes must have known that his photographs of the male nude and his more explicit letters could be considered offensive in the eyes of a conservative official. Even the editors of Physique Pictorial, a publication which never showed full nudity in its pages, expressed concern that "some officials interpret any exposure of the body as being 'objectionable' and it is impossible to strike a satisfactory compromise with them."169 As a direct result of congressional legislation, the magazine announced that it would stop accepting advertisements from companies and individuals who sold images of the male nude, even for "legitimate use by artists, sculptors, etc."170 Thanks to the editors' actions, however, the magazine could increase its share of the market for physique photographs and present itself as a legal distributor of semi-nude male imagery. The magazine told its readers:

Customers should discourage the few "outlaw" companies in this country who send out material which could only be called pornographic by even the most liberal judge. Remind them that there is an even greater sale for clean, wholesome physique photographs which can be openly sold and displayed.171

Given the legal environment and the general paranoia of the 1950s, it is easy to see why it was virtually impossible for Lynes to make a living selling his photographs of the male nude. When Lynes was able to sell a large group of prints to the Kinsey Institute in 1950, he was unwilling to send them in the mail:

169Physique Pictorial, February 1952.
170Ibid.
171Ibid.
The prints for which you [Dr. Kinsey] asked...are ready at last. Now what to do with them? I'll not consign them to the post. Shall I send them by express? Or will you have them picked up? I should like to deliver them in person, but that, alas, is not possible, not now.\textsuperscript{172}

Ironically, the Kinsey Institute was both a beneficiary and victim of the laws concerning the mailing of erotic materials. As a result of contacts made by Wardell Pomeroy, a colleague of Kinsey, the Kinsey Institute received shipments of confiscated materials from police departments. Yet in 1950, Kinsey was also charged with violating the law against sending erotic materials through the United States mail. Kinsey contested the charges in court, but he died in 1956, the year before the judge presiding over the case ruled in Kinsey's favor.\textsuperscript{173}

\textbf{Man in His Element and the Mail}

As one might imagine, Lynes's homoerotic photographs and the behavior and activities documented within his letters could have gotten the artist in a great deal of trouble. Steward's extant letters to Lynes suggest that the correspondence between the two could get especially randy. Steward not only sent Lynes erotic artwork, narratives, and praise, but he even played matchmaker by arranging sexual liaisons for the photographer, a practice the two jokingly referred to as "pimping."\textsuperscript{174} Steward was in fact the person responsible for introducing Johnny Leaphart to Lynes in the fall of 1952. Thus, it was only fitting that \textit{Man in His Element} was distributed through the mail since the

\textsuperscript{172}Letter from Lynes to Kinsey, 12 April 1950. This letter also indicates that Lynes sold Kinsey "115 nudes and 30-odd copies of drawings and paintings" for $120.

\textsuperscript{173}For a discussion of the Kinsey Institute's donations from police departments and the court battle between the United States and the Kinsey Institute, see Crump "The Kinsey Institute Archive," 1-12.

\textsuperscript{174}Steward, "George Platt Lynes," 22.
image came into being because of the date Steward helped to arrange in his letter.

Steward met Leaphart in the summer of 1952 on the Twentieth Century Limited, the train that connected Chicago, Steward’s home, to the East Coast. Steward and Leaphart had a brief affair in New York after they met, and Steward encouraged Lynes to make contact with him:

You’d like this wonderful gentle good-looking (superb body!) negro named John Leaphart. He lives at 1925 7th Ave., Un 4-2046 (he’s in the book, if you lose this). He knows I’m giving you the number, so do call him if the mood is on you some dark evening—he’ll delight you.175

Steward obviously enjoyed his experience with Leaphart and wrote to Lynes:

I think the three times we made the bed together while I was in New York were amongst the most enjoyable of a very full and rich summer. When we first tried it Thursday afternoon I thought that perhaps he was only beautiful trade, for nothing much happened except that. Then after dinner he suggested it again, and this time I was the delighted receiver of some of the most exciting mouth work—everywhere—that I’ve ever had. And Saturday morning before we saw each other, and I got royally screwed. I think perhaps his background is not very large, but that’s a little winter project for you; you can spread it out and deepen it.176

Lynes did indeed take Steward up on his challenge with regard to Leaphart, and he looked forward to it so much so that he anxiously relayed the news of his pending date to Perlin in Rome: “I’m arse-deep in boys again...[and] Sam Steward wants me to investigate a negro named Leapheart [sic], but so far there has been no room in the schedule for him.

175Letter from Steward to Lynes, no date; this particular note was handwritten on stationary from the Taft, a hotel at 7th Avenue and 50th Street in New York.
176Letter from Steward to Lynes, 16 September 1952.
The baby blacksmith does me the honour of declared infatuation. And I purr like a tiger puss.\(^{177}\)

The "baby blacksmith" Lynes mentioned was Buddy McCarthy, who, along with a number of other men, happened to be sexually involved with the photographer at the time. McCarthy was from Boston and met Lynes through a mutual friend, Ed Torgensen, while on a vacation following his discharge from the army.\(^{178}\) Lynes and McCarthy probably met in the spring of 1952.\(^{179}\) Lynes began to mention McCarthy, along with his many other suitors, in his letters to Perlin during the following summer:

> Sex it appears has reared its ugly pretty head again—with a vengeance. So far this week I’ve been had at by Buddy McCarthy, tiny brickshithouse fro [sic] Boston, hirsute as any ape, by Mac, by Jack Gillum, back from Texas, panting for my attention, by Dick Gitchell, Connelly’s coast guard from New London, and this afternoon I expect to be had at by little black Jon Harris.\(^{180}\)

Although McCarthy lived in Boston, he saw Lynes in New York regularly during the next several months. Lynes, who was probably at least two decades older than McCarthy, continued to describe him in his letters to Perlin: "Buddy’s not a blacksmith, merely built like one. He’s little and has enormously broad shoulders."\(^{181}\) Lynes also remarked:

> And poor Buddy’s all confusion. He thinks me God’s gift to young men (do you suppose?), can’t make out why I bother with him (so homely, so hirsute, so--as he says--proletarian), above all can’t make out why I keep pushing

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\(^{177}\)Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 19 September 1952. Lynes sometimes took playful liberties with the spellings of his friends' names; he usually referred to Johnny Leaphart as Johnny Leapheart [sic]. Lynes once wrote: “New doll (courtesy of Danny Shull) called Jim Chestnut. You know my taste for poetic names and this is inner circle stuff, in the class of Johnny Leapheart [sic] and Bill Blizzard, though not dark meat.” Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 24 January 1955.

\(^{178}\)McCarthy, interview with the author.

\(^{179}\)The earliest reference to Buddy McCarthy in the extant Perlin-Lynes correspondence is in a letter from Lynes to Perlin, 19 May 1952.

\(^{180}\)Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 10 July 1952.

\(^{181}\)Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 2 October 1952.
him into bed with my other (from his point of view, and I suppose from mine) divine playmates. But no harm. Everybody has a lovely time. 182

Although the two men were obviously from different backgrounds, and Lynes considered himself above McCarthy in terms of social status, he nonetheless found McCarthy’s youth and working class roots appealing enough to sustain his interest. In his letter to Perlin, Lynes also enclosed a photograph of the “baby blacksmith” as a visual companion to his careful description of McCarthy. 183 Again, it is not known which photograph of McCarthy was sent to Perlin. Given the date of the letter that accompanied the photograph—October 1, 1952—it may have been a print (fig. 27) from Lynes’s most recent session with McCarthy on September 27, 1952, or it may have been one (fig. 21 and fig. 24) from series 342, which Lynes took several months before on July 8, 1952. After seeing the photograph, Perlin responded: “thank you for the tiny photograph of the tiny Buddy—except for his wounding you (+ I hope all is 100% OK by now) he looks very, very sweet and delicious and all that remarkably Baroque décor in hair all over. Save me a piece please.” 184

At the same time Lynes was carrying on his affair with McCarthy, he was pursuing several other men and, of course, was about to meet Johnny Leaphart. As the date for Lynes’s meeting with Leaphart grew closer, the photographer wrote with anticipation to Perlin: “tomorrow I have a date with John Leaphart [sic], that ‘wonderful gentle good-looking (superb body!) negro’ I inherited from Sam Steward. I’ve not even seen him.

182 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 1 October 1952.
183 Ibid.
184 Letter from Perlin to Lynes, 8 October 1952. The “wounding” Perlin referred to in this letter was the back injury Lynes received during a rough encounter with McCarthy; see Chapter I.
Until now I've had no time for him. And now, my current harem disbanded, on tour, it's time for me to concoct a new one--don't you think?" 185 Three days later, following his first date with Leaphart, Lynes wrote to Perlin: "the brown boy I inherited from Sam Steward is HEAVEN--affectionate and good, beautiful in the long muscular way, chocolate and ashes-of-roses, and (you guess where and how) fantastic, wonderful." 186 In these passages, Lynes's characterization of Leaphart as a "brown boy" he "inherited" from another man, despite its humorous intentions, possesses an unmistakable ring of ownership. Leaphart is not described as an individual but as a diminutive racial type--a "brown boy"--Lynes desires for his "harem," a term loaded with connotations of sexual exploitation and possession. Furthermore, Lynes's query to Perlin asking him to "guess where and how" Leaphart is "fantastic" and "wonderful" is an obvious reference to penis size and sexual prowess. Lynes seems especially pleased that Leaphart possessed the stereotypical "big black dick," a central component of the racist imagination. According to Mercer, this stereotype creates white anxiety over the myth of black sexual superiority. 187 Lynes further fetishizes Leaphart's racial Otherness by likening his body to chocolate, an obvious metaphor for the darkness of his skin; to a self-conscious dieter such as Lynes, however, chocolate not only evoked a specific hue, but signified a tempting, pleasing sweet in which to indulge with guilty abandon from time to time. 188

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185 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 21 October 1952.
186 Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 24 October 1952.
188 Self-conscious about his appearance, particularly after he reached middle age, Lynes exercised and dieted frequently throughout his adult life; Perlin, interview.
After hearing Lynes’s written description of Leaphart, Perlin asked Lynes to “send pix” of him.\textsuperscript{189} At the time Perlin made this request, in a letter dated October 28, 1952, it was several days before Lynes even photographed McCarthy and Leaphart together in series 375. Lynes most likely sent Perlin a group of prints, including an image of Leaphart with McCarthy a few weeks later,\textsuperscript{190} although at first the photographer seemed unwilling to do so. In a letter dated November 7, 1952, Lynes remarked:

I’ll be leaping with Leaphart this evening, as I do these days about three times a week—though he’d come oftener if I could find the time for him. I’ve known boys who get around, but he is, I gather, the most screwed and screwing of the lot. Career of sex (oxygen therapy’s only a sideline) and all for pleasure, i.e. for free, bless his black hide. But can I send photos? Oh, I think not! We might both be jailed. But, on the other hand, maybe. I’ll look over the lot and see if I can find evidence—enough without compromising us. But you’ll be back soon anyway. They’ll keep.\textsuperscript{191}

Despite his reluctance, Lynes apparently enclosed some photographs in his next letter to Perlin dated November 14, 1952.\textsuperscript{192} On November 18, 1952, Perlin wrote to Lynes:

The photos are delovely [sic] + I’m happy to know what Johnny L. looks like, for example, besides—not, oddly, what I’d imagined, more Egyptian-type than I’d thought—for what reason I “saw” him as ruggeder [sic]—“leaner” (can’t get any leaner than he is)—still, divine + GBless [sic] + hooray. Buddy’s clipped chest etc. HORRID—sorry. And disturbingish [sic] is that the portion of his face visible (sans

\textsuperscript{189}Letter from Perlin to Lynes, 28 October 1952. Leaphart was also mentioned in letters from Lynes to Perlin, 21 October 1952, 24 October 1952, and 27 October 1952.

\textsuperscript{190}Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 14 November 1952.

\textsuperscript{191}Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 7 November 1952.

\textsuperscript{192}Lynes does not mention in this letter that he has enclosed photographs for Perlin. In a note Perlin wrote to Lynes a few days later (see letter from Perlin to Lynes, 18 November 1952), he directly responded to a number of subjects Lynes discussed in a letter from Lynes to Perlin, 14 November 1952. Perlin also commented about a group of photographs, including one from series 375, that Lynes recently had sent him; these images probably accompanied the same letter.
nose, mouth) is incredibly like R. Drew. Amazing. The
very high lean cheekbone, the thin lip-corner etc. etc.193

Although Perlin did not recall what photographs from series 375 Lynes sent to him, based
on his description in the preceding letter, he most likely received the print (fig. 4) of
Leaphart and McCarthy facing one another.194 In this image, McCarthy’s shaved chest
and head are partially visible, but his nose and mouth are concealed by Leaphart’s
shoulder, just as Perlin described. In 1979, an anonymous donor, most likely one of the
other original recipients of the image, gave the same print to the Museum of Modern
Art.195 The existence of this photograph and its “mystery donor” suggest that Lynes did
indeed print several images from series 375—not just the one known as Man in His
Element—and distributed them to friends other than Perlin and Steward. Based on their
extant correspondence, however, it does not seem likely that Lynes sent the print known
as Man in His Element to Perlin.

Lynes did of course send Man in His Element to Steward, who years later,
reminisced about its arrival in the mail and the unusual title Lynes gave to it.196 Lynes
rarely assigned specific titles to any of his nudes or portraits; rather, he identified them by
the names of the subjects or with series numbers. The fact that, according to Steward,
Lynes thought of a rather poetic title for this particular print suggests that it was special

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193Letter from Perlin to Lynes, 18 November 1952.
194Perlin confessed with regret that he no longer had any of the photographs Lynes used to send him in
the mail; Perlin, interview.
195The donor of this particular photograph most likely was Munroe Wheeler, as the verso of the
photograph is inscribed “M.W./R.X. McCarthy and John Leaphart.” A group of Lynes photographs once
belonging to Wheeler was included as lot 231 in a catalogue for an auction at Sotheby’s, New York on
April 18, 1996. According to the lot description, most of the fifty-five prints were also inscribed with
“M.W.” along with the names of the subjects and the dates when they were photographed.
and stood apart in some way from his countless other male nudes. The phrase "man in his element" is a frequently used expression that usually refers to a man who is comfortable in and able to control his surroundings. In American literature, the roots of the phrase extend back at least a century, and it seems more than coincidental that the expression has strong connotations of gender variance and class conflict. In 1853, Dr. Samuel W. Francis, a prominent physician, inventor, and author, published a short, comedic tale called *A Christmas Story*. The work was subtitled *Man in his element: or, a new way to keep house*. The story features a bachelor named William D’Aubrey who lives with his widowed sister Mary Walters. After Mary complains about her difficulties managing the household servants, William offers to take over his sister’s domestic responsibilities in order to prove that a man can run a home better than a woman. William proceeds to manage the household and servants with strict efficiency, and soon he has them running like a well-oiled machine, thus proving that, despite popular beliefs to the contrary, the home could indeed be a man’s element.

Francis’s short story, however, is much more than anecdotal; its plot centers around an intriguing switch in the era’s rigid gender roles. William, an unmarried man, takes on a woman’s duties. Although William engages in activities considered feminine, he is effective in his role because of his masculine traits. He asserts authority and power—his manliness, in other words—over his lackadaisical servants, whose poor job performances were tolerated by the more permissive and lenient Mary. It seems a remote possibility that Lynes, a well-read literary aficionado, and Steward, a professor of English,

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could have known about this particular story. At the very least, both men may have
recognized that the expression "man in his element" was historically rooted in American
literature and linked to the notion of a man who is in control and comfortable in an
environment or activity in which he is not expected to be. Like Francis's story, Lynes's
photograph addresses issues of gender variance, male domination, and class conflict. Of
course, it may never be known if the title *Man in His Element* was intended to refer
directly to either of the models in the photograph, but the expression is an appropriate
description of Lynes who was certainly comfortable in his role as voyeur and liked to be in
control of the men in his life and in front of the camera.

Although it was not possible to consult Lynes's letters to Steward in order to delve
deeper into the choice and meaning of the title *Man in His Element*, Steward's extant
letters to Lynes contain references to the photograph:

I'm delighted you like J. Leapheart [*sic*]. I used to have a
friend who got tired of bedding weightlifters and Bodies
Beautiful, and always said "but what do you do with the
body afterwards?" I was a little that way with JL, so I
know what you mean. But while he's silent, and horizontal,
I think he's really something. I'm glad you say you're a
voyeur because now I feel more at home since I'm one too.
...The thought of Buddy and Johnny being in a thing
together was quite exciting to me. I hope they didn't
disappoint you.199

Since this letter was written on November 3, 1952, just two days after Lynes's
photography session with Leaphart and McCarthy, the photographer must have
communicated to Steward immediately about its occurrence. In a letter written on

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198 Samuel Steward is deceased and it is not known what became of the letters he received from Lynes.
Although Lynes perhaps kept carbon copies of his letters to Steward, it is not known if they still exist, and
if so, where they are located.
199 Letter from Steward to Lynes, 3 November 1952.
November 16, 1952, Steward complimented Lynes on a photograph he received that may have been *Man in His Element*. Steward planned to add the print to his private album:

[It is a]...lovely picture—calm, beautiful, so well-fitted the parts—quiet, yum yum—and so nice of you to send it to me. It will go with the others. And those others, by the way, are well mounted and under covers and cover; I have been discreet as a Victorian maiden with them—yet I have shown them to several, who appreciated them no end, but who are not the gabby kind...I wish I could've been behind the screen and peeping out when John and Buddy were playing at two-backed beast.\(^{200}\)

On November 3, 1952, Lynes sat down at his typewriter and composed a long letter to Perlin. In this thoroughly detailed message, Lynes vividly described the events leading up to and immediately following his experience photographing McCarthy and Leaphart. Although a lengthy passage, Lynes's narrative is essential for understanding his photograph of the two men. Not only does the letter provide factual information about the creation of *Man in His Element*, it also reveals how letter writing was central to his voyeuristic experience. Lynes seemed to complete his voyeurism by documenting and recounting it to others in writing. While he utilized his typewriter to describe the actual experience, with his camera, Lynes recreated his voyeurism using the bodies of the men involved. In the case of *Man in His Element*, Lynes’s voyeurism cannot be divorced from the racial hegemony to which the photographer belonged, and his letter clearly projects its judgments about race and class, in addition to revealing the story behind the image’s creation:

> Months ago I took some nudes of Buddy, told him at the time that all that hair, though fun to play around in, wasn’t photogenic and that under it he (probably) had a beautiful

\(^{200}\)Letter from Steward to Lynes, 16 November 1952.
body. We made vague date to remove same and to rephotograph. A couple of weeks ago, while having a haircut, I remembered, and asked my barber to order a set of clippers for me. In due course they were delivered, I informed Buddy, etc., I meant, of course, to strip him except for armpits and pubic bush. IMAGINE MY HORROR when he turned up on a Friday evening with his pubes shaved clean like a baby’s! It wasn’t pretty. That day I had Mauricio and John Leapheart [sic] for drinks. Buddy wasn’t supposed to arrive until ten-thirty, arrived at five-thirty instead, making muddle. I’d not meant to introduce him to Johnny. There was a funny strained sort of atmosphere (I’d written B[uddy] about J[ohnny]—I would, wouldn’t I?) and nothing to be done about it. But in due course B[uddy] and I went off to dine with Jean Dewes and to go to Arthur O’Keeffe’s Halloween party. We all got stinking (and I, by the way, have been liquorless ever since) and B[uddy] got sulky-possessive, partly because I talked to Chuck for fifteen minutes, partly because I cuddled another fifteen with Ed Torgensen’s Dick, and stayed sulky all evening. In the morning we both were hungover but, all the same, sometime after noon, dragged ourselves to the studio where I proceeded to make with those clippers—as per arrangement. It took two hours to get all that fuzz off him and my hand ached so—I had to take time out to rest it ten or a dozen times. And, contrary to expectation, it was neither a pleasant or an erotic occupation. Half-way through the job Johnny phoned. (Remember I was feeling sickish and by that time was feeling exasperated—and maybe a switch diabolical—as well.) I asked B[uddy] if he’d be willing to pose with Johnny. A little to my surprise he said yes, so I asked J[ohnny] to come along. He did. I photographed B[uddy] both lyrical (?) and musclemanwise, and then photographed them together in all sorts of close-contact suggestive sentimental sensuous poses—but no (what dear Dr. K[insey]. would call) action pictures. J[ohnny] would have been willing, but I thought B[uddy] wouldn’t, and besides I was a bit shy about suggesting it. But then we all went back to 84th Street where everything did happen, though B[uddy] took a little persuading, and the sight of that big black boy screwing that super-naked little white bundle of brawn was one of the finest I’ve ever seen. But that was the ONLY pleasant part of the weekend. We went to dinner then, and again B[uddy] turned sulky—so sulky he wouldn’t speak to me from then (eight o’clock
maybe) until noon next day. And then he was all over me with hurt feelings jealousy remorse reproach etc. It wasn't nice. But--give me credit, please--I didn't lose my temper. I damn near did, though, and more than once. I just waited and waited to put him on that eight o'clock Sunday evening train. And now he has gone and doesn't even know I don't want him back. But that's another problem for another letter another day; letter to him, I mean. Once in a French music hall a monkey climbed from the stage to Isadora Duncan's box, and bit her; and she complained she always attracted madmen and monkeys. (one of G[alenway] W[escott]'s stories; you're sure to have heard it.) I get my madmen and monkeys all in one package, mad monkeys. At least (I think) I know when I've had enough.201

Lynes wrote this obsessively detailed narration two days after the events he described took place. But it was eleven days before he apparently mailed a print (fig. 4) from the series to Perlin. Lynes's text was actually the first image Perlin received of the story. Lynes sent the photograph almost as an afterthought--a visual complement to his written narrative of the Leaphart-McCarthy saga. Lynes's description of this photography session was more detailed than his usual letters--perhaps he knew the photograph was going to turn out well, or at least that its provocative content would require more explanation on his part. The information Lynes provided to Perlin in his letter was an essential component of the experience of looking at, or perhaps more accurately, of reading the print of McCarthy and Leaphart. Perlin, Steward, and other gay men with whom Lynes corresponded could be provided with such narratives along with the photographs he mailed for their enjoyment. Thus, to their original audience, the nude subjects in Lynes's photographs were anything but anonymous, a fact that is easy to forget

201Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 3 November 1952.
today, particularly when one sees Lynes's male nudes presented as unknown bodies and faces in exhibitions and books.

Lynes's lengthy written narrative also set the stage for Perlin's interpretation of the complex inscription of race and class in the photograph (fig. 4) that he probably received. Whereas the meaning of this image, like Man in His Element, might be viewed as open to interpretation and ambiguous, particularly with regard to its intriguing racial content,202 in the letter, Lynes made his views quite clear. Lynes did not privilege either McCarthy or Leaphart in this text, but instead diminished them both. Using his narrative voice, Lynes clearly established his superiority and control over the men posing before his camera and the events that unfolded between them. Lynes also demonstrated how, as a white, socially privileged man, he looked down upon the Other—including those, such as McCarthy, who were white but not part of the photographer's social class. In the letter to Perlin, Lynes referred to McCarthy's hairy, brawny physique in order to stress the man's working class background and appearance. Lynes probably intended the story about the "mad monkey" to serve as a characterization of his experience with McCarthy.203 If true, such an insult would have implied that McCarthy, in addition to being acrobatic (fig. 19), was in some way lower, less developed, and less sane than Lynes. "Monkey" was also a racist pejorative historically used by whites as a term for non-white people, and comparing

202 See Chapter I.
203 Lynes's reference to the "mad monkey" story in his letter to Perlin also could have served as a metaphor for the coupling of Leaphart and McCarthy in front of the camera, and later, in bed. In this context, McCarthy may have been the "mad" component of the "package," while Leaphart—the racial Other—was the "monkey." Lynes's intentions with regard to the meaning of the expression "mad monkey" are not quite clear in the letter.
Africans to primates was one method Europeans used to denigrate those perceived as racially different.  

In addition to insulting McCarthy, Lynes also used the racist diminutive “big black boy” to characterize Leaphart in his letter. Thus, using these pejoratives, the photographer defined McCarthy, the presumed “mad monkey,” and Leaphart, the “big black boy,” as Others. Leaving no doubt as to his voyeuristic intentions, Lynes also let Perlin know how much he enjoyed watching Leaphart “screwing” McCarthy. In other words, Lynes took pleasure in seeing a black man—the historic racial Other—penetrate and dominate his passive, white partner. As the photographer and author, Lynes positioned himself above both of these men in terms of his intellect and privileged class and race. Although McCarthy and Leaphart shared the photographer’s bed, Lynes did not consider them to be his equals—they were objects placed before the camera for his pleasure and amusement. He could desire the two men, but only within a context defined by the hegemony; Lynes had to recognize and assert his status over both Leaphart and McCarthy, and if his photograph did not explicitly express this control, then his narrative letters did.

As one might imagine, Lynes’s relationships with his models often ended as quickly and dramatically as they began. Although Leaphart and Lynes seemed to remain on good terms for some time, based on Lynes’s letters to Perlin, McCarthy’s relationship with the photographer swiftly deteriorated. McCarthy’s silence and remorseful behavior following the photography session caused Lynes to write to him, most likely to curtail

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204Pieterse, 45-51.
their relationship unless McCarthy behaved more to his liking. Lynes of course shared
with Perlin the news of his problems with McCarthy:

Two letters from Buddy, but no answer to my ultimatum.
Poor child! What he got out of that weekend, besides a
plug in the arse, was a bad cold (from depriving him of his
bearskin, do you suppose?) and bad feet--from doing
tumbling tricks without shoes, on a hard floor instead of on
a mat. Should I commiserate?205

Lynes would later refer to November 1st as “the day Buddy Boy got raped, both
tensorially and literally.”206 Given Lynes’s exploitation and cavalier treatment of
McCarthy, it is hardly surprising that their friendship ended. The pair still saw one another
at social events on occasion for the next few months, but Lynes had obviously hurt
McCarthy’s feelings and they drifted apart.207 Perhaps this rift and the unpleasant
memories associated with it provided the impetus for McCarthy to destroy his prints from
series 375, despite his previous allegations.208

Confessions

Lynes’s letters discussing the events leading up to and immediately following his
photography session with Leaphart and McCarthy read as a form of confessional
discourse, or in other words, as a means of admitting the truth about his actions and
behavior. Michel Foucault described the confession as “one of the main rituals we rely on
for the production of truth.”209 He added that “sex was a privileged theme of confession”

205Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 7 November 1952.
206Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 14 November 1952.
207Letter from Lynes to Perlin, 6 January 1953.
208See Chapter II.
Random House, 1978), 58. I am grateful to Diane Dillon for encouraging me to explore the link between
and "it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined." Foucault’s discussion of the confessional is particularly relevant to Lynes’s use of letter writing for the purpose of narrating photographs like Man in His Element and its variants. While such images suggestively depicted the bodies of Lynes’s sexual partners, the photographer’s narrative letter confessed in lurid detail the story behind the series’ creation, particularly the voyeurism that Lynes craved and reenacted in his work. Lynes’s confessional letters openly revealed information about himself and his models that was concealed or subtly implied in his photographs. He used such texts to explain the truth about his sexual identity and photographic practice, both of which were intimately linked. Yet such truth also combined elements of fact and fantasy; the personal image that Lynes constructed in his letters was shaped by the photographer’s cultural context, including its perpetual conflicts and hierarchies between Other and Self.

While one might argue that Lynes’s written confessions liberated the photographer from the silence imposed on him and other gay men in the 1950s, they also served to disempower his models. Foucault noted: “truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence.” In this context, mailing photographs and narrating them in letters offered Lynes a modest amount of freedom to speak the truth about his own life and partially overcome the
hegemony's silence concerning the topic of homosexuality. Lynes's models, however, did not enjoy the same expressive freedoms as the photographer; they were effectively silenced and rendered powerless in his prints and written confessions. The truth about Lynes's sexual identity and artistic production, as revealed in these works, was that he used them to express his superiority over those he perceived as different.

The supposed freedom Lynes found within his photographs and confessional letters also was not what it seemed. As Foucault remarked: "one has to be completely taken in by this internal ruse of confession in order to attribute a fundamental role to censorship, to taboos regarding speaking and thinking."212 In Foucault's eyes, the confession was "an immense labor to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce—while other forms of work ensured the accumulation of capital—men's subjection: their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word."213 Indeed, the enormous expenditures of time, energy, and resources that Lynes devoted to surreptitiously photographing and writing about images that could not be publicly shown or sold to generate income seem like a questionable form of freedom. Foucault declared that "one has to have an inverted image of power in order to believe that all these voices which have spoken so long in our civilization—repeating the formidable injunction to tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, what one is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking—are speaking of freedom."214 For much of his life, Lynes followed a pattern of seducing men for sex, photographing them in order to recreate a sense of voyeurism, and then reporting these experiences to his friends and

212bid.
213bid.
214bid.
acquaintances, often through his letters. The sex act was not an end in and of itself; rather, it was the means for Lynes's photographic practice, and ultimately, the confessions he felt obliged to reveal in his letters.

While Lynes may have believed that, through photography and writing, he was asserting power over his silenced models, in reality, by virtue of his letter's confessional tone, he was transforming himself into a subject and bowing to a power much greater than any that he experienced through his authorship. "One does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile,"¹²¹⁵ wrote Foucault. Lynes may have felt a need to construct an identity for himself in his photographs and letters that demonstrated he was superior to those he viewed as Others, but the racial and social hierarchy that Lynes internalized and inscribed in his visual and literary works was a manifestation of the same cultural hegemony that marginalized the photographer's sexual identity and practices. It prevented him from publicly showing his explicit male nudes in the first place and forced him to seek alternative methods—the mail, for instance—in order to exhibit images like Man in His Element.

Lynes's need to confess in writing and the personal subjectification it caused may have been an unexpected consequence of creating such texts, but it actually proved useful in his dealings with Alfred Kinsey and finding a suitable home for his negatives and prints of the male nude. Foucault demonstrated how, beginning in the nineteenth century, the

¹²¹⁵Ibid., 61-2.
West transformed the ritual of confession into a form of scientific discourse. In order to understand the truth about sex, scientists appropriated the techniques and practices of the confessional; to them, the confession represented the most effective method for gathering information about sex. Researchers asked their patients to confess in the name of science their sexual histories, behavior, and desires. Using the privacy and confidentiality of the confessional system, scientists could ask their subjects the most personal questions, and in return, they would receive detailed and candid responses. The medical community collected this information, analyzed and validated it, and if deemed necessary or appropriate, offered therapy to correct it.\textsuperscript{216}

According to Foucault, following the widespread dissemination of confessional procedures throughout the West, "a great archive of the pleasure of sex was gradually constituted."\textsuperscript{217} This archive captured the attention of nineteenth-century psychiatrists, who began to transform confessions about sex into a confessional science. As a result, sexuality became "situated at the point of intersection of a technique of confession and a scientific discursivity."\textsuperscript{218} In short, sexuality became firmly affixed within discourse, just as Lynes's sexual identity, or at least an important aspect of it, was inscribed in the discourse of his letters. In these texts, Lynes employed confessional techniques to liberate personal information about his sexual desires and behavior, but through them, he also convinced his correspondents to divulge their private confessions to him. Lynes saved these ephemeral confessions--the original letters he received and the carbons of his outgoing correspondence--and along with his vast collection of nude photographs, he

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216}ibid., 63.
\item \textsuperscript{217}ibid., 63.
\item \textsuperscript{218}ibid., 68.
\end{itemize}
assembled his own private "archive of the pleasure of sex." Lynes's archival impulses and confessional practices closely paralleled the professional activities of Kinsey. Over the course of his career, Kinsey, the heir to those nineteenth-century scientists who pioneered using the confession as a research tool, interviewed countless individuals in order to gather information about human sexuality. In the process, Kinsey amassed a vast archive, including thousands of photographs and sexual histories, covering a wide spectrum of human sexuality. Lynes's confessional tendencies made him an ideal subject for Kinsey's research; no doubt they helped foster his congenial relationship with the scientist, which in turn, led to the Kinsey Institute's acquisition of hundreds of the photographer's works, including the negative for Man in His Element.

Foucault believed that there were two ways to produce the truth about sex—an ars erotica in which "truth is drawn from pleasure itself," and a scientia sexualis which utilizes the confession to find the truth about sex. He also theorized that the West had no true erotic art, at least not like that found in certain non-Western cultures, and instead, it developed a sexual science.219 Foucault questioned whether the West's sexual science was actually a subtle form of erotic art: "the most important elements of an erotic art linked to our knowledge about sexuality--are in this multiplication and intensification of pleasure connected to the production of the truth about sex."220 Such a notion not only raises interesting questions about the motivations behind Kinsey's sexual archive and research pursuits, but it also demonstrates how Lynes's artistic production--an archive combining his photographs and letters--functioned as a form of erotic art. Lynes's

\[219\text{Ibid., 57-8.}\]
\[220\text{Ibid., 71.}\]
voyeuristic imagery, when viewed in relation to his confessional letters and archiving practices, not only produced the truth about the photographer's sexuality, but pleasure for Lynes and his friends.
Conclusion

During the last forty-four years, the context in which Man in His Element and its variants were first viewed and circulated has, as one would expect, changed considerably. Immediately after its creation in the fall of 1952, Man in His Element functioned as a form of private erotica for Lynes and his gay friends at a time when it was illegal to produce or distribute such material. Although the print could not be shown in public, Lynes found effective ways to display it. The work was furtively mailed across the country to Samuel Steward, and Lynes confessed the story behind the creation of the series in a letter to Bernard Perlin who also received a variant of the print while living overseas. An unknown number of the photographer’s friends received images from the series as well. The clandestine circulation of Lynes’s photographs within this private world not only motivated him to document with great care the story of their production in meticulously crafted letters, but it also required that he find a suitable institution to preserve and interpret them.

In 1954, when Lynes donated the negatives for Man in His Element and hundreds of other male nudes to the Kinsey Institute, his imagery was transferred from his personal archive to a scientific one, where it now occupies a muddled zone between Foucault’s ars erotica and scientia sexualis. In the 1980s, revisionist trends in the art world helped bring Man in His Element and Lynes’s largely forgotten oeuvre to light. During the last fifteen years, a number of exhibitions and publications have brought these images to the attention of a new audience and situate them within the art historical canon. Perhaps the most telling symbol of Lynes’s new-found fame has been the influence of his imagery,
particularly *Man in His Element*, on contemporary artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe and Isaac Julien.

Since its creation, the meaning of *Man in His Element* has depended not only on who viewed it and from what cultural vantage point, but also on the conditions in which it was displayed and whose voices were heard. While the subject of the photograph is rather obvious—homosexual desire and racial difference—its meaning is not as apparent. It is difficult to determine just by looking at the photograph if it was meant to be a scene of racial harmony or racist exploitation. Viewing such imagery without an understanding of its history only adds to its pronounced ambiguities. When Lynes's photographs are read along with his narrative letters, however, it is apparent that his work is more concerned with control than ambivalence. The mail offered Lynes the opportunity to control who received *Man in His Element* and its variants, and through letter writing, he could construct a context around these images and shape the audience's interpretation of them. In his narrative letters, Lynes positioned himself, a patrician, white male, at the top of the racial and class hierarchy inscribed within his work. As these texts so plainly reveal, Lynes viewed both of the models in series 375—black and white—as Others, individuals against whom he defined his concept of Self. While it was acceptable for him to desire these men and to enjoy instigating and observing their sexual interaction, at the same time, he found it necessary to assert his authority and power over them. Lynes's narrative letters were confessions designed to reveal the truth about his sexuality and to express the pleasure he associated with it. The truth of Lynes's pleasure, however, was that it also reflected and perpetuated a common model of oppression.
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Appendix: Illustrations
Fig. 1
Cecil Beaton
George Platt Lynes, date unknown
Photograph
Published in New York City Ballet: Photographs from 1935 through 1955 taken by George Platt Lynes, 1957
Fig. 2
George Platt Lynes
*Mast in His Element* or *Johnny Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy*, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#28 from series 375)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 3
George Platt Lynes
*Johnny Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy*, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute*, 1993
Fig. 4
George Platt Lynes
Johnny Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute, 1993
Fig. 5
Videocassette slipcase of *Looking for Langston*, 1989
Directed by Isaac Julien
Production still by Sunil Gupta

"A romantic, sinuous mixture of re-shot newsreels, clips from old movies and sultry beefcake... A hint of Derek Jarman."
*Village Voice—J. Hoberman*
Fig. 6
George Platt Lynes
Johnny Leaphart, October 23, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#20 from series 373)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 7
Robert Mapplethorpe
_Dan_, 1980
Unique gelatin silver print, 40 x 30 inches
Collection of Lynn Hurst and John Van Alstine
Published in _Robert Mapplethorpe_, 1988
Fig. 8
Robert Mapplethorpe
Ken Moody and Robert Sherman, 1984
Platinum print, edition 3, 25 1/2 x 22 inches
Collection of Aaron and Barbara Levine
Published in Robert Mapplethorpe, 1988
Fig. 9
Greek
Banquet Scene from the Tomb of the Diver, Paestum, Italy
480-470 B.C.
Fresco
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Paestum
Published in Il Museo di Paestum, 1969
Fig. 10
Gustave Courbet
The Sleepers, 1866
Oil on canvas, 53 1/8 x 78 3/4 inches
Paris, Musée du Petit Palais
Published in Courbet Reconsidered, 1988
Fig. 11
Walter Iooss, Jr.
Valeria Mazza and Tyra Banks, Sandown Bay, Kleinmond
Photograph
Published on the cover of Sports Illustrated, January 29, 1996
Fig. 12
F. Holland Day
*Ebony and Ivory*, 1897
Platinum print
Royal Photographic Society, Bath
Published in *History of Photography*, Winter 1994
Fig. 13
George Platt Lynes
*Untitled*, date unknown
Gelatin silver print, 8 3/4 x 6 3/4 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Russell Lynes
Fig. 14
Paul Cadmus
The Bath, 1951
Egg tempera on pressed wood panel, 14 x 16 inches
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of an anonymous donor
Published in Paul Cadmus, 1992
Fig. 15
George Quaintance
Egyptian Wrestlers, 1952
Published in Physique Pictorial, Spring 1953
Fig. 16
Théodore Géricault
Boxers, 1818
Lithograph. 13 3/4 x 16 1/2 inches
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum purchase with funds provided by Wallace and Isabel Wilson and “One Great Night in November, 1987,” and Mr. and Mrs. E. Gregg Wallace, Jr.
Fig. 17
Unknown
Boxing match between Joey Maxim (left) and Sugar Ray Robinson (right). Yankee Stadium, New York, June 25, 1952
Photograph
Published in A Pictorial History of Boxing, 1959
Fig. 18

George Platt Lynes
Buddy McCarthy, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#16 from series 375)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 19

George Platt Lynes

*Buddy McCarthy*, November 1, 1952

Gelatin silver print

Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#22 from series 375)

Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 20
Stephen Glass
Untitled photograph
Published in Ideal Manhood, 1948
Fig. 21
George Platt Lynes
Buddy McCarthy, July 8, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#10 from series 342)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 22
Cecil Beaton
Nathalie Paley, 1936
Photograph
Published in Beaton, 1980
Fig. 23
Jacques-André Boiffard
Untitled, c. 1930
Photograph
Musée National d’Art Moderne, Paris
Published in L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism, 1985
Fig. 24
George Platt Lynes
Buddy McCarthy, July 8, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#7 from series 342)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 25
Pavel Tchelitchev
*The Golden Leaf*, 1943
Gouache on paper, 25 x 19 1/2 inches
Collection of J. Crawford, New York
Published in *Tchelitchev*, 1994
Fig. 26
Cecil Beaton
Mary Taylor, for Vogue, 1935
Photograph
Published in Cecil Beaton: Photographs 1920-1970, 1995
Fig. 27
George Platt Lynes
Buddy McCarthy, September 27, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Contact sheet printed from original 2 x 2 inch negatives
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 28
Paul Cadmus
Conversation Piece, 1940
Oil and egg tempera on linen on pressed wood panel, 22 1/8 x 33 1/2 inches
Private collection
Published in Paul Cadmus, 1992
Fig. 29
George Platt Lynes
Male Nude, 1932
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute, 1993
Fig. 30
George Platt Lynes
Johnny Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#26 from series 375)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 31
George Platt Lynes
*Johnny Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy*, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#27 from series 375)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 32
George Platt Lynes
Johnny Leaphart and Buddy McCarthy, November 1, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#29 from series 375)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 33
Mary Cassatt
Quiétude, c. 1891
Drypoint, fifth state, 10 1/8 x 6 1/4 inches
Published in Mary Cassatt: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Graphic Work, 1979
Fig. 34
George Platt Lynes
*Male Nudes*, 1953
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute*, 1993
Fig. 35
George Platt Lynes
Paul Cadmus and Jared French, 1938
Gelatin silver print
Published in George Platt Lynes, 1982
Fig. 36
Paul Cadmus
Two Boys on a Beach #1, 1938
Etching, artist's proof, 5 1/8 x 7 inches
Collection of the artist
Published in Paul Cadmus: Yesterday and Today, 1981
Fig. 37
Alfred Eisenstaedt
V-J Day at Times Square, New York City, August 1945
Photograph
Published in Alfred Eisenstaedt: The First Fifty Years, 1976
Fig. 38
George Platt Lynes
Bill Blizzard and Johnny Leaphart, January 26, 1953
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#27 from series 409)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 39
George Platt Lynes
Bill Blizzard and Johnny Leaphart, January 26, 1953
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#12 from series 409)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 40
George Platt Lynes
*Frederick Ashton and the Principal Dancers of Four Saints in Three Acts*, 1934
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute*, 1993
Fig. 41
John Trumbull
George Washington, 1780
Oil on canvas, 36 x 28 inches
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of Charles Allen Munn, 1924
Published in American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. I, 1994
Fig. 42
Charles Cordier
Fraternité, 1867
Marble, 40 7/8 inches high
Private collection
Published in The Image of the Black in Western Art, vol. IV, part 1, 1989
Fig. 43
George Platt Lynes
Male Nude, 1938
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute, 1993
Fig. 44
George Platt Lynes
Male Nude, date unknown
Gelatin silver print
Published in The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe, 1992
Fig. 45
Advertisement (detail) for Aunt Jemima pancakes
Published in *Better Homes and Gardens*, February 1953
Fig. 46
George Platt Lynes
Johnny Leaphart, October 23, 1952
Gelatin silver print
Printed in 1995 from the original 8 x 10 inch negative (#6 from series 373)
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Fig. 47
J. T. Zealy

Renty, Congo, on plantation of B. F. Taylor, Columbia, S.C., March 1850
Daguerreotype
The Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Published in Reading American Photographs: Images as History. Mathew Brady to Walker Evans, 1989
Fig. 48
George Platt Lynes
*Orpheus* (Nicholas Magallanes), July 26, 1950
Published in *The New York City Ballet*, 1951 (souvenir program)
The Dance Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center
Fig. 49
George Platt Lynes
*Orpheus* (Nicholas Magallanes and Francisco Moncion), July 26, 1950
Gelatin silver photograph, 7 5/8 x 9 inches
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gift of the Robert Miller Gallery
Fig. 50
George Platt Lynes
Orpheus (Nicholas Magallanes and Francisco Moncion), July 26, 1950
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.
Published in George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute, 1993
Fig. 51
George Platt Lynes
Orpheus (Nicholas Magallanes and Maria Tallchief), c. 1948-50
Published in New York City Ballet: Photographs from 1935 through 1955 taken by George Platt Lynes, 1957
Fig. 52
George Platt Lynes (?)
Installation view of exhibition Two Hundred Portraits by George Platt Lynes, Plus an Assortment of Less Formal Pictures of People, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1941
Gelatin silver print, 9 3/8 x 7 1/2 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Russell Lynes
Fig. 53
George Platt Lynes (?)
Installation view of exhibition Two Hundred Portraits by George Platt Lynes, Plus an Assortment of Less Formal Pictures of People, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1941
Gelatin silver print, 9 3/8 x 7 1/2 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Russell Lynes
Fig. 54
George Platt Lynes
*American Landscape*, 1932
Photomural
Published in *Murals by American Painters and Photographers*, 1932
Fig. 55
George Platt Lynes
The Sleepwalker, 1935
Gelatin silver print, 12 7/8 x 10 1/2 inches
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Ford Motor Company Collection, gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell, 1987
Fig. 56
Issues of Der Kreis featuring George Platt Lynes's work
Collection of Alexander J. Yow, New York

Page from Der Kreis, February 1951 showing a photograph (fig. 49) from George Platt Lynes's Orpheus series
Fig. 57
Scrapbook of George Platt Lynes photographs (clockwise, from upper left: Buddy McCarthy, George Platt Lynes, Ralph MacWilliams, and Alexander J. Yow)
Collection of Buddy McCarthy, New York
Fig. 58
Postcard from George Platt Lynes to Otto Wittmann, stamped January 16, 1939
Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California; Gift of Otto Wittmann
Dear Alex:

It appears I've got myself dated up for Sunday. How (why) do I involve myself? No advantage or particular pleasure in prospect. And, of course, as always, always greedily, I look forward to being with you. And something tells me that, after a week of city life, you're going to want some time to yourself. Where does that leave us?

Be self-indulgent, but indulge me too. Dine with me Wednesday or Thursday. The sooner the better. Let me know.

The brawl for Tanny this evening. Off to Marco's in the morning. Back Sunday evening.

I told Glenway that the things you left were yours. If he doesn't forget, he'll take them to me in the country Saturday evening. In any case you needn't write. You'll get them back some time or other.

I've heard nothing from either Chuck or Ed about that green sofa. Oh, the vagueness of the young! But, in the event that Ed doesn't want it, it'll be left at Jamie's for us to pick up and carry around the corner. I bet though that Ed will want it. I did promise.

We're not having beach weather. Are you?

Yours,

[Signature]

*Fig. 59
Letter from George Platt Lynes to Alexander J. Yow, June 29, 1951*
Dear George,

Well, you have made me real ashamed of myself, for all week I have been wanting to write to you, and there has been a succession of committees, meetings and furtiving around until today, and when I began to think of writing at last, I went down to the mail box and found those wonderful cuttings of the little corporal there, perhaps he really may look better in the uniform if you say so, but in any case at all, that I can eat at my table and drink from my glass any time he comes to Chicago, of that you can be damned sure. I loved them, you wonderful creature, and I have already looked a soft hole through them, and I think there was really something I could do for you besides writing little paragraphs of my adventures, which seem all too silly and slight when you are so nice to me. Like your not having someone to sit for you every week, I don’t have things happening to me all the time, and to keep me to have to dip into me lurid past and dredge up little things as I did one in a “correspondence” which I read—read in Bloomington, and seemed to like a lot. So if you would be content with small narratives from the past—well, there are millions of those. Meanwhile, however, something lovely happened last night. I know a guy from Chicago’s west side who’s a young executive downtown, and like me, he reads an extraordinary double-triple life—he’s one of the “toughs” about 34, and he lives in Logan Square, because he was born there, and it has sunk to one of the real tough neighborhoods of the city, right of the sprawling hand-made shanties—little toughs that Chicago seems to be producing nowadays in greater numbers than any other kind. He called me up last night to say he’d met one of these, and did I mind if he brought him over? Of course not, I said, except I’ve just painted my coolie-screwing women mural off the wall behind my bed and the place is a mess. Small matter, he said, and after a little while they came. The kid was eighteen, and cute as hell—and his clothes just right. He had dressed up—which means that he had put on a new but rubbed-white pair of jeans that fit him like a glove both loose and tight, and he was wearing his own flannel quilted black jacket, and a turtle neck sweater—dark blue with grey arms and V at the neck. He had black black hair and was very polite, yet icier than ice, and yet furred near took my hand off with his grip. He was very naive about the H life, well, having introduced him to it not very long before—well, it wasn’t many minutes until we were all undressing—I was sitting on the edge of the bed naked, and Jolly crossed-legged in the middle, and the kid was wrestling himself out of his jeans and jacket, and then he suddenly paused and looked over at us and said in a little boy’s voice: “Chees! I feel just like da ‘Thanksgiving’ turkey!” I dapped near broke up the whole party... but didn’t. He got his coat on the bed and I went down on him while Jolly straddled his face and came in his mouth, and then Jolly and I changed places while a couple Shits went off in my head... After that, we turned him sidewise while Jolly continued, and I rimmed the kid. Then he came, he said a little after: “Youse guys sure treat a fella okay. I hope I kin come back.” And after the two of them left I sat there a little cold for a moment, thinking about two old queens using a kid that way—but if it’s evil, I’m glad, and I’m for more of it... So do tell me if you mind if I go back into the past a little farther, for I love to write about these little excitements, and if you can stand them, that’s a wonderful incentive to me, because—strange as it seems—I’m actually a very shy and timid lil sensitive plant...