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## Seduction, Control, & the Search for Authenticity: Madonna's Truth or Dare

E. DEIDRE PRIBRAM

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MADONNA'S 1991 FILM, *Truth or Dare*, based on her 1990 "Blond Ambition" tour—itself a combination of pop music and performance art—defies easy categorization. It is a "docudrama" of sorts: part documentary, part concert film, part dramatic enactment. By combining various filmic styles and traditions, *Truth or Dare* recreates certain long-standing cultural dichotomies between, for instance, onstage and offstage, public and private, reality and appearance, or truth and artifice. The film replicates such oppositions only to then question their continuing validity. Binary distinctions in *Truth or Dare* prove more apparent than real, more fleeting than differentiating. Ultimately, I believe, the film finds such categories irrelevant, at least as far as they concern this particular cultural icon and individual. Madonna.

The collapsing of long-held cultural dichotomies is a central tenet in recent formulations of postmodernism. An examination of *Truth or Dare* within the framework of postmodernist theorizing, in particular Jean Baudrillard's version, indicates that Madonna, in this film, can be viewed as a contemporary application of that body of thought. Moreover, discussion on this topic highlights current and often troubling concerns for feminist film theory, in the face of postmodern formulations, surrounding concepts of subject-object polarity that have played a fundamental role in theorizing the Other.

### IS SHE REVEALING, OR ISN'T SHE?: THE RECEPTION & PROMOTION OF "TRUTH OR DARE"

Discussion of *Truth or Dare* most frequently surrounds the question, "Is she revealing, or isn't she?" Do we learn anything "real" about Madonna, and if so, what? This is the debate that frames the film's reception in the popular press. The headline of *Newsweek's* feature article on her reads: "Madonna Lets It All Hang Out: The Shameless One stages a raunchy, revealing self-portrait." The article goes on to ask, "When a natural-born exhibitionist exhibits herself, is it the 'real' Madonna you are watching or an artful imitation of reality?" (Ansen 1991: 66). *US* magazine prefaces its story with a full two-page color photo of a physically revealed Madonna, accompanied by a quote from her interview, "If you're going to reveal yourself, REVEAL yourself." The article describes *Truth or Dare* as a "touching, vulgar, erotic

and revealing documentary” (Deevoy 1991, 18). Janet Maslin (1991, C15) writes in her *New York Times* review, “In the case of Madonna, who is even filmed gossiping in the restroom and visiting her mother’s grave, no such sacrosanct territory is shown to exist. Nothing is too private for Madonna to flaunt in public.”<sup>1</sup>

This is not to suggest that these questions are raised solely by the film’s reception in the press. Madonna and those representing her certainly play along, outside the film’s bounds, in the game they have created for the film’s revelatory nature. Consider, for instance, the packaging of the film with its slogan, “The Ultimate Dare is to tell the Truth,” or the back cover of the video with its image of a barebacked Madonna, “All Access” stamped upon her. Interview comments by the director, Alek Keshishian, adhere to the idea of the film as a search for authenticity around the public *and* private Madonna and its revelations of her “true” being. “Madonna felt a responsibility to let the public in on her truth. Sometimes I think it is more important to be understood than loved” (Heller 1991, 5-E).<sup>2</sup>

Madonna’s stance on this varies from interview to interview, and, true to form, she is cagey and elusive. Consider, for example, this excerpt from an interview with Carrie Rickey (1991a, 5-E):

Does she really believe that she’s made a revealing movie? . . . “What’s more daring than revealing the truth?” she demands. Excuse me. Madonna, but in the film aren’t you revealing only what you choose to reveal? “Yeah,” she admits, “I’m revealing what I wanna reveal. . . . While you *can* argue that I chose to show what I wanna show, I can also say that *what* I chose to show is very revealing.”

### **Filmic Signification: Constructing and Collapsing Distinctions**

*Truth or Dare* is a hybrid of two traditions in concert films. It is a cross between direct cinema practices in its black-and-white segments,<sup>3</sup> recalling films such as *Don’t Look Back*, which portrayed Bob Dylan’s 1965 tour of England; in its color sequences, it references more recent efforts, such as Jonathan Demme’s *Stop Making Sense*.<sup>4</sup> In direct cinema, what is revealed

backstage is as critical, if not more so, than what the audience observes through onstage performances in “coming to understand” the personality and cultural importance of a given celebrity or celebrities. In contrast, *Stop Making Sense* occurs entirely in concert. There is no backstage sphere of activity for the Talking Heads, no distinction made between public versus private domains. Diegetically, only onstage exists.<sup>5</sup>

The backstage scenes in *Truth or Dare* make reference to direct

cinema, in part because they are shot in black and white, as many of those films were (including *Don't Look Back*). In addition, a number of other signifiers are cited—for instance, it has the gritty look produced by a hand-held camera following action, sometimes too late or off the mark, rather than careful framing and composition. Shots are held longer and edits are less frequent than in the film's color sequences. The black-and-white footage has the feel of a single camera shoot.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, the color concert segments in the *Stop Making Sense* model are shot with multiple cameras to provide an optimal number of perspectives. Indeed, the editing during the performance scenes is fast-paced: Cuts come with great frequency, while angles and shot distances constantly alter. (This is also influenced by the style of music videos, the medium through which Madonna built much of her career.)

The formal devices and structure of the film establish two broad spaces that together make up Madonna's existence: the public world of performance, of audience and celebrity, and the backstage arena, a more personal, behind-the-scenes space. This backstage arena, although formally unified, can be further distinguished as backstage and offstage. Backstage lies immediately behind the scenes, just as Madonna prepares to go on in front of her audience or comes off after a performance. Offstage is an even more "personal" arena, further removed physically from the stage, and includes time spent with her family and friends such as Sandra Bernhard and Warren Beatty.

The "authenticity" of personal documentary, recording "real" events as they unfold, contrasts the carefully crafted and achieved look and feel of the performance sequences.<sup>7</sup> Two distinct spheres are established in the film, separated formally and spatially: Madonna as public persona, performer, and celebrity versus the more intimate life of Madonna the individual, the human being. The formal strategies surrounding the black-and-white sequences as opposed to those in color are intended to differentiate the two worlds of the film. They are set up, at least initially, in stark opposition to each other.<sup>8</sup>

This is further illustrated by the composition of the film's personnel. The credit sequence indicates that an entirely different crew was used for the documentary footage than for the concert scenes, including the director of photography and the editor, as though two distinct projects were being undertaken side by side.<sup>9</sup> Two different crews, two different traditions, and two different cinematic languages are operating in *Truth or Dare*.

However, though *Truth or Dare* distinguishes between public and private spheres, it does not do so in order to claim them as separable.

Instead, having established them in contradistinction, the film works to blur the meanings of those distinctions, to unveil them as more quandary than contradiction. I would like to look in some detail at the transitions between black- and-white and color sequences in order to show how the film structurally manages the oppositional formal and physical spaces it creates and then, ultimately, collapses them.

There are ten color segments, each marking a different song and onstage performance.<sup>10</sup> Seven of the ten numbers are performed in their entirety or near-entirety; three are short clips. With the exception of two numbers, both brief excerpts (“Keep It Together,” first version, and “Like a Prayer”), each color segment begins with an extreme wide shot, encompassing the stage and part of the audience.

Transitions surrounding the ten color sequences can be grouped into three categories. In the first, two numbers, “Express Yourself” and “Oh Father,” are performed in their entirety. “Express Yourself” is preceded by concert footage in black and white of Madonna and her backup singers performing the same number in Japan, in the rain and out of costume. This is abruptly followed by a straight cut, now in the United States, to an extreme wide shot of the stage occupied by Madonna’s dance troupe. (Madonna makes her entrance momentarily, ascending to the stage on a moving lift.) This is also the first instance of color footage. “Express Yourself” ends with a straight cut to a black-and-white image of a plane flying overhead—supposedly, the plane bringing Madonna and her personnel back to the States.

“Oh Father” is framed in a similar manner. The sequence cuts from a black-and-white image of Oliver, one of the dancers, to an extreme wide shot of Madonna on stage. The performance of “Oh Father” also ends in a wide shot of Madonna, although this time there is a quick fade to black before the next black-and-white segment begins. In this first category of transitions, then, the color performances remain intact (that is, without interruption) and are distinctively marked from the preceding and ensuing black- and-white footage.

The middle grouping of transitions encompasses color segments three through six (including two songs only partially performed). In the short version of “Keep It Together,” Madonna’s performance is hindered by a faulty microphone. Immediately preceding the song’s opening, we see her, dressed in appropriate wardrobe for the number, walking out of the backstage area in a medium close shot. This is followed by a straight cut to her, in medium shot, onstage and in color, jumping onto a chair as she performs the barely audible “Keep It Together.” This cut looks like matched action. It is a smooth transition from black and white to color, created by the apparent

continuity of her movements. This short color sequence ends in the same way: There is a straight cut from Madonna, again in medium shot, jumping down from her chair, to a wide shot, in black and white, of her walking backstage as she says, "Why has it never done this before?" in reference to her sound problems. Again, the continuity of her movements and of the subject matter (the poor sound) give the appearance of a single action. Although the transitions between onstage and backstage are flagged by the changes to or from black and white, the distinction between the two spaces is superseded, at least temporarily, by the (apparent) continuity of Madonna's motions and concerns.

"Like a Virgin" is performed in its entirety and begins with the customary extreme wide shot (cutting from Freddy DeMann, Madonna's manager, placing a bet with two of her bodyguards that her performance will be even more graphic than usual under the threat of arrest). However, this number ends somewhat differently from the previous pattern. There is a cut from the onstage performance to a Toronto TV news report, *still in color*, detailing Madonna's near arrest. This is followed by another cut, this time to black and white, of simulated sex images from *Like a Virgin*, beneath which the audio of the news report continues.

"Like a Prayer" begins with a cut from a black-and-white medium shot of Madonna backstage in prayer, surrounded by her dancers, to a medium wide shot, in color, of Madonna centered in the frame on stage. After a short excerpt of the song, the color sequence cuts from a medium wide shot of Madonna with her dancers to a slightly wider frame, in black and white, of Madonna emerging from a limousine in her bathrobe, with a towel wrapped around her head, as she returns home to have a doctor examine her ailing throat.

The sixth color segment, "Holiday," is performed in its entirety, beginning and ending with extreme wide shots of the stage. However, the performance is preceded by black-and-white footage of Madonna and her two backup singers, standing backstage and singing a portion of "Holiday," then it immediately cuts to the onstage version. In other words, in this middle group of color segments, the transitions are less abrupt and the black-and-white and color portions merge more smoothly, serving to connect, rather than oppose, them to surrounding material.

Until this point, the color performances (and, conversely, the black-and-white segments) have been kept intact. That is, the performance of the song is uninterrupted before the image reverts to black and white. From here on, however, this is no longer the case. The final four color performances (three in their entirety, one in excerpt)

intermingle black-and-white footage with color, in varying configurations. “Live to Tell” is preceded by Madonna, in black and white and surrounded by reporters, giving her statement to the press regarding the Vatican’s banning of her shows. We then cut to the beginning of “Live to Tell” in color, then back to more of the press conference and so on. In this instance, the press conference is the foundation of the scene, while the performance acts as cutaway and commentary. Indeed a good portion of the performance presents Madonna dancing but not singing, while her voice-over of the press statement continues.

The “Vogue” segment also follows a pattern of intercutting between stage performance and black-and-white images—in this case, of fans both with and without Madonna and of Madonna and her troupe at parties, on holiday, and generally having fun, while often making similar physical gestures to those being performed onstage. The cuts back and forth, between color and black-and-white, are frequent and rapid. However, in this instance, the performance serves as the base of the scene, while the black-and-white cutaways act as illustrations or snapshots. “Vogue” ends abruptly with a cut to a medium shot of Madonna, in black and white, playing the game truth or dare with her troupe.

“Causing a Commotion,” consisting of Madonna playfighting onstage with her two female backup singers, is only partially performed. We cut to “Commotion” from a conversation, in black and white, between Madonna and the two singers, Donna Delory and Niki Harris, lying in bed. And we return to this conversation several times from further excerpts of the three, in color and onstage.

The final performance number, “Keep It Together” (in its entirety this time), also intercut with black and white, is the most evenly balanced between the film’s two opposing stylistic signifiers. The song is performed without black-and-white interruption until all the singers and dancers have left the stage and Madonna remains alone. Then, as she repeatedly sings the chorus, we cut back and forth between her kissing her dancers and personnel good-bye at the tour’s end and other images of closure and separation to her, onstage alone. Now, the two aspects of her life and of the film are balanced equally. For instance, the sounds from both arenas—onstage and backstage—occur simultaneously. The color and black-and-white segments and the on- and offstage spaces are no longer locked in struggle for dominance. They do not compete with each other; they coexist until the show, the Blond Ambition tour, and the film end on a close-up of Madonna’s hat as it is tossed onto the stage floor.

And so, as the film progresses, the manner in which transitions are

managed alters. They evolve not abruptly but gradually. More importantly, their evolution serves to collapse the spaces that the film so carefully defines initially. We are left with one of the most significant questions posed by the film: What, after all, are the differences between onstage and offstage spaces?

A provocative aspect of the film's use of disparate cinematic styles, languages, and traditions is how it then comes to define which incidents and events belong to the onstage world and which to the backstage or offstage arenas. For instance, Madonna's singing of "Happy Birthday" to her father, though occurring onstage, in front of an audience, and in wardrobe, is shot in black and white, clearly denoting it as "personal"—or perhaps questioning it as such?<sup>11</sup>

## FEMINIST RECEPTION OF MADONNA AS POSTMODERN PERSONA

The film's use of devices such as black-and-white film stock versus color, concert film versus direct cinema, and public versus private spaces establishes polarities, only to then elide or confuse them. The ultimate goal, I believe, is to raise the validity of the central question of the film: Who is the public persona and who is the "real" Madonna?

Though many of the film's commentators argue that *Truth or Dare* fails to successfully reveal the "real" Madonna, the question, "Is she or isn't she revealing?" remains the framework in which the subject is considered. "While only the gullible would believe that Madonna consciously exposes anything more than her breasts in this film, of which she is the executive producer, *Truth or Dare* is an engaging portrait of the diva as control freak" (Rickey 1991b). Implicit in all the commentary is the acceptance of the terms of the "is she or isn't she?" question. A *New York Times* article by Neal Gabler (1991) makes explicit what is at stake here: "Everywhere the fabricated, the inauthentic and the theatrical have gradually driven out the natural, the genuine and the spontaneous until there is no distinction between real life and stagecraft."<sup>12</sup> Gabler's article—indeed, all the articles quoted here—reference a "real" that is always assumed but never specified.

In contrast, what *Truth or Dare* suggests is that elaborating questions of authenticity around traditional polar opposites is an act of deception. *Truth or Dare's* provocativeness rests with its ability to question the attempt to understand celebrities within the framework of public performer versus private person. The film offers itself up as evidence of the invalidity of the terms of the question, at least in the



face of a (postmodern) performer such as Madonna. It further causes us to ask what the relationship is between this specific performer's ability to fascinate her audiences and her constant reinventions of herself.

At stake here is much more than Madonna's reputation for playfulness— or for playing with her audiences' heads. In a recent essay, which I will quote at some length, E. Ann Kaplan (1988, 153-154) writes:

Feminism, particularly in America, has traditionally relied on a liberal- or left-humanist position. . . . Humanist values, applied specifically to those humans called "women" who often were not included in humanist cultural projections, formed the basis of arguments to improve women's condition of existence.

The blurring of distinctions between a "subject" and an "image"—or the reduction of the old notion of "self" to "image"—is something for feminists to explore, even as we fear the coming of Baudrillard's universe of "simulacra".

The new postmodern universe, however, with its celebration of the look, surfaces, textures, the self-as-commodity, produces an array of images/representations/simulacra that co-opts any possible critical position by the very incorporation of what were previously "dissenting" images. ... As a cultural mode, postmodernism would eliminate gender difference as a significant category, just as it sweeps aside other polarities.

Kaplan's argument is that in a modernist universe, where humanism is the prevailing ideology, individuals can be categorized into those who are granted subjectivity (white, Western bourgeois patriarchy) and those who are not. The latter remain the object of someone else's desire and the means by which subjectivity is achieved. In a world defined by humanism, individuals are either "self" or "other," wherein all people of difference, including women, comprise the Other.

The liberal or Left humanist positions that Kaplan refers to are political arguments based on concepts of (in)justice. That is, *all* persons can rightfully lay claim to existences as self-determining subjects, on the basis of individual equality. This, for many years now, has been the fundamental stance of movements struggling for equality of race, class, gender, sexual preference, and so on.

Kaplan suggests that ideological arguments based on the attainment of selfhood for all will be "swept aside" by postmodernism. In this newly forming universe, all are reduced to image, to Other, along with marginalized peoples who were previously defined as "people of difference." In other words, political, economic, and cultural inequalities will remain, but the means by which we have imagined overturning them will have disappeared.

I would suggest that Madonna as the reigning pop icon of

postmodernism and *Truth or Dare* in particular are useful models through which to explore some of Kaplan's concerns. This can be done in terms of two broad categories. First, there are the implications of postmodernism, using Baudrillard's analyses, without the extreme bleakness of his, or even Kaplan's, views. Second, there are the implications of postmodernism for feminism. Here, Madonna has always proven a thorny problem. Many feminists have been reluctant to embrace her, on the one hand, or dismiss her entirely, on the other.

Feminists' ambivalence toward Madonna derives from arguments of whether she works to destroy stereotypes or only confirms traditional roles and representations of women. These contentions are fueled by the difficulties surrounding the Madonna persona, the difficulties of *fixing* her as one set of meanings or another.

In a review of *Truth or Dare* in the leftist journal the *Guardian*, Elayne Rapping (1991a) writes,

Her sense of humor, irreverent and lusty, is a celebration of female freedom from sexual constraint of all kinds. Her sexual bravado . . . cannot possibly be misunderstood as the behavior of a sexual object.... She is so at ease with her sexual power, so fearless of its effects on others, so outrageously candid and open that she stands as a living symbol of the liberating power of breaking social taboos.

Despite Rapping's assertion that Madonna cannot possibly be misunderstood as a sexual object, many of the *Guardian's* readers did just that, in angry responses to her article. For instance, one reader wrote, "She is part of a continuum of images in our culture that sexually objectifies, degrades and confines women. . . . She makes her millions from the perpetuation of a gender role for women—the sex goddess and beauty queen—that is patriarchal and a thousand years old" (*Guardian* 1991b). Another wrote, "Traditional masculine definitions of sexuality center on power, control, domination and manipulation. We need new visions of sexuality that eroticize sharing, nurturing, communion and love. When a woman such as Madonna appropriates patriarchal attributes of sexuality, she is neither progressive nor feminist" (*Guardian* 1991a).

As Rapping (1991b) quite rightly points out in her response to these letters, a passive and essentializing attitude toward female sexuality is just as potentially regressive as Madonna's aggressive stance:

A sense of sexual power and a sense of being in control do not strike me as masculine experiences at all. Women have been denied free expression of and control over our desires and pleasures by masculine cultural norms. To portray women as sexually powerful therefore seems to me very exhilarating and positive. ... Were she to portray herself as passive, powerless and only interested in giving and nurturing, she would indeed be reinforcing sexist notions.

These arguments inevitably become mired in firmly entrenched positions surrounding established definitions of sexual dichotomies: What is progressive female sexuality, and what are regressive, male-imposed representations? Just as *Truth or Dare*'s formal strategies structure two (ultimately false) oppositions around public celebrity versus private individual, discussion around the film and surrounding the figure herself is often polarized, without, however, revealing a similar futility in those oppositional stances.

Whether Madonna is a beneficial or detrimental model for women, whether the image(s) she poses is a "good" or "bad" thing may well be irresolvable for many feminists and, moreover, beside the point. I am not suggesting the dismissal of all value judgments. I will, for instance, affirm that the goals and concerns of feminism remain, to my mind, "good." But whether Madonna is good for feminism (or whether she is a feminist) obscures the discussion. Rather, we should ask what she can elucidate (inadvertently or otherwise) about what it means to be feminist in a postmodern era. At issue here are evolving and tentative formulations of what postmodern feminism is or could be. Utilizing certain key concepts from the work of Baudrillard, who describes a changing, postmodern world based on new information and mass communications societies, we can begin to explore what Madonna may have to offer in this regard.

### **Sexuality, Power, and Gender Ambiguity**

Very near the opening of *Truth or Dare*, we see Madonna and her dancers during a rehearsal of "Papa Don't Preach." The song is disrupted by feedback coming from the sound system. Madonna abruptly stops the rehearsal and, speaking into the microphone, explains that the sound levels are not high enough to be causing such a problem and that if it cannot be resolved, she will not do the show. Then, after a moment's pause, too brief to have allowed for a response, she states, "I'm waiting."

Soon after this scene, we cut to the first color performance, "Express Yourself," in which Madonna ascends to the stage dressed in a pin-striped business suit. The suit jacket is slit open at the breasts, and the exaggerated cups of Madonna's bra protrude. As she takes off the jacket, we see that the bra is actually a corset, with garters, worn over the baggy pants of the suit. Her backup singers wear similar loose-fitting pants and black bras.

Framed by these two introductory scenes, we are alerted that the film's treatment of sexuality and power are inextricably linked. Immediately striking is the manner in which Madonna deals with her sound problems during the "Papa Don't Preach" rehearsal. She

speaks calmly and in a low voice, fully expecting to be given the respect due authority. She does not have to plead for it, argue about it, or enforce it. It is similar to the way in which someone like Warren Beatty exudes power—in the quiet, self-assured manner of those accustomed to being listened to. The specific kind of power Madonna exudes is control: control of her performance and how the rehearsal is conducted and control over those who work for her.

Equally striking are the specifics of the “Express Yourself” wardrobe. She references both genders simultaneously, signified by the combination of (male) business suit and (female) corset. That she parodies gender roles is indicated by the stiffness and protrusions of the corset’s bra, overdefining female sexuality and thereby neutralizing, altering, or obscuring its meaning (it is unclear which effect is intended). She is not soft or alluring but sharp and dangerous. The intentionality of the parody is made clear during the performance of “Like a Virgin” when her *male* dancers wear and fondle such ridiculously exaggerated bras that they make hers seem diminutive in comparison. The male side of the parody in “Express Yourself” is extended by the old-world (voyeuristic) “charm” of the monocle she sports.

Most notably, the corset worn over baggy suit pants undermines the traditional “sexiness” of the corset itself. Without the pants, the corset might have more strongly resembled the showgirl outfit worn by many women dancers, especially in the classic Hollywood musical. Instead, the departure from the traditional display of leginess is affirmed by the backup singers’ similar costuming.

#### THE WORLD OF SEDUCTION AND APPEARANCE: MADONNA AND BAUDRILLARD

According to Baudrillard’s theory of historically changing sexuality, in previous eras sexuality was a set of defined erotic practices that included the hidden, the repressed, and the proscribed. In contemporary society, which has formalized a far greater degree of explicitness, sexuality has come to have different meanings. Douglas Kellner (1989, 135), in his book on the work of Baudrillard, explains: “That is, in a society in which sexuality speaks in advertising, fashion, the media and other popular discourses, it is open and manifest throughout social life.”

Baudrillard (1990, 21) defines seduction as a game while sex is a function. Seduction is marked by the attributes of play and defiance:<sup>13</sup> “The ability to turn appearances in on themselves, to play on the

body's appearances, rather than with the depths of desire" (Baudrillard 1990, 8).

Combining gender roles and dress *is* Madonna's game of defiance. Her skills as part pop icon and part performance artist are tied to her ability to play on the body's appearances and turn those appearances in on themselves. Is her corset, with its sharpened breasts, an exaggerated parody of women's social function or an example of threatening female sexuality to male psyches? Does her mix-and-match outfit of male business suit and female corset comment on what it means to be male—or female? Or does it address what it might mean to exist in a society not delineated on the basis of gender.' Following Baudrillard, it is, indeed, possible to argue that Madonna's displays of sexuality exist on the level of seduction and appearances and not in the realm of sex, at "the depths of desire."

In an earlier age, obscenity was defined as that which was proscribed. But in the world of seduction, the definition of obscenity, too, has changed. "It is no longer the traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure; on the contrary, it is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more visible-than-the-visible" (Baudrillard 1983, 131). In a culture in which open displays of sexuality are widespread, the obscene is no longer that which is repressed but, instead, that which is too excessively visible. Here, Baudrillard uses the term *obscene* in the sense of "made explicit, fully visible." That is, the obscene is the excess of prevailing social attitudes toward sexuality within the cultural context of its use. In a society in which sexuality is severely restricted, the obscene is the exhibition of that which is forbidden. Conversely, in a social context in which sexuality is routinely made apparent, obscenity becomes its unlimited display.

Madonna's performances may shock some people and be banned from time to time. But the numbers of her supporters and their fervor may express, precisely, the recognition of the representation of sexuality as commonplace, even banal, in the postmodern era. This could also be the reason why, despite the supposed sexual extremism of her shows, she commands large and largely mainstream audiences.

Although Baudrillard no doubt plays on the pejorative connotations of the term *obscene*, use of this term is not bound by his limitations. On the contrary, popular usage of the word is socially constructed, based on prevailing notions of morality. That which was defined as obscene in the Victorian era, while referring to what was culturally repressed at the time, may no longer be so, for example, in the

expression of women's desires or sexual experiences outside the socially sanctified institution of marriage. Nor is any era's definition of obscenity accepted by all. Quite the contrary: Socially constructed definitions of obscenity that mark repressions or oppressions can rightfully be struggled against, especially by those whose sexual practices are oppressed by that norm (for instance, gays and lesbians). Baudrillard's emphasis on appearances is part of his critique of all theories that search for "truth" beneath the surface. Under attack, then, are virtually all of the "master" theories of Western humanism, including Marxism and psychoanalysis. According to Baudrillard (1988, 149):

The havoc interpretation wreaks in the domain of appearances is incalculable, and its privileged quest for hidden meanings may be profoundly mistaken. For we needn't search in some beyond, in a *hinterwelt*, or in an unconscious, to find what diverts discourse. What actually displaces it, "seduces" it in the literal sense, and makes it seductive, is its very appearance.<sup>14</sup>

The following conversation between Madonna and Carrie Fisher is excerpted from a two-part *Rolling Stone* interview, under Fisher's byline (1991b, 48):

F: What about your whole spanking thing? I don't get that.

M: It's a joke. I despise being spanked. It's play. I say I want to be spanked, but it's like, "Try it and I'll knock your fucking head off." It's a joke!

F: But I saw you on Arsenio and you said—

M: I was just playing with Arsenio.

F: This is a very important piece of news.

Why Fisher considers this important news or, more importantly, what prompts her to accept Madonna's declaration as more truthful than any other statement Madonna has made in any other context is unclear. It apparently does not occur to Fisher that Madonna might be catering her answers to her immediate audience—whether Arsenio Hall or Fisher herself. What is clear is the absence of any possible barometer for the definitive truth.

This exchange is taken from the same *Rolling Stone* interview (Fisher 1991a, 120):

M: They [men she goes out with] don't tell me I give good head, believe me, because I don't give it.

F: Ever?

M: They just tell me I'm a savage bitch. Who wants to choke? That's the bottom line. I contend that that's part of the whole humiliation thing of men with women. Women cannot choke a guy.

And later (Fisher 1991b, 78), Madonna reiterates; "They're not getting head from me, they're getting gifts from Maxfield."

Once again, we are left wondering, does she or doesn't she? Here is another mystery from the "definitive" source for the rest of us to unravel in our search for the authentic Madonna. Indeed, it is a provocative statement for Madonna to insist she does *not* perform oral sex, especially in conjunction with the now legendary scene in *Truth or Dare* where she gives head, with proficiency, to a water bottle. This inability to "fix" or position Madonna and the indeterminacy of her persona—in both statements and performance—suggest parallels to Baudrillard's concept of simulacra.

### **Simulation and the Quest for Authenticity**

The distinction between appearance and representation, in Baudrillard's view, is that representation refers to an original, a "real," while appearance does not (Baudrillard 1988, 170). Now, in our culture of information and the mass media, we are inundated with an overabundance of images and signs that no longer have referential value but, instead, interact solely with other signs. This marks the advent of simulation. Rather than the previous vertical connection, if you will, between sign and meaning, there is, instead, the horizontal relationship of sign to sign. "All the great humanist criteria of

value, all the values of a civilization of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs. Everything becomes undecideable" (Baudrillard 1988, 128). Moreover, everything becomes exchangeable, one sign for another. There is an uncertainty of meaning, free floating and indeterminate, rather than the stability of a referent tied to meaning.

The process of simulation, the evolution from representation to appearance, is the result of implosion. Rather than the explosion of capitalism and commodification in the modern era, postmodernism is marked by an implosion, a collapsing inward of traditional boundaries and binary distinctions such as elite and popular culture, appearance and reality, and so on (Kellner 1989, 68). Implosion, according to Baudrillard (1988, zio), is caused not by a lack but by an excess of information. Here, we arrive at the source of Baudrillard's definition of the obscene as explicit or fully visible. No longer that which is hidden in the sense of "deep structures" of meaning (Baudrillard 1988, 164),

the obscene marks the surface confusions of the postmodern information-communication culture: that which is excessively available and made too evident.

*Truth or Dare* raises the question of the “real”—which is public persona and which private individual?—but refuses to answer it. Or it does answer it by saying that the question itself is absurd and irrelevant. Madonna, this chameleon of appearances who refuses all fixed meanings, may be viewed as simulation in the context of Baudrillard’s theories. If one sees her in this way, she can then be received at surface value, confusions and contradictions intact. That is, there is no definitive “real,” no authentic Madonna, beyond the person(a) we already know through her various incarnations, guises, and forms. Following Baudrillard, if there is no authentic, then the appearances themselves, by displacing the authentic, become the real (or, to use his term, the hyperreal).

To attempt to distinguish between appearance and reality is, in Madonna’s case, misleading. No ground and no means exist to “prove” she is one way in (any) public and different in a separate, private existence. There is no hidden real that she keeps from us like a dark secret, no lie or deception. Ultimately, no distinction exists between her public self and some other concealed self, between the onstage and offstage aspects of her persona.

It is important to distinguish simulation from the “illusion” portion of the reality versus illusion construct. In fact, simulation displaces the entire reality versus illusion equation. Simulation is the map that precedes and displaces the territory it once was intended to describe (Baudrillard 1988,166). It is of the order of an alternate reality, the hyperreal. As Baudrillard explains (1988, 167-168):

To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn’t. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: “Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms” (Littre). Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: The difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between “true” and “false,” between “real” and “imaginary.”

To say something or someone is a simulation model does not imply feigning, pretending, or misleading, measured against that which is not feigned, actual, or true. It is, rather, to say that in the postmodern



world, simulacra are actualized, self-contained entities, without any measurement against a referent that would then render them representative. Therefore, simulacra displace or threaten the entire dichotomy of true versus false or of reality and its opposite, illusion. Feigning or dissimulation replace only the false or illusory portion of the dichotomy, leaving the *idea* of the equation unharmed.

Madonna's various appearances—her form of seduction—divert others from their path (in the literal sense of seduction) precisely because they search for her authenticity. In both her performances and her comments during interviews, she discloses an awareness, a self-consciousness, that the game is about “revealing” her “true” self. The way to play the game—to win—is by constant renewal. And so, she keeps reinventing herself, sometimes (as in her interviews) from moment to moment. And along the way, she dispenses clues and devises contradictions to keep us guessing. Indeed, her stock in trade (exchange value) depends on never being definitively placed. Once pinned down, fixed, made “real,” her persona as it is currently formulated would cease to exist (for, of course, there are many aspects of her life she could easily clarify were she to choose to do so).

And so, in *Truth or Dare*, there is an ironic integrity to her presentation of selves. The secrets given up and the privacies laid bare do not belong to her but to those around her. The moments of genuine vulnerability originate with her brother Marty, her childhood friend Moira, with Oliver waiting for his father or Sharon telling of her rape. There are no equivalent moments for Madonna (certainly not at her mother's grave) where we feel pity or sadness or wish to turn away in order to avoid a moment of intrusion. The dramatic conflicts in *Truth or Dare* arise, for instance, from the animosities between her dancers, not from the specifics of Madonna's life or personality. She is the conflict resolver, the one in charge, which she rather awkwardly conveys through the metaphor of mother.

### **Performance and Control**

This, however, returns us to something else that is absent from Baudrillard's analyses—the issue of control. Although Baudrillard delineates a complex description of the postmodern world, he is far more insightful at critiquing existing and emerging cultural conditions and much less helpful in identifying alternatives. “Suddenly, there is a curve in the road, a turning point. Somewhere, the real scene has been lost, the scene where you had rules for the game and some solid stakes that everyone could rely on” (Baudrillard quoted in

Kellner 1989, 174). Here, Baudrillard, sounding rather nostalgic, reads in sharp contrast to Madonna's playful defiance. Her spirited energy belies the bleakness and desperation of his postmodern view. Despite his disclaimer that postmodernism is neither "optimistic nor pessimistic," Baudrillard paints a bleak picture of what remains for the "survivors" of the demise of modernity (Baudrillard, quoted in Kellner 1989, 117). Again, his pessimism is in sharp contrast to the vitality Madonna exudes, which seems linked to her sense of control (the possibility of which, one suspects Baudrillard would argue, has completely vanished in the postmodern era, certainly on any kind of individual level).

The one aspect all parties, including Madonna, seem able to agree on concerning her persona(e) in *Truth or Dare* is that she is in charge. She is the focus of attention. The film presents her controlling the content of her show, as well as the way the show is run. She controls her life, her people, and even her image.

It may not make her "nice," but it does make her compelling and, I think, makes aspects of her life enviable to others. Those are the sentiments one hears in Carrie Fisher's (1991a, 35) introduction to their interview: "Madonna has no equal in getting attention. She often seems to behave like someone who has been under severe restraint and can now say and do whatever she likes without fear of reprisal." A similar euphoria surfaces in Elayne Rapping's review of *Truth or Dare* (1991a): "I left this film almost walking on air, so exhilarating was its sense of female pride, power and progress."

Madonna is a complex of controlled performance mixed with total abandon. We hold in awe someone who, with such audacity, can call Warren Beatty an asshole, gag on Kevin Costner's description of her show as "neat," give head to a bottle, and then retain them all in her film. Approval and disapproval within the bounds of *Truth or Dare* belong to her. What Madonna as public persona appears to want and to represent, in contrast perhaps to Marilyn Monroe (the other cultural icon she most frequently references), is to be in charge of her own life without exchanging control over her career, her body, or her image.

In this postmodern era. Madonna has succeeded in maintaining some degree of control over her existence—a good deal, by contemporary standards—precisely because she functions as simulation. Here is someone who lives as pure sign, who *chooses* to live as pure sign. She is an entirely public figure, a persona in and of the world, who more than willingly renders herself an image and an icon. Her whole life consists of performance. Apart from the issue of

whether this is a beneficial or detrimental choice as an individual lifestyle (or how many others would—or could—choose it), what it has provided Madonna is, precisely, this level of control, especially over her own image.

And so, as Madonna stays at least one step ahead of her audiences, reinventing herself and expressing herself in what are received as ever more daring appearances and all the while evading definition, we finally return to the question of the “assumed real” that is so often implied, though unspecified, and against which Madonna is measured, as people ask, “yes, but is this the real Madonna?”

#### THE ROLE OF THE “REAL” IN THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING

The two most frequently cited scenes from *Truth or Dare* are those in which Madonna gives head to a water bottle and converses with Warren Beatty while being examined by the throat specialist. Lost in Beatty’s always quoted line “Turn the camera off? She doesn’t want to live off-camera, much less talk,” is the tenor of the entire conversation, including Madonna’s responses.<sup>15</sup>

Madonna often “wins points” in various press accounts for not editing this scene out of the film, given the general consensus that Beatty gains the upper hand. But it could equally be argued that, within the bounds of the film, Madonna possesses him. He is reluctantly drawn into the film and becomes the property of her image. She, for instance, refused his request to be deleted from the film. Instead of Madonna being his status symbol, after all the press describing her as another one of Beatty’s women, he ends up being a postscript in her story. She shows him off hanging around backstage, calls him “asshole,” and calls him to her (“And don’t hide back there, Warren. Get over here.”) like a recalcitrant child or one of her attendants. He becomes her boy toy. She retains control of the image of their respective personae and the presentation of their relationship.

More important is the context of this scene, both within and beyond the bounds of the film. Warren Beatty, who more than any other Hollywood star understands the publicity value and therefore the box-office value of having an offscreen affair with his onscreen love interest,<sup>16</sup> suddenly turns camera-shy in *Truth or Dare*. In early scenes of the film, he is edgy, he paces and avoids the camera. Although accustomed to being a celebrity whose existence is frequently lived in front of cameras, here he jealously guards his privacy, his “real” life.

Madonna is constantly aware of the camera, but, then, so is

Warren. He just wants it turned off—occasionally and selectively. She doesn't.

Something about the shooting of this particular scene, while Madonna is being examined by the doctor for a fairly serious throat problem that will result in the cancellation of some of her shows, offends Beatty's sense of propriety (assuming he hasn't been set off by any number of other instances that were edited out of the film). For him, a line has been crossed between public and private, and he seems genuinely angered. It is Madonna who asks what the difference is between this and any other instance: "Why should I stop here?"

In her interview in *US* magazine (Deevoy 1991, 20), responding to a question about this scene. Madonna states:

I think what Warren was *trying* to say is that he is very shy and private and he doesn't understand my lack of inhibition because he's the opposite of me. What's so intimate about my throat? I mean, my God, everyone knows when I'm having an abortion, when I'm getting married, when I'm getting divorced, who I'm breaking up with. My throat is now intimate? Anyway, the cameras didn't follow me around 24 hours a day. They weren't in the room when I was *fucking!*

Madonna poses a good question here. What is it about this particular scenario that sets Beatty off, that offends his sensibilities, despite any number of other incidents that could be considered more intimate? Does it have something to do with the fact that what is at stake here is her livelihood, the business side of her existence? Perhaps it is the use to which the camera is put. When it is furthering her (or his) career by garnering publicity, for instance, it is not threatening. However, when her ability to work is on the line and the camera is recording that, it becomes intrusive.

At issue in the encounter with Beatty is the crux of the search for authenticity and of the implied real. In a column on *Truth or Dare*, Ellen Goodman (1991) writes.

But suddenly the voice of reason and sanity passed to none other than Warren Beatty.... But poor Warren was dating himself. There he was, tagged forever, as a member of a generation that actually draws a line, however often violated, however egotistically crossed, between life and art, between the private and the public self.

Here, Beatty is cast as the old-style star—more noble, less tarnished because he retains a sense of traditional values based on drawing lines between concepts such as life or art and public or private.

Madonna, on the other hand, represents the opposing tendency, as Goodman (1991) argues:

In *Truth or Dare*, the director makes a visual line between person and performer.

He uses black-and-white film for backstage, color for onstage. But Madonna crosses that line, playacting real life. In the strikingly narrow world that she rules as a superstar, the projection of her personality is her greatest artistic achievement.

This is opposed, one assumes, to “real” artistic achievement. What concerns me is how Goodman knows Madonna crosses the line if all we are presented with is the star playacting at real life. How would Goodman recognize Madonna’s “real life” in contrast to the playacting? Does her real life ever surface, no matter how briefly, in the film? Or is the implication that reality is simply something we would all immediately recognize?

Goodman’s concern—and Beatty’s—reflect more of their own perspectives than Madonna’s. Beatty, as representative of the old-style star, relies on notions of authenticity; Madonna denies them. The collapse of distinctions, based on binary opposites, may remain troubling for Madonna’s audiences and her press, but they do not bother her. Her work, as evidenced in *Truth or Dare*, does not attempt to resolve the collapse of distinctions such as public versus private, appearance versus reality; it only asks the audience to question the ongoing meaning and validity of such distinctions. It is not Madonna’s discomfort that the film confronts; it is Beatty’s, the press’s, and our own—the audience’s. *Truth or Dare* recalls clear distinctions of the past and summons a longed-for authenticity.

As Baudrillard (1988, 153-154) warns, “The alternative is unbearable (precisely because *truth does not exist*). We must not wish to destroy appearances (the seduction of images). This project must fail if we are to prevent the absence of truth from exploding in our faces.” By the destruction of appearances, Baudrillard means simply recognizing them for what they are: the displacements of old truths and old values that we are accustomed to and that have given shape and sense to our lives. Revealing the disappearance of those distinctions, of the ability to “fix” authenticity and its replacement with the seduction of images, is perhaps the ultimate dare with which *Truth or Dare* challenges us and the risk that Madonna poses.

#### MADONNA’S POSTMODERN REPRESENTATIONS: RETHINKING FEMINIST EQUATIONS

Although I agree with Ann Kaplan that subject-object categories may no longer be applicable in a postmodern universe, I would question the degree to which this, through the demise of humanism, eliminates a feminist position. In an article entitled “The Economy of Desire,” Mary Ann Doane (1989, 2,4) speaks of “rethinking the absoluteness

of the dichotomy between subject and object which informs much feminist thinking.” Doane refers to recent theorizations that delineate individuals as either subject or object, wherein women are inevitably “object.” Her argument is that there are instances in which women take up identifiable positions of subjectivity and that to relegate women to only object reaffirms their existing polarized and marginalized cultural positioning. Doane’s is a position that has been held by many feminists, myself included. However, in light of current theorizations around postmodernism, I would suggest that it is the categorization of all individuals based on subject-object distinctions (that is, the equation itself) that needs rethinking.

“There is and there always will be major difficulties in analyzing the media and the whole sphere of information through the traditional categories of the philosophy of the subject: will, representation, choice, liberty, deliberation, knowledge, and desire” (Baudrillard 1988, 214). The postmodern culture of mass media and information excess overturns and reshapes the relationship between subject and object in two important ways, according to Baudrillard. First, the simulated object that seduces takes precedence over the previously defined subject that believed itself in the sovereign position of power in the equation. Second, following poststructuralist theory, the subject position is eliminated entirely. As distinctions between public and private, interior and exterior are replaced by nonbinary media space, the subject itself becomes an object within the realm of information and communication technologies and practices (Kellner 1989, 71). This newly defined object, then, is not the old presence of the subject-object dichotomy but an altogether different entity that displaces the entire previous equation.

There are serious limitations to Baudrillard’s work, including his all-encompassing generalizations and frequent theoretical excesses. In addition, I have here considered only one public figure. Madonna, as a model for current configurations of personae. Much work needs to be done, vis-a-vis postmodernism, in the sphere of nonpublic, especially political, constructs of the individual. I would suggest, however, that many of these still early postmodern formulations merit exploration, while guarding against a view of postmodernism as antithetical to feminism. If Madonna is a model of seduction, of the succession of the simulated object’s primacy, then her striking ability to seduce with some measure of control over the dissemination of her image(s) may be a point of departure in the articulation of postmodern feminism.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The publisher regrets that the first printing of *The Madonna Connection* included alterations to Deidre Pribram's essay that were incorrect. The original language of the essay has been restored for this and subsequent printings.

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I would like to thank Lisa Henderson for her helpful comments over several conversations.

## NOTES

1. Maslin (1991, C15) goes on to add, "True, perhaps, to the spirit of the times, *Truth or Dare* turns commerce and real intimacy into those rare subjects that are off limits, and it exhibits calculatingly full abandon about confessions of any other kind." Other examples abound. In *Entertainment*, James Kaplan (1991, 18) writes, "Is this an intimate meeting between friends or a movie scene [between Madonna and Sandra Bernhard]? If it's a movie, where is the script? If it's a documentary, where's the reality?" In the British magazine *The Face*, James Ryan (1991, 59) notes, "If indeed, as the movie implies, Madonna's career can be boiled down to a series of rising dares, giving up her privacy to the unblinking eye of Keshishian's 16mm camera may have been the toughest gauntlet to accept."

2. I deliberately avoid the issue of authorial intentionality. Besides the difficulty of establishing it with any certainty in any instance or the question of its relevancy in an analysis such as this, there is the particular difficulty in this case of determining whether we are discussing Madonna's intent or that of the director, Keshishian—a subject much debated in the press on the film. "Evidence" in this regard is unclear and—not surprisingly from this source—contradictory. Early in the film, for example, during Madonna's "adjustment" scene, she is reluctant to allow the camera's presence, but Keshishian prevails. On the other hand, preceding this scene, as she is about to discuss business with her manager, Freddy DeMann, Madonna, with no apparent concern or hesitation, slams the door of her trailer in the camera's face, so to speak.

3. Direct cinema, the American version of cinema verite, was formulated around the belief that the camera could function as neutral observer, recording dramatic events as they naturally unfolded. Cinema verite, in contrast, used the camera to provoke events and thereby bring truths to light. The major proponents of direct cinema include Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, Don Pennebaker, and Albert and David Maysles. Among their most notable films are *Primary* (1960, Drew Associates), *Happy Mother's Day* (1964, Leacock), *Don't Look Back* (1966, Pennebaker), and *Salesman* (1969, the Maysles).

4. *Don't Look Back*, directed by Don Pennebaker, applied "behind the scenes" techniques to a pop culture figure. These strategies were used successfully in earlier films focusing on political subjects, such as *Primary* and *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963). *Stop Making Sense* (1984), directed by Jonathan Demme, is a concert film on the Talking Heads. Stylistically similar is Martin Scorsese's 1978 film of The Band, *The Last Waltz*.

5. Although I have stated that *Stop Making Sense* describes a more recent tradition in concert film, due to its focus on public performance and persona only, it is possible to argue that *Woodstock* (1970), directed by Michael Wadleigh, is the precedent here.

6. I say the "feel" because it is clear in many sequences that more than one

camera was used. For instance, the scene with Madonna and the doctor, which cuts back and forth as each say, "Aah," is achieved by two cameras filming simultaneously.

7. Indeed, the concert sequences are expertly shot and edited. On initial viewing, the concert segments seem equally balanced with the documentary footage. Only on repeated viewings does it become evident that the documentary footage takes up proportionately more screen time.

8. It is for these reasons that I make a distinction between the traditions represented by *Truth or Dare* and *Don't Look Back*, although both utilize onstage and offstage spaces. Elayne Rapping (1991a), for instance, uses *Don't Look Back* to compare and contrast Dylan and Madonna, but she does not differentiate the uses made of public performance versus private existence in the two films. In *Don't Look Back*, the on- and offstage segments are stylistically more unified. They are not set up in opposition to each other or used to elaborate the film's issues in the same way as in *Truth or Dare*. The two spaces are more of a piece in *Don't Look Back*, functioning as a continuum in the compilation or creation of its portrait of the artist-individual. *Truth or Dare*, on the other hand, establishes its arenas in contradiction to each other precisely to identify a quandary in the activity of celebrity-individual portraiture.

9. The credits are as follows: Robert Leacock: director of photography—documentary for the U.S. and Europe; Doug Nichol: director of photography—documentary for New York footage; Toby Phillips: director of photography—concerts; Barry Alexander Brown: editor; John Murray: editor—musical sequences.

Robert Leacock and Doug Nichol are credited as camera operators—but not directors of photography—along with eight others for the concert footage. Robert Leacock is the son of Richard Leacock, one of the original and most prominent members of the direct cinema movement.

10. The color segments, in order of performance, are:

- |                       |                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. "Express Yourself" | 6. "Holiday"                  |
| 2. "Oh Father"        | 7. "Live to Tell"             |
| 3.                    | "Keep It Together" 8. "Vogue" |
| 4. "Like a Virgin"    | 9. "Causing a Commotion"      |
| 5. "Like a Prayer"    | 10. "Keep It Together"        |

Though I have stated that each of the color segments parallels a different song, there is, in fact, a repetition. Number 3, "Keep It Together" is a brief version that, at the film's finale, is performed in its entirety (number 10). I am most concerned, for the sake of my discussion, in giving priority to the color segments, rather than the song represented by each.

11. Although I have limited my discussion to the songs differentiated by their color performances, in a number of other instances (in addition to *Happy Birthday*), the songs are marked by black-and-white performance. These include: a brief excerpt of "Papa Don't Preach" in rehearsal; a short clip of "Express Yourself," performed in the rain in Japan; an excerpt of "Holiday" as Madonna and her backup singers walk to the stage, hand in hand, under threat of arrest in Toronto; "Promise to Try" in its entirety, accompanied solely by black-and-white images, principally of Madonna at her mother's grave; a glimpse of "Causing a Commotion"; and a brief excerpt of "Holiday" as Madonna and her singers prepare to go onstage, which I have discussed in the text.

12. *Truth or Dare* is one of a number of examples cited to illustrate Gabler's



points.

13. I introduce Baudrillard's concept of seduction although I am fully aware of his extremely essentializing discussion of sexuality, wherein sex is masculine and seduction is feminine. I make no apology for him, nor could I think of any that would suffice.

14. In *Seduction*, Baudrillard (1990, zz) defines seduction, "in the literal sense," as "to take aside, to divert from one's path."

15. The transcript of the entire conversation between the doctor, Madonna, and Beatty is as follows:

**B:** This is crazy. Nobody talks about this on film.

**M:** Talks about what?

**B:** The insanity of doing this all in a documentary.

**M:** Why?

**B:** Well this is a serious matter, your throat. Yes?

**M:** Why should I stop here?

**B:** But does anyone say it?

**M:** Who's anyone?

**B:** Well anyone that comes into this insane atmosphere. You realize they all feel it when they come into this atmosphere. When they come into your dressing room, when they come wherever you are, they feel crazy. Now, do they talk about it?

**M:** No. They accept it.

**B:** Well, why don't they talk about it?

**M:** Cause.

**B:** Well you want to think about that, don't you?

**M:** No I don't. So let's get back to my throat.

There is a cut here that marks a jump in time. Madonna no longer speaks but is writing notes to communicate, per instructions from the doctor.

**D:** Do you want to talk at all off-camera? You have nothing to say? [M. shakes her head no.]

**B:** [laughs] She doesn't want to live off-camera, much less talk.

**D:** Yeah, I think that's what it is.

**B:** There's nothing to say off-camera. Why would you say something if it's off-camera? What point is there of existing?

Beatty apparently addresses this last comment directly to the camera (his sunglasses mask his eyeline) because we can hear a voice from offscreen, presumably that of the doctor talking to Madonna.

16. The latest is Annette Bening, his costar in *Bugsy*. Their baby, we are told at the time of this writing, is due at the same time the film is scheduled for release. The presence of a child "renews" what could otherwise have been a tired tale of yet another Beatty involvement.

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